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FRAGMENTS OF A PROLOGUE



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OPPRESSIONS OTHER THAN LOVE: PAKISTAN IN A RAINY SEASON



By Qalandar Bux Memon

renowned poem of Faiz Ahmed Faiz was brought to my attention last night. Sitting for dinner in a restaurant in Lahore the one-man entertainment with his key-board and mike walked up to my table and kindly asked if I had a request. 'Yes, A ghazal...of Faiz', I replied. Happy to be playing something other than the latest Bollywood film song he returned to his keyboard and began to sing:

That which was ours, my love, Don't ask me for that love again

The poem of Faiz goes on:

but there were other sorrows, comforts other than love. The rich had cast their spell on history: Dark centuries had been embroidered on brocades and silks. Bitter threads began to unravel before me As I went into alleys and in open markets Saw bodies plastered with ash, bathed in blood. I saw them sold and bought, again and again. This too deserves attention. I can't help but look back

When I return from those alleys – what should one do? And you still are so ravishing – what should I do? There are other sorrows in this world, Comforts other than love. Don't ask me, my love, for that love again.

Faiz was writing in late 1930's and his poem was typical

for a member of Progressive Writers Association (PWA) of which he was a founding member. The Progressive Writers Association came into formation in 1933 after a meeting in London of dissenting [anti-Imperialist and progressive] Indian poets and writers. By 1935 they had formed as an institution and stated their aims in a historic manifesto.

Hamen husn ke meyaar badalne honge [We will have to change the standard of beauty].

Their aim was revolutionary. The manifesto states that in a time when 'radical changes are taking place in Indian Society' and yet 'the spirit of reaction' though 'moribund and doomed to ultimate decay, is still operative and making desperate efforts to prolong itself' the writers duty is to 'give expression to the changes taking place in Indian life and to assist in the spirit of progress in the country'. The PWA wished to, 'rescue literature and other arts from the priestly, academic and decadent classes in whose hands they have degenerated so long; to bring the arts into the closest touch with the people; and to make them the vital organs which will register the actualities of life, as well as lead us to the future'. The manifesto further states, 'we believe that the new literature of India [Pakistan] must deal

with the basic problems of our existence today — the problems of hunger and poverty, social backwardness and political subjugation'. These sentiments are well summed up in Premchand's presidential address to the first meeting of the PWA, where he announced, 'Hamen Husn ke meyaar badalne honge' [we will have to change the standard of beauty]. Classical Urdu poetry, with its celebration of the beloved and his/her beauty or focus on 'oppressions of love' was, for the progressives, an idol distraction compared with the 'alleyways of injustice' operative in South Asia. The progressives, to be progressive, had to align themselves with the people [working class] and their political cause; and by extension the struggle of the laboring classes internationally — be it in London, Congo or Palestine. Jalib, a leading and yet under studied Progressive writer, writing against the dictatorship of Ayub Khan in 1962 put it well:

Deep jis ka mahallaat hi mein jale
Chand logon ki khushiyon ko le kar chale
Voh jo saaye mein har maslehat ke pale
Aise dastoor ko, subh-e benoor ko
Main nahin mantra! Main nahin jaanta!

[A lamp that sheds light only on palaces
that caters to the whims of a chosen few
that flourishes in the shadow of compromise
this system, this light-starved morning
I do not accept!]

Likewise, Faiz, in another landmark poem, asks, 'Why do the multitudes of these crowded cities live only to wait for death. Why does hunger grow in these fields which are laden with grain'. Indeed, these questions are equally pertinent today. Locally, here in Pakistan and globally.

In Pakistan, outside utility stores queues of four hun-

dred people have been common for the three months. Prices of basic goods have doubled in the last six months driving more people into poverty and hunger. For example, six months ago one could purchase one kilo gram of flour for 12 rupees (used to make chapatti — a staple food), one kilo gram of rice for 35 rupees, and one cylinder of gas (used for cooking by the majority of people) for 40 rupees. Today, the price for the same amount of flour is 25 rupees, rice stands at 60 rupees and cylinder gas stands at 120 rupees. The hardest effected have been the 40 million of Pakistan's 160 million people who are living below the poverty line (less than a dollar a day) — it must be borne in mind that the poorest spend between 50-60 per cent of their income on food in normal times. Clearly, the inflationary increase in the price of staple food by curtailing the money spend on education and healthcare further compounds the miseries of these 40 million Pakistani's and their children — thus condemning yet another generation.

Globally, the misallocation and use of resources is equally profound. It is fitting here to quote the exemplary statistics noted by David Held: the annual cost of supplying basic education to all children is \$ 6 billion, of water and sanitation \$ 9 billion, and of basic health to all \$ 13 billion — while annually \$ 4 billion is spent in the USA on cosmetics, nearly \$ 20 billion on jewellery and \$ 17 billion (in the US and Europe) on pet food. (See also, Learn to live without Masters, Slavoj Zizek, this issue). The system, we have to conclude, is inefficient in allocating resources and due to the human tragedies of its failure is morally condemnable.

In 1954, under the dictatorship of Ayub Khan, the Progressive Writers Association was banned — along with the communist party of Pakistan. Faiz was put in jail for four years on trumped up charges. The first generation of Progressive writers were saddened by both

the partition of India and the falling away of justice in the land. Level headed but defiant, Sahir Ludhianvi reflected:

Maana ke is zameen ko na gulzaar kar sake
Kuch khaar kam to kar diye, guzre jidhar se hum

[It is true, we did not turn the world into a garden,
But at least we lessened some thorns from the paths
we traveled].

Bol, Ke Lab Azaad hain Tere [speak, for your lips are
still free]

The thorns removed and the seeds laid down by the progressive writers came again to fruition on November 3th; when to remove, unconstitutionally, the judiciary of Pakistan - and with it the constitution and the remaining mechanism of checks and balances — as an check on his illegitimate regime (both in terms of not having a mandate from the people and also constitutionally speaking) Musharaff declared emergency. Within day's students, lawyers, journalists, intellectuals, and some working class people began to organise resistance together. In Lahore the universal symbol of resistance became a simple word - 'Bol' ('Speak'), which itself, is taken from a poem of Faiz. Tens of thousands of copies of the poem were printed and distributed at protests, dinners, campuses and cafes. Stickers with the word 'bol' have been plastered on walls, rickshaws, cars, house doors, back of jackets and signifies the resistance to the present arbitrary rule and the fight against the predatory regime headed by Musharraf.

November 5th was a watershed day. Hundreds of lawyers, gathered peacefully to protest the emergency, were brutally beaten and arrested (see, The day I was politically Baptisted, Waqqas Mir, this issue). Within a

day of this event, at meetings around the country, new tactics were devised to counter the brutal reaction of the regime, such as flash protests, hunger strike and hunger strike camps, clandestine anti-establishment graffiti, distribution of leaflets, the setting up of blogs and petitions on social network sites. Despite these precautions in the following days, students, lawyers, civil society activists continued to be arrested and beaten. While professors and students at campuses across Pakistan were threatened with dismissal if found to be engaging in 'political activity'. And yet, despite the application of extreme coercive power, people continue to come out to protest. Indeed, new links are being built between professions and generations. An elderly lawyer recalled to me how concepts which once meant little had come to gain new life for him — he was referring to the idea of 'rule of law'. Also, new organisations - still operative - were created; such as, The Student Action Committee, The Teachers Action Committee (inspired by the former), United Front (a group consisting of lawyers, students, Left and Centre left parties), People's Resistance (mainly consisting of intellectual and lawyers), Concerned Citizens of Pakistan (a group recently formed, led mainly by women, comprising teachers, doctors, lawyers and students). Let us take a moment to look at the monster that these groups and the vast majority of Pakistani's find to be tyrannical and illegitimate and thus a rule they oppose.

LOGIC OF VIOLENCE.

Musharref and his regime operate by the logic of violence. This logic is the reason for the Rather . —without a mandate from the people or any constitutional basis for rule. A point conveniently forgotten but which must be remembered is that Musharref came to power in a military coup — ousting a corrupt but elected politician.

Musharref and his military is rule by coercive power and a logic which has violence as its instinctive base.

(60 judges removed after November 3th – 60 suicide bombs this year in Pakistan.).

'coercion substitute for the constitution].

FEUDALS AND THEIR SIBLINGS

Feudals of all clans are reactionary forces. It has already been noted that feudal elements support Musharref's regime. In light of this one of the most disappointing aspect of recent political developments has been the focus given to feudals and their siblings [as progressive, or hopeful, forces] in both the domestic and international media. From members of the Bhutto clan (internationally) and others such as Monis Elahi and ____Sharif (locally). And yet this reactionary class is unable to offer a vision or a solution to the countries problems (see, End of Imagination, Ayesha Siddiq, this issue).

Let me briefly demonstrate my point using the example of the Bhutto clan and the ideology of 'Bhuttoism' – for they are seen as progressive and given attention in the international media. It does not take much to dismiss the two co-chairpersons of the Pakistan People's Party. One is notoriously corrupt (stealing 1.4 billion from the country when he was the spouse of a Prime Minister - according to the National Accountability Bureau) and is famous for squandering this money on luxuries such as renting two floors of a Manhattan hotel. The other is his son, aged 19. Secondly, in common with other parties of this clan, the remaining hierarchy is likewise feudal. Take, for example, the prime ministerial candidate Amin Fahim. His wealth comes from inherited land and the families of serfs that live on and toil this land. Wealth is created by this pool of serfs – cheap, one may say, bounded labour - and sustains, in luxury,

hoards of feudal and their off-spring (most of whom are idle or involved in politics). Feudals dominate their locality politically, economically and socially and use this power to keep serfs uneducated and outside non-feudal structures (ie. Government structures and laws) and thus sustain their pool of cheap labour, status and profits. Profits spend, in almost all cases, on western luxury goods, political campaigning and, of course, Japanese jeeps. A further pathology common to this class is their belief in their right to rule; often resulting in the 'personalization of politics' at the local and national level. Brought up in grandeur, mistaking the boundedness of their subjects for 'love' or affection, living almost always 'above' the rule of law, reflecting on the ignorance's and timidity of their serfs for their own brilliance and sophistication they fastidiously delude themselves (and it seems western media) of their ability to either bring positive change or justice to the country. History bears this out.

Bhuttoism its ideologues claim is socialist and concerned with the welfare of the people. Indeed, Zulifar Ali Bhutto – the founder of Pakistan's People's Party – sold such a dream. Yet, historically both he and his daughter (prime minister from) failed to legislate any reformative project against the feudal structures. To the contrary Zulifar Ali Bhutto ...use Eqbal Ahmed.

The establishment of Rule of Law, democratic practices, commitment to social justice and education are antithetical to feudal interest. For feudal led or dominated political parties – PPP, PML-Q and many others are largely feudal parties – to legislative such reforms would be no less then to commit legislative suicide – such as act would be unprecedented in history and all the education of Oxbridge and the Ivy league is not likely to bring it to Pakistan. However, a vanguard, though with limitations, has emerged to challenge the feudals,

their siblings, and the military.

THE VANGUARD

On the 6th of November, after heated debate, at a clandestine meeting, notable intellectuals, lawyers, and students unanimously agreed that the lawyers' movement presents the vanguard and progressive force in Pakistan. Indeed, this is a position this author would indorse; abide, taking their limitation into account. Despite being the victims of brutal attacks, imprisonment amass, dismissal, house-arrest (today the elected chairperson of the Supreme Court Bar Association – Aitzaz Ahsan - was again put under house-arrest for a further thirty days and the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court remains under house-arrest along with his family) the lawyers' movement has been steadfast in protesting by peaceful means. They had boycotted judges who had accepted the Provisional Constitutional Order (PCO) , marched on roads every Thursday and boycotted courts also on this same day, acted in solidarity with media and students organizations, and are planning a national strike from the 4th to 18th February. Secondly, remarkably, they have sustained this struggle almost continuously since 11th of March 2007 – in the process incurred scarifies, both financial and personal, at the altar of Rule of Law. Finally, they practice in their associations what they wish to see at the national level. Supreme Court Bar Council elections, Lahore High Court Bar Council elections and other Bar Associations elections across the country are a annual event and are conducted peacefully, in a fair manner, abide with healthy and robust campaigning.

A second progressive development has been the student movement. Here again democratic practices are part of the operative set-up. To make an anti-feudal point they have organized themselves without a leader and the Student Action Committee is open to all students and today unities [in Lahore] twenty-two educational institutions.

Internal critique plays a central role at their meetings. Indeed, pedagogical work such as study circles, book clubs, conventions, and lecture series are constantly organized and attended by these students. Another noteworthy decision they have taken is summed up by the motto: 'if you take one you take all of us'. By this they mean that should one student activist be arrested, harassed, or expelled all non-effected students would unite with them and offer and demand similar treatment. This unity was displaced and successful in securing the release of two arrested students. The students of the Action Committee offered themselves for arrest and also set up a student hunger strike camp (see, To Never Forget, Hassan Rehman & Amanullah Kariapper, this issue). Peaceful and democratic tactics have been adopted consciously to highlight and contrast the violent and dictatorial practices of the ruling elite – and thus its illegitimacy. Inspired by and following the path of the Progressive Writers the students, lawyers, journalists and other groups such as the Concerned Citizens of Pakistan are fighting for justice in the land – for the beloved Dawn:

...the heart, the eye, and yet deeper heart -
still ablaze for the beloved, their turmoil shines.
In the lantern by the road the flame is stalled for news:
Did the morning breeze ever come? Where has it gone?
Night weighs us down, it still weighs us down.
Friends, come away from this false light.
Come, we must search for that promised Dawn.

Faiz Ahmed Faiz.

Qalandar Bux Memon,

Lahore, 2nd February 2008.



Illustration by Eunhyung Kang

LEARN TO LIVE WITHOUT MASTERS.

AN INTERVIEW WITH SLAVOJ ŽIZEK
BY OSCAR GUARDIOLA-RIVERA

“

London, November-December 2007

1. GETTING RID OF THE BIG OTHER.

OGR: It seems as if, in the end, your philosophical and political project is to break through the various impasses of extrinsic vs. intrinsic accounts of everything, from cinema to science and politics, without playing to the gallery of hysterics who want you to give them 'the new law'. That would explain why your discourse (and your practice) cannot simply follow the conventions of the discourse of the university. Put otherwise, is this what you are getting at when you state that the task is 'to get rid of the Big other' in all its forms (including that of the 'organic intellectual')?

SZ: It was already Jacques-Alain Miller who elaborated the idea that democracy involves a kind of destitution of the big Other, with direct reference to Claude Lefort:

"Is 'democracy' a master-signifier? Without any doubt. It is the master-signifier which says that there is no master-signifier, at least not a master-signifier which would stand alone, that every master-signifier has to insert itself wisely among others. Democracy is Lacan's big S of the barred A, which says: I am the signifier of the fact that Other has a hole, or that it doesn't exist."

Of course, Miller is aware that EVERY master-signifier bears witness to the fact that there is no master-signifier, no Other of the Other, that there is a lack in the Other, etc. — the very gap between S_1 and S_2 occurs because of this lack (as with God in Spinoza, the Master-Signifier by definition fills in the gap in the series of "ordinary" signifiers). The difference is that, with democracy, this lack is directly inscribed into the social edifice, it is institutionalized in a set of procedures and regulations — no wonder, then, that Miller ap-

provingly quotes Marcel Gauchet about how, in democracy, truth only offers itself “in division and decomposition.” Is this, however, all that is to say here?

Let me recall Karl Kautsky’s old defense of the multiparty democracy: Kautsky conceived the victory of socialism as the parliamentary victory of the social-democratic party, and even suggested that the appropriate political form of the passage from capitalism to socialism is the parliamentary coalition of progressive bourgeois parties and socialist parties. (One is tempted to bring this logic to its extreme and suggest that, for Kautsky, the only acceptable revolution would take place after a referendum at which at least 51% of voters would approve it.) In his writings of 1917, Lenin saved his utmost acerbic irony for those who engage in the endless search for some kind of “guarantee” for the revolution; this guarantee assumes two main forms: either the reified notion of social Necessity (one should not risk the revolution too early; one has to wait for the right moment, when the situation is “mature” with regard to the laws of historical development: “it is too early for the Socialist revolution, the working class is not yet mature”) or the normative (“democratic”) legitimacy (“the majority of the population is not on our side, so the revolution would not really be democratic”) - as Lenin repeatedly puts it, it is as if, before the revolutionary agent risks the seizure of the state power, it should get the permission from some figure of the big Other (organize a referendum which will ascertain that the majority supports the revolution). With Lenin, as with Lacan, the point is that a revolution *ne s’autorise que d’elle-meme*: one should assume the revolutionary ACT not covered by the big Other - the fear of taking power “prematurely,” the search for the guarantee, is the fear of the abyss of the act.

Democracy is thus not only the “institutionalization of the lack in the Other”. By institutionalizing the lack, it neutralizes — normalizes — it, so that the inexistence of the big Other (Lacan’s *il n’y a pas de grand Autre*) is again suspended: the big Other is again here in the guise of the democratic legitimization/authorization of our acts — in a democracy, my acts are “covered” as the legitimate acts which carry out the will of the majority. In contrast to this logic, the role of the emancipatory forces is not to passively “reflect” the opinion of the majority, but to *create* a new majority.

2. THE ROLE OF THE PUBLIC INTELLECTUAL.

OGR: You seem to entail that even in democracy we keep looking for new masters, new guidance and new recipes, when in fact we should strive to get rid of them all. To be consistent with that perspective one must then question also the position of the engaged intellectual, such as yourself, which more often than not appears as the ‘advanced’ conscience of society, the one proposing new forms of social and political experimentation and innovation. You have been approvingly portrayed several times as such, as an experimental performer or an innovative thinker, for instance by the San Francisco Chronicle a few years ago, after the screening of the film ‘Žizek!’. However, if you reject this role for the intellectual as a convincing form of political action in the present situation, then what is/should be the proper role of the public or politically engaged intellectual? Have intellectuals done anything of any relevance whatsoever, as a British journalist put it after the death of Jacques Derrida? Or is it their destiny to fail (politically) even when they succeed?

SZ: What can a philosopher do today, what can he or she tell the general public haunted by the problems of ecology, of racism, of religious conflicts, etc.? The task is not to provide answers, but to show how the way we perceive a

problem can be part of the problem, mystifying it instead of enabling us to solve it. There are not only wrong answers, there are also wrong questions.

A fake sense of urgency pervades the Left-liberal humanitarian discourse: “A woman is raped every six seconds in this country,” “In the time it takes you to read this paragraph, ten children will die of hunger”... Underlying all this is a hypocritical sentiment of moral outrage. This kind of pseudo-urgency was exploited by Starbucks coffee stores a couple of years ago: at the store’s entrance, posters greeting customers pointed out that almost half of the chain’s profits went into health-care for the children of Guatemala, the source of their coffee, the inference being that with every cup you drink, you save a child’s life.

There is a fundamental anti-theoretical edge to these urgent injunctions. There is no time to reflect: we have to *act now*. Through this fake sense of urgency, the post-industrial rich, living in their secluded virtual world, not only do not deny or ignore the harsh reality outside their area — they actively refer to it all times. As Bill Gates recently put it: “What do computers matter when millions are still unnecessarily dying of dysentery?”

Against this fake urgency, we might want to place Marx’s wonderful letter to Engels of 1870, when, for a brief moment it seemed that a European revolution was again at the gates. Marx’s letter conveys his sheer panic: can’t the revolutionaries wait for a couple of years? He hasn’t yet finished his *Capital*.

A critical analysis of the present global constellation - one which offers no clear solution, no “practical” advice on what to do, and provides no light at the end of the tunnel, since one is well aware that this light might belong to a train crashing towards us - usually meets with reproach: ‘Do you mean we should do *nothing*? Just sit and wait?’ One should gather the courage to answer: “YES, precisely that!” There are situations when the only truly “practical” thing to do is to resist the temptation to engage immediately and to “wait and see” by means of a patient, critical analysis.

There is a well-known Soviet joke about Lenin. Under Socialism, Lenin’s advice to young people, his answer to what they should do, was ‘Learn, learn, and learn’. This was evoked at all times and displayed on all school walls. The joke goes: Marx, Engels and Lenin are asked whether they would prefer to have, a wife or a mistress. As expected, Marx, rather conservative in private matters, answers ‘A wife!’, while Engels, more of a *bon vivant*, opts for a mistress. To everyone’s surprise, Lenin says: ‘I’d like to have both!’ Why? Is there a hidden stripe of decadent *joueur* behind his austere revolutionary image? No — he explains: ‘so that I can tell my wife that I am going to my mistress, and my mistress that I have to be with my wife...’ ‘And then, what do you do?’ ‘I go to a solitary place to learn, learn, and learn!’

Is this not exactly what Lenin did after the catastrophe of 1914? He withdrew to a lonely place in Switzerland, where he ‘learned, learned, and learned,’ reading Hegel’s logic. And this is what we should do today when we find ourselves bombarded by mediatic images of violence. We need to ‘learn, learn, and learn’ what causes this violence.

This, of course, in no way means that one should agree with the liberal common wisdom according to which philosophers in politics stand for a catastrophic misfortune: starting with Plato, they either miserably fail or succeed... in supporting tyrants. The reason, so the story goes on, is that philosophers try to impose their Notion on reality, violating it - no wonder that, from Plato to Heidegger, they are resolutely anti-democratic (with the exception of some empiricist and pragmatists), dismissing the crowd of “people” as the victim of sophists, at the mercy of contingent plurality... So when the common wisdom hears of Marxists who defend Marx, claiming that his ideas were

not faithfully realized in Stalinism, the reply: thanks God! It would have been even worse to fully realize them! Heidegger at least was willing to draw consequences of his catastrophic experience and conceded that those who think ontologically have to err ontically, that the gap is irreducible, that there is no "philosophical politics" proper. It thus seems that G.K.Chesterton was fully justified in his ironic proposal to install a "special corps of policemen, policemen who are also philosophers":

"It is their business to watch the beginnings of this conspiracy, not merely in a criminal but in a controversial sense. /.../ The work of the philosophical policeman /.../ is at once bolder and more subtle than that of the ordinary detective. The ordinary detective goes to pot-houses to arrest thieves; we go to artistic tea-parties to detect pessimists. The ordinary detective discovers from a ledger or a diary that a crime has been committed. We discover from a book of sonnets that a crime will be committed. We have to trace the origin of those dreadful thoughts that drive men on at last to intellectual fanaticism and intellectual crime."

Would not thinkers as different as Popper, Adorno and Levinas, also subscribe to a slightly changed version of this idea, where actual political crime is called "totalitarianism" and the philosophical crime is condensed in the notion of "totality"? A straight road leads from the philosophical notion of totality to political totalitarianism, and the task of "philosophical police" is to discover from a book of Plato's dialogues or a treatise on social contract by Rousseau that a political crime will be committed. The ordinary political policeman goes to secret organizations to arrest revolutionaries; the philosophical policeman goes to philosophical symposia to detect proponents of totality. The ordinary anti-terrorist policeman tries to detect those preparing to blow up buildings and bridges; the philosophical policeman tries to detect those about to deconstruct the religious and moral foundation of our societies...

One should thoroughly reject not only this criminalization of intellectuals, but, even more, the defensive domestication of radical intellectuals who, so the story goes, offer a provocative correction to democracy which, through his exaggeration, renders visible the inconsistencies and weaknesses of the democratic project. The idea is that radical theories are provocations which are not really "meant seriously," but aim, through their "provocative" character, to awaken us from the democratic-dogmatic slumber and thus contribute to the revitalization of democracy itself... This is how the establishment likes "subversive" theorists to be: turned into harmless gadflies who bite us and thus awaken us to inconsistencies and imperfection of our democratic enterprise — God forbid to take their project seriously and try to *live* them...

3. NOT UNITE BUT SEPARATE.

OGR: Many of your self-appointed friends demand that you write 'more rigorously', 'more geometrical' I remember one of them saying. However, it seems that part of what makes your intervention so unsettling is precisely your refusal to play the role of the mainstream academic. A bit like the Cynics of ancient Greece, who were not that Greek, and whose political intent and philosophical outlook was no less powerful and rigorous than that of other post-Socratics. As we know, the latter often ended up tutoring emperors, close to power, while we have no news of any of the Cyn-

ics sitting comfortably with those in power. Then, perhaps there is some political truth in the refusal to play along the rules of the current academic establishment, committed to the self-revolutionising impulse of modern/colonial capitalism and to the integration of 'excess' into the normal, while being strictly 'rigorous'. Rather, your intervention seems to posit itself in the place of the analyst, separating what in the social link appears together in relation. Is it not this, precisely, the position of rebellion and revolution, separating from, even shattering the binds and relations that characterise the present situation?

SZ: Confronted with complex historical situations, our task is not to unite the empirical plurality, but to reduce complexity to its underlying minimal difference. Our immediate experience of a situation in our reality is that of a multitude of particular elements which coexist — say, a society is composed of a multitude of strata or groups, and the task of democracy is perceived as that of enabling a livable coexistence of all the elements: all the voices should be heard, their interests and demands taken into account. The task of radical emancipatory politics is, on the contrary, that of "subtracting" from this multiplicity the underlying antagonistic tension (we see immediately how far we are here from the fashionable criticism of the "binary logic": the task is precisely to *reduce* the multiplicity to its "minimal difference"). That is to say, in the multiplicity of elements, of parts, we should isolate the "part of no-part," the part of those who, although they are formally included into the "set" of society, do not have a place within it. This element is the symptomatic point of universality: although it belongs to its field, it undermines its universal principle. What this means is that in it, specific difference overlaps with universal difference: this part is not only differentiated from other particular elements of society within the encompassing universal unity, it is also in an antagonistic tension with the very predominant universal notion/principle of society. It is as if society has to include, count as one of its parts, an element which negates its own defining universality. Emancipatory politics always focuses on such a "part of no part": immigrants who are "here but not from here," those living in slums who are formally citizens, but excluded from the public law and political order, etc.etc. It thus reduces the complexity of the multiple social body to the "minimal difference" between the predominant/ruling universal social principle and those whose very existence undermines this principle.

On September 11th, 2001, the Twin Towers were hit; twelve years earlier, on November 9th, 1989, the Berlin Wall fell. November 9th announced the "happy '90s," the Francis Fukuyama dream of the "end of history," the belief that liberal democracy had, in principle, won, that the search is over, that the advent of a global, liberal world community lurks just around the corner, that the obstacles to this ultra-Hollywood happy ending are merely empirical and contingent (local pockets of resistance where the leaders did not yet grasp that their time is over). In contrast to it, 9/11 is the main symbol of the end of the Clintonite happy '90s, of the forthcoming era in which new walls are emerging everywhere, between Israel and the West Bank, around the European Union, on the U.S.-Mexico border.

So what if the new proletarian position is that of the inhabitants of slums in the new megalopolises? The explosive growth of slums in the last decades, especially in the Third World megalopolises from Mexico City and other Latin American capitals through Africa (Lagos, Chad) to India, China, Philippines and Indonesia, is perhaps the crucial geopolitical event of our times. The case of Lagos, the biggest node in the shanty-town corridor of 70 million people that stretches from Abidjan to Ibadan, is exemplary here: according to the official sources themselves, about two thirds of the Lagos State total land mass of 3.577 square kilometers could be classified as shanties or slums; no one even knows the size of its population — officially it is 6 million, but most experts estimate it at 10 million. Since,

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sometime very soon (or maybe, given the imprecision of the Third World censuses, it already happened), the urban population of the earth will outnumber the rural population, and since slum inhabitants will compose the majority of the urban population, we are in no way dealing with a marginal phenomenon. We are thus witnessing the fast growth of the population outside the state control, living in conditions half outside the law, in terrible need of the minimal forms of self-organization. Although their population is composed of marginalized laborers, redundant civil servants and ex-peasants, they are not simple a redundant surplus: they are incorporated into the global economy in numerous ways, many of them working as informal wage workers or self-employed entrepreneurs, with no adequate health or social security coverage. (The main source of their rise is the inclusion of the Third World countries in the global economy, with cheap food imports from the First World countries ruining local agriculture.) They are the true "symptom" of slogans like "Development," "Modernization," and "World Market": not an unfortunate accident, but a necessary product of the innermost logic of global capitalism.

No wonder that the hegemonic form of ideology in slums is Pentecostal Christianity, with its mixture of charismatic miracles-and-spectacles-oriented fundamentalism and of social programs like community kitchens and taking care of children and old. While, of course, one should resist the easy temptation to elevate and idealize the slum dwellers into a new revolutionary class, one should nonetheless, in Badiou's terms, perceive slums as one of the few authentic "evental sites" in today's society — the slum-dwellers are literally a collection of those who are the "part of no part," the "surplus" element of society, excluded from the benefits of citizenship, the uprooted and dispossessed, those who effectively "have nothing to lose but their chains." It is effectively surprising how many features of slum dwellers fit the good old Marxist determination of the proletarian revolutionary subject: they are "free" in the double meaning of the word even more than the classic proletariat ("freed" from all substantial ties; dwelling in a free space, outside the police regulations of the state); they are a large collective, forcibly thrown together, "thrown" into a situation where they have to invent some mode of being-together, and simultaneously deprived of any support in traditional ways of life, in inherited religious or ethnic life-forms.

