A Study in the Formation of Communist Thought in India, 1919-1951

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Summary

Despite having roots in 19th century Europe, Marxism had a deep impact on the trajectory of political ideas in the non-European world in the twentieth century. In particular, anti-colonial thinkers engaged productively with Marx's ideas as part of their struggle against Empire. Yet, little attention has been paid to the displacements and innovations in political thought as a result of this encounter between anti-colonialism and Marxism.

This dissertation aims to fill this gap by studying the history of Indian communism, focusing on the first three decades of the communist movement (1921-1950). I claim that this is an ideal time period to interrogate the formation of political ideas in India, since they presented themselves with particular intensity in the midst of an unfolding anti-colonial struggle, and arguably, the birth of the Indian political. The entry of communist ideas into the charged political environment of the 1920s had an impact on the ideological debates within the Indian polity, as well as stamping Indian communism with its own specific historicity. Through a tracing of debates among communist leaders, as well as their non-communist interlocutors, this work seeks to provide a novel lens to consider the relationship between ideas and their historical actualization, or between the universal and its instantiation in the particular.

Moreover, the dissertation argues that the radically different socio-political and historical landscapes of Western Europe and colonial India necessitated a confrontation with the stagist view of history dominant in the history of Western Marxism, prompting novel theoretical work on the issue of political temporality. Consequently, the relationship between *necessity* and *volition*, central to enlightenment thought, was radically transformed in the colonial world, particularly in terms of its entanglement with the problem of subjective violence. Engagement with such questions not only impacted Indian political thought, but transformed global communism itself, putting into question the concept of an "originary site" for political ideas. Thus, this work intervenes in debates in three distinct registers: Global Intellectual History, Marxist theory and Indian political thought

Preface

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other university or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. I further state that no substantial part of my dissertation has already been submitted, or is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the relevant Degree Committee.

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Introduction

Writing on India's 60th independence day, Jyoti Basu, the longest-serving chief minister in the country's history, asserted the 'immensely important role' of the communist movement in India's anti-colonial struggle. Remembering the intertwined history of Indian nationalism and communism, he declared

> The Indian communists have a proud record of dedication and sacrifices in the cause of national liberation, in defence of the interests of the working class, peasantry and other toiling millions. They were able to draw into their fold the overwhelming majority of revolutionaries and represented the best traditions of revolutionary movement in India.[1]

By 2007, the communist Left in India could indeed claim to be one of the largest communist movements in world during the post-Cold War era. Leading state governments in the provinces of Tripura, Kerala and West Bengal, with 30 consecutive years of elected rule in the latter, the Indian Left is an aberration in the history of global communism in the twentieth century.[2] The Communist Party of India (CPI) also lent critical electoral support to form the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) federal government in 2004. A decade ago, the CPI was forming its own federal government, but declined the offer.[3]

If Indian communism's engagement with questions of nationalism and democracy gave it its own historical specificity, such engagement did not foreclose the question of violence, whose subterranean existence has haunted the Indian political imaginary, notwithstanding the excessive reverence for Gandhi's 'non-violence' in Indian public life. From communism's inception in alleged terrorist groups, such as the Ghadar Party and Anushulan, to the ongoing 'People's War' being waged by Maoist groups (popularly known as the Naxalites) across India, the question of 'revolutionary violence' has remained central to debates in Indian communism. As recently as 2006, the Indian prime minister, Manmohan Singh, deemed the Naxalites the 'number one internal security threat to India', demonstrating the resonance of Left politics well beyond its interlocutors in the communist movement.[4]

For a movement that enhanced its global appeal by sustaining itself beyond the collapse of the Soviet Union, the collapse of Indian communism in the past few years has been equally spectacular. After suffering heavy losses in the general elections of 2009, communists were dislodged from their strongholds in West Bengal and Kerala, while their share of seats in the

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[1] Jyoti Basu, '60 Years of Our Independence and the Left: Some Thoughts', *People's Democracy* 31 (August, 2007), available at http://archives.peoplesdemocracy.in/2007/0819/08192007_jyoti%20basu.htm accessed 15th March, 2016.

[2] See Kheya Bag, 'Red Bengal's Rise and Fall', *New Left Review* 70:4 (2011), pp. 69-98.

[3] Aijaz Ahmad, *Lineages of the Present: Ideology and Politics in Contemporary South Asia* (London: Verso, 2000), pp. 209-239.

[4] 'Naxalism Biggest Threat to Internal Security: Manmohan Singh', *The Hindu* (May 24, 2010), available at http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/Naxalism-biggest-threat-to-internal-security-Manmohan/article16302952.ece accessed 20th March, 2016.

national legislature fell from 53 in 2004 to 10 in 2014.[5] The crisis was severe enough for pundits to declare that Indian communism had finally reached its terminal stage.[6]

A key nodal point in debates on Indian communism revolves around the relevance of communist ideology to the specificity of Indian history. Was the communist movement's fidelity to global Marxism a hindrance to embedding itself within the questions particular to India's political trajectory? Did the universalizing narrative of 'working class' unity leave little room for an engagement with more historically sedimented antagonisms in India, including those of caste, gender, regional assertion, etc., making Communists merely bitter spectators of the 'democratic revolution' in Indian political life since the 1980s?[7] Was the idea of communism so inherently flawed that after its global collapse in the 1980s, it was inevitable that Indian communism *had to* follow suit and reveal itself to be ethically and politically bankrupt?[8] If that is true, then it would imply that the crisis of Indian communism has to be located at the site of its philosophical 'origin', in the writing of Karl Marx himself, bracketing political and historiographical concerns as peripheral.

Extracting 'foreign' ideologies out of Indian history would be quite difficult without negating a large (if not overwhelming) part of the history of modern India. 'European' ideologies, including Marxism, Nationalism, Liberalism, Democracy, Republicanism, etc., have played such an integral part in the history of colonial and postcolonial India that it would be hard to distinguish these ideas from 'indigenous' realms of Indian politics, whether elite or subaltern. As recent scholarship has demonstrated, even the idea of the Indian 'nation' was formed in conversation with processes and concepts in global space, signifying the immanence of the global within Indian political thought.[9]

This dissertation engages with such questions arising out of the history of Indian communism, focusing on the first three decades of the communist movement (1921-1950). I claim that this is an ideal time period to interrogate these themes, since they presented themselves with particular intensity in the midst of an unfolding anti-colonial struggle, and arguably, the birth of the Indian political. The entry of communist ideas into the charged political environment of the 1920s had an impact on the ideological debates within the Indian polity, as well as stamping Indian communism with its own specific historicity. Through a tracing of debates among communist leaders, as well as their non-communist interlocutors, this work seeks to provide a novel lens to

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[5] 'Lok Sabha Elections 2014 Results: State-wise Results', *One India* (May 20, 2014), available at http://www.oneindia.com/bengaluru/lok-sabha-election-result-2014-state-results-1449516.html accessed 12 February 2015.

[6] Meghnad Desai, 'The Strange Death of Indian Communism', *The Indian Express* (January 10, 2016), available at http://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/the-strange-death-of-indian-communism/ accessed 22nd March, 2016.

[7] Thomas Crowley, 'The Many Faces of the Indian Left', *Jacobin* (12 May, 2014) available at https://www.jacobinmag.com/2014/05/the-many-faces-of-the-indian-left/ accessed 14th November, 2016.

[8] See Sadanand Dhume, 'The Coming Collapse of India's Communists', *Wall Street Journal* (April 16, 2014), available at https://www.wsj.com/articles/dhume-the-coming-collapse-of-indias-communists-1397666681 accessed 3rd November 2014.

[9] See Kris Manjapra, *M.N. Roy: Marxism and Colonial Cosmopolitanism* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010).

consider the relationship between ideas and their historical actualization, or between the universal and its instantiation in the particular. Moreover, the dissertation argues that the radically different socio-political and historical landscapes of Western Europe and colonial India necessitated a confrontation with the stagist view of history dominant in Western Marxism, prompting novel theoretical work on the issue of political temporality. Consequently, the relationship between *necessity* and *volition*, central to Enlightenment thought, was radically transformed in the colonial world, particularly in terms of its entanglement with the problem of subjective violence. Engagement with such questions not only impacted Indian political thought, but transformed global communism itself, putting into question the concept of an 'originary site' for political ideas. This work intervenes in debates in three distinct registers: Global Intellectual History, Marxist theory and Indian political thought, as elaborated below.

Intellectual History: Expressive or Incongruous?

I explore the history of Indian Communism by studying the writings of some of the primary thinkers and leaders of the communist movement during this era. Such 'history of ideas' permits us to trace both the frictions within the global communist movement, as well as the wider socio-historical context of colonial India that shaped these debates. As Quentin Skinner has forcefully argued, intellectual history can strengthen our understanding of historical development by situating the writings of philosophers and political thinkers within a specific historical/cultural milieu, in which their writings were deployed to respond to particular questions arising from within this terrain. Skinner was arguing against the tendency, quite widespread in intellectual history, to seek answers in the corpus of philosophers to questions that these writers were not, and perhaps could not, be concerned with. Such 'presentist' views of history transhistoricise contemporary concerns by submitting past thinkers to a critique from the vantage point of the present, invariably finding 'gaps', 'lacunae', or 'lacks' in their work, eventually condemning them as 'incomplete' works when compared to modern, bourgeois thinkers.[10]

Instead, Skinner calls for grounding thought within the ideological contexts in which it was being formulated, in which one can provide coherence of meaning to the terms deployed.[11] I consider such a view of intellectual history 'expressive', since it binds thought to the socio-economic context in which it is produced, with the former expressing the latter in the realm of ideas. Marxist thinkers have been at the forefront of this school of thought, arguing for a direct equation between Enlightenment thought and commodity production arising out of the collapse of feudal Europe. Although a crude version of this historiography at times borders on economic determinism, with the 'mode of production' directly shaping ideas, the more sophisticated thinkers argue for a more contradictory appreciation of a social formation, thus positing thought itself to be an expression of unevenness within society.

György Lukács, for example, argues for embedding 'modern philosophy' within the 'reified structures of consciousness' dominant in capitalist societies. For him, problems of knowledge

[10] Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics: Regarding Method* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 57-89.
[11] Ibid., pp. 87-89.

and cognition central to this philosophy increasingly find their resolution in the realm of pure thought, through a homology with natural science. Such abstractions are a product of the abstract nature of social organization under capitalism, rooted in the contradictory nature of commodity production itself.[12] Moishe Postone further radicalizes this conception by proposing an adequation between consciousness and social being, thus linking the specificity of labor under capitalism to the production of ideas. Since the wider structuring of social organization of commodity production veils itself in the fetish of immediate phenomena, political ideologies such as nationalism, liberalism, fascism, and even certain strands of communism, were misrecognized critiques of modern society, since they substitute the abstract forms of capitalist domination with concrete, but inadequate, representations such as territory, individuality or even 'labour'.[13]

Both Postone and Lukács represent a broader current of that emphasizes the reciprocity between being and thought, between the 'dynamics' of capital and its representation in ideas. We can categorize Michel Foucault within the broader category of expressive thought, though he displaces the centrality of capital with more disparate forms of power that circulate in spatial and discursive relations. Through a genealogical investigation of modern subjectivity (albeit European), Foucault argues that the disciplinary processes in modernity aim to turn 'multitudes into ordered multiplicities'.[14] This social ordering takes place equally in the realm of seemingly neutral institutions such as schools, jails and psychiatric wards, as well as in the public proclamations of bourgeois society. Ideas, therefore, notwithstanding their pretense to being scientific or 'revolutionary', are themselves products of this longer history of subject-production, often implicated in the structures of power that they claim to subvert.[15] The only space for critique in such frameworks rests either in working through the system, as is true for both liberalism and orthodox strands of Marxism, or by claiming an absolute, almost mystical *outside*, whose vitality remains as pure as it is evasive.[16]

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[12] György Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge/Mass.: MIT Press, 1971), pp. 110-149.

[13] Moishe Postone, *Time, Labour, Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 216-226. Postone argues that the alienated structure of modern society is a result of social relations of production mediated by abstract labour, which in turn is measured by abstract time. Domination in modern societies is less a function of direct, personal subjugation, and more a result of the imperatives of an indirect and impersonal process of capitalist reproduction. Yet, the emphasis on the impersonal character of control is unable to account for the direct, and often militarized, surveillance and subjugation of bodies under colonial rule.

[14] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1995), pp.135-149.

[15] Foucault makes this argument forcefully in his debates with French Maoists, particularly over the idea of "People's Justice". See Michel Foucault, 'On Popular Justice: A Discussion with Maoists', in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon, 1972).

[16] Bruno Bosteels uses the term "Speculative Left" for a tendency among leftist intellectuals, for whom an actually existing political sequence is never sufficiently pure enough to be identified with, thus reducing their radical critiques to little more than impotent posturing of a beautiful soul. See Bruno Bosteels, *Badiou and Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

I argue, however, that while a 'thick description' of historical contexts, and their genealogical tracing, are essential features for writing intellectual history, they are nonetheless inadequate. Despite the pervasive presence of structures of power in shaping subjectivity, there remain elements that appear unassimilable to these structures, interrupting linear or homogenizing narratives of historical development. The focus on an overarching dynamic of a historical period, whether named capitalism, modernity or colonization, does not permit the study of such events and processes that seem out of sync with its logic. This shortcoming of historicism is amplified in the historiography of the colonial world, where phenomena incongruous with conceptual categories developed in Western history frequently appear as irrational and belonging to a different temporal sequence, eventually to be integrated into the march of History, a project of assimilation common to both the state and dominant trends within social sciences. In other words, such a framework lacks an engagement with the *excess* in history, one that remains immanent to, yet unanchored in, any historical conjuncture.

I define 'excess' here as the paradoxical elements that exist in reality as antagonistic to it, as categories exceeding the framework of an overarching dynamic, whether economic or civilizational. These include 'subaltern' groups such as peasants, tribals, lower castes, and other unpedagogised bodies that remained on the margins of, if not annihilated by, the processes of capitalist accumulation. More broadly, the term includes groups such as diasporas or minorities that exceed the frameworks of nation-states, historical events such as communal riots that cause embarrassment to proponents of linear narratives of historical progression, or even popular revolts that defy the temporal rhythms of existing power by seizing the present, and consequently, opening new possibilities for the future. This work argues that the task for political thought, and consequently, for intellectual history, is to give conceptual clarity and political orientation to excess, and to turn it into a coherent political project. If we focused solely on the myriad ways in which power produced disciplinary subjects, we could only legitimately write history of ideas produced by Capital or the modern bureaucracy, since modern subjectivity is assumed to be in sync with their logics.[17] The diversity, as well as the subversive power, of political ideas stem from their ability to uncouple social being and thought, beginning the process of detachment necessary to produce genuine novelty in the realm of politics.

Positing *separation* as the quintessential commencement of political thought does not necessarily provide an alternative to expressive forms of writing intellectual history. Even orthodox Marxism rests on the assumption of an irreconcilable antagonism between 'modes of production', with nascent capitalism breaking itself off from feudalism, with the same fate awaiting capitalism when it will be superseded by communism.[18] Liberal ideology is also ungirded by the constant separation between the civilized and barbarian populations, with the former eventually subsuming the latter under their moral and political superiority. Intellectual history written with such parameters remains expressive insofar as political thought expresses nothing more than an innate tendency within Being that is constantly moving towards 'Coming-

[17]The relationship between reproduction of social power and its potential breakdown remained a central concern in post-68 French philosophical thought, particularly around the concept of "the event". See Bruno Bosteels, 'Traversing the Heresies', *Platypus Review* 54:3 (2013), pp. 1-4, (p. 1).

[18] See Friedrich Engels, *Socialism: Scientific and Utopian* (New York: Mondial, 2006).

into-Being'. Yet, the entire history of modern politics, particularly in the twentieth century, has demonstrated the potentialities of unexpected disruptions in political development, from the self-annihilation carried out by 'civilized' Europe during the two world wars, to the impatient demands of anti-colonial politics to seek equality in the here and now, making such violent interruptions more central to political subjectivity than reliance on gradualist and uninterrupted notions of progress. Yet, such events do not lend themselves automatically to a coherent political project, revealing instead the absence of a permanent ground, be it History, Capital, nation or revolution, as the paradoxical basis for political intervention.[19]

The indeterminacy of a political conjuncture negates the possibility of a direct adequation between the historically sedimented contradictions and their spontaneous expression in political thought. Instead, this work views political thought as nothing less than an intense *labour* that transforms scattered tendencies into a cohesive political project. The process of detachment from dominant logics is a provocation for a disciplined engagement to sustain and clarify the de-linking of being and subjectivity, of History and politics. Neither an 'intersection' between disparate struggles, nor an automated movement towards predetermined destination, political thought has to be *produced* through an intervening subject against the logic and inertia of History. The process of mobilizing, concentrating and sustaining social antagonisms does not stem from sociological guarantees, but is premised on the contingent capacity of political thinkers to articulate dispersed and sporadic events into a specific politics.[20] Therefore, I propose to investigate political thought as a contingent, creative process in which thinkers make theoretical interventions in novel situations, rather than merely becoming carriers of a subjectivity innate to existing structures. In other words, I argue that political thought, rather than being symptomatic and expressive of a displaced essence, is a *productive* process premised on the volition of political actors to intervene in a historical conjuncture, a position that I expand upon throughout this dissertation.

Global Intellectual History

The emergence of anti-colonial and national liberation struggles made the non-European world a central site of political contestation during the twentieth century. Yet, the referents used to study political ideas embedded in these struggles remained within the enlightenment tradition, positing that their trajectory tended towards, but had not yet fully acquired, the universal ideals developed in (19th-century) Europe. This tendency is most clearly reflected in modernization theory, which viewed the Global South as a site of deficit in relation to the Global North, prescribing technological and economic fixes (under Northern supervision) for overcoming the lag. This basic framework has structured much of Marxist, liberal and even nationalist historiography,

[19] According to Alain Badiou, the grounding of political thought on a "groundless terrain" is a result of the unbinding of the social bond. This means that while the existing political culture operates within a certain logic, an authentic political process begins as a break from this logic, without guarantees or a definite plan for the future. It must eventually develop its own logic, in fidelity to the Event. See Alain Badiou, *Metapolitics*, trans. Jason Baker (London: Verso, 2005), pp. 68-77.

[20] My argument is similar to, though not identical with, Jodi Dean's recent work on the relationship between the dispersed nature of social movements and the unifying role of political practice. See Jodi Dean, *Crowds and Party* (London: Verso, 2016).

where intellectuals working on the historical instantiation of these ideas in the non-European world view them as 'deviations' from the 'originary' ideas as developed in European political thought. The spatial binary between the colonizers and the colonized is transformed into an intellectual division of labour, one between those 'producing' and 'applying' of ideas.

Postcolonial thought has emerged as a direct challenge to the pervasive depiction of non-Europe as a site of a 'lack' always in need of economic and intellectual aid (even in its revolutionary manifestations). The search for the specificity of 'Indian' thought, for example, has led postcolonial thinkers to create a division between 'elite' and 'subaltern' domains, with the former mimicking global ideologies, and the latter embodying the 'autonomy' of indigenous resistance.[21] While such a separation between the 'derivative' nature of Indian nationalism and subaltern consciousness was an attempt to resist the flattening of 'local' thought into the global, it nonetheless finds it difficult to explain the political claim-making of subaltern groups in the language of these very global ideologies, be they nationalism, communism or liberalism.[22] If the power of colonial modernity has become so pervasive as to seep into the deepest recesses of popular consciousness, then the only option left for writing a global intellectual history is by subsuming the local under the imperatives of the universal, creating a homology between political ideas produced across global space.

This approach has recently been developed by Andrew Sartori and Manu Goswami. In his work on the formation of 'culture' as a political category in Indian politics, Andrew Sartori has attempted to move away from the colonial/colonized binary by locating the rise of cultural politics within the specific forms of practice constitutive of global capitalist modernity. In a theoretically complex argument, Sartori claims that culture becomes a misrecognized critique of the abstract domination of capitalism, induced by the uneven and fragmented global development engendered by Capital itself.[23] Sartori further argues that the formation of such a 'parochial critique' of global capitalism is not restricted to India or the colonized world more broadly, but is pervasive in capitalist peripheries, including European countries such as Germany. Similarly, Manu Goswami points out both the temporal and spatial imaginaries produced by late nineteenth capitalism that induced a particular imagination of a territorially bounded nationalism in colonial India within a globally hierarchized, uneven and fragmented global space. Such an imagination of a peripheral, perpetually exploited Indian national space allowed a conducive environment for the appropriation of similar, spatially bounded critiques of global Capital such as Friedrich List's theories against global uneven-development, and led to calls for more state regulation.[24] These works not only showed the remarkable global resonance of conceptual categories such as culture and nationalism, but also point to affinities between the

[21] See Ranajit Guha, *Dominance without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India* (Cambridge/Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998).
[22] See Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).
[23] See Andrew Sartori, *Bengal in Global Concept History: Culturalism in The Age of Capital* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).
[24] See Manu Goswami, *Producing India: From Colonial Economy to National Space* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

'East' and the 'West' beyond the colonizer/colonized divide, for example by tracing the relationship between German and Indian intellectuals.

Yet, the very insistence on a particular reading of global Capitalism as constitutive of political thought in diverse spatial and temporal sites is eventually also a weakness for this theoretical framework. For instance, while Sartori and Goswami are correct to point out a structural affinity between concepts emerging in disparate locales (that structure being Capital), they show little interest in demonstrating how these concepts were reshaped and reformulated not only based on specific, historical contingencies, but also by entirely different political questions that were at stake in each appropriation of these concepts. Secondly, since both Sartori and Goswami lay emphasis on the misrecognized nature of such conceptual tools (culture, nation, etc), they are unable to see how these very concepts were able to open up spaces for emancipatory politics during the anti-colonial moment.

Both the focus on 'derivative discourses' or 'universal' practices instituted by modernity deprive anti-colonial thought of its historical specificity. Chris Bayly attempted a way out of this impasse by highlighting how colonial thinkers engaged with global ideas to 'relativise, deflect and hybridize' them 'with modern Indian themes'. While making a historically grounded argument on the encounter between ideas circulating in a global public sphere and the 'life-worlds' in which colonial subjects found themselves, this approach nonetheless maintains a diffusive perspective on the global flow ideas.[25] Such theories, whether consciously or subconsciously, posit that modern Europe was the primary site for universal debates in political thought, after which these ideas spread to the non-European world, where they were deployed either for the perpetuation of domination or as tools for resistance. Either way, such gospel-like diffusion meant that Europe remained the originary site for producing ideas, while others, too caught up in the immediacy of their 'life-worlds' to think universally, encounter these truths as they develop consciousness of the modern world.

We then encounter the classic problem of the relationship between the universal and the particular in global intellectual history. This question is historically unavoidable, since the 'global' increasingly framed debates and practices, whether of colonialism, nationalism, communism, violence, etc., across disparate locales, creating thematic resonance in seemingly unrelated places. Yet, the debate, unfortunately, hinges on whether these themes had an 'originary center' in Europe, from where cosmopolitan or subaltern groups in the non-European worlds 'received' the *same* theories to apply in their particular contexts. The task for global intellectual history is to move away from this fundamental bias against, if not blindness to, the intense and critical engagement with political ideas in the colonial world. I draw on the recent work of Shruti Kapila's on the necessity of studying the specificity of Indian political thought, particularly when it encounters global concepts. Kapila argues that engagement with global themes in Indian politics should be read less as a reception of already formed ideas, and more as

[25]See Chris Bayly, *Recovering Liberties: Indian Political Thought in the Age of Liberalism and Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

a process of 'rupture' from the ideas' origins in foreign lands.[26] This framework posits that ideas were torn apart from their European iterations and re-formulated to embed them within the specific questions emanating from the terrain of anti-colonial resistance. Thus, the harmonious development of ideas was disrupted through the intervention of political actors, much like the interruption of colonial political life by the violence of revolutionary groups or mass revolts.

Such moments necessitated a distancing not only from colonial rule, but also led to ruptures from, rather than fidelity to, any pristine, originary idea. Reference to global thinkers in Indian political texts should be seen less as a sign of incorporation into global discourse, and more as an attempt to demarcate the point of departure from a theoretical edifice. Indeed, Kapila sharply notes that such 'heresy' was key to the universalization of ideas beyond their origins, turning *theoretical infidelity* into a *practical fidelity* to an idea.[27] Consequently, the alleged intellectual deficit in colonial South Asia is also challenged by this framework, since prominent figures as diverse as Ambedkar, Gandhi, and Iqbal can now be studied not only as political actors, but also as producers of novel ideas, not least by developing a *new practice of modern politics.* Therefore, disruption and production, rather than reception and consumption, remained central to non-European political thought.

Kapila's work is an invitation to rethink the anti-colonial struggle as a moment of violent ruptures from the state and History, rather than as a tale of triumphant non-violent resistance, as much of historicist writing depicts. One can, however, extend this argument by claiming that citations, much like borders, both separate and conjoin ideas across space.[28] Thus, to trace the global itinerary of an idea, it is necessary to view how seemingly disparate instances of an idea's citation can nonetheless be held together in a dialectical unity, without positing an absolute origin. In its encounters with non-European subjects, such as tribal and indigenous groups, or peasants that persisted in the midst of capitalist development, European ideas had to be either held in a state of suspension (as in the case of denial of citizenship rights to 'barbarians' in the colonies) or stretched every time they engaged with radical alterity. In the latter case, one could not simply posit the non-European world as a site for 'data collection' for already complete theoretical frameworks. Instead, the very substance of these theories itself had to be radically transformed.

In other words, the universality of an idea depended on its ability to erase its origins by tearing itself away from its site of birth, and becoming embedded in the questions emanating from a different terrain. Ideas that can bear the violence of an internal scission necessary for their translation across disparate locales alone can lay claim to universality. An antagonism, therefore, not only exists among different political ideas, but are immanent to ideas themselves, as a necessary motor for their development and universalization. As Žižek argues, it is only

[26] Shruti Kapila, 'Global Intellectual History and the Indian Political', in *Rethinking Modern European Intellectual History*, eds. Darrin MacMahon and Samuel Moyn (New York: Oxford University Press USA, 2014), pp. 253-274.
[27] Ibid., pp. 260-266.
[28] Dipesh Chakrabarty makes a similar claim in terms of the borders between the past and the present. See Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), pp. 97-116.

retroactively that political actors summon predecessors, i.e. one is not incorporated into a particular heritage by birth, but by retroactive identification with it. In this way, predecessors are more dependent upon their inheritors than the latter are on the former.[29] The same is true for the universal, which cannot actualize itself without the ruptures necessary within a contingent situation.

Therefore, this work posits that 'global' ideas are not fixed and eternal truths that slowly reveal themselves to humanity living in false consciousness. Instead, the trajectory of an idea is an adventure full of ruptures, disruptions, antagonisms, as well as an abandonment of 'fundamentals' of the idea. If we can place together political actors as diverse as German trade unionists and Vietnamese peasants under the category of 'communists', or Democrats in the US or an Ambedkar in India as 'liberals', it is not because of a direct equivalence between their politics. Instead, the relationship between the internal consistency of an ideology and its dislocation in its global itinerary remains contingent, contested and fragile, and the 'deviations' are only retroactively placed in the 'traditional' corpus of political thought, reconfiguring its internal contours. The task for us then is to study ideas as processual and always in flux, with a symptomatic reading of their dispersed effects across the globe to permit a reconstruction of their theoretical edifice.

Global Marxism, Non-Europe and the Twentieth Century

If we posit that the history of political thought develops as a result of ruptures and internal scissions, then nothing provides this claim with more evidential backing than the historical trajectory of Marxism. Writing in the midst of Europe-wide uprisings against authoritarian rule and declining living standards in the 1840s and 1850s, Marx saw the socio-economic and political developments of Western Europe as encompassing a universality that would in time engulf the rest of the world in its logic. Thus, in his preface to *Das Kapital*, he could confidently assert that 'The country that is more developed industrially only shows, to the less developed, the image of its own future'.[30] Such understanding of historical time, in which other spatial and temporal sequences dissolve to enter the logic of Capital, necessarily meant that (Western) European nations that were already gripped by it were the site of this future, subjecting the rest to a perpetual effort to 'catch up'. Even by the early twentieth century, Lenin, when discussing the 'three sources of Marxism', could only draw his inspiration from 'German philosophy', 'French socialism', and 'British political economy', reflecting the centrality, if not the total epistemological domination, of Europe in Marxist imagination.[31]

Despite the continued centrality of Western Marxism in the realm of what we today call 'theory', the trajectory of Marxist politics in the twentieth century made all claims to European centrality untenable, if not outright redundant. Marxism stands out as perhaps the only 'European' idea that held more popular appeal outside of Europe than on the continent itself. By mobilizing victorious

[29] See Slavoj Žižek, 'Mao Zedong: The Marxist Lord of Misrule', in *Mao On Practice and Contradiction*, ed. Slavoj Žižek (London: Verso, 2007), pp.1-28.
[30] Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* (London: Penguin Classics, 1992), pp. 89-94.
[31] Vladimir Lenin, *The Three Sources and Three Component Parts of Marxism* (London: Forgotten Books, 2015).

revolutions in countries and regions as diverse as Central Asia, China, Cuba, and Afghanistan, Marxism increasingly became associated with anti-colonial, and later, anti-imperialist forces throughout the non-European world. By the mid-60s, a section of the European Left itself was engaged in discussions on national liberation and 'Maoism', which as Bruno Bosteels has recently argued, was the vanishing mediator between different currents in the French philosophical milieu in the 1960s and the 1970s.[32]

Such cursory historical tracing is enough to demonstrate the practical de-centering of Europe in Marxist politics. Yet, the effects of twentieth-century politics in the peripheries has often only appeared as symptoms in the writings of Western Marxists, rather than as results of committed engagement with novel questions arising out of the local experiences, in order to clarify and develop their concepts. Thus, this dissertation is an attempt to overcome the widening gulf between theory and practice in global Marxism, by taking political developments in the non-European world as not only (imperfect) applications of an already furnished theory, but as sites generative of ideas that perpetually transformed theory itself.

The two key, interrelated themes that this work studies are the conception of History and the revolutionary subject in Marxist thought. As Gavin Walker has recently demonstrated, the process of primitive accumulation not only controlled labour power, but accumulated difference itself, to articulate it in a re-configured hierarchy, whether racial, gendered or national. The historical dynamic produced by Capital induced a 'historical' consciousness that implied a certain beginning of History (in Western Europe). In the same vein, it also produced a consciousness of 'divergence' for peripheral regions, since societies not following the 'logical' trajectory of capitalist development were designated as 'backwards'.[33] This spatio-temporal divide, exacerbated by colonial ideology, is a key problematic in reading non-European thought, since the giant shadow of History, despite its provincial origins, continues to haunt the imagination of modern political thinkers. Marxism remains internal to this problem.

Moreover, if Marxism is not merely an analytical tool, but a vehicle for transformative practices, then the question of transition, whether from feudalism to capitalism or from the latter to socialism, becomes central. Consequently, the search for the subject embodying the tension between the past and the future within the present turns equally critical. The figure of the proletariat played precisely this role in Marxist thought, as an immanent excess in European capitalism that had the potential to overthrow it. In other words, the complement to the theory of History is the theory of the political subject, the latter acting as a motor for the transformations in the realm of the former. Yet, the debates on revolutionary subjectivity in the non-European world revolve around an absence of the traditional proletariat, where the process of accumulation never coincided with the normative description provided in Volume One of *Das Kapital*.[34] Thus, we

[32]Bruno Bosteels 'Post-Maoism: Badiou and Politics', *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 13: 3 (Winter, 2005), pp. 575-634.

[33] Gavin Walker, *The Sublime Perversions of Capital: Marxist Theory and Politics of History in Modern Japan* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

[34] Dipesh Chakrabarty discusses the 'stretching' of the concept of the revolutionary subject in his recent writings. See Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'Belatedness as Possibility: Subaltern Histories, Once More', in *The Indian Postcolonial: A Critical Reader*, eds. Elleke Boehmer and Rosinka Chaudhuri (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), pp. 163–176.

encounter endless debates on the 'stage' of each peripheral region in relation to its nearness or distance from Europe, prescribing economic development to induce the production of the proletariat. A natural outcome of this particular trajectory in Marxism is what Dipesh Chakrabarty termed 'the waiting room of History', in which colonial subjects were expected to wait until the maturation of socio-economic relations, from which would have stemmed an authentically modern political subjectivity.[35]

Thus, both these conceptions underwent a crisis as Marxism encountered the non-European world, where the genealogy and habitation of modernity took a radically different form from its instantiation in Europe. If communists in the non-European world rejected the linear incorporation of their regions into an allegedly singular trajectory of Capital, what alternative conception of historical progression did they posit to permit their own participation in the international communist movement? What relation would exist between historical necessity and active volition in this re-configured framework? And more importantly, who will be the subject that can simultaneously claim political contemporaneity with revolutionary movements in the West, while also embodying the potential for actualizing an emancipatory future? Non-European communists simultaneously confronted these questions as they began developing their distinct response to the relationship between the historical development of Marxism in Europe and the radical alterity of their societies to that history.

These questions have even compelled contemporary Marxist intellectuals to undertake renewed interrogation of Marxist theory of capitalism itself, moving away from frameworks of totality and towards investigations into the 'unevenness' of global space.[36] As Capital's drive for universality crossed paths with histories foreign to its logic, this entanglement necessarily implied an intellectual engagement between the abstract dynamism of Capital and the concrete history of particular regions. Dipesh Chakrabarty has posited two separate realms for studying the history of capitalism, which he calls H1 (History of Capital) and H2 (Concrete History), with both reinforcing, but also interrupting each other.[37] While such a neat dichotomy between Capital and History has been criticized by a number of writers,[38] it nonetheless points to the dilemmas of writing the history of the non-European world while avoiding its pre-determination by a master-signifier, such as Capital, or even nation. The history of non-Europe, thus, could not be narrativised in linear terms, necessitating engagement with its 'broken time' of politics.

For writing an intellectual history of Marxism in the peripheries, I engage with Bruno Bosteels' recent work on Marxist thought in Latin America.[39] Bosteels argues that in conditions of 'underdevelopment' that are dominated by foreign interests, it is hard to identify a unifying

[35] Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, p. 8.

[36] A central category of anti-imperialism in twentieth-century politics, 'unevenness' became increasingly important in the theoretical edifice of post-war Western Marxism. See Louis Althusser, *For Marx* (London: Verso, 2006), pp. 87-128.

[37] Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, pp. 47-72.

[38] For example, Manu Goswami critiques Chakrabarty for failing to view how History 2 is already internal to the History of Capital. Goswami, *Producing India*, pp. 73-102.

[39] Bruno Bosteels, *Marx and Freud in Latin America: Politics, Psychoanalysis, and Religion in Times of Terror* (London: Verso, 2012).

center for consciousness, since Capital itself does not accumulate on the national terrain, but instead completes its circuit via the metropole. Similarly, 'global' ideologies formed in Europe circulate in the peripheries but remain incomplete, owing to the difference in the material conditions of their production in the metropole. The engagement with such ideas induces 'incompleteness' as an ideological, if not psychic, condition, negating the possibility of connecting words that exist in theory with actually existing phenomena. Thus, the crisis of finding an adequate ideological framework to anchor political practice in the non-European world is experienced also as a linguistic crisis, with the inability of existing language to adequately nominate material processes, often resorting to imprecise comparisons to Europe by declaring non-Europe to be 'not-yet' fully 'liberal', 'Marxist' or even 'Nationalist'. Such rendering of non-European thought as a site of deficit is not only prevalent in Western scholarship on the subject, but also posed a major challenge for thinkers from the Global South, especially as the language of lack and waiting confronted the vigour and impatience of the anti-colonial 'now'.

As noted earlier, the fundamental gap between orthodox Marxism and the 'insufficient conditions' for its realization on the peripheries has fueled much debate on the 'stages' of revolution corresponding to each social formation. Bosteels, however, posits a much more effective way of engaging with both the novelty of non-European Marxism and its potential universality by utilizing the theory of 'the missed encounter'.[40] He argues that Marx's lack of rigorous engagement with non-Europe created a structural antagonism between Marxism and the disparate practices of rebellion outside of Europe. This gap between the two, rather than hindering the development of Marxism, became a provocation for innovations on the part of non-European thinkers, while also reinventing Marxism itself in foreign situations. This antagonism, and the contingent and disparate responses to it globally, rather than being a peripheral phenomenon, was constitutive of Marxism *as a global practice*, since it permitted it to turn the different indices of pain, suffering and rebellion into a common political project.[41]

Such a framework not only transformed Marxism into a contested terrain whose future remained contingent, but more importantly, elevated ruptures from orthodoxy as the necessary condition for Marxism's relevance as a global ideology. Moreover, if 'objective conditions' were displaced as the sole criterion for analyzing politics, it also necessarily implied a transformation in the role of the revolutionary subject in Marxist thought. If the structures of modernity were experienced as an 'iron cage' of the present, then the dialectic of history could only move forward through an intervening subject *against* the inertia of this structure. Thus, rather than being determined by the innate 'laws' of a sociological process, for Bosteels, the communist subject appeared in moments of rupture from these laws, as a figure of disruption. Much like psychoanalysis, where the hysterical patient becomes the site for revealing the truth of society, Bosteels argues that Marxism also relied on a 'hysterical break' that interrupted the potential for linear, harmonious development of capitalism.[42] These breaks, which included riots, rebellions, protests, etc., were

[40] Ibid., pp. 29-51.
[41] Ibid., p. 116.
[42] Ibid., pp. 1-28.

not only incompatible with the reproduction of capitalism, but also posed serious challenges to orthodox Marxism, necessitating breaks immanent to theory itself.

One such point of departure was the centrality of *volition* against the fatalism of necessity in non-European Marxist thought. A momentary breakdown at the interstices of the capitalist system only points to the contradictions and gaps within the system, and does not itself produce a specific politics. Turning these ephemeral moments into a sustained and coherent project, with intellectual depth and a precision of target, always required hard conceptual and practical labor. Consequently, since the subject that could play the vanguard role unifying the various threads of the struggle (such as the proletariat) could not be neatly identified within an existing sociological category in non-Europe, it had to be *produced*. The absence of the proletariat turned concepts and processes such as nation, peasantry, indigenous communities, racial and gender justice into potential mobilizers for political action, with the subject formed often at the crossroads of these seemingly divergent tendencies. Thus, rather than following the trajectory of Capital, the task for Marxist thought and action in the non-European world was to embed itself in the disruptions to the system, tear subjects away from their subjection to the logic of under-development, and affirm a new praxis of politics, elevating volition above sociological determinacy.[43]

Such sociologically indeterminate moments necessitated sovereign decisions to overturn the impasse, turning politics into a *singular inception*, a radical beginning. I use Alain Badiou's concept of political 'sequences' to highlight the historically specific instantiations of communist politics, grounded not on the vacillations of political economy, but on sovereign decisions taken in moments of practical and theoretical paralysis, as points of departure for a new *form* of communist politics.[44] This implies that the particularity of a communist politics (summoned by proper names such as Leninist, Maoist, Trotskyist, National Liberationist, etc.,) can only be apprehended by a historical tracing of its specific genealogy, including the ruptures produced in the realm of ideas outside of orthodox Marxism. Such reliance on the 'interiority of thought' to grasp the referentiality of different *modes of communist politics* allows us to take into account both the continuities within global Marxism as a conscious political project aiming to overcome the organization of social life geared towards surplus-value production, while also historicizing each 'communist' movement based on its internal dynamics.

In this work, I posit that the formation of communist parties in colonial countries such as India led to a specific 'anti-colonial sequence' of communist politics, as both anti-colonialism and communism grappled with their earlier 'missed encounter', transforming both in their quest for producing a common politics. This encounter led to a shared vocabulary in Marxist thought globally, with terms such as primitive accumulation and imperialism, arguably of peripheral value for Marx himself, taking center stage throughout the twentieth century, both intellectually and politically. In particular, the question of 'colonial backwardness' was turned on its head by anti-colonial Marxism. It registered the colonial world as lagging behind Europe in industrial terms, but also potentially at the peak of its development due to its potential to break from global

[43] See Peter Hallward, 'Fanon and Political Will', *Cosmos and History: Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy* 7:1 (2011), pp. 104-127.
[44] Badiou, *Metapolitics*, pp. 26-57.

capitalism and begin the work of building socialism, a paradox whose theoretical importance I explore in the dissertation.[45] I study Indian communist thought as part of this dialectic between continuity and breaks, between History and Politics, and between fidelity and heresy, both simultaneously reinforcing and interrupting each other.

Finally, non-European Marxism does not represent merely an instance of global Marxism, its commensurability with the latter based on a supposedly universal critique of surplus-value production. Instead, this work argues that Marxism's encounters with the non-European world opened the theory to certain repressed themes within its own edifice, including the question of historical difference, the temporality of socialist revolution, the role of the state and the relationship between the peripheries and the metropole. The opening up of this vast continent of knowledge is what truly turned Marxism into one of the most popular and contested global political projects in the twentieth century, with a massive appeal in the colonies that could only be matched by mainstream nationalists. The universality of this shift to the margins was premised precisely on its ability to transform conversations in the global public sphere occupied by Marxist intellectuals and militants. This, however, does not mean that we fetishize non-European Marxism as the site for the revelation of 'true Marxism'. Instead, it is simply a call for recognizing the multiple sites of production of communist thought in the twentieth century, and to include them in our analysis as we describe, criticize and develop the concepts of Marxist politics.

Intellectual History and India

The third, and perhaps the most significant, thread in this dissertation is the development of Indian political thought in the twentieth century. Historians belonging to Subaltern Studies were some of the earliest proponents of studying the distinctness of Indian political thought, particularly in relation to European epistemology. For instance, Partha Chatterjee, in his book titled *Nation and its Fragments*, while analyzing the production of the 'nation' in colonial India, argued that Indian nationalist thinkers demarcated 'outer' and 'inner' domains to both engage with and resist colonial hegemony.[46] The outer or public domain was one in which nationalists sought to contest issues of the state, aiming to outdo their colonial masters on their own turf. However, it was the 'inner' domain of cultural autonomy that provided both a distinct self to Indian nationalism in relation to its Western counterpart and provided the impetus for the growing anti-colonial consciousness. This emphasis on distinct realms of Indian modernity is reiterated by Dipesh Chakrabarty. Chakrabarty argues that much of Indian historiography has borrowed epistemological categories from Europe, which has impeded our understanding of the complexities of India's modern public life.[47] By focusing on diverse issues such as anti-colonial temporalities, the role of religion in public life, as well the historicism prevalent in history

[45] Etienne Balibar argues that this paradoxical relationship to time existed within the thought of Vladimir Lenin. See Etienne Balibar, 'The Philosophical Moment in Politics Determined by War: Lenin 1914-1916', in *Lenin Reloaded: Toward a Politics of Truth*, eds. Sebastian Budgen, Stathis Kouvelakis, and Slavoj Žižek (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

[46] Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 12-14.

[47] Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, p. 32.

writing, Chakrabarty called for novel hermeneutic tools, distinct from ideological categories attendant to European enlightenment and Capital, to analyze popular politics and culture in India. This approach then categorized many cosmopolitan anti-colonial thinkers as ideologues of universalizing themes of the Enlightenment, which, according to Chakrabarty, are 'indispensable' yet 'inadequate' for understanding Indian modernity.[48]

While such work is correctly criticized for presenting reified understandings of a 'Western' realm and 'Indian' realm, it nonetheless demonstrates the inadequacy of existing frameworks to analyze the specificity of Indian history. As argued earlier, the task of global intellectual history is to resist the temptation to dissolve the historical density of a particular situation into the general, global tendency of an era. Instead, it is the study of the specific that permits the grasping of a general dynamic, as well as tracing the ruptures immanent to that dynamic, thus allowing for a better comprehension of both the continuities and the breaks that mark political thought in a historical period. Through a historical tracing of Indian political thought, I show how the specific genealogy of anti-colonial politics in India intertwined with global Marxism in the interwar period to produce a specific practice of Marxism that I call 'Indian Communism'.[49] Here, I decisively move away from notions that posit a relationship of 'production' and 'reception' between Marxism and Indian thought. Such a framework often places Indian thought in the not-yet stage of political consciousness, with only its encounter with Marxism permitting this 'incomplete' thought to come into being. Instead, while acknowledging that Marxism as an idea opened new horizons for Indian political actors, the reverse was equally true; Marxism's encounter with the anti-colonial movement in India re-configured Marxism itself, expanding its horizons and making certain aspects redundant, as we discuss later. Thus, Indian communism was neither Marxist hegemony over Indian consciousness, nor a fusion of two different ideologies, but the dialectical inter-locking of two disparate political trajectories that continuously interrupted, and propelled, each other to produce a novel practice of politics.

Therefore, my aim is to situate global ideas in a productive tension with the specificity of Indian history. This work points three broad characteristics of the Indian political that stemmed from the specific history of the formation of anti-colonial thought, and that overdetermined the production of political thought in India. I see these distinctions in the themes of 'distancing', 'historical difference' and 'political violence', tropes that I explain below and explore throughout this dissertation.

As mentioned, the experience of colonial modernity, with its reliance on the repressive apparatuses of the state to discipline populations in the name of a 'civilizational process', did not generate popular enthusiasm in linear notions of progress. In the absence of local rule or rights of citizenship, political thinkers in colonial India developed practices envisioning an active distancing from dominant ideologies of colonial rule. Thinkers as diverse as Vivekananda,

[48] Ibid., p. 4.

[49] Matthieu Renault has recently termed the Marxism of the peripheries as 'National Communism'. See Matthieu Renault, 'The Idea of Muslim National Communism: On Mirsaid Sultan Galiev', *Viewpoint Magazine* (March, 2015), available at https://www.viewpointmag.com/2015/03/23/the-idea-of-muslim-national-communism-on-mirsaid-sultan-galiev/ accessed 23rd May, 2015.

Aurobindo Ghosh, Gandhi, and M.N. Roy participated in, or developed, practices incongruous with the disciplinary procedures of the colonial state. These practices, ranging from religious, pedagogical and organizational concerns, were aimed at developing a counter-discipline to the inertia of colonial rule and its attendant ideologies. In other words, the thrust of anti-colonial thought was to develop new horizons in opposition to the ones imposed by colonial modernity, a tendency that forced Indian Marxists to re-pose the question of History within their theoretical edifice.

Second, such a break from colonial sovereignty necessitated an engagement with the question of historical difference. Colonial rule was premised on legal, political and epistemological exceptions, whether in the endless separating of the 'fanatics' from the 'civilized', or the liberal use of emergency laws to quell any perceived danger to colonial power. Anti-colonial revolts, however, posed a major challenge to the exercise of colonial sovereignty, particularly since they sought to create alternative forms of sovereignty grounded in religious, cultural, and political institutions.[50] This led to a politicization of difference itself, with the 'nation' becoming a terrain for mobilizing the uneven political, economic and epistemological relations between colonial Indian and the metropole. Another major example was the elevation of the Indian peasant as a political subject in the anti-colonial movement, bridging, if not annulling, the divide between 'modern' and 'pre-modern' subjectivity in the formation of the public sphere in India.[51] Not only did it traverse the colonial/anti-colonial divide, but difference as a political category also structured conflicts internal to the social sphere in India, resulting in popular contestations over caste, religious and linguistic identities. This work studies the persistence of seemingly archaic attachments, such as the nation, religion, and the countryside, as stemming from the peculiar trajectory of anti-colonial politics in India. Further, I argue that these historically sedimented differences could not be erased by a universalizing narrative of Marxism, and had to be inscribed within 'Indian communism' for the latter to resonate in colonial India, prompting displacements and shifts within Marxist theory.

Finally, the complementary processes of distancing and historical difference developed simultaneously with a novel conception of violence in colonial India. In her reading of G.I. Tilak, India's foremost anti-colonial leader prior to Gandhi's emergence in the 1920s, Shruti Kapila emphasizes the centrality of anti-colonial violence in thought. Rather than stemming from historical progression, the Indian political was conceived in terms of a war that reconfigured notions of kinship and enemy. Thus, a violent scission from the repetition of routine was a necessary condition for producing political demarcations, a view equally shared by the 'terrorist' organizations proliferating in early twentieth-century India, as well as political organizations such as the National Congress or the Muslim League, which frequently deployed confrontational tactics, including public agitation, for political claim-making.[52] A politics based on exceptional, violent moments of rupture from business-as-usual structured the Indian political, without the theoretical or ethical certainties typical of Western political philosophy. The contingent and

[50] Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments*, pp. 3-14.

[51] Rochona Majumdar, 'Subaltern Studies as a History of Social Movements in India', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 38:1 (2015), pp. 50-68,

[52] See Shruti Kapila, 'A History of Violence', *Modern Intellectual History* 7:2 (2010), pp. 437-457.

exceptional nature of the Indian political is described by Partha Chatterjee as 'the spectre of pure politics'.[53] Unlike Western Europe, where the disciplinary processes of modernity displaced conflicts existing in the social body onto the institutional terrain, the violence of anti-colonial movements brought these wars into the public domain, giving Indian political life its specific relationship to violence.

We are then confronted with the problem of delineating the relationship between Indian political history with the theoretical edifice of Marxism. As mentioned earlier, this work rejects the binary between 'Western' ideas and 'indigenous' Indian thought as mutually exterior. Instead, the task for us is to view their trajectories as immanent to each other after the encounter between Marxism and anti-colonialism. 'Indian communism' then is an incomplete, contingent and ongoing political project that brings together the historical specificity of Indian politics with Western Marxism, which results in the continuous reconstitution of both terms of this divide. Thus, this work emphasises this dialectical tension to move between these two terms, delineating how anti-colonial politics in India were influenced by Marxist ideas, and how Marxist ideas themselves were reconstituted by their engagement with novel tropes of distancing, historical difference and violence. There is then neither an origin nor a definite end to the consequences of this encounter, which remain open to transformation in novel encounters and contingent circumstances.[54]

Historiography of Communism

Over the last two decades, intellectual history has become a vibrant field in Indian historiography. As discussed earlier, Subaltern Studies played a major role in focusing scholarship in the production, translation and circulation of ideas in colonial India. Yet, the focus of this corpus has been either on understanding ideas implicit in popular practices, or on major figures of the Indian national movement such as Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and Bal Tilak.[55] The scholarship on the Communist Movement, however, has seldom delved into the theme of intellectual production, a gap I aim to fill through this work.

Yet, there have been a number of important works on communism in colonial India over the years that have attempted to develop a perspective *on the movement*, if not recovering the ideas *of the movement*.[56] The history of the communist movement in colonial India has been written

[53] Partha Chatterjee, 'Sovereign Violence and the Domain of the Political', in *Sovereign Bodies: Citizens, Migrants and States in the Postcolonial World,* eds. Thomas Hansen and Finn Stepputat (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), pp. 82-100.

[54] I take inspiration from and build on Althusser's later writings on the 'encounter'. See Louis Althusser, *Philosophy of the Encounter: Later Writings, 1978-1987,* eds. Oliver Corpet and Francois Matheron (London: Verso, 2006), trans. G.M. Goshgarian, pp. 163-207.

[55] See Faisal Devji, *The Impossible Indian: Gandhi and the Temptation for Violence* (Cambridge/Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012).

[56] In this section, I only engage with scholarship on communism in colonial India. The tactics and practice of communism are significantly different in the postcolonial sub-continent, particularly due to debates around constitutionalism, democracy and citizenship. For a discussion on the trajectory of communist politics in postcolonial India, see Praful Bidwai, *The Phoenix Moment: Challenges Confronting the Indian Left* (New York: HarperCollins, 2015), Vijay Prashad, *No Free Left: The Futures of Indian Communism* (New Delhi: Leftword

with three major themes. The first strand treats Communism as a threat to India's (and global) stability, and identifies with the counter-insurgency tactics of the state. The second revolves around the theme of 'failure', in which an attempt is made to understand why communists were unable to achieve the goal of bringing a revolution in India. The third attempts to read the communist movement in India on its own terms, by delineating the hybrid forms of political practice developed by communist activists. In this section, I discuss each of these themes, and conclude showing how my work borrows from this scholarship, and where I depart from their frameworks.