Of course, there is a crucial break between the slum-dwellers and the classic Marxist working class: while the latter is defined in the precise terms of economic "exploitation" (the appropriation of surplus-value generated by the situation of having to sell one's own labor force as a commodity on the market), the defining feature of the slum-dwellers is socio-political, it concerns their (non)integration into the legal space of citizenship with (most of) its incumbent rights — to put it in somewhat simplified terms, much more than a refugee, a slum-dweller is a *homo sacer*, the systemically generated "living dead" of global capitalism. He is a kind of negative of the refugee: a refugee from his own community, the one whom the power is not trying to control through concentration, where (to repeat the unforgettable pun from Ernst Lubitch's *To Be Or Not to Be*) those in power do the concentrating while the refugees do the camping, but pushed into the space of the out-of-control; in contrast to the Foucauldian micro-practices of discipline, a slum-dweller is the one with regard to whom the power renounces its right to exert full control and discipline, finding it more appropriate to let him dwell in the twilight zone of slums.

What one finds in the "really-existing slums" is, of course, a mixture of improvised modes of social life, from religious "fundamentalist" groups hold together by a charismatic leader and criminal gangs up to germs of new "socialist" solidarity. The slum dwellers are the counter-class to the other newly emerging class, the so-called "symbolic class" (managers, journalists and PR people, academics, artists, etc.) which is also uprooted and perceives itself as directly universal (a New York academic has more in common with a Slovene academic than with blacks in

Harlem half a mile from his camps). Is this the new axis of class struggle, or is the "symbolic class" inherently split, so that one can make the emancipatory wager on the coalition between the slum-dwellers and the "progressive" part of the symbolic class? What we should be looking for are the signs of the new forms of social awareness that will emerge from the slum collectives: they will be the germs of future.

4. DIVISION AND RADICAL POLITICS IN THE WORLD TODAY

OGR: The suggestion here is that today the task of radical politics is not synthesis (the popular synthesis, the cosmopolitical synthesis), in a phrase, to build a 'world' capable of including the whole of 'humanity' (actually, capitalism does that already) but rather, as thinkers like Agamben or Costas Douzinas in Europe and Enrique Dussel and Pheng Cheah elsewhere put it, to separate and distinguish: the people in state of rebellion from the nation in state of exception, law and violence out of fear from the denial of violence without fearing it, globalization from national or post-national liberation.

SZ: Peter Hallward was right in pointing out that the poetics of "resistance," of deterritorialized nomadic mobility, of creating *lignes de fuite*, of never being where one is expected to dwell, is not enough; the time has come to start creating what one is tempted to call liberated territories, the well-defined and delineated social spaces in which the reign of the System is suspended: a religious or artistic community, a political organization, and other forms of a "place of one's own." This is what makes slums so interesting: their territorial character. While today's society is often characterized as the society of total control, slums are the territories within a state boundaries from which the state (partially, at least) withdrew its control, territories which function as white spots, blanks, in the official map of a state territory. Although they are *de facto* included into a state by the links of black economy, organized crime, religious groups, etc., the state control is nonetheless suspended there, they are domains outside the rule of law. In the map of Berlin from the times of the now defunct GDR, the area of West Berlin was left blank, a weird hole in the detailed structure of the big city; when Christa Wolf, the well-known East German half-dissident writer, took her small daughter to the East Berlin's high TV tower, from which one had a nice view over the prohibited West Berlin, the small girl shouted gladly: »Look, mother, it is not white over there, there are houses with people like here!« - as if discovering a prohibited slum Zone...

This is why the "destructured" masses, poor and deprived of everything, situated in a non-proletarianized urban environment, constitute one of the principal horizons of the politics to come. These masses, therefore, are an important factor in the phenomenon of globalization. The true globalization, today, would be found in the organization of these masses — on a worldwide scale, if possible — whose conditions of existence are essentially the same? Whoever lives in the *banlieues* of Bamako or Shanghai is not essentially different from someone who lives in the banlieue of Paris or the ghettos of Chicago." Effectively, if the principal task of the emancipatory politics of the XIXth century was to break the monopoly of the bourgeois liberals by way of politicizing the working class, and if the task of the XXth century was to politically awaken the immense rural population of Asia and Africa, the principal task of the XXIth century is to politicize — organize and discipline — the "destructured masses" of slum-dwellers.

Hugo Chavez's biggest achievement in the first years of his rule was precisely the politicization (inclusion

into the political life, social mobilization) of slum dwellers; in other countries, they mostly persist in apolitical inertia. It was this political mobilization of the slum dwellers which saved him against the US-sponsored coup: to the surprise of everyone, Chavez included, slum dwellers massively descended to the affluent city center, tipping the balance of power to his advantage.

The course on which Chavez embarked from 2006 is the exact opposite of the postmodern Left's mantra on de-territorialization, rejection of statist politics, etc.: far from »resisting to state power,« he *grabbed* power (first by an attempted coup, then democratically), ruthlessly using the state apparatuses and interventions to promote his goals; furthermore, he is militarizing favelas, organizing training of armed units there. And, the ultimate scare: now that he is feeling the economic effects of the »resistance« to his rule of the capital (temporary shortages of some goods in the state-subsidized supermarkets), he announced the constitution of his own political Party! Even some of his allies are skeptical about this move: does it signal the return to the standard party-state politics? However, one should fully endorse this risky choice: the task is to make this party function not as a usual (populist or liberal-parliamentary) party, but as a focus for the political mobilization of new forms of politics (like the grass roots slum committees). So what should we say to someone like Chavez? "No, do not grab state power, just subtract yourself, leave the laws of the /State/ situation still being in place"? Chavez is often dismissed as a clownish comedian — but would such a subtraction not really reduce him to a new version of Subcomandante Marcos of the Zapatista movement in Mexico, to whom now many Leftist deservedly refer to as "Subcomediante Marcos"? Today, it is great capitalists, from Bill Gates to ecological polluters, who "resist" the State...

It is here that the materialist-dialectic passage from the Two to Three gains all its weight: the axiom of Communist politics is not simply the dualist "class struggle," but, more precisely, the Third moment as the subtraction from the Two of the hegemonic politics. That is to say, the hegemonic ideological field imposes on us a field of (ideological) visibility with its own "principal contradiction" (today, it is the opposition of market-freedom-democracy and fundamentalist-terrorist-totalitarianism - "Islamofascism" etc.), and the first thing to do is to reject (to subtract from) this opposition, to perceive it as a false opposition destined to obfuscate the true line of division. Lacan's formula for this redoubling is $1+1+a$: the "official" antagonism (the Two) is always supplemented by an "indivisible remainder" which indicates its foreclosed dimension. In other terms, the true antagonism is always reflective, it is the antagonism between the "official" antagonism and that what is foreclosed by it (this is why, in Lacan's mathematics, $1+1=3$). Today, for example, the true antagonism is not the one between liberal multiculturalism and fundamentalism, but between the very field of their opposition and the exclude Third (radical emancipatory politics).

This, then, is the subtraction to be made: the subtraction *from* the hegemonic field which, simultaneously, violently intervenes *into* this field, reducing it to its occluded minimal difference. Such subtraction is extremely violent, even more violent than destruction/purification: it is reduction to minimal difference, to difference of part(s)/no-part, 1 and 0, groups and proletariat. It is not only a subtraction of the subject *from* the hegemonic field, but a subtraction which violently *affects* this field itself, laying bare its true coordinates. Such a subtraction does not add a third position to the two positions whose tension characterizes the hegemonic field (so that we have now, on the top of liberalism and fundamentalism, also the radical Leftist emancipatory politics); this third term rather "denaturalizes" the whole hegemonic field, bringing out the underlying complicity of the opposed poles that constitute it.

Take Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*: the hegemonic opposition is there the one between Capulets and Montagues — it is the opposition in the positive order of Being, a stupid issue of belonging to a particular, this or that,

family clan. To make this issue into a "minimal difference," to subordinate all other choices to this one as the only choice that really matters, is a wrong move. Romeo and Juliet's gesture with regard to this hegemonic opposition is precisely that of subtraction: their love singularizes them, they subtract themselves from its hold, constituting their own space of love which, the moment it is practiced as marriage, not merely as a transgressive secret affair, perturbs the hegemonic opposition. (The crucial thing to take note of here is that such a subtractive gesture on behalf of love "works" only with regard to the "substantive" differences of particular (ethnic, religious) domains, not with regard to the class difference: class difference is "non-subtractive," one cannot subtract from it because it is not a difference between particular regions of social being, but cuts across the entire social space. When confronted to a class difference, there are only two solutions to the love link, i.e., the couple *has* to take sides: either the lower class partner is graciously accepted into the higher class, or the higher class partner renounces his class in a political gesture of solidarity with the lower class.)

One of the names of this subtraction is "dictatorship of the proletariat." "Dictatorship" designates the hegemonic role in the political space, and "proletariat" those "out of joint" in the social space, the "part of no-part" lacking a proper place in it. This is why the all too quick dismissal of proletariat as the "universal class" misses the point: proletariat is not the "universal class" in the same sense in which, for Hegel, state bureaucracy is the "universal class," directly standing for the universal interest of society (in contrast to other "estates" which stand for their particular interest). What qualifies proletariat for this position is ultimately a *negative* feature: all other classes are (potentially) capable of reaching the status of the "ruling class," while proletariat cannot achieve this without abolishing itself as a class — or, as Bulent Somay put it:

"what makes the working class into an agency and provide it with a mission is neither its poverty, nor its militant and pseudo-military organization, nor its proximity to the (chiefly industrial) means of production. It is only its structural inability to organize itself into yet another ruling class that provides the working class with such a mission. The proletariat is the only (revolutionary) class in history that abolishes itself in the act of abolishing its opposite. 'The people,' on the other hand, made up of a myriad of classes and sub-classes, social and economic strata, cannot structurally carry out such a mission. Quite on the contrary, whenever a 'historical task' is assigned to 'the people' as such, the outcome has always been that either a fetal bourgeoisie immediately took precedence and, through an accelerated growth process, organized itself into a ruling class." There is thus more than hypocrisy in the fact that, at the highest point of Stalinism, when the entire social edifice was shattered by purges, the new constitution proclaimed the end of "class" character of the Soviet power (voting rights were restored to members of classes previously excluded), and that the Socialist regimes were called "people's democracies." The opposition of proletariat and "people" is crucial here: in Hegelese, their opposition is the very opposition of "true" and "false" universality. *People is inclusive, proletariat is exclusive; people fights intruders, parasites, those who prevent its full self-assertion, proletariat fights a struggle which divides the people in its very core. People wants to assert itself, proletariat wants to abolish itself.* ✱

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.poetry section.

Martín Gubbins

The first time I saw Martín Gubbins, at a *Writers Forum Workshop*, it was obvious to me that he was at least a poet worth reading and watching. His work was distinctive; and, soon, of a kind of its own.

What one might have noticed at the workshop and in Gubbins' performances was the speed and facility with which he had learned from others since the last time one had seen him.

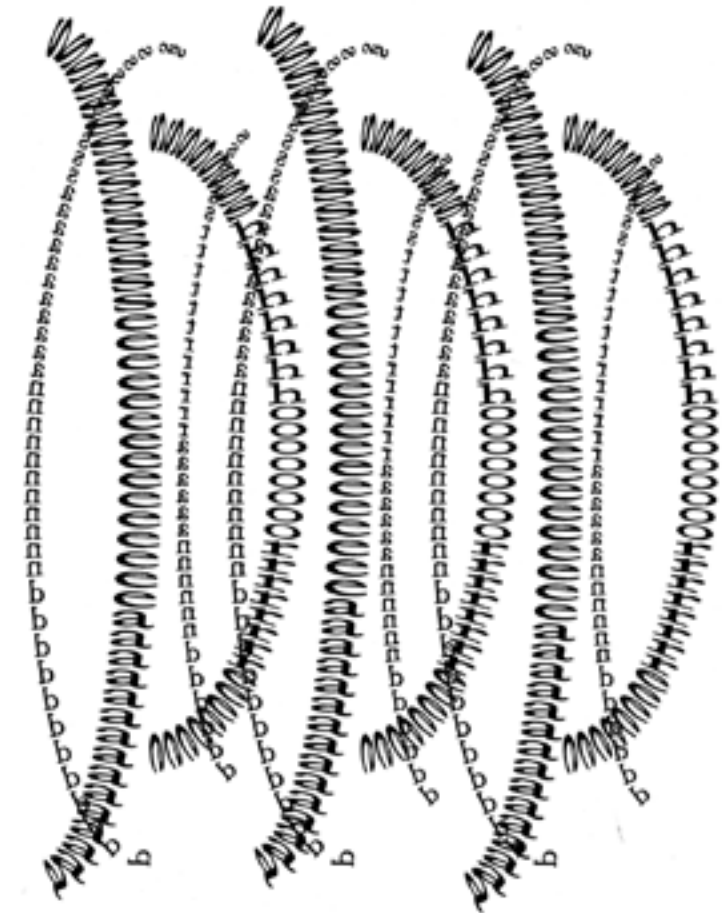
It was and is learning, not borrowing, manifested with subtlety.

His image-making is not just intelligent but craftsmanlike. It is intelligent and careful.

Gubbins' work may, in some ways, be rooted among the varied and rich visual poetics of Latin America; but it is informed also by knowledge of and continued contact with the European, a truly international body of work. And he is still young!

Lawrence Upton

January 2008



Contours of Chile, part I
(from *London Poems*)



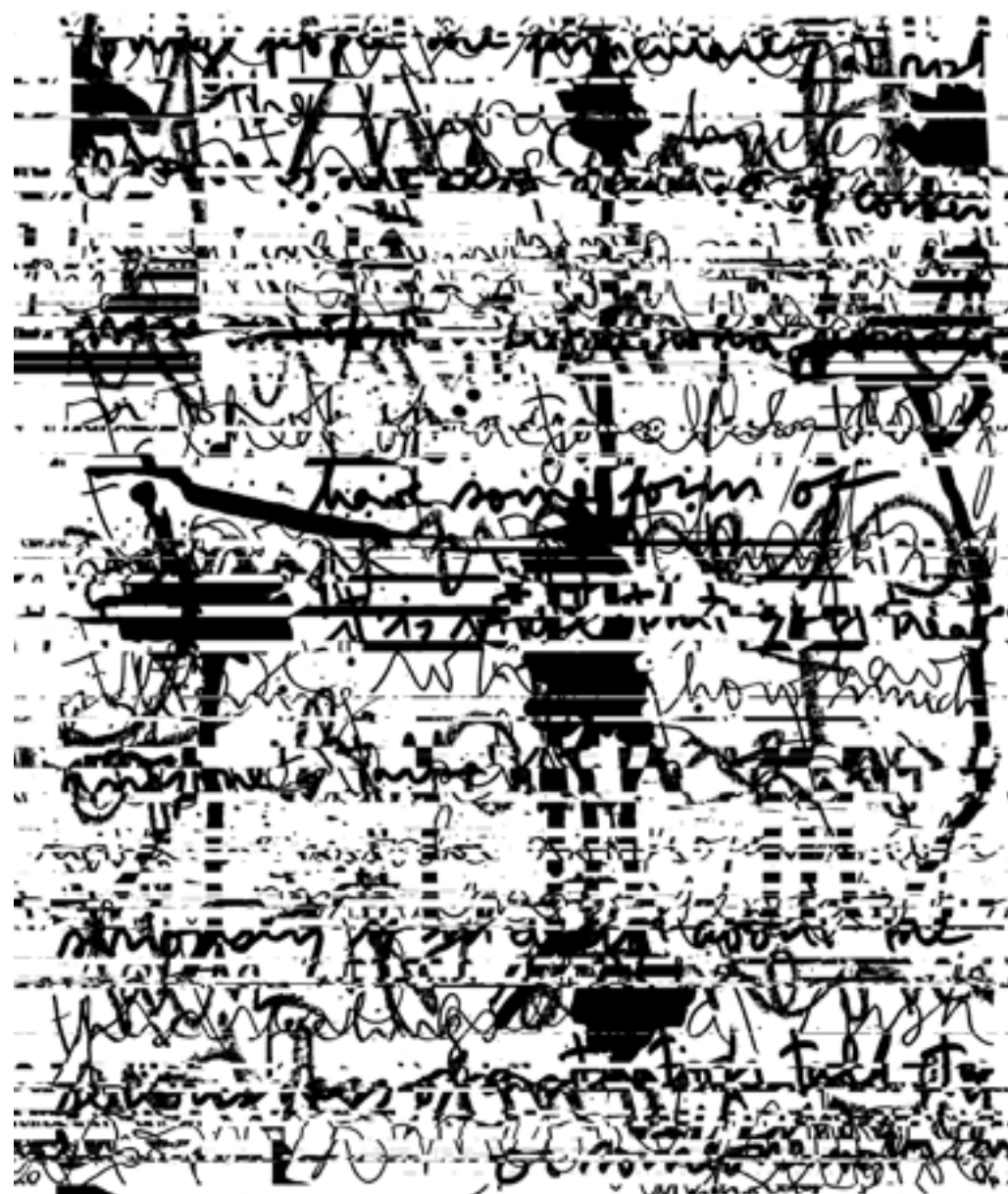
Contours of Chile, part II
(from *London Poems*)



Dee Diction
(from *London Poems*)



Roundabout, part V
(from London Poems)



Facts and Figures, part V
(from London Poems)



Big Brother
(from London Poems)

In the school they used to kill people in
 the school they used to kiple peoll in the
 school they used to kipeo plell in the
 school they used to ellki peopl in the
 school they used to lleo kippl in the
 school they used to lieutenant in the
 school they used to alientuent in the
 school they used to netuntalie in the
 school they used to kill so many in the
 school they used to ill man kosy in the
 school they used to mally iskon in the
 school they used to kool ma nys in the
 school they used to moany skill in the
 school they used to lany lomsk in the
 school they used to in the school they
 used to in the school they used to
 wwwwwwwithoutwantingIwanted in
 the school they used to in the land of the
 singing they used to in the hand of the
 river I wanted in the skin of the
 drum without wanting I wanted
 wwwwwwwithoutwantingIwanted
 concience cowards the pale shadow
 of thought cowards in the school they
 used to cowards in the feathers of the
 shortness of breath juana in the shitty
 school they used to juana the wallet goes
 shot off through the makeshift beds of
 the urgency of the being she used to
 say through two ways' detours the one
 that suddenly crestfallen distance of a
 thought the vaulting horse the dusk
 horizon through the gaps of the zinc
 roofing of the grass the aghh

In the school they used to
(translated from *En La Escuela*)



Passage
(from ALBUM)

MARTÍN GUBBINS → (Santiago, 1971), is a Chilean poet, sound artist and publisher. He has published ALBUM (Santiago, Ediciones Tácitas, 2005) and the CD En la Escuela (Santiago, Alquimia Ediciones, 2007) together with Tomás Varas. This year the Writers Forum Press will launch his first book of visual poetry in English (London Poems 2001-2003). His work has been exhibited in the UK, Sweden, Argentina and Chile; and published in several magazines and websites in Latin America, Europe and the USA. He founded and leads, together with other Chilean poets and artists, the Foro de Escritores in Santiago. <http://www.myspace.com/martingubbins>



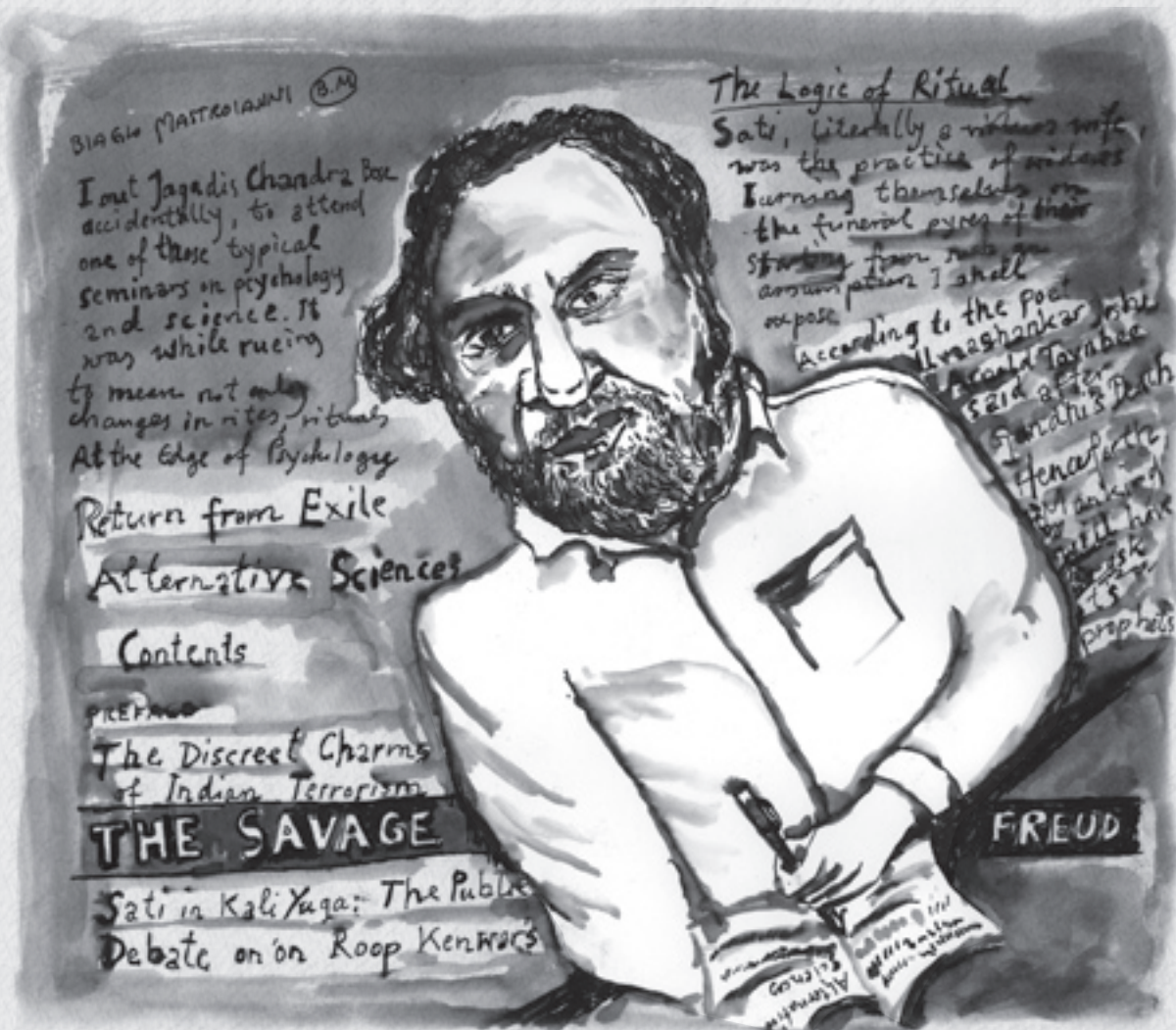
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Reader; and catalogues:
Africa Remix, Indian
Summer, Raqs Media
Collective, Transmediale 08.*

SOUTH ASIA

➔ Compiled by Cédric Vincents ➔





"THE OPPRESSED HAVE NO OBLIGATION TO FOLLOW THE RULES..."

⇒ INTERVIEW WITH ASHIS NANDY ⇐

Prof Ashis Nandy is a well known social thinker and social psychologist based at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), Delhi. He has been an outspoken critic of science, modernity and secularism. His writings since the early 1980s have been extremely influential, in conjunction with Edward Said's critique of Orientalism, in exposing the universalist pretensions of Western thought and social sciences. His most important books include *The Intimate Enemy*, *At the Edge of Psychology*, *Tradition, Tyranny and Utopia*, *The Savage Freud*, *Time Warps* and *The Romance of the State*. Nandy's critique of secularism in the mid-1980s unleashed one of the richest and most hotly contested debates in India — one that continues even today.

→ Interviewed by Aditya Nigam, Fellow CSDS, Delhi.

Aditya Nigam: I wish to speak to you about alternative knowledge — or knowledges. But before I go into the more theoretical questions, let me ask you about your biographical entry point. Given that you are a trained psychologist and statistician — both part of mainstream knowledge-systems — and in fact, joined the CSDS as a statistical person, how did you venture into this intellectual area?

Ashis Nandy: That is more or less accidental. I was trained as a sociologist. In fact, I initially went to a medical college and did three years in medicine. Later, in order to do sociology, I went to a department in Nagpur — one of the few sociology departments in India at that time. It was a department that was specifically trying to break away from the mainstream traditions of sociology. This department of sociol-

ogy was very much oriented towards mathematics and mathematization of sociology. There was a major component of statistics and because I came from a science background, I found that attractive. Like many young fools of that time, I thought that society could be quantified; all data, all insight could be quantified. Subsequently, I went into psychology — in fact I was trained in clinical psychology, not simply psychology — and it was heavily psychoanalytic at that time and so was heavily anti-quantitative in orientation. Many of my seniors were trained psychoanalysts. But my interests in alternative knowledge proceeded in a convoluted way. I was interested in the psychology of politics. But in those days, about the only people interested in psychoanalysis and the psychology of politics were some of the Frankfurt School scholars, especially Adorno, Horkheimer — and Erich Fromm for a while. They actually made use of and combined quantitative studies with psychoanalysis and I will tell you some other time...interesting stories about that [‘the quantitative side of the story’.] But it is interesting that the Frankfurt school scholars were the only ones, and only Jews probably, who escaped the Nazi persecution because they took their own studies seriously and trusted their own data. Their survey on the ‘authoritarian personality’ revealed to them a prominent authoritarian core in the personality of the German workers, who were otherwise, technically communists or socialists. They understood that there if an authoritarian regime came to power, one couldn’t trust them. So they shifted, so the story goes, their office near the station and when the time came, they escaped from there to Switzerland...but that’s beside the point.

So in that sense, there was this conflict within me also. When I came here to the Centre [CSDS] — I was about 26 — I was interested in two kinds of things. First, the psychology of politics as reflected in major social and political reform movements in India. I started going through Raja Ram Mohun Roy and his life; simultaneously, I was interested in the psychological components — and the context — of the intellectuals and the intellectual world since the nineteenth century. Not much work seems to have been done since the nineteenth century. I wanted to study this indifference and this took me towards scientists. My first independent study in fact was a study of two scientists...I was interested in the psychological and cultural sources — well psychological sources to start with — of creativity and of the kind of knowledge they produced. That gradually took me to the area of culture because I found that we cannot figure out these things — even the psychological interpretation is not complete — without paying attention to the cultural context. Ultimately this became my more sustained interest. I became interested in the culture of science itself. The question of properly scientific creativity and the destructiveness of science...The psychology of politics had already taken me in that direction of understanding violence. And ultimately this became a kind of swing and my increasing preoccupation came to be with the sources of human creativity and destructiveness. This led to my more general investigations on the destructiveness of science and a search for a radical critique of science that would focus not only on the critique of its ‘faulty’ context but would examine the very text of science itself. I found it increasingly difficult to believe that it was merely the context that accounted for its problems and that there was some thought police guarding the borders of the text itself, as it were. That took me to different kinds of knowledge systems which had different kinds of starting points and different baselines...different points of departure. I was astounded to see the sheer diversity and the sheer resilience of many of these systems of knowledge. In fact, the resilience of these systems impressed me terribly and two things struck me while attempting to understand these knowledge

systems. One, that in the ultimate analysis, dominance is not ensured through political economy, though it manifests itself through it; it is also not ensured through superior technology. It is mainly ensured through categories. If you can generate categories which marginalize the categories of others, then you have forced them to play your game. And as long as that can be ensured, you can be pretty sure that your dominance will not be challenged, because that game is yours.

Aditya: When you talk of alternative knowledges or alternative knowledge systems, what are the kinds of things you have in mind? One kind that easily comes to mind are those that can be called the ‘traditional knowledge systems’. They are also defined by the fact that their importance is more local...

Ashis: Yes, it can be local, but it can have much wider relevance also. Take for instance, something like healing systems. At a rough guess, a survey by CV Seshadhri shows this, that at least 80 percent Indians go to traditional healers. It is not that they do not approach modern doctors but their approach is more like that of going to a grocery store. There may be things that do not go with each other but when you buy you do not buy this and not buy that...I think they use all kinds of systems. At least one luminary of the medical profession produced some data contesting this figure and saying that only about 40 percent people go to traditional healers. This figure is not convincing to me — you know the figure for Australia is 60 percent. I suspect that his questionnaire asked in an either/or fashion: do you do x, Or, do you do y? And because you are the kind of person you are, I mean the interviewer is the kind of person he is, and given the cultural and status baggage, the respondents give the answer they do. I have examples in my own family where my uncles have been very well known doctors. Whenever I had a cold and cough, they would immediately recommend drugs to me. Their wives, *aamaar maamiraa* (my aunts), would ask me what they said. I would say they asked to take such and such medicine and their response would be, “Why do you listen to them? Who asked you to go to them?”[said in Bengali]. I will give you turmeric powder and pepper in warm milk — just have it. So this is there in almost all households. I am sure my house was no exception. We take recourse to these traditional systems all the time. But at the same time there is a healthy and robust skepticism regarding these — all healing systems — often expressed in common Sanskrit saying that circulate at a popular level, to the effect that the vaidya [a traditional healer] kills by the hundreds, while the doctor kills in thousands. This robust skepticism began to fascinate me because I noticed that this skepticism was absent in modern medical culture. One third of all medical reference in North America are iatrogenic — that is one third of all diseases reported are either drug induced or doctor induced.