Gene D. Overstreet and Marshall Windmiller's work, 'Communism in India', was the first comprehensive academic study on the history of the communist movement in colonial India.[57] The article is impressive in its breadth. The authors vividly describe the international situation and the circumstances in which communism appeared as an attractive ideology on the Indian political strategy. They also delve into the debates within the Communist Party of India in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s, as well as their intersection with debates in global Marxism. The book also provides a detailed context of the anti-colonial movement in India, with particular emphasis on the relationship between the Indian National Congress and the Communist Party.

Yet, the primary problem with their work is their identification with the colonial state's narrative when describing the 'threat' posed by communism to the region. For example, the work posits the advent of communism in India as part of the Bolsheviks' strategy to spread their influence over India, turning the 'origin' of Indian communism into a geostrategic calculation made in Moscow.[58] More significantly, Overstreet and Windmiller treat the colonial state as a benevolent entity desiring the best for its subjects. Consider the manner in which they depict the state in its conflict with anti-colonial activists:

> Moreover, the British proved amenable to an appeal to conscience. Though they did not fully satisfy the nationalist demands, neither did they wholly thwart them, and nationalist agitation was rewarded with gradual progress towards self-rule. Thus, radicalism had little chance to flourish; as long as peaceable political action produced some result, a violent revolutionary program could not inspire overwhelming mass enthusiasm.[59]

The framing of colonial rule as open to dialogue with the national movement is historically inaccurate. As a number of historians have demonstrated, excessive violence by the colonial state was not an aberration, but provided the context in which anti-colonial politics took shape. This is particularly true after the end of the First World War, when many Indian cities were placed under emergency laws and handed over to military administrators. This historical inaccuracy on the part of Overstreet and Windmiller compels them to characterize communist tendencies as

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Books, 2016), Bidyut Chakrabarty, *Communism in India: Events, Processes and Ideologies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), Kamran Asdar Ali, *Surkh Salam: Communist Politics and Class Activism in Pakistan, 1947-1972* (Lahore: Oxford University Press, 2015).

[57] Gene D. Overstreet and Marshall Windmiller, *Communism in India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959).

[58] Ibid., p. 7.

[59] Ibid., pp. 15-16.

'extreme' and, at one point, label the politics of militant outfits as 'clumsy acts of violence on the part of teenage conspirators'.[60]

Such depiction obfuscates how violence was central for producing the dynamic that resulted in the 'gradual progress towards self-rule'. The idea of Indian self-rule was intimately tied to the anti-British militancy inspired by Tilak in the early twentieth century.[61] Moreover, as discussed earlier, even Gandhi's 'peaceful' tactics involved 'extremist' tactics such as direct action against government policy, often leading to violence from both sides. Conceptually and historically, communist politics was neither alien to the history of armed struggle against British rule in India, nor to the mass anti-colonial upsurge after 1919, but existed within this milieu.

This framework prevents the authors from seeing communist politics as part of this continuum of anti-colonial politics confronting a powerful, and at times brutal, Empire. The clichéd depictions of communists as violent stem from a fundamental misreading of the historical moment of communism's emergence onto the political stage in India. Such an approach is particularly inadequate for studying the development of ideas, since it fails to contextualize thought in relation to the political situation, viewing it instead as deviations from an ideal (imperial) liberal order.

The second strand of writing on the communist movement focuses on its failure to become a hegemonic force in the national movement, particularly in relation to the Indian National Congress. Such framework is used by D.N. Gupta in his book 'Communism and Nationalism in Colonial India, 1939-1945'.[62] Gupta studies the intersection of communism and nationalism during the Second World War, and asks why communists were unable to capture popular imagination during this period.[63] He rejects the notion that Indian communists were mere agents of the Soviet Union, and instead places them within the wider context of the burgeoning anti-colonial movement. Moreover, he also criticises Marxist historians who make retroactive justifications for the mistakes made by the Communist Party of India, preventing a critical assessment of the strategy of the party leadership.[64] His aim is neither to question the motives of the political actors involved in the communist movement, nor glorify their work, but to focus on the consequences of the decisions made by the party during the war.

The CPI supported the British war effort after the Soviet Union was attacked by Germany, declaring it a 'People's War'. Yet, the decision backfired since the Indian National Congress was leading the 'Quit India Movement' against the colonial government. Gupta argues that the primary reason for the failure of the party during this period was its active support to the war effort, a decision that made it appear as a collaborator of the British at the peak of the anti-

[60] Ibid., pp. 285, 17.
[61] Kapila, 'A History of Violence', pp. 437-442.
[62] D.N. Gupta, *Communism and Nationalism in Colonial India, 1939-1945* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2008).
[63] Ibid., pp. 16-17.
[64] Ibid., p. 19.

colonial movement.[65] Moreover, the party's belief that independence could only be achieved under its own leadership meant that it was more focused on breaking away Congress activists from the party leadership, than on building a genuine united front against colonial rule. While the party lost prestige due to its stance on the war, it was also unable to convince the Indian public that the jailed leadership of Congress would betray the cause of independence.[66] The result was that by the end of the war, Congress emerged as the largest political force in the country while the CPI remained a peripheral player in the country's politics.[67]

While the book provides an important window into debates on nationalism and internationalism, an excessive focus on failure prevents Gupta from focusing on the innovations/interventions made by the CPI, both in Indian politics and global Marxism. Indeed, if one were to make the absence of revolution as one's point of departure, then it would have been difficult to identify the contributions made by communist intellectuals such as Antonio Gramsci or Rosa Luxemburg, since they participated in 'failed' movements. In fact, the failure to attain political power can itself generate novel thought, particularly as political actors reflect on their past and look for opportunities in the present. What remains missing in Gupta's narrative, therefore, is an understanding of the ways in which members of the CPI navigated a complex local and international political terrain to contribute on themes such as internationalism, nationalism, and violence to produce a specific practice of communist politics.

The third major theme studies communist politics in India as part of the global circulation of ideas and practices in the first half of the twentieth century. Maia Ramnath's work on the Ghadar Party, titled 'Haj to Utopia: How the Ghadar Party Charted Global Radicalism and Attempted to Overthrow the British Empire', is part of the scholarship focused on the global nature of anti-colonial politics.[68] While the book focuses on the international trajectory of the Ghadar Party, it devotes a substantial section to the intersection between Ghadar activists, Indian communists and the Soviet Union.[69]

Ramnath focuses on the 'combination of contexts, populations, issues, frames, scales' that structured transnational anti-colonial politics.[70] The migration of Indians to North America permitted political activists to build a political organization that could challenge the British Empire in disparate locales, rather than being confined to a fixed geographical location. Moreover, the CPI's politics, particularly its global connections, were formed by using the networks of groups such as the Ghadar Party and the activists from the Caliphate Movement.[71] In this sense, the CPI was part of a global, cosmopolitan space of radicalism where ideological

[65] Ibid., p. 230.
[66] Ibid., p. 270.
[67] Ibid., p. 20.
[68] Maia Ramnath, *Haj to Utopia: How the Ghadar Movement Charted Global Radicalism and Attempted to Overthrow the British Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).
[69] Ibid., pp. 123-165, and pp. 194-232.
[70] Ibid., p. 4.
[71] Ibid., pp. 194-232.

affiliations remained flexible as part of the larger political commitment toward undermining Empire.

Ramnath's focus in this work is on the practical solidarity developed by communist partisans with other groups, demonstrating how this period was ideologically promiscuous. Yet, the emphasis on the overlapping practices of different groups in the anti-colonial movement veils the significant differences between them. While hybridity and fluidity were important features of this period, so were polemics among anti-colonial activists. In fact, the differences between these groups were serious enough to lead to outright confrontation as the British withdrew from India. Ramnath's scholarship also demonstrates why the glue of 'internationalism' or 'cosmopolitanism' is inadequate for explaining the development of a political project.[72] Many of the major political currents that rival each other in the contemporary sub-continent were formed in the diaspora, but this common feature should not obfuscate how they fundamentally diverged, producing a conflictual public sphere. The author does little to delineate the singularity of each political project, a position that reproduces a simple binary between the Empire and a reified anti-colonial movement.

From the perspective of intellectual history, Ramnath's approach does not move beyond the language of 'interests', since what brought together an eclectic group of activists was their opposition to Empire. Yet, I argue that these groups, despite the flexibility of tactics, were rooted in distinct ideological registers. The ideological promiscuity of these groups is a result of their departure from fixed categories that exist in political thought. Yet, the failure to nominate unorthodox political ideologies is a shortcoming on the part of intellectual history, which views political projects, particularly in the non-European world, as 'combinations', as if European Marxism or Liberalism were not influenced by disparate ideological tendencies. The more difficult, and for this reason important, task is to develop an adequate language for nominating political projects that violate established categories, rather than labeling them with terms such as 'eclectic' or 'flexible', that tell us more about the lacunae in our field rather than something specific about their politics.

The theme of hybridity is given particular attention in Shalini Sharma's work on communist politics in colonial Punjab.[73] Her work examines the ways in which Indian tropes became part of the Communist lexicon developed in colonial India. In particular, she focuses on themes such as suffering, heroism and martyrdom as the conceptual vocabulary for anti-colonial politics in Punjab. According to Sharma, Marxism had to be inserted within the broader tradition of anti-colonialism, leading to a novel vocabulary for communist politics. For example, the theme of sacrifice became central to the organizational culture of the party, overtaking concerns about Marxist political economy.[74]

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[72] Kris Manjapra's work on M.N. Roy has the same shortcoming. While it seeks to imagine the past and the future beyond the imperatives of the nation-state, it does not specify the singularity of each political ideology. Cosmopolitanism becomes too large a framework to explain the political practice of disparate groups. Manjapra, *M.N. Roy*, pp. 111-151.

[73] Shalini Sharma, *Radical Politics in Colonial Punjab: Governance and Sedition* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014).

[74] Ibid., pp. 35-59, 116.

Sharma's work is fascinating as it shows the intersection between the circulation of global ideas and their deployment in popular politics. She pays attention to the transmutations that occur in the process of translating an ideology in a novel setting. Yet, her work is of a descriptive nature, and does not delve into the theoretical contributions made by Indian communists in their attempts to formulate a political project relevant to colonial conditions. In other words, this work remains within the framework in which ideas are produced in the West and are applied in the non-European world through deviations engendered by the particularities of each locale.

My own work departs from the existing literature on the Communist Movement of India by asking different questions: What were the salient features of Communist thought in India? What was the contribution of Indian communism to global Marxism, particularly in the domain of political thought? What historical, structural and ideological contexts formed the background for the production of communist thought in colonial India? How did partisans of the communist party improvise to produce a new vision and new practice of communist politics? And finally, what was the relationship between tradition and novelty for simultaneously claiming inheritance and distance from global Marxism and Indian politics?

These questions allow us to trace the genealogy of ideas through the politically charged decades of the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s. Rather than focusing on the 'failures', 'lack' and 'mistakes' of the communist movement, this work focuses on the ideas and practices affirmed by Indian communism. This will prevent the examination of the movement from the point of view of fixed theoretical frameworks, and allow us to interrogate the challenges posed to communists emanating from the conjuncture itself. Moreover, I move away from descriptive accounts of debates among communists during this period. Instead, my aim is to highlight the theoretical difficulties that structure these debates, and the attempts at finding resolutions for them.

Studying innovation in colonial India is particularly difficult since Indian political thinkers often use canonical vocabulary in their political writings. Yet, I argue that the references to orthodox texts often cloak the ways in which Indian political actors departed from orthodoxy and formulated new political ideas. Part of our task as intellectual historians is to make explicit what is already implicit in these texts by retrieving the novelty that lies in the guise of tradition. As intellectual historians of the colonial world, we must place the non-European world as a site for intellectual production, rather than mere repetition. Yet, we need to also resist the temptation of positing the colonial world as completely autonomous from developments around the world. Instead, our task is to study the paradoxical movement of ideas both within a broader tradition, and simultaneously in excess of it. In other words, we must show how anti-colonial thinkers both appropriated and reconfigured global ideas as they deployed them in political struggles.

The debates on identifying Marxism as 'extreme', 'Euro-centric', or 'hybrid' can benefit from an engagement with contemporary literature around the 'Idea of Communism'. This theoretical framework views communism as a practical attempt to overcome hierarchy and exploitation,

denying an origin to the idea in the process.[75] It studies communist thought as tied to contingent eruptions of emancipatory politics (often termed the Event), in which political actors develop thought within a particular situation while maintaining fidelity to more universal ideas, affecting both the particular situation and the universal idea itself. Such a framework allows communist movements in disparate locales nationally and regionally to become part of the global discourse of Communist thought without effacing their own historical trajectory.

This method is now being used to study communist thought in places as diverse as Latin America, North America, Europe, and East Asia.[76] The 'deviations' in communist practice in disparate locales is no longer viewed as a lack on the part of communist partisans, but as generative of global communist thought. Yet, this novel lens remains missing from scholarship on Indian communism, which remains confined to traditional concerns of reception, deviation, failures and national security. In this dissertation, I attempt to overcome this lacuna by using a similar lens to study the development of communist thought in colonial India. Through this work, I also hope to push forward the scholarship on the 'Idea of Communism', since the colonial world remains a major gap in this framework.

Finally, I focus on the 'revolutionary subject' as the nodal point through which I delineate the improvisations in Indian communism. The focus on 'deviations' stems from the negligible presence of the most important element for 19th century communist thought, i.e. the proletariat. At the heart of the polemics among Indian communists, as well as their International interlocutors, was precisely the identification of the political subject that could become an agent of emancipation in colonial conditions. In particular, the colonial situation, with its denial of citizenship and unrestrained violence, provided a distinct context for formulating political thought. Yet, this crucial search, and its implications, remained missing from scholarship on Indian communism. My aim is to bring to light this debate, and show how the study of Indian Communism can aid us in re-thinking debates on political subjectivity, and contribute towards broadening the debates in global intellectual history.

Methodology

This work, therefore, attempts to intervene in debates on the global circulation of ideas, the theory and history of Marxism, and the specificity of colonial India. The vanishing mediator that brings together these seemingly disparate threads is the question of novelty; how did history collide to produce a new theory and practice of communism? Following Althusser, I posit that the primacy in all three belonged to the exigencies of a determinate political conjuncture (in this case, colonial India) that propelled an engagement with Marxism and other European ideas to overcome the impasse of an unfolding struggle. Indian communist thought is studied here as an adventure of invention and production, with Indian Marxists becoming important interlocutors

[75] This framework is primarily inspired by the intersection of French Marxism and Maoism from the 1960s and 1970s. Different thinkers working in this tradition came together in London in 2009 for the 'Idea of Communism' conference, which led to an edited volume. See Slavoj Žižek and Costas Douzinas (eds.), *The Idea of Communism* (London: Verso, 2010).

[76] See Alessandro Russo, 'How to Translate the Cultural Revolution', *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 7:4 (2006), pp. 673-682, and Bosteels, *Marx and Freud*, pp. 299-310.

simultaneously on the Indian political stage as well as in the global public sphere of Marxist intellectuals.

Such a task requires a number of innovations on the part of historians while writing intellectual histories of anti-colonial intellectuals. First, the lack of popular education, in addition to tight surveillance by the colonial state on college campuses, meant that anti-colonial thinkers lacked institutional spaces for producing their ideas. Therefore, unlike Kant, Hegel or John Stuart Mill, all of whom worked in state-sanctioned institutions, anti-colonial thinkers often had to produce their thought in 'unconventional' sites, including jails, while in exile or in the midst of popular revolt. The most profound impact of this displacement was on the relation between theory and practice, since anti-colonial thinkers were writing to intervene in the midst of ongoing struggles, turning into *theorists of practice*. Contrary to the abstractions of Western political philosophy, Indian political thought was formed within the framework of an 'immediacy', i.e. with direct consequences for immediate political practice. This difference has led to a grave error on the part of intellectual historians who often create a dichotomy between the sufficiently abstract, and hence universal, thought produced by European thinkers, and the historically specific ideas formulated by anti-colonial thinkers that cannot be extricated from their particular moment of enunciation. Moreover, the intellectual import of such practice is often downplayed by confining it within the ambit of 'strategies', 'tactics', or 'interests', thus making such work purely contingent phenomenon.

Against this epistemological violence that negates the universal lessons of anti-colonial thought, this work proposes that interventions of anti-colonial thinkers were simultaneously profound conceptual innovations. To trace them, however, we must develop frameworks adequate for grasping the dialectic between theory and practice, in which theoretical texts become 'seditious acts', while practices open new domains for theoretical reflections. I argue that novel practices such as Satyagraha by Gandhi, the Caliphate movement's mobilization based on notions of 'hurt', or the Ghadar Party's formation as a militant organization in the diaspora, point to radical rethinking of themes as diverse as violence, affect and Empire. As Faisal Devji argues, the language of 'interests' remains inadequate since it is unable to explain the complex ethical, political and strategic decisions undertaken by anti-colonial thinkers to align disparate 'interests', and also fails to take into account that a political project takes a life of its own beyond the contingent circumstances of its birth[77]

Therefore, the task for us is to study the writings and the practices of anti-colonial actors as simultaneously generative of political ideas. By recognizing that 'ideology is embedded in practices', we are able to shed light on the ways in which novel practices rendered old conceptual categories redundant, thus stretching, if not transforming, European ideas within the Indian political landscape. This approach also permits us to study the gap between European ideas deployed by anti-colonial thinkers, and the deviations from these ideas in *actual practice*. Therefore, we can examine this gap as the space for innovation and novelty in the colonial world, without which anti-colonial thought continues to appear as merely deficient application of fully formed concepts.

[77] See Faisal Devji, *Muslim Zion: Pakistan as a Political Idea* (Cambridge/Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2013).

Yet, such a project requires laborious effort on the part of the intellectual historian to develop the concepts implicit in these practices. Since political thinkers in colonial India were writing in the midst of a national liberation struggle, they could not be as concerned about how their actions or writings fit into the existing corpus of enlightenment ideas. Merely reiterating the history of resistance in colonial India would not grant us access to the thought that conditioned the Indian political, since the very structure of these innovations are veiled through the imprecise use of European interlocutors by Indian political thinkers themselves. The task of intellectual historians is to retrieve, and further develop, the concepts embedded in the polemics and practices of anti-colonial politics. If intellectual historians can have endless debates on the 'real meaning' of the corpus of a Marx or a Hegel, and further develop their ideas in the process, then we can apply the same principle to political thought in colonial India. Thus, this work studies the gap between the citations of Marxism in the writings of Indian communists, and their 'deviations' from these works in practice, as a provocation for rethinking the development of political concepts in colonial India, as well as studying the consequent ruptures immanent to Marxist theory itself.

Dissertation Overview

This work is organized into five substantial chapters. The first chapter discusses the colonial state's engagement with the 'idea of Communism'. Through a tracing of debates among colonial officials on the question of 'Indian fanaticism', I show how the control and disciplining of bodies was an essential component of colonial governmentality in India. By focusing on the introduction of tear-gas as a part of the British arsenal for 'pacifying' Indian political life, this work argues that British authorities aimed to transform 'Indian mobs' into docile, individual subjects, thus constituting a liberalism produced under bodily pain. Yet, the 1920s saw an increasing search for political ideas as an anchor within the developing popular political sphere in India, making ideological demarcations central to political debates during this period. The colonial state, which had mastered the art of managing the bodies of subjects, found its own frameworks inadequate when confronting the appearance of rival political ideas. As a result, the state found it increasingly difficult when the 'irrational' Indians were no longer agitating as spatially specific and temporally ephemeral mobs reacting to a particular issue, but were mobilizing around geographically dispersed, and temporally enduring groups held under the sign of an idea. I show the (dark) comical effects of attempts to control political ideas in the 1920s and 1930s, culminating in the outlawing of Marxist ideas during the Meerut Conspiracy Case. Consequently, I show the centrality of political thought in contestations, both inside the anti-colonial movement, as well as between the colonial state and anti-colonial activists, a major lacuna in discussions on colonial history.

In the following four chapters, I look at four different figures from the Indian communist movement to delineate the continuities and ruptures both within Indian political life with the appearance of Marxist ideas, and within global Marxism. One clarification is due-- I look at individual militants of the communist movement, but not because I adhere to a 'great men' view of history. Instead, I engage with these specific people since their lives provide us an effective background for the encounter between Marxism and disparate strands of anti-colonialism, while they were also some of the most prolific and eloquent chroniclers of the political project

emanating from this encounter. Thus, the names used in this work do not represent individual intellectual biographies, but serve as anchors to examine aspects of communist politics, grasped in their continuities and certainties, as well as the infidelities and contingencies inherent in the conjuncture.

The second chapter traces the life and writings of M.N. Roy from his early years as a member of the underground 'terrorist' network in Bengal, to his heydays as one of the most important interlocutors between European Marxism and the non-European world, to his eventual denunciation and removal by the Stalinist bureaucracy (1905-1929). Roy captured the imagination of the global communist movement when he challenged Lenin on the colonial question at the Second Comintern meeting in Moscow (1920). I explore how Roy developed a critique of the Communist movement's neglect of the burgeoning movements in the colonial world, in which he stressed that capitalism at the peripheries was more vulnerable, and hence provided more opportunities for a successful communist movement. Moreover, I argue that 'time' was the central problematic for Roy, as he militated against the notion of History that framed the colonial world as politically backwards, and made attempts to formulate a politics based on a shared time of revolt and rebellion across global space. Although Roy later condemned Marxism as a threat to individual liberty, replacing it with his philosophy of 'Radical Humanism', I argue that within his oeuvre, we find useful critiques of bureaucratic socialism and linear notions of History that can aid us in tracing the rupture he created within orthodox Marxism.

The dissertation's third chapter engages with the works of Shaukat Usmani, a young partisan of the revivalist Caliphate movement who became the central leader of the Communist Movement in India in the 1920s. By describing his journey out of India as part of the Hijrat Movement and eventual encounter with communist rebellions taking place in Muslim Central Asia, I show how political Islam entered into an ideological and practical entanglement with global communism. As two of the most important global ideologies opposed to Empire, I propose that they shared a deep subjective affinity that inscribed the two onto each other throughout the twentieth century. I demonstrate the ways in which Usmani saw his journey from a militant of the Caliphate Movement to a partisan of the Communist Movement as part of a continuum of anti-imperial politics, shedding light on political subjectivity in India, as well as reconceptualizing Marxism based on its encounter with historical difference, in this case, religious attachments.

The next chapter follows the afterlives of the 'Hindustan Ghadar Party', as this diasporic outfit of revolutionaries attempted to find a foothold in the political landscape of colonial Punjab. By following the politics of Sohan Singh Josh, the foremost leader and intellectual of the communist movement of Punjab, I study how communism was inscribed within the tradition of the Ghadarites. Josh chose the peasantry as the social group that could bridge the gap between Marxism and the Ghadar Party to develop a communist praxis in colonial Punjab. How did the peasant emerge as the inheritor of the potentialities located earlier in the global itineraries of Punjab militants? What transformed the peasantry, viewed in enlightenment thought as a figure of deficit, into the bearer of a future lying dormant within the present? Moreover, I also examine the utilization of the motif of shame by Josh as a vehicle for anti-colonialism, highlighting the importance of affect in communist subjectivity.

The chapter on B.T. Ranadive, the firebrand general secretary of the Communist Party of India (1948-1950), deals with the engagement of Indian communism with the problem of decolonization. Ranadive has often been accused of 'left-wing adventurism' for his calls for a nationwide insurrection against the Nehru government. Yet, I argue that the absolute dichotomy created between the 'people' and the postcolonial state was a result of a loss of historical referentiality in the abrupt absence of the (almost) universally detested colonial enemy. The consequent impasse in the communist movement, which led to Ranadive's removal from the post of general secretary, was a result of the failure of the Indian communists to formulate an adequate response to questions of sovereignty and republicanism in postcolonial India.

I conclude the dissertation by tying together the various threads through a discussion on revolutionary subjectivity in the twentieth century. Through a brief discussion of communist politics in contemporary India, and drawing on recent debates in intellectual History and philosophy, I show how this work can broaden our conception of the subject by tracing its formation within, and beyond, the anti-colonial sequence. The encounter (or lack thereof) of Indian communism with diverse social groups, such as lower castes, religious and ethnic minorities, tribals, and women, forecloses the possibility of imposing a universal subject of revolutionary politics. Instead, the presence of this 'motley' crowd demonstrates the incompleteness of Eurocentric theories of subjectivity, and opens up new avenues for inquiry into communist thought. Such focus is not only crucial for appreciating the singularity of Indian communism, but also allows us to intervene in the political impasse of the communist movement in contemporary India, as the latter oscillates between a textual fidelity to orthodox Marxism and the 'divergences' in actual practice that continue to intensify in the rapidly transformed social, economic and political landscape of India today.

Chapter 2

Colonial Governmentality and the Idea of Communism

Introduction

In the summer of 1921, a flurry of messages was exchanged between the Peshawar Intelligence Bureau chief, the members of the Crime Investigation Agency and the head of the Indian Intelligence Bureau. There were news of local authorities in the Chitral Valley, near the Afghan border, unearthing a major 'Bolshevik Conspiracy' in India, presumably funded by the Soviet Union. The seven men arrested were accused of carrying 'subversive' literature into the country and of conspiring to take advantage of the anti-government unrest in the tribal regions along the Indo-Afghan border as well as the general unrest prevalent due to the Gandhi-led non-cooperation movement.[78]

In what later became known as the Peshawar Conspiracy Case, the colonial state received its first major opportunity to consider a threat posed by Indian Communism to colonial rule. The Intelligence Bureau had already taken keen interest in the proceedings of the Communist International in Moscow, particularly its open support of anti-colonial struggles in the colonized ld. The intelligence community in India was of the opinion that attempts by communists to exploit the anti-government sentiment prevalent in India in the aftermath of the Great War was one of the gravest dangers to the perpetuation of colonial authority, and recommended empire-wide efforts to prevent communist infiltration. David Petrie, Chief of the Indian Intelligence Bureau, cautioned against judging the threat of communism based purely on the low membership in communist organizations. Instead, declaring communism a plague and recommending vigilance similar to that which hospital authorities are expected to show, 'even in times when public health is at its best,' he called upon the Government of India to 'make sure there is no way any communist or communist idea can enter India'.[79]

Such nervousness about the very presence of communists pervades the judgements made in the Peshawar Conspiracy Cases. In justifying the harsh sentences doled out to the accused, despite lack of evidence of any overt act to further their allegedly intended goal, the judges invoked section 121-A of the Indian Penal Code to assert that proof of membership with a 'communist conspiracy' (which had become synonymous with a 'communist organization') was enough to indict an individual for challenging colonial sovereignty. This equation of communism with violent conspiracy was summed up in the judgement for the case in the following words:

> The attitude of the Bolsheviks towards all settled governments is a matter of common knowledge. So also their hostility and desire to overthrow the governments of all civilised

[78] G. Adhikari, *Documents of the History of the Communist Party of India* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1974), pp. 27-29.

[79] David Petrie, *Communism in India* (Calcutta: Government of India Press, 1928), p. 321.

> powers as at present constituted. This general knowledge is a matter of which judicial notice can be taken.[80]

The guilt by association established in this first appearance of communism within the juridical apparatus of the colonial state would continue to structure the latter's understanding of the threat associated with communism. The very existence of communists as subjects embodying legal rights is questioned by emphasizing their refusal to accept the legitimacy of colonial sovereignty, since the latter remains the sole guarantor for protecting those legal rights. A cursory look at over half a dozen major 'conspiracy cases' initiated to wipe out the communist 'threat' makes it clear that those accused of taking part in communist activities were no longer ordinary juridical subjects. In fact, their refusal to accept colonial authority had already placed them outside the system, a place from which the legal apparatus could only include them through the act of exclusion, as we shall discuss later.

But the question remains, why would an idea 'imported' from abroad have the potential for social disruption? Indeed, critics of government high-handedness toward Indian communists often complained that the communist threat was a figment of the imagination of the intelligence community in India, and had little appeal beyond a few sections of society. In response to such charges, Petrie's successor as the head of the Intelligence Bureau, H. Williamson, asserted that these criticisms were less attentive to the state of Indian society.

> A former Home Member of the Government of India has recently written that the only appeal that Communism can make in India is to the predatory instincts which are to be found throughout the whole country among the have-nots, or those who prefer living by their wits to living by honest work… But the 'have-nots' in many parts of India constitute not only the most numerous but also the most virile section of the population...any effective subversive movement (except perhaps, that of Gandhi, who has at times revealed a capricious willingness to compromise with the powers that be), whatever, its outcome, is welcome to Moscow.[81]

The image of a 'virile section' of society has a much longer genealogy within colonial governmentality, from regions inhabited by 'turbulent and excitable races' to a general character of 'Indian mobs', who, when in a state of frenzy, understood 'no language other than of the bullet.'[82] It is this fear of the potential combination of communist thought with the excitable nature of the Indian masses that overdetermined the state's response to the communist movement.

As a prelude to my work on communist thought, this chapter engages with the colonial state's depiction of communism with three main aims. First, I study colonial governance in India through an engagement with contemporary theoretical concerns regarding sovereignty and

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[80] Adhikari, *Documents of the History*, p. 29.

[81] H. Williamson, *India and Communism* (Calcutta: Government of India Press, 1933), p. 3.

[82] J.D. Coleridge to Under Secretary of State for India, (12th August 1936), File 868/30/30, Use of Tear Gas in India, IOR/L/PJ/12/414, The British Library Archives.

exceptionalism. In addressing this question, I argue that the colony is an ideal site for the investigation of sovereignty, where the lines between legal and illegal remain perpetually ambiguous. I do not intend, however, to reproduce another genealogical study of biopower and the construction of the security state. While indebted to such scholarship, my own aim in this work is to consider moments in which the gaps and fissures in the structures of power allow for the possibility of political novelty. The emphasis on the gaps inherent in colonial governance makes it possible to locate an active anti-colonial political subjectivity that was able to produce ruptures within the structure, rather than merely reproducing ideologies attendant to Capital and the Enlightenment.[83] In other words, I employ the method that Bruno Bosteels recently termed 'strategic ahistoricism' in order to read state power as not only a constraint, but also as an enabling condition for the specific form of communist thought produced under colonial conditions.[84]

Second, I trace the genealogy of the idea of 'fanatical' in the colonial discourse to elucidate the threatening potential of communism in India. Since a fanatical mob is viewed as one that is passionately attached to its objective as compared to the rational self-interested individual, the state engages in acts of 'dispersal' as the primary method for taming and pacifying the frenzied mob. Such a method increasingly targeted the very conditions essential for bodily functionality as potential avenues for the deployment of sovereign power. Further, I show that the use of the phrase 'professional agitator' by the colonial state introduces a key distinction between frenzied mobs that could be pacified, and political actors who operate with a diligently elaborated 'Idea' and, hence, were in the position to 'exploit' societal unrest. Thus, efforts to separate the physiological from the ideational conditioned the state's attempts at containing communist ideas.

Finally, I examine colonial anxieties regarding anti-colonial geographies utilized by communists, and the depiction of communists as part of a larger 'foreign conspiracy', a charge that has endured into the post-colonial era. I argue that the attempts of the British authorities to depict Indian communists as 'foreigners' was not only ironic, but can also be used as a provocation for rethinking the metaphor of foreignness under colonial rule.

Colonial Liberalism, Crowds and the Figure of the Fanatic

In his reply to critics who argued that the communist threat in India was a mere figment of the imagination of the intelligence community, Sir David Petrie cautioned that the presence of communists in great numbers was not the key element required for a larger conflagration.

> A mob, indulging in the kind of mass violence of which we had an unpleasant foretaste in 1920-22, does not require to be composed of convinced communists, but only of persons whose minds have been inflamed beyond all control; and that Communism is an exceedingly potent and subtle poison for exciting the mob-mind in such a way.[85]

[83] Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, pp. 3-26
[84] Bosteels, 'Traversing the Heresies', p. 1.
[85] Petrie, *Communism in India*, pp. 316-317.

What is revealing in this statement is that the power of communism is not said to stem from its reach within Indian society. On the contrary, it is the specific construction of the image of Indian society as perpetually on the verge of mob rule that induces the latent power of communism. Petrie adds:

> ...the ease with which popular feeling against the Government can be whipped up in this country, will ever tend to increase the odds in favour of communism being able to find its opportunity.[86]

The intersection of 'frenzied crowds', anti-government sentiment, and communism (the anti-government ideology par excellence) produced the perception of constant subversion in the minds of colonial officials. But it was British understandings of the very nature of the collective Indian subject that drove their anxieties towards both popular agitation and political ideologies inside India, phenomenon they would tolerate inside Britain. It is this construction of the 'irrationality' of the 'Indian mind' that we now turn to.

A number of scholars have demonstrated the difficulties for liberal thought when dealing with the question of crowds in public spaces. Arjun Appardurai has argued that liberalism finds it difficult to manage any small number other than the number one. This is because at the heart of liberal ideology resides the ideal of a rational individual. To the extent that collectivities are viewed as an aggregation of self-interested individuals coming together through and for a process of deliberative action, they are deemed to be legitimate actors. The mob, regardless of its size, is always in excess of the number one, and hence is unable to make a calculated and rational choice, more enthused by passion than informed by reason.[87] The differentiation between the cognitive capabilities of rational subjects (mostly European) and frenzied mobs (colonized subjects), can be gleaned from the following statement by Lord Chelmsford in support of the repressive measures used against the non-cooperation movement:

> ...when this movement (Civil Disobedience) was initiated, it was apparently not obvious to its promoters, as it was to all thoughtful persons, that in India in its present state of development (whatever may be the case in other countries) the unsettling effect of the advice to the public in general to break selected laws was likely to lead to a situation which might involve the overthrow of all law and order. [88]

The inability of Indians to distinguish between opposition to a particular law and between the dissolution of all forms of law owed to the stage of their 'development', thus securing the domain for the state to continue its pedagogical process. It is pertinent to point out that in all such conversations on mob frenzy, a distinction is made between a detached rational observer and someone who is too closely tied to her object(ive), and hence incapable of rational cognition.

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[86] Ibid., p. 319.

[87] Arjun Appadurai, *Fear of Small Number: An Essay on the Geography of Anger* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), pp. 59-63.

[88] Nasser Hussain, 'Towards The Jurisprudence of Emergency: Colonial Rule and The Rule of Law', *Law and Critique* 10:2 (1999), pp. 93-115, (p.111).

Alberto Toscano focuses his discussion on the persistence of the fear of the fanatic in liberal thought on the question of the proximity between the subject and the object.[89] Toscano argues that since its battles with the aristocracy in the 18th century, liberalism has sought to separate the domain of interests (associated with commerce) from the domain of passions (linked to the irrational desire for valour found in the aristocracy). While the pursuit of particularistic interests allows for conflict, it stops well short of an all-out war stemming from the intensity of an impassioned attachment.[90] If the advocacy of rationality and interests was initially used to critique the perceived decadence of the aristocracy, Toscano shows how, in the last two hundred years, the allegation of passionate attachment has been directed against subaltern classes and colonized subjects. He continues

> As a politics of abstraction, fanaticism is to be condemned for its unconditional character ('without regard to consequences') and its refusal of measure and moderation... detached from any calculation of utility and feasibility.[91]

The characterization of frenzied mobs as totally consumed by their passions and placed beyond all possibility of a rational dialogue allows the state to justify its engagement in exceptional forms of violence to maintain order. Such sentiment was echoed by J.D. Coleridge, military secretary to the Government of India. In the aftermath of an incident in Karachi in 1936 in which the police shot protesting crowds, killing 47 protesters, Coleridge was asked to give his opinion on whether more 'humane' methods of crowd control could be used in India, such as tear gas, as had been used in the United States. Mr. Coleridge replied:

> The analogy of conditions in America has been drawn. I submit however that conditions between riotous mobs in India and America are different. The former are fanatical and usually in far greater numbers than in the latter. If filled with frenzy (such as at Karachi) I am extremely doubtful if anything less than the bullet will stop them![92]

Both the categorization of fanaticism and such heavy-handed responses by the state have a long history in Colonial rule in India. Laws such as the Thuggee Act of 1836 and the Act for the Suppression of Outrages in the District of Malabar in 1854 had already categorized large sections of the native population as 'special categories' to whom the normal juridical procedures could not fully apply, owing to their deficient political development. Giving his reasons for the creation of such exceptions, D.F. Mcleod, the Lieutenant Governor-General of Punjab, stated that such laws become necessary, due both to the particular political relations in the colony and the nature of crimes committed by the excitable races.

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[89] Alberto Toscano, *Fanaticism: The Uses of an Idea* (London: Verso, 2010).
[90] Ibid., p. 24.
[91] Ibid., p. 6.
[92] J.D. Coleridge to Under Secretary of State for India, (12th August 1936), File 868/30/30, Use of Tear Gas in India, IOR/L/PJ/12/414, The British Library Archives.

> There can, I think, be no doubt in the mind of anyone that this class of offences wholly differs in character from ordinary outrages, and should be dealt with differently from them.... In Great Britain and Ireland, where happily the causes which give rise to such acts can rarely arise, resort is had to Martial Law, or suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act.... But in this country, where he [sic] relations between the Rulers and the ruled are so widely different, and more especially in those parts inhabited by turbulent or excitable races, such acts may at any time occur... [and] would not... be adequately met by such special action.[93]

In commenting on pre-emptive forms of violence against the allegedly uncontrollable rage of the fanatic, Toscano correctly points out that such violence operates as a mimetic gesture of fanaticism, an anti-fanatical fanaticism.[94] Such a gesture does not function within a closed economy of crime and punishment, instead it is aimed at containing the excess that cannot be contained by the normal juridical procedure. Thus we must place the anxiety experienced by the British with the onset of the mass movement in 1919 within the larger history of the construction and the subsequent fear of the body of the fanatic. In a more overtly political register, Ranabir Samaddar argues that government under colonial rule meant nothing more than the 'physical tasks of watching, disciplining, deploying, annihilating, besides the paltry task of the welfare of individual body to detach from the bodies and the minds of the colonised'[95] It is the question of watching and disciplining 'bodies' during and after the Punjab disturbances that we shall discuss in the next section.

Obedience, Violence and Colonial Sovereignty: Punjab Disturbances 1919-1920

The end of the First World War marked a decisive turn in the political climate prevalent in the colonized world. From Indonesia to Algeria, colonies began witnessing an intensification of political activities, with whispers of total independence emerging as a serious possibility on the political horizon.[96] In India, the 'disturbances' in the Punjab and the North Western Frontier Province marked a watershed moment in the constitution of anti-colonial politics as a mass movement. This was soon followed by the Non-Cooperation Movement announced by Gandhi, a moment that brought in the peasantry and other marginalized groups as active participants in the Indian political sphere. The Intelligence Bureau of India declared the non-cooperation movement comparable to 1857 in the ways it 'had shaken the foundations of our rule', adding that another such 'general upheaval, such a widespread outbreak of disorder will render a continuance of our rule impossible'.[97]

Dipesh Chakrabarty has aptly emphasized how the immediacy or the 'now' inaugurated by mass participation in the anti-colonial movement existed in antagonism with gradualist notions of

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[93] Mark Condos, 'License to Kill: The Murderous Outrages Act and the Rule of Law in Colonial India, 1867-1925', *Modern Asian Studies* 50:2 (2016)., pp. 479-517, (p. 489).
[94] Toscano, *Fanaticism*, p. 15.
[95] Ranabir Samaddar, *Emergence of the Political Subject* (New Delhi: Sage, 2010), p. 45.
[96] See Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (New York: New Press, 2008).
[97] Petrie, *Communism in India*, pp. 316-317.

History propagated by Imperial liberalism, the latter conceptualization relegating colonized subjects to the 'waiting room of History'.[98] Much has been written conceptualizing the emergence of a subaltern subjectivity prior to the pedagogical procedures recommended by colonial ideologues in preparation for full citizenship. My own aim in this section, however, is to focus on the response of the colonial political and legal apparatus to the Punjab riots of 1919-1920, after government troops massacred over 400 unarmed protesters for 'unlawful assembly' at the Jalianwala Bagh in Amritsar.[99] An exploration of the emergency promulgated in the Punjab provides us a closer glimpse into colonial sovereignty and violence, revealing itself to ward off threats perceived to be exceeding the normative legal frameworks.

Ranajit Guha asserts that colonial authority stemmed less from the need to garner consent from colonial subjects than from pure coercion. If the potential of this loss of authority over indigenous populations is the key element that haunted colonial rule in India, the anti-government riots in 1919 played a major role in heightening this colonial anxiety.[100] For example, the chanting of the slogan *Hukum kya chiz hai, hum koi hukum nahin jante* – (what is an order; we know of no such thing as an order) during anti-government protests in the Punjab in 1919 was cited by colonial officials as symptomatic of the breakdown of colonial 'obedience', hence necessitating a state of emergency for 'punishing' such behavior.[101] These punishments included spectacles such as parading all the students and the faculty of the Santam Dharam College in Lahore in the hot sun to be eventually interned at the Red Fort for 3 hours. Their only crime, if it can be termed as such, was that they happened to study in a college whose walls were defaced with anti-government slogans.[102]

Such an attribution of a generalized guilt can also be seen at work in the saluting orders issued by the local commander in Gujranwala. This particular order required all inhabitants of Gujranwala to leave their conveyances whenever they witnessed a European officer and stand in an upright position to salute. When the Hunter Committee, a commission set up to investigate alleged violations of law during the Punjab Emergency, pressed the commander to explain his reasons for issuing such an order, he pointed to the accelerating decline of respect for authority, something that this unusual decree was meant to reinforce.

> The tendency of the present day is to abolish respectfulness. The Indian father will tell you that sons are not respectful even to their parents.[103]

Thus, the collective power of the mobs could only be neutralized by the spectacle of the suffering, tortured body. As Nasser Hussain suggests in his illuminating study of the Punjab disturbances, the primary target of 'fanciful punishments' during the emergency were not particular individuals who committed particular crimes. He claims that in some ways these acts

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[98] Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, p. 8.
[99] See Alfred Draper, *Amritsar: The Massacre That Ended the Raj* (West Sussex: Little Hampton, 1981).
[100] Guha, *Dominance without Hegemony*, pp. 1-99.
[101] Hussain, 'Towards The Jurisprudence', pp. 93-100.
[102] Ibid., p. 113.
[103] Ibid., p. 114.

cannot even be constituted within the economy of punishments, as their goal was intended to be *elsewhere*, i.e. towards the re-establishment of a fledgling colonial authority. Reading Walter Benjamin's distinction between myth-making and myth-sustaining violence as moments equal to the founding gesture of law and its subsequent reiteration by the state, Hussain claims the martial law or state of exception enforced by the Punjab government had resided in the former sphere, where the state had to announce its authority as a gesture akin to the 'manifestation of gods...a manifestation of their existence'.[104]

The colony becomes a privileged site for the study of the relationship between the foundational and normative violence, with both co-existing in a shared temporality rather than in a sequential manner, as the terms may suggest. In fact, when the state of emergency was imposed in large parts of colonial India after 1919, colonial rule had already been established and sustained for over 150 years. Moments of fear and vulnerability force the state to expose the 'dirty secret' of its own origin by setting aside normative legal procedures to institute a regime of direct and arbitrary force aimed at maintaining a fragile social bond, a violence whose memory the state otherwise continuously aims to wipe out in its normative functioning.

One can infer this from the statement given by General Dyer, the man responsible for ordering troops to fire indiscriminately at the crowds in Jalianwala Bagh. In one of the more glaring examples of the link between colonial violence and colonial vulnerability, General Dyer reiterated the logic of his actions in the following words:

> I fired and continued to fire until the crowd dispersed, and I consider this is the least amount of firing which would produce the necessary moral and widespread effect it was my duty to produce if I was to justify my action. If more troops had been at hand, the casualties would have been greater in proportion. It was no longer a question of merely dispersing the crowd, but one of producing a sufficient moral effect from a military point of view not only on those present, but more especially throughout the Punjab. There could be no question of undue severity.[105]

. Apart from revealing the cruelty of the colonial administration of law and order, what is remarkable about this statement is that this particular act of killing people was intended to have a 'moral effect from a military point of view' to pacify an insurgent Punjab, rather than to deal with the threat posed by individuals defying law Fear of colonial vengeance was the structuring principle of this violence, both for dispersing/annihilating the crowds present, as well as demoralizing anti-colonial groups throughout the province, if not the country. Thus, the public torture, humiliation and annihilation of the Indian body was a mechanism used by the colonial state for a generalized control of Indian political life. As the primary form of producing the subjection of its subjects, colonial violence suspended liberal legal notions of individual rights and responsibilities, comprehending Indian resistance through the racialized notions of 'mobs' 'frenzied' and 'fanatics', thus permitting the deployment of collective punishment.

[104] Ibid., pp. 106-109.
[105] Ibid., p. 95.

Yet, the colonial state disavowed such exceptional violence, insisting on continuing the civilizational process of disaggregating Indians into rational, individual subjects. This alternative trajectory in colonial governmentality became increasingly tied to the use of violence in shaping the individual subject. In the next section, we discuss how bodily violence became a key practice not only for inducing fear among the population, but also as a detailed pedagogical technique for producing the subject of liberalism, 'the individual'.

Mobs, Tear-Gas and The Production of the Individual

In his much celebrated essay titled 'Necropolitics', Achilles Mbembe described colonialism as constituting a vertical sovereignty that distributes communities and violence 'along the y-axis'. In a direct reference to aerial superiority, Mbembe argues that such power both allows the state to literally remain 'on top' in terms of surveillance, while also acquiring the capacity to punish entire populations in campaigns of terror unleashed from the skies.[106] This literally became the method of colonial disciplining following the riots in Punjab and the North Western Frontier Province in 1919. The first case of aerial bombardment in Colonial India occurred immediately at the end of the First World War in Gujranwala, where jets were used to silence a riotous mob the day after imperial troops had fired and killed 400 people at Jalianwala Bagh, acts that made it difficult to judge whether the war had ended or begun for the colonized world. Indeed, from only November to December 1919, The British dropped between 2.5 and 7 tonnes of bombs there every day for a full month to crush insurgencies in Waziristan.[107]

While the bombardment of the tribal regions continued periodically until 1947, these areas received another major challenge via the Air Disarmament Resolution, which was drafted at the Geneva Disarmament Conference, that prohibited the use of aerial bombardment against civilian populations. British military commanders, however, reiterated that the 'whole moral effect of air power would be destroyed' if bombing villages was to be considered equivalent to bombing civilians.[108] While denying the humanity of those living in these border regions, colonial officials also considered aerial bombardment to be a 'more humane' way of dealing with insurgent tribes as compared to sending in troops, which would cost more 'in heavy casualty lists, deaths from disease, and expense which runs into millions of pounds'.[109]

The question of 'humane' forms of violence lay at the heart of colonial attempts at allaying unruly elements. If we read this 'humanism' together with Mbembe's elucidation of vertical sovereignty, the crucial question for the state emerges to be not the literal conquering of airspace, but in finding ways to disable the mechanisms through which insurgent or frenzied violence could threaten colonial powers. In other words, the aim of such violence was to forcefully 'detach' the mob from its frenzy, to pacify it and hence, to facilitate its passage from a passionate collective to an aggregation of individuals. The introduction of tear-gas as a weapon to suppress

[106] Achilles Mbembe, 'Necropolitics', *Public Culture* 15:1 (2003), pp.28-29.
[107] Vazira Fazila-Yacoobali Zamindar, 'Altitudes of Imperialism', *The Caravan* (August 1, 2014), available at http://www.caravanmagazine.in/perspectives/altitudes-imperialism accessed 17th February 2015
[108] Zamindar, 'Altitudes of Imperialism', (2014).
[109] Zamindar, 'Altitudes of Imperialism', (2014).

popular agitation became an important example of violence that individuates. I use the debates around the use and utility of 'tear-gas' on anti-colonial crowds among colonial officials as a window for studying the pedagogical aspect of 'humane' forms of violence. As Peter Sloterdjik has argued, the creation of two distinct zones of conditioning in the same space is a gesture *par excellence* of modernity.[110] Commenting on the use of gas warfare in the First World War, Sloterdjik posits that the use of gas in combat is directed not directly at the life of the enemy, but on the climatic and atmospheric conditions inhabited by the enemy. Gas

> voids the distinction between violence against people and violence against things: it comprises a form of violence against the very human-ambient 'things' without which people cannot remain people. By using violence against the very air that groups breathe, the human being's immediate atmospheric envelope is transformed into something whose intactness or non-intactness is henceforth a question. In other words: air and atmosphere-the primary media for life, in both the physical and metaphorical sense-only became an object of explicit consideration and monitoring in domains such as aero-technics, medicine, law, politics, aesthetics and cultural theory in response to their terrorist deprivation.[111]

The conditioning of the environment and the habitat became an important site for consideration by modern states when met with the sight of the mobs. Yet, the use of tear-gas in the colonial world had a different genealogy than gas-warfare during the First World War, since it was geared not at mass annihilation, but centered on the production of docile, individual bodies.

Tear gas was first used in the British Empire in March of 1936 in the Punjabi village of Buttar a to force two 'outlaws', Ujagar Singh and Kundan Singh, out of a house where they had taken refuge, so that they could eventually be shot dead. Despite acknowledgement of technical difficulties such as blowback from the wind towards the police and leakage of cartridges in the police van, the report submitted by the superintendent of Ferozepur's police unit, H.D.M. Scott, considered the use of gas grenades and long range shells to be 'invaluable' and felt that the 'tear gas was used with excellent results' in this particular encounter.[112]

The use of tear gas had been debated for nearly a decade prior to its deployment in Buttar Bakoha, with colonial officials in Cairo, Palestine and Punjab taking particular interest in convincing Westminster of the advantages of using tear gas, particularly as a more humane way of controlling mob violence than bullets.[113] Yet, there remained nervousness regarding the use of tear gas on protesting crowds, not least because the use of gas had become synonymous with carnage during the First World War. Other anxieties revolved around the precise nature of the

[110] See Peter Sloterdjik, *Terror from The Air* (Cambridge/Mass.: MIT Press, 2009).
[111] Ibid., p. 25.
[112] H.D.M. Scott to Chief of Intelligence Bureau. Copy of Letter from the Government of Punjab (March 18, 1936), File 868/30, Use of Tear Gas in India, IOR/LP/PJ/12/416, The British Library Archives.
[113] Copy of Letter to Government of Punjab on Tear Gas Experimentation in Cairo (March 14, 1936), File 868/30, Use of Tear Gas in India, IOR/LP/PJ/12/416, British Library Archives.

impact of this gas on human physiology, its effects on surrounding civilian populations, particularly if they happened to be European, the high costs associated with purchasing this equipment from US firms, and the potential blowback toward the police depending on the direction of the wind.[114]

None of the colonies were keen to be the first ones to pull the trigger because of such fears. Indeed, in experiments conducted on Indian constables at the police training school at Phillaur, Col. D. R. Thomas, the chemical examiner for the Government of Punjab, stated that he was 'struck' by 'the lack of gas control'.

> The gas was rapidly carried away by air currents from the scene of action, not so much along the ground but invariably to an altitude where its effect was lost. I would suggest that the density or weight of the gas was at fault when compared with that of the surrounding atmosphere.[115]

If the relationship between the 'gas blanket' and the surrounding atmosphere was one major reason for the use of tear gas, which was otherwise deemed 'a useful auxiliary for Police purposes in India', the report recommended the following precaution.

> What is really required is a blanket or a curtain of gas which would persist in the crowd, and when the crowd has dispersed would fall down and not penetrate into the houses of innocent people and inconvenience women and children. I firmly believe that on this factor depends the success of otherwise of the use of tear gas for the dispersal of mobs in the streets and village squares.[116]

Such capacity to break down the very possibility of cohesive action by the mobs becomes plausible only when a line of demarcation can be established between the 'gassed area' and the 'air-conditioned zone' free from such effects. It is for this purpose that a military document produced for the 'tactical employment' of tear gas on rioting mobs recommended the use of gas masks while launching these in order to gain a tactical advantage over the assembled crowds.[117] If a passionate attachment as compared to a reasoned interest is what divided fanaticism from rationality, the use of tear gas, with its focus on building an atmospheric 'curtain' aimed to impair the sensory organs from where the frenzied passion of the natives arises.