Not that there is no skepticism in the mainstream medical culture...but that’s repressed. Illich [Ivan] has given some instances and Manu Kothari too has given some very telling examples...For instance, one of the instances he has given is that of surgeons who operate on intestinal ulcers. The rate of surgeons prescribing surgery to themselves or to their family members is one-third the rate they prescribe to others and these are cases of elite hospitals. In fact one survey says very explicitly that by standard medical conventions, doctors would routinely under-prescribe drugs for themselves and their kind and similar is the case also with surgical interventions. So I became interested in this...I began to think that talking of a

science like medicine...It enjoys a kind of sanctity and once you say that 'science says this' then everybody takes it as gospel truth. So this is one kind of way in which the text is also contaminated.

The other way of looking at it is this that scientists, because they operate within a particular kind of context, produce a kind of science that is itself contaminated, like the example that I have used quite often that Amulya Reddy told me for the first time: when they were coming to drop the bomb in Hiroshima, three scientists who had worked on the Manhattan project, went to Norbert Weiner and told him that they had calculated that what height they must detonate the bomb in order to maximize the casualties. Weiner said to them, "please keep me out of it." Three of the four scientists were Nobel Laureates. Weiner himself was a Nobel Laureate, so were the other nuclear physicists. The only one who was not a Nobel Laureate was a mathematician and that was presumably because there was no Nobel Prize in mathematics in those days. I believe that responsibility has to be shared by the scientists themselves and it will not do to always pass on the burden to impersonal forces of politics, or 'American imperialism' or 'military-industrial complex' or 'capitalism' or 'Nazism' and such other things, when it comes to the destructive uses of science.

Aditya: In *Science, Hegemony and Violence*, you have spoken of science as the new reason of the state, which can be used to 'kill, main and exploit' in the name of science and you referred to Robert Jungk's claim about nuclear energy — that you have extended to science as such — that this produces a kind of set up that is incompatible with democracy and democratic governance. I would like you to elaborate a bit on that.

Ashis: This is really an empirical thing. Jungk was basically a journalist turned thinker. He figured out through his empirical observations that wherever you see nuclear weaponry or nuclear energy, there is a whole structure of secrecy, surveillance and authoritarian control. Everywhere, whether the country is democratic or not. It is absolutely mandatory; it is universal. In fact, that is why I am not only against nuclear weaponry but also nuclear energy. I have another reason also; I think this notion of 'objectivity' that science insists upon demands two splits, two kinds of splits in our consciousness: One, between the observer and the observed, or the subject and the object, if you like — the doctor and the patient, researcher and the researched; and the other is the split that science demands between your cognitive and your affective or motivational self. I call this the double split of consciousness and all this is the demand of objectivity. I have invariably seen that even if you do get probably more objective results in some respects, the division of subject and object is maintained no longer even in the philosophy of sciences. There are so many philosophers who have spoken about that. But one of the dangers of this objectivity is 'objectification' or what Aime Cesaire calls 'thingification'. He states this in the context of colonialism particularly, where the subject races are treated as 'things' to be 'improved', 'reworked', 'remodeled' and if necessary recalibrated, discarded, junked or treated as obsolete, redundant or anachronistic — or whatever. And this split is in the heart of modern science — even though some of the recent work in theoretical physics and theoretical biology might protest against it, the entire culture is still very much built around this split. And once you begin to use science as the basis of deciding how to handle human affairs: whether to establish

mega dams or not, whether to allow biotechnologically modified food grains, this becomes the ultimate sanction. Then it matters little if a few thousand people are killed or a hundred million killed — it all appears like some unavoidable 'collateral damage'.

Aditya: One question here, since you speak of the 'imperialism of categories', about alternative knowledge systems. You have stated that modern, western knowledge systems not only produce modes of domination, they also produce and decide upon the limits of dissent, its forms and so on. Could you tell us a bit more about the alternative systems that you have in mind that do not conform to the framework and limits and criteria set by the dominant knowledge systems. Gandhi, of course, comes to mind.....

Ashis: I think they exist all around — Gandhi is only one instance and, in a sense, Gandhism is much greater than Gandhi. Gandhi himself said that what I am saying is that is nothing new and is as old as civilization. But if you read this very good friend of mine who died recently, Syed Hussain Alatas from Malaysia, you'll find that some of those things are there too...where he talks about laziness also as a way of subverting the norms set by the dominant, the myth of the West if you please. So these kinds of things are not unknown. There was this conference of evangelists in Bangkok a few years ago whose proceedings I was going through. They think Hindus are Satanic, because they believe that all religions lead to Truth and that actually subverts the Truth of their religion. So these different modes that simply lie outside the logic and normative criteria set by the dominant have not been unknown in history. There are many instances of this kind among the plantation labourers in the Americas and Africa — one can even argue that Cecil Rhodes' famous description — or notorious description, if you like of the African as half savage, half child, is partly a recognition that this is the way they remain intractable and unmanageable. But this is all over the place; it is human nature and I don't think it is Gandhian very consciously. All large, dominant systems also create a space for dissent — in a kind of 'Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition' style — using the same language, same conventions, to establish that dissent is sane, normal, reasonable and well intentioned. But I don't think that the oppressed have any obligation to follow the rules of the game — and they do not. In a society where such sanctioned forms of dissent are prevalent, there will of course, be people in large numbers who will go towards them, but there will always be people who defy these and try to subvert the given mode of dissent and of course, they will not be seen as dissenters; they will be seen as lunatics. They will be seen as being outside the ken of conventional rights granted to dissenters. So for instance, sixty percent of the Americans believe today that torture is justified, especially, say while dealing with a 'terrorist' who apparently knows about an impending terrorist attack. Obviously, terrorism — rightly or wrongly, that is not the point — happens to represent then a new kind of dissent. The kind that does not conform to laid out criteria and there is always a scope that such dissent also represents a search for a different kind of world and challenges the dominant in a much more radical fashion — and the real test of tolerance and democracy comes there.

Aditya: In this context, one question about the efficacy of such dissent. ...Often the sharp division and lines drawn between what is 'authorized' dissent and what would be considered to be reasonable dissent, lead to a situation where the latter are often reduced to ineffectivity.

Ashis: let me say this: that the really interesting kinds of dissent that flout the norms of conventional dissent are those that use the idiom of those actually marginalized and excluded by the system. To them such dissent is truly and easily understandable; to them it does not seem to flout any kind norm/s. They constitute the heart of common sense, to an extent, even the heart of everyday life. Here it becomes a very different kind of thing. The language is limited... When Nelson Mandela spoke of resistance, armed struggle his language was truly understood by his people. Even when he changed to non-violence, his language remained intelligible to them — as with say Aung San Suu Ki. Mandela's almost natural acceptance in South Africa, was because that is the language of the majority of people. It was only a small minority, linked to a globally dominant knowledge system, what you may call a shared global common sense of a global middle class that thought he was taking a very odd position.

Aditya: I wish to now come to the position you have enunciated in "History's Forgotten Doubles". History, it seems is the other pole of your critique. If science forms one aspect, it is history and the notions of Time, temporality etc that form the second aspect...

Ashis: Well, in a manner of speaking, it is the same aspect. The drive towards 'objectivity', its fetishization is the main problem. If History was one among many ways of relating to the past then it would be different; it would enrich our understanding of the past. But as with science, it appoints itself as the dominant and in fact, the sole way. It institutes a certain hierarchy that banishes all other modes of relating to the past — myths, legends, shared public memory transmitted over generations. And so the past of communities which do not use History, is lost. It is not merely a question of excluding chunks of past, for that can always be dealt with by invoking a counter history. History relies on exiling notions, sentiments, feelings, pain. So the voice of a survivor (of any violent event), becomes invalid — except in 'oral history.'. The pain of the survivor...or the families who have been destroyed have very little status in History. Take the Partition for example. At least two hundred books have been written on it and all excellent books but it is only recently in the 1990s, that scholars have started work on the nature of violence and suffering. We had to wait for one and a half generations before we would begin excavating this aspect of the Partition's history. Likewise the best works on the European genocide came out only in the 1970s and 1980s. They came out partly outside the discipline of History. This is because it is not just a matter of the annihilation of a culture, or a community only in terms of numbers. It is also a matter of the trauma involved in it. It is a matter of the way in which the millions who survived transmitted the experience. One of the most tragic findings of mine in the Partition study is that those who are direct victims and suffered enormously during the Partition and saw families and children killed in front of their eyes — they still have fonder and warmer memories and openness about the community which inflicted the violence but their children and grand children do not

because they only have atrocity stories. They have never lived in any situation with those communities, they have not experienced the other side of these relationships.

Aditya: I was actually struck by the way you formulate something in the beginning of the essay "History's Forgotten Doubles", which is otherwise such a radical critique of the enterprise of History. You say that there are people who live outside History but they also have theories of the past and that they also believe that the past is important in terms of shaping their present and future. And I wondered about this formulation, partly because I have been trying to look at issues of Time in so-called non modern contexts and one of the things that seems to be quite evident is that this separation of the Past, Present and Future — these are very modern notions....

Ashis: That is one of the problems, at least when I wrote that article. I was bothered about that because that kind of clear separation is completely missing, say, in the Indian epics...

Aditya: Not just epics but one finds so many of these instances in our own lived cultures and I was struck by a recent study of the Zapatistas where the professors from Mexico University landed up — fired by Marxism-Leninism — to organize the indigenous peasantry of the Chiapas mountains. This study has a discussion based on detailed interviews with Sub-Commandant Marcos, and it is fascinating. Marcos explains in great detail how they had to unlearn so many of the things the knew and one of these concerned the indigenous people's notion of Time — so that when they were speaking, it was difficult to tell whether the incident happened last week or five hundred years ago or in some absolutely ancient past...

Ashis: Yes, actually that was the problem. I had to traverse between the language of History and non-history. You are right and I tried to grapple with this question while making a critique of history. You find in many of the legends and myths not only here but in many other places and folk literatures, it appears quite clearly. We Indians don't have that kind of conception...so somebody comes from the future and goes away...or you find in the Bengali *upakathas* [folk tales of a kind], where the birds talk like human beings. It is not as if they are blessed by some sage or some such thing. They do not feel any need to justify it. Similarly you have someone going to heaven or to *paataal* [hell] and coming back. This traversing of time is very well developed in our cultures and in Latin America too it is very developed, not just Sub-Commandant Marcos... and it appears in a very interesting way that when you are talking of the Past, the present and the future are present in it, and when you are talking of the Present, the past and the future are present in it and when you talk of the Future, the past and present are present in it. So there are three modes — it is as if when you talk of one modality say the Past, that is like the dominant gene and the other two become regressive and likewise when you talk of the Present and Future...Even then you doubt whether you can call them 'regressive'.

Aditya: One question here about your relationship with Ivan Illich and others...How did you connect with Illich?

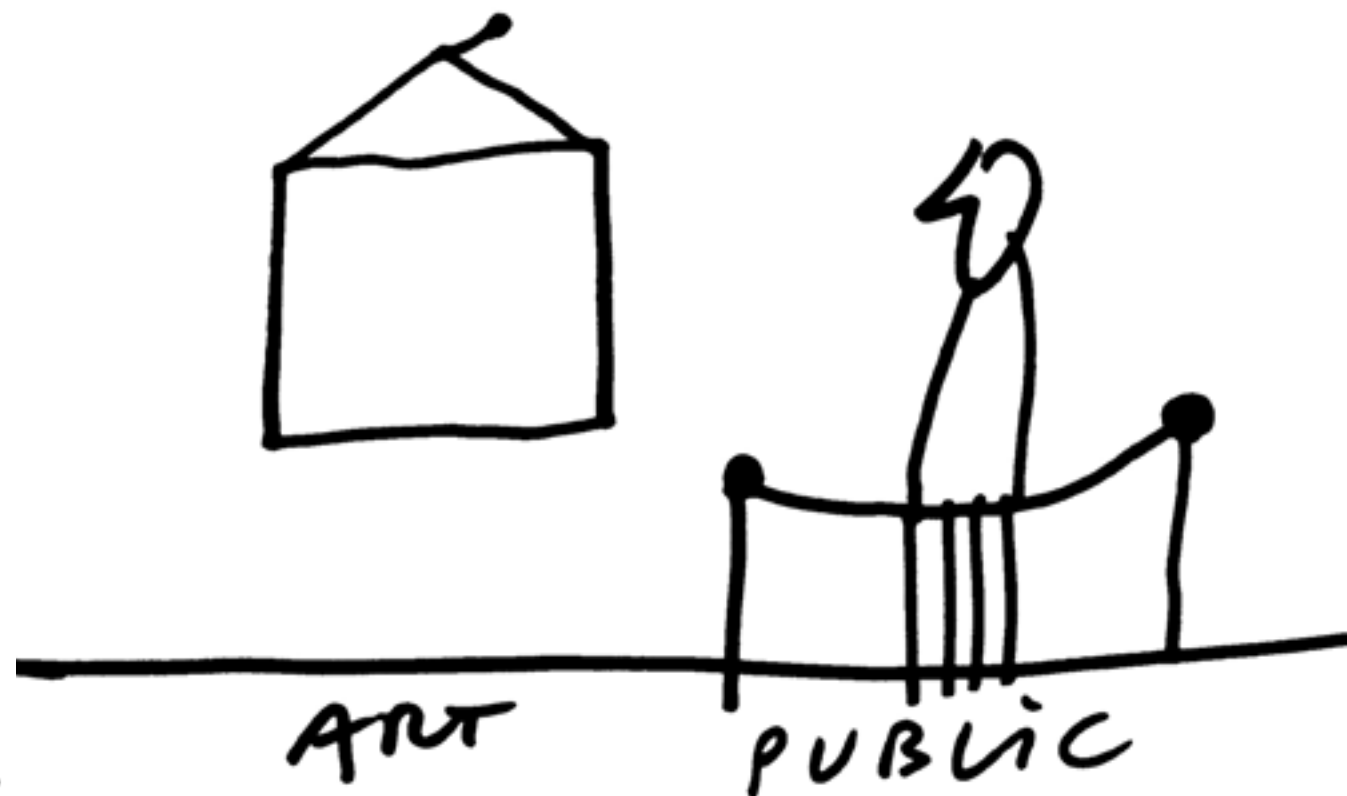
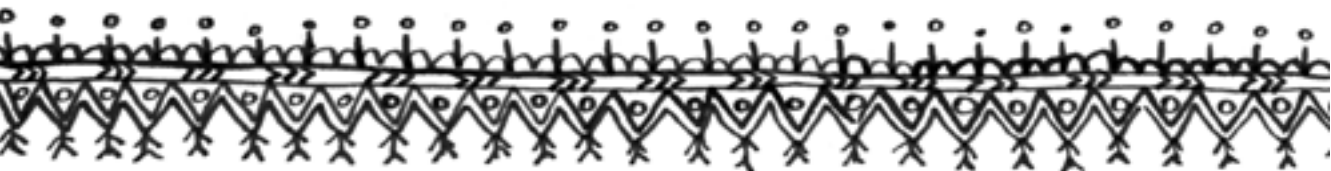
Ashis: Accidentally. Because he was very enamoured of India — Gandhi, India and India's new experiences. I found his idea of "Deschooling Society", in many ways to be a very powerful of justification of [Gandhi's concept of] Nai Taleem or 'New Education'. All my writings have come amidst a certain intellectual engagement with alternative knowledge systems and that brought me to Ivan Illich. Illich then led me to Gustavo Esteva and Majid Rahenema and a galaxy of other intellectuals...

Aditya: One final question. Since we have talked about dissenting knowledges as opposed to mainstream systems, at least one of the important influences for you has been Sigmund Freud...

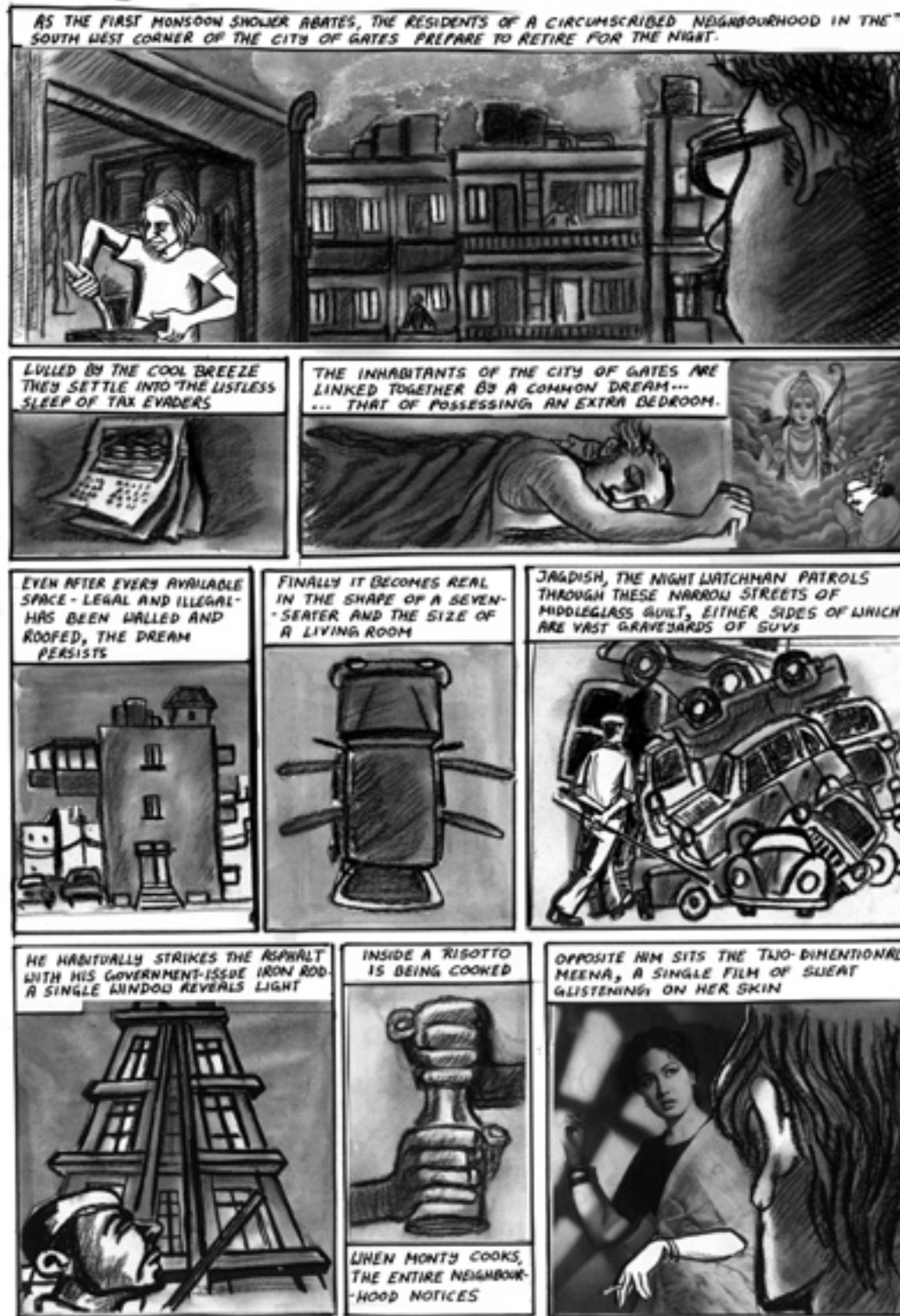
Ashis: Yes.

Aditya: And you have also mentioned somewhere that Marx — as he came to you through the Frankfurt School, especially Adorno and Marcuse...

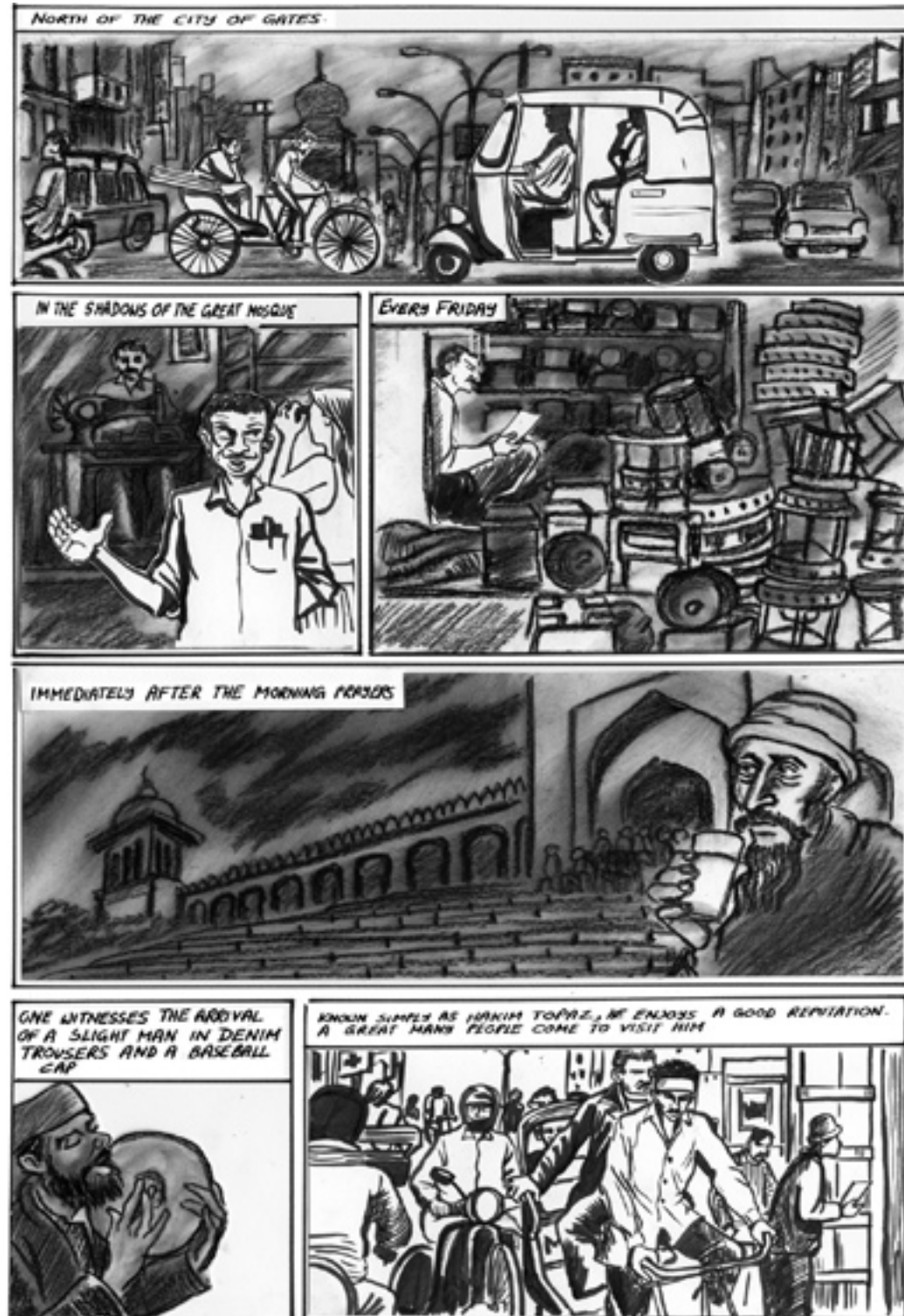
Ashis: Yes, Adorno and Marcuse in particular. There was a lot of influence of Erich Fromm among some in India though I thought he was the weakest of the lot. So for me, it was Adorno, Marcuse and Hannah Arendt. They were the only ones at that time who were critical or skeptical of the promises of modernity. Marcuse — though he himself was a product of the Enlightenment — was able to make a serious critique of the Enlightenment. Heidegger was not so much a direct influence and I came to him much, much later when people started telling me that what I was writing resonated with Heidegger. But Marcuse was important in challenging the idea of 'normality', of 'sanity' and his concept of 'negation' was important. Many of my attempts to reach out to other schools of knowledge, to writers like Castaneda and other knowledge systems, involved precisely such 'negation'. It is not that I am looking for some pristine, ultimate Truth in the alternative systems, or for an undiscovered paradise in them I am looking for ways of making the world more fluid and more open and opened up for the future so that the next generation can define their future more democratically — in a more participatory manner. The openness and fluidity of emotional and intellectual life is what is most crucial. ✱

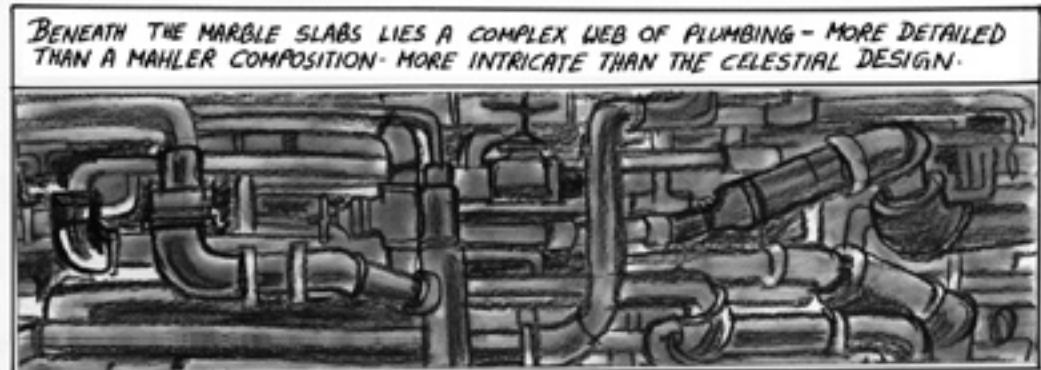


Bachelor of 21 dreams



PSYCHIC PLUMBER





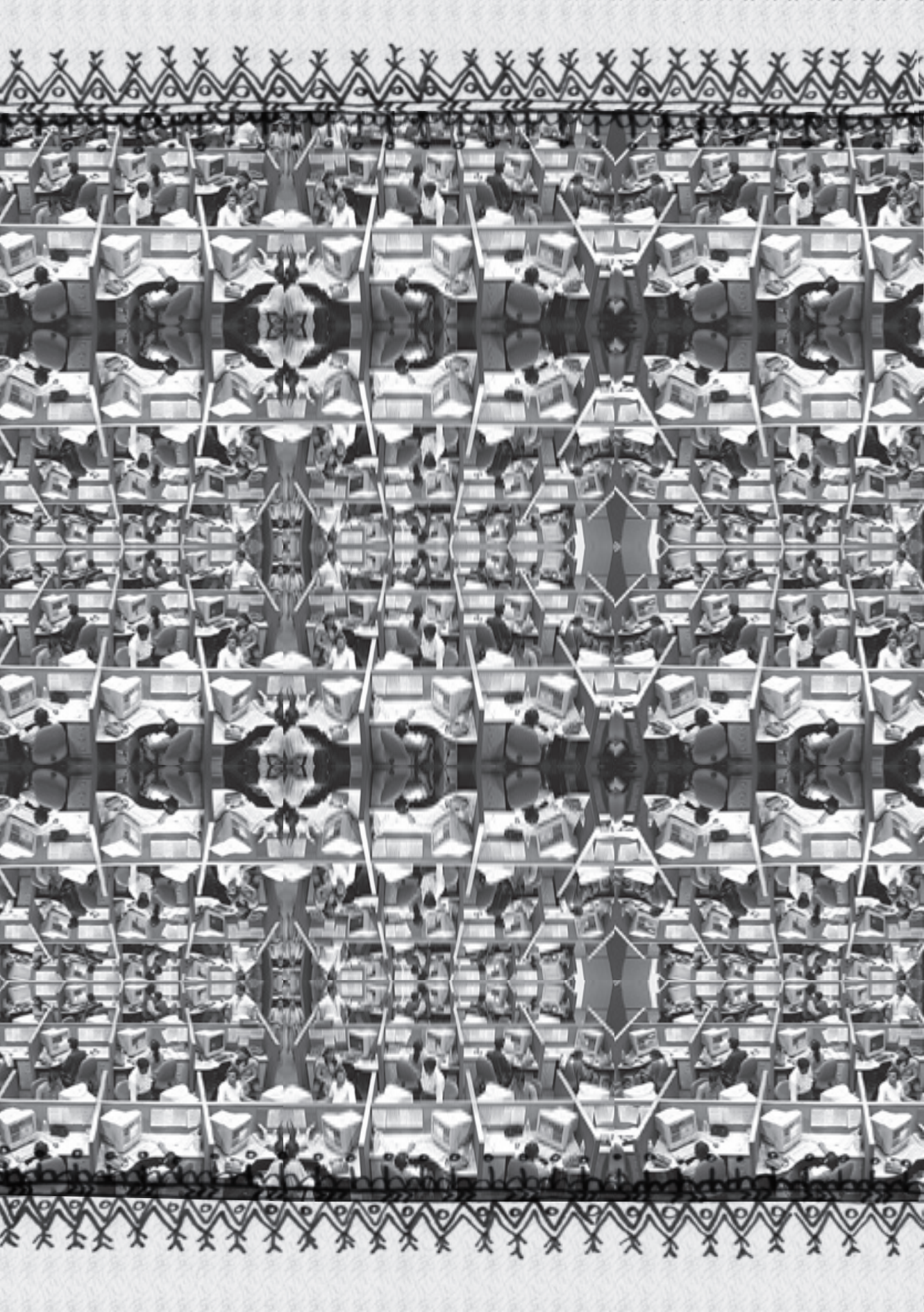
FARSOORAM, THE PSYCHIC PLUMBER, HAS THIS TO SAY TO JUSTIFY THE FANTASTICALLY HIGH BILL HE HAS DEMANDED FOR FIXING A MINOR BLOCKAGE



3



4



OUT OF JOINT: INTEGRATIONS AND DISINTEGRATIONS OF GLOBAL ECONOMY

— A. ANEESH —

Amid heated debates on job outsourcing to India, John Edwards, promoting his candidacy for the Democratic presidential nomination in 2004, said, "The real solution is to outsource this [Bush] administration." This one-liner kept reverberating in Democratic politics throughout the election year, resurfacing here and there in John Kerry's campaign. Perhaps Edwards could not grasp the meaning of his own statement. Outsourcing does not mean mere expelling but rather getting the job done elsewhere. The unintended suggestion in his statement was that American administration should be run not by someone like Edwards but by someone in a place like India who could do it cheaply and efficiently. But on closer inspection his statement does accidentally tell an interesting story: national events can indeed take place outside the bounds of nation. For instance, federal and state taxes are the backbone of any administration. There is a whole national discourse organized around taxes in the United States. Yet some of this presumably national endeavor was indeed taking place in India during Edwards's campaign: about 150,000 federal and state tax returns were being prepared in India in 2004.

A silent transformation in the global organization of work is upon us. With high-speed data-communication links, workers based in one part of the world are increasingly able to work at locations far beyond their immediate horizon. Other stories of globalization and migration have commonly centered around the body, narrating how laboring bodies move from the developing to developed nations, and how the integration of transnational labor—both documented and undocumented—takes place and struggled

along national borders. Indeed, over the years the border has only grown in significance. In the decade after 1993 the U.S. Border Patrol doubled in size and tripled its budget; for migrants as well, the border has become costlier, in terms of increased *coyote* fees and also in lives—between 1994 and 2001 the bodies of more than 2,700 failed migrants were regularly recovered on both sides of the border between the United States and Mexico. The border has not lost its significance, of course. But there is a development in migration that negotiates national borders differently. Let's call it "virtual migration."

This story unfurls an emerging paradigm of transnational work that allows workers in India to connect to corporations and consumers in the United States with high-speed satellite and cable links, providing through globally accessible data servers a range of services. Work activities may include software research and development, engineering and design, animation, geographic information systems, processing of insurance claims, accounting, data entry, transcription, translation, and customer services such as technical support. Features of this labor integration may include a continuous monitoring of work by the client in the United States, who can perform quality checks and communicate with Indian workers as if they were on site. Since the United States and India have an average time-zone difference of twelve hours, the client may enjoy, for a number of tasks, virtually round-the-clock office hours: when America closes its offices, India gets ready to start its day. Thus paradoxically, the new space of transnational work has reversed its relationship with the worker's body. Rather than move the body across enormous distances, new mechanisms allow it to stay put while moving vast quantities of data at nearly the speed of light.

In an increasingly integrated global economy, therefore, a different kind of labor migration is taking place. Virtual migration implies that a programmer based in India and working for a local firm can directly provide services in the United States, that a call center employee in Delhi—who sits in front of a computer screen wearing a headset—may sell a miniature rotisserie to a Californian. Many software development strategies rely on transnational software platforms that integrate groups scattered around the globe.

Virtual migration signifies that many debates about high-skilled migration around the globe have become somewhat redundant. With newly gained flexibility in labor supply through transnational virtual migration, contemporary capitalism seems to have found solutions to two major problems. First, corporations can avoid confrontation with nationalist politics on the issue of alien immigration, because they can harness foreign labor online without a visa, bypassing the always opposed politics of national culture and identity. In contrast to physical migration, which brings in humans along with the labor—demanding tolerance for cultural difference, education for their children, a possible long-term settlement, and general social security from the affluent society—virtual labor flows do not require that alien humans join the nation. Second, the invisibility of virtual labor helps American corporations avoid the charge that they would rather hire immigrants than citizens.

Virtual migration also has other important social consequences. Call centers in India work at night to serve their clientele in the United States during their daytime, and there is no shortage of people looking

for jobs that required them to adjust and synchronize their lives with regular consumer or work hours in the United States. As virtual migration reconfigures local contexts and the social times of people's lives, it does raise significant questions about the meaning of life and work. People who performed nightly labor lived in two worlds. One happened during their daytime (during the major part of which they slept), marked by local languages, friendships, and relations; the other, at night, was marked by the English language as well as interactions with people living in the United States. The holidays enjoyed by the worker were those celebrated in the United States. This integration into a global system of labor effects a break with local mechanisms of social integration, by introducing temporal asymmetry as opposed to temporal symmetry—a temporal coordination that makes communal life possible by organizing activities in the same time frame. The importance of temporal symmetry is clear: the most common method of punishing monks was to separate their activities temporally from those of the rest of their community, or by shifting their meal time a couple of hours away from the communal meal time. Night work in Indian companies tends to put workers out of phase with their own society. In what is considered a graveyard shift of social life, many workers seemed dissatisfied and treated their jobs as a temporary phenomenon in their lives. By placing people in another time zone, virtual integration enables an unhinging of people's "present" time from their concrete presence "here and now" for the sake of their trans-presence in another place. Spatio-temporal integration, at least in the context of night work, seemed at once spatio-temporal alienation. There is a high attrition rate among these workers, even if demand and supply for such services is growing at a high annual rate.

In order to telecommute at night, customer service agents in India are given American pseudonyms, some training in American accent as well as in American history and geography. Language plays an important part in the success of Indian software firms, as the considerable prevalence of English in India gives them an advantage over their competitors from non-English-speaking countries like China. Globalization needs certain unifying mechanisms, including linguistic homogeny, to create a viable field for virtual labor flows. A number of institutes have opened in India to neutralize the thickness of regional accents.

Some contend that "revolution" brought about by call centers is not merely economic but also cultural, promoting affluence and challenging age-old patriarchal values that prevented women from working at night. Claims of affluence as well as women's liberation must be taken with reservation. It would be an overstatement to describe call-center workers as affluent. Unless these young workers lived with their parents, they could only hope to rent a decent apartment at their starting salaries of Rs. 8,000–12,000 in places like Delhi, Bombay, or Bangalore. Salary raises are tightly linked with the number of telephone calls that one takes so that one can meet the team's target, which is usually an incredibly high number of 250–300 calls a night. Exceedingly high call targets, permanent night shifts, and such health problems as insomnia, weight loss, stress, and declining eyesight were some of the reasons why employees did not stay on their jobs for long. One must realize that night work is not a new or a mere global phenomenon. Recently Harriet Presser, in a disturbing look at the pervasiveness of nonstandard work schedules in the United States, pointed out that two out of five employed Americans worked mostly at nonstandard times—

in the evening, at night, on a rotating shift, or during the weekend. In this overlooked story about a silent, swift, and invisible social fragmentation, spouses are not together at home in the evening or at night, and parents are often not home with their children. People's integration into the twenty-four-hour economic system is also a temporal unhooking of family life. While discussions of a 24/7 economy conjure up images of a fast-paced, seamlessly integrated engine that serves its consumers around the clock, the social cost of economic growth should also enter into discussions. In virtual migration, the ever-growing subordination of the social to the economic acquires global dimensions. We find a new form of inequality—work-time inequality—extending its march into life's very foundations by disturbing circadian rhythms, which are connected with body temperature, hormone levels, and sleep. Night work may be associated with higher rates of cardiovascular disease, breast cancer, gastrointestinal disorders, miscarriage, preterm birth, and low birth weight. Some social protections for workers in India are being removed in favor of a more productive and competitive system of night work. The Factories Act of 1948 is being amended to align with the needs of virtual labor migration. The act stated that no woman shall be required to or allowed to work in any factory between 10 p.m. and 5 a.m. The Factories Amendment Bill 2003 removes this restriction imposed by section 66 of the Factories Act of 1948 on women's night employment. To allay the fears of the Central Trade Union Organisations that the "work environment in the country was not favourable for night work of women," the bill allows "employment of women workers between 7 p.m. and 6 a.m. only if the occupiers of the factories make adequate safeguards as regards occupational safety and health...adequate protection of their dignity, honour and safety and their transportation from the factory premises to the nearest point of residence" (Factories Amendment Bill 2003). The bill also mentions that "many Women Organisations have filed Writ Petitions in the various High Courts...to provide for night work by women on the ground that the existing provisions of the Act are discriminatory."

A proper understanding should perhaps not be framed in terms of women's freedom to choose their hours of work, for everyone must have equal opportunities. The issue might be framed instead along the lines of the need for an eight-hour workday—that is, not necessarily in terms of the equal distribution of misery (night work for all) but of its reduction for both genders.

The growing interdependence of labor markets signals greater vulnerabilities. The question is not limited to how a decline in demand for labor in the United States directly influences the employment situation in India, or to how the relative ease of virtual migration from India increases the possibility of short-term job displacements in the United States. The question pertains to a larger issue of integrating temporally isolated pockets of social life in a way that has far-reaching significance in terms of the increasing submission of the social to the economic. ✱

A. Aneesh is author of Virtual Migration: the Programming of Globalization.

BANIPAL

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No 30, Autumn/Winter 2007



PIRACY, AND THE FICTIONS of GLOBALISATION

→ Lawrence Liang + Rana Dasgupta ←

Lawrence Liang is a Bangalore-based lawyer and prominent thinker in the realm of "intellectual property" — a phrase he dismisses as a woefully reductive account of the realm of ideas in today's world. "The attempt to graft the moral and legal language of property onto the realm of the intangible," he says, "raises serious questions as to how we imagine our relationship with knowledge and culture." <http://www.altlawforum.org/>

*Here he discusses culture, property and piracy with Rana Dasgupta, a novelist from Delhi whose book of contemporary folktales, *Tokyo Cancelled*, was published in 2005.*

Rana Dasgupta: You've suggested that the current battles over piracy and copyright suggest a deeper crisis in the configuration of globalisation. Can you explain?

Lawrence Liang: Let me start with the following tragic story:

On August 20th 2007, riots broke out in the northern Greek port of Thessaloniki as Nigerians, mainly young demonstrators, confronted the police after the death of a Nigerian immigrant. Greek television showed footage of dozens of smashed windows and several damaged cars. Police said the victim, whose name has not been made public, had been selling CDs and DVDs illegally, and that he jumped from the first floor of a cafeteria to escape a police inspection. His injuries were fatal and he died on the spot.

This brings out for me some of the key conflicts that plague the globalizing world. Globalisation has opened corridors through which capital, goods and people can flow more easily – but they're surrounded by checkpoints, and shut out more than they let through. For the majority of the world's poor, for instance, globalisation has introduced many new obstacles to mobility – and the media landscape of ultimate freedom and movement is full of irony. At the same time, many of the products, practices and networks that people build to make up for their lack of access to these corridors are criminalized, and punished with increasing severity.

This anecdote indicates the reality behind a lot of contemporary fictions. The guarding of borders against illegal immigrants protects the fiction of the nation, while the defence of the media commodity protects the fiction of property in the digital age. Both these fictions are currently sustained by highly brutal acts of military or police violence.

RD: "The fiction of property in the digital age." Can you say more? Hasn't it become impossible to dismiss "property" like this? I thought all those old attempts to question the reality of property had evaporated, that it had congealed so far that every political side is now committed to the "fact" of property?

LL: Take a look at the advertisements issued by copyright owners to help consumers distinguish between real DVDs and fake ones. What's fascinating about these ads is that the distinguishing marks of "authenticity" have little or no connection to the underlying material – the alleged property to be protected. They tell you to look out for things like spelling mistakes, or the quality of the cover. The most important signal is that the pirated CD does not contain any details about copyright. In other words, it does not acknowledge its status as property.

Before digital media, the limitations of technology made it easy to delineate an "original" media commodity. Copying a videocassette at home was not easy: you needed two video players and lots of time – and, most importantly, every time a cassette was copied, the quality degenerated substantially. So you needed media corporations to maintain the supply of high-quality originals.

When media objects became available in digital form, however, they could be easily duplicated and transferred with no loss of quality, and the "object" that existed in law became much less self-evident. Songs and movies were just files like every other, and people did with them as they did with other files: they saved several copies in different places, they emailed them to friends, they put them online. There was nothing special anymore about the "original" and the entire process of reproduction and distribution could happen without large corporations even getting involved.

In this situation, the logic of reproduction and the property form collide. Everything changes except the attitude of media companies, which assume that the same old business models will continue. For them the CD and the DVD are merely new carriers of old commodities. Resolutely oblivious to the fundamental dynamics of digital media, they put their faith in copyright, which intervenes to sustain the fiction of a stable commodity form anchored in property, and tries to put a brake on ubiquitous reproduction.

The more absurd and anachronistic this intervention has become, the more excessive its tactics. The

death of the Nigerian media merchant in Greece is only one instance of the increasing violence with which copyright is defended around the world.

RD: Media companies usually argue that they make a considerable investment in a particular song, movie or software application, and if this is not recouped they will not be able to make more, and there will be no culture! Are you on the side of the Philistines?

LL: When we are told that a film cost so many million dollars, it's assumed that these figures make sense to us. I'm interested in understanding this idea of investment and value a little better. The bulk of this enormous sum goes into publicity, marketing and massive payments to stars. I could argue that this is not the only possible model for culture. But the "Hollywood mode of production" has become predominant form of corporate filmmaking in the world, so let's work with it for a while.

For at least the first eighty years of the film industry, a film's revenues came from the box office. It is only with the advent of video, satellite TV, etc that you have the early disintegration of the media commodity into a bundle of separate rights. It is these legal instruments that are the "property" at stake, and their value has nothing to do with the cost of a film or how many people want to see it. Most current Bollywood blockbusters have made their money before they are released. The distribution rights of Farah Khan's *Om Shanti Om*, for instance, were sold for a record-breaking Rs 750 million (£9 million) – while the film was made for only Rs 150 million (£1.8 million). The lead star, Shahrukh Khan, earned Rs 600 million (£7.5 million) from distribution rights before the film's release. Whether or not audiences watched the film was irrelevant.

Nowadays a film begins its life as a series of negotiations, including the assignment of theatre rights, music rights, satellite rights, cable rights etc. It then has its theatrical release, which is divided according to geographical zones. When the movie comes out there are a number of merchandising tie-ups and the release of a soundtrack. The soundtrack is split into various media forms: CDs, cassettes, MP3s and mobile ringtones. These are again broken down into geographical regions. Finally you have the release of DVDs, VCDs and video games, to which all the same subdivisions apply.

This practice, called "windowing," is designed to generate a near-endless series of returns on a one-time investment. It relies on an impractical fantasy of total control over the space and time of the commodity flow, which is sometimes forced to take bizarre and counter-intuitive forms. "Region coding" for DVDs, for instance – where the world is broken into five regions, and a DVD bought in one region will not play in another – directly contradicts the mobile logic of digital technology, and makes the official DVD much less useful and valuable than the pirated equivalent, which has no such limitations. And the further you go down the chain the more impossible the fantasy is to sustain, because the media object becomes part of social life, and no one can place limits on its movement.

Shujen Wang captures the context accurately when she says,

Piracy occurs at the point where deterritorialised forces of capitalism intersect with the reterritorialised forces of the nation, where the cross-bordered flows of information and copyright goods require national laws and enforcement to contain, if not eliminate piracy.

The informal networks of individuals sharing files with each other, and the highly organised networks

of commercial piracy, are far faster and more flexible than their official counterparts. They frustrate the logic of windowing, and challenge the idea that "peripheral" countries must wait their turn to consume contemporary culture. Copyright tries to create barriers to this unfettered reproduction, but the fantasy of total control will always remain exactly that. It ends up in another fantasy, more paranoid: the fantasy of immense losses caused by the unofficial circulation of this media.

RD: Discussions of piracy often invoke Asia as the evil engine of everything. Is Asia particularly significant in the global system of piracy?

LL: "Asia" as a marker is a bit unclear, because on the one hand you have a country like Japan which is one of the world's leading exporters of intellectual property, and at the same time you have Bangladesh which ranks as one of the lowest countries in the development index. But there are certain historical conditions that unite many hundreds of millions of people across that region and that are particularly conducive to the emergence of an "Asian commons."

This becomes clear when we examine the histories of dispossession — first by colonialism, then by the modern nation state and finally by the forces of global capitalism — that have turned a large number of people into castaways from the official circuits of knowledge, culture and property. At the same time, there are older histories of the informal circulation of people and culture across Asia, which feed very directly into the cultures of piracy apparent today.

This is an idea of Asia that emerges from a set of quotidian practices of borrowing, sharing and informal production. And it is crucial to understand that it is only through these practices that the fertile environment of information, media, software and products in contemporary Asia could ever have emerged. The global market is a totally inadequate system to deliver these things widely and equitably in this region.

The largest area of piracy in India, for instance, is in the field of textbooks, particularly medical and legal textbooks. The official editions of these books are often more expensive, in absolute terms, in India than they are in the US, which makes them unaffordable for most students. This means that only the pirate market is able to supply the necessary materials for a normal education system.

A friend of mine who was a lawyer in a leading Indian law firm once told me about an incident that had produced a crisis of meaning for him. His job was to conduct raids against copyright infringers. Most of these raids targeted media pirates, but the raid that unnerved him was against a person who sold photocopied textbooks outside a leading teaching hospital. He went along, and the police were roughing up the bookseller, and suddenly the bookseller said, "If I don't sell these books for three hundred rupees [£3.70], where do you think your doctors are going to come from?" My friend was completely taken aback by this statement, perhaps recalling his own dependence on cheap photocopied books through his own legal education.

"Piracy" is a fact of life in most places where a media-saturated modernity encounters severe wealth inequalities. The global intellectual property and trade regime has been built in part on the criminalization of this simple logic. "Piracy" has been transformed from a development challenge into a permanent

Images by Navin Thomas



negotiating advantage for the U.S. and other rich economies.

RD: You often use "piracy" in quotes, and I wanted to ask you about this word. In your own account of things, it covers many absolutely benign practices. Do you feel a need to challenge this terminology?

LL: In fact I have always liked using the word "piracy" to talk about contemporary disruptions of intellectual property, because it allows us to think about the connections between this moment and older conflicts around property and illegality.

The land enclosures during the 17th and 18th centuries in England, which resulted in the expropriation of a great amount of common land for capitalist agriculture, logging, mining, and speculation, also created a great army of the dispossessed who could be set to wage work in new manufacturing centres.

These people provided the workforce for building and sailing ships. Ships were essential to the connectivity of the international capitalist economy, and, as Peter Linebaugh has documented, shipbuilders and sailors were required to work under extremely difficult conditions and were exposed to severe dangers. But ships also provided a site for the coming together of diverse labourers, from different ethnicities, bound together often by a pidgin tongue — and thus created the conditions for a solidarity that would challenge the smooth flow of capital. This solidarity was forged around a common situation of dispossession, and a new form of labour.

The first pirates were often the "outcast of the land" who would mutineer against the conditions of their work, and create an alternative order challenging the division of labour and of capital. In fashioning their hydrachy, these buccaneers often drew from the memory of utopias created by peasants, in which work had been abolished, property redistributed, social distinctions levelled, health restored and food

made abundant. By expropriating a merchant ship (after a mutiny or a capture), pirates seized the means of maritime production and declared it to the common property of those who worked on it. Rather than working for wages using tools and machinery belonging to a merchant capitalist, pirates abolished the wage and commanded the ship as their property, sharing equally in the risks of common adventure.

Piracy's redistribution of wealth was understandably considered to be a massive problem. Pirates were declared to belong to no nation, and in fact piracy emerged as one of the earliest crimes of universal jurisdiction in a time when nation states were carving out their absolute sovereignty. But piracy was not merely a problem of the failure of implementation or enforcement. Piracy also set up an alternative ethic, and an alternate mode of being. Piracy was democratic in an undemocratic age and egalitarian in a highly unequal age.

I find it useful to invoke this history when I speak of piracy in the contemporary world. Rather than thinking about the question of intellectual property as a contemporary disjuncture, it allows us to see it as part of a continuum of defiant struggles against dispossession.

What is interesting about the contemporary moment is that, as in the early modern world described by Peter Linebaugh, many different kinds of people have again become "trespassers". The trespasser is not an isolated, deviant figure, because the majority of the world is trespassing in some way — whether they are downloading music, working with unauthorised proprietary software or content, buying fake branded goods or using low-cost medicines. The range of offenders against the current property regime is very wide, and demonstrates just how cynical that regime has become.

RD: The seafaring pirates you describe have a great romance which it's difficult to apply to today's media pirates. I don't think you could argue that today's pirates have a social vision. They see an opportunity to make money by copying and distributing what they did not make, without any higher end. Do you think there is a romance to contemporary piracy? Any intellectual exhilaration?

LL: People often argue that piracy is a form of parasitic capitalism, which is dependent on the official structures and infrastructures of information capitalism. But on closer look, you can see that the relationship is more complex, and as in any other social or economic structure, there is a great deal of porosity between the formal and informal networks.

Look at the market for Western music in India. Before the entry of Magnasound in the late eighties this was not big. HMV devoted only a tiny percentage of its catalogue to English music. But in every Indian city, you would always have the rock or jazz enthusiasts who would congregate around places which stored bootleg tapes, duplicated cassettes or created mix tapes. These practices enabled the formation of a fan culture around particular genres of music and it is only because of the presence of these informal networks that Magnasound could set up in India with an assured consumer base. In Calcutta, the city I was born in, the bootleg music stores existed alongside second-hand book stores in a street appropriately called Free School Street. Free School Street was famous throughout India for jazz and blues enthusiasts, some of whom would visit Calcutta only to buy rare tapes there.

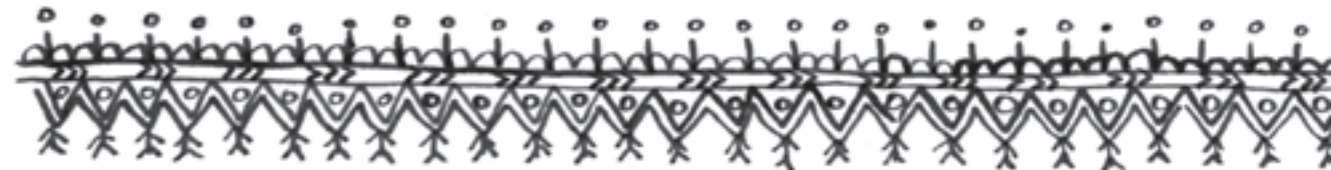
Almost all rock musicians testify to the fact that they learnt their music listening to bootleg tapes, which were treasured like great books of learning. It is therefore ironic that the emergence of Magnasound, and the official market for English music in India, led to the decline of music culture in Free School Street. Well orchestrated raids and police harassment effectively wiped it out.

If such older networks depended on a live network, or a word-of-mouth culture, the internet has transformed and accelerated them. If you take for example the voluntary network of people who subtitle films, it is incredible to observe the immense contribution they have made, translating virtually every major film in the world. This is the kind of thing that leads Yochai Benkler, Professor at Harvard Law School, to ask for a more nuanced understanding of the idea of value in the contemporary. He argues that informal networks are capable of producing far more wealth and value than any of the formal networks. Wikipedia is an incredible example of this.

The ultimate effect of informal networks is to produce a cultural public domain that is far richer and more interesting than the global market can. The massive presence of pirate networks in every part of the world bears testimony to the fact that neither states nor corporations are able to produce an adequate public domain for contemporary, globalised society, and pirate networks represent a startling response: We will build it ourselves! The greater variety and quality of the pirate network compared to the market network can be easily seen if you look at the film markets of Asia.

In the early days of globalization, travel writer Pico Iyer set out to document what he despairingly called the Ramboization and Coco Colonization of Asia. This is a trope that has been adopted by a number of critics of globalization, who argue that what has taken place is merely the Americanization of the world. And yet if you take a look at what is being sold in the DVD shops in Indian pirate markets, you find that apart from your standard Hollywood and Bollywood fare, you also increasingly find a range of films from countries whose films do not have any official circulation in India. Pirate markets sell all the world classics, from Tarkovsky to Godard to Wong Kar Wai, and they now sell a wealth of lesser-known films from every country in Asia. This in turn stimulates more film production — the remaking of Korean films into Hindi, for instance. If Iyer were to make his trip again, this time stopping to check out the movies that circulates through the underbelly of globalization, he would find that Hollywood has much less hypnotic power.

If there is a romance to contemporary media piracy it is this. It is a vision of plenitude, next to which the vision of the global market looks to be one of dearth. ✨





A Filmmaker's Notebook

~ Ayisha Abraham ~

These are brief notes on the making of "One Way", a short 15 min experimental video. They include sketches of ideas for the film before it was shaped into the three rough cuts, all formally quite distinct, and then the final film, which in its present finished form has two versions.

These are some of the thoughts I had as I tried to construct a video narrative of this migrant worker.

The film is set in a basement of an apartment in the neighbourhood where I live. To be precise, it is set by a railway line that used to be the old British Cantonment. I knew the Nepali who worked as a security guard in our apartment building. He is Shyam Bahadur, the protagonist of my film. He later became a security guard in another building where the residents allow him to live in the basement with his wife and four children.

From my notebook:

Today I am in two places at the same time.

Looking down from the 13th floor, onto the city. Experiencing the pleasure of "seeing the whole". It is 'I' that scans this aerial view.

And from the basement of the building, called The Savoy, I try to experience the world from the eyes of Shyam Bahadur.

Bahadur means courage.

Then there are the fragments that are the embedded spaces of a city; the basements, the lifts that move vertically, up and down.... The security guard booths.

I wonder what the relationship of the city planner and the cartographer is to the pedestrian.

There are two versions of the film circulating. They are doing the rounds of film festivals now; France, Portugal, Germany, Brazil. I keep checking the net for the newest country it has travelled to.

"One Way" was a part of a series of 6 films strung together as a feature length documentary called 'State of the World'. The film was finally completed in the middle of 2007. It was edited with the help of the producer of the film, with a wider audience from outside of India in mind. The other version, the version I finished myself with my friend, Cynthia Madansky, is more a form of expression, a narrative made abstract, because that is the way I wanted it to be. I make my films, like an artists layers a painting. I don't think 'audience'.

In the first version I did away with "context", descriptions of the "Indian" city outside the gates of the building where it was located. I cut out those pans of the city from that 13th floor and chose to stay with Shyam Bahadur's perspective of the city, by and large a view from the basement.

From my Notebook:

I have had to zoom in and zoom out of the footage over and over again.

Like when I had to shoot take after take of Bahadur coming out of the basement. In the take that makes its way into the film, titled "silhouette", in my logs, he emerges from the darkness of the underground space to the light of the street level.

This time he did not look into the camera. What a relief!

I shoot with the intention of creating a narrative that will speak of the plight of not just this particular Bahadur, but all those like him who inhabit our landscape as migrant workers, in the new mushrooming developments of this ever growing city. He must become emblematic of the larger predicament of other Bahadur's, other security guard's, torn away from the memories of home to alien alleyways of tar, brick and mortar. There is even a community of Napalese security guards. There are 120 of them and they live in an abandoned old house, now in ruins, most of it having collapsed last year with the heavy rains.

They have created a Mini Nepal. Wood is tied together in large heaps by the doors. Food is cooked outside while chickens run about. Litter lies unattended, and children, with a dishevelled look, run around and play together in what is a convenient commune. I would never have noticed such a community, had I not been taken there and yet, it lies off a main road and not very far from where I live, tucked away, behind the commercial fly by night enterprises off the main road. It is these interstices of the city, these hidden spaces that I am in search of. In search of those marginal or invisible people; marginal or invisible city spaces, spaces for living, for survival. And those, the smallest people, caught

in the large wheel of the economic life of the city, upon whom the city depends.

But who will look out for those who provide such security for us middle class folk? These are my questions as I probe the lives of such mute spectators onto the comings and goings of life in middle class apartments.

In the film the images interplay with the text...it is not merely translation/subtitling...the text holds its own across the images, that look like stills except for the rustle of a leaf, the sound of the blowing of wind. The drifting of a cloud.

Editing/Rhythm/Voice/Poetry/Movement

A fictional time traveller.

Most Nepali's leave their families when they come here. Abandoned by their state, newly arrived and established migrants must create their own support system. The first stop is securing the community in distinct neighbourhoods...