All these details are geared towards transforming the haunting figure of the mob into an aggregation of docile individuals, while amassing the collective strength of the colonial state. Jodi Dean has recently argued that the central function of ideology under modern capitalism is to produce individual subjects through a process of detachment from the crowds. She argues that

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[114] Ibid., pp. 3-4.

[115] Copy of report on Tear Gas Demonstration, at the Police Training School, Phillaur, by col. D.R. Thomas, O.B.E., M.B., I.M.S., Chemical examiner to Government, Punjab, Lahore (January 18, 1936), File 868/30, Use of Tear Gas in India, IOR/LP/PJ/12/416, The British Library Archives.

[116] Ibid., p. 2.

[117] Report on Tactical Employment of Tear Gas, Public and Judicial Department, Punjab, Lahore (June 22, 1936), File 868/30, Use of Tear Gas in India, IOR/LP/PJ/12/416, The British Library Archives.

Althusser's conception of 'hailing' is better understood as a process of separation from the crowds, a form of isolation that has the function of demarcating concrete, identifiable individuals from the anonymous crowds. A policing tactic widely used during the May '68 riots in Paris, the hail was used to not only identify individual protestors, but also to imprison them. For Dean, the individual, when removed from the crowds and denied the emancipatory political possibilities opened up by the coming together of the latter, becomes a prisoner of the status quo. Using such instances of interpellation as a metaphor for modern ideology, Dean argues that the formation of the individual, far more than representing liberal virtues of rationality and liberty, is better understood as an imprisonment, a 'form of capture'.[118]

This framework is useful in understanding the relationship between violence and the production of the individual subject. Similarly, the function of the tear-gas was not merely negative in its ability to disperse a charged, threatening crowd, but also had a generative dimension in its capacity to individuate members of the crowd. This process is made obvious in a letter to the Secretary of State of India written by the Inspector General of the Punjab Police, in which he advocated using tear gas against a 'more determined class of rioters'. He states that

> the psychological effect in combination with the physical effect is very great at all times. The extreme and unendurable irritation to the eyes, nose and skin is combined with complete incapacity for coherent action and an overpowering desire to abandon everything in order to shield the eyes and escape from the gassed areas...it breaks the cohesion of a crowd, reducing it from a dangerous unit with a common and constructive objective to disorganized collection of individuals with nothing but the negative objective of the personal escape from the gas...The tactical principle underlying the action of military force in civil military disturbances is exploitation of the lack of cohesion which is characteristic of a mob to effect dispersion, thus relieving the menace of assembled opposition.[119]

This form of 'dispersion' became a common method used in colonial police manuals to describe the eventual goal of any police action against mobs. We are here presented with a process of transformation, minutely studied in its scientific detail, from a crowd passionately attached to its objective to a collectivity of individuals concerned with nothing but a negative interest of self-preservation within the confines of gassed area. What is remarkable is that the 'rational' subject is created not through the exercise of critical faculties in a pedagogical process, but through the disabling of the sensory organs. Similarly, the 'free' subject is not formed through voluntary decisions, but is forced to choose between self-annihilation or self-preservation through the 'terroristic' alteration of the natural habitat. In other words, the 'rational' and 'free' subject of liberalism is better read as a coerced, frightened, obedient and unthinking subject of colonial despotism.

[118]Dean, *Crowds and Party*, p. 51.

[119] Letter from IG Punjab Police to Under-secretary of State for India, Punjab, Lahore. (February 17, 1936), File 868/30, Use of Tear Gas in India, IOR/LP/PJ/12/416, The British Library Archives.

This simultaneous attack on collective action and thought resulted in *the production of the liberal individual under bodily pain.* If colonial pedagogy aimed for a teleological progress towards rational, self-interested individuals, in the case of the fanatics, such an ideal type was eventually secured in the negative space of dispersion, where impairing sensory organs elevated the preservation of the individual body to the primary task for the political subject, an individualism, constructed primarily through the immediacy of pain and suffering.

Yet, the continued advancement in techniques of control did not decrease the nervousness of the colonial state regarding the growth of communism in India. In particular, the state's method of fighting political agitation through force met an impasse when faced with political opponents fraternizing neither on the basis of an instinctual frenzy, nor on an individualist interest rooted in self-preservation, but in adherence to a thoroughly articulated idea of communism. Difficulties in dealing with this novel figure of a political subject meant that despite repeated attempts to decimate communist organizations, including through the most elaborate network of surveillance deployed against any one particular organization during colonial rule, communism always, in a begrudging acknowledgement by H. Williamson, ' like it makes an immediate comeback...a resilience worthy of a better cause'.[120] In the next section, we discuss colonial panic around its failure to nominate this novel figure of politics, one that it tried to grasp through the imprecise term of a 'foreign conspiracy'.

Foreign Conspiracy

Since at least the early 20th century, the British Empire had been closely monitoring the activities of Indian radicals in exile. The Ghadar Party, formed in North America in 1913, was one of the most significant attempts to forge a political platform for anti-colonial activists in the Indian diaspora. Spanning work over 4 continents with a particularly powerful base in North America and Europe, the Ghadar Party became a major vehicle for conducting anti-British activities in both India and abroad.[121] Similarly, Anushulan Party, a Bengali militant organization, capitalized on its links in the Far East to procure arms and literature for conducting an armed struggle against the British. The Caliphate Movement, with its rhetoric of pan-Islamic solidarity, coupled with rising 'restlessness' amongst the Muslim tribes of the North Western Frontier Province, only accentuated the vulnerability felt by the Government of India over a 'foreign plot' against colonial rule.

Enseng Ho, in his illuminating study of the politics of diasporic communities, argues that due to their global resonance, ideologies such as communism and Islamism were able to utilize their unmoored geography as a tactical advantage over imperialism.

[120] Williamson, *India and Communism*, pp. 208-209.
[121] Ramnath, *Haj to Utopia*, pp. 1-16.

> Internationalization of anti-colonialism achieved what a spatially less ambitious push could not: anti-imperialism, a clear view of the beast, the full elephant of empire instead of merely one of its four colony-legs touched by the blind.[122]

This gaze from the outside onto the 'full elephant of empire' meant that 'viewing from the top' was no longer the monopoly of colonial regimes. The ability of anti-colonial political actors 'for geographical mobility often meant crossing imperial and departmental jurisdictions' from where they appeared as 'sophisticated like empire itself, and enough so to represent a potential threat'.[123]

The perceived potential of Indian communists to produce an anti-colonial geography in sync with the enemies of the British Empire accentuated the threat of communism in the minds of officials in India. The Government of India took particular interest in following the debates in the Communist International regarding the British colonies. Depicting communism as a Soviet tool against the British Empire, David Petrie elucidates the centrality of British colonies in the fight against communism.

> There can be no doubt whatever that Great Britain has drawn upon herself the main force of the Bolshevik attack, partly as being the antithesis of all the Soviet system stands for, and partly as the chief bulwark against the world-wide revolution which the Bolsheviks regard as the essential condition of their ultimate success.[124]

The characterization of Indian communism as a ploy for Soviet communism set off what Chris Bayly refers to as 'knowledge-panic' within official circles.[125] A close watch was kept on any Indian entering or leaving the country, particularly keeping track of his or her possible association with communism. Pilgrimages such as the Haj provided avenues for particular anxiety, since they provided spaces where colonized subjects could meet and discuss politics outside the gaze of the state. In a report on the connections between pilgrims and Khakimoff, a Soviet agent based in Mecca, an intelligence official had the following to say:

> Reports have been received from time to time indicating the efforts made by Khakimoff. It was stated that Bokharan hajis would be used in furthering propaganda. Some of these, en route to the Hedjaz, were subsequently arrested under suspicious circumstances in Peshawar… Although there is little tangible result of Bolshevik propaganda in the Hedjaz, there are good grounds for suspicion that the Soviets are not idle… In the guise of pilgrims, visitors from India, Malaya, Java, and Russia get into touch with Khakimoff,

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[122] Enseng Ho, 'Empire Through Diasporic Eyes: A View from The Other Boat', *Comparative Studies in History and Society* 46:2 (2004), p. 241.
[123] Ibid., p. 240.
[124] Petrie, *Communism in India*, p. 6.
[125] Chris Bayly, 'Knowing the Country: Empire and Information in India', *Modern Asian Studies* 27:1 (1993), pp. 3-43.

> who rarely fails to place a member of his staff at their disposal. If there have been no tangible results, there are at least great possibilities.[126]

Threats of the 'great possibilities' emanating from such sites led the state to enact many laws aimed at hardening the borders deemed to be porous. The Passport Act (1920), for example, was one such attempt at increasing the ability of the state to 'screen elements' entering or leaving India, with particular attention paid to 'keeping undesirable aliens' (that included 'lunatics' and 'idiots' in official categorization) out of India.[127] Similarly, the increasing fear of the Indian Seamen Association, with collaboration from communists in Britain and France, entering India with 'subversive propaganda' (mostly communist publications) led to the Sea Customs Act of 1932, which gave increased powers to colonial officials to prosecute any individual found to be guilty of using the sea routes to promote anti-government activities in India.[128] The extent of colonial paranoia on the impact of possible infiltration of communists, as well as the vulnerability felt by the Empire from regions contiguous to India, can be gleaned from the panic in intelligence circles surrounding the arrival of a French family in the rather obscure valley of Kulu, near the Tibetan border, in 1931.

Professor Nicholas Roerich moved with his two sons to set up a university, but was believed to be plotting a 'communist rebellion' in the region and linking it to a future uprising in Tibet and the Sianking province of China. It was also believed by the intelligence community that Roerich was preparing to exploit a popular myth prevalent in the Kulu Valley and Tibet on the return of the Buddha to free them from foreign rule, a role that would be played by Roerich's son. Thus, by taking advantage of the 'illiteracy' and 'superstitious' beliefs of the people in the region, the Roerichs would have begun a communist conflagration that could potentially spread throughout the region, including China, Afghanistan, and eventually engulfing India.[129]

> The highly suspicious activities of Professor Roerich clearly indicate a larger ploy to promote communist propaganda and help establish a Soviet stronghold in Asia. All of this might seem like wishful thinking on the part of some highly imaginative communists, but nothing can be dismissed as outside the realm of the possible regarding communist intrigue, especially when it has the complete backing of the Soviet Union.[130]

This leap from suspicious activities of a family to a concrete and achievable plan for global revolution is symptomatic of the way the colonial state depicted, and often exaggerated, the latent power of communism. Such attribution of global power to small, mobile groups by the state resembles what Arjun Appadurai has termed the 'fear of small numbers'. Appadurai argues that vulnerable groups in small numbers are often seen by majority groups and the state as connected to supra-national networks into which these groups can tap for social advancement

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[126] Petrie, *Communism in India*, pp. 199-203.
[127] 'The India Passport Act, 1920', in *The Indian Code, Government of India, Ministry of Law* (Delhi: Manager of Publications, 1955).
[128] Williamson, *India and Communism*, p. 125.
[129] Ibid., pp. 49-52.
[130] Ibid., p. 52.

and political mileage. Groups with small numbers no longer appear as weak, as connections in wider global networks make them seem allied with forces much more powerful than the nation-state. In the context of neoliberal India, this imagined reversal of power between majority and minority communities opens up space for resentment against the latter, which is accused of being part of a global conspiracy against the nation, a gap is often filled through acts of violence.[131]

In the colonial setting, we witness a similar fear of small groups connected with larger international players, albeit without the majoritarian anxieties characteristic of the post-colonial nation-state. From the Government of India's own estimates, even by the middle of the 1930s, communist organizations could boast a combined membership of only 2,000 people.[132] The menace of communism did not only stem from the lure of Indian fanaticism, but also from its ability to evoke sympathy and solidarity globally. The struggle against Indian communism became synonymous with the global fight against the Soviet Union, rendering the bodies of Indian communists a space for inflicting defeat on global communism. Justifying the persecution of four communists in the Cawnpore Conspiracy Case, 1924, the Governor of Punjab, Hailey, declared that the necessity of imprisoning these communists arose due to the need to check the activity of the USSR in India.

> As Home Member, I undertook that prosecution, not so much for the sake of punishing the people concerned, three-quarters of whom were really rabbits, but in order to warn people in India of what was happening, and if possible, to prove to the Third International and its friends that it was no use wasting money on their agents.[133]

Petrie went on to suggest that the 'hatred of British rule means Bolsheviks will also have traitors in India willing to help these outsiders', implying that Indian communists were traitors due to their support to 'outsiders'.[134] The accusations of 'treason' against Indian communists is hard to digest, considering that they were being levelled by (British) colonial officials. Yet, I argue that the source of this anxiety was the colonial state's inability to grasp the persistence of a political community formed under the sign of an Idea, and sustained through a common commitment. A state that had mastered the art of dispersing, organizing, reshaping and annihilating bodies, became vulnerable when confronted with a physically dispersed but ideologically cohesive enemy, a conceptual foreignness when viewed from the disciplinary lens of the colonial state.

We see such sentiment most clearly in colonial renditions of the threat posed by communism to the established order. For example, in the Meerut Conspiracy Case (discussed below), the judges emphasized the threat posed by communist thought to existing social relations, asserting that communism was unlawful since it wanted the 'Destruction of the British and Indian Middle

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131 Arjun Appadurai, *Fear of Small Numbers: An Essay on the Geography of Anger* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), pp.79-84.

132 Williamson, *India and Communism*, pp. 10-15.

133 Quoted in Sharma, *Radical Politics*, p. 26.

134 Petrie, *Communism in India*, p. 321.

classes'.[135] Similarly, while government officials proposed the amelioration of the peasantry's condition as a way of avoiding unrest, they felt the 'trouble' began with communists when they tried to make the peasant 'think too much of himself'. In another example, colonial officials thought one of the most disturbing facts about a strike in Calcutta in 1931 was the sight of students from 'respectable families' standing in solidarity with striking coolies, a form of 'vandalism' not suited to students. [136]

In each of these instances, colonial anxiety emanates from the discrepancy in the assigned roles of social groups and their practices induced by communist ideology, whether in the alleged 'destruction' of the middle classes, or in the gesture of a defiant peasant 'thinking too much of himself' or in the act of students departing from the norms of their 'respectable families' to identify with striking coolies. The ability of ideology to produce such dislocations between social being and political subjectivity prompted the colonial state to move beyond the body and devise a strategy to discipline the realm of ideas. The contestation over the presence, proliferation and prohibition of ideas became a central battlefield between colonial officials and anti-colonial militants, as we discuss below.

Beyond the Body: Suppressing an Idea

By the early 1930s, the Government of India had moved towards recognizing the legitimacy of trade union activity within the ambit of the law. Similarly, spontaneous protests in of themselves were no longer the main cause of concern for the state, beyond the usual administrative challenge of maintaining law and order in the short-term. Hence, the depiction of labour activity as a banality was a common feature of intelligence reporting on colonial unrest, as is witnessed in the following report on a strike in Quetta in 1936.

> Labour unrest has also occurred at Quetta, where, on May 1st, some 8,000 carpenters, masons and labourers, dissatisfied with revised rates of pay and the introduction of longer hours of work for the summer season, suddenly downed tools. This strike, however, appears to have been entirely non-political in origin and was quickly settled on the intervention of the local civil authorities.[137]

The 'non-political' nature of the strike consisted in its spontaneity, an act that in earlier years the entire edifice of colonial rule, but here was reduced to an affair 'quickly settled' by the local administration. Such a distinction between the spontaneous and the 'political' was often made in intelligence reports to designate legitimate and subversive forms of labour activity. 'Politics' and 'genuine demands' were to be differentiated, a characterization that had a major impact on political thought in India, as we shall discuss later.

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[135] Meerut Conspiracy Judgement: Trial (April, 1933) File 59 (C)/28 Part 2, Meerut Conspiracy Case, IOR/L/PJ/12/333, The British Library Archives.

[136] Williamson, *India and Communism*, p. 77.

[137] Extracts from Weekly Report of the Director, Intelligence Bureau, Home Department, Government of India, Simla (30th March, 1935), File 230/235, Weekly Report of the Director, Intelligence Bureau, IOR/L/PJ/12/481, The British Library Archives.

The difference between what is authorized and what is illegal is made more explicit in the following reports produced by intelligence agencies that focus on communist 'infiltration' of the labour movement.

> The Cawnpore strike was brought about by communist agitators. These agitators, recently released from jail on the cases against them under section 108, Criminal Procedure Code, being withdrawn have made the most of their opportunities, and the situation has rapidly passed from bad to worse. Control seems to have passed completely out of the hands of legitimate labour leaders, and the avowed intention of the communists to bring about a general strike in all the mills is not far from being realized.[138]

A similar distinction between *legitimate* trade unionists and *professional* agitators is made clearer in the following report on a strike in Calcutta in 1937.

> In Calcutta and its neighborhoods… sporadic strikes continue. A notable feature of the dispute is the increasing number of instances in which the stimulating of disaffection among workers in key positions is made the means of enforcing idleness upon hundreds dependent on their output. These tactics represent a new departure in Indian strike technique and are part of a plan drawn up by the professional agitators, most of whom are communists, for creating continual friction, in order to embarrass the local ministry. 57. 31st July 1937.[139]

In such reports, we see the emergence of distinct spheres, one belonging to immediate demands and headed by 'legitimate' trade unions or through spontaneous activity, and one belonging to a more calculated, directed and purposeful activity, led by the 'professional agitator'. If the fear of the spontaneous, frenzied mob unravelling the social bond had been haunting colonial rule for decades, in the era of mass politics, the register had been shifted to the domain of the calculating political actor who was simultaneously attached to collective action, yet was sufficiently detached to not be decimated with the withering away of the mob. It is this gap between the immediacy of the strike and the long-term commitment towards the specified goals that separated the 'non-political' trade unionist and the professional agitator, and precisely because of the latter's ability to maintain a gap between himself and his its object, it could not be dealt with using the methods of dispersal directed at pacifying frenzied mobs.

The accuracy of the colonial description of 'professional agitators' need not concern us here. For now, what is crucial is to delineate the contours of this distinction between the non-political and the political activist articulated by the state, which resonates with debates such as appearance and essence. Indeed, by the 1930s, mass protests were no longer being condemned for their mere

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[138] Extracts from Weekly Report of the Director, Intelligence Bureau, Home Department, Government of India, Simla (7th August 1937), File 230/235, Weekly Report of the Director, Intelligence Bureau, IOR/L/PJ/12/481, The British Library Archives.

[139] Extracts from Weekly Report of the Director, Intelligence Bureau, Home Department, Government of India, Simla (31st July, 1935), File 230/235, Weekly Report of the Director, Intelligence Bureau, IOR/L/PJ/12/481, The British Library Archives.

manifestation, and were instead constantly placed under a hermeneutical gaze of the state to excavate a hidden kernel behind the veil of immediacy, attempting to locate *the* Idea that made the collective appear threatening.

The Meerut Conspiracy Case, perhaps the most infamous of all the 'Bolshevik Conspiracy Cases' against communists in the 1920s and 1930s, provides a good case study for the elaboration of the threat posed by the 'communist menace'. Of the 33 men accused of engaging in a conspiracy to deprive the King of his sovereignty over India, 27 were found guilty, some of them life imprisonment.[140] One reason for the national and global uproar against the verdicts involved the duration of the trial, which dragged on for four years and became one of the longest cases in India's judicial history. Even the Under Secretary of State to India, R.T. Peel, while considering the incarceration of 'dangerous communists' as 'advantageous', admitted that the length of the trial had 'cast a major discredit upon the government'.[141] Such criticism was dismissed by the judges, stating that while the 'Indian judicial system was admittedly ponderous', this particular case took so long due to the 'very wide ramifications of the conspiracy and the bulk of papers seized. And the natural desire of the accused not to facilitate the proceedings'.[142]

When responding to claims by critics that the length of the trial was a particularly gross injustice to the six defendants, including a Briton, who were incarcerated for four years only to be acquitted by the judges, the judges blamed the accused for their own plight.

> The blame must be placed on the accused themselves, since they had caused reasonable grounds for suspicion for their association with known communists.[143]

In a language reminiscent of colonial anxieties over hygiene and contagion in India, those in close proximity to communists were viewed as possibly infected by communist ideas. If it was justified to keep the suspects imprisoned on 'reasonable' suspicion aroused through their connections with communists, it was because, much-like any individual in contact with a contagious disease, they had to be enclosed and minutely inspected before receiving clearance for resuming ordinary life in society. The disease whose spread the courts were trying to contain was the idea of communism, which, according to Petrie, had the potential to engulf the Indian masses like a 'rat that can decimate an entire population'.[144]

The language of colonial hygiene directed at communists reflected attempts by colonial officials to evict the idea of communism out of the bodies of communist activists, as well as remain vigilant to its spread. In fact, the Meerut Prisoners Committee based in London had vociferously

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[140] See Sohan Josh, *The Great Attack: Meerut Conspiracy Case* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1979).
[141] R.T. Peel to Government of India (17th August 1933), File 59 (C)/28 Part 2, Meerut Conspiracy Case, IOR/L/PJ/12/333, The British Library Archives.
[142] Meerut Conspiracy Judgement: Trial (1933), File 59 (C)/28 Part 2, Meerut Conspiracy Case, IOR/L/PJ/12/333, The British Library Archives. p. 5.
[143] Ibid., p.8.
[144] Petrie, *Communism in India*, p. 70.

condemned the sentences, since it had judged the guilt of the accused merely on the basis of a 'notional agreement', and more importantly, for their adherence to a particular ideology.[145] The emphasis on guilt based on the possession of an idea was criticized by the Manchester Guardian in the following words:

> The 26,000 documents, covering 7,500 pages of print, the readings of Lenin and Karl Marx, the quotations from the Communist Manifesto of 1848—in a word, all the matter which it is difficult to imagine any English court of law allowing even to be admitted as evidence...The other lesson is a much older lesson—old, but yet one which each country and each age must learn again for itself, that it is an evil thing to prosecute men for their opinions. The only lasting justification of democracy—that democracy which we are now trying to introduce in India—is that it has rather higher standards of liberty and tolerance than the autocratic systems. It is mainly for that reason that the Meerut trial is such an unpleasant episode in the history of British justice.[146]

The books of Marx and Lenin being referred to as reasons for prosecuting communists was one indication that the juridical system was punishing the adherence to a doctrine, an issue that became a cause of embarrassment for imperial liberalism. Criticism from a range of organizations in British society, including Labour Party MPs, trade unionists and bar associations, was serious enough for a detailed response from the judges defending their reasons for the severity of their judgement. Supplementing the extensive citation of 'subversive literature' in the judgement, the courts took recourse to using public speeches as evidence of a 'secret' conspiracy to overthrow the government, one that had been 'uncovered' through the 'diligent efforts of the police and our intelligence services'.[147] The absurdity of such statements was repeatedly invoked by the international press as well as the accused in their polemics with the judges when they asked the latter to clarify why public speeches were deemed to be secret.[148] It was another case in which the state apparatus was forced into a position where it needed to create a disjunct between its own claims and practice; in other words, it could not acknowledge that the accused were being tried for the sole purpose of possessing a prohibited idea.
Responding to such criticism, the judges elaborated their position in the following words:

> It is apparent from these few extracts alone that the members of the Communist Party of India, who subscribe to this programme of the communist international, have undoubtedly formed a revolutionary body with the professed object of overthrowing the present order of society and bringing about the complete independence of India by means of armed uprising of the proletariat...The contention of the learned advocate for the appellants that such an objective is a distant aim to be realized in the unknown far-off future cannot be accepted for a moment. No doubt the communists would, as a tactical

[145] Meerut Prisoners Release Committee to Members of Bar (18th July, 1933), File 59 (C)/28 , Meerut Conspiracy Case, IOR/L/PJ/12/339, The British Library Archives.
[146] 'The Meerut Trial', *Manchester Guardian* (10th June, 1931), p. 8.
[147] Meerut Conspiracy Judgement: Trial (1933), File 59 (C)/28 Meerut Conspiracy Case, IOR/L/PJ/12/333, The British Library Archives, p. 5.
[148] Josh, *The Great Attack*, p. 75.

> measure, begin with the preliminary stages in the first instance, but whenever conditions become favourable they would adapt themselves to those conditions and resort to armed revolution, if necessary. Nowhere in the programme is it suggested that such an armed revolution is not to be brought about within any period of time. The question is entirely one of opportunity and the opportunity has to be seized and not lost sight of as soon as it occurs.[149]

It was no longer important to prove that communists had indeed indulged in any particular acts to further their intentions. Instead, the very act of accepting a 'revolutionary' ideology placed communists in excess of the legal framework, from where the distinction between a past or future crime was obliterated. Commenting further on the temporality of the crime, the judges also dismissed the defendants' claim that the speeches of the accused were not referring to the overthrow of King George's sovereignty, but that of an unspecified future sovereign, stating

> This argument overlooks the fact that in law the King never dies. It is enough for the prosecution to prove that there was a conspiracy to deprive the King-Emperor of the sovereignty of British India. It is not necessary to show further that the conspirators were conspiring for such deprivation to take place within the lifetime of His Majesty the present King-Emperor.[150]

Hence, the intention of ending colonial rule was declared a crime against all past and future sovereigns. Here, the metaphor of the 'waiting room of History' popularized by Dipesh Chakrabarty does not fully capture the colonial response to the threat posed by communism, since there is no claim for a movement of History in any particular direction. Instead of the 'not-yet' of colonial liberalism, we see the 'never' of colonial authoritarianism, a *perpetual present* that is constituted as the prison for the professional agitator, a space where time itself dissolves. Such a present was to be secured through constant pre-emptive vigilance against an encroaching future, one that must be 'nipped in the bud,'[151] i.e. tamed within the present.

In fighting the 'communist menace', the courts, much like the intelligence apparatus, acknowledged the distinction between a spontaneous protest and a political sphere regulated by an Idea. While the former could be tamed through the staging of spectacles and the management of an economy of pain and suffering to create docile bodies, the latter could only be fought through its containment in the present, since its being, while traversing individual bodies, always remained in excess of them. Yet, containing an Idea, for the state, which is more adept at constraining bodies, proved to be incredibly difficult, as the state repeatedly tried to quantify the threat of communist ideology. This inadequacy of elucidating the exact contours of the threat posed by communism led the state to construct the domain of the 'underground', a space of intrigue and conspiracy linked to foreign powers. The charge of a foreign conspiracy was another

[149]Meerut Conspiracy Judgement: Trial, (1933), File 59 (C)/28 Meerut Conspiracy Case, IOR/L/PJ/12/333, British Library Archives, p. 16.
[150] Ibid., p. 9.
[151] Ibid., p. 12.

attempt by the state to embody the communist threat, a threat that was immanent rather than external to colonial India.

Conclusion: Capitalism, Colonialism and Political Thought

In this chapter, I have explained why communism appeared as a significant threat to the British Empire despite its relatively small numerical strength. By situating the fear of crowds as a primary vehicle for retributive colonial violence, I argued that the alleged fanaticism of the Indian mind prompted detailed mechanisms for demobilizing the crowds, and for producing a detached individual under bodily pain. Further, the figure of the communist appeared particularly menacing for colonial rule because it could not be subdued through conventional methods of dispersal utilized to control crowds, since the politics of the 'professional agitator' appeared to be calculated and durable as compared to the momentary emergence of a protesting mob. Finally, I have tried to set the premise for interrogating the history of communism as an idea, since such history was not merely an abstract debate among theorists, but had very real ramifications for colonial government and for partisans of the communist movement, as the actors involved in the Meerut Conspiracy Case demonstrate.

Yet, so far I have left untouched an analysis of the specific form of Indian capitalism, a specificity that for Andrew Sartori constitutes the structuring principle for political thought.[152] In my work, however, I stress how political thought, while operating within the specificity of historically constituted social relations, is incongruous with capital and the state, and is best understood as a space of relative autonomy. Similarly, politics cannot fully synchronize with a social movement; indeed, the latter is a provocation for thought, but it becomes political only when the logic of the momentary insurrection is separated from the logic of the state, and is sustained through an interplay between conceptual elucidation and the discipline of a fraternity. In other words, it is the elaboration of a specific Idea in the midst of a partisan struggle that provides an autonomous space for political thought. In the next chapter, we will further explore such themes, as well as examine the temporality of communism in India through reading M.N. Roy's polemics as an encounter between communism and anti-colonialism.

[152] Sartori, *Bengal in Global Concept History*, pp. 1-24.

Chapter 3

Freedom from Necessity: M.N. Roy and The Politics of Volition

Introduction

In an open letter to the European working class movement in 1919, M.N. Roy, Abani Mukherjee and Santi Devi (Evelyn Roy), declared 'The time has come for the Indian revolutionists to make a statement of their principles'. As the first programmatic articulation of communist thought in India, aptly titled 'An Indian Communist Manifesto', the authors emphasized the global historical significance of the entry of the popular classes into Indian politics, a fact that they noted had been ignored by radical political groups in the European world. Rejecting all teleological assumptions that explained colonial politics in terms of the impossible task of 'catching up' with the West, the open letter stressed the need to rethink communist thought in a way that placed the colonized world at the centre of the struggle for global political and social emancipation.

> The tremendous strength which imperialistic capitalism derives from extensive colonial possessions rich in natural resources and cheap human labour must no longer be ignored. So long as India and other subject countries remain helpless victims of capitalist exploitation and the British capitalist is sure of his absolute mastery over millions and millions of human beasts of burden, he will be able to concede the demands of British trade unionists and delay the proletarian revolution which will overthrow him [...] Cease to fall victims to the imperialist cry that the masses of the East are backward races and must go through the hell fires of capitalistic exploitation from which you are struggling to escape.[153]

In a constitutive tension between *inheritance* and *novelty*, the manifesto questioned normative political categories of Marxism, simultaneously placing mass politics in India within the tradition of the international labour movement. More than three decades later, however, Roy was to become a major critic of communist politics, describing Marxism as inadequate for the 'moral crisis' facing humanity.

> A re-examination of the different contemporary political theories [...] reveals the disconcerting fact that in their practice there is little fundamental difference between them, because capture of power [...] is the common postulate of all political theories. The ensuing scramble for power has led to a progressive demoralisation of public life […]. Socialists and later on Communists maintained that economic reconstruction on the basis of common ownership was the condition for human development. The result has been the eclipse of the individual by collectivities; totalitarianism and dictatorship in political practice have been the corollary to collectivist social philosophies.[154]

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[153] M.N. Roy, 'An Indian Communist Manifesto', in *Selected Works of M.N. Roy*, ed. Sibnarayan Ray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), vol. I, p. 163.

[154] M.N. Roy, *Politics, Power and Parties* (New Delhi: Ajanta Publications, 1960), pp. 19-20.

For Roy, the journey from revolutionary nationalism to communism and finally to radical humanism was not only his personal story, but also was indicative of the biography of an era's slide into pervasive cynicism skeptical of attempts at significant transformation from an oppressive situation, lest it reproduce at an even grander scale the very authoritarian structures one claims to be fighting.

> It was experience, gained in the various attempts at improving the lot of Indian humanity, which led me step by step to the realisation of the fallacies and inadequacies of old beliefs, ideas and ideals. It was not the result of my personal experience alone; it was deduced from a generalisation of human experience of an entire period.[155]

These words, delivered at a lecture in 1948, reflected Roy's disillusionment with the ossified and paranoid bureaucracies of the socialist states, with whom he enjoyed an intimate relationship before being expelled from the Comintern in 1929, and also with the post-colonial nation state, which despite its formal freedom, stood 'baffled and frustrated' in its aim to create an egalitarian society.[156] The crisis of this period was not merely related to the presence of oppressive structures, but was more closely tied to a condition in which all forms of thought and politics that could potentially pave a way out of the contemporary situation became obscured. This impasse of political thought in the face of global catastrophes and the disorientation of emancipatory politics led Roy to assert

> [T]he whole civilized world is finding itself in an insecure and unsettled mood; cherished ideals seem to be crumbling, the present is gloomy and the future looks dark.[157]

This remarkably pessimistic tone corresponded with the end of a political sequence following the encounter between communism and anti-colonialism in the early half of the twentieth century, an encounter whose primary theoretician was Roy himself.[158] The inability of History to progressively lead toward social justice led Roy to conduct an all pervasive critique of existing political philosophy, leaving the question of adequate political intervention in a state of suspension.

> Those who want to solve the problem of the individual's relation with society should apply themselves to the task of making more and more individuals conscious of their potentialities, convincing them that by birth they are capable of rational judgement, and therefore, also of moral judgement, and therefore of being free. A society composed of a significant number of such men, will be a rational and moral society.[159]

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[155] Ibid., p.2.

[156] Ibid., p. 86.

[157] Ibid., p. 86.

[158] I use the word "sequence" to group together a form of political ideas and actions formulated to address specific questions faced by emancipatory politics in particular time periods. I have a more detailed discussion on sequencing politics in the introductory chapter of my dissertation. Also see Alain Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis* (London: Verso, 2010).

[159] Roy, *Politics, Power and Parties*, p. 18.

The displacement of political questions to moral concerns emerged as a major source of criticism of communist politics in the twentieth century, with the term 'totalitarianism' denoting this shift from the political to the ethical.[160] This ethical turn, in its various guises, proposed two primary alternatives for moving beyond the violent impasse of communist thought in the twentieth century. The first consisted of elevating the protection of individuals from the excesses of the state as the primary ethical responsibility, leaving the question of building alternative structures in a state of suspension, especially since this mode of politics often invokes statist intervention to guarantee protection.[161] The second response involves the unbridled celebration of the immediacy of social movements, condemning attempts to clarify their theoretical stakes or to unify their actions as 'outside interventions' by an 'intellectual vanguard', interventions that by default lead to totalitarianism in this theoretical universe. In such a framework, we end up in a nihilistic cycle of extreme enthusiasm generated by the onset of a movement, followed by disappointment and despondency in the wake of its dispersal, with no articulation between these two moments.[162]

Radical humanism, with its emphasis on protecting individuals against violations by the state, and a greater role on 'educating' the masses rather than preparing for subjective interventions, also aimed to move outside the conflictual terrain constitutive of politics to pedagogical and ethical concerns for overcoming the conjunctural impasse. The inability of this doctrine to gain serious purchase in the Indian political imaginary stemmed from its withdrawal from the immediacy of political struggles underway in post-colonial India, with the search for quasi-divine 'moral individuals' replacing the need for calculated interventions in a heterogeneous social landscape. The search for purity was the most radical symptom of the defeat of emancipatory politics, to the point of putting into question the very possibility of political interventions.

Roy's critiques of communism, however, continue to speak to the global, not to mention Indian, disillusionment with Marxist orthodoxies and the logical slide into totalitarianism of a politics aiming to present volition as History. Keeping in line with the framework of this dissertation, I revisit Roy's articulation of the relationship between communism and anti-colonialism, while also emphasizing the untapped resources of this encounter that could replace the spectral presence of disappointment and fear with political and analytical clarity. In this study, I conduct a close historical tracing of Roy's debates in the Comintern, including his theoretical and political innovations, and posit the relationship between History and volition as the precise point of impasse in his thought. Consequently, I aim to recover the possibility of political interventions

[160] For a classic rendition of this argument, see Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century* (London: Vintage, 2000).

[161] Dipesh Chakrabarty advocates this position in his calls for avoiding ethics' subsumption under politics. See Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Habitations of Modernity: Essays in the Wake of Subaltern Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002). For a critique of this position, see Wendy Brown, 'Human Rights and The Politics of Fatalism', *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 103:2/3 (2004), pp. 451-463.

[162] For a sustained critique of the desire of a politics without such mediation, see Jodi Dean, *The Communist Horizon* (London: Verso, 2012).

freed from a basis in historical necessity, a possibility that I locate within the fissures of the Comintern's thinking on the 'Colonial Question'.

Further, I distance myself from obituaries of the Left that elevate 'failure' as the only standpoint for reading communist thought in the twentieth century. Such wholesale rejection of this political sequence compels us to lose the thread constitutive of political debates in this period. On the one hand, it fuels contemporary nihilism by advocating a synchronization of political thought with the dominant, and increasingly authoritarian, political frameworks of our time. On the other hand, it produces a Left in search of a pristine politics, above and beyond all existing contradictions, with the anxiety of avoiding authoritarian structures eclipsing the goal of gaining relevance in the socio-political landscape. In either case, such an approach is unable to grasp the contradictory movement of political thought in the twentieth century, and consequently incapable of developing theoretical tools for overcoming the political paralysis in the wake of the defeat of emancipatory projects.

Instead, I argue for reading this historical sequence as an unfinished task, with undercurrents and missed encounters that cannot only provide us with a novel lens for reading this political moment, but can also aid us in tracing latent trajectories that could overcome its impasse. Therefore, while Radical Humanism appears as symptomatic of a suspension of politics in the aftermath of defeat, I argue that Roy's identification with humanism was only one of the multiple possibilities his interventions in the Comintern opened up for rethinking political subjectivity, with alternative paths still waiting to be utilized in novel encounters. In other words, I read his writings in the Comintern through Walter Benjamin's suggestion of making 'the continuum of history explode' in order to set free the unrealized potential of this dialogue and engage with it as a work in progress, rather than condemning it as a relic from a misguided past.[163]

Such an approach differs from critiquing political thought through normative frameworks (whether Marxist, Nationalist or Liberal) and from conscious attempts at distorting history to present a heroic figure rather than one mired in contradictions. Instead, I conduct a close reading of Roy's political writings to tease out the various possibilities within his polemics in the Communist International, particularly on questions of political subjectivity, History and volition, in order to recover the underlying trajectory of his thought that can speak to the present. Roy's *oeuvre* presents an ideal site for interrogating the tension between necessity and will, since his interlocutors were part of incongruous political traditions, ranging from anti-colonial nationalists, such as Aurobindo Ghosh and Mahatma Gandhi, to communist leaders, such as Lenin, Trotsky and August Thalmier. This intellectual promiscuity propelled Roy to sculpt ideas inherited from each tradition in unprecedented and improvisatory ways. Before we begin our discussion of Roy's life and work, however, let us briefly clarify the theoretical and political stakes of our study.

Finally, I do not intend to posit Roy as a thinker who uninterruptedly moved toward a newer conception of political subjectivity without imbibing on prevalent Marxist orthodoxy. I

[163] Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', in Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* (Berlin: Schocken, 1969).

categorize his work as an unfinished task, implying that a parallel trajectory persisted within his thought, one that conformed to the sociologically driven view of revolutionary change. This contradictory juxtaposition is itself a product of the globally uneven economic and political landscape in which political ideas circulate, leaving old and new methodologies anchored in the same instance. Even the most polemical texts by Roy are marked by a torsion produced by the superposition of these two trajectories and invite an interventionist reading that can delineate the contours of each to study their specific development, a task I carry out in this essay.

Roy's Encounter with Communism: A Brief History

Kris Manjapra, in his illuminating study of Roy's political thought, places him as a major figure in 'cosmopolitan thought-zones', intermediary spaces between worlds without belonging to any, which emerged around the world in the wake of the First World War. Such spaces hosted conversations amongst political thinkers from incongruous backgrounds without being constrained by the apparatus of the colonial state or the disciplining pressures of anti-colonial movements.[164] In this section, I briefly describe Roy's remarkable journey from nationalism to communism, with a slightly different emphasis. My aim is to delineate the trajectory that shaped the possibility of an encounter between anti-colonialism and Marxism and allowed Roy to place them into a mutually productive relationship, rather than as parallel or divergent methods of conceiving political subjectivity.

Roy began his political career as a young anti-colonial activist in the Swadeshi movement that began in 1903 against the British plans to partition Bengal. The Swadeshi movement was inspired greatly by intellectuals such as Vivikenada and Aurobindo Gosh who were interested in producing a disjunct from the quotidian temporality of the colonial world. In one of the earliest examples of the idea of a 'vanguard' in the anti-colonial struggle, Swadeshi intellectuals emphasized the need for bodily and spiritual discipline to build autonomous subjects who could mediate between the laws of the colonial world and the 'anxious desire' of the colonized to burst open the window of an oppressive colonial temporality.[165]

The 16-year-old Roy, then known as Narendra Nath Bhattacharya, joined the movement as a school boy, and began leading student strikes and campaigns for boycotting Western products in India. The movement eventually dwindled under severe colonial crackdown, and Roy was arrested in the Howrah Conspiracy Case in 1910. Charged with 'conspiring to deny His Majesty Sovereignty over his Indian lands', Roy was acquitted the following year. With the subsiding of the mass movement, a core group of activists, operating around the Anushilan and Juguntar parties, resorted to sporadic acts of terror, such as assassinating colonial officials.[166]

In an attempt to re-think the relationship between mass politics, organizational forms and violence, Roy joined Jatindranath Mukherjee, one of the leaders of the revolutionary movement

[164] Manjpara, *M.N. Roy*, pp. 1-30.
[165] Ibid., pp. 5-25.
[166] John Haithcox, *Communism and Nationalism in India: M.N. Roy and Comintern Policy, 1920-1939* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), pp. 5-6.

in Bengal, in his efforts to bring together different revolutionary factions to build a province-wide armed revolt of the popular classes. The young Roy was sent to Jakarta, Indonesia (known at the time as Batavia under Dutch rule), to meet the German consul general to finalize plans for smuggling armaments into India. These weapons were to be stored in the forests of Sundarban, from where they were to be distributed to different units of the Juguntar Party in Bengal in preparation for an eventual march on Calcutta.[167]

The British intelligence discovered the plan and raided the office of a bogus firm, Harry and Sons, created to receive German funds. While a number of leading members of the 'conspiracy' were arrested, Jatin, the architect of the plan, was killed in an encounter with the police and the military on the 10th of September, 1915. Further, a large number of arrests and killings of dissidents was carried out across India, hence diminishing the prospects of a popular, all-India revolt against the Empire.[168] Roy was in Java for the procurement of arms when he heard news of the colonial intelligence began to crackdown on suspected members of the Juguntar Party, and he decided against immediately returning to India.

After a dizzying journey that took him across Japan, Korea, and China, Roy obtained a visa to the United States under the alias of Father Charles Allen Martin, a Roman Catholic priest who was travelling from the West Indies to Paris to pursue theological studies. On 15th June 1916, Roy, escaping the British authorities across continents, arrived in San Francisco, the hotbed of anti-colonial militancy, particularly amongst migrants from colonial Punjab. Removed from the immediacy of struggle and the all-consuming need to evade colonial authorities, the US provided a relatively relaxed space for Roy to re-think his politics after the demoralizing debacles of the revolutionary underground in India. Roy began engaging with a broad range of perspectives critical of colonialism, including the ideas of the then US President, Woodrow Wilson, as well as a number of anti-colonial and socialist writers.[169] He also met and married Evelyn Trent, a radical graduate student at Stanford University, who would later co-author 'An Indian Communist Manifesto' with Roy under the pseudonym of Santi Devi.

Roy and Evelyn moved to New York in 1917, and hosted a number of anti-colonial Indians visiting the US. An event in honor of Lajpat Rai in New York led Roy to seriously question the limitations of anti-colonial nationalism. When confronted with questions from the audience on what his vision was for an independent India, particularly on how he differentiated between foreign and indigenous forms of oppression, Lajpat's reply that 'it was better to be oppressed by one's brother as compared to a stranger' left Roy unsatisfied.[170] In search of ideas that could unhinge the pursuit of justice from particularized identities or familial linkages, Roy became a regular visitor to the New York Public Library, where he began a systematic study of the ideas of Karl Marx.

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[167] Ibid., p. 6.
[168] Ibid., p. 6.

[169] Manjpara, *M.N. Roy*, pp. 30-35.
[170] Quoted in Haithcox, *Communism and Nationalism*, p. 7.

This period of reflection and exploration was interrupted as Woodrow Wilson announced the US entry into the First World War on the side of Allies. One of the consequences of this decision was the immediate clampdownon anti-British activities in the US, with Wilson advising Indians to accept a peaceful imperial relationship with Britain. Not for the first time in his life, Roy found himself on the wrong side of the law, as US authorities launched a ferocious clampdown on pacifists, socialists and anti-colonial activists.[171] An arrest warrant was issued against Roy for participating in a German-funded conspiracy against Britain and for violating US neutrality laws, forcing him and Evelyn to abscond to Mexico City in June 1917.

Roy's experience in Mexico City radically re-oriented his political thinking and propelled him to prominence in global revolutionary politics. The city was still grappling with the effects of the Mexican revolution of 1911 and the subsequent civil war, and was a major site for anti-colonial activists from around the globe, including a dense network of Indian nationalists. Within a few months of his stay in Mexico City, a time he would later describe as 'the most memorable period of his life', Roy became fluent in Spanish, writing articles for the radical journal El Pueblo, and became part of the inner circle of President Venustiano Carranza.[172] Carranza had assumed power in 1915 after the departure of Francisco Madero, and held anti-American views due to the increasing US interference in Latin America. Germany was keen to exploit the rift between Mexico and the US, and used Mexico City as a conduit to support anti-Entente activities in the region, a plot that played a significant role in the US decision to enter the First World War.

German agents in Mexico City, many of whom were familiar with Roy from his stays in Shanghai and Jakarta, facilitated his entry into the inner circle of Carranza, positioning him as a major figure in Mexican radical circles, which eventually led to him becoming the general secretary of the Mexican Socialist Party. By this point, however, Roy was desperate to move out of German patronage, not as a result of an inclination for nationalist politics, but rather because of his discomfort with the direction the nationalist movement had taken, which he criticized both for its questionable alliances in the global arena and its inability to offer a socio-political alternative to colonial rule. His meeting with Borodin, the Soviet Ambassador who came to know of Roy through his articles in the English-language section of the newspaper *El Heraldo de Mexico*, eventually made it possible for him to move out of the German-backed anti-colonial circles and closer to communist activists. After having failed to convince the Socialist Party to rename itself as the communist party, Roy led a small breakaway faction to form the Communist Party of Mexico, a move supported by Borodin to facilitate Roy's entry into the second Communist International meeting as a full delegate representing a Soviet recognized party.[173]

Roy's personal trajectory, as well the impasse of the anti-colonial movement, had instilled his interest in communist ideas. Equally uneven and unforeseen developments opened European Marxism to its encounter with the anti-colonial movement. At the end of the First World War, Europe witnessed a series of popular working class uprisings that were at least partly inspired by

[171] See Adam Tooze, *The Deluge: The Great War, America and the Remaking of the Global Order, 1916-1931* (London: Penguin, 2014).
[172] Haithcox, *Communism and Nationalism*, pp. 8-9.
[173] Ibid., p. 11.

the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. The popular foment, which gripped Germany, Hungary, and the Netherlands, among other countries, transformed this moment into the most extensive Europe-wide revolt since the uprisings of 1848.[174] The enthusiasm generated by these events led Trotsky, one of the leading theoreticians of the Bolsheviks, to declare that Europe was on the verge of revolution, from where the fruits of emancipation would spread to the colonial world. In his address to the first meeting of the Comintern in 1919, which was held in the midst of these upheavals in Europe, Trotsky asserted

> The workers and peasants not only of Annam, Algiers, and Bengal, but also of Persia and Armenia, will gain their opportunity of independent existence only in that hour when the workers of England and France, having overthrown Lloyd George and Clemenceau, will have taken state power into their own hands... Colonial slaves of Africa and Asia! The hour of proletarian dictatorship in Europe will strike for you as the hour of your own emancipation![175]

This is not to make the rather lazy argument that Trotsky's perception of the colony was similar to those of colonial officials, who viewed Europe as the centre for emancipation and at best could have pity for those in the colonial world. Trotsky did emphasize the uprisings in the colonial world, and the increasing integration of 'backward' countries into capitalist, and possibly, socialist relations. Yet, this brief sermon to the working classes of the colonized countries to greet the coming socialist revolutions in Europe as their own triumph is all that we hear on the colonies at the first Comintern congress. This omission can be explained partly by the missed encounter between Marx and the colonial world, and partly by the enthusiasm generated by working-class uprisings across Europe. Whatever the case, the colonized world remained significantly absent from the knowledge produced by mainstream European Marxism until the second Comintern meeting in 1920.

By the mid-1920s, the situation had changed significantly across the globe. Working-class revolts in Europe had been defeated in quick succession by the counter-offensives of European governments, while a continent-wide crackdown on communist organizations was launched.[176] Concomitantly, the end of the First World War witnessed the eruption of mass movements across the colonial world in the first tryst between colonial rule and 'popular politics'. A combination of the failure of working-class revolts in Europe, the rise of popular movements in the colonial world and a desperate search by the Soviet Union for allies outside the increasingly hostile European terrain, resulted in the increased importance of the colonial question in the Second Comintern meeting in Petrograd in July 1920.

M.N. Roy's elevation to a full delegate to the congress, despite his relatively brief acquaintance with Marxism, and an even more tenuous relationship with Mexico, the country he was representing, stemmed out of the Soviet search for allies in the non-European world. It is this

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[174] See Pierre Broue and Eric Weitz, *The German Revolution, 1917-1923* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2006).

[175] Leon Trotsky, 'Manifesto of the Communist International to the Workers of the World 1919', available at https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1924/ffyci-1/ch01.htm accessed 17th November 2014.

[176] Broué and Weitz, *The German Revolution*, pp. 817-874.

encounter, overdetermined by an impasse and an opportunity, that we now turn to in Roy's writings as a leading intellectual of the Comintern in the 1920s.

History and the Revolutionary Subject

The primary question confronting communists from the non-European world was whether their societies were 'ready' for communism, a suspicion arising out of the close tie between historical progress and revolutionary subjectivity in orthodox Marxist politics. The search for correspondence between socio-economic change and political practice had already been made tenuous in the wake of the defeats of the European working class, with the most dramatic staging of this theoretical debate between Mensheviks and Bolsheviks in Russia. Lenin, the chief architect of communist politics in the twentieth century, elevated the role of *political volition* in constructing revolutionary subjectivity, advocating the immediate seizure of state power in Russia, rather than withholding political action until society reached an 'ideal' state of socio-economic development, a strategy supported by the Mensheviks.[177] In Lenin's thought, the task of bridging the gulf between historical progression and political practice was handed to the vanguard party, a watchman that would ensure the synchronization of these two processes.[178]

If the victory of the Russian revolution opened a sequence in which the disjunct between History and politics became a cause for propelling rather than constraining the revolution, the relationship between the two terms became even more tenuous in Marxism's encounter with the colonial world. As discussed earlier, the heterogeneous forms in which capitalist modernity appeared in the colonial world intensified the lack of correspondence between sociological deduction and political subjectivity. On the other hand, the onset of the mass movement in India increased the urgency of developing new methodologies to allow for a communist intervention in the crisis, a question that placed analytical Marxism in a state of crisis. Until the second congress of the Comintern, however, Marxism remained tied to older categories that could not identify a neatly defined sociological term that could carry out its 'historical role' in the colonial situation. Roy, as an anti-colonial militant for almost two decades, persistently intervened in the Comintern proceedings to challenge the hesitation in drawing novel strategies from the uprisings in the colonial world, a fidelity to orthodoxy that he claimed was becoming an impediment for globalizing the importance of communist thought.

> While the Communist International is discussing the problem of a program it should pay serious attention to this, in view of the act that to develop the program of the International in the Eastern countries is more complicated. It is more complicated because (unfortunately it is to be confessed) our comrades of the Communist International have so far devoted very little time to the study of these questions.[179]

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[177] Sebastian Budgen, Stathis Kouvelakis and Slavoj Žižek (eds.), *Lenin Reloaded: Toward a Politics of Truth* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).

[178] For a more thorough discussion of Lenin and Mao's relationship with History, see Bosteels, 'Post-Maoism', pp. 575-600.