Line of questioning

1. security
2. history as Gurkhas
3. image of loyalty/image of criminality
4. family life, past and present
5. landscape of comfort; there and here. The mountains and the plains.
6. changing cities, economies
7. future of families and children
8. journeys from the village and within the many city apartments.
9. community support
10. Women, children and old people left in the village

Notes:

Journeys/displacements; from country to country, building to building, floor to floor, from basement to street level. I see the many journeys that the Bahadur has had to undertake. I splice those relevant sentences from long paragraphs of the transcripts and create a narrative of journeying, a continuous flow, a continuous sense of travel, sometimes it is not necessarily traveling very far from "home".

I have worked on construction sites, as a guard for 12-13 years,

I have worked in 8-9 buildings

When I moved here to this site we lived at the gate

In a plywood hut for three years

When the building is almost finished

I have to move to the first floor

When the first floor is ready

I move to the second
When the second is ready
I move to the basement

As the walls get built
The place is full of cement, sand and water
It's my job to splash water on the cement
For 'curing it'

We gather all our belongings in a pile
And cover them w/plastic sheets
Then I spray water on the walls

I am like a cat that runs up and down

"Home" is elusive. Here it is in the basement of other peoples' homes.
It is in the dungeon-like cavern of an electric room. Here, clothes hang with signs hung on the wall cautioning of the danger of electric shock, and listing the procedures to be followed in the case of electric shock.

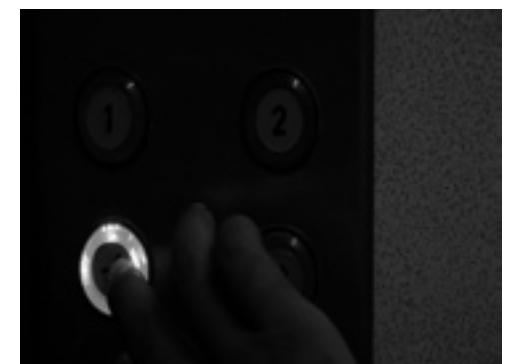
The soundtrack must exaggerate this danger. I am sitting with the sound designer and he creates digitally an ominous hum of electricity. Every time Bahadur walks into this electric room this high frequency noise amplifies. It is a grating noise to listen to and it must make you feel uncomfortable.

I show my film, the rough cuts, to my friends and acquaintances.
There are many points of view. Some like the first version, the others the second. No consensus. Then a writer I know, puts the words I have been looking for in my mouth. She says: what you have here is a proscenium, a theatre. In other words the basement can be seen to be a theatre.

All the worlds a stage! So is a basement.

As I constructed the film on the editing table it comes to me as a kind of mise en scene; a set, a theatre where the day to day life of this security guard takes place. Like on a stage, the actor cannot venture too far away from his audience, or make his actions invisible to the viewer. Similarly, the life of a security guard is bound, limited, and transcribed by the space that he has to guard. The limit imposed on his movement is, in my mind, where the film must set itself. It must be contained and confined. He, and the other players, in this "play of life", have their roles scripted. They come in and out of the frame.

The cars, parked in the basement also have their roles defined, they become prominent characters, part of the cast in the basement, where they are housed; and where the middle class occupants of the apartments above must enter before leaving the building and navigating the city in these bubble-like containers. This is a, "State of the World".



Your characters/dwellers are mere players that enter and depart from this underground space.

Here class unfolds. It is the space where the workers traverse. They must transit through this basement. The security guards, the cooks and house-help, the woman who sweeps the common areas everyday, the electrician, the courier, the delivery boy, the drivers of cars. They they walk in and out, or cycle in and out everyday.

It was fortuitous that when we were shooting the white car that Shyam Bahadur cleans every afternoon, the owner walked-up and drove it away. Our cameras are still rolling. I feel happy with this long shot. That the 'observation' is complete. Shyam Bahadur salutes him as he exits and then departs from the space. What is visible from where our camera is positioned, from beneath the ground, inside the basement, pointing outward toward the street level, are mere torso's. These are working class torsos, waist downwards. Disembodied bodies, faceless, bodiless, walking labour. The angle from where you shoot is crucial. Top down, Bottom Up??

So I gradually see the larger concept of the film emerge now. I shot the film with the intention of telling a story about a security guard. One that crosses a border and must perpetually remain on the margins, barely acknowledged, persona non-grata, a non-citizen living on the fringe of society, without a security net, the safety net that protects the poorest citizens).

I look at the footage digitized as clips, in my hard disk. I see Bahadur walking up and down the slopes of the basement. The seven days he walked to find work in the plains of India has now translated into this repetitious motion of walking up and down the slopes, in and out of the underground basement.

Notes from the Underground:

We are left in the darkness of the basement. Bahadur is back upstairs. He must work as he performs in our documentary.

The cameraman beckons to Bahadur, asking him to make an entrance to fill the viewfinder. Bahadur walks straight towards the camera and gradually the black silhouette of his body masks the image and fills the frame. Should I cut the shot before he becomes an indistinct shadow. A friend, a documentary filmmaker, calls it a childish shot. Yet, in the basement, Bahadur seems to flatten-out, his presence becomes a mere shadow.

We are in the electric room and Nepali music is playing. These are some new cassettes brought by his Uncle from Mahendra Nagar, a region on the border of Nepal and India. They are protest songs to mark the uprisings against the Monarchy in April 2006. The days of protest and the courage displayed on the streets of Kathmandu is admired by all the foreign correspondents on television. I watch this footage every evening when I return from the basement room after spending time with Shyam Bahadur and his family. When I am with them we look at photographs of their family: childrens' school notebooks with neat alphabets, written carefully in running hand, then the television reportage on the violence on the streets of Nepal. Eyeball to eyeball the Royal army against the whole country. This must make its way into my film, this show of solidarity, this passionate call for freedom and democracy. This TV footage that has been dominating the news this week of April as I research my short film. It must find a place somewhere in my video portrait.

Notes from the building's terrace:

The sound is acoustically all mixed up here on the terrace. The myriad sounds of the evening merge into one. The birds on their trail home, the evening Azaan from the mosque, the chanting of the Pentacostal nuns, and the cacophony of traffic with the competing shrill of car horns.

As the protagonist at the end of the film, climbs out from the shielded basement, the light falls upon his eyes, his iris must readjust itself; he opens and shuts his eyes. The technician in Lisbon, whom I am doing colour correction with, wants to enhance the colours of this "exotic" city, encountered on the screen of her machine. I must explain to her that the character in the film needs to readjust his eyesight to the bleached-out reality of the outside. The bright sun striking down on those colourfully painted homes of the neighbourhood is seen through a hazy lens. Blurred vision. Faded city. A thin film seems stretched over the neatly framed view of the dense chaotic traffic clogging the city. As his eyes readjusts to the light of the outside, so do his ears begin to hear the sounds of the evening. All mixed up there on the terrace.

Where did you grow up?

Can you describe your village, how high up in the mountains is it?

How long would it take for you to get to the nearest town? To the border?

How many days of walking did it mean?

Why did you leave for India?

How did you know about Bangalore? How did you get here?

Post Script:

I am in Kathmandu this Oct 2007 for the screening of the film. I am showing my first version, the one some people refer to as the "arty" one. I had wanted to screen it here first before I even screened it in India. I am talking to the director of the festival. And he tells me about a special relationship that the people of Bajhang district, which is where Shyam Bahadur is from, have to Bangalore.

There was a Raja Jai Prithvi Bahadur Singh of Bajhang Nepal who was a passionate advocate of world peace and brotherhood, a preacher, a thinker and a concerned humanist. He was driven into exile by the royal family and he settled in Bangalore. The people of Bajhang know Bangalore from the folklore (surrounding) him.

In our conversations over coffee in the foyer of the festival venue, the director encourages me to do a longer documentary. I am quite excited. I have wanted to follow Shyam Bahadur back into the mountains, to his village.

He fears the mountains now, because 35 long years have passed since he to climbed them daily. I must think about a narrative: is it to be a film about Syham Bahadur, following him as he returns to the villages of the district, villages where today only the woman, the young and the very old reside. Or is the story about Raja Jai Prithvi Bahadur and his legend?

I must think of doing this sequel soon. ✨

Ayisha Abraham is an installation artist and experimental filmmaker.

Her films include Amnesia (2001), Straight 8 (2005) and One Way (2007)





Global Economic Imaginaries

EDITED BY AMIN THOMAS SAMMAN

part 1

Imagining East Asia

AMIN THOMAS SAMMAN

"If we are prepared to consider history as a text, we can say about it what some modern author said about a literary text: the past has deposited in it images which could be compared to those retained by a photographic plate. Only the future disposes of developers strong enough to make appear the picture with all its details."

Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften I* (1955)

Since Japan's accession to the OECD in 1964, a stable and impressive growth trajectory has propelled the Pacific into the minds of Western scholars and technocrats. The financial turmoil of 1997-98 certainly prompted a re-assessment of developmental practice in the region, but in so doing only re-animated inquiry into the underpinnings of its economic fortunes. Yet for all the ink that has been spilt, there have been few attempts to interpret the broad patterns in these assessments over time. The persistence of the 'Asian model' as a discursive device – despite both a pronounced discontinuity in meaning and an unclear scope of application – suggests that this is a shortcoming in need of redress. This essay seeks to take a step in this direction, providing a critical examination of the concept of the Asian model itself. Specifically, it seeks to explore how dominant representations of East Asian capitalism have *shaped* world economic order in the post-Bretton Woods era.

It is now widely appreciated that market dynamics alone cannot account for the rapid industrialisation of Japan, the 'Tigers', the core ASEAN countries, and most recently, the People's Republic of China². The Northern three in particular (Japan, Taiwan and South Korea) are recognised to have combined market discipline with a degree of governmental oversight. This however, is where agreement ends. Proponents of the developmental state have attributed the miraculous catch-up of specific countries to judicious interventionism, and in turn locate the cause of the crisis in the financial liberalisation that began in the late 1980s. Neo-classically inclined economists have instead stressed the 'market-friendly' policies of the re-

gion as a whole but have relied upon previously downplayed government-business linkages in their analysis of the crisis. What emerges from these pitched-disputes is a sense of the importance of how the Asian experience is narrated. Indeed, as we will see, what is at stake are not mere facts but normative positions about how states should be structured, how civil society and business should interact with the state, and how nations should relate to the global economy. As the world's attention settles on China and India, it is more important than ever that we start to think seriously about the 'imagined economies' of globalisation. What exactly is the relationship between economic theory and the substantive events it purports to explain? How do visions of development constitute world economic order? And, most importantly, what lessons might these processes hold for the practice of radical democratic politics today?

DEVELOPMENT, THE NATION-STATE AND GLOBALISATION

'Development' is a multi-layered concept. In historical terms, the relationship between world order and the nation-state is crucial: where the modern idea of development as a national project emerged in the context of decolonisation and the Cold War, the neo-liberal idea(l) of development as a global project has rested on the consolidation of the nation-state system and the elaboration of a market-based alternative to the Bretton Woods agreement³ (1944). But even within the post-Cold War era, different visions of the

capitalist state have vied to inflect the path of actual globalisation. East Asia in particular has generated a staggering amount of discursive variation. For neo-liberals, the key to Asian growth was that governments did not impede the operation of market mechanisms; for neo-Weberians it was the willingness of governmental pilot agencies to shape national comparative advantage; and for other cultural theorists it was that 'Asian values' had enabled a unique mode of corporatist-authoritarian governance. Post-crisis, most pundits were left to



Images by Nadim Samman

conclude that the cultural and material basis of state power in the region had been gradually eroded. The neo-liberals, however, were able to perform a peculiar act of developmental double-speak: 'crony capitalism', they told us, rested on unhealthy relations between governments, banks, and businesses.

If we are to make sense of these battles, we need entertain the possibility that a concept like the 'Asian model' is not merely *referential* but also *productive*, stabilising identities and enabling patterns of social activity. We also need to situate it historically and look for these constitutive effects beyond the confines of the region. After all, not only have the debates been steeped in the paradigms of Western social science, they have quite explicitly addressed the core components of the modern political economy, generating lessons for the developing world. Indeed, Asia's intermediate position in the post-war period has conferred upon it a decisive legitimating function: any vision of how economic development works – if it is to prove more than "arbitrary, rationalistic and willed" – must be able to square itself with the

region's trajectory⁴. It is no surprise then that schools of thought have sought to present it as an exemplar of their teachings. But what standard genealogies often miss — by interpreting (re-) assessments as a form of updating — is the performative force of a 'paradigm in practice': rather than simply *reflecting* newfound conventional wisdom in developmental strategy, dominant accounts of Asian growth and crisis have also *shaped* it. We can see this in the discourse of '*outward-orientation*' — which replaced the state with the market as the engine of growth, and in that of '*good governance*' — which has put state-strength back at the heart of the market's proper functioning. The broad acceptance of each of these has been underpinned by Asian experience and its demonstration effect. The concept of the Asian model can thus serve as a mirror for the *production of hegemony* on a global scale. I illustrate this in the following sections by locating the neo-liberal narrative in the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank (WB) and linking its evolution to systemic changes in the global political economy and innovations in economic theory.

‘OUTWARD-ORIENTED GROWTH’ & THE WASHINGTON CONSENSUS

The debt crisis of the 1980s marked the confluence of a number of factors: namely, the emergence of off-shore wholesale dollar markets (late 1950s); the OPEC shocks (1973, 1979); stagflation in the industrial world (1973-1980); and the US Treasury's turn to monetarism (1979). We can take this last factor as the trigger, for, by inducing a worldwide recession (1980-1983), Paul Volcker's interest rate hike not only multiplied the debt-servicing burden facing Latin American nations that had financed their deficits through the Eurodollar market, but also caused a collapse in commodity prices, compromising their ability to earn the foreign-exchange required to repay loans. In effect, these are all manifestations of a broader crisis that began unfolding in the early 1970s: that of global Fordism⁵. The development discourse of the day however took a much narrower view, depicting debt-servicing difficulties as essentially the product of misguided domestic policy. This diagnosis both reflected and strengthened a nascent counter-revolution in development economics, culminating in the formulation of the now infamous Washington Consensus. This laissez-faire vision 'policed' the debt crisis through the language of adjustment, retrenchment, deregulation and openness. It was this last dimension — 'openness' — that enabled an ascendant neo-liberalism to find its own image in East Asian experience.

During the 1970s, East Asian nations began differentiating themselves from the rest of the developing world with their export-oriented industrialisation policies. Despite the fact that these were in many cases supplemented by interventionist measures, the success of the newly industrialising countries came to be a potent symbol of the market's progressive potential. At the base of this was a crude WB distinction between "outward...[and]...inward-oriented" developmental strategies⁶. Take the case of South Korea in the 1960s: it abandoned import-substitution, tapped international capital markets, and shifted into the production of capital goods. Whilst these are all measures that are in cosmetic harmony with the Washington Consensus, they were in actual fact underpinned by tariff protection, restrictions on inward foreign direct investment, and an elaborate structure of concessions that channelled productive activity into sectors consistent with regional production chains. In this way, South Korea's classification as an "out-

ward-oriented economy" in the 1987 *World Development Report* (WDR) concealed a considerable amount of information, effectively conflating production for world markets with deference to market principles (pp. iii, 81, 92). Applied across the region — which had in large part managed to avoid debt-difficulties — this optic allowed an "export-promoting strategy modelled on the example of the NICs [newly industrialising countries] of East Asia" to emerge as the remedy for embattled state-led projects the world over (p. 81)⁷. Now, to be clear, this is not to deny that South Korea's export-earnings assisted its debt-servicing; nor is it to question the role of the market in Hong Kong's economic success. Rather, the point is that by holding up the region's experience with "outward-looking policies" as validation of the growth/adjustment couplet, the neo-liberal narrative effectively framed the debt crisis as a "punishment visited on countries...[that had]...departed from the norms of economic and political liberalism", thereby tipping the balance in favour of the restructuring advocated by the IMF and WB⁸. Indeed, IMF commentary itself explicitly recognised this "powerful demonstration effect"⁹. The Asian model, therefore, as a stylised and partial rendering of the East Asian trajectory, was crucial in securing a liberal response to the debt crisis in the developing world. It also aided the transition to liberal productivism in the industrial world by illustrating the efficiency costs of an overbearing welfare state. In this way, the hegemonic vision of the 1980s — that of "a world developing its resources and capacities in response only to the ups and downs of relative prices and the self-imposed stasis of limited government" — rested at least in part on Asia's status as a body of successful practice¹⁰.

FROM 'FREE-TRADING' ASIA TO 'CORRUPT' ASIA

Institutional economics can be seen as vital to the ongoing domestication of Asian development in the early 1990s¹¹. After filtering through from academia in the early 1980s, it successfully accommodated calls to acknowledge the role of the state and ultimately paved the way for a broader revision of neo-liberalism in the late 1990s. At the risk of simplifying this complex process, three key moments can be discerned: the elaboration of a 'market-friendly' approach to intervention; its application to East Asia; and finally the linkage of successful market liberalisation to regulatory state capacity.

The term "market-friendly" first appeared in the 1991 WDR, describing a middle ground between laissez-faire and interventionism¹². While granting governments a role in correcting market failures, the Report insisted that stretching this mandate would incur unnecessary costs in terms of growth and poverty reduction (pp. iii, 2, 9). The thrust of its analysis, therefore, was that a certain type of intervention — in the provision of educational and infrastructural public goods, for example — could increase the payoff to 'getting the prices right'. Whilst hardly a paradigm shift, this addition to the development lexicon enabled the neo-liberal narrative to weather the challenges mounted by the statist and continue presenting Asia's rise as a lesson in the magic of the market. Specifically, interventions in East Asian economies no longer had to be airbrushed out of the picture; rather, they needed only to be described as "disciplined" and "more moderate than in most other developing countries" (p. 5).

Nowhere is this more apparent than in the 1993 Report, *The East Asian Miracle*¹³. Despite being com-

missioned and funded by a Japanese Ministry of Finance that was eager to overturn the tendentious accounts of the 1980s, the Report's conclusion was that "widely-shared market-friendly policies...[were]...the foundation of East Asia's success" (p. 347). To be sure, contained within were a number of noteworthy concessions: namely, that more selective interventions appeared to have succeeded and that directed-credit programs in Japan and South Korea may have increased investment and generated important spill-overs (pp. 242, 356). But these were isolated and fragmentary messages, ultimately subordinate to an over-arching narrative which emphasised the region's success with "getting the basics right": private domestic investment in physical and human capital were portrayed as the "principal engines of growth"; export-push policies were singled-out as the "most successful selective intervention[s]"; and industrial policy was deemed to have been "largely ineffective" (pp. 5, 312, 325). Now the point here is not that these findings were flawed — although there is no shortage of arguments to this effect. Rather, it is that the neutralisation of Japanese counter-hegemony in the early 1990s was as reliant on the construction of new theoretical frameworks as it was on shoehorning material trends into existing ones. Specifically, the developmental lesson learnt — that "promoting specific industries or attempting to leap stages of technological development will generally fail" — was the result of an explicit engagement with state-led initiatives; it was grounded in a recognition that most governments had intervened systematically and through multiple channels.

This burgeoning institutionalism found fuller expression in the 1997 WDR, which carved out a "catalytic, facilitating" role for government in the development process⁴. Rather than viewing state and market as separate mechanisms, the Report emphasised the "rudiments of social order" on which market transactions rely and charged governments with the provision of these "institutional foundations" (p. 41). Whilst the strategy outlined did warn states not to overstep their capability, it stressed the need to raise this capability by building public institutions. Most strikingly, the Report contained a tentative endorsement of the "more interventionist policies" in East Asia where the state's role and capability had been "skillfully matched" (p. 61). This was of course left to sit rather uneasily with the financial crisis that soon engulfed the region. The point, however, is that by outlining a 'second-generation' of reform, the Report had laid the ground for a significant modification to the neo-liberal vision: no longer was liberalisation to be equated with de-regulation.

'GOOD GOVERNANCE' & THE POST-WASHINGTON CONSENSUS

In the late 1990s, Asia's miracle came undone. Beginning with the devaluation of the Thai baht in July of 1997, a wave of panic swept across the region, prompting dramatic reversals in portfolio capital flows and precipitous contractions in GDP. At least three interacting factors can be identified: namely, the region's newly liberalised capital accounts; the waning of the 'emerging market' boom in Latin America; and the continued practice of exchange-rate pegging. In this context, the Thai government's belated attempt to address its current account deficit served as a trigger for wider pre-emptive capital exodus. By underlining the structural interdependencies of an economically integrated world, these events dealt a serious blow to the methodologically nationalist vision of the Washington Consensus: even countries that were once the benchmark for 'sound policy' were subject to forces beyond their borders. The response of the inter-

national financial institutions (IFIs) was to refocus its narrative on the *interaction* between states and global markets, reinventing its hegemonic codes and articulating a new vision: that of the regulatory state. Once more, Asian experience — this time fed through the language of transparency, governance, and sequencing — provided a powerful demonstration effect.

By the early 1990s, East Asian nations were finally perceived as a threat to the laissez-faire vision of economic development. They had also, through the international debate over 'Asian values', distanced themselves from Western political liberalism. This alterity enabled the region to serve as a precautionary tale when the crisis arrived in 1997-98. Specifically, by conflating key developmental state practices in the North East with poorly insulated political processes in the South East, the IFIs were able to produce a blanket diagnosis of the episode that cast disruptive financial speculation as a mere messenger of domestic institutional shortcoming. Preferential tax-systems, relational finance, high debt-equity ratios and state-firm cooperation — practices that the WB had slowly incorporated into the region's success story — were cast by the IMF as 'governance problems' and linked to poor financial sector health⁵. On this reading, the crisis was the result of investors recognising these problems in one country and not being able to confirm their absence in others. Thus, an Asia synonymous with 'cronyism' came to signify the corrosive effect that politics can exert on the functioning of global capital markets⁶. What followed was a concerted push to implement contractual, rules-based modes of economic governance — the dirigiste moment in the neo-liberal revolution. IMF prescriptions to enhance transparency and improve governance led it to augment its traditional packages with deeper structural measures, including the reform of financial and corporate legal codes, public institutions such as central banks, and even the judicial system. These formed the basis of an important new distinction between 'disorderly' and 'well-sequenced' capital account liberalisation. In so doing, they signalled a new chapter in liberal orthodoxy: unlike its predecessor, the emergent 'post-Washington Consensus' foresaw a vital role for the state in providing a domestic institutional framework capable of facilitating effective integration into world markets. Now, to be clear, the point is not to deny the role of weak prudential supervision in setting the stage for *rational* investor panic; nor is it to question the political clout of the chaebols in South Korea, let alone apologise for nepotism in Malaysia. Rather, it is to highlight the role that 'corrupt Asia' — as an economic imaginary with significant albeit partial correspondence to actual practice in the region — played in legitimating a new vision of 'stateness' for the *rest* of the world. The contents of this vision were not the mere expression of paramount sectoral interests but the result of an interaction between the institutional optic laid out in the 1997 WDR and the dramatic events of the crisis itself. One can find this prism at work in the 2002 WDR, *Building Institutions for Markets*. As the title suggests, in seeking to embed the structural adjustment policies of the 1980s and



1990s, the Report privileges economic constitutionalism over its political counterpart, willing into existence a world economy insulated from the anti-competitive effects of transitory political majorities. Today, it may well be that ideas of 'good governance' and the 'rule of law' are commonsensical, but early on, this hegemonic vision drew its legitimacy from the perilous tale of Asia's fall from grace.

THE ASIAN MODEL & THE DIALECTIC OF DISCOURSE AND MATERIALITY

The Asian model does not 'exist'; it is not just 'there'. Indeed, any attempt to capture the essence of the region's development is necessarily an exercise in imagination: not only do practices vary between countries; they have also changed over time. This has led many to dismiss the concept as a textual phenomenon. Yet the Asian model still deserves to be taken seriously: the concept itself can serve as a mirror for the *production of hegemony* on a global scale, reflecting in its contents the passage of material trends *through* structures of knowledge-production and *to* the plane of commonsense. This is of 'real' significance because by shaping policy options and choices, hegemonic visions can re-configure the very terms of a polity, altering the material interdependencies of the world economy. Such was the case with the debt crisis of the 1980s and the financial crisis of the 1990s, where representations of East Asian experience restored order to a world economy under strain by guiding elite interpretations of each episode and legitimating the IFI's prescribed policy responses.

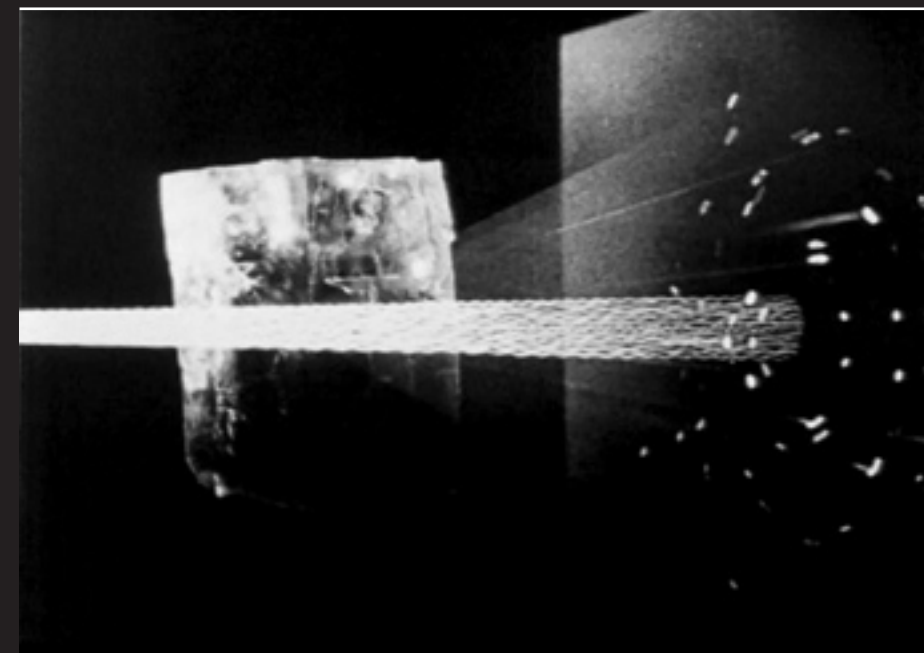
In many ways, there is a striking parallel to be drawn with the 'Orientalism' studied by Edward Said, for neo-liberal narratives of developmental practice in the region have sketched-out the shifting boundaries of the 'civilised' world by (counter)-example. On the one hand, *free-trading* Asia — as a 'myth of success' — de-legitimises planned and autarkic growth strategies; on the other, *corrupt* Asia — as a 'precautionary tale' — sanctifies contractualism as a principle of rule. To write-off orthodox economics as instrumental paleo-liberalism is to

miss this dialectic and under-estimate the nature of hegemony. Just as the rules, structures and technologies that organise the production and distribution of economic analysis shape the reality that they pertain to address, they are at the same time held to account by unforeseen events in the material world, which on occasion send analysts frantically searching for the puzzle-pieces. When this happens, it is the search itself that bridges the gap between new and old ways of knowing, lending the 'popular beliefs' that guide it the

equivalent of material force. For transformational politics the implication is clear: we need to ditch the old post-structuralist/historical-materialist dichotomy. If economic 'science' is an evolving cultural precept embodied in international organisations and capable of reconstituting states and world order, then we need to build new frames of thought from within the old. And if economic 'events' are the rocks on which discourse gets caught, then we need to create everyday practices that will call established worldview[s] into question. Gramsci was right: each of us has an epistemology; we need to start approaching it entrepreneurially. ✨



1. W. Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften I* (Frankfurt 1955): p. 1238, quoted in S. Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso 1999 [1989]): p. 141.
2. The 'Tigers' is an established short-hand used to refer to Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, and South Korea; the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) was formed in 1967 by Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore and the Philippines.
3. The Bretton Woods Agreement (1944) set the terms for international trade and monetary affairs in the post-war period. The settlement was a compromise designed to satisfy both Britain's desire for full-employment and America's desire for free trade. Although the system broke-down in 1971, the multilateral organisations it gave rise to remain defining features of the world economy.
4. A. Gramsci, *Selections From the Prison Notebooks*, (ed.) and (trans.) Q. Hoare and G. Nowell-Smith (London: Lawrence and Wishart 1971): pp. 376-77.
5. See A. Lipietz's *Mirages and Miracles: The Crises of Global Fordism* (London: Verso 1987).
6. World Bank, *World Development Report*, 1987 (Washington, DC: World Bank 1987): p 78.
7. World Bank, *Korea's Experience with the Development of Trade and Industry: Lessons for Latin America* (Washington, DC: World Bank 1988): 19.
8. S. Corbridge, 'Discipline and Punish: The New Right and the Policing of the International Debt Crisis', in S. P. Riley (ed.) *The Politics of Global Debt* (London: Macmillan Press 1993): p 26.
9. P. Hasan, 'Adjustment to external shocks: Why East Asian countries have fared better than other LDCs', *Finance and Development*, 21 (4) 1984: p. 17.
10. J. Toye, *Dilemmas of Development: Reflections on the Counter-Revolution in Development Economics*, 2nd Edition (Oxford: Blackwell 1993): viii.
11. The institutionalist tradition seeks to historicise the economy by situating it within broader processes of social and political change. New institutional economics represents an attempt to do this from within orthodox economics; it explains the emergence of market institutions as a rational response to the problem of transaction costs.
12. World Bank, *World Development Report 1991: The Challenge of Development* (Washington, DC: World Bank 1991).
13. World Bank, *The East Asian Miracle: Public Policy and Economic Growth* (Washington, DC: World Bank 1993).
14. World Bank, *World Development Report 1997: The State in a Changing World* (Washington, DC: World Bank 1997): iiv.
15. M. Camdessus, 'Lessons from South East Asia', Remarks at a Press Briefing, Singapore, 13 November 1997.
16. M. Camdessus, 'Reflections of the Crisis in Asia', Address to the Extraordinary Ministerial Meeting of the Group of 24, Caracas, Venezuela, February 7 1998; cf. 'Governments and Economic Development in a Globalised World', Remarks at the 32nd International General Meeting of the Pacific Basin Economic Council, Hong Kong, May 17 1999.



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The Knowledge-Based Economy

BOB JESSOP

Thomas Friedman has recently informed us that, thanks to globalisation, the world is flat. His critics have responded by reminding us that there are very real limits to this process of globalisation, whether material, political or cultural: we still live in a 'spiky' world. Meanwhile, Michael Porter continues to sell his high-priced recipes for improving economic competitiveness to cities, regions and nations across the globe. But as his contribution to the most recent World Economic Forum Report on 'global competitiveness' shows, boosting and maintaining competitiveness is an uncertain game of snakes and ladders. Indeed, critics have identified competitiveness as a 'dangerous obsession', a never-ending treadmill that obliges one to run ever faster to avoid falling behind. Yet despite these controversies, 'globalisation' and 'competitiveness' remain two of the most powerful economic narratives today. They exert a massive influence on all of our lives. Take the current discussions of a new Asian renaissance: both terms figure strongly in the incessant references to India and China as global players; their growing competitiveness in services and manufacturing respectively; and the corresponding imperative for advanced western economies to face this challenge by becoming more skilled and even smarter. In this and other respects, such narratives seem to make sense of a hyper-complex world that defies ready comprehension by providing simple, flexible, and productively vague stories that connect past, present, and future as a basis for path-shaping action.

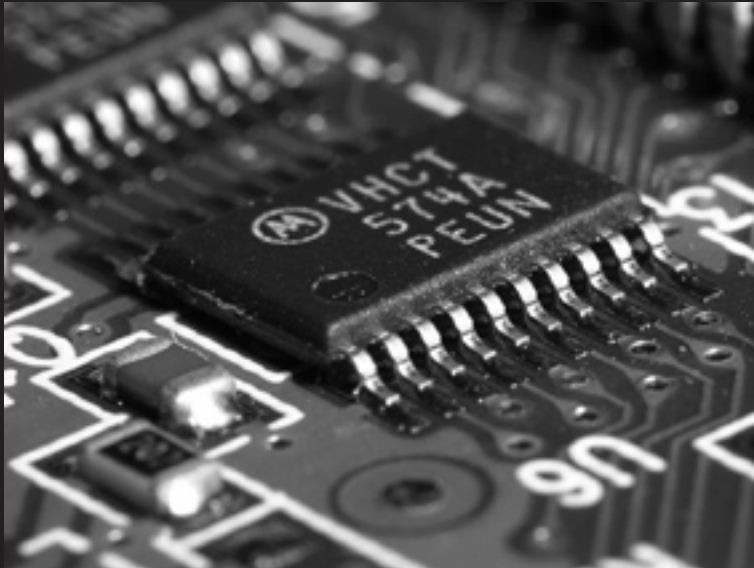
Another master economic narrative, which is closely linked to these two and also has a strong impact on economic strategies, state projects, and societal visions, is the knowledge-based economy (or, more simply, the knowledge economy). It is now taken-for-granted that there is an accelerating transition to knowledge-based industries on a global scale; that this transition is central to future growth prospects at all scales; and that promotion of conditions favourable to the knowledge-based economy is critical in the

struggle for long-term competitive advantage and sustained prosperity in the world market. Indeed, official economic strategies at all levels – from towns, cities, and regions through national states to supranational bodies like the European Union and, finally, international institutions and global regimes – reflect this. This story of the knowledge-based economy is reinforced by its close links to other notions like the information economy, the learning economy, the creative economy, and the information society. But how valid is this account of the contemporary economy? What does it include and what does it exclude? Valid or not, how did this account become so powerful a master economic narrative or imaginary? Could it be that the search for ever smarter and more abundant goods and services is occurring at the expense of our respect for deeper truths and ultimate values?

MAKING SENSE OF A COMPLEX WORLD

Real world economies cannot be comprehended in all their complexity in real-time. This holds for any person or organisation seeking to make sense of economic performance and economic change, whether as an interested stakeholder or a disinterested observer. This lack of omniscience (or even an understanding of what such knowledge requires) is one reason why liberals believe in the 'invisible hand of the market' and in keeping the state out of the economy. Alongside the invisible hand, however, we find competing models, metaphors, and descriptions for real world economies, especially when observed in their broader institutional settings and role in everyday life. The knowledge-based economy is just one of these models but is extraordinarily powerful in linking a range of apparently disparate changes and trends in the real world. As such, for better or worse, it also provides important guidelines in different fields of economic, political, and social practice.

A master economic imaginary should satisfy two requirements. Firstly, it can inform and shape *economic strategies* on all functional and territorial scales – i.e. from the firm to the wider economy and from the local through the regional to the (supra-) national. These strategies necessarily address the operation and articulation of market forces and their non-market supports. Secondly, it can inform and shape *state projects* and *broader visions* on different scales. Insofar as this entails the provision of guidance in the face of political and social uncertainty, it is about providing a means to integrate private, institutional, and wider public narratives about past experiences, present difficulties, and future prospects. The more of these fields a new economic narrative can address, the more resonant and influential it will be. This explains the power of the 'KBE' as an increasingly hegemonic discourse, able to frame broad struggles over political, intellectual and moral leadership, as well as those over the more concrete fields of technical and economic reform. Like a Rorschach Inkblot, it is able to link different sets of ideal and material interests across a broad range of organisations, institutional orders, and everyday experiences. The basic idea is being articulated on many scales (from local to global), in many organisational and institutional sites (from firms to states), in many functional systems (such as education, science, health, welfare, law, and politics, as well as the economy in its narrow sense) and in the public sphere and life-world. It has been translated into a range of different visions and strategies (e.g. smart machines and expert systems; the creative



Images by Jon Sullivan

industries; the increasing centrality of intellectual property; lifelong learning; the information society; and/or the rise of cyber-communities). In fact, the KBE can be inflected in neo-liberal, neo-corporatist, neo-statist, and neo-communitarian ways – witness the differences between the USA, Finland, Singapore, and counter-cultural movements like

Linux, the open source movement, and so on. The power of the KBE narrative often seems to depend on these productive ambiguities and misunderstandings to sustain alliances and institutionalised compromises between disparate interests.

The KBE narrative guides investment, economic strategies, and a wide range of government policies not only in advanced capitalist economies but also in the Asian dragon economies, China, India, Latin America, new EU member states, and elsewhere. In this sense it is closely linked with stories about globalisation and competitiveness. Its appeal is grounded in its ability to speak to key events and phenomena of our time: significant shifts in core technologies, the restructuring of advanced capitalist economies, new forms of enterprise, new modes of competition, and so on. Whether it offers a scientifically adequate description of today's economy in all its chaotic complexity and – just as importantly – whether it provides a sound basis for firm-level strategies and government policies are quite different issues. For the moment, however, I focus on its undoubted power as a theoretical and policy paradigm and the reasons for this.

WHAT'S SO NEW ABOUT THE KBE?

Surely knowledge has always been important to every economy, especially in periods of major transformation. What is novel today is the growing reflexive application of knowledge to the production of economically useful knowledge and the increased treatment of knowledge as intellectual property. Given that all economies are knowledge economies, we need to consider why the KBE has become a master narrative. This is not a wholly innocent phenomenon. For, although it has material and ideological roots in 1960s debates on post-industrialism, it gained momentum in the 1980s as American capitalists and state managers sought an effective reply to the growing competitiveness of European and East Asian rivals. Academic studies, think tank reports, and official inquiries indicated that the US economy was still competitive in key sectors associated with the KBE. This research prompted a concerted campaign to develop the mate-

rial and ideological basis for a new economic strategy based on deepening and widening the KBE and on the massive extension of intellectual property rights to protect and enlarge the dominance of US capital for the anticipated next long wave. This reflects a neo-liberal policy for productive capital that safeguards US super-profits behind the cloak of free trade in intellectual property and so complements its neo-liberal policy for financial capital. The new strategy was translated into a successful hegemonic campaign (armoured by law and juridical precedents, the dissemination of US technical standards and social norms of production and consumption, bilateral trade leverage, diplomatic arm-twisting, and bloody-minded unilateralism) to persuade other states to adopt the KBE agenda.

The same problems confronting the USA in the 1970s now face Japan, Australasia and the leading European economies. Their policy makers now embrace the same logic, widening and extending intellectual property rights, and, wherever possible, investing in (extra-) economic fields that bear on global competitiveness in the KBE. New Labour has followed suit, and, at the Lisbon Summit in 2000, the European Union committed itself to becoming the most competitive knowledge-based economy in the world (with the proviso that this remain compatible with the European social model). The same policies are being implemented elsewhere by nation-states with different roles in the global division of labour (e.g. New Zealand, South Korea, Germany, and Colombia) as well as a wide range of provinces, metropolitan regions, and small cities. More significantly, they are being heavily promoted by international agencies (notably the OECD and World Trade Organization but also the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development) and by regional economic blocs and inter-governmental arrangements (e.g., the EU, APEC, ASEAN, NAFTA, and Mercosur, the Latin American trade bloc). Once accepted as a master narrative – with all its nuances and scope for interpretation – it has become easier for the neo-liberal variant to shape the development of the emerging global knowledge-based economy through both the sheer weight of the US economy and the exercise of economic, political, and intellectual domination.

THE PREMATURE HARMONISATION OF CONTRADICTIONS

The KBE is often presented as a win-win solution for economic actors, political forces, citizens, and the environment. Knowledge is clearly better than ignorance; knowledge work is preferable to hard graft; the use-value of knowledge increases with its circulation; and so forth. But the enthusiastic embrace of the KBE disguises contradictions and conflicts that cast doubt on its universal social beneficence. A key site of contradictions in this regard is the tension between knowledge as a collectively generated resource (or intellectual commons) that produces most social benefit when it circulates freely, and knowledge as an object that can be privately owned (as intellectual property) and thereby provide the basis for monopolistic rents. Indeed, in many respects, there is nothing inherently scarce about knowledge as a collectively produced collective resource and, whether or not all 'knowledge wants to be free', it is widely presumed that, as a 'non-rival' good, it should circulate freely within scientific communities, democratic polities, and, in the form of perfect information, even liberal market economies.

Yet knowledge is in various forms increasingly subject to enclosure, transforming it into a scarce commodity. This process of commodification is generating tendencies towards market failure and other social problems that cannot be resolved by the market mechanism itself. This is expressed in a variety of contradictions between knowledge as intellectual commons and knowledge as intellectual property. Take the private expropriation of the collectively produced knowledge of past generations. The most notorious example of this is the appropriation of indigenous, tribal, or peasant 'culture' in the form of undocumented, informal, and collective knowledge, expertise, and other intellectual resources and its wholly or largely unremunerated transformation into commodified knowledge (documented, formal, private) by commercial enterprises. Another form of enclosure, more familiar in advanced economies than bio-piracy, is the divorce of skilled and/or intellectual labour from control over (1) the means of production that it deploys — achieved through its formalisation and codification in smart machines and expert systems; and (2) the creative products that it produces — achieved in part through 'work for hire' contracts that appropriate creativity for the benefit of the employer. A third example is the growing commodification of publicly financed research in universities and institutes along with the denigration and evaporation of academic research that is not self-evidently 'commercial'. More generally, this contradiction is reflected in the tendency for each branch of capital to want free access to information, knowledge, and expertise whilst wishing to charge for the information, knowledge, and expertise that it itself can supply.

Other contradictions are grounded in the growing interdependence of the economic and extra-economic determinants of competitiveness. There are two sides to this. First, whereas market pressures in a world of shareholder capitalism encourage short-term economic horizons, sustainable competitiveness depends on social capital, trust, communities of learning and the cultivation of entrepreneurial cities, enterprise culture, and enterprising subjects — conditions that take years to build but can soon be destroyed. Second, since innovation draws on the intellectual commons and often involves polycentric, multi-scalar, and multi-actor networks within and beyond the economy in its narrow sense, it is hard to distinguish between the origin and value of contributions to knowledge-intensive, design-intensive, or creative goods or services. This can encourage cooperation but it can also engender conflict over division of the spoils or even block innovation.

The treadmill of competition in the KBE intensifies pressures on firms, regions, or production-systems to stay ahead of their competitors so that ever-renewed technological rents and increasing market share can alleviate the normal tendency for super-profits to be competed away and/or invented around. It also encourages attempts to protect vulnerable monopolies in knowledge or information by embedding them in technology, standards, tacit knowledge, or legally entrenched intellectual property rights. Another effect is that less competitive sectors and regions in the KBE must secure below average profits and incomes, leading to unequal exchange and uneven development. This is especially acute where neo-liberalism and its competitive race to the bottom are dominant.

STATE INTERVENTION

States at different scales have key roles in promoting the KBE and managing the effects of uneven development and the competitive treadmill. They have reoriented policies towards competitive knowledge production and seek to reorganise not merely economies but whole societies around these imperatives, so that sectors previously considered extra-economic are now deemed crucial to long-term competitiveness. Initially, this reflected prevailing views about the sources of economic advantage in dynamic Asian economies (beginning with the developmental state in Japan, and then the East Asian tigers). These views have since been reinforced by the growing recognition that our newer Asian competitors are also actively

embracing and pursuing KBE strategies, threatening not only to dominate mature manufacturing and service sectors but also to catch-up and even overtake less dynamic western economies in knowledge-, design- and creativity-intensive sectors. The same lessons were being learnt earlier, of course, through reflections on competitive regions like Silicon Valley or competitive countries like Finland. Given their different positions within the world market, states tend to polarise, firstly, around interests in protecting or enclosing the commons (e.g., North-South), and, secondly, around the most appropriate form and scale of intellectual property regimes. Some states are more active than others in promoting the primitive accumulation of intellectual property, in privatising public knowledge, and in commoditising all forms of knowledge; others are more concerned to protect the intellectual commons, to promote the information society, and to develop social capital.

A socially optimal policy of investment in knowledge is hard to establish. In many cases this is perhaps best achieved through state promotion of innovation and diffusion systems (including social capital);



Images by Nadim Samman

broad forms of 'technological foresight'; co-involvement and/or negotiated 'guidance' of the production of knowledge; and the development of suitable governance structures for a networked, transnational world. This is reflected in the state sponsorship of information infrastructures and social innovation systems on different scales; in the development of intellectual property rights regimes and new forms of governance and/or regulation for activities in cyberspace; and in the development of new forms of infrastructure suited to a knowledge-based economy rather than an era of mass production and mass consumption. More generally, economic policy is increasingly oriented to promoting innovation, competitiveness, and flexibility for the next long wave of economic expansion. Full employment and planning have been demoted in favour of full employability and entrepreneurship. Social policy gives less emphasis to universal welfare rights and more to active labour market policies and to targeting social exclusion. Many policies previously considered as, at best, only indirectly relevant to economic performance have been redefined as critical for competitiveness and this makes it harder for states to reconcile their response to ever more insistent economic imperatives with the more general demands of securing political legitimacy and social cohesion. One reaction to this is to rely less on state action to compensate for market failure and to rely more on private-public partnerships, civil society, and new forms of community solidarity.

CONCLUSIONS

The KBE cannot be adequately understood by regarding knowledge as another factor of production alongside land, labour, and capital that has somehow suddenly become more important in economic organisation. Discovery of the 'knowledge economy' reflects instead a shift in master economic narratives in response to the 1970s crisis of the post-war model of national economic growth based on mass production and mass consumption. It identifies new sources of competitive advantage in a capitalist world market, encourages the treatment of knowledge *as if* it was a naturally scarce resource, and transforms the relationship between economic and extra-economic competitiveness. This is leading to the importance of life-long learning, the global war for talents, the promotion of creativity, the subordination of university teaching and research to economic imperatives, and the evaluation of welfare state expenditure in terms of its contribution (or otherwise) to international competition. Meanwhile, the growing commodification of knowledge intensifies contradictions between the circulation of knowledge as a collective resource (the intellectual commons) and its appropriation as a source of private profit (whether as *de facto* or *de jure* intellectual property). In short, while the expansion and circulation of knowledge holds out the promise of emancipation, in its commodified form may well reinforce subordination to the treadmill of capitalist competition and unending pressure for economic growth, with harmful effects on humankind that are becoming ever more evident in climate change as well as economic and social exclusion.

Accepting these limits to a capitalist knowledge economy, we should seek to embed nature and human creativity in a re-moralised society. It is therefore tempting to call for a knowledge-based *society* to replace the knowledge-based *economy*. But, if we accept that not all knowledge is good (faster cars, better

weapons of mass destruction, more effective means of torture, etc.), then the search for knowledge must be subordinated to higher imperatives. Thus I conclude that it would be better to replace the knowledge-based economy with a wisdom-based society that draws on the collective good sense as well as accumulated knowledge of humankind. This is reflected in the wise words that are wrongly attributed to Chief Seattle of the Cree Indians but nonetheless indicate the limits of commodification:

Only after the last tree has been cut down
Only after the last river has been poisoned
Only after the last fish has been caught
Only then you will find out that money cannot be eaten ❄

ART SECTION

Featured Artist: Interview with Bani Abidi

By Francesco Cincotta

Bani Abidi is a Pakistani artist who lives and works in both Lahore and New Delhi. She was educated at the National College of Arts in Lahore and has an MA from the Art Institute of Chicago. Stills from her recent works, "The Address" and "Reserved" are featured in this issue. The videos of these works will be shown at the Green Cardamom Gallery, London in March.

Francesco Cincotta is a photographer and video artist, and an editor of Naked Punch.

Francesco: Bani what were your early projects like, those you did when you were in school in Lahore or immediately afterwards. And how did they evolve?

Bani: Well I was studying painting and printmaking at the NCA and it was indeed a lot about mark making and exploration of various mediums and material processes, in the guise of 'abstraction', the easiest trope to use if you didn't know what you were doing. That is also the kind of semi abstract painterly work our teachers were doing at the time and we were really into that. NCA was more of a turning point in my life in terms of my socialization and less so in my understanding of art making. But at the same time as I was studying in Lahore, friends of mine had joined the newly established (at that point) Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture in Karachi, and there was a whole crew of really interesting teachers there; David Alesworth, Durriya Kazi, Iftikhar and Elizabeth Dadi, who were a great source of inspiration for all of us at that time. They were working with the language of popular visual culture in Karachi which was a very exciting thing, because regardless of what manifestations it took up in our own work, their ideas made us value the narratives of contemporary life for the first time. In a country where art, for the most part, held onto notions of pre-colonial traditionalism, or was a negotiation with modernism, there was something very honest and radical about this thinking. I think my generation of artists owes a lot to them.

Francesco: What were your interests when you began your studies in Chicago? And how were you influenced while studying in that city and in the United States?

Bani: The moment I reached the US I started unpacking ideas of colonization, almost like a rite of passage. I was particularly interested in notions of décor and architecture and what people in Pakistan considered sophisticated: I was painting diagrammatic drawings of Victorian furniture on the walls of my studio. Or I would make paper models of faux Greco Roman/ Baroque architecture, which was the trend in Karachi when it came to a display of wealth amongst the nouveau riche class. Inversely, by the end of my studies I had become very aware of the exoticism in the US of all things Asian, not the least of which was a growing interest in contemporary miniature painting. My final work was a sculptural installation that was a DIY traditional Mughal garden.

Francesco: What and who do you consider to have been the major influences in the directions you have chosen.?

Bani: Well I think the initial inspiration to start working with the moving image was very much an outcome of being in Chicago. I owe it to the Film Center at the Art Institute. Had it not been for the \$2 student entry fee, I wouldn't have had a chance to watch the amount of cinema that I did. And although even today I have no desire to make feature films, or enter into mainstream cinema, it is film that continues to excite me. For instance, I think the element of absurdity in the work of directors like Jacques Tati, Elia Suleiman, Abbas Kiarostami, really made me think about the place of humor in sociopolitical narratives. One of my favorite films is the documentary by Abbas Kiarostami called 'Homework', which is a talking heads interview with 6 year old boys in Tehran discussing the homework that they get from school. This is what I call a superb example of skirting around a particular issue in this case the effects of an authoritarian system.

Francesco: Did you start working with still photography and video at the same time? Do you see yourself as an artist who can pick and choose mediums?

Bani: I have actually only now started working in photography, after 7 years of making videos. I see it as an extension of video making, and use similar production methods. I don't see myself as an artist who will experiment with everything. Just video, photography and maybe drawing, which in my work are usually connected to each other conceptually.

Francesco: Maybe the popularity of animation will bring with it a renewed interest in drawing.

Bani: I think it definitely has done that, I've often used animation when I have taught drawing and some of the students took animation up as their main medium later.

Francesco: When did your work begin to focus on political issues? Or would you describe it as a focus on cultural issues in a broader sense?

Bani: It started with my first video 'Mangoes' which I made 8 years ago, while I was living in Chicago. It is one of a trilogy of videos that I made dealing with the relationship between Indians and Pakistanis. The petty nationalism's of the Pakistani and Indian diaspora in Chicago, plus my own encounters with Indians made me consider the politics of Partition for the first time. I think few works of mine deal in any direct way with specific political situations, they hover around constructions of history and identity. Currently



for the past year or so, I've been thinking a lot about power and servility in human society, and that is where pieces like 'RESERVED' and 'The Address' are coming from.

Francesco: Please tell us something about the origin, planning and filming of the two projects. For example were they story-boarded with each shot carefully planned? Or do you utilize some elements of chance?

Bani: Both 'RESERVED' and 'The Address' were completely pre-planned. 'RESERVED' was closely story-boarded, and I produced all the scenes of the traffic jam, the school children, the motorcade and all the rest. But since it wasn't a film with dialogue or characters, it took on a life of its own during the shoot, which was great. It was about people lingering around waiting and so they waited very naturally ...in their case, for the shoot to be over. It eventually looked more like a documentary than fiction.

'The Address' was a project that evolved in stages. The TV set used for televised presidential addresses on Pakistani TV had always intrigued me. Popular and reviled politicians alike, feudals and generals, all made their rounds in the political arena, but with minor modifications the elements of the TV set remained the same through history: a backdrop of a blue curtain, Mohammad Ali Jinnah's portrait, and the Pakistani flag. I finally recreated this set with the assistance of a painter of trompe l'oeil backgrounds. The central photograph of the series 'The Address' eventually became that empty set. Transferred onto a DVD, I then played this image on TV's placed in public spaces. The shoot was not a public art event but it was orchestrated on location because I intentionally wanted to create a series of photographs of people watching TV, as this is usually the single moment of TV viewership where the entire nation is unified.

Francesco: Your work has been shown in many places. What type of feedback have you had from your audiences, specifically about the two projects we are interested in featuring.



force that could motivate, or set-up an atmosphere in which artistic work thrived. It was true in the west for a short time in the sixties or seventies. But somehow these elements, these tensions, no longer provide the same energy or motivation.

Bani: I think these elements still provide a lot of energy in societies which are in transition, like countries in Eastern Europe, and a lot of Middle Eastern and Chinese art for instance. There is not much to be complacent about in these spaces, people are only beginning to articulate their lives and there is a lot more to come. It is another matter that unlike the art of the sixties and seventies, everything has now been co-opted by the art market.

Francesco: Do you see the techniques that artists use today: video, photography and sound as universal? As replacing painting, drawing or etching, the traditional tools of the past?

Bani: Well I certainly think they are more democratic tools and a lot more people are able to participate in art-making as a result. They are non-exclusive mediums, which already have a strong presence in contemporary life, so by virtue of that they are more universal than say 'etching' ever could have ever been in the life of an average person.

Francesco: Is there a gender issue for woman artists in your society? It does still exist in many places here, in spite of many years of presumed equality, that a woman is seen not just as an artist, but as a woman or female artist; and somehow, not as serious.

Bani: Well the interesting thing is that there are more female artists in Pakistan than there are men. Men are usually forced to take up mainstream lucrative professions like engineering and business studies, whereas the women don't have any such pressures. So we have a lot more women studying the arts and

the humanities than men. Amongst my peers from the NCA and IVS who went onto becoming professional artists there are about 9 women and 2 men.

Francesco: As an artist trained both in the USA and Pakistan how do you position your work. Are you, as an artist, concerned mainly with the issues of South Asia and its aesthetics, or do you see yourself as an international artist able to pick and develop projects wherever and whenever they occur?

Bani: Well I find life in certain parts of the world far more interesting than others. So I am picky about what I work with. Most of my work does draws from my life here, and then by extension I think of projects I would like to do elsewhere. For instance, I am currently doing a photo and video project that is based on Ryszard Kapusinski's book about the court of Ethiopia's Haille Salassie. I found a lot of resonance in it regardless of the fact that it is someone else's history, I am thrilled about working with it. As far as 'South Asian' aesthetics go, it's impossible to say whether there is such a thing in today, so no, I don't subscribe to them.

Francesco: I will qualify and expand on the above question: I am also a filmmaker. I was born in the USA, lived in New York for many years and now live in London on an Italian passport. My cultural references are deeply subconscious having been influenced by what I have experienced as a New Yorker, as a child of an immigrant family in the United States: by my cumulative cultural experiences. But my aesthetic is changing, almost imperceptibly as a result of the continuous exposure to other cultures and aesthetics. And because I have had the opportunity to work with people from very different backgrounds. Do you feel a something similar happening?

Bani: Well to be honest while I lived in the US I almost stopped making art. I didn't really have the freedom to glean from art making trends around me, because the stereotypes imposed on me, being a Pakistani Muslim woman, were highly problematic...and just outright dull. That was the time when artists like Shirin Neshat and Shazia Sikander were getting very well known. It was very disillusioning because I was neither interested in sensationalist representations of Islam, nor was I interested in the exotic mark making of the 'mysterious east'.

But of course since the US is a multi-ethnic, international community, it formed my politics and my intellect, so I changed a lot personally. But more recently, with a lot of inclusion in large shows, traveling and meeting up with artists internationally, I have met wonderful artists and looked at their work and processes closely. It's all added up enriching my own work. I do look at a lot of video and photography coming out of Eastern Europe and the Middle East, and can identify a loose community I belong to.

Francesco: What I was also alluding to, was for me and for many of my friends, the boredom we share for much of the art we see in Europe and the USA. Just the sheer mass of work is daunting, but so much of it is repetitive and very shallow. And what really strikes me is that how

little of this art really sparks a debate or a conversation among the observers. It is somewhat like the lack of debate about our society as a whole, it hardly exists. As for the art gallery or museum they serve as the organizers of a social occasions, and the happening is not centered on the art, but on the gathering itself. Although there is often a buzz at an opening, the buzz is frequently not about the art.

On the other hand there is a buzz around the art in Latin America and places outside of Western Europe and the United States. The creative life is important. be it poetry or painting, video or photography; music or another art form.

Bani: Yes I totally agree, I think that North American and Western European art scenes are saturated in a way. I also found that the work of a lot of my contemporaries in the US was very self referential (in an art historical sense). So it was primarily about how their work was a 'dialogue with' or 'inspired by' particular artists or art works. I think it is reflective of the society, in the way you say that there are no major debates, politically or otherwise amongst people. While I was in Europe this year, something like a discussion on the ban on smoking was the ultimate issue. I think it's also a case of having your life hyper represented. In Pakistan I can say for sure, that we continue to long for poignant expressions of our lives, be it in art, literature or poetry. So apart from the fact that life itself lends itself really beautifully to art, I think there is still a deep need for new writers, film makers and artists to rise up and represent our lives.

Francesco: I still have one more question and that has to do with the situation or the position of video, and photography to a lesser extent, within current artistic practice. It seems as if there are many standards of acceptability, beginning with works that are often little more than home movies or casual snapshots; and on the other extreme, works that are at the high-end of photography or film. I am not personally bothered by the diversity, a good work stands on its own ... what I still feel, though, is that artists have entered a foggy area of practice, one that may not need a critical solution, but one that is open to discussion. Are we photographers or filmmakers, or artist who use film (video) and photography in a more narrowly defined sense? Should we even care?