[179] M.N. Roy, 'Original Draft of the Supplementary Theses on the National and Colonial Question' (1919), available at https://www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/2nd-congress/ch04.htm accessed 11th October, 2014.

In the first major political statement on the colonies by the Communist International, the second Comintern congress adopted the 'Thesis on the Colonial Question' introduced by Lenin, which called for the expansion of communist politics to the colonial world and an active search for allies in the anti-colonial struggle. In a crucial intervention into this debate, Roy put forth a 'supplementary thesis' as a polemic against Euro-centric readings of the revolutionary potential in the global conjuncture. Roy argued that colonies had displaced Europe as the raw-nerve of global capitalism, allowing greater room for accommodation between labour and Capital in the metropolis.

> The Great European War and its results have shown clearly that the masses of the non-European subjected countries are inseparably connected with the proletarian movement in Europe, as a consequence of world capitalism. The fountainhead from which European capitalism draws its main strength is no longer to be found in the industrial countries of Europe, but in the colonial possessions and dependencies [...] Super-profit gained in the colonies is the mainstay of modern capitalism, and so long as the latter is not deprived of this source of super-profit, it will not be easy for the European working class to overthrow it [...] By exploiting the masses in the colonies, European imperialism will be in a position to give concession after concession to the labour aristocracy at home [...] Consequently, the Communist International must widen the sphere of its activity.[180]

This inaugural gesture of Indian communism aimed to expand the geographical coordinates of global revolution, stemming out of a need to demarcate a space for communist politics in a colonial setting. Arguing that the colonial world is a primary site for the perpetuation of global capitalist domination, Roy was not merely adding to a critical political economy whose seeds had already been laid by nationalist economists in the colonial world and the European peripheries.[181] In fact, Roy argued that colonial powers shifting the locus of exploitation to the colonial situation created a high possibility of a breakdown in the capitalist structure at its peripheral extremities, thus opening up the colonial world for political interventions.

Roy's fundamental aim was to highlight the uneven trajectory of Capital in global space, and use this very unevenness as a tool for interrupting and eventually undermining its grip on society. This dialectical approach allowed him to simultaneously maintain an internationalist position while launching a critique of the increasing docility of the labour movement in Western Europe, particularly on its silence regarding British excesses in the colonies. Roy, however, avoided an essentialist view of the English working class as inherently 'counter-revolutionary', by maintaining that 'the English proletariat is not an iota worse than the proletariat of any other country'.[182] Instead, he maintained that the English proletariat had 'deviated' from its historical role due to its development 'alongside the powerful development of British Imperialism', a crucial factor in corrupting 'the psyche and theory of the English labour movement' due to the

[180] M.N. Roy, 'Original Draft', (1919).

[181] Goswami, *Producing India*, pp. 31-72.

[182] M.N. Roy, 'Imperialist Plunder and the Corruption of the English Proletariat', in *Selected Works of M.N. Roy*, ed. Sibnarayan Ray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), vol. II, pp. 287.

ability of the British ruling class to 'make concessions' for them out of the immense wealth created from colonial plunder.[183]

Roy elevated the inability of the English working class to act as a supposed vanguard of the global revolution, beyond any racial, national or territorial prejudice, to a fundamental theoretical and political task in his polemics on colonial communism. In his report to the fifth Comintern congress in 1924, provocatively titled 'Imperialist Plunder, Corruption of the English Proletariat and Conditions of Revolution in England', Roy denounced the seduction of the British working class movement to the bourgeois order

> The English proletariat has not only not lost faith in the Labour Party and the Labour government, but it still has loyalty to them…. We must not ignore facts, and the facts are that the English proletariat is not only loyal to the labour leadership but, to a large extent, also to the bourgeois system, the democratic system.[184]

This observation was not just aimed at the reformism of the labour movement, but was also a critical appraisal of the relationship between representation and revolutionary subjectivity. For Roy, the integration of the British labour movement into the liberal-democratic system meant that its radical potential had been eclipsed by its absorption into statist forms of representation. If the classic proletariat, with its most complete historical realization in England, managed to merely find a place for itself within the prevailing norms of representation rather than acting as the 'leading edge' of a global revolution, Marxists were confronted with a situation that posed a fundamental challenge to any straightforward reading of politics via class positions.

The only way forward, according to Roy, was to view capitalism in its global totality in order to propel the English working class into revolutionary action. This required a shift away from locating political subjectivity within a historically constituted sociological term, and towards novel sites that the hegemonic order had failed to assimilate. Thus, against a politics of sociological certainty that was bound to integrate into the dominant order, Roy posited the need to search for fissures within the totality of the system that could be utilized to develop an alternative adequately removed from the ruling ideology. The colonial world, for Roy, was the point of excess whose assimilation into the bourgeois order of representation remained impossible primarily due to the intensive forms of exploitation in the colonies, an intensity that allowed Capital to accommodate the metropolitan working class. Accordingly, the English capitalists would continue to 'bribe the English labour aristocracy' to 'maintain their rule'[185] unless the colonial world became an active, if not a leading partner, in the struggle against the bourgeois order.

> When we speak of the organization of a communist party in England, we must not forget that England, i.e., the islands which form the Kingdom of Britain is merely the top of a large political, economic and financial tree. If we wish to destroy the top of a tree without

[183] Ibid., p. 288.
[184] Ibid., p. 287.
[185] Ibid., p. 288.

> giving due consideration to the extensively ramified roots which feed the top, it would be a mistake, and we would duly experience disappointment in our task.[186]

What allowed Roy to inaugurate a decisive break in Marxist theory was his rejection of examining politics as stemming directly from specific socio-economic categories. Instead, Roy located political possibilities in terms and situations that remained in excess of the prevailing norms of representation, hence securing an autonomous space for political thought outside its inscription into the existing social bond sanctioned by the state. Roy's elevation of the colonial world as the point of immanent excess within the global conjuncture would resonate with similar displacements of revolutionary subjectivity in the wake of Marxism's encounter with the non-European world, for example with Mao's positing of the peasantry as a revolutionary factor or Fanon's depiction of the lumpen proletariat as the primary vehicle for political subjectivization.[187] The common thread for all these thinkers was their refusal to read the absence of terms and sites in hegemonic frameworks as a symptom of a historical deficit, instead viewing this very lack of a stable inscription as a sign of their subversive potential, endowed with an ability to radically transform the situation in which they find themselves held in a condition of marginality.

Yet, it is important not to view this argument merely for its resonance with the school of under-development or Third World nationalism that argues for the predisposition of peripheral regions for revolutionary upheaval because of the presence of more intensive forms of exploitation. Such an approach would again tie revolutionary subjectivity to a fixed unit of measurement, in this case the degree of exploitation, ignoring the political import of Roy's arguments. Moreover, such revolutionary potential could not be produced merely in the realm of ideas. If class determinism was to be replaced by strictly de-socialized thought, for example in which Roy's assertions alone could guarantee the production of a revolutionary situation in the colonial world, we would enter the realm of a purely speculative form of thinking, dangerously detached from any material realities and hence disallowing political axioms from gaining any serious purchase on a situation it aims to transform.[188] Instead, for Roy, the political possibilities in the colonial world were determined neither by the level of socio-economic exploitation, nor by a 'revolutionary desire' on the part of a few intellectuals, but a 'will to freedom' demonstrated by the Indian masses in their *actually existing struggles*. In a text titled 'The Awakening in the East', he asserts that the colonial world is ready for revolution precisely because it has demonstrated its readiness.

> This is happening today in the Eastern countries, where the myriads of toilers have been groaning under the same exploitation against which their more fortunate and less downtrodden comrades of the Occident have been carrying on a heroic fight. The East is awakening: and who knows if the formidable tide, that will sweep away the capitalist structure of Western Europe, may not come from there […]. The disruption of Empire is the only thing that will complete the bankruptcy of European capitalism; and the

[186] Ibid., p. 286.

[187] See, Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 2005).

[188] Peter Hallward discussing similar themes his new work on political will. See Peter Hallward, 'The Will of the People: Notes Towards a Dialectical Voluntarism', *Radical Philosophy* 155:3 (2009), pp. 17-29.

> revolutionary upheavals of the Asiatic countries are destined to bring about the crumbling of the proud imperial structure of capitalism. So, the awakening of the East is perhaps the fifth act of the World Revolution.[189]

For Roy, political thinkers could no longer act as philosopher kings, analyzing society through objective/normative categories at a distance from existing social struggles. Instead, political theory had to submit itself to the conditions induced by social upheavals, extrapolating lessons from their emergence while simultaneously elaborating on their significance. Crucially, such a framework asserted the *primacy of struggle* for political thought, rather than the deduction of political functionality from the place assigned to an individual or group within the social edifice. Roy highlighted this relationship in a letter to a friend in which he criticized middle-class intellectuals in India for their inability to move beyond their rigid frameworks to embrace the bold lessons produced by the advent of popular participation in the political sphere.

> Look around you and see what the masses of the Indian people want today, and let me tell you, they are not so unwilling and apathetic as you seem to think. It is only among them that any fighting spirit is to be found. Who has occupied the center of our movement for the past three years? [...] The peasantry of the United Provinces, the Punjab, Bengal and Madras, and the workers in all our great industries are the real power behind the movement. Those who, overestimating their own importance as intellectuals, overlook those revolutionary forces, miss the whole significance of what is taking place in India today.[190]

Akin to the psychoanalytical model, where the hysterical subject becomes the site for the revelation of the hidden kernel that structures social consciousness, for Roy the revolutionary subject also appeared in the form of a 'collective hysterical subject' that interrupted the routine flow of affairs, rather than in an uninterrupted and pre-determined movement toward a theoretically sanctioned political consciousness. The task for political thought was to elucidate the consequences of this figure of disruption in order to mediate between the momentary breakdown of structure and the everyday routine of politics. Despite his willingness to maintain flexibility in response to unforeseen upheavals in the colonial world, however, the problem of mediation between these two moments remained a point of impasse within Roy's thought, a point that we examine in the next section.

Volition, History and Violence: The Impasse for Roy

While the sudden and momentary appearance of mass politics in India indicated a lack within the dominant political imaginaries, whether statist, nationalist or Marxist, it did not in itself mark the birth of a specific political sequence. In fact, there is no reason such brief encounters with mass mobilization would not be followed by a return to normalcy, with a retrospective categorization

[189] M.N. Roy, 'The Awakening in The East' (July 1920), available at https://www.marxists.org/archive/roy/1920/07/15.htm accessed 5th November 2014.
[190] M.N. Roy, 'On Rallying the Masses', (November 1922), available at https://www.marxists.org/archive/roy/1922/11/10b.htm accessed 1st November 2014.

of such moments via the statist language of criminality or madness. On the other hand, a political sequence begins precisely *after* the passing away of the disruption, in a sustained and enduring fidelity to this aberration by constructing an interface between the ephemeral site of the Event and the everyday routine, in order to re-examine the latter from the resources made available by the former. If the Event allows for the momentary appearance of the lack inherent in any social structure, the process of persisting with the lessons of the popular upheavals long after their dispersal is what Bruno Bosteels has described as giving 'being to this lack', particularly through its elaboration in political thought and its actualization via adequate forms of organization.[191]

The task of thinking through the consequences of popular revolts in the colonial world posed similar questions for Roy, who insisted that the critical challenge for radical politics would be the construction of an *idea* that could sustain the will displayed in the momentary but repeated uprisings of workers and peasants throughout the country. He argued that the new political capacity indicated in such mass uprisings would remain in a state of suspension until its inscription into a political program that turned this will into a motor of History. Consequently, in a book published in 1923, Roy urged the Indian National Congress to develop a fighting program that could simultaneously borrow from, and lead, the national movement for independence.

> [T]he activities of the Congress during the last three years have contributed immensely to the intensification and crystallization of this national will [...] This much has been accomplished. The next phase of our movement has to be built on this foundation [...] to enable it (the Congress) to lead the struggle of the Indian people further ahead on the road to freedom, the adoption of a fighting programme is indispensable—a programme by which the Congress will assume the leadership of the struggle for existence, in which the masses of the people are involved.[192]

Such interdependence between mass movements and political subjectivity was similarly reflected in Roy's elaboration of the purpose of a communist party, which he says

> is composed of those who articulate the purpose and desire of the multitude involved in this movement [...] Since the Party is the political organ of the multitude, the principles it advocates through its programme must be in consonance with the objective forces impelling the multitude in the movement.[193]

Yet, despite his emphasis on the intimate relationship between social action and political thought, we begin to witness a parallel trajectory in Roy's works, one that remained tied to an analytical view of political consciousness. Consider, for example, his criticism of the National Congress for failing to follow the 'objective' tendencies of the national movement.

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[191] Bruno Bosteels, 'The Leftist Hypothesis: Communism in The Age of Terror', in *Idea of Communism*, eds. Costas Douzinas and Slavoj Žižek (London: Verso, 2013).

[192] M.N. Roy [1923], *India's Problem and Its Solution* Reprint (Charleston: Nabu Press, 2013), pp. 26-27.

[193] M.N. Roy, 'What is a Program?', in *Selected Works of M.N. Roy*, ed. Sibnarayan Ray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), vol. I, p. 432.

> The newly acquired political importance obliges the Congress to change its philosophical background; it must cease to be a subjective body; its deliberations and decisions should be determined by the objective conditions prevailing and not according to the notions, desires and prejudices of its leaders.[194]

We are not merely viewing a reversal to an older, dogmatic Marxist position that had already been made untenable by a series of events after the First World War. On the contrary, Roy is responding precisely to the appearance of the disjunction between political action and historical progression, in other words, the distance between will and necessity. The uncertainty induced within Marxist theory as a result of History's progression into totalitarianism and docility evacuated the ground on which the theory of communist subjectivity was premised upon, opening up the space for political volition. While Roy was one of the first communist thinkers to recognize this displacement, the difficulty arose in assigning an adequate place to History within this transformed paradigm, particularly since the umbilical cord connecting necessity and will was never severed.

In fact, even in his earlier criticisms of the passivity of the English working classes, Roy sought to utilize the mass upheaval in the colonial world to unhinge it from its attachment to the bourgeois order so as to allow it to perform its 'historical role'. Hence, having overcome the paralysis imposed by a mechanical reading of the political emergence from a socio-economic base, the new impasse involved specifying a method for overcoming the disjunct between necessity and will. In response to this question, Roy remained firmly anchored in the political sequence opened by Lenin's thought, for whom the party was a vehicle for closing the gap between politics and History. Consider the following words, presented to the Sixth Comintern Congress in 1928, in which Roy elevates the party as an instrument of mediation between the objective potentialities of the proletariat and its subjective capacity to overcome the bourgeois order.

> The interest of the proletariat demands the complete overthrow of imperialism, establishment of a revolutionary democratic state [...] In spite of the fact that the Indian proletariat is objectively charged with a great political task, it is very young, politically immature and organizationally weak [...] The proletariat will become more conscious and ready for the revolutionary struggle only under the leadership of the Communist Party.[195]

It is at this point that we see the juxtaposition of two contradictory movements that produced an impasse for Roy, as well as other communist thinkers of his era. On the one hand, political subjectivity aimed to bridge the gulf between political practice and historical progression. On the other hand, however, the widening gulf between the two realms in the first quarter of the twentieth century intensified the crisis of Marxian categories in explaining political subjectivity,

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[194] M.N. Roy, 'Manifesto to The Delegates of the 36th Indian National Congress', (1923) available at https://www.marxists.org/archive/roy/1923/01/manifesto.htm accessed 12th November 2014.

[195] M.N. Roy, 'Draft Resolution on the Indian Resolution', in *Selected Works of M.N. Roy*, ed. Sibnarayan Ray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), vol. III, p. 105.

depriving communist thinkers of an objective criterion from which to measure the adequation of political action with a purported directionality of History. Such a lack elevated the communist party to the sole arbitrator of determining the synchronization of subjective actions with historical progression, and consequently, any movement that developed a trajectory different from the norms established by the party was castigated for castigated for having a corrupting influence on the Indian labour movement. The desire for locating a supra-contradiction that existed above and beyond the multiple contradictions of an actually existing national liberation struggle was symptomatic of this search without a clearly defined object, and partly explains the missed opportunity of Indian communism in the national liberation struggle. The following dismissal of the Swaraj Party by Roy, written in 1925 in the aftermath of the non-cooperation movement, is representative of this missed encounter.

> The period of clash between imperialism and native capitalism is closed. The Swaraj Party was the 'foam' of this clash, to quote Lenin's telling characterisation of the Cadets. In the coming period of reconciliation there will be hardly any necessity for the existence of such a Party [….] The anti-imperialist struggle is a historic necessity. It must be carried on, only with the difference that the social foundation of the Nationalist movement will be shifted to a different class. The workers and peasants will not only be the backbone of the nationalist movement in the coming period, they will have to assume the political leadership of the movement as well.[196]

By collapsing imperialism and native capitalism onto each other, a shorthand to describe the uneven contestation between British rule and the nationalist movement led by the National Congress, Roy attempted to redeem classical notions of 'class struggle' by preserving the purity of the two antagonistic terms of the divide. Yet, such a pristine vision of politics was easier to maintain in a self-referential Marxist theory than in the unfolding mass movement in India, particularly frustrated by the Congress' continued domination of popular politics in the country. The refusal to acknowledge the messiness of actual politics, where emphasizing a contradiction remained a theoretical and practical task rather than a scientifically verified given, resulted in a pervasive presence of suspicion. Such suspicion was extenuated by the widening gulf in popular politics and normative Marxist categories, with Roy denouncing nationalist leaders for 'corrupting the direction' of the mass movement.

> The collapse of the movement of mass passive resistance commonly known as the Non-Co-operation (or Gandhi) movement, led to the crystallisation of a certain political tendency which found expression in the Swaraj Party. It was the tendency towards liquidating the revolutionary character of the struggle for freedom and bringing the nationalist movement back to the bourgeois politics of reformism.[197]

'Liquidation,' a term that gained notoriety in twentieth-century historiography due to its deployment for the elimination of political opponents in the Soviet Union, was symptomatic of a

[196] M.N. Roy, 'Who will Lead: Class Differentiation in the Indian Revolutionary Movement' (1925) available at https://www.marxists.org/archive/roy/1925/x01/x01.htm accessed 20th November 2014.
[197] Roy, 'Who will Lead', (1925).

politics unable to clarify the incongruous movement of objective conditions and political subjectivity. Roy's criticism of the popular movement for an alleged 'deviation' from its historical task became a common theme in communist politics in India, reflecting an unresolved relationship with popular movements. Roy used the metaphor of 'destruction' for the pristine moment, in which the correspondence between the objective and the subjective moments would usher in a 'new era'.

> When the natural development of events is blocked artificially, the latent energy forces itself out and then revolution violently destroys the reactionary forces which threaten the new era.[198]

Violence here enters the frame to overcome the gulf between an objective tendency and subjective volition, with the communist party assigned the task of guaranteeing this correspondence amidst the crisis of an objective Marxism. The search for an absolute break from the multiple contradictions constitutive of all social formation not only resulted in endless accusations of corruption hurled at the mass movement, but also led to 'purging' within the communist party itself, since the latter existed within a heterogeneous landscape, hence perpetually remaining prone to the impacts of societal corruption.[199] It is the possible resolution of this endless violence in Roy's later writings that we turn to in the next section.

Politics as Production: A Path Not Taken

From the mid-1920s onward, the Comintern was marked by deep divisions, amplified by the power struggle within the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. By this time Roy had become an important leader of the Comintern, elected to the Executive Committee in 1926 and later a representative of the body to China. The massacre of Communist Party members in China at the hands of the Kuomintang in 1927, and the inability of the communist movement in India to develop into a popular force compelled a rethinking of political strategy in Roy's work. Initially apprehensive about the possibility of working with nationalist forces, Roy became increasingly interested in the potential of nationalism as a vehicle for popularizing communist ideas, as well as presenting a united front amongst exploited sections of society against colonial domination.[200]

This 'centrist' position placed Roy in the Comintern conflict on strategic issues confronting communist parties in Europe and the colonial world. Roy's emphasis on a moderate line brought him closer to Stalin and Bukharin against Trotsky in 1926, whom he denounced as an ultra-leftist adventurer for his advocacy of speeding the process of global revolution. In 1928, after Stalin had a falling out with Bukharin over the latter's belief that the collapse of capitalism was not imminent, Roy continued to support Bukharin's position in favor of working closely with social democrats in Europe and with nationalist forces in the colonial world. Stalin's ascent to power,

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198 M.N. Roy, 'India: Her Past, Present and Future', in *Selected Works of M.N. Roy*, ed. Sibnarayan Ray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), vol. I, p. 153.

199 For a detailed discussion on the purges of the violence, see Alain Badiou, *The Century*, trans. Alberto Toscano (London: Polity, 2007).

200 Samaren Roy, *The Twice Born Heretic* (Kolkata: Firma KLM [PVT] LTD., 1986), pp. 135-150.

however, meant that the space for political debate became increasingly precarious both in the CPSU and the Comintern, resulting in a backlash against members opposing the official line. Roy's insistence on the need to work with popular forces soon earned him the label of a 'colonial apologist' by Comintern members who believed his willingness to work with the Congress was nothing short of betrayal. His decision to continue writing for the Brandler Press, the organ of the communist opposition in Germany, eventually proved to be the last straw, as he was denounced at the Tenth Plenum of the Executive Council of the Comintern and eventually expelled in 1929.[201]

These purges were a result of the impasse of communist politics in the twentieth century, faced with the impossible task of finding a pristine contradiction between the old and the new, and an all pervasive suspicion of the old seeping into the new. If senior Comintern leaders such as Roy, not to mention Bukharin, Zinoviev and Trotsky, could be publicly denounced as renegades colluding with the forces of reaction, it was because there was no objective guarantee for establishing the separation of the residue of the past from the revolutionary present, a lack that elevated the elimination of individuals deemed to have betrayed the cause as the sole guarantee for overcoming suspicion. Commenting on such paranoid forms of violence, which increasingly moved inwards to wipe out alleged traitors within communist organizations, Roy criticized the arbitrary methodology deployed to denounce former colleagues in the Comintern.

> For some time, I have been standing before the 'sacred Guillotine' the mad application of which is causing such havoc to the International movement [....] Manuilsky clinched the affair by damning me as a renegade. It was a very simple procedure. No evidence whatsoever was produced to show how a traditional 'leftist' has become a right opportunist, how one suddenly becomes a 'renegade' after more than twenty years' active service to the revolution.[202]

We are then confronted with a politics of volition that resulted in massive violence, directed both against its opponents as well as its own fraternity. The critiques of 'totalitarianism' mentioned at the beginning of the paper often converge on the monstrosity of the purges, to completely reject the political sequence opened by the Russian revolution. In the post Second World War period, Roy himself moved toward the ethical turn, beginning with a critique of Marxism as an 'unrealistic, empirically unverifiable doctrine':

> As that theoretical deduction from a certain Marxian hypothesis could not be corroborated by the actualities of life, social development did not take place as predicted by Karl Marx, even after the working-class captured power and established its dictatorship in one sixth of the earth.[203]

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[201] Haithcox, *Communism and Nationalism*, pp. 130-138.

[202] M.N. Roy, 'My Crime: An Open Letter to Members of The CI', in *Selected Works of M.N. Roy,* ed. Sibnarayan Ray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), vol. III, p. 583.

[203] Roy, *Politics, Power and Parties* p. 56.

From critiquing Marxism as a doctrine that posited 'freedom as necessity', Roy eventually denounced the very idea of collective political action as a threat to the sovereignty of the individual. The pressures of popular politics had 'resulted in the prevailing psychological tendency of seeking security in the mass', with Roy elevating the recovery of the individual as the primary task of Radical Humanism. [204]

> Only when the monster called the masses is decomposed into its component men and women, will an atmosphere be created in which democratic practice becomes possible.[205]

Roy's denunciation of collective political action after almost five decades of political militancy was a response to the political impasse generated by the unresolved relationship between necessity and will, with the eventual conclusion that willing freely was impossible under a collectivist project. Instead, Roy's attempts to detach freedom from necessity resulted in absolute indifference to socio-historical realities, evacuating all historical sedimentation from his description of rational, moral individuals. Our historical tracing of the impasse, however, allowed us to locate it in the transformed yet truncated relationship between volition and History, enabling a grounding of this violence in the impossible search for an objective criterion to legitimize subjective interventions. In fact, there exists a different path opened by Roy in his twilight years with the Comintern, one that he himself chose not to take in his later years. Let us then conclude this chapter by reconstructing its trajectory, with particular attention to the way in which Roy amplifies the torsion between History and volition.

I focus on a text titled 'An Alarm Call for Self-Examination', which was published in 1929 in the 'Brandler Press' of the communist opposition (KPD) in Germany under the pseudonym of 'Richard'. This text lies at the intersection between a search for a politics freed from necessity and his eventual distrust of collective action, thus pregnant with multiple possibilities. The essay begins with the following quotation from Marx's Eighteenth of Marx to draw political lessons from the defeat of the French working class in 1852.

> Proletarian revolutionaries criticize themselves constantly, interrupt themselves continually in their own course, come back to the apparently accomplished task in order to begin it afresh, deride with unmerciful thoroughness the inadequacies, weaknesses and paltriness of their first attempts [...] until a situation has been created which makes all turning back impossible, and the conditions themselves cry out!
> [...] Here is the rose, here dance![206]

Beyond the obvious strategic use of this quote to launch a criticism of the Comintern leadership, who Roy accused of failing to adequately learn the lessons of a series of defeats in Asia and Europe, he begins to grasp politics as an autonomous domain in conversation with its own historical unfolding, accumulating the lessons of previous defeats and preparing for the battles

[204] Ibid., p. 58.
[205] Ibid., p. 59.
[206] M.N. Roy, 'An Alarm Call for Self-Examination', in *Selected Works of M.N.* Roy, ed. Sibnarayan Ray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), vol. III, p. 234.

ahead. In his attempt to distance himself from a fantastical belief held by the Comintern that the global conjuncture was on the verge of victorious communist revolution, Roy began to sever the umbilical cord that attached volition to necessity and had generated such ungrounded optimism for an imminent revolutionary explosion. Instead, Roy sought an alternative grounding for the dialectics of communist politics, one in which political thought could overcome its impasse through an interrogation of its own role in partisan struggles.

> Crises, like the present one, lie grounded in the essence of a proletarian revolution that is yet to mature its dialectics. The revolution will grow stronger and become invincible to the extent (as we understand it) that it learns from the crises and overcomes them relentlessly […] We must pay equal attention to our defeats and our victories.[207]

Roy ties the 'maturing' of the revolutionary dialectics to the ability of communists to patiently examine the lessons of past contestations, rather than waiting for an ideal time for political action or misrecognizing the present as always on the verge of a revolution. While such patient analysis replaced attempts to synchronize political movements with the laws of History, it did not mean that Roy was proposing to de-link political thought from articulation with concrete reality. In fact Roy was developing a stronger relationship with social reality in this text, freed from the purported directionality advocated by the dominant trend in the Comintern.

> The will to victory is an inherent characteristic of any revolutionary movement. But there are also other factors which are no less essential [….] If these factors are absent, the revolutionaries have to be careful that they are not driven by the admirable qualities of the will to win to such an extent that they lose sight of the actual conditions of the given situation. Revolution is no romance, it is tied to reality.[208]

In fact, the entire text is directed against an infantile form of willing divorced from material reality, that eventually justifies itself only through a theoretical basis in necessity. Roy here is at his boldest, refusing to take comfort in notions of an uninterrupted movement toward communism, instead accepting the intellectual challenge of producing a cohesive politics from the lessons of a pessimistic reality. In the same text, Roy conducts a critique of 'ultra-leftism' of the communist leadership in Germany, which had called for a general strike without adequate preparation.

> That the policy of the Party was based on a misunderstanding of the situation was decisively proven by the incidents that followed. The call for a general strike went unheeded […] Even a protest-strike for a few hours could not materialize [...] Throughout the entire course the people denied the party of its following [….] In such a case the Party has to recognize the vainness of its heroic gestures and dedicate itself to the more difficult task of regaining the confidence of the masses, which has been lost largely as a consequence of the last adventure. [209]

[207] Ibid., p. 237.
[208] Ibid., p. 235.
[209] Ibid., p. 236.

Roy was even more critical of the Comintern's position on India, which dismissed any form of anti-colonial nationalism not under the communist leadership as an equivalent to colonialism.

> Today, the whole country except the proletariat and the peasantry has come to be considered as counter-revolutionary. The communists must now lead the working class against the entire united front of counter-revolutionaries who, according to this theory, include everyone from the British Viceroys to the petty bourgeois nationalists who threw bombs at the Legislative Assembly as a mark of protest against oppression.[210]

The lumping together of disparate groups as 'counter-revolutionary' resulted in a politics completely unable and unwilling to establish hegemony over the anti-colonial movement. Such a politics aimed to ride on the movement of History in anticipation of a pristine contradiction between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, eventually colliding to end the class struggle that had structured human society since eternity. If the anticipated revolutionary moment failed to materialize, the deficiency was attributed to reality rather than theory, insisting that the former needed more time for the 'maturing' of the socio-economic contradictions in preparation for the eventual epochal battle.

Against such infantile enthusiasm, Roy called for a politics that existed *in history*, one that aimed to tease out the relations amongst specific sociological terms, and remained open to a fidelity to unprecedented events that could transform these relations. If the latter was displayed in Roy's attempts at unhinging Marxist orthodoxy in the wake of the anti-colonial struggle, the former became evident in Roy's insistence on tracing the trajectory of this event within the multiplicity of contradictions existing in society, instead of searching for a neat social dichotomy sanctioned by theory. Such attempts to form a self-reflexive conception of political subjectivity have been characterized by Bosteels as a move from 'Politicizing History' to a 'Historicization of Politics'.[211] The latter allows politics to develop as a result of accumulating lessons from its own history, without relying on an external referent to legitimize itself. By severing its basis in necessity and conducting an analysis based on concrete reality, Roy was making a final attempt to salvage communist politics in the wake of a series of catastrophic mistakes made by the Comintern leadership.

> The incapacity to learn from experience characterizes the present crisis of the international communist movement [....] The absence of a healthy and constructive criticism which would be feared by the leaders of the movement, goes hand in hand with a lamentable mental stagnation that holds its ground under the mask of 'seclusionism' and the garb of mechanical discipline. The result is that mistakes, instead of getting corrected, produce new mistakes [….] Theories are made, not on the basis of vital facts,

[210] Ibid., p. 239.

[211] Bosteels, *Badiou and Politics*, pp. 1-45. Politicizing History refers to attempts at closing the gap between necessity and freedom through political will. Historicizing Politics, on the other hand, refers to politics freed from the realm of necessity, and one that is able to examine its own historical unfolding without any objective normative categories. We will discuss this difference in greater detail in the next chapter.

but with a view to justifying mistakes which arise either from ignorance or from well-intentioned experimentation.[212]

Conclusion

Roy's call for untying the knot between History and volition was ignored by the Comintern, leading to the decimation of communist parties in Europe and India in the early 1930s. Roy returned to India in 1929 to form an alternative communist movement, but was soon arrested on conspiracy charges that had been accumulating for a decade and half since he had left the country. Upon his release after half a decade in prison, Roy moved closer to the national movement, joining the Congress Socialist Party to widen the base of the anti-colonial struggle. He had a falling out with the Congress Party over the Quit India Movement in 1942, insisting that the rise of fascism demanded a temporary united front with the British, without which the goal of freedom would be further deferred. Roy formed the Radical Democratic Party to support the war effort, and after six years in obscurity, disbanded the outfit in 1948 to focus on philosophical work.[213]

The wholesale dismissal of his own political past as a misguided adventure stemmed from a series of defeats encountered by Roy in his political career. Yet, I argue that Roy's interventions are best understood as theoretical and political innovations, suspended at the nodal point of clarifying the relationship between History and volition. An unquestioned fidelity to Marxist orthodoxy would have annulled the very possibility of anti-colonial politics, which propelled Roy to push Lenin's ideas to the unfamiliar terrain of the colonial world. Concomitantly, his attempts to bridge will and necessity via the party elevated the latter to the sole arbiter of political authenticity, resulting in an endless cycle of violence against elements deviating from norms established by the party, finally leading to Roy's own 'purging' from the organization. Radical humanism, with an absolute disconnect between freedom and necessity, and the consequent lack of a theory of subjectivity, was one outcome of the widening gulf between these two realms. His persistent critique of official communist politics in the late 1920s and early 1930s, however, pointed towards a different yet unfinished trajectory in his thought that allowed for a political subjectivity freed from any external referent, while simultaneously remaining attentive to the specificities of a historical formation.

Roy hinted at, but was never fully able to explicate, the mediation between transcendental ideas and existing reality, partly due to his absence from India for much of his political life. Yet, the challenge to clarify this relationship remains central if we are to move beyond the political imaginaries imposed by the grim realities of modern capitalism, while simultaneously avoiding an otherworldly posturing that ignores the specificities of the terrain through which politics must pass.[214] We will further explore this question in the next chapter on communism's (missed) encounters with popular politics in colonial India.

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[212] Roy, 'An Alarm Call', p. 237.

[213] Manjapra, *M.N. Roy*, pp. 152-167.

[214] Peter Hallward discussing similar themes his new work on political. Hallward, 'The Will of the People', pp. 17-29

Chapter 4
Islam, Communism and the Search for a Fiction

In one of her major public interventions on the post-9/11 security challenges to the West, former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher sought to draw parallels between the 'War on Terror' and the 'Cold War'.[215] Provocatively titled 'Islamism is the new Bolshevism', her article argued that, despite the novelty of contemporary Islamism, its 'best parallel is with early communism'. She added,

> Islamic extremism today, like bolshevism in the past, is an armed doctrine. It is an aggressive ideology promoted by fanatical, well-armed devotees. And, like communism, it requires an all-embracing long-term strategy to defeat it.[216]

Mrs. Thatcher was not the only public figure in the West who placed communism as a political precedent to the 'Islamist threat' to Occidental governments, owing to their shared 'fanaticism'. Indeed a number of politicians, policy-makers, intellectuals and security experts have emphasised the apparent continuity between the challenges posed by Communism and Islamism to a liberal Western order.[217] The ostensible boldness and novelty of this genealogy, however, seems to melt away once we turn our gaze towards the colonial era, and the British characterization of the simultaneously burgeoning Islamist and Communist movements against colonial rule.

In the aftermath of the First World War, the British-Indian intelligence community extended its operations to the 'Mohamedan world' to counter the activities of 'Indian revolutionaries.' The latter were increasingly exploring the possibilities of forging alliances with the larger Muslim world, where countries as diverse as Turkey, Egypt, Turkmenistan and Afghanistan were gripped by popular movements against Empire. Colonial anxieties were exacerbated after the commencement of the Khilafat Movement (1919-1922), a popular movement in India against British plans to abolish the Ottoman Empire, and perhaps the most significant challenge to imperial rule since 1857, as we shall discuss later.[218] Such attempts by Muslim (and non-Muslim) Indians to forge a new anti-colonial political geography centered on Muslim lands forced the intelligence agencies in British India to make 'Mohammadan lands' the primary sites for their activities, particularly to combat the threat posed to Empire by pan-Islamic radicalism.

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[215] This chapter is a re-worked version of my article published in *Muslims Against the Muslim League: Critiques of the Idea of Pakistan*, eds. Ali Usman Qasmi and Megan Eaton Robb (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 255-284.

[216] Margaret Thatcher, 'Islamism is the New Bolshevism', *The Guardian* (February 12, 2002), http://www.theguardian.com/world/2002/feb/12/afghanistan.politics, accessed 17th November, 2015.

[217] See David Satter, 'Yesterday Communism, Today Radical Islam', *Forbes* (November 3, 2009), http://www.forbes.com/2009/10/30/ideology-islam-communism-opinions-contributors-berlin-wall-09-david-satter.html accessed 16th November, 2015.

[218] See Gail Minault, *The Khilafat Movement: Religious Symbolism and Political Mobilization in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

Yet, towards the mid-1920s, with the decline of the Caliphate movement and the rise of the Soviet Union as a competing power in Muslim Asia, the primary task of British intelligence networks shifted from simply combating political Islam, to also, more importantly, acting as a bulwark against the spread of communism to India and the Middle East. Consider the following reports from Sir David Petrie, the head of Indian intelligence (1924-1927), on the confluence between the battle against political Islam and communism.

> But another factor of greater importance which has frequently caused embarrassment, less on the account of the extent of the organisation itself than of the fanatical character of its members, has been the colony of Hindustani fanatics, commonly known as the mujahidin who, though mercenaries and in themselves insignificant, have from time to time been used, or have lent themselves, for anti-British activities. It is in this respect that they have engaged the attention of the Bolsheviks, with a view to perhaps their being used as a means of communication with India through their adherents.[219]

Thus, when viewed from the perspective of colonial self-preservation, we witness the emergence of a conceptual vocabulary around the word 'fanatic' to co-join the communist and the Islamist projects, a legacy that continues today. What disrupts such a neat placement of political Islam and communism together, however, is the *actual* history of political events of the 20th century in the Muslim world. Communism and political Islam were often pitted against each other in perhaps one of the most enduring and fiercest rivalries of the Cold War era. From the Middle East to South/Central Asia to the Far East, communists and islamists battled each other to win political hegemony, often resulting in deadly clashes, including for example in Indonesia in the 1960s, or in Pakistan in the 1980s. This political contestation was registered within the domain of intellectual production, with communist intellectuals accusing political Islam of being tied to the vestiges of a failing past, while the latter accused communism of being a foreign, and hence, an imported political ideology.[220]

We are then presented with a curious case of two global political ideologies that seem to follow each other like a shadow, either equated as principal threats to liberal universalism, or presented as fierce adversaries fighting to win political hegemony in the non-European world. If we can dismiss the liberal attempts to equate the two currents as the official ideology of Western imperialism, the distinctions made between 'scientific socialism' or 'authentic Islam' by partisans of these political projects will also have to be scrutinized, since they were based on the repression of an embarrassing past in which 'Islamists' and 'Communists' worked together, often in the same organizations, to build an anti-imperialist project. The relationship between the two then remains a spectre that is excessively invoked but is seldom conceptualized or even historicized, and at other times, is consciously forgotten.

Yet, its continuous return calls for a genealogical investigation into the relationship between Islam and Communism to unearth both the subterranean connections and antagonisms that

[219] Petrie, *Communism in India*, p. 300.

[220] See Tariq Ali, *The Clash of Fundamentalisms: Crusades, Jihads and Modernity* (London; Verso, 2003).

permit such repeated equivalence. My aim in this chapter is three-fold. First, I want to provide a historical and conceptual basis for analyzing perplexing similarities between communism and political Islam. Centring my argument on the specificity of colonial India in the 1920s, I argue that such resonances existed due to the historical moment in which Britain's imperial order appeared intellectually, if not politically, exhausted, prompting activists to seek newer horizons for imagining a future political community. I deploy the concepts of 'distancing', 'negation' and 'heroic sacrifice' as aspects of the shared subjectivity between Communism and political Islam. We can delineate the contours of these overlapping tendencies, however, only if we view Islam and communism as *political projects in the making* within specific histories of anti-colonialism, rather than as stemming from unrelated, and even opposed, textual traditions. Consequently, I show how exigencies of the political conjuncture always stood in primacy to any straightforward textual fidelity.

Second, I argue that communism's entry into Indian politics was overdetermined by the specificity of the political conjuncture. I develop the idea of a political 'fiction' as a method for conceptualizing decisions taken to develop new horizons for self-relating.

Finally, I posit that despite a shared geneology, communism and Islam differed in important ways during this period, in particular on their conception of a future political community. I particularly highlight the central role played by a permanent 'antagonism' in communist thought in the anti-colonial world.

I tell this story through the figure of Shaukat Usmani, a forgotten figure of the Indian communist movement who was perhaps one of the best known communists outside Europe during the 1920s. His early life allows for a study of both the convergence and the splitting of political islam and communism since he traversed both these ideological spectrums in the charged political atmosphere of the 1920s.

Shaukat Usmani: A Short Biography

Born in 1901 in Bikaner, Rajasthan, Usmani became involved in the Caliphate Movement in 1919 while he was still a student in school. In his memoirs, Usmani often ignores or downplays his involvement in this religiously inspired movement, as is evident in his later characterization of the movement as

> ...the greatest drawback to India's progress. It strengthened the extra-territorial sympathies of the Indian Muslims and cut them more and more asunder from the Nationalist movement. [221]

Yet, Usmani never criticizes his own involvement in the movement, which had compelled him to leave his home and face death on a number of occasions. I shall later return to the significance of Usmani's condemnation of a past movement while simultaneously attempting to redeem his own

[221] Shaukat Usmani, *Peshawar to Moscow: Leaves from an Indian Muhajireen's Diary* (Delhi: Swaraj Publishing House, 1927), p. 13.

role in it. Usmani responded to a call by a number of *Ulema* imploring Indian Muslims to migrate to Muslim-ruled lands after British plans to dismember the Ottoman Caliphate were revealed. As one of the earliest recruits to this movement, which witnessed the exodus of 36,000 people from India, Usmani left for Afghanistan in early 1920, en route to Turkey to join the forces of Enver Pasha, who were believed to be defending the Caliphate against the British Empire. Recalling his abrupt decision to join this movement, Usmani sought to highlight the desire of the Indian youth to escape the drudgery of colonial rule.

> Some of us had started with high hopes when we had left our homes, of being able to liberate our country and drive away British imperialists. I had sharply rebuked a classmate of mine at the railway station of Bikaner a few days before leaving for hijrat, when he had sarcastically remarked, 'What about your holidays, are you also going to some hill stations to pass your summer vacations?' I had retorted 'No, I am going to the other side of the Pamirs to bring calamity on the heads of the British rulers whom your relatives are serving so obediently.' This had completely silenced him. He was the son of a surgeon in the British service.[222]

Usmani, who left for Afghanistan with the 'third batch' of the Muhajirs (totaling 80 people), was welcomed by none other than the Amir of Afghanistan, who provided lodging for these youngsters as state guests at Jabal-us-Sirah, a hill station near Afghanistan. The purpose of this seclusion was to provide military and political training to the Muhajirin before they could be integrated into Afghan society. Soon, however, differences emerged between the Muhajirin and Afghan authorities, as the former asked for more access to major cities such as Kabul, eventually asking to be relieved to continue their journey towards Turkey to fight in defense of the Ottoman Empire. Part of their decision to leave Afghanistan in the autumn of 1920, a few months after their arrival, was influenced by the lack of enthusiasm for the Caliphate Movement amongst the Afghan population:

> The Khilafat which meant so much to the Indian Muhammedans had no meaning whatsoever for the Afghan masses. They remained quite indifferent to it, save a few who saw in it a potent weapon against the British government. To an average religious Afghan, *millat* [nation] did not mean more than nation….I invite our Moulanas to come with me to Afghanistan, Turkestan, Azerbaijan or Turkey and show me half the zeal about Khalifa and Arabia there, as we see in India...It was the pursuit of some higher ideals that had forced us to quit it (Jaba-us-Saraj), so very early, and we left it much in the same way as we had left our homes.[223]

Despite the setback in Afghanistan, the search for 'higher ideals' impelled Usmani and others to continue their journey. Entering Turkestan after a perilous journey across the border, the Muhajirin, found themselves in the middle of intense civil strife between pro-Bolshevik forces against the traditional ruling classes of Central Asia. A split occurred within the ranks of the Muhajirin over their relationship with the political developments in Turkestan. A few, including

[222] Ibid., p. 32.
[223] Ibid., pp. 15-17.

Usmani, insisted on staying in the Soviet Union, while others were adamant about leaving Central Asia for Turkey to launch a Jihad. The Soviet authorities persuaded Usmani to remain with the larger group, since they believed that a division amongst the Muhajirin over the Soviet Union would tarnish the image of communism in Indian nationalist circles. In a bizarre event (which I will discuss later), Turkestani authorities seized the boat of the Muhajirin as soon as they left Soviet waters, accusing them of being Bolsheviks. Sentenced to death, only a host of contingent of circumstances, including bombardments from rival factions, secured the release of the Muhajirin, who immediately headed back to Soviet-controlled Asia.[224]

These experiences had exhausted Usmani's inclination towards the Caliphate, and he became keenly interested in the communist project. He promptly joined the revolutionary committee to defend Bokhara against the forces of the former *amir* (leader). Shortly thereafter he was called to Moscow, and later to Tashkent, by M.N. Roy, who was given the responsibility by the Comintern to coordinate revolutionary movements in Asia. Studying first at the University of the Toilers of the East, which had been set up by Lenin specifically for non-European students, and then, moving to Moscow, Usmani studied Marxist theory, and undertook military training. He eventually became a leader of the newly constituted 'Communist Party of India' in Tashkent in 1920.[225]

Usmani returned to India at the end of 1922 as a partisan of the communist movement, was arrested in 1924 in the famous Kanpur Conspiracy Case of 1923, and then was jailed for 4 years. Released in 1927, he left for the Soviet Union to participate in the Sixth Comintern Congress, where he was welcomed as one of the most important international figures of the communist movement, giving him a place on the Presidium of the Congress, seated only third from Stalin.[226] On his return to India, he was arrested in the infamous Meerut Conspiracy Case in 1929 and was sentenced to life in prison. A global campaign for his release (and the release of other prisoners) was organised. Usmani also achieved the distinction of being the first Indian to contest the British general elections while imprisoned in an Indian jail, when the Communist Party of Great Britain nominated him as a candidate in 1929. While his election campaign further enhanced his status as a global celebrity of the communist movement, the Indian political scene changed rapidly during this period, challenging the rootless 'cosmopolitanism' of the preceding decades, as I elaborate later. Local communist leaders challenged the 'Emigre' leadership of the party, ousting many of its founding members in 1932, including Usmani himself.[227]

Usmani's political rise and fall was nothing short of spectacular. Welcomed by the King of Afghanistan as a 19-year-old muhajir, developing personal relations with political giants such as Stalin, Zinoviev, Nehru, Maulana Muhammad Ali, and even Enver Pasha, in whose name he had left Bikaner in the winter of 1920, he became one of the most prominent Indian political figures on the international scene. Yet, by 1932, dejected due to his ouster from the communist party, he quit active politics at the young age of 31, devoting his life to journalism and literary writing,

[224]Ibid., pp. 23-27.
[225] Ibid., pp. 37-50.
[226] See Shaukat Usmani, *I Met Stalin Twice* (Bombay: K. Kurian, 1953).
[227] Overstreet and Windmiller, *Communism in India*, p. 135.

with a number of fictional portrayals of his voyages across Central Asia. Usmani, however, remained engaged with exploring progressive political possibilities within the Muslim world, as he moved to Cairo in 1964 to join Lotus, a literary magazine of the Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Organisation. During this period, he also worked closely with the Palestine Liberation Organization, penning a book dedicated to the Palestinian struggle.[228] An Indian 'Islamist' who embraced communism but remained closely tied to political causes in the Muslim world, Usmani's story is one of intellectual and political promiscuity opened by the inter-war period, a project that, nonetheless, remained politically and intellectually incomplete. Writing in 1976, two years before his death, he emphasized this lack of closure in his political life:

> Sweet memories of that period still haunt me, give me inspiration sometimes and at others depress me because we are still far away from the goal which we cherish.[229]

'Divine Cry of Lenin': Communism and Political Islam

The intense rivalry in Asia between the Soviet Union and the British Empire in the 1920s was not only a conflict between two different socio-economic visions for the region, but in its geographical specificity was also a contestation to become the sovereign of Muslim Asia after the impending collapse of the Ottoman Empire. In fact, what is often termed the 'National Question' in the Soviet Union was primarily a 'Muslim Question' since a majority of 'nationalities' in the country consisted of Muslims in Central Asia. Posing the most radical challenge in developing a political relationship between communism and the non-European world, the newly installed Bolshevik government immediately sought a common ground with Islamic movements challenging the British Empire, or the remnants of Tsarism within Central Asia. A special appeal to 'Muslims' sent out in December 1917 highlights the significance attached to political Islam by the newly installed Soviet authorities.

> Muslims of the East! Persia, Turks, Arabs, and Indians! All you whose lives and property, whose freedom and homelands were for centuries merchandise for trade by rapacious European plunderers! All of you whose countries the robber who began the war now want to divide amongst themselves...Lose no time in throwing off the ancient oppressors of your homelands...Muslims of Russia! Muslims of the East! In the task of regenerating the world we look to you for sympathy and support.[230]

Here, we witness the contradictory movement inherent in the historical conjuncture within which the Soviet state found itself. The lack of revolutionary enthusiasm in Europe, the centrality of Central Asia to any modern state-building project and the emergence of an anti-British pan-islamism compelled Bolshevik leaders to develop new alliances outside their traditional relationships with European communists. Such calls for support were followed by a number of concrete measures to forge unity, including the formation of a 'Muslim Congress' in Petrograd, the introduction of Sharia courts in Central Asia, and a financial campaign to fund a 'global

[228] See Shaukat Usmani, *Glimpses of Palestine: Past and Present* (Cairo: Anglo-Egyptian Bookshop, 1973).
[229] Ibid., p.73.
[230] Ramnath, *Haj to Utopia*, p. 194.

Jihad' against the British, particularly amongst the Pushtun tribes of India. In fact, at the Baku Congress of the Peoples of the East held in 1920, Soviet leaders such as Zinoviev repeatedly pledged support to anti-colonial movements in the Muslim world, describing the freedom of 'Muslim lands' as one of the primary internationalist duties of the revolution.[231]

The sentiments were largely mutual, as some of the most important Muslim scholars called on Muslims to take inspiration from the Soviet revolution in their own efforts to regenerate the Muslim world. In fact, rather than viewing Bolshevism as a European tradition incommensurate with Islam, many sought to displace it onto a quasi-spiritual register to allow for a common political project. Maulana Mohammad Barkatallah, a popular Indian revolutionary with strong sympathies for pan-Islamism, called on Muslims to 'embrace' socialism 'seriously and enthusiastically'.

> Following on the dark long nights of tsarist autocracy, the dawn of human freedom has appeared on the Russian horizon, with Lenin as the shining sun giving light and splendour to this day of human happiness... Oh Muhammedans! Listen to this divine cry. Respond to this call of liberty, equality and brothership which brother Lenin and the Soviet government of Russia are offering you.[232]

This adequation between the 'divine cry' of Lenin and the historical regeneration of the Muslim nation may seem anachronistic today, but it remained a dominant theme in the evaluation of the Soviet government in Muslim political thought during this epoch. Religious scholars ranging from Obeidullah Sindhi, who was a member of the Indian provisional government in Afghanistan, to Maulana Hasrat Mohani, who became one of the founding members of India's first Communist Party, praised Soviet policies towards Muslim Asia and sought to develop fraternal relations between Communism and political Islam.[233] Even Maulana Muhammad Ali Jauhar, the principal leader of the Khilafat Movement, contacted Shaukat Usmani to explore the possibility of opening up a channel for Soviet funding. It is not surprising, then, that the first Emigre Communist Party of India formed in 1921 consisted entirely of Indian Muslims based in the Soviet Union, and almost all of them were related to the pan-Islamic movements of the era.[234]

My objective in recalling these events is not to inscribe this shared history between political Islam and communism onto the register of political or geostrategic interests. In such narratives, it is simply an 'aligning' of interests between unrelated political currents that allow for such momentary alliances. Claiming to be free from an ideological bias but deeply embedded to a positivist sociology, such analyses naturalize 'interests' onto certain sections of society, without investigating the hard labor through which individuals or groups even begin to identify with particular causes. For a Muslim or an Indian or a worker is under no abstract obligation to identify with any one particular cause, let alone to agree to sacrifice his life for it, an act that

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[231] Dave Couch, 'The Bolsheviks and Islam', *International Socialism: A Quarterly Review of Socialist Theory* 110 (2006), http://isj.org.uk/the-bolsheviks-and-islam/ accessed on 7th August 2015.
[232] Couch, 'The Bolsheviks and Islam', (2006)..
[233] Ramnath, *Haj to Utopia*, pp. 194-197.
[234] Adhikari, *Documents of the History*, pp. 1-10.

blurs the very criterion for judging interests. Moreover, as Faisal Devji has argued, the conceptual tools used to justify particular movements or momentary alliances often obtain a life beyond both the 'inner motives' of their authors as well as the immediacy of the political conjuncture.[235] My own aim now is to demonstrate that beyond the multiple contingent reasons that brought together specific encounters between political Islam and Soviet communism, there are more deeply embedded questions of a shared historical subjectivity that allow these two political currents to recurrently overlap throughout the twentieth century.