Bani: Well video art in the US started off as an anti-establishment medium which focused more on ideas and on structures of free video distribution and screenings for example, than it did on galleries, production value and aesthetics. And now even though it has lost its radical edge and other mediums have filled that space, artists working with video are aware of its historic link to activism and also its no frills production. I guess in some ways that legacy lives on and creates a space for a very 'basic' use of video. So now you have a real mixture of artists who either use film quality production, as opposed to others who just whip out a camera and shoot. I think these are different genres and intentions within one medium. And both ways of making video have good and bad practitioners. I think video has to be seen as a medium that has diverse applications and encompasses different processes, and the standards can be set within various trajectories. ✨



Production Stills from *Reserved*, 2007



© Bani Abidi / Image courtesy Green Cardamom and the Artist

The Address, 2007
Digital Prints





The Address, 2007
Digital Prints





The Address, 2007
Digital Prints



Production Stills from *Reserved*, 2007

SAIRA WASIM





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← Xxxxxxxxxx



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Cover Artist: SAIRA WASIM

Pakistani artists have embraced the language and history (both low and high) of the culture to interrogate Pakistan's contemporary society. The fruits of this shifting and mixing are works of art that turn artistic and societal traditions, from miniature painting to matrimonial rites, on their sides even as they uphold their significance. In these works, they present their views on life in the country. Yet their paintings, videos, prints, and drawings are not soapboxes from which they shout out their messages. Instead of direct sociopolitical slogans, these artists suggest underlying passions that provoke them to make art. These passions are borne from the experience of living in the volatile environment that exists in Pakistan. Through their works, these artists express and examine the complicated nature of national and cultural identity in Pakistan.

Saira Wasim is one such artist. In her 2000-2003 series of miniature paintings *Honor Killings*, the artist examines the practice of murdering a daughter, sister, or wife who is perceived to be promiscuous. This murder is rationalized because it is meant to preserve the family's honor. Saira's paintings charm the viewer even as they allegorize slain victims who are represented as delicate and beautiful flowers. In her art, she draws attention to a subject that she believes many people in the country ignore. She does this in a metaphorical manner by titling the works with the names of different types of flowers, for her the fragile and beautiful parts of nature that serve as the personifications of women. The paintings are radiant and at first resemble delicate landscapes. Upon closer inspection, the viewer sees something much more dreadful. In *Water lilies*, Saira paints what look to be these flowers floating in a pond but they are actually veils; the stamens are in fact bloody swords protruding out of traditional headdresses worn by some women in the country. The colors she uses do not hint at the horror of the event—pastel-like shades of blues, greens, and golden browns that catch the light and glisten.

Initially, the viewer may believe her paintings are idyllic scenes, however, after realizing that the blossoming flowers are actually dead women, suddenly they appear horrific, even as the beautiful and seductive detail draws one in. The eye is attracted to the jewel-like radiance of the image, yet the mind is repulsed by these visions the artist depicts. Although the terrible subject of the work is discovered, the image will remain visually harmonious. It is the ambiguous shapes of the flowers/women that keep viewers shifting in their perception of the work from attraction to repulsion. If an image is ambiguous, it suggests that there is something hidden waiting to be revealed. The duality between the symbols of a delicate flower and a bloody veil unmasks the tragic reality behind the calm splendor. It points to the horrible conditions that some women have to endure in parts of Pakistan even while they, as Saira believes, exude beauty.

This type of work—one that examines and depicts violence that is a part of Pakistani society—has been criticized for presenting art audiences with stereotypical images of the South Asian country. Artists, critics, and arts professionals in Pakistan express these views. They believe that those who make such works do so to increase their chances of having exhibitions and sales abroad. Writers who explore the impact of globalization on the arts share these criticisms. The art historian Boris Groys, for example, writes about the production of a national art that is problematic and does not take account of the nuanced position it emerges from because the international art market demands that it is recognizable as being an art of that nation. He believes that people want the “national artist” to make something specific to the country of origin—easily recognizable signs are of a premium. The national artist, in effect, has to have the ability to look through the eyes of a tourist. Gayatri Spivak writes of these demands as well; sometimes they are self-imposed. She approaches her examination of the national artist through considering identity. The notion of origin is so tied to identity politics—the belief that there is an originary, authentic aspect that forms identity for all eternity. She looks into the dictionary definition of the English word identity in order to discuss the problems with identity politics—the root words do not mean “same” in the sense of single, unique, individual but rather sameness as in repetition, more than one, all being the same. So different types of identity (religious, national, cultural) are not so much about being unique, but indexical. For the “national” artist looking for an international audience, they need to be careful not to reify the same ideas about nation as perceived on the outside in order to fulfill a demand by the international audience—i.e. the national artist as “trafficking in national identity.” This turns identity into a commodity.

For artists in Africa, this may be the use of *kente* (printed African cloth) in their artworks. In Pakistan, symbols of violence such as missiles, guns, and army camouflage could be the “traffickers” of national identity. This is perhaps what is expected out of the country because international news media imagery depicts it as such. However, like the Nigerian Yinka Shonibare’s incorporation of *kente*, Pakistani artists who make work with or represent “national symbols” do so in a nuanced manner. It is often a subversive appropriation of icons. Shonibare critiques colonialism in his installations, while Saira Wasim paints images that are both disturbing and enchanting. In the latter artist’s work, the tiny, yet fully articulated images beg the viewers to have a closer look at everything that is going on in the dazzling world she has depicted. Her enticing images do not ally with the terrible issue she explores.

Although she has not been personally affected by this tragic occurrence, she researched the topic extensively. After reading many newspaper articles on honor killings, she decided to explore the issue in her art. In fact, these works are more about her observations than about the murders. She has always presented her views on the socio-political climate wherever she may be. Exhibiting sensitivity to her surroundings, the artist keys into these circumstances and explores them symbolically in her art. As an artist, she does not simply advocate an end to such killings. Instead, she pictures what she believes are the consequences. And she does this in an unexpected manner.

Saira moved to the United States in 2003. Since then, the artist has lightheartedly yet poignantly offered both insider and outsider perspectives to the consequences of American foreign policy around the world. Her latest works present a roster of international leaders including George Bush, Pervez Musharraf, Tony Blair, and Hamid Karzai. Their portraits are precisely drawn, making these figures easily recognizable. Yet they do not appear in a context that would be familiar to most. Instead the images reveal how Saira pictures these leaders and their actions. In one work entitled *New World Order*, Bush looks like a holy being—the direct messenger of God that he believes himself to be. Meanwhile, Musharraf appears childlike in the lap of the U.S. president. He is a toy with body parts that the owner can twist and turn.

By merging seemingly divergent sentiments—humorous and serious, grim and pleasing—Saira and other artists in Pakistan present multiple ways to understand the concerns related to life in the nation. They ask us to reconsider seemingly innocent situations. Or, in contrast, they shed light on something appearing dangerous that is, in the end, harmless. These artists do not simply present issues related to the society in Pakistan; they play with them. In Saira’s *Honor Killings* series, the tragic is hidden behind the beautiful. As such, her paintings are doubled in their meaning and intent.

The double entendre is something incorporated into the work of several young artists active today in Pakistan and its diaspora. It is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as “a double meaning; word or phrase having a double sense, especially as used to convey an indelicate meaning.” This figure of speech is often ironic and ambiguous. Saira Wasim uses this tool in her artwork in both conceptual and formal ways. In addition to presenting the deadly in a shimmering manner, the artist also undermines the heralded technique of miniature painting in her work. Miniature painting is weighed down as a traditional method, understood by some as one that has and needs to stay the same. While artists today may learn about and blend together several historical schools of miniature painting, the “traditional” style they appropriate is in fact a multi-faceted combination of all kinds of sources. In essence, by making their own adaptations, they are not appropriating the tradition but participating in it. So to uphold the method as it has been practiced in the past, it is vital that artists today continue to expand its parameters. The belief that miniature painting will only be maintained if it is practiced as it was in the past finds an unexpected answer in the work of Saira Wasim and others. Like her predecessors, Saira updates the old through adding recent artistic techniques and styles, using new materials, and exploring contemporary themes. Those who want

miniature painting to remain the same do not account for how works were made in the past.

In the last fifteen years, miniature painting has grown as a field in the contemporary arts scene in Pakistan. Largely due to the popularity of the department at the National College of Arts in Lahore, miniature painting as a field contributes to the growth and development of global contemporary art. Artists working in this medium play with its preciousness. In both formal and conceptual ways, they bring opposites together. Like Saira Wasim, they explore terrible events and issues in a format that is often referred to as "exquisite." ✱

This article is an excerpt from my dissertation, "Playing with a Loaded Gun: Contemporary Sociopolitical Art in Pakistan" (University of Texas at Austin; PhD anticipated in Summer 2008)

In Pakistan, individuals are identified by their first name. The family name is the first name of the father to denote the relationship "son of...". This dissertation will thus use the first name after providing the full name.

This is the view expressed in discussions I've had with artists who do not make social commentary in their art, in the work of some art critics, and by some art teachers.

- James Clifford, Boris Groys, Craig Owens, Martha Rosler, Robert Storr, and Michele Wallace. "The Global Issue: A Symposium." *Art In America* (July 1989): 86-89, 151-153.

- Gayatri Spivak, "Acting Bits/Identity Talk," in Kwame Anthony Appiah and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., eds. *Identities* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995).

- Oxford English Dictionary

While painting pre-existed the Mughal Empire, primarily as parts of illustrated manuscripts, it was under the Islamic rulers that it developed a particular character that melded Persian, Indian, and European elements together. The royal courts from the mid-sixteenth to mid-eighteenth century burgeoned with artistic activity—it was the golden age of Islamic art in South Asia. However, to imagine these styles as purely Mughal, purely Rajput, etc. would be incorrect. In Mughal India, where there were not any forced conversions, Hindu culture still thrived under the Islamic reign. Instead of remaining isolated, the different cultures co-existed and affected each other's development. Additionally, prints from the West (especially Flemish and German images brought to the courts by Jesuit missionaries) influenced some of the major artists in this tradition.

BILD: VLADIMIR BONAČIĆ, »GF-E16-4 CNSM«, 1969/1971, DYNAMISCHES OBJEKT, PRIVATSAHLUNG

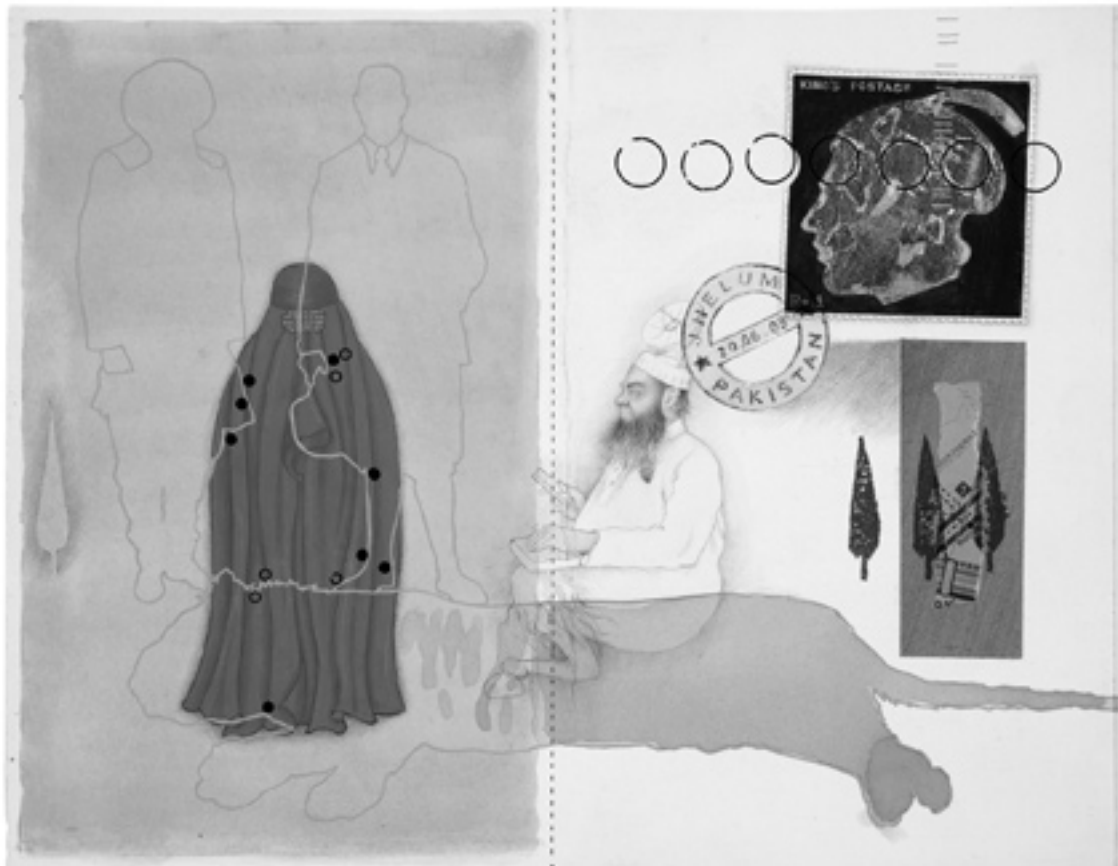
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Hasnat Mehmood, Aisha Khalid, Nusra Latif Qureshi, Saira Wasim, Talha Rathore and M. Imran Qureshi
Untitled, 2003
 © The artists
 Courtesy of Green Cardamom and the artists]

Juliana Cerqueira Leite

Interview with Hammad Nasar

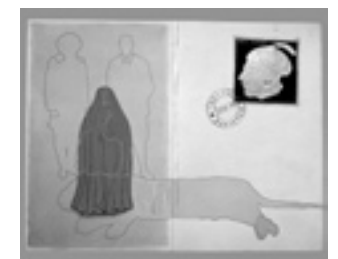
Jan. 12, 2008

Juliana Cerqueira Leite: Peter Weibel has described the curator as a 'producer' — defined here by the producer's role in film: commissioning writers, actors and directors to realize an idea. Do you see your relationship with curating in a similar way or is there a better description for what you do?

Hammad Nasar: To me curating is an unspecified and poorly defined discipline engaged in moderated conversations about art. They are critical conversations, and if done well, can be as useful in uncovering new ways of looking at old material as well as in developing new material. But like any conversation they need more than one person to be engaged, otherwise they are soliloquies.

For example, Karkhana was a full-fledged exhibition conceived and organized by the artist Imran Qureshi when I first came across it. To my eyes the process that led up to creating the twelve collaborative paintings was at least as important as the finished works, and I wanted to capture that process in a book. This set off a collaborative project between museums, academics, artists and curators which led to a different type of exhibition - Karkhana: A Contemporary Collaboration —using the existing work to tell a richer story.

On the other hand, Beyond the Page — a UK exhibition that argued that miniature was not just a technique but also an attitude — was an argument developed in conversation with artists Imran Qureshi, Rashid Rana and Hamra Abbas and the academic Anna Sloan among others. And it gave the opportunity to invite artists to create new work in two different spaces.



JCL: What would be your current theoretical framework for developing projects at Green Cardamom?

HN: Green Cardamom works both as a commercial gallery and as an organisation creating public projects in partnership with museums, galleries, academic institutions and artists. Too often, 'international' is used to describe a Euro-American viewpoint hovering somewhere mid-Atlantic. We are trying to help forge a different meaning of international for the art world — with its centre in the Indian Ocean.

Within that very broad rubric, the projects we take on are determined by the interests and concerns shared by our team. Some of the thematic platforms we have done projects around include contemporary miniature, pop in the vernacular, and faith and identity.

Others we are developing include: partitions as the way nations get made (the subject of a research fellowship I am doing at Goldsmiths, and a series of events and exhibitions called Lines of Control), the notions of paradise in popular culture, and drawing as a process.

They continue the theme of open conversation that I referred to earlier.

JCL: Several key figures and young artists in Pakistan have studied, lived or live abroad. In light of the increasing interest by the Western art world in Asian art and considering that these artists must be aware of the exoticizing of their work by international galleries, how self-conscious or artificially rushed has the production of an identity for contemporary post-modern Pakistani art become?

HN: Pakistani art has been consumed by considerations of identity ever since the birth of the nation in 1947. And given Pakistan's propensity to lurch from one existential crisis into another, I don't see much respite from these issues just yet. Having said that, I feel there is a difference in the approach of the current generation of artists who have had the luxury of history, of being born Pakistani, and thus not wrestling with the notion of creating a visual identity.

The issue of exoticisation is a live one. Not only in the sense that it is perceived as an easy way to market the "other", but also in that the art world is alive to this issue, and is equally likely to not engage with the exotic out of fear of being identified with this exoticisation. This is interesting when you look at the work of people like Nusra Latif Qureshi, who very consciously and critically uses the element of visual seduction in her artistic interrogation of how history leaves its marks. Her work, in a paradoxical way, appeals to both highly informed professionals equipped with the references that help them unravel the multiple layers and to lay audiences who can look at the work as pure eye-candy. The folks in the middle are left unsure of quite what road to take.



Karkhana artists Imran Qureshi, Aisha Khalid, Nusra Latif Qureshi, Hasnat Mehmood, Talha Rathore and Saira Wasim collaborated in producing twelve paintings. The artists were all trained in the National College of Arts in Lahore and share an interest in miniature painting. Living in Lahore, Melbourne, Jhelum, New York and Chicago they exchanged works via international couriers and took turns contributing to each piece.



Nusra Latif Qureshi
Defining Exotic Spaces, 2006
Mixed Media / Site specific installation at Asia House, London.
© Nusra Latif Qureshi / Photo: Vipul Sangoi
Courtesy of Green Cardamom and the artist

JCL: Politics in and of Pakistan, because of its effects on ordinary life — i.e. the recent declaration of emergency — dominates the intellectual space in places like Lahore and Karachi where a lot of artists such as Sophie Ernst and Saira Wasim live. How does this affect Pakistani and South Asian contemporary art practice?

HN: In a major way of course. How could it not? I realised the full extent of this, not by studying current reactions in Pakistan, but out of seeing the impact of the communal violence (in Gujarat and beyond) on visual artists in India, specifically the work of people like Nalini Malani, Amar Kanwar, Shilpa Gupta, Anita Dube and Navjot Altaf. The political and social tension opened up a way for a new generation of Indian artists to explore the trauma of partition. Which has largely been suppressed in both countries.

JCL: To what extent do contemporary Pakistani artists engage with other traditions of South Asia? I have noticed a lack of engagement with the Hindu and Buddhist traditions? Would I be right to notice this and if so are the reasons to do with Pakistan being 'divorced' from its tradition due to the nationalist propaganda defining the country as a Muslim nation?

HN: I am not sure I fully agree with that. The art history (at least pre-partition) is the same for India and Pakistan, and I can bore you with examples of Indian artists like Anita Dube referencing Muslim jalis or Pakistani artists like Hamra Abbas reinterpreting Hindu mythology.

But you also need to remember that lived Islam in South Asia is very different from that in the Gulf or the Maghreb. Many supposedly Muslim cultural practices in South Asia are not religious but cultural and hence shared.

Am I allowed to disagree and agree with you? Because I still do feel that there has been, for a long time, a reluctance to accept 'non-Muslim' cultural heroes, as if doing so would somehow negate the reason for Pakistan's creation as a Muslim homeland for South Asian Muslims. This has, in fact, been the subject of a wonderful project by Bani Abidi, *The Boy Who Got Tired of Posing*, in which she has looked at how, under General Zia's rule, there was an attempt to arabize Pakistan's culture.

JCL: Can the resurgence of miniature painting in contemporary Pakistani art be defined simply as an attempt to find a unique national visual language? How is this linked to the development of the

miniature painting programme at the National College of Art in Lahore during the 1980s?

HN: There is no word for miniature in Urdu, and a miniature painter is simply musawwair or artist. You have to remember that this is what art was in the sub-continent before the Raj.

Lots of artists from previous generations studied miniature painting and were influenced by it. What happened in the 1980s was the vision of one artist and teacher, Zahoor ul Akhlaq, to activate the largely dormant potential of miniature painting as a living framework for creating contemporary art. He did this partly through his own practice, but also by elevating the miniature department at the National College of Art in Lahore to the same status as Western painting, printmaking and sculpture.

Up until then miniature was a convenient visual language for successive Pakistani regimes looking for 'national art'. But the last two decades has seen a wealth of extraordinary talent coming out of this department: Imran Qureshi, Shahzia Sikander, Aisha Khalid, Nusra Latif Qureshi and more recently Muhammad Zeeshan and Khadim Ali.

JCL: This new interest in miniature painting requires that the artist develop skills presently out of fashion in Western contemporary art education through copying old masters and respecting traditional technique. Does this trend separate artists from the region into those leaning towards Western techniques and conceptual practice and those whose work is more traditional?

HN: Thankfully this is not a binary opposition. There are artists who can draw and think. If we take the example of Hamra Abbas, an infinitely creative artist who has interrogated the forms and frameworks of miniature through sculpture, installations, ceramics, lenticular prints, videos and even drawings. Her life-sized amorous couples in Plasticine at the 10th Istanbul Biennial referenced Indian miniatures, and she combined paintings with a three channel video projection for a work she produced while artist-at-residence at the V&A and Gasworks in London.



Hamra Abbas
Lessons on Love III and Lessons on Love I, 2007
 Installation view at the 10th Istanbul Biennial
 ©Hamra Abbas / Photo: Serkan Taycan
 Courtesy of Green Cardamom and the artist

JCL: At the recent opening of the National Gallery in Islamabad president Musharraf is quoted as saying that "it's vital to project a soft, peaceful, tolerant image of Pakistan." Critics fear that the gallery will become a tool of political propaganda instead of a space for reflecting the true spec-

trum of Pakistani art. As a curator are you positive about the future of this institution?

HN: The National Gallery is certainly a marker for a greater recognition of the visual arts in the Pakistani government's agenda. My concern is that it has been developed as a building first and to my mind the building should be last thing an institution needs. What goes inside it, why it goes inside it, how is it updated and who makes these decisions are the bigger questions for a national gallery.

I would like to highlight the approach adopted by a non-government initiative in Karachi, the Foundation for the Museum of Modern Art (FOMMA) which I think is more promising. They have opened an art historical research centre, a small temporary exhibition space, a venue for lectures and discussions and initiated a publications programme in preparation for taking on a big building. I am much more optimistic about initiatives such as these and the programme run by the foundation-backed VM Art Gallery to set up the infrastructure that will do justice to the full breadth of Pakistani art. ✿

End

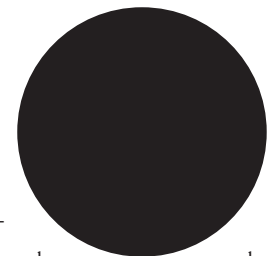


pakistan dossier
edited by qalandar bux memon



the end of imagination

ayesha siddiqi



The British papers recently published photographs of Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari posing for the media on the Church, Oxford. The photographs and television foot- confident young man eager to take on an unkind world and his Pakistan People's Party (PPP). After Benazir Bhutto's murder on December 27, 2007 the central execu- tive committee of her party, led by her husband, Asif Ali Zardari, decided to make Bilawal the chairman of the party. He will take over the role once he completes his education at Oxford University. Until then, he will manage the 'front office' for his father who has decided to run the party with two other senior party members, Mukhdoom Amin Fahim and Shah Mehmood Qureshi.

the 19-year old grounds of Christ age showed a highly become the future of

The decision reflects the party leadership's effort to save the PPP from disintegration after having lost its charismatic leader. It is believed that only the Bhutto name would keep the party together. More- over, it is not any Bhutto name, but someone connected with Benazir Bhutto, a leader who demonstrated against the regime of General Zia-ul-Haq, and laid down her life during the tenure of the present dictator, former General Pervez Musharraf. It does not matter that Musharraf had taken off his uniform almost a month before Benazir Bhutto's tragic death. Giving up his military career did not automatically turn him into a civilian with deserved political strength no longer dependent on the military for power.

There are many who argue that the PPP should have acted more democratically and chosen another

leader, someone who has struggled for democracy, such as Aitzaz Ahsan. After all, why hand over the party to Zardari who proved controversial and extremely costly to his own wife while she was alive? Bhutto was sacked on charges of corruption which were mainly linked with her husband. Even if successive regimes were unable to prove charges against Zardari, why treat the PPP as a dynastic party?

Why should we expect the PPP to be radical when the entire elite seems to have lost their sense of political imagination. For instance, there are many who now look towards the present army chief, General Ashfaq Pervez Kiyani to overthrow Pervez Musharraf and his partners in the PML-Q. Why can't they fight the battle themselves? Why don't they dirty their hands in politics instead of always expecting the army to intercede on their behalf.

The limited protest on behalf the chief justice and his lawyers lacks the fundamental component of a mass movement. The political parties are responsible for organizing a political movement, but they would rather depend on the generals than risk their security.

Sadly, this story has repeated itself since the army first took over power in the country in 1958. When Musharraf took over power in October 1999 some had hope that things would change. They have been disappointed. After two extended periods of military rule (1958-71 and 1977-88) the political leadership and the elite at large might have known better than cooperate with an army chief. Like ants queuing to pick-up their food, people lined-up to get positions in the caretaker governments, or became the general's cronies. Their explanation was that since things couldn't change, even under the regime of the first popularly elected Prime Minister, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, or during the ten years of the sham democracy of the 1990s, Musharraf was the only way to put the country back on track.

It wasn't realized then and it isn't understood now, that allowing the military to rule only makes them more powerful; and it enhances the authoritarian character of the polity.

However, many who supported Musharraf then were of the view that he represented middle class values. A scion of a middle-class family with professional parents, Pervez Musharraf, for many, represented a class which is viewed as the guarantor of Pakistan's economic progress and development. Economists such as Akbar Zaidi, for instance, have argued that Pakistan cannot become democratic until it attains a certain level of economic capacity. Incidentally, The retired General Musharraf and other senior officers of the army, also subscribe to this notion. Many, seemingly progressive intellectuals, saw Musharraf as a representation of the enlightened middle class which would act as a counter-force to feudalism in the country. There are many who extend the argument to the military as a whole, and claim that the military represent middle class values; hence, it would bring beneficial change in the country. It has not happened.

There are two basic fallacies in the above argument. First, arguing that the military is a harbinger of positive change in the country is as unsound a concept as is expecting the 19-year old Bilawal to bring about a major change in Pakistan. The military, especially the elite of the armed forces, represent an independent class, which has always served the interest of the ruling elite, and now do it much more vociferously, because they share the same interests. The senior generals, senior civil bureaucrats, politicians, big industrialists and businessmen, major landowners (popularly feudal), important religious leaders and those who control the media, are all part of the same club with a shared interest. It is not just a matter of common stakes, but also the fact that most of the major players are related to each other through

marriage. It is really reminiscent of feudal Europe.

Authoritarianism was always ingrained in Pakistan's politics. It dates back to the years before the country was even created in 1947. The Muslim elite opted to form a polity where they could protect their interests. The military was seen as guarding the stakes of the elite and providing greater economic opportunities by deals made with foreign governments in the name of security. Therefore, the elite became dependent on external capital inflows from the West, particularly the United States. The 1950s, part of the 1960s, the 1980s and the period after 2001 were years when the elite enriched themselves due to the flow of money from foreign aid.

Over the years, especially after 1977, the military made itself into an independent class which protected its own interests and used legal and constitutional mechanisms to safeguard its corporate interests as an equal member of the elite. The debate regarding the need to create a National Security Council (NSC) on the pattern of the Turkish counterpart, was a way of putting the military on an equal footing with other members of the elite in matters of governance and policy-making.

The military's enhanced power secured greater economic opportunities allowing the senior officers to become financially independent. Moreover, for the senior echelons of the armed forces, the NSC or legal provisions such as the controversial article 58 (2) (b), ensured that the politicians could not destabilize the state or the political system to a degree which threatened the military's economic interests. The military elite, in effect, used its political power to build and preserve its economic interests. It is not surprising that the armed forces are one of the major political and economic powers in the country. The defense budget is not the only component of the military economy. The net capital of the military is more than seven percent of the GDP and comprises real estate and business interests of the military elite. The generals are central to the process of resource distribution and want it to remain that way. The military, for instance, controls 11.58 million acres of which 6.9 million acres is agricultural land that has been distributed among serving and retired officers and soldiers. The ordinary soldier gets far less than the general and does not have the same access to subsidies, such as farm-to-market distribution, plus the free labor and water, that is granted to the senior officers-turned-agriculturists. For example, General Musharraf's land in Bahawalpur is guarded by a dozen para-military officers. It is not unusual for commissioned officers to be given other perks, such as land or homes, in the city.

So, even if General Kiyani were to ask serving officers to return from the civilian positions they presently occupy and to desist from meeting with politicians, and to leave the political process to civilians, the intention would not be to reduce the military's political authority or its economic influence, but rather to bring about cosmetic changes in order to improve the organization's image. After all, if things really get out of control politically, it will be the military which will be called upon to save the country from further chaos.

The second fallacy is the concept that the middle class is bringing sociopolitical progress to Pakistan. The relatively well educated middle class of the country, like everywhere else in the world, are guardians of status-quo. In Pakistan's case, it is they who currently benefit most from the neo-liberal policies of the state, and by aligning themselves with those forces which will ensure the greatest material opportunities. Authoritarianism helps to selectively redistribute resources to a limited number of people. In modern day

Pakistan, for example, the opportunities made available to civil servants or young educated professionals, in the form of consultancies, distributed by multinationals, such as the Asian Development Bank, US AID, British DFID or the World Bank, or the other various national and multinational NGOs, has produced a class of people who desire a political stability which maintains their continued material benefits.

In the overall power structure of the state, the middle class becomes a ladder which allows the best amongst them to enter the upper-middle class. Once individuals attain that objective they tend to acquire the instinct of the elite. The socioeconomic system encourages people to remain focused on strengthening the status-quo and using their capacities to rise from one level of society to the next. The military and the civil bureaucracy are two groups which allow people from the lower-middle class to attain a higher socio-economic lifestyle. Prior to the 1950s, both these groups represented the upper-middle class. However, after the 1950s there was greater flexibility for the lower-middle class. This was deemed a safe route for social advancement, one that would not bring about a major shift in the overall socioeconomic standards of the society.

The educated middle class, which also includes Pakistani expatriates, do not necessarily identify themselves with, or represent the under-privileged and dispossessed Pakistani masses. Internationally, they are fighting a battle in the name of nationalism to improve the image of the country without seriously changing matters at home, for instance the condition of the countries millions of poor.

The Pakistani expatriates, in particular, shy away from open discussion or mention of the tricky issues in the country, such as inequality or sectarian and ethnic tension, as this makes them suspect in the eyes of their social peers that still live at home. This attitude, unfortunately, is increasing the chasm between the poor masses and the elite and the potential elite.

The laws of the state, regarding economic and resource re-distribution which depend on them, remain highly in favor of the elite, and this promotes all kinds of extremism. This, in turn, leaves the poor, who are dependent on the land, at the mercy of religious extremists who promise equality. I remember seeing a billboard outside a mosque in Karachi which called for donations to the mosque in return for guarantee of a plot of land in heaven. Jihad and martyrdom is symbolic in terms of what it offers the dispossessed: since the elite are not willing to share the resources of the land in this life, the poor young man/woman is willing to give up their lives in hope of getting a better status in the world hereafter. After all, martyrdom would allow a poor person to stand ahead of their master in the next life, even if they have no hope to get ahead in this life.

The socioeconomic and sociopolitical progress that is taking place in Pakistan today is feudal in flavor. Yet many a learned people in the country today argue that feudalism is dead in Pakistan and that people known as feudal-landlords are simply big landowners who use land as a source of income; but the fact is that the attitude of feudalism has seeped into all levels of Pakistani society. Feudalism is not an institution, it is a social attitude which is held by the non-landowning classes as well. A feudal model is superimposed on any redistribution of resources, including land.

As one would expect the redistribution of land resources is highly elitist. For instance, although the country is short of five million houses, most of the real estate development today addresses the needs of the upper-middle and the middle classes. The state is reluctant to build an infrastructure that meets



the needs of people moving from rural areas to urban centers. While 80 percent of the country's population lived in villages in the 1980s, today that figure has decreased to about 66 percent. There is a lack of schools, hospitals and housing for people who have made the move to the urban areas.

The state continues to ignore the needs of the poor. The political parties are equally incapable of coming up with new ideas to help these people who eventually turn to sharia as the sociopolitical system that might bring an iota of justice. Most of the people demanding sharia are simply looking for justice: the equal distribution of resources. Sadly, the elite continue to play a game of snakes and ladders, a game in which there are more snakes than ladders for the commoners.

There are no signs as yet of an Iranian or a French revolution in the country. The masses are too tired and the country lacks the right leadership to start a new political movement. Although the masses still remember the sweet taste of emancipation brought by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the PPP's rule of the 1970s makes them cautious of burning their boats and following leaders who might later deceive. What they can do, however, is to feel anxious and angry. The anxiety is usually expressed in the form of rage against an ethnic group, or against someone of the opposite race or gender.

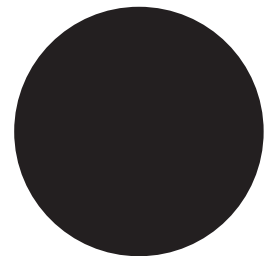
The people who wept for Benazir and continue to do so, also grieve for the years of treachery imposed on them by the short-sighted elite of the country. Bhutto's death has reinforced the thought of how lonely and helpless they are. Her death was also a reminder of how heartless the establishment and the elite have become.

At this time we have reached the end of political imagination in Pakistan and one can only hope and pray for things to change. If change is to come, the youth and the masses who suffer from the present system, must rise. At present, the movement in the educational institutions provides some hope that the next generation can pave the way for major socioeconomic improvement. Challenging the elitist system is the only hope for a stable Pakistan. ✱



november 5th; the day i was politically baptized

wagdas mir



(General Pervez Musharraf, acting in a blatantly unconstitutional manner, imposed Martial Law in Pakistan on 3rd November, 2007. The Establishment described it as an 'Emergency'. However the 'Emergency' provided for in the Pakistani Constitution does not provide for a 'suspension' of the constitution or the power to remove judges of the superior courts. This act was followed by many other unconstitutional steps, the sole aim being the suppression of any dissent. The author, a lawyer, participated in one of the earliest protests organized by the lawyers' movement on 5th November, 2007 at the Lahore High Court. The following account was written in the evening of the same day.)

Now when I look back at it, it all seems to have happened in slow motion. That moment we knew would arrive, that we (, the lawyer community), had waited for and dreaded. The moment when blood would be spilt by those who came in the name of the law, when tear-gas would be fired, when stones would be thrown in desperation, when slogans would be shouted. Then tears were shed, Then silent prayers were said. Our hopes were raised high; and then it was all brutally suppressed. When they attacked us, we defied them. We had lied to our loved ones about where we were going, but never forgot the truth about where we were headed. We became political; we changed forever and yet nothing changed at all. It was all ignored and yet it all was taken note of.

We found heroes around us, but not enough to win the day. They used naked and brute force to suppress us, but not enough to win then or ever. We shared tales, but not enough was said. We looked to the future and wondered if enough can ever be done. Then we had to ask ourselves and each other — how

committed we are to change and the instituting of simple principles of governance — the Rule of Law and the return of judges who under the emergency had been illegally removed from their posts- ? We discovered that we are committed and we want change in Pakistan. And that is what matters.

It is often said that because of the coverage by the modern day electronic media we feel as if we are 'there' when events take place. Till today, I too thought that was true. But nothing prepares you for the actual moment. Nothing prepares you for the adrenalin rush when the crowd chants a moving slogan (Laathi goli ki sarkar, nahi chalay gi..nahi chalay gi...the government of bullet and baton will not last). Nothing prepares you for the ecstasy of the liberation from silence. Nothing enables you to fathom how it feels to see yourself and others around you being politically baptized. It is true, nothing prepares you for the unknown, especially that which you do not know about yourself. And yet there is no greater joy than discovering a part of your own self, even more so, when that part connects you to others.

Freedom breaks barriers. We, as a nation, are enslaved to silence and inaction. But the moment of liberation builds up like a storm. You hear speeches being made in front of you and you clap lazily. Then one eloquent person says something which ticks off a chain reaction in your blood stream. You listen more attentively to the slogans. The crowd chants, 'Laathi goli ki sarkar..nahi chalay gi, nahi chalay gi'[the government of bullet and baton will not last!] and you listen to it, unsure of yourself. Moments later you hear just the slogan and nothing else. It builds up, and it builds up. Your heart beats a bit faster. They shout again...'nahi chalay gi, nahi chalay gi'!(will not last! WILL NOT LAST!). You look around you, and yet you are not looking at others. The only thing that matters is your voice. You want to get it across. The same insignificant man shouts for a third time, 'Laathi goli ki sarkar...' (the government of the baton...), a momentary silence spreads out before you. You break the shackles, you pump your fist in the air, you take a deep breath. You are ready to say it like you have never said anything before. You are ready to announce your arrival, your political birth. Your voice booms above all others and yet the words come out collectively, 'Nahi chalay gi, Nahi chalay gi'. A free man, slave no more.

I can't mention the names of my friends who were with me that day. What I can tell you is that all of them broke barriers. And, as always, the turmoil has resulted in new bonds being formed without even a word being spoken. The words that were spoken met with a brutal response. The brutality that resulted strengthened our resolve to stand up for each other and for our cause. It made our bond stronger. The bond that was formed when the first tear-gas shell exploded around us and we supported each other even as we stumbled. The bond that was formed when I shouted to two of my friends to stop them from running into the police. Nothing can help me put that experience into words. Let us just say that a common belief in the righteousness of our cause guided us.

It has been said that it is the banality of evil that is the scariest thing about it. The same can be said for the oppression and brutality that Pakistan faces today. Those carrying it out look just as human as you, their actions are shamelessly inhuman. Even if one disagrees with the lawyers movement nothing justi-

fies the extreme brutality of the police. Anyone and almost everyone at the High Court was arrested, even those sitting in the canteen and the library; and here it must be noted that since its inception in March 2007 the lawyers movement and associated protests have been peaceful; our weapon has been our arguments; on the streets we hurled only slogans.

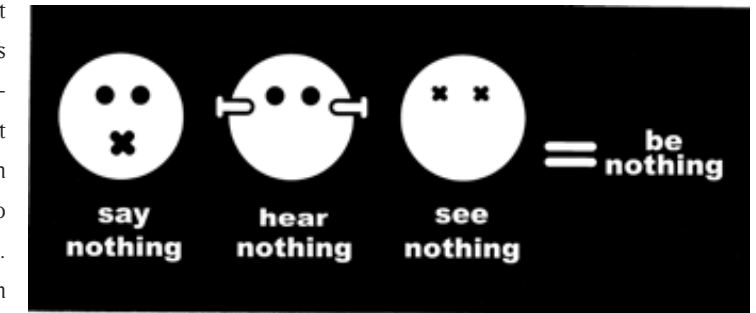
The baton charge came out of nowhere. Then the first tear-gas shells exploded around us. Everyone ran towards safer grounds, but we didn't forget each other: I ran back to grab a female friend who was disoriented and lagging behind. We kept shouting directions at each other: Go there, run this way. We

gave each other water, tissues and salt to deal with the tear-gas, even if that meant running out of our own supplies. These are the moments that the cameras of photographers or news channels do not catch. how can they convey the anger that surges inside you when you see four policemen brutally beating up a 25-year old lawyer after dragging him from the canteen. No camera image can tell you how it feels to watch a policeman use a baton to split open the head of an elderly female lawyer. You feel only revulsion when a male cop slaps a female across the face while her head is bleeding.

Those arrested from the library and the 'Bar room' told me that the police barged in, broke the furniture and mercilessly kicked and punched all inside before carrying them away. A Special Branch officer entered the dispensary of the High Court (where a female was being treated) and slapped her as she lay on the bed before dragging her away. The words tyranny and oppression cannot convey what I witnessed today, neither does brutality. Let me use an Urdu word, it is *Zulm* (arbitrary injustice). *Sheer Zulm*.

The police officer who stood outside the High Court (Aftab Cheema of the *Zulm* persuasion) should also grab a copy of that sacred document called the Constitution of Pakistan. Oh yes I still believe it exists. I would request him and his superiors (including the never Honourable President of Pakistan) to try and handle the affairs of this country using the Constitution rather than batons and tear-gas. The logic is simple, the Constitution guides you unlike the baton. You guide the baton. You control it, it does not control your actions. Sure Musharraf tried using the Constitution as a baton but found the Supreme Court in the way: A baton is handy for those who are impatient and tyrannical.

The President definitely does not like lawyers, and he is eager to make that clear. This mindless violence will not hamper our resolve or dampen our spirits. If anything it adds to our belief that those in power fear us because they feel that we can make a difference. That we can bring about the change that they so desperately want to avoid. We stand for everything they would suppress, and for all the rights



they would deny the people of this land. But it is their fear, their suppression that will be our strength. The oppressors are un-nerved because of us. It makes them attack us, arrest us, charge us with offences that are laughable in these circumstances (350-plus lawyers arrested at the Lahore High Court today have been charged with attempted murder of police officials. A similar number have also been charged under the Anti-Terrorism Act of 1997). What they hate is what we love, i.e. the idea and practice of the rule of law. It must take a lot on the part of the establishment to ignore all that they do. I can never forget the smirk on the face of the officer in the Central Jail as he abused lawyers. He said it was time the police took revenge for everything that the lawyers had gotten away with in the recent past. I think he was referring to the exercise of some of our fundamental rights. Apparently, he did not like the idea that there were any rights at all. Why would he? The idea of rights would suggest that he must be guided in his actions by certain principles. This is very offensive if you are a government official, I suppose. How can anyone tell you that you are wrong or that the orders given by superiors maybe unconstitutional and unjust?

While I was looking for friends at the Central Jail, three prison vans were off-loaded. All of them had determined looking men in black coats and white shirts. One very pleased police man was noting down the names of the lawyers. In a side office hung a well known portrait: Mr. Jinnah looked on from the wall behind the officer's chair as this servant of Pakistan carried out the commands of the oppressive powers. The Pakistani flag sat on the officer's desk. Our national flag never looked more out of place. Mr. Jinnah though being surrounded by men of his own vocation, looked more pleased than before.

This battle to restore the judiciary is a legal argument, and we the lawyers have already won the argument. The government may use all the strength it can muster, but arguments are never shot down by force. And when the government tires, and tire it will, we will be out dancing in the streets regardless of how many bruises and broken bones we have. Our biggest strength is the inevitability of our success. You cannot use *Zulm* to deal with the inevitable. You merely delay it. To the final few days of oppression then! In the famous words of William Wilberforce (while advocating the abolition of slavery), 'it is my belief that my cause will bear me out'.

*Joonhi hamesha ulajhti rehi hai zulm say khalq
Na in ki rasm nayi hai, na apni reet nayi,
Joonhi hamesha khilaye hain hum nay aag mein phool
Na in ki haar nayi hai na apni jeet nai*

(this is the way creation has always been in conflict with arbitrary injustice,
neither are their ways new nor our tradition,
this is how we have ensured that flowers always bloom in the fire,
neither is their defeat new nor our victory). ✨

Muhammed Ali Jinnah, the leader of the movement for the foundation of Pakistan, was a celebrated lawyer in his time and a staunch constitutionalist.



to never forget

hassan rehman & amanullah kharjapper

It seems a little narcissistic to go into the details of one's own brief incarceration when it has been followed by the arrests of hundreds of opposition political activists, by the illegal detention of Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Aitezaz Ahsan, President of the Supreme Court Bar Association, by the murder of hundreds attending political gatherings in the last few months, and by Lahore's first suicide bombing. What follows is meant, therefore, not as an attempt at self-aggrandisement, but as a personal account of two participants in the movement for the restoration of the judiciary and the Constitution.

To set the stage a little, on the 3rd November 2007, General Pervez Musharraf, the Chief of Army Staff, citing the rising tide of extremism and the inability of the government of President Pervez Musharraf to stem it, pulled a coup and imposed a State of Emergency on the country. Within a few hours, a seven-member bench of the Supreme Court was convened and declared the declaration of Emergency Rule to be untenable and unjustified. Before Musharraf's generalissimo avatar addressed the nation on television that night, he had already moved to shut down all private electronic media channels and had issued orders for the dismissal of the Chief Justice of Supreme Court of Pakistan, Mr. Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry, as well as the more irksome members of the bench and the leaders of the lawyers' movement. The blatant power grab hit home in several prominent educational institutions in Lahore — at the Lahore University of

Management Sciences (LUMS), Imran Khan, leader of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (Movement for Justice) and a popular youth icon, was addressing a hall full of students when it was announced that orders had been issued for his arrest. In another incident the following day, the police 'raided' the premises of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan where 55 members were meeting to discuss the situation. Among those arrested were a couple of professors from LUMS. The two actions provoked the student body into action, prompting them to participate in a demonstration on the 5th of November outside the Lahore High Court, where they witnessed first-hand the vicious brutality of the police as it tear-gassed and baton-charged unarmed, peaceful protestors.

By the 7th of November, the wave of protests had spread to the Lahore campus of FAST-NUCES, a school recognized nationally for its excellence in computer sciences. A few students and one faculty member had gathered at the gate to discuss how to go about organizing a protest when they were asked to disperse by a contingent of armed policemen in no mood to brook any opposition. After hectic negotiations between the university administration and the police, it was decided that the students would conduct their protest inside the gates and that the police would withdraw from the campus without taking the protesting students into custody. Somewhere in the middle of all this, a student who had not realized what was going on tried to leave for home and was slapped and pushed around by the policemen. The whole incident brought home the gravity of the situation to FAST students, who immediately started planning a larger, more purposeful protest on the 9th

The two of us were involved in the events at FAST and in bringing together a small group of concerned students opposed to the imposition of martial law. The organization thus created was called 'FASTRising'. We had two aims: restoration of the pre-3rd Nov. Constitution and raising the level of political awareness of the students of FAST. One of the events that FASTRising became involved in was a 24-hour vigil kept by human rights activists outside the official residence of Justice Shahid Siddiqui of the Lahore High Court. The honourable judge was one of the nine who had refused to take the oath on the new Provisional Constitutional Order (PCO) promulgated by President Musharraf. Perhaps to make an example of him, the Chief Justice of the Lahore High Court ordered that Justice Shahid Siddiqui be evicted from his official residence. Within a few hours of the order of eviction being issued on the 3rd of December, a human shield of around 60 activists assembled and a schedule was worked out for a 24-hour vigil. A FASTRising blog entry noted:

"An around-the-clock Citizens' Guard mounted by resistance workers outside Justice Shahid Siddiqui's official residence has become a wonderful opportunity for interested individuals to come together to share ideas, vent their anger and work out strategies and tactics to subvert this illegal regime.

There's a regular programme of *Shaam sohani* and impromptu, satirical *qawwaali*, of full-throated sloganeering and of course cup after cup of tea to keep the cold at bay. It's festive, but more importantly, it's empowering - in the true sense as opposed to the NGO apology for it.

For a while, at least, this is Resistance Central - and it's an open invitation to all.

You'll find us there - at any time of day: 14 Tollinton Road, GOR-I."

They shut us down at 11 PM, 6th of December 2007. A contingent of about 50 policemen 'raided' the premises and arrested us along with our fellow activists (some lawyers, a faculty member from LUMS, a member of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (see note), and other activists. We were taken to a nearby police station and kept in a heatless lock-up in the bitter cold. Learning the news, a group of about 100 human rights activists reached there and demanded our release, staging a charged yet peaceful protest demonstration. The protest continued for two hours as enraged activists raised slogans against the government, against President Musharraf, against the judges who had taken oath on the PCO and against the abuse of the extraordinary powers the General had wrested from the President. Perhaps the most inspiring - and not a little surreal - moment was when we heard one of the activists singing a revolutionary poem in the true semi-classical tradition. Later, we were told by the activists present that night that what fired them up was hearing us responding gustily to their slogans from within the lock-up. At that time, we did not know that they could hear us!

Around 3 AM, the police told the activists that there was no point protesting as they were not authorized to release us before a hearing in a magistrate's court the following morning. As soon as the protestors had dispersed around 4 AM, the police loaded us into another van, this time accompanied by two policewomen, who seemed even more woebegone and annoyed than us. We later learned that one of them had been due to go off-duty when we were arrested and by the time the crime police handed us over to the prison police the following morning, she had been on duty for more than 24 hours. So, here we were, being driven to an unknown destination in the wee hours of the morning, powerless, in the grip of an impersonal, de-humanised system, worrying what our families would say, wondering what we were to be charged with. The exceptions, perhaps naturally, were the lawyers, whose courage and utter contempt for the police was a real inspiration for the rest of us. Eventually, we stopped at the police station in Manawaañ, a small village on the outskirts of Lahore near the border with India. Our welcoming committee seemed to comprise the entire local constabulary, some surprised and bemused, others irritated and disdainful. The lock-up cell was a slight improvement - located inside the station house as opposed to the verandah, it afforded some protection from the early morning chill, the toilet and bathroom actually had doors separating them from the main body of the cell, and there was more space for us to sit down. Most of us fell asleep, thankful for whatever little space we got on the *durree* (floor mats), but two of the group had to crouch uncomfortably in the remaining space. Around 8 or 9 AM, we were woken up and told to get ready to move. Where? No reply.

We were taken to the magistrate's court in the Cantonment area of Lahore. Here, we were kept waiting inside the prison van for about two hours, during which a man in a white *shalwar kameez*, who refused to identify himself, entered the van and took down our names. We had hoped to be charged in the

magistrate's court, but this was not to be (perhaps the authorities feared a scene would develop — besides, what good is an Emergency if you can't even deny *habeas corpus* to pesky protestors?). As the van was leaving the court premises, one of us happened to spot a human rights activist, one of the many who had spread out all over Lahore trying to locate the court to which we may have been taken. We shouted out to her that we were probably being taken to Camp Jail. Some of them tried to raise a ruckus right there, hoping to get arrested as well, but the Police did not bite and concentrated on getting us out of the court area. Our friends trailed the van to Camp Jail.

Once at Camp Jail, we were charged with violations of Section 144, termed "16 MPO" (Maintenance of Public Order) in the legal jargon we were picking-up. After another search and a few rounds of rather comical data entry - surreal moment no 2: two prim young ladies, who did not identify themselves or indicate their rank (*de riguer* behaviour, it seems), interviewed some of us (random selection, arbitrary choice?) using a standard list of questions - *Why were you arrested? Have you ever taken drugs? Do you drink? Do you smoke? Do you get angry easily?* - the exercise appearing as pointless and baffling as the best Kafkaesque event - we were escorted to Barrack 10 A, our official residence for the next four days.

In many ways, it was a relief to finally arrive in a proper jail, we felt more secure. We also felt angry and frustrated at being locked up, and the sense that someone else was in charge of our fate from one moment to the next. That was the humiliating and debilitating aspect of our brush with the State. And yet it was an incredibly rich experience:

.We quickly developed a spirit of camaraderie, we were in this together and decided to use the time to get to know each other and learn from each other's political knowledge and experiences. It was a time of learning.

Our discussion topics including the stranglehold of the military on Pakistan's state; the failure of the two generations of Pakistanis to work for positive change and improvement in society; the intertwined social, familial and marital relationships within the establishment. We endlessly discussed the lessons of history and debated such events as the Chinese expansion into East Asia and down to the Bay of Bengal in the 1500's and 1600's.

.A second concrete result of imprisonment was the solid friendships we made in those few days as we discussed our aspirations, personal as well as collective, the way our fate was tied up with that of the country as a whole, the feeling of impotence evoked by a truly detailed study of our problems as well as the pressing need not to shirk from this long-overdue task.

Meanwhile, on the outside, constant pressure was being applied on the government (the local administration as well as the high-level decision-makers) to secure our release. It started with the spontaneous demonstration outside the police station the night we were picked up, continued with a demonstration outside Camp Jail in which the so-called 'burger' students (see note) crossed a significant psychological

barrier and actually blocked a major road (Ferozepur Road), pasted stickers on the jerseys of passing policemen and generally made a major nuisance of themselves: they eventually found a strong tactic by establishing a hunger strike camp at the Lahore Press Club that was manned at all hours of the day. Many of our close friends - and many others who did not know us personally, but joined out of a feeling of solidarity and indignation - gave up regular activity in order to campaign for our release.

They were able to subvert prison regulations and provide us with luxuries normally denied to detainees: a change of clothes, toiletries and home-cooked food; sandwiches and baked goods; and newspapers, other than the blatantly pro-establishment *Daily Times*.

A memorable moment occurred on the night of the first Sunday of our imprisonment in the form of an impromptu prisoners' *mushaira* (traditional Urdu poetry recital). This was an evening of song and poetry, and there were no genre barriers. We recited classic literature: Ghalib and Faiz Ahmed Ahmed; but also Punjabi folk songs, popular anthems of revolt from Jalib, and even random selections picked from readers' submissions to the poetry pages of local newspapers. The evening was topped off with attempts to re-create Lateef Sera's *Shaam Sohani* (see note), a motivational chant that weaves together the various slogans that have been commonly used in protests against the Musharraf's government since March 2007.

On the 10th of December, World Human Rights Day, we were still prisoners and subject to arbitrary jail conventions. For example, in anticipation of the visit of Ansar Burney, Caretaker Minister for Human Rights, we were forced back into our prison cells even though we were normally allowed to walk around in the barracks compound — just in case the Minister deigned to visit us. We were reduced summarily to little more than animals in a cage, and that too for the visit of the Human Rights Minister on World Human Rights Day — we alternated between chagrin and irony.

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On the afternoon of the 10th of December we were told that we had now been charged under the Anti-Terrorism Act: distributing pamphlets and pasting stickers apparently constituted terrorist acts. We learned later that the government added these charges merely as a ploy to deny us bail! Imagine the desperation and hollowness of the state that makes such grave allegations on flimsy grounds for the sole purpose of moving the case to the jurisdiction of the anti-terrorism courts with their extraordinary powers to deny bail and subvert due process.

A most comical turn of event was yet to come, when a few hours later, the Deputy Superintendent of Camp Jail came to our barracks and asked us if we wished to move to a sub-jail, and if one of us would

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volunteer his residence for this purpose. So, the very day we were charged with terrorist activity, the state also offered to lighten our punishment to a form of house-arrest. The reason they moved us was so that they could free up the barracks for the anticipated influx of still more political prisoners. For us, it meant that for the first time in four days, we would sleep under a private civilian roof. Finally our families would be able to contact us more easily and our view of the outside world would be enlarged beyond the walls of the prison.

And yet, there was another insult: the police insisted on hand-cuffing us (reduced to one wrist after our anguished protests) while transporting us from Camp Jail to Aman's house, declared our sub-jail.

The next day, 11th December, while the Anti-Terrorism Court was preparing to hear our bail applications, proceedings were suspended when the Court was notified that all charges against us were being dropped.

We, with the help of our supporters, had secured our release, but by no means our aims. The larger struggle goes on.

epilogue: 'i protest, therefore i am'.

We believe that the underlying goal determines the importance of a movement and not the number of protestors. Pragmatists are bound to question this verdict. They might point out that numbers do matter, especially in a country where the judiciary is not independent (and now disbanded) and only brute power matters. Judging by the criterion of 'numbers', the students' movement has been limited. We write blogs, we wax eloquent on the importance of the rule of law and an independent judiciary, we issue meticulous press releases, we protest on the streets, but when counted against a country with a population of 160 million, there are only a few of us.

The failure of the country to rise against the government, veteran political activists comment, was bound to happen because:

- 1) The flag bearers of the movement attend the elite universities whose student population does not represent a true cross-section of society, it is naive to expect that a movement originating in these universities would stir the less privileged segments of society.
- 2) Comparing the people of Pakistan, with those of Latin America or other countries where thousands take to the streets to protest against the government injustice, is wrong, because people here have a different chemistry, a different mindset. They have taken to the streets only once for an abstract issue – back in 1979 when they wanted the government to implement Nizam-e-Mustafa, i.e., Islamic *Sharia*. They will not mobilize for something that is not directly related to religion.
- 3) Resistance movements depend on the middle class, whose numbers are declining in Pakistan. The poor have much greater worries: they struggle for their daily bread. The rich are not affected by the

law (or absence thereof), and in any case are busy with their applications for US/Canadian/Australian immigration.

So did these reasons stop the students from *acting*? NO!

To us, protesting on the streets, even when we were few in number, was more a question of philosophy and less of strategy: 'I protest, therefore I am', claimed one protestor from FAST-NUCES. 'Being on the right side, in a war, is more important than winning the war', said another.

We started our movement after the 3rd November, when Musharraf imposed an emergency in the country and we will continue. By and large, we have been playing safe: operating through anonymous blogs, never revealing our names to the ever-curious media, and putting up photographs on blogs only after blurring the faces. None of the more active participants wanted to act like a saviour of humanity, none of us wanted to enter power politics. Now are we ready to act in the open. We have realized that movements cannot be run from anonymous blogs, they DO need human faces. And the most important lesson we learnt is that truth is not an abstract quantity – it needs sacrifices, tears and blood – it needs creation! This is the lesson which the students of Pakistan have recently learned.

Dil na umeed tau nahi, nakaam hee tau hay

Lambi hay gham kee shaam, mager shaam hee tau hay

The failure is but transient, the heart still hopeful

Long is the evening of sorrow, but it is only an evening

-- Faiz Ahmed Faiz. ❀

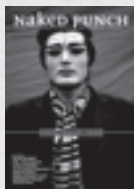
Among others things we have done is to set-up a blog as our response to the media block-out. Our blog functions as a site for diverse groups to post and receive information about the latest protests: www.fastrising.blogspot.com

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf: The political party founded by Imran Khan in the mid-90's.

Burger Students: Slang term indicate class difference. A distinction is made between rich college kids who snack on burgers and their poorer rivals who make do with a chicken kebab on a bun. Also, there is a comment on the socialization of these kids insofar as these kids are brown on the outside but white on the inside, indicating their preference for western language, clothes, and diet.

Lateef Sera: Member of the Lahore Bar, very active in the lawyer's movement, he kept us on our toes with his ready wit on many a chilly evening.

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