The Act of 'Distancing'

A number of scholars have argued that the inability of Indian subjects to compete with the material wealth of Europe prompted the construction of an 'inner' domain or spiritual essence of the nation, both superior to, and uncorrupted from, the experience of Western colonialism.[236] From *sanyasis* to *sufis* to a number of other ascetic currents in India in the late 19th century, aimed to re-configure spiritual rituals as transformative practices for carving out an indigenous mode of existence, autonomous from the constraints of a colonized world. A key feature of these practices included an active *distancing* from material and ideological coordinates of colonial life through embodied sacrifice and personal suffering. In a world dominated by a colonial ideology preaching gradual assimilation of Indian subjects into the imperial project, and held together by the terror of unrestrained violence, rejecting the comforts of material life and voluntarily undertaking bodily suffering were aimed at creating a bulwark against one's submission to the compulsions of Colonial rule, at least in the realm of ideology.

Once the modern Indian political burst onto the scene with the onslaught of the Caliphate/non-cooperation movement, the motif of collective sacrifice and transformative violence took center stage in the Indian political landscape. From local to transnational 'terror' outfits, to organs of mass 'national' politics, the question of self-negating violence dominated the political imagination in India. Maulana Muhammad Ali Jauhar, the leader of the Caliphate movement which acted as the first inspiration for Shaukat Usmani, had already called upon Muslims to 'sacrifice their health, wealth and life in the name of God' and urged them to decide what 'they intended to do and announce it plainly, leaving the authorities to decide their own course of action as they pleased'.[237] Indeed, Devji has shown that even Gandhi, often held up as an example of liberal humanism in the West, based his theories of non-violence on the absolute rejection of life preservation as an ideal, instead privileging a relationship with death through voluntary suffering as a more authentic mode of existence.[238]

Such indifference to colonial sovereignty and commitment to axiomatic declarations were attempts to forge a political subjectivity freed from the seductive calculations and imposing

[235] Devji, *Muslim Zion*, pp. 1-12.
[236] Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragment.* pp. 6-9.
[237] Mushirul Hasan and Pernau Margrit, *Regionalizing Pan-Islamism: Documents on the Khilafat Movement* (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers and Distributors, 2005), p. 13.
[238] Devji, *The Impossible Indian*, pp. 151-184.

violence of colonial rul**e**.[239] The absolute disjunct between a linear conception of Historical progress that had ungirded imperial ideology, and the actual global events that unleashed unprecedented catastrophes on a planetary scale since the outbreak of the First World War, necessitated such a *distancing*. As Shruti Kapila has argued in her reading of Tilak, a foremost Indian nationalist, the emergence of the Indian political was conceived as being tied to a non-historicist conception of a violent event that could overcome the increasingly stifling reality of colonial rule.[240] In this conception, politics is neither merely an individual or collective relationship to the state, nor an expression of historically sedimented contradictions, but is instead a process of creative production aiming to overcome a political deadlock, with transformative violence as its motor. It is no wonder then that the Caliphate movement, which coincided with the peace celebrations of World War 1 in India, urged a boycott of the celebrations in favor of a martyrs' week to commemorate Indians killed by the British, indicating that the war had only begun in India.[241]

The Caliphate Movement then provided the necessary ruptural event from Imperial rule that could inaugurate a political modernity beyond the contours of colonial governmentality. In the ensuing decade, it became the reference point for all the major currents in Indian political life, as Islamists, nationalists, 'terrorists,' and even communists, oriented themselves by claiming fidelity to it. Shaukat Usmani's political career itself was the product of the Caliphate Movement as he, in a supreme act of self-negation, left his home in the hope of finding adequate resources for launching an effective war against imperial rule. The act of self-exile in the Hijrat movement inscribed a physical geography to the distancing sought from colonial ideology, as partisans literally explored novel frontiers for developing new forms of political praxis. But how did Usmani, and many others like him, subsist in this breach opened by the mass upheavals in India, guarding against the threats and temptations of re-assimilation?

The Interregnum: Between Negation and Death

The positing of an absolute negation of colonial rule did not signify that Indian revolutionaries possessed a neatly laid out plan to replace it. This was a moment of purely axiomatic claims against the Empire, as well as its alleged allies within Indian society, to mark out the emergent political community from a decaying political order. The Indian political imagination was at a crossroads, with the old one dying and the 'new yet to be born'.[242] A decomposition without a

[239] This is not to make the rather exaggerated claim that there was an absolute binary between colonial and anti-colonial politics. Indeed, heterogeneous forms of political subjectivity existed in the 1920s, which often engaged productively with questions of equality and dignity within colonial India. My claim, however, is that following the Amritsar massacre, the status quo was deemed unstable by both the government (which resorted to emergency measures) and political organizations in India, including the Congress, which began calling for immediate independence. It was the overlapping of an end in the belief of colonial infallibility and a desire for a post-colonial future that led to the search for newer horizons for political action in the present. A key aspect of developing a politics incongruous with the colonial present was to demarcate an autonomous space for political action, a praxis I call "distancing," as I explain later.

[240] Kapila, 'A History of Violence', pp. 445-454.

[241] Hasan and Margrit, *Regionalizing Pan-Islamism*, p. 11.

[242] See David Forgacs and Eric Hobsbawm, *The Antonio Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings 1916-1935* (New York: New York University Press, 2000).

recomposition, a destruction sans a reconstruction, a negation without an affirmation, this interregnum was marked by a ferocious violence, which could easily shift from being deployed against colonial officials to a fratricidal war against religiously or ethnically marked communities.

The 1920s raised novel questions on both the form and content of anti-colonial politics. The intellectual promiscuity characteristic of the 1910s, in which political organizations as varied as the Congress and the Ghadar Party avoided explicit ideological borders, imbibing instead on disparate ideologies deemed incongruous in European political thought. The defeat of the non-cooperation movement led to multiple fissures within the nationalist movement, while the Colonial state's efforts to implement punishments based on alleged associations with ideologies, aided the process of consolidating ideological and consequently, organizational demarcations. It is no wonder then that the intelligence apparatus in India deemed the entry of ideologically driven into India as the greatest threat to Colonial stability, going as far as using the presence of Marxist literature as the strongest evidence for indicting a number of anti-colonial activists in the infamous Meerut Conspiracy Case. I argue against the romanticization of a 'pre-ideological' era of the late 1910s and early 1920s by demonstrating that the need for political ideology as a new compass was felt precisely as a result of an impasse within anti-colonial politics which operated with a simple (ideological) binary between the colonizers and the colonized. The bursting of popular politics in Colonial India meant that social contradictions, including class, caste, religion, gender etc, could not be easily integrated within the dominant nationalist narrative. The formation of political projects that could recognize such disparate contradictions and turn them into political antagonisms, as well as colonial differentiations amongst political currents, prompted the need for ideological affiliation. [243]

Indeed, Usmani characterised his own decision to leave India as not only stemming out of opposition to British rule, but also out of disgust at the 'nonviolence' of the movement, 'a cult destitute of any dynamic force,' which 'did not appeal in the least' to 'the younger imagination'.[244]

Usmani's journey thus begins as a search for a politics that could usher in a radical beginning for a future political community. We mentioned earlier how Usmani in his writings simultaneously denounced the 'misadventure' of Hijrat as orchestrated by Muslim fanatics while glorifying his own heroic rule during the epic journey. In fact, in one of his travelogues written from prison in 1927, meant to be one of the most important works of propaganda for the communist movement, Usmani narrates the heroism of this journey as part of his credentials as a communist leader. From what subjective position, then, can one of the most widely acknowledged events of modern political Islam be re-inscribed into the short history of the burgeoning communist movement in India? Such a collapsing of the two political currents onto each other allows us to locate the shared subjectivity of this period, held together in the search for a politics adequate to a future political community.

[243] See Ali Raza, 'Separating the Wheat from the Chaff: Meerut and the Creation of "Official" Communism in India' *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and Middle East* 33:3 (2013), pp. 316-333.
[244] Usmani, *Peshawar to Moscow*, p.1.

The *Hijrat* Movement provided thousands of Indians 'an opportunity for going outside and studying the methods of other countries.'[245] This search for new horizons signify the experimental nature of this period which at least partly explains the overlapping of multiple political trends before they became anchored into precise ideological and organizational disciplines. Such a search intensified in Usmani's life as he, along with a group of Muhajirs, became increasingly dissatisfied with the lack of political orientation in 'Muslim Afghanistan'.[246] The wrath of the Muhajirin had quickly turned from British officials to Muslim rulers, particularly the Amir of Afghanistan, who was accused of curbing their enthusiasm by keeping them isolated in Jabal-us-Siraj, cut off from any political or intellectual activities. This was by no means a light charge, since the characteristic impatience of anti-colonial politics was precisely aimed against a 'politics of waiting' imposed by colonial rule in which colonial subjects could attain their full being through a gradual civilizing process supervised by the colonial state.

What role did violence play in this interregnum, characterized by a passionate wandering without clearly defined goals or a strategic axis to achieve them? The embracing of a heroic death provided possible destinations that could vindicate the journey begun in India. Indeed, in an interregnum where the map of the journey-to-come remained insufficiently imagined, death was elevated to the principal guarantee for subsisting in the negation opened by anti-colonial revolts. I will elaborate this point with an anecdote from Usmani's travelogues. As already mentioned, the Muhajirin were arrested in late 1920 by Turkestani authorities as Bolshevik spies, and were ordered to be executed. The reasons for their arrest are not entirely clear from Usmani's account, owing largely to the fact that none of the Muhajirin spoke Turkish and hence did not fully comprehend all the discussions. Yet, it is clear that at least from the perspective of Usmani, it was a case of mistaken identity, since the Muhajirin had arrived to support the Turkestani authorities.[247] Let me now quote some passages that describe Usmani's thoughts minutes before an execution that seemed imminent, in order to shed light on the role of death within this chaotic moment.

> There was death-like silence, no one stirred or lifted his head. The rifles were levelled at our heads in order. The second message that came confirmed the first one. The commander made a similar announcement. This time the rifles were loaded and we were convinced that our end was near.... Death began to dance before our eyes. Nothing was visible, save death stark naked...It was a matter of a few more minutes…With our heads bowed down we were reviewing our past. Within a few moments our imagination travelled from home to Kabul, from Kabul to Tirmiz to the massacre ghat…. We resigned ourselves to our fate and had some consolation that we were dying in pursuit of noble and

[245] Ibid., p.1.

[246] Ibid., p. 20.

[247] From Usmani's account, it seemed as if the local warlords, fearful of a Soviet invasion, hastily arrested the *Muhajirin* arriving from Soviet territory and handed out a death sentence. Usmani does not provide detailed reasons for his arrest and sentence, claiming that the language barrier prevented him from understanding the intricacies of the situation.

> high principles. We reviewed our past and were satisfied that we were dying at our posts. We had set out on our journey from India and were dying for India's cause.[248]

Within this narrative, we view two seemingly unrelated trajectories. On the one hand, we are confronted with the utter horror of a meaningless death imposed upon these young partisans, dying for a charge they never understood, and at the hands of an enemy that never was. Thus, this imminent death signified an internal deadlock for anti-colonial politics, one that seemed to take it to a point of exhaustion.

However, we are not immediately offered a Nietzschean recommencement after an end. Without the delineation of any clear horizon for political action, we are instead presented with death as a substitute for a political strategy. For if the subjectivity induced by anti-colonial politics did not allow for annulling the constitutive negation of colonial rule, and the lack of a vision for a new world denied a novel measure for one's own political actions, death confirmed the permanent subsistence within this space of negation. The abrupt move in Usmani's narrative from the chaos of an impending, and perhaps pointless death, to 'dying for India's cause' is part of a retrospective act to provide meaning to what appears to escape it. In short, death here 'sutures' the terrifying gap between the subject's intense desire for a new world and his complete inability to attain it, suspending political subjectivity within the space of negation.[249]

Much of the political realignment in India during the 1920s can be read as an attempt to move out of this impasse, a project in which Usmani was an enthusiast participant. To initiate discussions on possible future trajectories, a record number of political journals appeared on the public scene, with the influx of 'subversive literature' termed the 'gravest threat to the Empire' by colonial officials.[250] How should we then understand this widening interest in different political ideas within India, including Usmani's association with communism, beyond its characterization as an ideological entrapment?

Knowledge, Incalculability and Decision

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[248] Ibid., pp. 68-73.

[249] My aim is to build the writings of a number of theorists, including Antonio Gramsci, who argue that the existence of popular upheaval marks a crisis for the status quo, and if not superseded by an emancipatory political alternative, is often followed by a morbid fascination with death. Etienne Balibar and Alain Badiou have recently termed such "intervaillac" periods often lead to pathological symptoms, including fascist mobilization, as a possible resolution of the gap in social reality opened up political Events. Hence, against the subsistence in a space of pure negation which may end up aligning itself with fascism, they emphasize the need for alternative political projects, including alternative fictions (in fidelity to the consequences of the Event) to overcome the impasse produced by an interregnum. See, Alain Badiou, *The Rebirth of History: Times of Riots and Uprisings*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2012).

[250] Petrie, *Communism in India*, pp. 16-18. An important part of the CPI's activities in the 1920s was the goal of smuggling Bolshevik propaganda into India, while for the British officials, including David Petrie, the inflow of "subversive literature" was at the heart of the Empire's strategy to curb Communism. In fact, as stated earlier, the possession of "illegal" literature, including books from Marx, Engels and Lenin, was the main charge against in the Meerut Conspiracy Case which led to life sentences for the entire leadership of the Communist Party of India. Raza, 'Separating the Wheat', pp. 316-325.

While a melancholic attachment to death maintained a pervasive presence within the subjectivity of an interregnum, it was supplemented by the desire for a heroic overcoming of obstacles, the two often anchored in the same instance. I argue that this move from one to the other represented the passing from negation to affirmation. Let me quote a passage from Usmani's journey from Afghanistan into Central Asia (1920) as he passed through the notoriously dangerous Panjshir valley. In a section titled 'Pansjhir Defiant', Usmani recounts the decisions imposed on the group as they confronted the seeming impossibility of moving ahead owing to the physical traits of the route.

> After that came an abrupt descent and we came face to face with the turbulent Panjshir, then in flood and sweeping over the road. There was no other way and the mountains looked inaccessible and defiant...Every one of us was forced to think over this serious question. A bitter feeling of defiance arose in our mind against the refractory river and a council was called. Some hinted at the plan of going back, but the majority were for victory or death. Arguments on principles were also made. Napoleon's crossing the Alps was quoted. Alexander's exploits were instanced. To go back meant surrender, to step into the fast-running water meant instantaneous death. Which was to be preferred? All agreed that death with honour was preferable to turning back. Not a step backward became our slogan. Death with heroism was something attractive and we decided to go forward...At moments it seemed that the river would wash away. But our will power proved stronger than the current, and in due time we reached dry land.[251]

Both the reference to political figures before crossing the Panjshir, as well the decision to narrate this event in communist propaganda literature, exemplified the supreme importance attached to heroic sacrifice in Usmani's political imagination. The conflation of nature and politics is neither a stretch, nor without precedent, since in the same era, the Soviet Union was claiming to have regained the control of nature from the abstract temporality of Capital, directing it through official will by the Five-Year Plans.[252] A few years later, such overcoming of nature through politics would reach its peak in China during the Long March, where every soldier killed due to the punishing physical geography was deemed a martyr, while a belief in the human ability 'to move the mountains' became a slogan for the perpetual overcoming of 'natural' challenges.[253]

Such a determination to overcome adversity through transformative sacrifice structured the political landscape in which Usmani encountered communism. On his return to Bokhara, the city had witnessed a 'revolutionary' uprising against the *Amir*, the latter backed by landlords and the institutional clergy.[254] I quote his passages on the encounter with this revolutionary movement, to elucidate the stakes involved in his decision to side with it as the Amir's forces launched a counter-attack to recapture the city.

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[251] Usmani, *Peshawar to Moscow*, pp. 19.

[252] See Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary life in Extraordinary Times* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[253] Mao Zedong, *Selected Works of Mao Tse Tung* (Oxford: Permagon Press, 2014), vol. III, pp. 271-274.

[254] For an in depth study of Bolshevik activities in Central Asia, see Helene Encausse, *Islam and the Russian Empire: Reform and Revolution in Central Asia* (London: I.B. Tauras and Co. Ltd., 1988).

> In a few days more the Turkomans again mustered strong and surrounded the town. One day we saw that our Afghan friends who used to come to us at least once daily did not come for two days, instead we saw a corpse lying on horseback and brought to the adjacent barracks which were occupied by the Red soldiers. We went to the President and expressed our sympathy and deep anguish to see a friend of ours thus killed…We offered him our services if required. The President welcomed our offer and took us into his confidence as good comrades.[255]

The *Muhijirin* were given the task of defending a strategic point near the river by the 'revcom', the revolutionary committee of Bokhara.

> To defend the river front was a military problem of great interest...But what could we do? We were a motley crowd of 36 and our fighting strength really amounted to nothing. But there was no other course left. Either we should choose to fight and die, or should see the town plundered before our eyes, then, falling into the hands of the Turkomans, should meet a death of ignominy and cowardice. Moreover, was not fighting for the cause of Bokharans a cause of all the freedom-loving people on earth? We happened to be there, and liked to share the fate of the Bokharan soldiers.[256]

We are presented here with a subjectivity identical to the crossing of the river at the Panjshir valley. The crossing of the flooded area was based on neither a prior knowledge of the operation, nor could be undertaken with any guarantees of success. 'Death' or 'victory' were the options. Similarly, in Bokhara, Usmani was confronted with a political decision to side, and possibly die, for a communist government, without any knowledge of Marxism, or even an awareness of military strategy. The execution of their friends, the impending invasion by the city, and the 'fearlessness' exhibited by the revolutionaries placed the *muhajirin* and the Bokharan communists in a shared existentialist situation. In other words, they offered to die for a regime to which they had no ideological affiliation, but only a sense of *practical solidarity.*

This situation invoked the ethical decision of either continuing or abandoning the battle, a moment of pure scission between confidence and doubt, without any mediating term. For political action always depends on the existence of a remainder that cannot fully be elaborated through premeditated action or prior knowledge, opening an interstitial space that must be filled by axiomatic declarations amounting to a leap in the dark, rather than following sociologically deduced conclusions. The decision to identify with Bokhara's revcom opened a new phase in Usmani's life, as he successfully defended the town to 'vindicate the honour of India.'

[255] Usmani, *Peshawar to Moscow*), p. 82.
[256] Ibid., pp. 82-84.

> ..he [President of Revcom] came straight to us and began to lift us up in ecstasy, praising us, and shouting 'Long live the Indian Comrades' 'Long Live the cause of free India' 'Long Live the defenders of free India.[257]

We are already miles away from discussions of 'scientific' or 'sociological' political theory, engaging instead with more immediate questions of heroism and sacrifice in the face of impending danger. Usmani encountered communism as part of the continuum that began with a distancing from imperial ideology and a search for a new anchor for political action. This primacy of political action led Usmani to repeatedly complain about the part of his life in Russia (1921-1922) when he was compelled to undertake classes in Marxist theory.

> I had no knowledge of Marxism. My main aim was to fight like a soldier in the ranks of the fighters for the liberation of India….It was quite amusing to come across terms such as bourgeoisie, proletariat, petty-bourgeoisie and dictatorship of the proletariat. Often irresistibly I would laugh while reading such odd terms, and my fellow-residents would be amused by my behaviour....Frankly speaking, I was not satisfied with a mere theoretical study of the subject...The big theoreticians drowned us in their arguments about building a theoretical background for the Indian revolution.[258]

In an impatience characteristic of anti-colonial politics, Usmani instigated a revolt against M.N. Roy whom 'all regarded as our teacher,' against his alleged pedantic ways, insisting that he be relieved from the studies to rejoin the struggle for independence in India. He approached 'Comrade Raccocci,' the Secretary-General of the Communist International, who arranged Usmani's meeting with Stalin on this matter.

> I told him bluntly, 'I want to go back to India'. And his reply was, 'why did you come here if you want to go away without completing your studies? But I succeeded in convincing him that I could best serve the cause of Indian revolution there, in India'.[259]

The primacy of politics over theory, of decision over knowledge and of confrontation over waiting, is clear from these passages.[260] The ease with which Usmani was simultaneously able to occupy the position of a partisan of communism and political Islam allows us to make a preliminary hypothesis on why political Islam and communism were often anchored in the same geographical and temporal situations in the 20th century. First, both stem out of a negation of the

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[257] Usmani, *Peshawar to Moscow*, p. 84.

[258] Shaukat Usmani, *Historic Trips of a Revolutionary: Sojourn in the Soviet Union* (New York: Sterling Publishers, 1977), p. 46.

[259] Ibid., p. 73.

[260] There is of course a different conceptualization of waiting in Gandhi's thought, as recently pointed out by Uday Mehta. As a response to the dislocations in social life produced by colonial capitalism, Gandhi elevated waiting as a political virtue for sustaining an authentic relationship with the self. Such a conception of waiting came into a productive conflict with other strands of anti-colonial politics, including communist, a theme I shall discuss in future work. See Uday Mehta, 'Patience, Inwardness, and Self-Knowledge in Gandhi's Hind Swaraj', *Public Culture* 23:2 (2011), pp. 417-429.

globally prevalent liberal imperial ideology, creating a space for an intellectual and political rupture. Second, both engaged in a search for a novel political community, and hence were oriented towards the future. Third, they used heroic sacrifice, including the voluntary embracing of death, as both a rejection of the fear of colonial violence and as an assertion of the transformative potential of political violence.

After leaving his studies in Moscow, Usmani was imprisoned in India in 1923 for 4 years, where he claims that the only books available to him were the Mahabharta and Ramayana.[261] On his release in 1927, he became involved in clandestine political activity as the leader of the communist party before being re-arrested in 1929 in the Meerut Conspiracy Case. It is then fair to suggest that the premier face of Indian communism in the 1920s was not at any point well-acquainted with Marxist theory, a condition shared by other renowned communists of the era.

If Usmani identified with communism as a result of a pre-history of political action, what did it even mean to be a communist beyond organizational affiliation? In other words, is there any utility in using the term 'communism' for diverse practices carried out in the name of the idea across the globe?

Communism, Historical Difference and The Role of Fiction

The search for a regulative idea that could orient a movement caught up in a space of negation was a response both to the actually existing violence of imperial rule, and to the inertia and confusion arising out of the collapse of the Khilafat/Non-Cooperation Movement. Usmani's association with communism was part of what Althusser in his later writings described as an 'encounter,' similar to a person jumping onto a moving train, except that it was the idea of communism that jumped onto the moving train of anti-colonial nationalism.[262]

As noted earlier, the deadlock of a violent and discredited imperial order in the aftermath of the war did not just present an abstract intellectual problem, but was shaping multiple political trajectories. Thus, if the ideological universe occupied by a supposedly harmonious imperial liberalism was now viewed as simply a mask displacing a deeper antagonism between the colonizers and the colonized, attempts to replace it with a newer order required a minimal level of fiction as a support for political commitment in the present. By fiction I mean the postulating of certain ideals emanating from a political terrain, in order to interrogate the same terrain in a self-reflexive act of political knowledge production. While always containing elements of ideology, the necessity of fiction arises out of the need to move out of the domain of a pure, melancholic negation and allow for new coordinates of self-relating, a new horizon for evaluating actions in the present.[263] The name 'communism' sought to provide one such horizon,

[261] Usmani, *Peshawar to Moscow*, p. 83.

[262] See Althusser Louis, Philosophy of the Encounter: Later Writings, 1978-1987, eds. Oliver Corpet and Francois Matheron (London: Verso, 2006), trans. G.M. Goshgarian, pp. 163-207.

[263] My argument is influenced, though not determined, by Badiou's treatment of fiction. Mobilizing popular mythology and culture was part of a global trend amongst political thinkers in the 1920s, including Sorel, Gramsci and Ernst Bloch. This engagement was partly a response to the inadequacy of "scientific" analysis in developing communist praxis, and partly a response to the successful mobilization of popular culture by fascist forces in

inscribing into permanence the rupture from imperial liberalism instituted by the anti-colonial revolt, and allowing particular actions to be invested with larger, transcendental meaning. For any 'anti-colonial' action depended on such a horizon that permitted localized acts of disobedience gain a meaningful coherence at the national scale, beyond their depictions as contingent 'disturbances' by the colonial state.

It is on such a register that I read Usmani's glorifying accounts of the Bolshevik Revolution in Bokhara

> At every hundred steps the Russians and Bokharans delivered lectures in Russian and Persian, emphasising the solidarity of the oppressed people….It was a lesson for us. We saw freedom in her true guise here. In spite of their poverty the people looked more jovial, and revolution had instilled in them contentment and fearlessness. The real brotherhood of mankind could be seen here amongst these people of 50 different races. No barriers of caste or religion hindered them from mixing up with one another. Every soul was transformed into an orator..The speech, suppressed for centuries together, burst out like a flood.[264]

In other instances, Usmani explains the relationship between religion and communism in the Soviet Union.

> The most amusing was the visit of Faizullah Khojaev, head of the Bokhara administration...He invited the Indian students to his room for tea and entertained us with Bokhara sultanas, talking about the progress Bokhara was making under the new regime. I could not resist the temptation of asking him whether he was a Communist. Prompt came his reply, 'By the Grace of God, I am a Communist'.[265]

The accuracy of Usmani's descriptions is a moot point, since that would place us back into questions of hermeneutics, debating whether he had correctly read the situation, tying an entire generation's political experience to textual interpretations. Instead, we must read his choice of narrating these events onto a political register, as an attempt to produce an alternative fiction to the imperial fiction, one that could both speak to the real anxieties within the Indian conjuncture and envisage an actionable plan for overcoming them. The depiction of the Soviet Union as a concrete representation of the future-to-come for the colonized world was perhaps a case of a poor fiction, one that would be later challenged by the Maoist assertion that argued for locating and intensifying the contradictions within the socialist states. But that does not take away the necessary function of a fiction in suturing the space of a lack of absolute knowledge, particularly when the sacrificial decisions demanded by any oppositional political project require a minimal level of confidence in undertaking actions laden with unforeseen risks. In this respect, a fiction

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Europe. See Alain Badiou, *Philosophy for Militants*, trans. Bruno Bosteels (London: Verso, 2012) and George Sorel, *Reflections on Violence* (New York: Dover Publications, 2004).

[264] Usmani, *Peshawar to Moscow*, pp. 57-58.

[265] Usmani, *Historic Trips*, p. 56.

does not represent a sociologically deduced conclusion, but an affirmative prescription, one that marks the commencement of a conceptual labour aimed at instituting a new form of politics.

Once again, however, this should not be confused with an uncomplicated acceptance of communist ideology by Usmani and others. Indeed, what he finds fascinating about the Soviet experience is not its dominant descriptions by prominent communists of the era, but the shared affinities between the Soviet Union and the 'Oriental people'. In a section titled 'Russians and Soviets are Oriental' Usmani asserts these similarities.

> Firstly, villages in the Soviet Union and especially in Eastern Russia, while differing in the details of their organisation, present a social picture similar to the villages in India. They are essentially co-operative. The people of the West resent the idea of the Soviet as much as they resent the idea of the *Panchayat.*[266] It is due to its coming into direct clash with their social experience which is individualistic in all respects and aspects. But on the other hand the eastern tribes and clans as well as villages find nothing inconsistent in the Soviet idea since their mode of life is primarily social and not individual.[267]

Needless to say, such purported affinities between a village panchayat (itself too grand a category to have much meaning) and the Soviets cannot stand any historical test. Yet, as Shruti Kapila has powerfully argued, citations often functioned to mark a point of rupture from, rather than an unquestioned fidelity to a textual tradition. The attempts to link Soviet Communism with the eastern 'mode of life' was an example of the infidelity characteristic to Indian political thought.

Yet, it was the emphasis on communism's own missed encounters with the non-European world that propelled anti-colonialism as an agent of communism's universalism outside its point of origin. Usmani, and a host of anti-colonial communists during this period, were communists to the extent that they allowed communism to speak in situations and to processes hitherto outside its purview. Thus, citations, much like borders, not only separated, but also allowed for shared intellectual trajectories, in which geographically scattered and historically disparate indices of suffering could nonetheless be concentrated into a common and actionable political project, in the here and now. For Usmani, Communism was a name that summoned such heterogeneous struggles to institute a global political project, making the rupture with imperial liberalism permanent.

Islam and Communism: The Divergence

If Political Islam and Communism shared an antagonistic posture to imperial liberalism, they differed precisely on the nature of the fictions they constructed to respond to it. This speaks both

[266] Panchayats are traditional forms of village councils, often contrasted with modern institutions introduced by the colonial state.

[267] Usmani, *Peshawar to Moscow*, pp. 165-168. In this discussion, apart from emphasizing the affinity between the Soviet and Eastern way of life, Usmani highlights the Soviet aid to the colonized world in order to depict the Soviet Union as an ally of the East.

to their intellectual and geographical overlap, but also to the subtle but crucial differences that mark out their internal antagonism. Indeed, throughout his retelling of the disputes amongst the Muhajirin, that is, between those wanting to associate with the Communists in Bokhara and those wanting to continue the journey to Turkey, Usmani uses the term 'our step-brethren', denoting a familial, yet fraught relationship.[268]

A detailed engagement with the specificities of political Islam is beyond the scope of this work. I elucidate my argument by engaging with Faisal Devji's study of the most successful manifestation of political Islam in South Asia, the Pakistan movement.[269] As already stated, I do not want to reiterate the already well-known history of the Communist Party's attitude towards the Pakistan Movement. Instead, my aim in this essay has been to simultaneously interrogate the political projects of Islam and Communism at a conceptual level. If earlier I showed their overlapping tendencies at their moment of birth, here I attempt to delineate the point of departure between the two political ideologies, one that sheds light on the reasons for the often tense relationship between the Muslim League and Muslims belonging to the Communist movement. Devji's study of the Pakistan Movement is an ideal site for examining these differences, both for his emphasis on the political thought produced by the Pakistan Movement, and for explicitly comparing it to the ideas developed by the Communist movement.

Devji argues that what provided the Pakistan Movement with its historical specificity was a concept of a nation that never fully coincided with a state or a territory. It was instead religion that provided an alternative to Pakistan's lack of territorial anchorage. Moreover, the Pakistan Movement was conceived as a political community oriented towards a future, in which questions of territory and ethnic/linguistic diversity would disappear to allow for a homogenous polity, an ideal that Devji claims it shared with communism.[270]

There are two major assumptions in this otherwise thought-provoking work. The first is obvious. Communism in the non-European world, at least since Lenin's thesis on the colonial world in 1920, always emphasized 'national liberation' as the principal task of the communist movement in Asia, with 'nation' understood in a conception as orthodox as possible during the era.[271] It will be difficult to find any theoretical work of significance from communists in Asia, or even Latin America or Africa, which rejects the nation as a principal site for political action.[272] The other, and perhaps more significant comparison, concerned the belief that historical differences would disappear in a future. This perspective offers a more interesting lens to conduct a comparative study of Islamic and Communist thought, since in a certain teleological itinerary of European Marxism, the working class is invested with the capacity to overcome all existing antagonisms.

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[268] Ibid., p. 59.

[269] Devji, *Muslim Zion*, pp. 241-250.

[270] Ibid., p. 28.

[271] See Vladimir Lenin, 'Draft Thesis on the National and Colonial Questions' in *Selected Works* (New York: International Publishers, 1938), vol. X.

[272] "National Liberation" remained a central concern for political praxis amongst communists in countries as diverse as Vietnam, South Africa and Indonesia. On the importance of national sovereignty for communist movements in the non-European world, see Prashad, *The Darker Nations*, pp. 1-30.

The difference, however, persisted on the role of contradiction or antagonism within the structure of a communist fiction. For whatever the teleologies of European Marxism, the existence of a radically different political geography in Asia, with questions of colonialism, nationalism, religion, and regionalism, to name a few, meant the problem of engaging with multiple and intrinsic contradictions could not be circumvented. A cursory look at the literature of Indian communism makes it clear that all given political categories such as regionalism, nationalism, caste politics or even socialism are intrinsically tied to antagonistic terms that never allow for any full closure. Usmani himself defers any possibility of an epoch shifting moment in a pristine event of class struggle as he rarely, if ever, mentions the word 'proletariat' in his writings, substituting it with 'nation', 'oriental people', 'colonized', 'workers', 'peasants', 'eastern characteristics', etc., without any preferential order. Neither does Usmani elevate any particular contradiction to a transhistorical character to provide for a 'subject-object' of history that could overcome all existing contradictions. Instead, he indicates a number of possible nodal points for future conflict, arising out of his own political experience, without ever providing a coherent conceptual framework to explain this apparent aberration when viewed from the perspective of orthodox Marxism. That these historically sedimented conflicts represented a challenge to be overcome through the anti-colonial motif of sacrifice, rather than automatically superseded in industrialized society were further clarified in his electoral campaign in the British general elections.

As stated earlier, Usmani was chosen as a candidate for the Communist Party of Great Britain in 1929. The elections were important for two symbolic reasons. First, it allowed for publicizing the cause of political prisoners in India. Second, he was pitted against Sir John Simon from the infamous Simon Commission Report of 1929, a controversial report on constitutional proposals in India that led to India-wide demonstrations, often violently suppressed by the police. Placing a communist imprisoned in a colonial jail against one of the most prominent symbols of colonial domination in India generated much public discussion on the plight of Indian prisoners, even if this hype did not translate into votes.[273] The following quote from Usmani's letter to constituents titled 'Echo of the General Election', which arrived too late to be widely distributed in the constituency, indicates the difficulties he saw in building a shared political project, even while fully believing in its possibility.

> I have been selected by the Communist Party in Spen Valley to stand as a candidate for Parliament and I wish, though separated from you by 6,000 miles and prison bars, to place before you an appeal. I appeal to you, not on my own behalf but of the 300 million toiling masses of India...I claim to be a humble representative of the vast mass forces of revolt which are now so quickly gaining strength in India and throughout the entire colonial world. I have been working for the masses of this country since 1920. Imprisoned without trial in 1923, I was tried and sentenced to four years' rigorous imprisonment in 1924 for Conspiracy as a Communist….All in India who take part in the struggle for emancipation or who assist the exploited masses must suffer more or less the same fate as I have done…. I am asking you to disregard personal consideration, the claim of traditions and the ties of race and colour, and to prefer the weak to the strong,

[273] Shaukat Usmani, 'An Echo of the General Election', *The Labour Monthly (*1929), pp. 504-508.

> the poor to the rich, the absent to the present. I ask you to make this sacrifice not for my sake, but for the sake of the solidarity of the workers of the world... I appeal to you, confident that you will rise superior to limitations of race and colour, and, in spite of all obstacles, stand by your class.[274]

The first issue to highlight is that there are no claims made of a generalized equivalence between the interests of the working-class in India and Britain, but rather this unity is viewed as political project to be constructed. Taking historically produced differences, including 'race' and 'colour', which are termed 'limitations' and 'obstacles,' what is striking is how Usmani describes their overcoming as an act of 'sacrifice', rather than a natural alliance based on easily discernible, shared interests. Such identitarian claims, having their autonomous anchor in 'tradition' could not be disregarded, not least because much of colonial ideology was built on the fiction of a separation of races. Nor does it imply an immediate personal advancement for British workers, since the communists in India had already pointed out the corrupting influence of imperialism on them. In a characteristic overlap between anti-colonial subjectivity and communist politics, Usmani calls for an indifference towards 'personal consideration' as a condition for building global solidarity. Thus, his conception of class solidarity, rather than overriding historical antagonisms, sought their resolution through a process calling for a transformative sacrifice.

Second, what future political community is Usmani invoking by calling on his constituents to prefer the 'poor to the rich, the absent to the present'? This 'absence' does not point to a future community fully coinciding with a humanity freed of its immanent antagonisms. Instead the call to 'stand by your class' points towards an insurgent, divisive unity. 'Class' in communist politics denoted a partisan and divisive viewpoint to name a structuring gap impossible to suture within capitalist society, with *class politics* indicating a political project corresponding with this recognition. It is at this point that the communist fiction decisively parts ways with fictions of a harmonious whole, whether defined territorially or ideationally. The communist fiction in the colonial world was instead constituted as a response to antagonisms engendered by colonial rule by not only inscribing them into a specific politics, but also to widen their horizon, displacing them diagonally onto existing identity formations in search of new political alliances. There is then only a theory of society as a contradictory totality, one that permanently invokes decisions on the antagonistic terms within a particular situation, without allowing for any closures.[275]

Conclusion: The Politics of Place

[274] Ibid., pp. 504-506.

[275] It was for this reason that the Communist Movement, even while supporting the Pakistan Movement, rejected the argument that there was an ontological basis for the creation of Pakistan based in religion or territory. Instead, the demand for Pakistan was supported or opposed on the basis of the resolution of the nationalities question, as a partial step towards working class unity in the sub-continent. This partly explains the hostility of the Communist Party of Pakistan towards the Muslim League (and vice versa) immediately after independence, since the Communists saw the postcolonial situation as displacing rather than ending social contradictions, with the Muslim League emerging as the primary adversary for "real freedom" in Pakistan. See Ali Raza, 'The Unfulfilled Dream: The Left in Pakistan 1947-1950', *South Asian History and Culture* 4:4 (2013), pp. 503-519.

Usmani viewed his own travels as not only political, but as tied to the politics of India. Even while traveling abroad, the 'honour of India' dominated his political imagination.

> This travelogue, this piece of history, this journey, is not a pilgrimage without politics. We had started our journey because of the political situation in our country. The entire country was in revolt. The foreigners, the British imperialists, had made our lives impossible...Though it is true that I have traveled extensively in Asia, Europe and a part of Africa, it must be frankly stated that there has never been the slightest notion in my head to become another 'Sindbad the sailor'.[276]

Against the contemporary postmodern or postcolonial celebration of hybridity as a political possibility, anti-colonial thought elevated the geographical categories of territory and place as primary sites for political intervention. Perhaps Usmani's non-place within the emergent political landscape of India is what prevented him from gaining a political foothold within the country that was equal to his stature in the international arena. His description of the multiple directions in which he was pulled after his release from prison in 1927 testifies to his own anxiety regarding his lack of an anchor on the political stage, and indicates the realities of the political scene in India.

> I was facing several problems at this time at the end of 1927. Arjan lal Sethi, who was held in great esteem by the revolutionaries of North India...was impressing upon me that being a son of Rajasthan, I should settle down in Ajmer and train revolutionary cadres there. Then there was the Kanpur Mazdoor Sabha, with whose leaders I had worked during the period of my underground life before my arrest in May 1923...Thirdly, there was a call from my Communist party comrades that I should do something for Akbar Khan Qureishi who had by this time already undergone some seven years of imprisonment...Habib Ahmed Nasim, one of the Moscow-Tashkent conspiracy ex-prisoners was already settled in Delhi and it was agreed between him and me that I should do some editing and journalistic work in Delhi.[277]

Usmani was even approached by a number of young political activists to begin a guerilla war against the British, a result of 'an exaggerated sense of my capacity to lead a military campaign.' As Usmani emerged from a four-year sentence into the changing realities of the country, the pressure of the Indian politics, with antagonisms working in multiple vectors, was evident. The 'problems' he faced included questions of regional and political belonging, not to mention the mundane tasks of earning a living. While Usmani decided to settle in Delhi, he was approached by Maulana Muhammad Ali, who wanted him to tour the Soviet Union to ask for financial aid- a journey he decided to undertake with the aid of Abdul Ghaffar Khan, who helped him escape to Afghanistan via the Khyber Pass.[278]

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[276] Usmani, *Historic Trips*, pp. 16; 111.
[277] Ibid., p. 85-86.
[278] Ibid., p. 84.

This journey was Usmani's last significant public act as a communist leader before his arrests in 1929 and his subsequent retirement from politics. Perhaps it was an indication that his politics had become suspended at the meeting point between his association with global communism, and its reconceptualization within the Indian political scene, even though, as I have argued, the former was overdetermined by the subjectivity of the latter. Against the contemporary celebration of a groundless cosmopolitanism, the Indian political scene demanded political ideas to be anchored in specific histories and geographies, not as a hurdle to their universalisation, but as the only condition of their possibility. The question of 'place' is further explored in the next chapter on communist debates on the peasantry.

Chapter 5

In the Shadow of Ghadar: Marxism and Anti-Colonialism in Colonial Punjab

The relationship between Marxism and the colonial world can best be described as a missed encounter, since the political trajectories of late 19th century 'social democracy' in Europe and the burgeoning critiques of colonial rule by anti-colonial intellectuals and organizations did not cross paths until the 1920s. Positivist Marxism, tied to a linear conception of history, could only view the colonial world as a permanent site of deficit, removed from the universal history of class struggle prevalent in the industrially advanced West. Such a conception of a civilizational hierarchy was not only a result of an ideological construction peculiar to 18th- and 19th-century European thought, but was also tied to an objective process of economic, political and ideological differentiation produced by the uneven development of capitalism across global space.[279] Yet, a missed encounter does not merely play the role of keeping apart political ideologies emanating from distinct historical contexts. Rather, this lack of historical correspondence between specific political ideologies becomes the condition of possibility for their encounter, overdetermined by contingent events, yet structured by the persistence of deeper, subterranean currents that allow for mutual translation.[280]

In this chapter, I interrogate the advent of communist ideas in colonial Punjab in the 1920s as a new ideological current in the Indian political landscape. I focus in particular on the simultaneous appropriation of the Ghadar Party history and European Marxism by Punjabi radicals to produce a specific communist praxis in colonial Punjab. My aim here is not to recount the complex reasons the Ghadar Party joined the communist movement in India. Instead, I write a history of the *intellectual trajectory* of communism in Punjab as a peculiar encounter between European Marxism and the anti-colonial struggle. Further, rather than asking the usual question of how Marxism entered and transformed the political landscape of colonial India, I seek to explore the ways in which political practices in colonial Punjab impacted Marxist ideology, rethinking and displacing its internal coordinates. The colonial deficit in Marxist thought was not only viewed by anti-colonial intellectuals as a limit to Marxism's global import, but also as a provocation to improvise and reconstitute its framework to permit its resonance in the colonial world.[281] Thus, I argue that a rupture from a pristine Marxism was not a sign of a 'deviation'

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[279] Contemporary scholarship convincingly argues against a conception of linear economic, social and political development within capitalist modernity. Instead, it posits uneven productive space as constitutive of Capital against its own fantasies of homogeneity. Unevenness produced disparate ideological and political practices, the result of which are finally being registered within intellectual history. See, for example, Neil Smith, *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital and the Production of Space* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008) and Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, pp. 97-116.

[280] See Louis Althusser, *Philosophy of the Encounter: Later Writings, 1978-1987* (London: Verso, 2006).

[281] For a similar argument, see Shruti Kapila, 'The Majority of Democracy', *Social Text Online* (February, 2015), https://socialtextjournal.org/periscope_article/the-majority-of-democracy/ accessed 16th August 2015. Intellectual history must move beyond the global division of labor in which European intellectuals think and non-Europeans practice. Instead, we should study these practices as profound reconceptualizations of modern ideas in and of themselves. Bruno Bosteels has recently emphasized the theoretical importance of these innovative practices as 'theoretical acts' or acts of theoretical production. Bosteels, *Marx and Freud*, pp. 75-96.

from 'the idea', but instead was a vehicle for its inscription in a historically specific site, and, consequently, for its universalization outside its point of origin in Europe.

I explore these questions through the story and writings of Sohan Singh Josh, a communist from colonial Punjab and vocal defender of the Ghadarite tradition. Josh's oeuvre is ideally placed to delineate the convergence of Marxism and the Ghadar Party as he identified with, and worked through, both these traditions to formulate communist politics in colonial Punjab. By showing how he developed a new practice of Marxism, particularly on the question of the 'revolutionary subject', I examine how such practice formed the basis for a new framework for Marxist theory itself. In other words, I consider communism in Punjab as a productive site for theoretical reflection, rather than merely a place for passive reception of European ideas.

Marxism and Ghadar: The Encounter

A detailed survey of the Ghadar Party's encounter with global communism is beyond the scope of this article. It is important, however, to briefly comment on the conjuncture that permitted these two project to intersect in the aftermath of the First World War.

The Ghadar Party was formed in 1913 to challenge British sovereignty over India. The party consisted of Indians (mostly Punjabis) living outside and aimed to ignite a rebellion across colonial India, particularly in the British Indian military to win independence. The party was able to build an impressive anti-imperial geography, with a network in countries as diverse as the United States (mostly California), Canada, Honduras, Afghanistan, China and the Soviet Union. Apart from doing propaganda work through a number of publications, the Ghadar Party sought alliances with anti-British forces, including Germany and Turkey. With bases in multiple countries and participating in 'conspiratorial' activities, Ghadar was an integral actor in what Tim Harper has recently called the 'Asian Underground', a global space consisting of exiles, rebels and criminals found in major urban centers of Asia during the early twentieth century.[282]

By the late 1910s and early 1920s, the Ghadar Party was politically and organizationally exhausted.[283] The party failed to induce widespread rebellion in the British Indian military, particularly with the defeat of the daring attempt to seize control of the Mian Mir Cantonment in Lahore, which the party hoped would trigger military revolt. The colonial state punished the architects of this botched attempt in the 'Lahore Conspiracy Case' and concomitantly launched a crackdown on Ghadarite activities throughout the Empire, reduced its capacity to pose a substantial challenge to colonial authority.[284] In addition, after the US' entry into the war, Woodrow Wilson's government outlawed anti-British groups, including the Ghadar Party in California,, decimating its organizational structure through a number of sedition cases. Finally,

[282] Tim Harper, 'Singapore, 1915, and the Birth of the Asian Underground' *Modern Asian Studies* 47:6 (2013), pp. 1782-1811.
[283] The Indian intelligence community also felt that Ghadar activists had "little concrete result to show" during this period. Williamson, *India and Communism*, pp. 156-158.
[284] See Malwinder Singh Warraich and Harinder Singh (eds.), Lahore Conspiracy Case I and II (Chandigarh: Unistar, 2008).

the defeat of the Axis in the war (a major funder and supplier of weapons to the Ghadar Party) removed a major global ally, making geopolitical realities increasingly bleak for transnational anti-colonial groups.[285] Top intelligence officials in Colonial India assessed Ghadar's political capacity by concluding that there was 'very little concrete result to show' and the party was 'rendered inoperative' after the 'Armistice was signed'.[286] The Ghadar Party continued its activities in the pacific and even in North America, but leading members of the group desperately searched for new ideological and geostrategic anchors.

During the same period, Bolshevik Russia found itself in the midst of a civil war, and faced hostile territories to the West. Furthermore, the failure of communist uprisings in European countries meant Russia needed to seek new allies beyond their traditional relationships with European communists. This conjuncture propelled the colonial world, and the anti-colonial movements germinating in it, as potential allies in the struggle for global communism.[287] Lenin's thesis on the colonial question, the holding of the Congress of the Peoples of the East at Baku, and the formation of the University of the Toilers of the East at Tashkent were tied to the transformed political possibilities presented by the post-war conjuncture, with the colonial world at the center of this new imaginary (see chapters 2 and 3).[288] Ghadar Party leaders who were sympathetic to Marxist thought, such as Santokh Singh and Rattan Singh, became voting delegates and official observers, respectively, at the fourth Communist International Meeting, cementing relations between Soviet Russia and the anti-colonial movement in India. Santokh Singh also enhanced his understanding of Marxism by studying the subject closely during his stay in the Soviet Union, a continuation of his exploration of Marxist ideas from his stay on the East Coast.[289]

Santokh Singh was part of a number of transnational Ghadarite militants who had not only acquainted themselves with Marxist philosophy, but were also seeking avenues to enter the transformed political landscape of colonial Punjab. The 'Punjab Disturbances' of 1919-1920 and the violent response of the colonial state, including the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre, had not only solidified anti-colonial feelings in the province, but also opened a new sequence for political action, displacing the vanguardism of the previous decades with mass mobilization as central to the political imaginary in India.[290] As a Ghadar militant, Santokh Singh inhabited transnational

[285] Manjapra, *M.N. Roy*, pp. 63-97.

[286] Williamson, *India and Communism*, p. 157.

[287] See Alexandre Bennigsen and Enders Wimbush, *Muslim National Communism in the Soviet Union: A Revolutionary Strategy for the Colonial World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979).

[288] The Second meeting of the Communist International witnessed the first in-depth debate on the role of the colonial world in global communism. Lenin presented his thesis on the "National and Colonial Questions", which he followed by presenting another document, that was written by the Indian delegate, M.N. Roy. It signaled the emergence of the non-European world as the principal theatre for communist politics during the twentieth century. See Vladimir Lenin, 'Draft Thesis on the National and Colonial Questions', in *Selected Works* (New York: International Publishers, 1938), vol. X.

[289] Petrie, *Communism in India*, pp. 152-157.

[290] The "Punjab Disturbances" and the Amritsar Massacre could be seen as moments of the birth of 'the political' in modern India. Not only did anti-colonialism gain mass appeal in colonial India, but the multiple contradictions forming the social body also found expression in the political domain, resulting in contestations over the place of

spaces incongruous with imperial geography, but now he aimed to situate himself in mass politics inside Punjab. He returned to colonial Punjab in 1926 to organize a workers and peasants political party influenced by Marxism.[291] After a brief internment in his native village at Amritsar, he began publishing *Kirti* magazine, an organ given the twin tasks of disseminating 'communist ideology' in vernacular idioms, and defending the legacy of Ghadarite heroes.[292] Singh's failing health compelled him to seek allies in political communities in the Punjab to continue his work, which is how he met Sohan Singh Josh, a young and emerging political leader in the Punjab and future editor of *Kirti* magazine.

Josh was born into a peasant family at Chetenpura village of Amritsar in 1896. To support his family, he took up a number of petty jobs before being appointed for a junior post in the Censor's Office in Bombay. He was assigned the task of reading letters from the Punjabi diaspora in order to prevent 'seditious' literature from entering India.[293] In a move that would seem both ironic and embarrassing later in his life, Josh destroyed 'hundreds of letters' written by Punjabi radicals to their relatives and comrades in Punjab, people whose activities he would later radically identify with.

> ...the Censor Office were merciless-- a cog in the machine working like automats, showing no sympathy or human emotions either for the addressers or the addressees. Rather, we were keen on collecting as much information as possible from those letters for the special files allocated in the name of patriotic Indians who were considered 'conspirators, suspects or seditionists' by the British Government. I was a mercenary… I was a Sikh, and like other Sikhs was loyal to the government.[294]

The Akali movement in colonial Punjab radicalized Josh, turning him into a major proponent of anti-British views.[295] The movement had the overt aim of reclaiming control of Gurdawaras from corrupt, pro-British *mahants,* and also became the concentrated expression of anger amongst the once loyal Sikhs against the increasingly authoritarian British rule in the Punjab. In 1922, Josh was one of the prominent leaders of the Akali movement who were arrested by British authorities, and was sentenced after proclaiming in front of the magistrate that he had 'little faith in British rule'.[296] He gained further fame and notoriety after leading a group of political prisoners to engage in civil disobedience within the jails, questioning the sovereignty of colonial power on the bodies of the condemned prisoners.

> Our struggle in jail was part of the general struggle that was being waged throughout the country for religious and political reforms.… We knew that no improvements inside the jails could take place without struggles and sufferings; we knew how the *Ghadar* patriots

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religion, caste and class within the nation. For an excellent discussion on the colonial anxieties over the 'disturbances', see Hussain, 'Towards the Jurisprudence', pp. 100-110.

[291] Williamson, *India and Communism*, pp. 159-160.

[292] Raza, 'Separating the Wheat', pp. 322-327.

[293] See Sohan Josh, *My Tryst with Secularism* (Columbia: South Asia Books, 1991).

[294] Ibid., p. 14.

[295] Ibid., p. 20.

[296] Ibid., p. 88.

had fought in Andaman and Indian jails, and had made great sacrifices for winning their rights for *kachcha* and *pagree.*[297]

Josh placed himself within the tradition of the Ghadar activists, the people he had spied on for years, and aimed to emulate their politics, an identification we shall dwell on later. In jail, he was torn in the struggle between 'fanatical Akalis' who insisted on singing songs glorifying Sikh rule over India, and pro-Congress prisoners who protested against Sikh rule for being exclusive of the larger Indian nation.[298] He became increasingly dissatisfied with the parochial turn in Akali politics, claiming that a major challenge confronting the anti-colonial movement was to overcome identitarian divisions. After a number of clashes with the Akali leadership, both intellectual and physical, he began to search for alternative ideological and organizational anchors for his politics.[299] This is roughly the point (1927) when he met Santokh Singh, who immediately recruited Josh to *Kirti* as an editor, an encounter that would prove to be most enduring for Josh's political trajectory.[300] He would later describe the political significance of *Kirti as a* 'the continuation of the Ghadar Movement in a new way'.[301]

He became the most prominent leader and intellectual of the communist movement in the Punjab in the 1930s and 1940s, being repeatedly arrested by the colonial state for his seditious activities, and served a 5-year jail term for the 'Meerut Conspiracy Case'.[302] Josh led an electoral campaign in 1937 against Sardar Raghbir Singh (a major landlord in Amritsar) on a platform calling for an end to 'landlordism', defeating the latter by 12000 votes and becoming one of the 5 communist MLAs in the Punjab Legislative Assembly.[303] Josh remained a member of the Communist Party of India until his death in 1984, serving as a major chronicler of the radical tradition in the Punjab, giving special emphasis to the Ghadar Party and the Communist Movement within the continuum of perpetual rebellion.

Thus, we witness the intersection of three different political currents in the 1920s: Leninism's decisive move to explore revolutionary potentialities in the East, the Ghadar Party's attempts to find a foothold within colonial Punjab, and Sohan Singh Josh's search for a new ideological anchor for himself in mass politics in Punjab. Here, I am most interested in the third strand, i.e. Josh's attempts to place communist politics in Punjab as a continuation of the twin legacy of European Marxism and the Ghadar Party. In his writings, Josh does not view Punjab's radical tradition as a story of deficit due to its missed encounter with Marxism, a position that would make orthodox Marxism appear as the universal kernel of wisdom able to unlock the impasse of any particular situation. Instead, he develops a framework in which Marxism itself needed a

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[297] Ibid., p. 48.
[298] Josh, *My Tryst*, p. 51.
[299] Ibid., pp. 72-73.
[300] Ibid., pp. 101-102. Santokh Singh was impressed by Josh's statement in the Akali leaders' conspiracy case and approached him through his Ghaddarite comrade, Bhai Bhag Singh, a Canadian, to write articles for the newly found *Kirti* at the end of 1926.
[301] Sohan Josh, *My meetings with Bhagat Singh and Other Early Revolutionaries* (New Delhi: Communist Party of India, 1976), p. 13.
[302] See Sohan Josh, *Hindustan Ghadar Party: A Short History* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1977).
[303]Sohan Josh, *My Tryst,* p. 215.

particular, historically dense site that would not only make it relevant for political action, but in the process, would also change its own theoretical premises. Consider how Josh rather embarrassingly writes about his lack of knowledge of Marxism when he joined *Kirti,* a 'Marxist magazine', as an editor.

> I did not know much of Marxist theory. I knew only what I had read and learnt from the *Liberty and the Great Libertarions,* which also contained excerpts from the writings of Marx, Engels and Lenin. Hence, whatever I knew was eclectic, anarchistic and communistic all mixed together and unsystematic.[304]

I read this 'unsystematic' thought not as a limitation, but as a vehicle for producing political novelty within the realm of communist praxis. Here, I take a methodological liberty. I study Josh (and other anti-colonial Marxists) as an author of a new practice of communism, without necessarily developing a theoretical or conceptual framework adequate to this novelty. I consider his oeuvre as an ideal site of this novelty, as he brought together disparate strands to build a viable project for political action in colonial Punjab.[305]

Theatricality, Violence and the Elevation of the Social

Violence was a central trope for Ghadar activities, providing the party with a 'universal language' for anticolonialism. As Rohit Chopra has argued, the theatricality of violent acts targeting high profile figures was not only aimed at inducing fear in imperial officials, but was also geared towards developing a new conception of collective belonging in colonial India.[306] In his reading of the prominent Ghadar leader and intellectual, Lala Hardayal, Chopra argues that for the Ghadar Party, violence functioned as a medium of communication between different ethnic, linguistic and religious groups through its audacious defiance of colonial authority. Furthermore, while praising the failed bombing of Lord Hardinge (Viceroy of India) in Delhi in 1912, Hardayal asserted that the ability to produce and use bombs set apart civilized nations from non-civilized ones.[307] Apart from inculcating a consciousness of dignity necessary for national belonging (nation being a marker of civilization), the bomb also gave colonized subjects the power to differentiate between legitimate and illegitimate targets of violence, a necessary component of modern sovereignty denied to the colonial world.

Chopra is correct to note the limits of sustaining a political community based on the theatricality of violence, since it required a perpetual production of enemies within the body politic. I argue, however, that the primary limitation of such a conception was not its identification of adversaries, since antagonism is inherent to any notion of politics. The key impasse of the

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[304] Ibid., p. 102.

[305] I agree with Shruti Kapila's argument that the Indian political was formed less as a result of "applying" western ideas in India, and more through creating ruptures from received ideologies. Citations of European ideas in the works of Indian thinkers often functioned as a point of departure from, rather than a fidelity to a theoretical framework. Kapila, 'Global Intellectual History', pp. 253-274.

[306] Rohit Chopra, 'The Roar of the Bomb: Violence as Universal Communication in Ghadar Party Writings', *Global Media and Communication* 8:2 (2012), pp.157-170.

[307] Ibid., p. 158.

Ghadar Party was its inability to appreciate the divisions within the social formation in colonial India. The absolute belief in the power of singular, violent acts to forge a unified political community ignored the question of social unevenness, i.e. the fact that colonial rule did not have homogenous effects, but instead was instrumental in producing and exacerbating differences within the social body. A political project premised on the absolute binary between the 'colonial' and the 'colonized' assumed an adequation between the political and the social realms, hindering its ability to engage with the contradictory nature of colonial social formations.

The lack of mass support for the botched 'Lahore munity' led by Ghadar militants shattered their belief in an unmediated antagonism between a reified 'colonial state' and the 'colonized masses'. On one hand, the limited popular appeal of Ghadarite activities compelled activists like Hardayal, exhausted by the alleged inaction of the Indian masses, to abandon militancy, dismissing Indians as biologically incapable of courage and valor.[308] On the other hand, militants such as Rattan Singh and Santokh Singh took greater interest in understanding the splits internal to the social formation in colonial India that had impeded the growth of the anti-colonial movement. The desire for regenerating anti-colonial politics by grasping contradictions immanent to Indian society, rather than maintaining an absolute exteriority to a closed colonial 'system,' opened anti-colonialism to an encounter with the sociological analysis offered by Marxism.[309]

As discussed earlier, Josh met Santokh Singh at a moment of political uncertainty, where the young firebrand and the veteran rebel were both searching for new ideological moorings. Santokh Singh's decision to found the *Kirti* magazine as a vehicle for popularizing Marxist analysis was one attempt to come to terms with the defeat of the Ghadar Party and to build an alternative political project that recognized the centrality of social relations in colonial Punjab. While Josh joined *Kirti* as an editor of the magazine, the two differed on the nature of the historical conjuncture they found themselves in, and consequently, on the appropriate line of action. Consider Josh's reflections on his final meeting with Santokh Singh:

> I found him very pale and emaciated; and there was a tremor in his voice...The only thing he said to me in his low, tremulous voice was: 'You are writing very hot stuff; go cautiously'.
>
> ...I thought he was not up to date with regard to the real situation in Punjab.... But now I think, I was wrong; he knew the nature and character of the movement and wanted to avoid any premature hazards it contained. He had the experience of the Ghadar Party's armed struggle which had been started prematurely, without proper preparation and thorough assessment of the Indian situation and organisation.[310]

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[308] 'Har Dayal, Rebel, Recants His Views', *New York Times*, (8 June, 1919), available at *New York Times Article Archives, 1851-Present.* http://query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=9E03E4DB1F39E13ABC4053DFB0668382609EDE&legacy=true accessed on 7th June 2015.

[309] For an appreciation of the variety of positions held by anti-colonial thinkers in relation to the colonial state, see Chris Bayly's work on the formation of liberal thought in colonial India. Bayly, *Recovering Liberties*, pp. 1-23.

[310] Josh, *My Tryst*, pp. 103-104.

There is a move away from the complete autonomy of the political in these writings, to a search for a new dialectic between state, society and politics. Josh eventually interpreted Singh's words as suggesting a lack of a direct correspondence between social and political conflicts, and the need for 'patient' work to produce an adequation between the two spheres.

> 'Go cautiously' could only mean 'patiently organise the workers and peasants to fight their struggles, tell them who their friends were and who their enemies: [sic] and, perhaps, do not indulge in bombastic slogans'.[311]

Josh's point of departure from the Ghadar Party lay in two seemingly contradictory manoeuvres-- the identification of sociological groups that could be 'objectively' inclined to join the political struggle against colonialism, and the simultaneous gap he posited between their social being and their political project. 'Peasants' and 'workers' were marked as sociological groups structurally unassimilable into colonial rule, while emphasis on 'patient work' amongst them denoted the subjective task of turning this social conflict into a coherent political project. Whereas for Ghadar, the theatricality of violent acts had the potential to seize popular consciousness and transform social despair into a revolutionary insurgency, for Josh, politics became a creative process of identifying, intensifying and sustaining specific contradictions within the social body. In fact, the main point of disagreement between Bhaghat Singh and Josh in the late 1920s also concerned with the place of violence while they worked together in the Naujwan Bharat Sabha.[312]

> Bhaghat Singh wanted to do something very quick through the use of bombs and pistols, in order to politically awaken the slumbering youth and students who had forgotten their duty towards their motherland; something spectacular that would make them sit up and do some thinking about the soul-crushing British enslavement of India… 'Our young, hot blood cannot wait for that long' he asserted.[313]

> ...It seems that Bhaghat Singh wanted to win me over to his way of thinking. We had discussed these differences several times, but stuck to our viewpoint of organising the workers and the peasants patiently [to] prepare for the mass revolution. The Ghadar Party had failed because it could not get the masses on its side. This awareness was the main factor which prevented me from joining them.[314]

This moment signifies the intersection, and transition, between two specific sequences of political thought. Steeped in modernist conceptions of politics, both Ghadar and communist

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[311] Ibid., p. 104.

[312] Apart from being a member of the same organization (Naujwan Bharat Sabha), Bhaghat Singh also wrote for *Kirti* under the pseudonym of "Vidrohi" while Josh was the editor. Until the end of his life, Singh remained torn between the idea assumption of heroic death, and the approach of patiently building of mass political organizations. See Harish Puri, *Ghadar Movement: Ideology, Organisation, and Strategy* (Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, 1993).

[313] Josh, *My Tryst*, p. 133.

[314] Ibid., p. 134

politics aimed to mobilize an anonymous public sphere. But whereas Ghadar found spectacular acts as the missing link between anti-colonial politics and popular consciousness, communists such as Josh sought to create a new dialectic between the vague category of the masses, the sociologically precise concepts of 'workers and peasants', and the subjective will of anti-colonial nationalism (as we discuss later). In fact, Bhaghat Singh himself, in his later writings from jail, dwelled upon the limitations of the Ghadar Party's violence and propagated the need for a more precise study of existing social contradictions as a way of overcoming the impasse of anti-colonial agitation, signalling a new sequence of mass politics in colonial Punjab.

> The party should start with the work of mass propaganda. It is very essential. One of the fundamental causes of the failure of the efforts of the Ghadar Party (1914-15) was the ignorance, apathy and sometimes active opposition of the masses. And apart from that, it is essential for gaining the active sympathy of and organising the peasants and workers... This party of political workers, bound by strict discipline, should handle all other movements. It shall have to organize the peasants' and workers' parties, labour unions, and kindred political bodies.[315]

Communists were not the only political force keen to grasp the complex relationship between the social and the political. In her study of Ambedkar's thought, Shruti Kapila argues that Ambedkar's engagement with the caste question produced a profound reconceptualization of the role played by social antagonisms in political thought. For Ambedkar, historically embedded social antagonisms, such as caste, needed to be acknowledged and mobilized in the political domain. The minimal gap separating the social and the political, and the repeated interruption of one by the other, provided politics with both its historical specificity and its contingency.[316] Thus, engagement with Marxism was part of a broader trend in Indian politics to create new ideological and political anchors for the anti-colonial movement, and to find novel appreciation of the social for political thought. Politics was now deemed to be conditioned by social conflicts, and thus the production of communist praxis in colonial Punjab required the rethinking of 'global Marxism' to account for the historically specific social relations prevalent in the region.

Such a rethinking not only allowed for the entrance of Marxism as a new horizon for political orientation in colonial Punjab, but also transformed the theoretical premises of Marxism itself, providing Indian communism its historical density. Ironically, it was on the question of sociological precision, namely the revolutionary potentialities of the peasantry, that Josh began to develop communist praxis distinct from its genealogy in Europe. To explore this singularity, we must ask why someone who wished to situate himself in the tradition of the transnational Ghadar Party and 'global communism' premised his politics on the peasantry, the archetypal figure of backwardness in modernist discourse. I examine this question through a study of transnationalism in the early twentieth century, as well as the socio-historical specificity of the Punjab.

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[315] Quoted in Ram Chandra, *History of the Naujwan Bharat Sabha*, ed. Malwinder Warraich (Chandigarh: Unistar, 2007), p. 264.

[316] Kapila, 'The Majority of Democracy', (2015).

Beyond Global and Local: The Broken Time of Politics in Colonial Punjab

My engagement with anti-colonial politics in 'global space' is different from current scholarship on the subject that examines diasporic politics as a rootless 'cosmopolitanism', dissolving the centrality of 'place' with its historical, cultural and affective density, within a universalizing narrative of the 'global'.[317] As Tim Harper has argued, such a banal focus on flows and encounters risks obfuscating the anxieties and violence emanating from global migration, flattening such frictions by constructing a fiction of a seamless emergence of a smooth, 'cosmopolitan' humanity. Such a methodological construction has an uncanny resemblance with colonial narratives that portrayed global revolutionaries as external threats that required the tightening of imperial borders to prevent their intrusion into the imperial body politic.[318]

My own task is to restore the centrality of these transnational, anti-imperial networks to the imperial geography *from which* they emanated. For despite the global itineraries of Ghadar revolutions, they never could, nor in my opinion did they seek to, escape the history that compelled them to migrate from Punjab. Ever since its formation, the primary aim of the party was to influence political life inside India, while preparing revolutionaries to 'return' to the country to carry out subversive activities. One of the primary tropes of the Ghadar Party was a call to acknowledge the trauma of the Ghadar rebellion of 1857, a gesture seeking to produce politics by a *confrontation* with History , rather than seeking a *flight* from it.[319] In this section, I first study both the peculiar historical conditions prevalent in colonial Punjab that facilitated the formation of the transnational Ghadar network. Second, I show how Josh attempted to constitute a political praxis adequate to the Ghadar legacy *inside* colonial Punjab to overcome the internal/external divide constitutive of colonial propaganda, finding in the figure of the peasant a potential embodiment of the emancipatory promise offered by transnational revolutionaries.

In colonial Punjab (much like the rest of the colonial world), capitalism, state formation and, consequently, political subjectivity, did not follow a linear trajectory. Instead, we are presented with a broken time that cannot be narrativized under a master-signifier such as Capital, colonialism or even less so, feudalism.[320] The special relationship enjoyed by the region with the colonial state meant that the imperatives of security, capital, and land were superimposed onto each other in a complex unity. The Land Alienation Act (1900) is a classic example of the contradictory tendencies existing in colonial Punjab that the British had to negotiate in order to reproduce their power. Punjab's landed elite felt threatened by the increasing encroachment of urban-based finance capital on agricultural lands. Yet, the resentment displayed by Punjab's landed elite against this process of land alienation greatly perturbed colonial officials since they

[317] Manjapra, *M.N. Roy*, pp. 111-151.

[318] See Nivedita Saxena and Siddharta Srivastava, 'An Analysis of the Modern Offence of Sedition', *NUJS Law Review* 7:2 (2014), pp. 121-147.

[319] Josh, *Hindustan Ghadar Party*, pp. 1-8.

[320] In recent years, scholars as diverse as Jairus Banaji and Etienne Balibar have argued that there is no straightforward correspondence between "base and superstructure" or the content and form in capitalism. Beyond necessitating a detailed analysis of a particular formation, such an approach also keeps open the possibility of historical and political contingencies. See Jairus Banaji, *Theory as History: Essays on Mode of Production and Exploitation* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2011).

required their support in maintaining stability in Punjab, as well as for recruitment for the Indian military. The result was a peculiar social arrangement in which 'non-agriculturalist tribes' were barred from acquiring agricultural land, solidifying economic, caste and political barriers between urban and rural Punjab.[321] Simultaneously, the Punjab's peasantry, apart from producing for the world market, was physically assimilated into a global geography through their participation in the Indian military, traveling to disparate locales, from the Far East to the Middle East to the East Coast in the United States.[322]

A worrying factor for the British was the fact that, despite the integration of a surplus rural population into the military, the agrarian crisis affecting the middle and the poor peasants was too acute to be resolved through an absorption of the surplus peasantry into the state apparatus. Recurrent agrarian crises often led to localized peasant uprisings, such as the 1907 'disturbances' against the Colonisation Bill, the largest mass agitation by the peasantry against colonial rule.[323] Such specific arrangements meant that the peasantry represented the poor and backward 'other' of industrial progress, while simultaneously being central to modern geo-politics due their critical role in the British Indian military, creating a peculiar tension in assigning it a political temporality. It is not surprising, that the first truly 'global' political movement from colonial India, the Ghadar Party, was fuelled by Punjabi peasants living in the diaspora, signifying this paradox. Therefore I ask, why did someone who wished to situate himself in the tradition of the transnational Ghadar Party and global communism premise his politics on the peasantry, the archetypal figure of backwardness in modernist discourse?

Communism and the Peasant Question

The presence of multiple temporal rhythms made it impossible to decipher a singular socio-political logic for colonial Punjab. It meant that the question of 'the global' had to be rethought and reconstituted in relation to the internal dynamics of the politically charged 1920s and 1930s colonial India. Josh locates the rise of the Ghadar Party rebellion within the double consciousness of the Punjabi peasantry, impoverished, yet globally mobile.

> The main reasons for Indians going abroad was economic… The economic conditions of the Punjab peasants had worsened during the second half of the nineteenth century due to the increased land revenue, heavy indirect taxes, Sahukar's debts and fragmentation of land holdings. Land on which they were making their poor living had passed into the hands of the rich peasantry and banya sahukars. There was no employment for the peasant youth except enrolling themselves as military recruits in the British army….The Punjabi soldier had proved his worth in the wars of expansion of the British Empire. He had gone overseas, fought many battles in different countries under the British flag and

[321] See Hassan Javid, 'Class, Power, and Patronage: Landowners and Politics in Punjab', *History and Anthropology* 22:3 (2011), pp. 337- 369.
[322] Ramnath, *Haj to Utopia*, pp. 17-33.
[323] Barrie Gerald, 'The Punjab Disturbances of 1907: The Response of the British Government in India to Agrarian Unrest', *Modern Asian Studies* 1:4 (1967), pp. 353-358.

> seen people of different religions, colours and nationalities. This broadened his mental horizon to an extent, he acquired an adventurous spirit.[324]

According to Josh, the intersection of extreme misery and the acquisition of a transnational 'mental horizon' imbibed the Punjabi peasant with an 'adventurous spirit'. The critical place occupied by the Punjabi peasantry within the coercive apparatus of the colonial state made it a special target for appeals by revolutionaries aiming to subvert colonial authority. For this reason, the planned rebellion by the Ghadar Party in 1914-1915 rested on the assumption that there would be a combination of military rebellion, beginning in the Mian Mir Cantonment of Lahore, and mass peasant support in the Punjabi countryside.[325] Josh argued that the reasons for the failed rebellion, known in the British legal lexicon as the 'Lahore Conspiracy Case' lay precisely in the inability of the Ghadar leadership to win over the active support of the peasantry.

> A wiser, more capable and far-sighted leadership with widespread organisation was needed to take advantage of the unrest prevailing among the peasantry and in the Sikh-Hindu and Muslim regiments, prepare them for a combined assault and start the revolution… But the above formula of men, money and arms was inadequate and insufficient. Because even if all these three were there, the revolution perhaps could not have succeeded without the mass backing and an organised central leadership and its far-flung branches following a strict discipline.[326]

The active support of the peasantry here appears as the 'missing link' between the heroic but doomed voluntarism of the Ghadarite revolutionaries and a transformative politics in India. The formation of the Kirti Kissan Party in Punjab was meant to overcome this lacuna and to situate revolutionary politics in the midst of the agrarian crisis. Thus, communist politics began in Punjab by invoking the revolutionary potential of the 'peasant masses', as Josh's reflections on the Kirti Kissan Party conferences demonstrate:

> ...I spoke at great length about the starving and famished conditions of the working masses, especially the peasant masses…. We wanted to wean away the poor and the middle peasantry from the influence of the Zamindara League and expose the pro-landlord politics of Choudhry Chhotu Ram… The agenda of the Rohtak conference was almost the same as that of the Lyallpur conference...The main task was to meet the land needs of the peasantry.[327]

The seamless insertion of the peasantry as the principal vehicle for radical politics is apparent from these lines. In fact, the primary activities of the Communists in Punjab revolved around the 'Qarza committees' formed to organize against increasing rural indebtedness and high rates of land revenue.[328] This also explains why the first (successful) electoral campaign of communists

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[324] Josh, *Hindustan Ghadar Party*, p. 40.
[325] Ramnath, *Haj to Utopia*, pp. 70-94.
[326] Josh, *Hindustan Ghadar Party*, pp. 269-270.
[327] Sohan Josh, *My Tryst*, p. 121.
[328] Ibid., p. 200.

in the Punjab was entirely centered on the agrarian situation. Josh's electoral campaign against Sardar Raghbir Singh was also premised on fighting the problems faced by middle and poor peasants.

> But he [Raghbir SIngh] was not all virtue, and he was a known oppressor of peasants of villages in his possession and under his domination, depriving them of their share of irrigation water and harshly raising rents from them. Further, he was a lackey of the British who had never raised his voice against the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre, and in fact favoured the continuation of British Raj. All these factors provided us with enough ammunition to expose him throughout the length and breadth of the Tarn Taran.[329]

Josh links the destitute conditions of the peasantry with colonial exploitation (an oppressive landlord who was also a 'lackey of the British'), placing the two within a continuum. As stated above, Josh went on to achieve a historic win against Raghbir Singh, with a margin of 12,000 votes. Gains such as these made by communists in the 1930s, are often attributed to the 'global' appeal of communism during the inter-war and post-war periods.[330] While broadly correct, such an analysis nevertheless carries the risk of depicting anti-colonial politics as either a mere reiteration of ideas already developed *elsewhere*, or at best local 'modifications,' denying the possibility of intellectual autonomy to the non-European world.

Borrowing from Dipesh Chakrabarty, I posit that European ideas, including Marxism, had to be stretched each time they were deployed in colonial India, displaying both their utility, but also their imprecision when dealing with novel political practices outside the sites of their origin.[331] To this sharp analysis I make one addition; not only does historical difference force us to expand upon existing theoretical frameworks, but it also compels us to reconstitute such frameworks, challenging the very idea of an original site. I, therefore, argue that the elevation of the peasantry as the principal revolutionary subject in colonial Punjab, far from being a particularistic *deviation* from a pristine Marxist theory, provides us with tools for rethinking Marxism on the basis of a *new practice of theory*.

Peasant Deviation or Anti-Colonial Innovation?

Rochona Majumdar has powerfully argued that the primary displacement in revolutionary thought in colonial India occurred through the politicization of the peasantry during the anti-colonial movement, a social group deemed 'pre-political' in the most radical canons of European thought. Yet, the stubborn persistence of the peasantry in the social body, and increasingly visible presence in Indian political life, interrupted linear representations of socio-political development.[332] As Majumdar rightly points out, however, 'peasant' was less of an empirical, objective category, than a master-signifier for social groups and classes (such as tribals,

[329] Ibid., p. 209.
[330] See Joachim Haberlen, 'Between Global Aspirations and Local Realities: The Global Dimensions of Interwar Communism', *Journal of Global History* 7: 3 (2012), p. 415.
[331] Chakrabarty, 'Belatedness as Possibility', pp. 163-176.
[332] Majumdar, 'Subaltern Studies', pp. 50-54.

unemployed, urban poor, etc) marginalized by the process of primitive accumulation, but without a proper name in political thought. She places this importance attached to the peasantry as part of the 'romantic' search for a non-industrial 'revolutionary subject' in the twentieth century.

The framework developed by Majumdar is useful in highlighting the political significance of processes and social groups that produced the modern political in India through the *interruption* of a specific modernity imagined by colonial (and colonized) elites. One of the key contributions of Subaltern Studies has been its focus on the peasantry as introducing a gap between Europeans notions of an ideal modern citizenry and the actual practice of modern subjects, a productive space between *imagining* and *inhabiting* modernity. I build on this framework to posit that a praxis premised on the interruption of capitalist modernity rather than its maturation, the excluded remainder of the historical process, in this case the peasantry, threatened the disintegration/transformation of the political order. Consider Josh's analysis of why the peasantry provided communists an opportunity to establish a foothold within the political landscape of colonial Punjab.

> The (Zamindara) League stood for the interests of the landlord and the kulaks: the Chaudhuri used the word zamindar to cover over the entire peasantry, including the poor and the middle peasantry. The provincial Congress committee was also holding its conference to defend the interests of the corrupt banis and put forward its own political program. We wanted to wean away the poor and the middle peasantry…... Our strong point was that we were against landlordism, and wanted their lands to be distributed among the landless and the poor peasantry.[333]

The *non-place* occupied by the peasantry in existing forms of representations, which had been 'covered over' in colonial and nationalist discourse, made it possible for it to become a political subject. Here, we witness an important similarity between Ghadar Party activities and peasant revolts that allowed for their simultaneous incorporation into communist thought. Anti-colonial groups such as the Ghadar Party constructed a transnational, anti-colonial geography exceeding the limits of imperial sovereignty. As Enseng Ho has argued, this *excess* allowed anti-colonial groups to haunt the colonial imaginary, since their ability 'for geographical mobility often meant crossing imperial and departmental jurisdictions' from where they appeared as 'sophisticated as empire itself, and enough so to represent a potential threat'.[334] The conflagration of peasant discontent into a political crisis also remained a concern for British officials, who recognized that the 'trials and troubles of the Indian peasant are many and he who seeks to ease their lot may well succeed in not only gaining their confidence but also their blind and unthinking devotion'.[335] Therefore, contrary to the 'external' threat posed by Ghadar, the peasantry represented an *immanent excess*, whose financial precarity often turned into political defiance, threatening the internal stability of the Empire.

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[333] Josh, *My Tryst*, p. 118.

[334] Ho, 'Empire through Diasporic Eyes', pp. 210-246.

[335] Williamson, *India and Communism*, p. 153.

Colonial anxiety over a fusion between these *global* and *local* symbols of interruption triggered simultaneously a transnational and national operation to contain the 'threat' posed by such groups, with colonial officials vowing to 'stamp' them out 'like the plague'.[336] Following from Agamben, I posit that such excessive figures were at the heart of colonial sovereignty, since their inclusion into the legitimate body politic could only be realized through the exclusionary gesture of sovereign violence.[337] Such an *inclusion through exclusion* was not only a response to a foreign intrusion or an external threat, but was also critical in structuring the internal life of the Empire, a fact borne by the flurry of 'sedition' charges against the leading figures of the National movement inside India.[338] Thus, Josh's attempts to forge an identity between 'global' groups such as the Ghadar party and 'local' agrarian movements stemmed from each's *excessive* presence in imperial categorizations, with their lack of place endowing them with a disruptive potential in the present.

We see that groups such as the Ghadar party were not merely 'cosmopolitan,' a category unable to explain their political specificity beyond mundane theme of geographical mobility. Instead, we should view them as part of a *political project* in fidelity to the disruption of a historically specific Empire, which could align with other groups (internal or external) that posed a similar threat to imperial rule. British officials themselves placed these two threats together, condemning *Kirti* for simultaneously 'advocating the organisation of workers and peasants' and 'championing the cause and ideals of the Ghadar conspirators', in the worse combination of 'internal' and 'external' threats imagined by colonial authorities.[339] Therefore, rather than creating a socio-cultural homology as a basis for political identification, it was the ability of both the Ghadarites and the insurgent peasantry to interrupt colonial sovereignty that allowed their adequation in a shared political project, without posing a logical contradiction.

Loss, Volition and Sacrifice

Yet, the mere interruption of social processes does not allow us access to the historicity of communist thought, i.e. how a *specific* politics was imagined, practiced and sustained in a given historical situation. Instead, we run the risk of reading a particular political interruption in the colonial world as simply a *repetition* of similar insurrectionary moments elsewhere in modernity, whose consequences had already been deduced by European thinkers. We know from Deleuze, however, that no repetition is innocent of improvisation, even if the novelty appears to be part of a world constantly repeating itself.[340] A repetition of an idea in a novel setting is always also a movement of an internal loss, displacing its own coordinates to permit the emergence of unfamiliar elements, even if the lack of an adequate language corresponding to this novelty cloaks the new inside the vocabulary of the familiar. The peasantry signified a critical new

[336] Petrie, *Communism in India*, pp. 321.

[337] Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2004).

[338] Shruti Kapila, 'Once Again, Sedition is at the Heart of Defining the Nation', *The Wire* (2nd February, 2016), available at https://thewire.in/22763/once-again-sedition-is-at-the-heart-of-defining-the-nation/ accessed on 4th of March, 2016.

[339] Williamson, *India and Communism*, p. 160.

[340] See Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).

element in Marxism's repetition in the non-European world which induced a deeper loss than merely a displacement of the proletariat as a political subject.

The classical Marxist conception of the proletariat was tied to a stagist view of history in which the proletariat represented the maturation and exhaustion of the capitalist mode of production, allowing it to embody an epoch-shifting potential to take humanity beyond the present. The absence of the proletariat as a principal political subject was also a loss of such certainty in the Big Other of History and its sociologically predictable laws, turning political action into a *creative* and *productive* process tied to the contingency of the historical conjuncture. Thus, rather than simply an exchange of positions between the proletariat and the peasantry within a shared conception of History, the erasure of scientific guarantees turned *volition* into a central aspect of political subjectivity in anti-colonial thought. I study volition through the trope of sacrifice which, apart from signalling a confrontation with History through its interruption, allows us to examine a precise practice through which anti-colonial thinkers, including Marxists, produced autonomous political ideas.

Let us take an example of the Ghadar party's elucidation of colonial rule. For the Ghadarites, participation in colonial institutions represented a process of financial and psychic self-enslavement for the colonized subjects. Consider the following lines from the first edition of *Ghadar di Goonj,* the official newspaper of the Ghadar Party.

> The world derisively accosts us: O Coolie, O Coolie. We have no fluttering flag of our own anywhere. We go fighting to wave the British flag over our heads. This is a very shameful thing for us. You became slaves to the English nation and disgraceful to the name of Hindustan.[341]

The emphasis on shame (as we shall discuss later) is immediately followed by a call to arms to arrest this subjection by inculcating a spirit of self-abnegation.

> Make the platoons aware, why are you sleeping, O swordsmen? Indians won battles in Burma, Egypt, China and Sudan, Shame on us we that we helped our enemy. This is what a wretched slave does….. Driving out the British tyrants, we have to brighten the name of India like bright torch. …... If we remain alive we shall rule and if we die, the world will sing songs of praise for us.[342]

In a gesture common to various anti-colonial movements, the Ghadar Party called for an active *distancing* from the material and ideological coordinates of imperial rule. The lack of political institutions expressing the will of anti-colonial organizations compelled groups like the Ghadar Party to substitute the pursuit of material benefits with voluntary suffering in order to resist assimilation into the imperial project. In psychoanalytic terms, 'sacrifice' was offered by anti-colonial militants not in the name of universally accepted institutions or a political community,

[341] Quoted in Josh, *Hindustan Ghadar Party*, p. 172.
[342] Ibid., p. 191.

but instead as an act that *brought into existence* a new political community.[343] In other words, since there was no institutional or sociological guarantee for the existence of ideals such as 'liberty' or 'nation', *sacrificing* in the name of such ideals became the alternative ground for their production by inscribing them on a suffering body. Thus, anti-colonial movements in India had to produce the grounds on which to premise their political ideals, with concepts attaining their sanctity not from a legal regime, but from sacrifices offered by anti-colonial militants in their name. It is for this reason that Josh elevated the element of self-abnegation central to Ghadarite subjectivity as the party's most essential and eternal contribution to communist politics in the region.

> The Ghadar armed struggle was not fought in vain. It left an indelible heritage of revolutionary spirit and courage in the country. It set a new precedent of selflessness, self-sacrifice and self-abnegation for the cause of freedom and took it to a new height...Their martyrdom taught us at every moment of our duty and obligation towards India's freedom.[344]

The appeal of the figure of the martyr in Josh's writings stem from his ability to become a productive symbol for a regulative idea. Writing in the *Kirti* magazine, the official organ of the communist movement of the Punjab, Josh depicted a martyr as the epitome of the revolutionary subject.

> The martyr is far higher than the standard of his time, and his views are far loftier than those of other people. The people who are tightly bound with the chains of conservative views cannot understand his lofty flights (of imagination) and independent views…then comes his turn for execution. Does he become upset on hearing of his death? Does he begin to cry? Does he make entreaties to save himself? Never. He rejoices, merry-makes, leaps and jumps and sings smilingly.[345]

This description of a joyful martyr elevated confrontation with death as a more authentic mode of existence than mere attachment to life privileged in liberal humanism. But more importantly, it is the martyr's indifference to existing temporality that made his actions indiscernible to those attached to a defaulting present. One may argue that suffering and sacrifice became universal tropes for political claim-making in colonial Punjab as acts in excess of the present, interrupting its reproduction. In fact, Marx himself had to be placed within this tradition of conscious self-abnegation to make him legible in the region's politics. In a speech on Marx, which could have easily have extended to revolutionaries from the Ghadar Party, Josh describes Marx as one who 'suffered' for humanity.

> He had been passing his life in securing bread for the poor people. The German Government offered to give him the higher posts several times but he refused to accept them and said that in order to provide happiness in the world it was necessary that some

[343] See Dennis Keenan, *The Question of Sacrifice* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), pp. 33-45.
[344] Josh, *Hindustan Ghadar Party,* p. 271.
[345] Ibid., pp. 98-99.

> people should be in distress. Happiness cannot prevail over the world unless some persons become martyrs for the sufferings of the people.[346]

The transformation of Marx into a colonial, or better still, an anti-colonial militant undergoing voluntary suffering was part of the larger shift in communist practice in the colonial world, particularly on political subjectivity. Josh privileged the consciously suffering partisan as a bearer of revolutionary potentiality, rather than situating the latter in a sociologically deduced group, such as the industrial working class. In a classical anti-colonial gesture, Josh cloaks his departure from orthodox Marxism by invoking, if not incorporating, Marx into a new conception of revolutionary subjectivity. Yet, much like every border, the line separating orthodox from anti-colonial Marxism also co-joined them. As we have discussed, for Josh, what was at stake was not a rejection of Marxism as a 'foreign idea' to be substituted by indigenous thought, but to use the particularity of the historical situation, and its attendant cultural and political repertoires, to produce a *new practice* of Marxism. The giant shadow of the Ghadar movement and the persistence of agrarian revolts produced a historically specific communist subjectivity that overcame the loss of historical certainty through volition and sacrifice. This new dialectic of Marxism developed in Punjab provides us with a window to re-open Marx's own oeuvre to examine repressed elements that resonate with this praxis, as we shall see in the next section.

Encountering Two Geneologies of Shame

We have studied how communism arrived in colonial Punjab as a peculiar encounter between Marxism and Ghadarite anti-colonialism, resulting in a complex interplay between external imperatives and internal displacements. Yet, there perhaps appears to be a deeper subterranean connection between the political practice of the Ghadar Party and Marxism, despite their production in distinct spatial (and temporal) locales.[347] Once again, we look at Josh's attempts at fusing these disparate currents to unearth these connections.

For Josh, the history of communism in Punjab, and the history of the Ghadar Party, were an attempt to continue the work of a deeper undercurrent in Punjab's collective unconscious, the revolt of 1857. The uprising and its subsequent defeat aided in securing a special place for Punjab in colonial administration, while also served as an untapped source of accumulated rage against the Empire.

> According to British authorities themselves, the most important factor which tilted the balance in favour of British victory was the arrival in time of the Sikh regiments in Delhi...The Sikh chieftains, in their selfish interests, with their illiterate armies openly sided with the British rulers and stabbed the revolt in the back…. Even backward areas heard many rumours and stories current [sic] during those days. It gave a good jostling

[346] Quoted in Sharma, *Radical Politics*, p. 43.

[347] My argument is partly informed by Bruno Bosteels' excellent discussion on the persistence of subterranean undercurrents in social formations, and their re-emergence through encounters in distinct historical moments. See Bruno Bosteels, *The Actuality of Communism* (London: Verso, 2011).

> the high and the low [sic]. It aroused feelings of sympathy for the rebels and people were sorry they did not succeed.[348]

We see the double movement in which Punjab had been integrated into Empire through the loyalty of its military regiments and the ruling elite, yet tales of the revolt circulated in colonial Punjab as a heroic episode of resistance. This interplay between a revolutionary promise and a haunting betrayal retained 1857 as an unfinished experience in popular memory. Much like the British invocation of the event each time there were anti-British 'disturbances' in order to justify excessive state violence, anti-colonial movements also had to engage with 1857 as a settling of scores from the past, as well as to retroactively save its heroic promise by situating it in existing anti-colonial struggles.[349]

As discussed earlier, for a militant anti-colonial organization like Ghadar, belief in an onward march of progress was replaced by the humiliation of participating in a project of self-enslavement. Shame became the raw material for fueling political and ethical action by militants in the Punjab. Shame also served as the affective motif through which they mobilized the revolutionary potentialities of past revolts, such as 1857, which had been obscured by Punjab's apparent loyalty to Empire. Ghadar leaders displaced existing codes of loyalty and honor towards the British state onto the register of anti-colonial shame. In the first edition of its newspaper, *Ghadar di Goonj*, published in 1914 and cited almost verbatim by Josh in his works on the Ghadar Party, the theme of humiliation is deployed to counter-pose the Punjab's alleged attachment to Empire.

> Are you not ashamed that in times of war you are ordered to the trenches and the British troops are kept in the rear in security? For all danger to your lives you get only nine rupees a month and out of this, you have to clothe and feed yourself and save from this for your family, whereas the British soldier gets three good square meals a day and is provided with the best of uniforms, besides getting forty five rupees a month and bonus, etc.[350]

In a classic example of counter-interpellation, these words were aimed at disrupting the process of recognition through which colonized Punjabis came to identify with Empire, by emphasizing the physical separation between Indian and white soldiers in the British military. It is this estrangement from dominant modes of identification induced by shame that opened up a separation from colonial ideology, denoting the disjointedness between colonial self-representation and its actual practices in Punjab. Josh stressed the centrality of Ghadar's contribution in the realm of ideology, by 'reminding Indians' of the realities of colonial rule.

> The Ghadar heroes' everlasting contribution was that they raised the banner of Ghadar (revolt) against British slavery and reminded Indians that the motherland was still fettered in British chains and they had to be broken...And they reminded us that the war for

[348] Josh, *Hindustan Ghadar Party*, pp. 12-13.
[349] Condos, 'License to Kill', pp. 479-517.
[350] Quoted in Josh, *Hindustan Ghadar Party*, p. 191.

> independence started in 1857 and carried forward by them in 1914-1915 still remained unfinished and that it had to be concluded.[351]

By inducing a consciousness turned against itself, shame had the power to 'remind' colonial subjects of an originary event in which revolt and subjection lay anchored in the same instance. For Josh, the 'unfinished' work of Ghadar, that 'had to be concluded,' was continued by the communist movement in India, which 'always sought and got inspiration from the 1857 revolt'. Thus Ghadar's summoning of 1857 allowed it to become a vanishing mediator between military revolts against the British and the advent of mass anti-colonial politics in India, tying the two moments together in a history of continuing rebellion.

Should we view Marxism's relationship with Ghadar's history as simply an extension or negation of Marxist thought, or can it aid us in locating elements within Marx's *oeuvre* that allowed for such belated resonance in the non-European world? I argue that there were, perhaps, deeper undercurrents structuring Marx's writings that allowed aspects of his thought to be incorporated into an anti-colonial subjectivity premised on shame and suffering. In a beautiful but rather under-studied commentary on German patriotism in a letter to Ruge written in 1843, Marx highlights the revolutionary potential in *shame*, if directed at one's own participation in a farcical political project, in this case, German nationalism.

> The glorious robes of liberalism have fallen away and the most repulsive despotism stands revealed for all the world to see. This, too, is a revelation, albeit a negative one. It is a truth which at the very least teaches us to see the hollowness of our patriotism, the perverted nature of our state and to hide our faces in shame. I can see you smile and say: what good will that do? Revolutions are not made by shame. And my answer is that shame is a revolution in itself... Shame is a kind of anger turned in on itself. And if a whole nation were to feel ashamed it would be like a lion recoiling in order to spring.[352]

It is difficult to miss the resonance between the deployment of shame by Marx and by the Ghadarite revolutionaries, as if there was a secret knot that tied together the two political projects and permitted a mutual incorporation. Here, shame is deployed as an 'anger turned on itself' in an act of self-accountability. 'Shame is in itself a revolution' insofar as revolution demands a minimal separation, 'a recoiling' from the laws of the world, only in order prepare for subjective interventions 'to spring'. Much like the Ghadar party, Marx emphasizes subjective transformation, rather than an expression of objective relations, as a necessary pre-condition for meaningful intervention. We are miles away from discussions of teleological laws of History pre-destined to move towards a revolutionary event, and are instead presented with a

[351]Ibid., p. 271.

[352] Karl Marx, *Early Writings*, trans., Rodney Livingston and Gregor Benton (New York: Vintage, 1975), pp. 199-200.

revolutionary subjectivity that is incongruous with fantasies of linear development.[353] The encounter between 'Marxism' and the anti-colonial movement compels us to register the consequences of communist praxis in the colonial world within traditional Marxism, including making audible the silences within the texts of Marx, a long-neglected task that is finally being undertaken in intellectual history.[354]

The Ghadar movement, and its appropriation by communists in Punjab, became one of the many sites of the encounter that turned Marxism into a theory of rupture from History, rather than simply an expression of its teleological movement. Josh's appropriation of Marxism not only overcame the internal impasse of the radical tradition in Punjab, but also aided in restoring to Marxism its own forgotten legacy, obscured by the positivism dominant in 19th Century Europe.

[353] In recent years, there has been an emphasis on recovering the political aspects (i.e. interventions) of marx, rather than simply viewing him as a scholar of political economy. In such analyzes, Marx is not seen as either a critic or an enthusiast for modernity, but rather a militant who was actively strategizing to overturn the status quo. It is this legacy of Marx that became relevant in the non-European world. See Alain Badiou, *Communist Hypothesis* (London: Verso, 2009).
, Harry Cleaver, 'Karl Marx: Economist or Revolutionary?' in *Marx, Schumpeter and Keynes: A Centenary Celebration of Dissent*, eds. Suzanne W. Helburn and David F. Bramhall (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 1986), pp. 121-146, and Daniel Bensaid, *Marx for our Times: Adventures and Misadventures of a Critique* (London: Verso, 2002).
[354] I have in mind Bruno Bosteels and Kevin Anderson's work. See Bosteels, *Marx and Freud, pp. 9-128.* and Kevin Anderson, *Marx at the Margins: On Nationalism, Ethnicity and Non-Western Societies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).

Chapter 6

The Postcolonial Condition: Ranadive and the Search for Authenticity

Introduction

At midnight on the 15th of August 1947, Jawaharlal Nehru proclaimed that India had fulfilled its 'Tryst with destiny' by gaining 'freedom' from the British.[355] This declaration at the twilight of colonialism in India, and later in much of Asia and Africa, ended a political sequence that began with struggles against colonial rule, culminating in the crystallization and victory of the nationalist movement. Yet, the transfer of power to political organizations leading the independence movement resulted in contradictory sentiments-- a celebration of the 'nation's' triumph against the deferral of its right to exist, yet simultaneously the fear that independence was merely another name for continuing the rule of the elites. Nehru himself qualified his congratulatory statement by accepting that the promise of the independence movement was not realized 'wholly or in full measure', alluding to an underlying anxiety that the end of British rule had not foreclosed political possibilities.

Thus, enthusiasm and suspicion marked the same historical moment, with a split between the 'nationalist' current that vowed to begin a process of reconstruction through development, and the 'radical' tendencies that argued that *authentic* freedom still lay *elsewhere.*This debate has been central to subaltern studies, and, more broadly, postcolonial studies, with their emphasis on the continued reproduction of an elite and subaltern domain in post-independence India.[356] This chapter revisits the moment of independence to interrogate how the communist movement responded to the transformed configuration of socio-political relations. I argue that the primary problem confronted by the communist movement was to find new historical referentiality in the absence of the colonial enemy, in order to develop a strategic axis in an era of decolonization and the rise of republicanism in India.

I explore these themes through the figure of Balchandra Trimbak Ranadive, the firebrand communist leader who served as the general secretary of the Communist Party of India from February 1948 to January 1950. He was eventually removed from the leadership and denounced as a 'left adventurist' for his alleged putschist tendencies, since he called for an all-India insurgency against the Nehru government soon after independence. During the two-year period he presided over the party as the general secretary, the membership of the Communist Party plummeted from 89,000 members to 20,000, as numerous cadres and members of the leadership were either jailed or killed by the security forces of the newly independent state.[357]

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[355] Quoted in Brian MacArthur, *Penguin Book of Twentieth Century Speeches* (London: Penguin Viking, 1992), pp. 234-237.

[356] Guha, *Dominance without Hegemony*, pp. 1-99.

[357] M.B. Rao, 'Introduction' in *Documents of the History of the Communist Party of India*, ed. M.B. Rao (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1960), vol. VII, p. xiv.

Despite the almost universal condemnation of Ranadive's political line[358], this chapter posits that his writings and political practice exemplified the crisis of finding a historical homeland for communist ideas at the moment of decolonization in India. Therefore, this study considers his stint as general secretary as a symptom of a larger theoretical crisis in Indian Communism, one that sheds light on the openness of political debates in post-independence India, but also on the communist movement's confrontation with novel questions of sovereignty, violence and freedom.

Background

As discussed in chapter one, the late 1920s and early 1930s witnessed the complete disarray of the communist movement in India as a result of a severe crackdown on party activists by the colonial state, beginning with the Meerut Conspiracy Case (1929) and culminating in the ban on the Communist Party (1934). In the 1930s, the reconstituted Communist Party of India (CPI), under the leadership of P.C.Joshi, considered the 'ultra-leftism' of the 1920s to be the primary reason for the decimation of the party organization. The total rejection of the national movement by the CPI, including its political expression in the National Congress Party, was deemed central to the party's alienation from the broader anti-colonial movement. Consequently, the party leadership was accused of 'adventurism' for its decision to take on the combined might of the colonial state and the national movement, leading to further political isolation.

After its reconstitution in 1934, the CPI changed its oppositional stance towards the mainstream nationalist movement, particularly the Congress Party, as part of the global 'Popular Front' policy supported by the Soviet Union. In Europe, the primary task of this front was to organize all progressive political forces, including social democrats, in a united bloc against fascism.[359] In the colonial world, the popular front functioned in the form of an 'anti-imperialist front', multi-class alliance against colonial rule. As part of a detailed strategy outlined in 1936 by R.P. Dutt and Ben Bradley in their essay 'An Anti-Imperialist People's Front in India', the CPI identified the National Congress as the united platform for anti-colonial forces in the sub-continent.[360] Therefore, communists joined the Congress Socialist Party, a section of the National Congress, in 1934 as part of the Anti-Imperialist Front, and remained part of this group before the Congress Socialist Party split from the National Congress in 1940. The CPI experienced steady growth in membership during this period, in particular the growth of their peasant and trade union fronts, such as the All-India Kissan Sabha and All-India Trade Union Federation, as well as artist groups such as the Progressive Writers' Association.[361]

Even after officially splitting from the National Congress, the CPI continued supporting the National Congress as the primary expression of the will of the Indian people. Despite the divergence between the two groups over support for the British-led war effort during the Second

[358] A typical case is Praful Bidwai in his recent book on the history of the Indian Left, in which he dismisses the Ranadive period as an 'extremist phase' in Indian communism. Bidwai, *The Phoenix Moment*, pp. 1-44.
[359] Helen Graham and Paul Preston (eds.), *The Popular Front in Europe* (Basington: Palgrave Macmillan, 1987).
[360] Palme Dutt and Ben Bradley, *The Labour Monthly* 18:3 (1936), pp. 149-160.
[361] Overstreet and Windmiller, *Communism in India*, pp. 155-171.

World War, with the CPI supporting the war under instructions from the Soviet Union and the National Congress leading a 'Quit-India Movement' against the government[362], the CPI, under the leadership of P.C. Joshi, continued to view the National Congress as the principal anti-colonial force that could lead an anti-imperialist, national government after the end of the Second World War. Consider the following lines from *Forward to Freedom,* a political document of the CPI delineating its vision for a post-war India,

> National India led by a national government will be smashing the imperialist fetters imposed on every department of our national life. In the very process of defending ourselves, we will be building our economy, we will be imparting national consciousness to 400 million of our countrymen… National India with her own hands will be shattering the foundations of British India and creating those of a People's India. [363]

Two points need to be emphasized regarding the above quotation. First, the CPI maintained its belief in an imminent historical progression after the victory of the 'People's camp' against fascist forces, which would culminate in a defeat of imperialism in the colonial world. The second, and more crucial, issue is the proposal of an intertwined revolution. The struggle for a socialist transformation was traversed by the fight for political independence from colonial rule. The intersection between the question of national sovereignty and social transformation, and the role occupied by mainstream nationalists in this configuration, remained a key problematic for communist thought as colonial India moved towards independence.

As relations between the All-India Muslim League and the National Congress deteriorated after the end of the war and the question of partition loomed, P.C. Joshi, the general secretary of the CPI, argued for a 'United National Front' of the Muslim League and the National Congress. The call for national unity amongst the two principal political organizations in colonial India was aimed at turning the CPI into a vehicle for 'carrying forward the best in the common traditions of both the Congress and the League'.[364] Yet, it was precisely on the question of supporting 'bourgeois parties', such as the National Congress and Muslim League, that Ranadive created a rupture from the existing political line of the CPI, and the theoretical framework that underpinned it.

Ranadive joined the Communist Party in 1928, on the eve of mass arrests of communist leaders across India, and the onset of an era of underground activity for party members. He became active in the trade union movement, particularly amongst textile and railway workers in Bombay. Even during the era of the 'anti-imperialist front' of the National Congress and the Communist Party, Ranadive was involved in militant trade union activity, often against business interests allied with the Congress. In fact, the militancy of Bombay's working-class activity became a major strain on the relations between the Congress and the communists after the former formed ministries between 1937 and 1939, with trade union leaders accusing Congress leadership as

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[362] Gupta, *Communism and Nationalism*, pp.187-211.

[363] Quoted in B. Ranadive, 'Report on Reformist Deviation', in Rao (ed.), *Documents of the History*, pp. 125.

[364] Communist Party of India, 'For the Final Bid to Power! The Communist Plan Explained' in *People's Warrior: Words and Worlds of P.C. Joshi*, ed. Gargi Chakravartty (Delhi: Tulika, 2014), p. 140.

collaborators and Congress accusing them of being anti-national saboteurs.[365] This contestation between trade unions and the Congress, with its specific vocabulary, was a rehearsal for the conflict between the communist movement and the National Congress following the end of colonial rule.

Divine Violence and the Contingency of the Political: 1946-1948

As India moved closer to independence, the CPI, under the leadership of Joshi, continued to view 'the bourgeois leadership' as an ally against foreign rule, with the aim of exposing the limitations of imperialism's strategy of dividing the Indian people. In a letter on the political-organizational strategy of CPI, written in February 1947, Joshi asserted that

> The main weakness of imperialism lies in the fact that the bourgeois leadership it is using against us is also the popular leadership, the embodiment of their aspirations, bound by programmatic pledges, answerable to the people.[366]

Terming the Muslim League and the National Congress as 'elder members' of the 'family' whom the CPI 'respects' as 'a younger member'[367], Joshi made appeals for unity between the two parties to strengthen the 'common voice of all'.[368] The end of the Second World War, however, had transformed the dynamics of India's political economy, with rising inflation fueled by the military expenditure. The Indian economy was made more vulnerable by its 'sterling balances'. In short, the British government paid for the expenses accrued in India by paying the Indian government in a sterlings account in the Reserve Bank of India in London, while printing paper money equivalent to this amount in rupees for circulation in India, pushing inflation to as high as 179 percent.[369] While India witnessed the emergence of a number of 'hoarders' and 'profiteers' during the war, the economy entered a state of decline as war-related consumption disappeared, creating a classic crisis of overproduction in the Indian economy. The accumulation of debt and a slowdown of industrial activity was coupled with rising inflation and consequently increased economic discontent, particularly since trade unions and peasant committees claimed that the working people were being forced to pay for the post-war crisis.[370]

The dire economic situation of colonial India as a result of the war expressed itself in intensified labour unrest, the number of strikes doubling from 820 in 1945 to 1629 in 1946. As a result of the developing militancy in the labour movement, the Nehru-led interim government instituted the Industrial Disputes Act, which placed restrictions on the right to strike by referring the case

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[365] Claude Markovitz, 'Indian Business and the Congress Provisional Governments 1937-39', in *Power, Profit and Politics: Essays on Imperialism, Nationalism and Change in Twentieth Century India*, eds. Christopher Baker, Anil Seal and Gordon Johnson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 487-526.

[366] Ranadive, 'Report on Reformist', p. 155.

[367] Communist Party of India, 'For the Final Bid to Power! The Communist Plan Explained'," in Chakravartty (ed.), *People's Warrior*, p. 140.

[368] Ibid., p. 142.

[369] Aditya Mukherjee, 'Empire: How Colonial India made Modern Britain', *Economic and Political Weekly* 45:50 (2010), pp. 73-82.

[370] B. Ranadive, *India's Sterling Balances* (Bombay: People's Publishing House, 1945).

to industrial courts. Sardar Patel, the home minister for India, tried to split the trade union movement by creating the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC) as a rival union to the communist-controlled All-India Trade Union Congress (AITUC).[371] Similarly, famine-stricken Bengal, witnessed one of the most sustained and militant peasant uprisings in the district of Tebhagha, where sharecroppers demanded the reduction of the share of landlords from half of the produce to one-third.[372] This movement was followed by a revolt against the *nizam (feudal leader)* of Hyderabad. The uprising, known as the Telangana Movement, involved the participation of almost 3 million peasants, and was crushed in 1951 after a three-year military operation carried by the Congress government.[373]

These developments were intensified by the Naval Mutiny of 1946, in which over 10,000 sailors of Indian origin revolted against living conditions, eventually turning into a broader uprising against the colonial state when workers in Bombay took strike action to support the striking sailors. The divergence between the Communist Party and the 'mainstream' nationalist groups began as both the Congress and the Muslim League opposed the strike, while the CPI extended its solidarity to the strikers. While the revolt was eventually suppressed by the government, leaving eight sailors dead, it revealed the increasing discontent on socio-economic issues that could not be contained within the logic of a colonial/anti-colonial binary.[374]

The emergence of socio-economic unrest on the eve of independence arrived as an unexpected Event, not because it lacked a basis in objective conditions, but because it lacked a place in the existing political frameworks of the era. In other words, for political parties in colonial India, including the CPI, socio-economic unrest appeared as a disruptive force in the smooth march towards freedom, posing a challenge to the contemporary political logic of anti-colonial forces. Walter Benjamin's conception of divine violence is useful for analyzing this sudden upsurge of socio-political unrest. For Benjamin, a form of violence that escapes the economy of means and ends associated with legal violence, as well as the dialectic between constituted and constituent power, is 'divine', since it cannot be explained away within the logic of existing sovereign power. Suspending all moral and ethical judgement, divine violence brings forth the impasse of a specific conjuncture, without offering a programmatic scheme for overcoming it.[375] As Žižek argues, rather than articulating an alternative, divine violence is a sign that 'things as usual' cannot continue since there is a fundamental deadlock within the status quo, and that a rupture from it would be less violent than perpetuating it, turning heresy into a political virtue.[376]

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[371] See Shalini Sharma, '"Yeh Azaadi Jhooti Hai!": The Shaping of the Opposition in the First Year of the Congress Raj', *Modern Asian Studies*, 48:5 (2014), pp. 1358-1388.

[372] D.N. Dhanagare, 'Peasant Movements: Peasant Protests and Politics--The Tebagha Movement in Bengal (India)', *Journal of Peasant Studies* 3:3 (1976), pp. 360-368.

[373] J. Roosa, 'Passive Revolution meets Peasant Revolution: Indian Nationalism and the Telangana Revolt', *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 28:4 (2001), pp. 57-94.

[374] Andrew Davies, 'From "Landsman" to "Seamen"? Colonial Discipline, Organisation and Resistance in the Royal Indian Navy, 1946', *Social and Cultural Geography* 14:8 (2013), pp. 868-887.

[375] Walter Benjamin, 'Critique of Violence' in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, ed. Peter Demetz (New York: Shcocken, 1986).

[376] See Slavoj Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (New York: Picador, 2008).

Ranadive took on the challenge of clarifying the new situation by building a novel theoretical practice rooted not in existing ideological frameworks, but in ongoing social struggles, elaborating their stakes and extrapolating political lessons from them. Criticizing the Communist Party leadership under Joshi for its 'right-reformism', i.e. support for the National Congress, Ranadive argued that the party's stubborn attachment to existing strategic frameworks precisely at a moment when ongoing social struggles were making them redundant, was the primary obstacle for the party in seizing the novelty present in the political conjuncture.[377]

> It is very strange that this meeting of the central committee which met only two months after the naval ratings revolt only casually mentions that great event and does not even care to study the character of the new upsurge, where it is leading, the qualitative change that is coming over India… the manifesto was written in this strain and though it talks here and there of a joint struggle, but struggle is the real thing which is absent from it.[378]

Ranadive became a member of the CPI's central committee in 1943, a time when the party was mobilizing support for the British war effort in a gesture of fidelity to the Soviet Union. However, while Joshi believed that a victory of the Soviet Union in the Second World War would lead to British withdrawal from India and the formation of an independent government, Ranadive argued that the colonial government's exploitation of the country's resources during the war had created structural conditions for India's perpetual dependence on the imperialist bloc. He criticized the belief that India was progressively moving towards independence, as well as explicitly hitting at Joshi's thesis that a section of the bourgeoisie was opposed to imperialism, and hence could play a progressive role in the given conjuncture.

> Formerly, the national bourgeoisie and its leaders had to rely on the masses, masses' struggles, etc., to secure concessions, share in power, etc., to advance their own interests. The bourgeoisie was excluded from political power, it had no real opportunity to develop industries and had no political power over the people. The postwar revolutionary upsurge forced imperialism to change its strategy, in order to be able to strike at the democratic forces all the more ferociously… In the new state, therefore, the national bourgeoisie shares power with imperialism, with the latter still dominant indirectly.[379]

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[377] In Moscow, Zhadanov emerged as a major post-war theoretician and an interlocutor of anti-colonial movements. In a speech, and a subsequent report, to the Cominform meeting (a meeting of nine major communist parties from around the world) in 1947, Zhadanov argued that since the world was divided into two irreconcilable camps, no compromise was today possible between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. This was interpreted by Ranadive and his supporters within the party to mean Soviet support to build an anti-Congress politics in India. See A.A. Zhdanov, *The International Situation: Speech Delivered at the Informatory Conference of Representatives of a Number of Communist Parties Held in Poland in the Latter Part of September 1947* (Moscow: Foreign Language Publishing House, 1947).

[378] Ranadive, 'Report on Reformist', pp. 149-150.

[379] Communist Party of India, 'Political Thesis' in Rao (ed.), *Documents of the History*, p. 49.

Ranadive and Rajesh Rao, leaders of the two principal tendencies against Joshi, argued for constructing an independent bloc against the Congress government, a 'front from below'.[380] In other words, rather than relying on an alliance with the National Congress, these leaders believed that Congress leadership had integrated itself into global capital, and hence lost its will and capacity to fight for national sovereignty. The difference between Ranadive's 'People's Democratic Front' and Rao's 'United Front from Below' lay in their characterization of the bourgeoisie (and the rich peasantry) as a whole, and whether India was ready for an imminent socialist revolution, as will be discussed later.

Ranadive's characterization of the bourgeoisie as a social group in cahoots with imperialism should not be reduced to a traditional class analysis of 'tendencies' contained within social reality, as is the dominant trend when studying communist history. In such readings, the acrimonious debates in CPI after the partition are viewed as divergences over sociological categories.[381]

This chapter argues, however, that an analysis based primarily on categories of political economy, while indispensable, remains insufficient to understanding the *political* stakes involved in the CPI's contestation with and over the National Congress. Rather than being a mere disagreement over the socio-economic conjuncture of newly-independent India, I argue that the primary difficulty for communist thought was how to produce a rupture from a fraternal organization, the National Congress, which was necessitated due to the growing gulf between popular upheavals and the Congress-led government. Here, I draw on Shruti Kapila's insightful work on the trajectory of 'the political' in twentieth-century India. Writing on the thought of Tilak, India's foremost anti-colonial leader before Gandhi's rise to the national stage, Kapila argues that the central problematic for anti-colonial thinkers was not a denunciation of an absolute Other (such as colonial rule), but the fluid and contingent struggle for creating distinct political fraternities. Such a community was not based on the identification of a primordial essence, but was instead premised on the sovereign decisions taken during moments of political indeterminacy. Such ruptural moments necessitated *fraternal violence,* since the indeterminacy of the conjuncture meant that the routine classification of kinsmen and enemies was suspended, and hence needed to be supplemented by an exceptional moment of violence against one's own kin to reconfigure the friend-enemy distinction, before a return to normalcy.[382]

This framework is useful for studying the communists' confrontation with the National Congress, with whom they had been in alliance for over a decade. For Ranadive, the withdrawal of the British from South Asia was not merely a gain in a progressively linear trajectory towards freedom, but had to be confronted as a *loss* of historical referentiality, in the abrupt disappearance of an (colonial) enemy. If India was no longer formally controlled by the British, then what antagonisms could produce and sustain politics in post-independence India? More

[380] A.A. Zhdanov, *The International Situation: Speech Delivered at the Informatory Conference of Representatives of a Number of Communist Parties Held in Poland in the Latter Part of September 1947* (Moscow: Foreign Language Publishing House, 1947).
[381] Bidwai, *The Phoenix Moment*, pp. 1-44.
[382] Kapila, 'A History of Violence', pp. 445-454.

pertinently, through what theoretical manoeuvres could communists construct an oppositional framework to their erstwhile allies in the anti-colonial movement, particularly as popular movements began contesting the National Congress' hegemony over the country's political imaginary?

The CPI was not the only force confronted by such questions. The shock-inducing violence of the partition between religiously marked communities, as well as the labour/peasant militancy from 1946 onwards, pointed to fissures internal to the 'national' movement as excessive elements within this movement. Apart from the 'Muslim question' partially resolved through the partitioning of India, questions of regional sovereignty, class antagonisms and caste contestations took center stage in national politics. The violence of this period, occurring equally through the colonial state and its successors in the Pakistani and Indian governments, as well as in the domain of the 'popular' through revolts and communal riots, provided the background to Ranadive's engagement with questions of sovereignty, freedom and revolutionary practice. It appeared, as posited by Joshi, as a disruption of a harmonious development of History, revealing the contingent nature of politics that escaped transcendental meaning and necessitated departures from received theoretical or political frameworks. The next section investigates Ranadive's thought as a reflection of this disruptive violence, and of the imperative to produce ruptures within communist tradition to account for the transformed conjuncture.

Seizing the Novelty

At the Second Congress of the CPI in Calcutta in February of 1948, the leadership of P.C. Joshi came under heavy criticism for his uncritical loyalty to the Nehru government and the party's neglect of growing working class discontent since the end of the war.[383] The Congress elected Ranadive as the new general secretary, who had advocated a hardline position towards the central government, as well as unconditional support for the popular revolts underway in the country. Ranadive's principal gesture was his insistence that formulaic conceptions of politics had become redundant after protests shook the whole sub-continent in 1946. In other words, he called for an infidelity to existing textual orthodoxy of Indian communism, with transformative violence displacing sociological predictions for revolutionary change. Claiming that the party had failed to recognize and respond to the novelty exhibited in these spontaneous uprisings, he called to register the effects of this unrest within the theoretical edifice of Indian communism.

> The end of the war presented us with a new problem. The war was over and our rosy picture of the automatic liberation of all peoples including India was not realised… At a time when the Indian people were entering the period of armed conflict with imperialism, and the bourgeoisie was getting ready to strike a treacherous deal over the heads of people, we (Communists) assure the people of prospects of immediate peaceful realisation of Indian freedom.[384]

[383] Rao (ed.), *Documents of the History*, pp. 1-7.
[384] Ranadive, 'Report on Reformist', p. 140.

Ranadive argued that the contradictions between the national bourgeoisie and imperialism, which had propelled popular politics in colonial India, had come to an end through a power-sharing formula between global Capital and local elites, thus positing the exhaustion of the 'nationalist' sequence in Indian politics. This logic of postcolonial power is contrasted with the eruption of popular discontent, manifested in the strike wave that swept the country in 1945 and 1946. The first 'Political Thesis' issued by the Central Committee headed by Ranadive was a bold statement on the need for situating communist thought under the conditions of popular unrest to overcome the paralyzing lag between theory and practice.

> ...despite the compromising, disruptive and anti-struggle policies pursued by the Congress and League leaderships, the tempo, the sweep and the militancy of the struggle of the workers and employees in the city, of the peasants and tenant-serfs in the countryside, of the common people in the feudal-aristocratic states went on rising steadily in 1945-46… Gandhi's non-violent India, guarded by the bourgeoisie for more than a quarter century against militant action, now suddenly resorted to arms… India has never seen such a sweep; never seen the armed forces collapsing in front of popular pressure; never seen the working class fight with such abandon and courage. It was the eve of the total collapse of imperialism.[385]

Thus, the departure of the British from India was not merely celebrated as a victory at the end of a bitter anti-colonial struggle, but became a curious case of postcolonial militancy. As discussed, the key challenge was to find a place for the Indian bourgeoisie, hitherto considered in contradiction with the colonial order and, therefore, an ally of the communist movement, within the transformed configuration of postcolonial India. Ranadive called for creating an equivalence between the former colonial regime and the bourgeoisie represented by the National Congress, elevating the latter as the principal enemy of the communist movement.

> The so-called transfer of power was one of the biggest pieces of political and economic appeasement of the bourgeoisie which was necessary to strike a deal. This power, putting the bourgeoisie in control over manpower and resources of a vast territory, though as a junior partner, was the dream of the bourgeoisie and it has realised it… From the standpoint of the revolution, all that it means is that henceforth the bourgeoisie will guard the colonial order. [386]

For Ranadive, the outburst of strike action had highlighted a disjunct between the nationalist leadership and popular aspirations, since the former were forced to take an openly anti-strike position. This popular upsurge not only interrupted the immediate strategic/tactical framework of the CPI, but also disrupted the linear notion of progress prevalent within the dominant Marxist framework. As discussed in previous chapters, since the Second Comintern meeting in 1921, the question of nationalism overdetermined the fight towards socialism in the colonial world, with the latter entering the horizon of possibility in the aftermath of territorial independence. While this framework already marked the displacement of Eurocentric discussions on revolutionary

[385] Communist Party of India, 'Political Thesis', pp. 32-33.
[386] Ibid., p. 31.

practice, it nonetheless operated within a teleological conception, since national sovereignty became the missing link between colonial 'deformation' and historical progression. Yet, this formula, while creating a necessary distance from orthodox Marxism, nonetheless concealed who held sovereignty over political decisions in moments of political indeterminacy. The years around independence were one such moment, not only because they were structured by unprecedented communal violence, but also because of the working class militancy geared against nationalist forces, which blurred the lines between colonial rule and freedom, as discussed further below. As communist thought struggled to actualize itself in this concrete historical situation, Ranadive posited the CPI's refusal to acknowledge a deep antagonism within the nationalist bloc as an essential feature of the political theoretical impasse in post-independence India.

> ...its [CPI under Joshi] tailism behind the Indian bourgeoisie expresses by saying Indian freedom will be won if we can successfully resolve our national differences, meaning thereby that if Congress and League leaders resolve their mutual differences, thus making Indian freedom totally dependent on the selfish desires of these two bourgeoisie. There is no perspective of struggle, no call for struggle... Unity of these two parties is made the sole condition of national freedom.[387]

Instead of recognizing existing political formations as leaders in the quest for 'national freedom', Ranadive called for creating a 'divisive unity', a unity based on struggle and active volition, which could initiate a break from the contemporary logic and frame an alternative political possibility.[388] The 'divine violence' of the years preceding and following Partition not only made the available prescriptions redundant, it also opened up the possibility of political declarations hitherto deemed impossible. The principal question that conditioned communist thought in this period was how to seize this impossibility. Ranadive's thought existed within this question.

The 'Interlaced' Revolution in Postcolonial India

One of the key tasks for the newly constituted Central Committee, under the leadership of Ranadive, was to build a perspective and strategy while keeping in view the radically shifting coordinates of Indian politics in the aftermath of independence. This challenge led to a double displacement in communist thought. First, the lack of a widespread working class presence in the Indian sub-continent already necessitated the search for a 'hybrid' political subject. Second, the events of 1946 meant that any such subject would need to seize the novelty opened by popular revolts across the country. It was under the imperative of these two ruptures, one from the dominant form of global Marxism, and the other from the trajectory of Indian communism, that Ranadive drew the contours of the strategy for a revolution in India.

As argued in chapter 2, communists in the colonial world contested the orthodox Marxist conception of the stages of history, in which a country was deemed 'ready' for revolutionary

[387] Ranadive, 'Report on Reformist', pp. 141-142.

[388] I take this term from Jodi Dean's fruitful discussion on the issue of consensus in political organizing, particularly around Occupy Wall Street. Dean, *The Communist Horizon*, pp. 207-250.

politics based on its socio-economic development, with communist parties in peripheral countries assigned the awkward task of helping build capitalism. Writing in 1948, Ranadive called for 'People's Democracy' as the strategic horizon for Indian communism, articulating a novel understanding of the 'stages' involved in communist thought, based on the global division between two camps (the Soviet Union and the United States), as well as the intensifying labour struggles across India.

> It is therefore impermissible to talk about building capitalism, giving a long period of development for capitalism, as certain communist leaders have done. It is a throwback to the old discredited social-democratic conception which wanted to construct a Chinese wall between the democratic and socialist revolutions... This heightened conflict in each country, together with the intensified conflict between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat on a world plane, interlaces the two revolutions more closely, inextricably, and makes it impossible to win the first without passing over to win the second. It is this deep interlacing… that underlies the character of the present revolution as people's democratic revolution, which emphasises its extreme nearness to the socialist revolution, and at the same time, sharply demarcates it from the bourgeois-democratic revolution.[389]

Rather than opting for a neat category from the closet of orthodox Marxism, or accepting 'politics of waiting', Ranadive emphasizes the *interlacing* of different stages to describe the political possibilities in the *here and now*. A 'People's democratic revolution' which was *nearly* a socialist revolution, and separate from a 'bourgeois-democratic revolution', signifies the in-betweenness in which the CPI's strategic axis under Ranadive existed. Rather than merely placing Indian communism in the continuum of global Marxism, the reference to 'socialist' and 'bourgeois-democratic' revolutions was used as a point of departure for the specificity of the Indian situation, and consequently, the autonomy of Indian communism. The reference to global events, in particular the February and October Revolutions in Russia in 1917, which cast a giant shadow on all discussions on strategy in India, were part of a broader attempt to simultaneously situate India within the global history of communism, while also insisting on its particular trajectory that resisted straightforward assimilation into a global narrative of Marxism. Consider his criticism of party members who sought to create an adequation between the Indian situation in 1948 and pre-revolutionary Russia:

> Both make a mockery of Marxism, by mechanically transferring the class-combinations obtaining at the two stages of the Russian revolution, to the Indian situation, without asking whether in view of the fact that three decades [of] revolutionary struggle have passed since the October revolution, that the second world war has completely altered the balance of class-forces in the country, there is any chance of the stages getting intertwined, of class relations getting mixed, of the class combinations of one stage being combined with the combinations of the next stage… A rigid mechanical expectation to

[389] Communist Party of India, 'On People's Democracy', quoted in B. Ranadive, 'Report on Reformist', pp. 459-460.

> see in Indian conditions an exact replica of the position of various classes at the two stages of the Russian revolution leads to comic effects and wrong conclusions.[390]

This was one of the clearest statements rejecting an evolutionary view of history, positing instead the presence of combinations, mixtures *intertwined* in a complex social formation. If not illuminating the exact nature of class relations, such proclamations at least permanently blocked the possibility of viewing India as a mere iteration in a global history, whether capitalist or communist. More radically, such extraction of India out of the stagist view of history meant that Indian communism no longer had to *follow* a linear political development. Consequently, India could not be placed in a temporal hierarchy, as trying to 'catch-up' to western communism, but instead the 'intertwined' stages established its contemporaneity with global communism. The challenge was then to constitute a subjectivity that could dialectically grasp the possibilities inherent in an uneven and contradictory totality, privileging politics over sociological precision.

If the historical stage of political praxis was unique, then it necessarily followed that the prevailing configuration of power could not appear as anything other than a complex combination of sociological elements, lacking precision in available Marxian language. Thus, under Ranadive, the CPI moved away from its characterization of the ruling hegemonic bloc as 'feudal-imperialist' (from which emanated their support to the more 'progressive' bourgeois parties such as the Congress and Muslim League), and instead posited the presence of a 'feudal-bourgeois-imperialist' combine, removing the necessity of a 'bourgeois-democratic revolution' and allowing for an intertwining of democratic, anti-colonial and socialist revolutions.

> What is the strategy that we have outlined for our stage of the revolution? It is given in a nutshell in the slogan of a democratic front, which is defined as an alliance of the working class, peasants, oppressed middle classes, against bourgeois-feudal-imperialist combine [sic]… Objective: overthrow of the bourgeois government heading imperialist-bourgeois-feudal combine [sic], completely wiping out survivals of medievalism and going to the transitional economy through nationalisation… It will be found that the stage of revolution we are [in] partly shares the characteristics of both stages of the Russian revolution.[391]

The complex articulation of disparate 'modes of production' into a unified ruling bloc meant that any rupture from this constellation would face the challenge of successively intertwined transformations, disrupting any neat classification of historical stages. For example, consider Ranadive's elevation of the ongoing peasant revolt in Telangana as signifying communism, bracketing questions of socio-economic development.

> Telangana is another big landmark in the history struggles led under the leadership of our party. Here we took the struggle to new qualitative heights with exemplary organisation.

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[390] B. Ranadive, 'Strategic and Tactics in the Struggle for People's Democratic Revolution', in Rao (ed.), *Documents of the History*, p. 125.

[391] Ranadive, 'Strategy and Tactics', Ibid., pp. 248-249.

> Circles close to the nizam tremble before the name of Telangana. For Telangana today means communists and communists means Telangana.[392]

Communism's equation with the struggle waged in Telangana resonated with the deeper undercurrent of subjectivity in colonial India, in which acts, collective and individual, in defiance of existing authority, became the locus for political action. Yet, while positing that Telangana became a symptomatic site for revealing both the repression of the Indian union and the capacity of the masses to resist, Ranadive knew that it would have been an exaggeration to claim that it represented a general disenchantment towards the Nehru government. If the mode of production and the transitional program negated the homogenizing categories sought by theorists, then the development of revolutionary consciousness itself had to be posited as broken, fragmented and dispersed, necessitating a combination of tactics.

> Nevertheless, to start with we have to take into account the uneven development of consciousness and advance a form of struggle suited to the consciousness of the participants. This unevenness we must realise is due to the fact that the influence of the proletariat is uneven. The struggle to isolate the bourgeoisie is the struggle to overcome this unevenness to bring the masses to the level of the advanced sections.[393]

The 'struggle to overcome this unevenness' was synonymous with the attempts to 'tear away the masses' from mainstream political forces. If the strategic goal of the CPI in this period was to think through, and innovate upon, the intertwined form of the 'Indian revolution', then the greatest obstacle lay not in the repressive apparatus of the post-colonial state, but in the alleged ideological attachment of the 'masses', the source of revolutionary subjectivity, that is, to 'bourgeois' political forces. The next section engages with both the theoretical elaboration of Ranadive's critique of national ideology, as well as explores it as the most fundamental impasse of his politics.

The Search for Authenticity and the Politics of Unmasking

Pedagogical preparation was a central ideological feature underpinning the colonial project in India. In fact, the primary critiques of the Empire in the early twentieth century were based on the failure of the colonial regime to live up to its own aims. More hardline political forces demanding full independence, such as Anushulan and the Ghadar Party, inhabited to the margins of mainstream political life. Yet, by the 1920s, this polite opposition had turned into an overt antagonism between the nationalist forces and the colonial regime, with the demand for an independent nation-state increasingly becoming the primarily horizon for political agitation. With the removal of the mask of civilization, the rivalry between the colonial government and the anti-colonial movement was primarily one between the repressive apparatus of the former, and the ability of the latter to mobilize popular classes against such repression. In other words,

[392] Communist Party of India 'Review of the Second Congress of the Communist Party of India', in Rao (ed.), *Documents of the History*, p. 197.
[393] Ranadive, 'Strategy and Tactics', p. 260.

with a broad consensus on the practice of colonial rule, the question of 'ruling ideology' became a side concern for partisans of the anti-colonial movement.[394]

As became evident in the previous sections, for Ranadive, the transition from a colonial to post-colonial state represented a continuum of fundamental power relations, rather than a major rupture from the past. While terms such as 'freedom' and 'sovereignty' were part of a shared vocabulary between the Communists and the National Congress, there was divergence on whether they had been realized with the departure of the British. In fact, the CPI famously raised the slogan '*Ye azadi jhooti hai* (This freedom is fake) to demonstrate its point of view that India had not overcome the shackles of domination with the formal departure of the British.[395] In a strategic gesture similar to the anti-colonial movement's deployment of Enlightenment ideals, Ranadive argued that despite the fact that terms such as 'freedom' and 'sovereignty' obscured the continued subjugation of the Indian people, they nonetheless simultaneously provided the terrain for a political intervention. Consider his scathing critique of both the Nehru government for its close association with the West, as well as of the 'ultra-left' elements within the communist movement who rejected engagement with such 'bourgeois concepts'.

> If anyone were to use the words freedom, independence, sovereignty, to create illusions [that] these exist, that the government represents them, to bolster the government, then it's opportunism. But when they are used as a weapon of exposing the freedom, of exposing the steps to tie down India to imperialist strings… they serve the purpose of rousing the people to fight for and defend national sovereignty and freedom. All such exposure can only be made in the name of freedom and sovereignty… the people have the strength to defeat illegal pacts, provided the communist parties discharge their duty and therefore the Communist Party must clear the way for the people to see the bourgeois conspiracies clearly and fight them. For this patient struggle is necessary.[396]

Ranadive argued that the political subject existed in the gap between words and their meanings, as an excess of possible significations over the terms deployed. If the language of freedom and sovereignty merely covered over their practical absence, it meant that political action had to be directed towards amplifying this contradiction and aiding in tearing off the masks to render this gap visible. Even in this rather simplistic equivalence between the colonial and the postcolonial situation, Ranadive recognized a fundamental difference between the two moments. Unlike the final years of colonial rule where the government had lost all popular legitimacy, the Nehru government carried with it the support of the broadest sections of the anti-colonial movement. Thus, the possibility of a break with the National Congress opened up by the events of 1946 was obstructed by the 'illusions' about the Nehru government in the popular imagination. Unlike the open contestation with the colonial state, the post-colonial government, despite Ranadive's

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[394] Dipesh Chakrabarty makes a similar argument, emphasizing the direct war-like nature of the contestation between the colonial state and the anti-colonial movement. See Dipesh Chakrabarty, '"In the Name of Politics": Sovereignty, Democracy and the Multitude in India', *Economic and Political Weekly* 40:30 (2005), pp. 3293-3301.

[395] Bipan Chandra, Aditya Mukherjee, and Mridula Mukherjee, *India Since Independence* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2008), p. 258.

[396] Ranadive, 'Strategy and Tactics', pp. 386-387.

characterization of the latter as a 'stooge of imperialism', derived its legitimacy from the anti-colonial movement itself. For Ranadive, the Nehru government represented ideological glue for the 'imperialist-bourgeois-feudal combine' that displaced the primordial violence of socio-economic relations that had only intensified since British withdrawal.

In other words, India had entered a regime of masks, one that prevented the clear demarcation of political cleavages. The arrival of independence after the withdrawal of the British masked continued subservience to imperialism, the coming to power of a 'national government' masked a government of the bourgeoisie and the exclusion of the masses, and the appearance of political cleavages within the National Congress masked the consensus on the perpetuation of bourgeois rule. In a pamphlet written in 1948 and titled 'Political Thesis',
Ranadive criticizes those on the Left who separated the present from the colonial era, or emphasized the ideological differences between Nehru and the more right-leaning Congress leader, Patel.

> Nehru is seen as a fighter against Patel's policies and almost made to appear as the leader of the democratic forces. Every verbal opposition of Nehru to Patel is magnified. It is thus an illusion created that if Nehru's hands are strengthened against Patel, the government will be transformed into an instrument of the will of the people.
>
> This estimate of Nehru is anti-Marxist and serves to tie down the masses to the bourgeois ideology. It must be understood that Nehru is as much of a representative of the bourgeoisie as Patel is. They both defend the class policies and interests of the bourgeoisie which is now collaborating with imperialism.[397]

This homogenizing depiction of political tendencies in post-colonial India had the function of both marking out an autonomous space for communist praxis, but also critiquing ruling ideology to break Nehru's dominance over the 'trusting masses of our country'.[398] Breaking this link required what Ranadive thought were the existing ruptural tendencies developing across India that placed pressure on the Congress' hold on Indian politics. This is why Ranadive posited 'unmasking' as the principal task for communists in the post-independence era.

> Disillusionment with the policies of the national leadership is rapidly growing among the people… At this stage the fate of the democratic movement depends on the correct policy of the Communist Party and of the working-class, a policy which must see the great strength of the forces of democracy and their weakness in the illusions that the masses have about the bourgeoisie. To gather that strength through the democratic front, to dispel the illusions by unmasking the collaborators and to carry forward the program on the basis of the democratic movement, these are the special tasks of the party of the working class.

[397] Ranadive, 'Political Thesis', p. 55.
[398] Ibid., p. 56.

If colonial ideology envisioned a gradual movement towards freedom and sovereignty, the anti-colonial movement dismissed this 'politics of waiting' as a mask hiding perpetual subjugation of Indians to foreign rule, and countered it by demanding freedom in the here and now. Ranadive aimed to import this impatience into the politics of postcolonial India by refusing to accept the legitimacy of the Nehru government. Concomitantly, it revealed a deeper thirst for authenticity triggered by the anti-colonial revolts, turning the status quo suspect, but without a clearly defined criterion for what 'authentic' freedom would look like. The utmost challenge was then to create a political praxis that could simultaneously dispel the 'illusions' in the Nehru government and mobilize the masses for a future insurrection.

> The Communist Party must devote utmost attention to winning the masses away from the influence of the bourgeois leaders through propaganda, joint campaigns and joint struggles… It is therefore essential that leftists associated with those organisations should carry on a persistent battle, both inside and outside these organisations, to unmask the policies of the leadership and win over the masses for the democratic revolution and the democratic front.[399]

The positions taken in this paragraph not only had strategic value, but also posed a theoretical problem for the edifice of orthodox Marxism. In a subjectivity produced by suspicion in the midst of a transition, sociological knowledge, rather than illuminating political praxis, itself became suspect. The categories of 'nation', 'freedom' and 'sovereignty' that had sustained the enthusiasm of anti-colonial revolts and provided them with ideological precision, were rendered obsolete due to perceived internal corruption. Even the working class, the 'subject-object' of history, had 'deviated' from its historical destiny determined by History due to elements that 'disrupted its political unity'. For if the logic of masks displaced the political content in independent India, it necessarily followed that such masks obscured the working class movement itself, producing a gap between the movement's sociological being and its potential political project. Consider the document by the Ranadive-led CPI polit bureau, warning against 'treacherous elements' within the working class, during the railway strikes of 1949:

> These vacillators will mask their treachery by talking about vanguardism, as the Benares strike-breakers and traitors have done; or they will adopt some other slogan saying strike is not possible, etc., and make use of bourgeois propaganda in the press which soon will start propagating that no strike is now possible. With this warning against the vacillators in our own ranks, all our comrades, party organisations, all comrades working on the railway front must bend their efforts towards bringing about the strike.[400]

Overdetermined by the chaos of the transition (colonial to post-colonial), Ranadive's thought contained a profound skepticism, even suspicion, of political demarcations formed during the anti-colonial movement. If the anti-colonial sequence that began in the early 1920s vociferously denounced the colonial 'civilizing' project as an illusion, then the search for 'authentic' freedom, and the subject capable of instituting it, only intensified with the departure of the British from

[399] Ibid., p. 79.

[400] Communist Party of India, 'Railway Strike and our Tasks, in Rao (ed.), *Documents of the History*, pp. 514-515.

India. The popular revolts beginning with the Royal Navy Revolt in 1946 exceeded the logic of the emerging nation-states, revealing political possibilities that were out of sync with 'national' politics. The myriad substitutions, displacements, and ruptures were an attempt to seize the political novelty at once obscured and revealed by the tumultuous events of the era. The means of obtaining clarity required a dialectical scission of existing terms such as 'nation', 'freedom' and 'class' to separate the 'fake' from the 'authentic'. The impatience inherent in such subjectivity required internal purging of the communist movement to resist its subsumption to bourgeois ideology. In other words, the search for the authentic political subject, freed from the illusions created by the hegemony of masks, had as its shadow an all-pervasive suspicion of existing reality.

The Collapse of the Ranadive Line

The attachment of the masses to the 'illusions' of the Nehru government proved more stubborn than Ranadive had imagined. Despite the intense chaos created by the revolts in 1946 and the communal riots in 1947, the CPI found it increasingly difficult to sustain the momentum as the Congress-led government embarked upon a policy of consolidating its control across the country. The central government prepared itself to counter the strategy of the communists by isolating them in the labour movement through a combination of creating a parallel trade union, denouncing them as 'traitors', and using the repressive apparatus of the state to quell their strongholds. On 26th July 1948, Nehru addressed a labour rally in Madras, one of the focal points of working class agitation led by communists, issuing a stern warning to the Communist Party for its antagonistic stance towards the Indian state. Claiming that communists were committing 'atrocities in the provinces in the name of economic doctrine', he stated that 'if any group of people wants to declare war against the state, then the state is at war with them'.[401]

This tone was indicative of a departure from the rebellious Nehru heading the anti-colonial movement, as well as the polite disagreements between the Congress and Communist leadership during the Joshi era. Dipesh Chakrabarty has noted how the Nehruvian government began mimicking the colonial regime on questions regarding the preservation of law and order soon after independence.[402] The same Nehru who encouraged students to take active part in civil disobedience during the British era denounced left-wing student activism in postcolonial India, claiming that 'Students in India have lost any sense of discipline and it is not easy to deal with them by methods of force and compulsion, though these may have to be resorted to sometimes'. Moreover, the formation of the Indian National Trade Union Congress in 1947 as a counter to the communist-led All India Trade Union Congress paid dividends, as by 1949 the membership of the INTUC stood at 989,983 members against 679,143 members of the AITUC. This was made possible in no short measure due to government patronage of INTUC, such as its nomination to the International Labour Organization as India's representative, coupled with repressive measures to counter the militancy of the AITUC.[403]

[401] 'Nehru Attacks Communists', *New York Times* (July 27, 1948), p. 7.
[402] Chakrabarty, 'In the Name of Politics', pp. 3293-3297.
[403] Sharma, 'The Shaping of the Opposition', pp. 1358-1388.

Sardar Vallabhai Patel, Nehru's home minister, went a step further, declaring communists 'terrorists' in 1948 for disrupting 'national reconstruction'. Declaring that the 'days of strikes and hartals are gone', which were needed when India was 'fighting against a foreign power', Patel launched a witch-hunt against communist activists throughout the country.[404] Some of the measures included the banning the Communist Party in West Bengal, launching raids at party offices in Delhi, Madras and Bombay, while also linking Communists to secessionist elements in Kashmir and Assam, as well to communal elements in Hyderabad.[405] In other words, communists were elevated to the principal 'internal' enemy, a fifth column that owed its allegiance to foreign powers. The most brutal response of the government, however, was reserved for Telangana, where the communists had joined forces with the local Congress cadres to launch an armed struggle against the Nizam of Hyderabad. With the entrance of the Indian troops to dismantle the Nizam's authority, the local Congress leadership welcomed the central government's intervention and ended its agitation.[406] Communists, however, demanded an end to the feudal relations dominant in the region, and saw the Indian military's intervention as little more than a symbolic measure that did not alter existing social relations. Their persistence led to an all-out military assault directed against the communists, who were dislodged from their strongholds, and forced to operate as disparate guerilla units in the countryside until 1951, when the communists officially surrendered to Indian forces.[407]

The effect of these measures on the morale and the organizational structure of the Communist Party was immense. The party was placed in an awkward situation in which it had to defend allegations of foreign subservience, as well as being involved in terrorist activities immediately after the partition riots, when all mainstream political forces called for peace and stability in the country. Almost universally condemned in the press, isolated from mainstream political forces, and facing intense repression from the central government, the infrastructure of the party crumbled, with the membership dwindling from 89,000 to 20,000. Furthermore, Ranadive was increasingly attacked from within the party, both from the 'Left' Andhra Committee for not adequately preparing for a 'people's war' and from the 'Rightist' Joshi, who claimed Ranadive's antagonism towards the Nehru government had isolated the party from the masses, suggesting that he was mentally 'deranged'.[408] The strategy of overthrowing the 'bourgeois-feudal-imperialist combine' appeared to have decisively collapsed.

During this period, Ranadive was engaged in a bitter confrontation with dissident voices within the party, often engaging in polemics with party members. Indeed, as many party cadres began deserting the party, and the Congress-led government strengthened its coercive and ideological dominance over the political landscape, Ranadive identified the roots of this failure in the 'lack of preparation' among party comrades.[409] After positing that nationalist politics masked a more

[404]Ibid., pp. 1362-1367.
[405] M.B. Rao. 'Introduction', in Rao (ed.), *Documents of the History*, pp. xxi.
[406] Roosa, 'Passive Revolution', pp. 70-75.
[407]M.B. Rao 'Introduction', in Rao (ed.), *Documents of the History,* pp. xiii.
[408] P.C. Joshi, 'Letter to the Central Committee', Chakravartty (ed.), *People's Warrior,* p. 184.
[409] One of the first charges levelled against Ranadive by the new central committee constituted after his removal was that the party was being run by a coterie around Ranadive, and party members were increasingly scared to voice

authentic politics led by the 'party of the working class', the lack of progress on the political terrain induced doubts on the authenticity of the party itself. Commenting on the collapse of certain party units in the face of state repression, Ranadive accused the 'petty-bourgeois' class composition of the party as the main obstacle for successful political action.

> The Andhra Committee very correctly stresses the faulty class composition of the party, the manning of key posts by elements from alien classes as one of the main causes of the collapse. Our party in Andhra… was paralyzed because it was not based on the really revolutionary classes and therefore the hesitation and even treachery common to such elements from other classes affected it.[410]

In the absence of a criterion for deciding upon the authenticity of political categories, the semblance of ideology seemed to seep into the revolutionary organizations themselves. The reason for the failure of communist strategy was not based on a lack internal to the strategy, but on the fact that the party was not composed of 'really revolutionary classes'. Thus, the enthusiasm for novelty that had structured Ranadive's thought in 1946 paved way for suspicion as the determining political factor, alleging that the vanguard itself was suspect. It was for this reason that he elevated the internal struggle against petty-bourgeois elements as one of the central tasks of the Communist Party.

> This petty-bourgeois revolutionism is at the root of the mistakes in Andhra. And it is not only in Andhra, but in other provinces also where the disease has spread since the session of the second party congress. Certain petty-bourgeois intellectuals have interpreted the party line to mean license for left phrases divorced from the actual conditions of day-to-day struggle or the interplay of class forces… the tendencies represented by all these are petty-bourgeois revolutionism, which must be mercilessly fought if the party is to discharge its revolutionary responsibilities.[411]

The 'merciless' fight against petty-bourgeois tendencies was prompted by the increasing desertions by communists already underway in places like Telangana and Bengal. Purging party members as a response to dwindling membership made sense only within the logic of a search for authenticity, where each setback was proof of a further need for unmasking 'vacillating' elements within the party. For, if the primary task of the party was to separate the semblance produced by ideology from the authentic categories of revolutionary politics, the fear that this ideology had taken root in the party, particularly in moments of a crisis, became a central anxiety for party leadership.

> In Russia, petty-bourgeois revolutionism was concentrated outside the Bolshevik Party--in the socialist revolutionaries and the anarchists… In India, after the end of petty-bourgeois terrorism in Bengal and other places, an end brought about by developing a

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dissenting views on the fear of being labelled "cowards". Communist Party of India, "Letter of the New Central Committee to All Party Members and Sympathisers" in Rao (ed.), *Documents of the History*, p. 636.

[410] Ranadive, 'Strategy and Tactics', p. 313.

[411] Ibid., p. 319.

> mass movement, many of those elements swung over to the party. Remnants continued to eke out their independent existence, but they themselves had to accept socialism and appear as Marxists… All this meant that some of the petty-bourgeois elements could not be fully assimilated and proletarianised, and therefore the tendency to petty-bourgeois reaction, revolutionism, i.e. neglect of classes and their role, should be strong. In India therefore, unlike Russia, at present at any rate, petty-bourgeois revolutionism has to be fought inside the party. It was routed in Bengal when it was outside the party. Inside the party it assumes Marxian garb and has to be unmasked.[412]

Thus, the enemy resided within the party, necessitating an internal struggle. For Ranadive, 'petty-bourgeois revolutionism' became an imprecise phrase to describe any phenomenon that neither corresponded to a sociologically determined role of classes, nor to the strategic tasks of the 'People's democratic revolution'. It was a term denoting a 'divergence' from the proletarian point of view as developed by the party, inducing panic over the failure to 'fully assimilate' these tendencies. Suspicion overpowered the search for an authentic politics, turning unmasking into a process most ferociously practiced inside the party, with differences of opinion deemed to be 'subjective impositions' against the objective criterion set by the party. The realm of suspicion moved beyond the categorization of individuals based on their social origin (although this criticism was not extended to the coterie surrounding Ranadive himself), to a 'tendency' with particular traits such as 'impatience', 'indiscipline', 'betrayal' and 'cowardice'. Indeed, the last trait was invoked obsessively by Ranadive as the party faced increasing repression from the Nehru government, declaring that party cadres were not sufficiently brave to play the role history bestowed upon them.

Such denunciations became more pronounced as Ranadive, in March 1949, called for railway workers to paralyze the Nehru government.[413] The move was one of desperation, since the party had been dislodged from its strongholds in Telangana in 1949, its communication networks had been disrupted throughout the country, scores of its cadres had been jailed, tortured or killed, while factionalism had paralyzed the internal life of the party. Moreover, the trade union movement itself was bitterly divided, with Congress supporters and socialists such as Jayaprakash Narayan refusing to participate in any trade union activity aimed at overthrowing the central government. The lack of enthusiasm for his political strategy was interpreted by Ranadive as a sign of treachery and cowardice, turning criticism into betrayal.

> This has been the real problem all along, whether in relation to working-class or kissan struggles, and the provincial secretary has been shirking it, failing to see it, and some comrades were attempting to pass on the responsibility for this state of affairs to the masses. The underestimation of the mass tempo and the failure to keep pace with it, finding out [sic] excuses not to lead it, are characteristics of a reformist outlook and they are seen here…The same retreat before militancy of the masses and then running to methods of individual actions, petty bourgeois revolutionism was in evidence in UP in Azamgarh, where one of the biggest *kissan* (peasant) upsurges has been practically

[412] Ibid., p. 321.

[413] Communist Party of India, 'Railway Strike and our Tasks', in Rao (ed.), *Documents of the History*, pp. 513-541.

> sabotaged through vacillation before struggle and running away from it… It is an instance where in the face of the revolutionary tempo of the masses the petty-bourgeois leadership really fled away in panic from the mass…[414]

The last phase of Ranadive's leadership was completely dominated by the super-ego effect. The more his strategies failed to win over mass support, the more he blamed the incompetence of his own comrades, taunting them, making impossible demands on them, as well as launching widespread purges of dissidents in party institutions. With the failure of the party to mobilize for the railway strike, Ranadive came under increasing pressure inside the party, as well as internationally, to quit as general secretary. The Andhra Committee proposed an alternative vision of the 'National Democratic Revolution', whose primary features supported sections of the 'progressive bourgeoisie' and rich peasants, claiming that India was still under colonial rule and that, hence, the primary fight remained against foreign domination. More importantly, against the insurrectionary model advocated by Ranadive, the Andhra committee proposed a 'protracted' struggle based on the Chinese model, backed by a 'people's war' in the party's strongholds.[415]

Since the Chinese strategy had gained immense prestige in the aftermath of the People's Army's victory in 1949, this new line, advocating 'national liberation' was supported by the Cominform in its journal, advocating the 'Chinese path' for colonial and newly independent countries. With increased government repression, a revolt within the party, and international backing for his rivals, Ranadive decided to quit as general secretary. Rajeshwara Rao, leader of the Andhra Committee, took over as general secretary. Ending his tenure as leader of the communist movement, a dejected Ranadive wrote a 'self-critical' report on his tenure and eventually gave a 'confessional' speech on 30th May 1950 at a party meeting.

> Both in my report and in my speech I could not really and properly criticize myself. My criticism on [the] organizational part has been criticized as insincere. I accept it.... I have stabbed the Party in the back. It is an enormous guilt which only those who are guilty of [it] realize, but on lines given by Vanu I will unmask myself.[416]

The search for authenticity that began with 'unmasking' the Congress and the League, and was followed by socialists in the trade union movement and 'petty-bourgeois revolutionism' in the Communist Party, finally ended up consuming Ranadive himself. Nothing appeared pristine enough, not even the vanguard itself that took upon the responsibility of purging the party, turning the fight against semblance into a nihilist drive towards self-annihilation. In unmasking himself barely two months after launching an insurrection meant to unmask 'petty-bourgeois' elements both within and outside of the party, Ranadive showed his intense fidelity to the

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[414] Ranadive, 'Strategy and Tactics', pp. 342-353.

[415] Communist Party of India, 'Letter of the New Central Committee to All Party Members and Sympathisers', in Rao (ed.), *Documents of the History*, pp. 631-632.

[416] B. Ranadive, 'I Will Unmask Myself', quoted in Partha, Chaudhry, "I Will Unmask Myself" *Liberation* 1 (1968), p. 4.

communist movement, but also revealed the impossibility of a politics stubbornly attached to the quest for 'authenticity'.

Ranadive and the Impasse of Communist Thought

How are we to then think through the rise of Ranadive as an uncompromising leader against the 'reformist' but entrenched leadership of the Communist Party, and his sudden fall from grace as a 'backstabber' and an extremist? The existing literature on Ranadive's time at the helm of the communist Party in India is bracketed as a moment of 'fanaticism' in an otherwise smooth, 'scientifically guided' journey of Indian communism. But such analysis misses the fact that Ranadive's line was supported by a vast majority of delegates at the Second Congress in 1948, and more importantly, that Ranadive was not replaced by those who thought he was too extreme, but rather by the tendency that claimed he was too 'reformist' for his refusal to support a people's war. Ranadive's confessions are not of much help either, since while cleansing him of the past and allowing him to re-enter the party apparatus as a dignified intellectual, they leave the task of thinking through those turbulent times in a state of suspension. This section aims to shed some light on *the impasse in Ranadive's thought as internal to the subjectivity produced by the transition* from colonial to postcolonial India.

Since the mid-1930s, communist politics were sustained by affirming a dichotomy between the colonial state and the anti-colonial movement. The latter was the terrain on which struggles of workers, peasants and students sought to gain hegemony under the leadership of the communist party. While Ranadive was apt at discerning that the anti-colonial sequence, in which the party was firmly allied with the National Congress, had become obsolete with the naval mutiny of 1946, he was unable to delineate the contours of the politics of the emerging nation-state and the place of revolutionary thought within it. Instead, in search of a neat binary in the aftermath of British withdrawal from India, Ranadive castigated the 'bourgeois' Nehru government as a mere political replacement of the same socio-economic order.

Therefore, despite some novel interventions, Ranadive continued to operate within a traditional Marxist conception of History. In his framework, the ruling ideology obfuscated the historical role of the working class movement by attaching the masses to the Nehru government, necessitating its 'unmasking'. This prompted the search for a pure revolutionary subject, freed from ideology, a process that became self-destructive due to a pervasive suspicion over the authenticity of all referents expressing this political subjectivity. As the desire to locate a neat political dichotomy was frustrated by the continued hegemony of the Nehru government, the writings of Ranadive increasingly acquired a melancholic structure. Alain Badiou has demonstrated that the search for authenticity and the subsequent process of unmasking existing reality was a central feature of communist politics in the 20th century. Yet, what lay beneath the mask was not an authentic category to be mobilized for a 'truer' politics, but a gap, a void that revealed the groundlessness of politics.[417] Thus, the search for authenticity could only spiral inwards, aiming at the referents standing for the pure category, since the former could never fully

[417] Badiou, *The Century*, pp. 48-57.

exhibit the qualities of the latter. The flipside of this search for the revolutionary subject was an endless purge, since only in nothingness could one lay rest to all suspicion of impurity.

Therefore, if the 'illusions' about the Nehru government in the popular imaginary were persistent, they could have been generative of political possibilities. The anti-colonial movement in India, with its incorporation of popular classes in defiance of legal, civilizational or pedagogical concerns, had opened up the possibility of a polity that allowed for an autonomous trajectory of questions such as sovereignty, democracy, and citizenship, i.e. the political produced historically within the anti-colonial struggle.[418] As Shruti Kapila has observed, the republicanism emerging out of the anti-colonial movement did not permit any closed totalities, with antagonisms in the social body interrupting homogenizing politics.[419] The category of the 'people' (and one can argue, of the proletariat) escaped equivalence with a given empirical category, opening up novel possibilities to disrupt, and potentially, reconfigure the political landscape.

Such an analysis transforms politics from an expressive to a creative, productive and contingent process. Thus, the impasse of communist politics that was revealed in its self-annihilating quest for authenticity was a result of an *expressive* view of politics, i.e. the belief that political practices were manifestations of sociological categories, be they 'bourgeois nationalism', 'petty-bourgeois revolutionism' or 'proletarian viewpoint'. Ranadive's theoretical and practical interventions can be seen as an attempt to bridge the gap between the promise of History and the actual *deviations from it* in the realm of popular politics, an innovative framework that nonetheless remained tied to Marxist certainties. He was unable to accept that the political turmoil during the British withdrawal had not only made anti-colonial alliances obsolete, it had also made the notion of permanent political binaries redundant, bringing forth what Partha Chatterjee has recently deemed the 'spectre of pure politics', i.e. a politics without guarantees or a transcendental logic.[420]

An example of Ranadive's limitation is his periodization of the historical moment through invocation of revolts and popular movements of 1946, while simultaneously viewing the events of 1947 as minor disruptions in the overall trajectory of working-class unity against nationalism and communalism.

> In developing these struggles, special attention should be paid to Muslim workers, and to reforge the unity of Hindu and Muslim workers. The Hindu and Muslim workers are divided by the exploiting classes, and in their blindness follow the class enemies. The exposure of communal politics, of bourgeois politics, how it deceived the masses to advance the cause of the exploiters, how the exploiters once more join hands to oppress the exploited, must be sharply brought out... Muslim communalism was a weapon of

[418] Chakrabarty, 'In the Name of Politics', pp. 3293-3301.
[419] Kapila, 'The Majority of Democracy', (2015).
[420] Chatterjee, 'Sovereign Violence', pp. 82-100.

> vested interests and the masses were befooled; that the cry of Indian unity and democracy of accession was a cry for compromise. Thus, working class unity should be restored.[421]

The events of 1946, with their class character and their militancy, while challenging the existing trajectory of Indian communism, fit rather neatly into Ranadive's search for a transcendental political subject. In such a framework, the historical content of the Indian situation, including communal unrest, religious and regional assertion, as well as questions of territorial sovereignty, were disruptions in the emergence of the political subject revealed in the aftermath of the naval revolt. Yet, much like the unrest in '46, the violence emanating from post-partition riots had suspended the existing political logic, resisting transcendental explanation or a priori moral judgement. To gain a foothold in the historical situation of postcolonial India, the novel power of working class revolts had to be tied to the contradictions existing in the conjuncture, including the conception of the 'nation' on which Congress maintained its hegemony.

Ranadive's discomfort with rupturing from global communist orthodoxy is also revealed in his refusal to engage with Mao Zedong's ideas, an issue consistently raised by the Andhra Committee. Consider his reply to the suggestion of incorporating Maoism within the edifice of Indian communism, written in December 1948, a month prior to the Chinese revolution.

> Firstly, we must state emphatically that the CPI has accepted Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin as the authoritative sources of Marxism. It has not discovered any new sources of Marxism beyond these. Nor for that matter is there any communist party which declares adherence to the so-called theory of New Democracy alleged to be propounded by Mao and declares it to be a new addition to Marxism. Singularly, there was no reference to this new addition to Marxism in the conference of nine parties. Under these conditions it is very wrong for a section of the CP leadership to take upon itself the task of recommending new discoveries, which one of the most authoritative conference of Marxists has not thought fit to recommend.[422]

Whether Mao's concept of 'New Democracy' was correct or not is beside the point. The key issue here is the reification of, and a fidelity to, a certain (European) Marxist tradition, precisely at a moment when it faced its most radical internal challenge from the Chinese revolution, which began a new (and eventually, popular) sequence of communist politics in Asia. Mao took the challenge of forming a new dialectic between popular movements, territorial sovereignty[423] and the contradictions of the social formation.[424] Here, politics was not conceived as a linear and progressive *revelation* of an authentic political subject, but rather the *production* of this subject in, through and beyond a complex historical terrain. For Ranadive, instead, the principal task was merely an *affirmation* of the proletarian point of view, while simultaneously guarding it against the inertia of history. Thus, the task of tying together the moments of '46 and '47, or of working

[421] Ranadive, 'Strategy and Tactics', p. 436.
[422] Ibid., p. 293.
[423] Arif Dirlik, 'Mao Zedong Thought and the Third World/Global South', *Interventions* 16:2 (2014), pp.233-256.
[424] See Mao Zedong, *On Contradiction* (Beijing: Foreign languages Press, 1937).

class militancy with questions of territorial sovereignty and social conflict, were subsumed under a linear, if at times interrupted, progress towards an innate revolutionary subjectivity.

Through this attachment to a transcendental subject, Ranadive sought a complete break not from History, but from *history* itself, i.e. the specific genealogy of Indian politics. This was reflected in his categorization of national or religious politics as 'masks' or 'deviations', rather than examining the historical context that allowed for the persistence of such attachments in the political imaginary. His attempt to suture the wounds opened by the chaos of the post-partition situation, with communal riots, regional revolts, followed by state consolidation, under the rubric of a 'proletarian viewpoint' was a desperate attempt to provide order to a moment that escaped it. His reliance on textual traditions became an obstacle in actualizing Communism as a political project based on the possibilities present in a historically concrete moment, turning textual fidelity into political *infidelity*. Thus, by focusing narrowly on the overthrow of the government in Delhi as the horizon for political action, Ranadive was not *too radical*, but *not radical enough*, since he could not let go of his theoretical certainties emanating from an absolute political binary. Unable to fully open his thought to the contingency of the political, he remained caught in the impasse between objective criterion and subjective interventions, between History and politics.

Conclusion

After the removal of Ranadive from the post of general secretary, the newly constituted central committee denounced the 'authoritarianism' of the Ranadive era, and declared the 'Chinese path' or 'Maoism' as the new horizon of Indian communism. It declared India to be a semi-feudal and semi-colonial country, with an armed struggle in the countryside as the most strategic weapon for the communist movement. The party, however, suffered a major blow when its guerilla units surrendered to the Indian armed forces in 1951, ending the prospects of the 'People's War' planned by the Andhra Committee. This prompted another change in the communist leadership, with the moderate Ajoy Gosh ascending to the post of general secretary, a position he held until his death in 1962.[425]

The three tendencies represented by P.C. Joshi, B. Ranadive and Ajoy Gosh continued to co-exist in the party until the early sixties. The splits within the communist movement between the pro-Congress Communist Party of India, the anti-Congress but primarily urban-based Communist Party of India-Marxist, and the pro-people's war Communist Party of India-Marxist-Leninist (also known as the Naxalites) can be traced from the divisions germinating in the communist movement in the late forties and early fifties. Yet beyond the distinct socio-economic analysis through which the differences between each of these tendencies is understood, there exists a more fundamental question of tying the knot between history, violence, and volition. In other words, the question that remains is how to suture the gap between popular disruptions and the genealogy of political subjectivity in India, or put differently, between the emergence of novelty and its existence within a concrete historical situation. The act of tying together these

[425]M.B. Rao, 'Introduction', in Rao (ed.), *Documents of the History*, pp xiv. and Overstreet and Windmiller, *Communism in India*, pp. 309-334.

seemingly contradictory experiences elevates the centrality of volition in the midst of political indeterminacy, a challenge that continues to haunt the scientism dominating Indian communist thought to this day.

Chapter 7

The Subject of Communism: Towards a Conceptual Framework

In this dissertation, we have traced the encounter between Marxism and anti-colonialism as dynamic and processual, transforming both terms of the divide. The commencement of popular revolts throughout the colonial world at the end of the First World War coincided with the Russian Revolution and the country's search for allies in the non-European world. This search became particularly pertinent in the aftermath of the failure of working class revolts in Western Europe and the relative stability of liberal democracies in 1920s, with a concomitant rise in anti-colonial militancy prompting European communists to seek allies in the non-European world. Yet, while the intertwining of the national liberation struggles and communist politics remained a central theme in shaping the political realities of post-World War I geopolitics, it has received inadequate historical and theoretical explication, particularly in terms of conceptualizing the consequences of this encounter.

This dissertation has attempted to fill this lacuna through a focus on the specificity of anti-colonial history in India and its relationship to Global Marxism, resulting in the emergence of what I have called 'Indian Communism'. Rather than viewing this term as a closed entity, this work has posited Indian Communism as a singular process with its own historical specificity, theoretical and practical innovations, fidelities and infidelities, as well as immanent impasses and pathologies. By exploring themes such as the place of History, temporality, religion, affect, and violence in political thought, this work has shown how a focus on displacement, scission and rupture is more useful in grasping the specificity of communist thought in India, rather than an emphasis on deficit, reception or imitation in relation to a pristine idea of communism. The central concept that ties the various thematic issues together is the 'revolutionary subject' in communist thought, understood as the political actor that mobilizes, sustains and eventually leads the transition to communism. By positing traditional Marxism as fixating on the identification of a pure subject-object of history, this work has argued for the 'motley' and 'hybrid' nature of communist subjectivity, in which an engagement with historically specific and diverse logics of domination was a necessary pre-condition for actualizing communism into a coherent and relevant political project.[426] The successes, impasses and failures of political thought can only be analyzed in respect to the challenges emanating from the terrain in which the former is embedded, which in this case, was the anti-colonial movement in India.

While this dissertation is concerned with the anti-colonial sequence (1920-1951), the previous chapter demonstrated an acute crisis in historical referentiality for the communist movement in the absence of the colonial enemy, the partition of India into two independent states, and the move towards building a postcolonial polity. How do we then analyze the adventure of Indian communism (now divided into three states, including Pakistan and Bangladesh) in postcolonial India, including contestations over questions of citizenship, representation, sovereignty, ideology and violence? More importantly, can the birth of Indian communism shed new light on the

[426] For a further exploration on the nature of political subjectivity in the non-European world, see Bruno Bosteels, 'Twenty Theses on Politics and Subjectivity', *Zinbun* 46:1 (2016), pp. 21-39.

trajectory of Communist thought, and perhaps permit it to acknowledge its own 'origin' in heresy rather than a straightforward fidelity to textual traditions. While a detailed history of Indian Communism in the postcolonial period is beyond the scope of this work, I utilize the rendition of communist thought developed in this work as a possible framework for rethinking the trajectory of communist subjectivity in South Asia since 1947. In doing so, I explore how the conflict between Marxism as a theory of modernization and as a rupture from capitalist modernity shaped communist subjectivity in the non-European world, and how the anti-colonial sequence can provide us with analytical tools to overcome this paralysis.

Communism in Postcolonial India: A Brief History

We can identify two themes, each with its own epistemological premises, that have structured much of the debates around communist strategy in postcolonial India. The first revolved around the exact socio-economic stage of India, determining the political possibilities for the communist movement. Popularly known as the 'mode of production' debate, it generated some of the most fascinating and bitter antagonisms among communists in India, both within the communist parties as well as in intellectual circles.[427] Despite remarkable variety and innovation, most of this debate took place within the schema of traditional Marxism, comparing the Indian political economy to the history of capitalist development in Europe, with the express aim of assigning a temporality to the Indian revolution. This debate led to the development of a shared vocabulary around concepts such as 'bourgeois democratic revolution', 'People's Democratic Revolution' or 'People's Revolution', delineating the *stage* of the revolution corresponding to the 'maturation' of socio-economic relations, the advancements in industrialization and commodity production, and the role of imperialism in structuring the social formation.[428] Assigning India a particular temporality then, was critical in formulating the tasks for communists, both in terms of an oppositional strategy to the prevailing order, as well as the challenges in government.

The second major theme that dominated communist thought in the postcolonial period was the question of representation and democracy. This became a particularly relevant, and fiercely contested, terrain since the government of independent India made the bold, or at least unique, decision of declaring India a republic. India's emergence as the 'world's largest democracy' presented a conceptual challenge as, in the words of Partha Chatterjee, the Indian polity embraced electoral democracy while undergoing the process of primitive accumulation, a process often viewed as a precondition for a successful transition to democracy.[429] The successes and the limitations of Indian democracy have led to diverse responses from communist partisans and intellectuals; embracing the electoral arena as the primary vehicle for socio-political change, a combination of 'parliamentary' and 'non-parliamentary' struggles, and the absolute negation of representative democracy as inherently incapable of signifying the actually existing struggles of

[427] See Hamza Alavi, 'India and the Colonial Production', *Economic and Political Weekly* 10:33 (1975), pp. 1236-1262, and Jairus Banaji, *Theory as History*, pp. 349-360.
[428] For a review of the debates on the mode of production in India, see M.V. Nadkarni, 'The Mode of Production Debate: A Review Article', *Indian Economic Review* 26:1 (1991), pp. 99-104.
[429] Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments*, pp. 158-172.

dispossessed people, thus insisting on developing a political strategy incongruous with institutional logics.[430]

The third, and perhaps the most lively, debate in the current conjuncture revolves around the tense relationship between a universalizing narrative of 'class politics' and the emergence of social movements rooted in disparate forms of domination emanating from the specific history of social relations in India. Particularly in the last 30 years, there has been a proliferation of a number of struggles around resource allocation based on identitarian categories (caste, language, gender, etc.,) as well as an increasing tendency of the political to intervene in the domain of the social to rectify historical wrongs.[431] This debate, which has both witnessed heated arguments and produced unprecedented alliances between communists and partisans of these social movements, once again highlighted the contested nature of the political subject in Marxist thought, particularly on articulating the relationship between history and practice on the one hand, and sociological categories on the other.

These three themes have intersected to produce the many splits and alliances among communists in the 70 years since independence. During the colonial period debates on historical difference in India prompted rethinking of the place of peripheries, the peasantry, and religion, turning such sites and figures of deficit into political possibilities. The peasant revolts in Telangana during the transition to independence, as well as the refusal of influential communist tendencies to reject the legitimacy of the Indian state, led to brutal military action to suppress dissenting voices (see chapter 5). This confrontation between the state and subaltern groups meant that the question of integrating the latter into the national polity through nationalist assimilation or developmental rationality remained a major challenge for postcolonial governments. In the aftermath of partition, this question was partially resolved through India's turn towards republicanism, opening the doors of electoral politics to subaltern sections of society and thus incorporating them into the conflicting logic of representation.[432] Or did it actually provide a democratic mask to the ongoing exclusion of the marginalized? Much of the debates hinge on ambiguity regarding the place of subaltern elements in relation to Indian sovereignty, whether as motors to the vibrant, even if at times chaotic, life of Indian democracy, or as elements in excess of the representative order.[433]

For the communist movement, this question became central in the 1950s and 1960s, as on the two occasions in these decades when the communists came to power (in the state of Kerala in 1957 and the state of Bengal in 1967), their governments were unceremoniously dismissed by

[430] For a review of the various ideological currents within Indian Communism, see Praful Bidwai's informative discussion on the subject. Bidwai, *The Phoenix Moment,* pp. 1-78.

[431] See Gail Omvedt, *Dalits and the Democratic Revolution: Dr. Ambedkar and the Dalit Movement in Colonial India* (Thousand oaks: Sage Publications, 1994).

[432] Shruti Kapila has shown how conflict was central to the Indian conception of republicanism. Kapila, 'The Majority of Democracy', (2015).

[433] This ambiguity has generated much debate on the role of subaltern subjects in political claim-making in India. See Rosalind Morris (ed.), *Can the Subaltern Speak? The History of an Idea* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), and Ahmed Aijaz, 'Post-Colonial Theory and the "Post-Condition"', *Socialist Register* 33:1 (1997), pp. 353-381.

the central government, reinforcing the narrative of absolute hostility between bourgeois and communist politics.[434] Moreover, the violent repression of peasants, workers and students as a response to increased militancy against corruption, shortages and inequality, culminating in the promulgation of the Emergency in 1978, further intensified the debates among communists on the relationship between violence and representation.[435] The two major splits in the communist movement (1962, 1968) should be read as a combination of the three themes elaborated above, with violence as the vanishing mediator between them.

This debate was already present at the time of the split in the Communist Movement in 1964 over geo-strategic considerations, such as the Sino-India war and the Sino-Soviet Split, as well as over the disagreements regarding the role of the National Congress in relationship to imperialism.[436] A tendency in the Communist Party of India viewed the National Congress as representing the interests of the national bourgeoisie against the domination of monopoly capital and imperialism. Such a view necessitated the struggle for a 'National Democratic Revolution' in which the working-class builds an alliance with sections of the bourgeoisie, petty-bourgeoisie and farmers (existing within the National Congress) against encroachments from global Capital. The Communist Party of India (Marxist), a splinter group of the Communist Party of India that formed as a result of this debate, held that the Indian bourgeoisie was increasingly integrating itself within the imperialist bloc, and therefore could not be viewed as a reliable ally. Hence, the group focused instead on sections of the national bourgeoisie outside of the governmental apparatus, as well as sections of the working class and the peasantry bearing the brunt of the state's developmental agenda. Calling for a 'People's Democratic Revolution', the party positioned itself in complete opposition to the National Congress government, the big bourgeoisie, as well as what it viewed as India's gravitation towards US imperialism.[437]

While the question of violence maintained a spectral presence in the split of 1964, particularly on the question of confronting the central government, it became unavoidable with the second major spit in the communist movement in 1967. As the Congress Consensus from the late 1940s began crumbling in the wake of food shortages, industrial unrest and accusations of unbridled corruption and nepotism, the Left engaged in an intense debate on its future strategy, as well as on the role of violence. This debate was pushed into a full-scale (often violent) battle within the communist movement was the commencement of a peasant uprising in the area of Naxalbari (Darjeeling district) in West Bengal. Beginning as a movement of peasants and sharecroppers against exploitative relations in the countryside, it soon developed into an agrarian revolt against social, cultural and economic relations in the countryside. Led by Kanu Sanyal, the movement saw widespread participation of CPM cadres in Bengal, with peasant and middle class

[434] Bidwai, *The Phoenix Moment*, pp.189-264.
[435] See David Lockwood, *The Communist Party of India and the Indian Emergency* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2016).
[436] Bidwai, *The Phoenix Moment*, pp. 1-44.
[437] See Ray Sally, 'Communism in India: Ideological and Tactical Differences Among Four Parties', *Studies in Comparative Communism* 5:2/3 (1972), pp. 163-180.

revolutionaries taking direct action to shift the balance of forces dominant in rural India, and by extension, the rest of the country.[438]

The ensuing debate between the CPM leadership and 'rebellious' sections within the party turned into the most ferocious disagreement on the question of representation, not least because Bengal at that time was ruled by the party itself. The logics of governance, in which the CPM was increasingly enmeshed were diverging from the logic of rebellion, whose most prolific, if not fanatical representatives, were the militant activists involved in the Naxalbari Movement. The divide became entrenched as the communist government sided with the police to crush the insurgency through force, resulting in a split in the party and the formation of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist).[439] The latter gave ideological adherence to the teachings of Mao Tse-Tung, and announced a 'People's War' against the Indian state to attain its revolutionary ideals. While the movement soon collapsed under state oppression and strategic disorientation, it nonetheless electrified sections of the Indian countryside as well as the middle classes, a fact that permitted a constant return of the 'Naxal problem' in Indian political life.[440]

It is worth noting the homology between the splits in the Indian communist movement throughout the colonial and early postcolonial period, particularly as expressed during the leadership of B.T. Ranadive. At that time, the 'right' tendency had argued for a closer relationship with the National Congress, the 'centrist' tendency led by Ranadive called for an intensification of the parliamentary and non-parliamentary opposition to the Congress, while the 'Left' tendency was represented by the Andhra Committee, which had not only rejected an alliance with the National Congress, but also condemned parliamentary work, calling instead for a 'protracted people's war' against the nascent Indian state. In other words, the splits in the '60s had opened old wounds, signifying the lack of resolution in communist thought on the key questions of representation, republicanism and violence.

Communism in Pakistan

The fortunes of Indian Communism in the postcolonial state of Pakistan were rather less remarkable than its counterpart in the Indian Union. Formed as a separate entity in 1948 at the Second Congress of the Communist Party of India at Calcutta, the Communist Party of Pakistan took the task of propagating revolutionary change in territories designated as East and West Pakistan. Led by the charismatic member of the Progressive Writers' Movement, Syed Sajjad Zaheer, the party found itself immediately embroiled in a political battle with the ruling elites of the newly formed state of Pakistan. Two primary fault-lines structured communist politics in Pakistan. First, the 'ideology of Pakistan', defined in terms of Islam as the unifying glue for the

[438] See Ramachandra Guha, *India After Gandhi: History of the World's Largest Democracy* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), pp. 306-310.
[439] Ibid., pp. 306-310.
[440] Indeed, by 2009, India's prime minister, Manmohan Singh, termed Naxalites as the biggest security threat facing India, ostensibly eclipsing the threat posed by terrorism. See 'Naxalism Biggest Threat to Internal Security: Manmohan Singh', *The Hindu* (May 24, 2010), available at http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/Naxalism-biggest-threat-to-internal-security-Manmohan/article16302952.ece accessed 20th March, 2016.

ethnically and linguistically diverse social landscape of the country. Consequently, the second fault-line was the centralization of power by unelected apparatuses in the state, particularly the military and the bureaucracy, which made the question of decentralization and democracy central for communist strategy in the country.[441]

The late 1940s and early 1950s witnessed the CPP organize a basic infrastructure for Left politics, such as building up the Progressive Writers'
'Movement, trade unions, peasant committees and student unions. Since the party was following the confrontational 'Randive line', the government soon designated the party as the primary threat to peace and stability in the country. This antagonistic relationship was exacerbated by the Pakistani elite's gravitation towards the American camp, through both economic as well as defense pacts, leading commentators to call Pakistan the 'most allied ally' of the United States.[442] The increasing repression by the Pakistani state, the stifling of political life through the 'overdevelopment' of certain state institutions, and the party leadership's impatience in gaining state power, prompted the leadership of the party to discuss a possible coup d'etat against the government with dissident generals of the Pakistan army in 1951. This seemingly bizarre attempt by communists to collude with sections of the state to undertake an undemocratic seizure of state power can be understood within the anti-colonial sequence, in which gaining state power was the primary task before freedom could be realized. The failure of the coup resulted in the castigation of communists as anti-islam, anti-pakistan and anti-state, leading to the imprisonment of the top leadership, and an eventual ban on the party in 1954.[443]

The party never recovered from this crisis, and remained a marginal underground organization until its dissolution in 1991. It became part of a number of organizations fighting for regional autonomy, most remarkably the National Awami Party (NAP), a coalition between ethno-nationalists and communists, to fight the dominance of the military-bureaucratic apparatus, the latter comprised mostly of Punjabis. The CPP remained on the margins of Pakistan's political life, and it is debatable how much influence rested with communists within this broader formation. While the party was involved in number of prominent campaigns for regional autonomy as well as democracy against the intermittent imposition of military dictatorships in Pakistan, it could not become an electoral or a major oppositional force in the country's political landscape, and was invoked more as a spectre by the Pakistani state to discipline its opponents, rather than as an actual adversary capable of attaining state power.[444]

Perhaps a major reason for such marginalization was the inability of the communist movement to articulate a novel theory of political praxis specific to the conditions of Pakistan. This can be best discerned by the fact that despite making heroic sacrifices in the struggle for democracy in Pakistan, the movement was hardly able to come up with a satisfactory theoretical edifice to

[441] See Atiya Khan, 'The Vicissitudes of Democracy: The Failure of the Left in Pakistan, 1940-1971', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Chicago (2011).
[442] Ayesha Jalal, *The State of Martial Rule: The Origins of Pakistan's Political Economy of Defence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).
[443] See Kamran Asdar Ali, *Surkh Salam: Communist Politics and Class Activism in Pakistan, 1947-1972* (Lahore: Oxford University Press, 2015).
[444] Saadia Toor, *State of Islam: Culture and Cold War Politics in Pakistan* (London: Pluto Press, 2011).

understand its own participation in the movement, or the place of democracy in communist politics in a country dominated by the coercive apparatuses of the state. Similarly, much communist thought in the aftermath of the ban of the communist party was focused on the 'underdevelopment' of socio-economic relations within the country, and concomitantly, an underdevelopment of political consciousness. Such characterization of the backwardness of Pakistani political culture often appeared as a justification for the party's own inability to gain popular support in a complex, but hardly unprecedented political setting of authoritarianism.[445] Even discussions on the revolutionary potential of the peasantry was rare, and it became central only when a Maoist faction, led by Major Ishaq, split to form the Mazdoor Kissan Party, as a continuation of the legacy of the Kirti Kissan Party in colonial Punjab.[446]

Perhaps the biggest missed encounter after the formation of Pakistan was between the communist movement and political Islam. As discussed, in the 1920s and 1930s there was a burgeoning of interactions between partisans of the communist and the Islamist movements due to their rejection of European empires and a search for new coordinates for establishing a political community. While the two traditions could hardly be considered completely in sync with one another, the productive dialogue became absolute enmity, with political Islam increasingly gravitating towards the ideology of the state, and communism becoming synonymous with the complete rejection of all traditional political and cultural repertoires. While 'Islamic Socialism' became a prominent intellectual current in the late 1960s and early 1970s, it was associated more with the populist movement of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto than with an overt relationship to the communist movement, or even to Marxist thought.[447] Perhaps with the fall of the Soviet Union, and the increasing antagonism between the Pakistani state and political Islam, there might open space for renewed dialogue between the two political projects, freed from the rigid demarcations of the Cold War, and in the spirit of adventure, curiosity and novelty that marked their exchange in the 1920s. The next section explores the theoretical and methodological lessons derived from the study of Indian communism to examine the production of communist thought in the twentieth century.

Exploitation versus Domination: A Framework for Future Inquiries

Conceptualizing the history of colonial India requires methodological innovation precisely because its trajectory violates the normative models prevalent in Western historiography. Such violations not only arise from the peculiar trajectory of capitalist development under colonial conditions, but also in its interruption through popular agitation by subaltern groups in Indian society. The rise of the peasant as a political actor posed an intellectual problem, since much of theorization of citizenship and political agency was based upon the liquidation of the peasantry

[445] We can argue that, far from being an exception, struggle against authoritarian regimes, including those backed by fascist and imperialist troops, was a common setting for militants of the communist movement in the twentieth century, from the partisans in France and Italy, to guerilla movements in China, Cuba, and Vietnam.

[446] See Iqbal Leghari, 'The Socialist Movement in Pakistan: An Historical Survey, 1940–1974', unpublished PhD thesis, Laval University (1979).

[447] Bidanda Chengappa, 'Pakistan: Impact of Islamic Socialism', *Strategic Analysis* 26:1 (2002), pp. 27-47.

as the dominant class. India gravitated from this model both for the pivotal role played by the peasantry (as well as other subaltern groups) in producing the anti-colonial dynamic, thus erasing the possibility of a neat reliance on sociological categories for political analysis.[448]

'Resistance' was elevated as the central motor for historical becoming in Indian historiography, preventing its 'logical' deduction from sociological processes. The Subaltern Studies Collective made perhaps the most spectacular and rigorous attempts to place the resistance of marginalized groups at the center of Indian history. Ranajit Guha's monumental works titled 'Dominance without Hegemony'[449] and 'The Prose of Counter-insurgency'[450] aimed to both show the specificity of colonial rule in India outside of an overarching dynamic of History, as well as the myriad forms of subaltern resistances incomprehensible from the point of view of colonial officials and orthodox historians. The task has since been to demonstrate the ways in which subaltern groups have intervened, undermined and at times overcome the logic(s) of capitalist development, an endeavour that led to an impressive intellectual output while also leading to fierce debates among historians.[451]

These debates have now extended to explanations for the contested nature of citizenship, the unique public performance of democracy, and the central place for violence in twentieth century Indian thought. Yet, while there seems to be an agreement on the importance of popular assertion, we discern a split in Indian political life and historiography into the domains of *exploitation* and *domination*.[452] The school of thought most closely associated with Marx (but also nationalist currents) has often emphasized the prevalence of economic exploitation, and concerns of political economy more broadly, as the essential elements structuring socio-political relations in colonial India. On the other hand, intellectuals and political actors who tend to view domination as generative of Indian political life view cultural, psychic, social and state apparatuses as critical factors determining the relationship between power and resistance.[453]

The emphasis on exploitation stems both from the Marxist insight that the fundamental antagonism of modern society is the relationship between Capital and labour, and from the

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[448] Majumdar, 'Subaltern Studies', pp. 50-68.

[449] Guha, *Dominance Without Hegemony*, pp. 1-99

[450] Ranajit Guha, 'The Prose of Counterinsurgency', in *Selected Subaltern Studies,* eds. Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Spivak (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 45-88.

[451] For a brief overview, see Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'A Small History of Subaltern Studies', in *A Companion to Postcolonial Studies, e*ds. Henry Schwarz and Sangeeta Ray (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007).

[452] Fredric Jameson correctly argues that contemporary theories of "power" and "resistance" focus all their attention on forms of coercion, including bodily discipline. There is, however, less focus on the processes of exploitation marked by a specific mode of production. This schema entails two shortcomings. First, domination and resistance become ahistorical categories since it ignores the specific socio-economic relations that produce them, and towards which they aspire. Second, the critique is restricted to bourgeois-democratic demands of inclusion and recognition, rather than of fundamental transformation of social relations. In other words, domination cannot function as an analytical category without its insertion into a specific mode of exploitation. As I briefly argue below, the same is true for exploitation, which cannot reproduce itself without relying on ideologies and apparatuses of domination. See Fredric Jameson, *Representing Capital: A Reading of Volume One* (London: Verso, 2011), pp. 149-151.

[453] For a detailed discussion on the relationship between Marxism and postcolonial criticism, see Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (London: Routledge, 2005).

Nationalist/Marxist argument that the structuring principle of colonialism was the 'imperialist' extraction of resources and labour from the colonies. Rather than relying on the 'appearances' of a given phenomenon, for example colonial development in areas like agriculture, railways, etc., such a theoretical perspective insists on deploying abstract categories to reveal the inner logic and contradictions of colonial extraction that are veiled by appearances. The category of value, as demonstrated in the recent works of Andrew Sartori and Manu Goswami, permitted this scholarship to situate economic exploitation at the center of cultural and national imagination, producing a global antagonism between the colonial and the metropolitan countries, as well as generating social, cultural and political forms to apprehend this antagonism within colonized spaces.[454]

Not only did the writings on imperialism, beginning from the 'drain of wealth' theory in the late 19th century, maintain the centrality of economic exploitation in studying colonial rule, but the same lens was also applied by the remarkably popular and bitter 'Mode of production' debates in Indian historiography. As discussed, these debates took place with the assumption that a correct diagnosis of the mode of exploitation, defined in terms as diverse as 'semi-feudal', colonial and capitalist mode of production, could provide us insight into the workings of the colonial and postcolonial systems, while also aiding us in positing an alternative adequate to the specificities of Indian political economy. While this scholarship has been useful in deciphering processes often masked by the rapidly changing, and often chaotic, events of Indian socio-political life, it has had the disadvantage of ignoring what is clearly visible in Indian political life. In other words, such reliance on deep structures of exploitation at the expense of forms of domination failed to explain the persistence of caste, religion, gender and region as political categories, since they could not be assimilated into the universalizing category of 'value'. This gap between studying the production and circulation of values, and the processes of social, psychic and physical domination required both for *reproducing* relations necessary for value production, led to a sustained critique of Marxist/Nationalist methods of writing history.

This criticism was directed at the totalizing tendency of such scholarship, for which contradictions immanent to Capital substituted more historically sedimented forms of contradictions among the 'working people', as well as the importance of specific techniques of colonial governance. More radically, by failing to take into account the experiences of different social groups in their concrete manifestation in Indian history, Marxist historians have been accused of silencing the voices of subaltern groups in history, thus reproducing forms of domination through their work, despite claims of undertaking a political project ostensibly geared towards equality in contemporary India.[455] The remarkable fame enjoyed by Subaltern Studies was a testament to this lacuna in Indian historiography, as they situated socially and politically marginalized groups at the center of historical writing. One of the clearest examples of the success enjoyed by such endeavours is the spectacular popularity of Ambedkar's writings in

[454] Sartori, *Bengal in Global Concept History*, pp. 176-229, and Goswami, *Producing India*, pp. 1-30.
[455] Aditya Nigam, 'Secularism, Modernity, Nation: Epistemology of the Dalit Critique', *Economic and Political Weekly* 35:48 (2000), pp. 4256-4268.

recent years, turning the question of social marginalization (according to caste, in this case) into a central theme of political thought.[456]

The emphasis on forms of domination has coincided with the 'democratic moment' in Indian political life. With the collapse of the 'Congress Consensus' in the aftermath of the emergency, India witnessed a proliferation of social movements asserting caste and regional identity, thus opening the ambit of political claim-making to new actors on the Indian political stage.[457] Despite its contribution to expanding the horizons of historical research, this scholarship has often bracketed questions of political economy, thus finding it difficult to ground its own production within larger socio-economic dynamics in society. Moreover, an emphasis on resisting the myriad forms of domination results in democratic demands for inclusion, substituting anti-colonial and Communist axioms that called for transforming the very situation in which political actors were immersed. In other words, the concept of 'revolution' that had invoked and sustained much enthusiasm throughout the twentieth century, was at best viewed as anachronistic, and at worst, as an essentially misguided project.

Yet, the question of exploitation has neither disappeared in our neoliberal moment, nor has it stopped impacting the precise form of domination in contemporary societies. Indeed, as many authors have argued, the new forms of financialized exploitation introduced by neo-liberal reforms, and the concomitant rise of technocrats in key policy-making decisions, has hollowed contemporary democracies, with parliaments acting less as representatives of popular will, and more as implementers of decisions made by unelected bodies of 'experts'.[458] Thus, just as the lack of attention on disparate forms of domination tends towards a universalizing analysis of socio-political situations, neglecting the processes of exploitation obfuscates how forms of domination are overdetermined by the former.[459]

The relationship between exploitation and domination is a question not limited to debates within Indian political and intellectual life, but structures much of the debates on the past and future of emancipatory projects. In the tradition of Western Marxism, this question has arisen in the last few decades as the tension between the concepts of totality and commonality against the prevalence of historically produced difference and heterogeneity. A major example of this trend can be witnessed in the works of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, who have argued for a simultaneous engagement with various forms of exploitation and domination, where the task of political practice is to produce a chain of equivalences among seemingly disparate elements. Such a theory permits various forms of marginalization to both interrupt and propel each there, rather than stand in a fixed relationship of exteriority or antagonism.[460] The critical discussions

[456] See Anupama Rao, *The Caste Question: Dalits and Politics in Modern India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).
[457] Guha, *India After Gandhi*, pp. 304-374.
[458] See James Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine: Development, Depoliticization and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).
[459] For a detailed discussion on the subject, see Louis Althusser, *Sur la Reproduction* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2011).
[460] See Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 2001).

that such theories have generated are testament to the fact that the question of exploitation and domination remains a vital problem in renewing Marxism as a political project today.

Such theories, however, are unable to grasp the historically specific ways in which exploitation and domination enable and shape each other. For example, there cannot be an anti-capitalist struggle without confronting the precise ways in which a multitude is constantly transformed into docile individual bodies for producing Capital. As Wai Kit Choi has argued in his reading of labor organization during the Shanghai Commune, the proletariat as a united and coherent subject can only be established through a recognition and contestation of the uneven terrain on which working class domination is secured. Rather than merely creating equivalences between disparate struggles through abstract categories, the very process of psychic and physical empowerment of historically marginalized groups created the conditions of possibility for confronting capitalism, since it allowed for a concrete accumulation of working class power, rather than positing its abstract potentiality.[461] Thus, we remain within the problematic aptly discerned by Althusser in his famous essay on ideology, in which he claimed that the relations of production are dependent on the institutions of reproduction. In other words, the process of surplus value extraction presupposes a stable network of hierarchical relations for its smooth functioning, a condition that is constantly threatened by multiple forms of resistance emerging in the ideological apparatuses.[462]

One of the major lacunae of contemporary communist thought in India (and perhaps in much of the world) is its inability to link the 'new social movements' emerging against historically sedimented forms of domination with Marxist insights into the inner workings of Capital. This missed encounter is particularly disappointing since the very birth of communist politics in colonial India was premised on intellectual heresy and tactical improvisations. As argued throughout this dissertation, political actors in colonial India participated in the global public sphere of intellectual production by paradoxically keeping distant from the Western political tradition. In the case of Marxism, I showed how Indian communists highlighted questions of colonial domination, racial prejudice, religious attachments and the peasantry as potential nodes for developing a communist politics. Thus, Marxism's encounter with disparate forms of domination and resistance were not a hindrance to its actualization, but were a vehicle for its universalization beyond its site of origin in Western Europe.

While much of official communist politics in India today can be viewed as a retreat from the possibilities opened up by Marxism's encounter with anti-colonial thought, there are certain struggles in contemporary India that reveal the improvisatory nature of Indian Communism. The encounter between tribal resistance to processes of primitive accumulation and Maoist conceptions of a People's War have already produced a singularity in the shape of the Naxalite movement in India.[463] Here the revolutionary subject is neither the industrial working class nor

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[461] Wai Choi, 'Revolutionary Shanghai: Rethinking Class and the Politics of Difference through Chinese Communism', *Science and Society* 73:2 (2009), pp. 242-260.

[462] Althusser, *Sur la Reproduction*, pp. 11-42.

[463] For detailed commentary on the Naxalite Movement, see Stuart Corbridge and Alpa Shah (eds.), *The Underbelly of the Indian Boom* (London: Routledge, 2014).

the peasantry, but various tribes simultaneously defending their cultural, spatial, economic and political rights. This politics takes place in the language of Marxism and through the tactics of guerilla warfare, but is also aided by civil rights organizations, sympathetic journalists and public intellectuals. Whatever the merits of such a politics, it nonetheless is influenced by the communist sequence opened up by anti-colonialism, since it is comfortable in displacing the sociological coordinates of the revolutionary subject to include figures of deficit such as tribals, lower castes, women, etc.

The encounters between communist partisans and 'indigenismo' has already produced some of the most successful political projects of the contemporary Left in Latin America, and it perhaps offers a glimpse into the possibilities opened by the current conjuncture.[464] In India, apart from the sustained alliance between tribals and communist intellectuals, a renewed interest in Ambedkar's ideas and critiques of developmentalism among leftist intellectuals opens the possibility of novel encounters between Indian communism and popular movements. Yet, what can the transformations at the level of political economy, and the resistances generated in response to them, inform us about the future itinerary of the category of the subject? With the limitations and failures of 20th century communism, has the concept of the revolutionary subject become inoperative for intellectual and political purposes? Are we supposed to abandon the dialectical concept of the proletariat, formed in the 19th century as a result of a scission from the the amorphous category of the 'people' from 18th century enlightenment thought, in favour of broad categories such as the dispossessed, the marginalized, the subaltern? Finally, does the history of anti-colonial Marxism offer new insights into the current debates in theory (and practice) on the place of the subject in political praxis?

The Anti-Colonial Sequence and the Revolutionary Subject

This dissertation began by exploring the nature of political subjectivity in late colonial India, through a discussion of communist militants engaged in the anti-colonial struggle. By engaging with diverse themes such as the relations between the core and the periphery, the role of religious attachments, the centrality of the peasantry in anti-colonial thought, and the transition from colonial to postcolonial society, we aimed to reveal the specificity of 'Indian Communism' in relation to both 'orthodox Marxism' and other political currents within the anti-colonial movement in India. Our focus was on deciphering the nature of the 'revolutionary subject' in Indian Communism, to see how it could relate to and expand our understanding of global communist subjectivity in the twentieth century. What are the lessons of this history, and how can it contribute to the burgeoning debates on political subjectivity in contemporary work on intellectual history?

We defined orthodox Marxism as a specific analysis and practice of politics, arising out of 19th-century Western European political tradition, with the 'proletariat' as the paradoxical element central to the system's reproduction, but also the potential agent of its demise. Yet, the radically

[464] See Linera Garcia, 'Indianismo and Marxism: The Missed Encounter of Two Revolutionary Principles', *Monthly Review Online* (January, 2008) https://mronline.org/2008/01/31/indianismo-and-marxism-the-missed-encounter-of-two-revolutionary-principles/ accessed on 12th October 2016.

different conditions in the non-European world placed enlightenment ideas (including Marxism) into a state of crisis, since they had to respond to questions arising out of a different historical trajectory. We have seen how historical difference, far from being an impediment to the development of universal ideas, is its motor.[465] Moreover, this difference not only transformed the political practice of communists in the colonial world, but necessarily impacted the theoretical edifice of Marxism itself, including reconfiguring the category of the revolutionary subject. Yet, while Indian Communism developed a new practice of Marxism, India's contribution to understanding global communism, particularly on the problem of subjectivity, remains under-theorized, if not under-explored. How are we then to make explicit on the theoretical terrain what is implicit in the praxis of Marxism after its encounter with anti-colonialism? In other words, how do we reconstruct the subject without reference to orthodox categories of loss and belatedness used to study subjectivity in the developing world, and in fidelity to the lessons of the anti-colonial sequence?

If politics in the colonial world created a crisis of signification for categories of modern subjectivity, the fall of the Soviet Union and the concomitant 'End of History' sentiment wiped out sociological certainties that were operative throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Thus, contemporary literature on Marxist theory and history is attempting to develop an analysis of both the 'failures' of the Left in the last century, as well as attempting to renew the category of the subject adequate to the challenges of the current conjuncture. Alain Badiou has called for situating communism in specific modes of doing politics, tied to a determinate thought within a particular historical period. The anti-colonial sequence (that Badiou does not identify) lies between the Leninist and Maoist modes of politics (1902-1929 and 1929-1967), containing elements from both.[466]

The Leninist sequence began as a critique of teleological views of History, in which the emergence of a revolutionary subject would coincide with the development of industrial capitalism. The disjunct between History and politics, already exemplified by the colonial experience but amplified by the First World War, ended the illusion of progress inherent to much of enlightenment thought, including Marxism. The concept of the 'vanguard' party proposed by Lenin was a response precisely to this impasse in communist thought, where the trajectory of History seemed to diverge from its supposedly revolutionary destination. This discrepancy was filled by the concept of the party, with a concomitant development of the themes of discipline and will as an essential element in suturing this gap.

For Mao, the category of History became increasingly tenuous, if not suspect, as he turned China, and consequently much of the non-European world, into primary sites for political intervention. The impossibility of following the trajectory of Europe's capitalist development accentuated the break from History, placing the question of volition at the center of political

[465] Dipesh Chakrabarty makes this argument powerfully in a recent essay on conceptions of time in Marxism. Chakrabarty, 'Belatedness as a Possibility', pp. 163-170.

[466] Alain Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis* (London: Verso, 2010).

thought.[467] This implied that only a violent process of detachment from the logic of accumulation could open novel emancipatory possibilities, thus framing one of the most popular and maligned ideas of twentieth century politics, the 'protracted people's war'. Rather than merely searching for the revolutionary subject in a reified sociological category that could overthrow the status quo, the protracted method called for a precise identification of a contradiction that needed to be resolved. For both Lenin and Mao, the state had to be both the focus of popular rage but also the object of desire, since capturing state power became central to communist imagination in the twentieth century. But whereas Lenin conceptualized the state as a fort to be captured through an insurrectionary moment in a 'revolutionary crisis', Maoism called for a patient struggle to build 'base areas' in disparate locales within a national territory, thus simultaneously containing elements of centralization and dispersion.[468]

Thus, both Lenin and Mao represent proper names for a new articulation of mass movements, party, and the state, a relationship very pertinent to the development of anti-colonial thought. For indeed, the experience of colonial rule as a 'waiting room of History' elevated volition and subjective interventions over objective criterion in political thought. The 'vanguard' was an idea that belonged as much to the ascetic tradition in colonial India as it did to Leninism, a resonance arising out of a response to the same impasse, i.e. the loss of faith in the teleological movement of History, and a search for new horizons for a political community. It is perhaps for this reason that Lenin's writings eclipsed those of Marx and Engels in their popularity among partisans of the anti-colonial movement.[469] In particular, Lenin's ideas resonated with nationalist claims that imperialism had robbed India of its destiny, thus emphasizing the need for overcoming the divergence between the promises of History and the stifling reality of colonial rule. Moreover, ideas of violent detachment from History, of building zones of 'anti-colonial sovereignty' in a prolonged and protracted battle against colonial power, were current in groups such as the Ghadr Party, much before the official entry of 'Maoism' into Indian political vocabulary (See chapter 4). Finally, the 'national state' as the horizon for socio-economic change remained central to anti-colonial politics. As Uday Mehta has argued, the concept of a national government for anti-colonial intellectuals was tied to Jacobin ideas of using the state as an instrument for radical transformations in the social sphere, ideas consistent with Leninist and Maoist conceptions of state power.[470]

What then is specific to political subjectivity in anti-colonial Marxism? Or put differently, did political agitation in the colonial world in the name of Marxism produce a different genealogy of the subject? We can grasp both the similarities and the differences in the sequences opened up by Leninism, Maoism and anti-colonialism if we identify a nodal point that connects these disparate threads. We have posited the Marxist conception of History as the vanishing mediator in both the

[467] Samir Amin, 'What Maoism has Contributed', *Monthly Review Online* (September, 2006). https://monthlyreview.org/commentary/what-maoism-has-contributed/ accessed on 2nd October 2016.
[468] See Alain Badiou, 'Idea of Communism and the Question of Terror' in *The Idea of Communism 2,* eds. Costas Douzinas and Slavoj Žižek (London: Verso, 2013).
[469] See Devendra Kaushik and Leonid Vasil'evich Mitrokhin, *Lenin: His Image in India* (New Delhi: Vikas, 1970).
[470] See Uday Mehta, 'History and the Social Problem: The Case of India', in *Proceedings of the Seventh Annual Gilder Lehrman Center International Conference at Yale University* (2005), available at http://www.india-seminar.com/2010/615/615_uday_s_mehta.htm accessed 7th March, 2015.

agreements and disagreements among different political tendencies in global Communism, including in India. Perhaps the most radical contribution of Indian communism to global communist thought is its abandonment of the very category of History to create new horizons of political meaning, precisely since an attachment to linear notions of temporality would have annulled its political energies.[471] Much of official Communism in India today, however, fails to draw the consequences of a political landscape in which the category of History has practically become redundant in its orthodox rendition, as communist parties continue to pretend that their own increasing political irrelevance will be overcome through the gradual annihilation of 'feudal relations' in the country. Yet, such reliance on a mechanical view of time not only misreads the modern nature of the Indian polity (albeit different from modernity's itinerary in Europe), but also fails to draw the ultimate Nietzschean lesson of its own political past: that while it continues to believe in the Big Other of History, it has in practice already killed it, turning its adherence to teleology into nothing more than nihilist and self-denying attachments.[472]

If a break from History was the 'groundless ground' on which Indian Communism was always built, this radical de-centering of History now structures contemporary debates on political subjectivity in European Intellectual History. The post-1968 movement in intellectual production has grappled precisely with the uncoupling of politics from sociological or objective criterion in order to examine its own autonomous development, rather than merely as an expression of a deeper sociological process. This move has turned the focus on the identification and mobilization of discrepancies in sociological phenomena as the site for political intervention. Words such as gap, inconsistency, and void have come to denote the new theoretical edifice that views incompleteness as essential for grasping the political possibilities inherent in any situation.[473] For theorists of radical democracy, such as Laclau and Mouffe, it means the identification of structural antagonism, rather than constitutional procedures, as central to all forms of political contestation in democracies.[474] For Badiou, an Event reveals the site of a fundamental inconsistency in a given situation, thus indicating the impossibility of forming a closed totality. In these new theoretical paradigms, the void of the situation demonstrates a point of antagonism that is impossible to resolve within the framework of sociological reasoning, making decisions and subjective interventions the sole vehicles for overcoming a conjunctural impasse. Defining politics as an exceptional act of creation precisely at a point where routine procedures fail to reproduce the system, such frameworks aim to produce (partially) consistent political projects out of the inconsistencies that structure socio-political reality.[475]

Such displacement in the place of the political in contemporary theory cannot be attained without a fundamental dislocation in a number of other themes of political theory that was grounded on the stability of sociological categories. If the 'correct' reading of the situation from an objective

[471] As argued throughout the dissertation, this abandonment was of a practical nature owing to the improvisations made by Indian Communists in the anti-colonial struggle. Yet, they have mostly failed to register the effects on this practice onto the theoretical register.
[472] Badiou, *The Century*, pp. 165-178.
[473] Bosteels, *The Actuality of Communism*, pp. 129-169.
[474] Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, pp. 149-194.
[475] Badiou, *Metapolitics*, p. 68.

criterion is no longer a valid basis for proposing, let alone committing to, a political project, what symbolic universe could hold together the utopian hopes of communism?

It is here that the study of communist thought in the colonial world can prove essential in providing a theoretical and political resolution of this impasse, since the absence of History as the fundamental pillar of political praxis was not experienced as a loss by partisans of the anti-colonial movement, but as the very condition of possibility for their politics. Moreover, as we have seen throughout this dissertation, Indian communism, as one specific example of Marxism's encounter with anti-colonialism, aids us in developing alternative concepts for grounding subjectivity. With volition as the overarching thematic for this alternative conceptualization, we saw how categories of fiction, sacrifice, suffering, and fraternity play a critical role in sustaining political commitments. In the case of post-colonial India, the remarkable stability of republicanism also poses the challenge of articulating subjectivity with the question of popular subjectivity, a problem that continues to haunt the contemporary Indian (but also global) Left.

Contemporary political theory must grapple with these themes as it attempts to develop conceptual clarity out of the despondency and resignation marked by the collapse of emancipatory projects at the end of the 20th century. Indian Communism, as well as other communist movements tied with national liberation struggles, is an ideal site for developing new conceptual frameworks to study political subjectivity in the aftermath of the loss of historical certainties, a task equally important for advancing critical theory and for renewing emancipatory politics adequate to the challenges of the contemporary conjuncture.

Conclusion

The task of tracing the history of global ideas remains conceptually challenging, not least because 'the global' is both generated and interrupted by specific histories. While global intellectual history has often flattened the differences in the reception, production and meaning of ideas produced in disparate locales as part of a singular logic, the reliance on difference as the principal epistemology for studying political thought obfuscates the ways in which political actors engage with global ideologies across time and space. The task is then neither to flatten the particular under the totalizing logic of the universal, nor to claim the incommensurability of different particulars, but to think of the two as interlaced in a productive tension. In other words, it is no longer possible to think of a specific political thought without taking into account the influences and pressures upon it by processes beyond its immediate site of production. Nor can we examine global ideologies without their inscription into specific political projects.

In this dissertation, we have studied the transformations and dislocations internal to Marxism as it encountered the anti-colonial movement in India. We have attempted to develop a methodological approach that grasps the difference between orthodox Marxism and its iteration in the colonial India not as unrelated ideological currents, but as a mutually transformative relationship. I have shown how by holding global Marxism and Indian Communism together, we not only gain a more nuanced understanding of how these two terms interrupted and shaped each other, but also come closer to understanding how intellectual production *actually* took place in

the colonial world as a process of scission, rupture and reconstitution. This dynamic between repetition and discontinuity can be used to study the trajectory of other ideas with global purchase, including liberalism, conservatism, fascism and nationalism, to move beyond their provincial origins in Europe in order to gain a more holistic account of their development and influence in modernity.

There is no doubt that Communist thought provides a unique window into studying the global production and circulation of ideas due to its spectacular success in the non-European world despite its 'origins' in Europe. Yet, much more work is required to register the effects of this displacement onto the domains of history and theory if we are to reconstruct the salient features of twentieth century political thought from the perspective of the global South. Only by recognizing the non-European world as a central site for intellectual innovation, and committing to a critical engagement with its history, can we end the perpetual division of labor between Europe (as the arena for epistemological reflection) and non-Europe (as the place for action and providing empirical data for European thinkers to develop their ideas). With the end of this forced division, perhaps we will be able to begin a new beginning, freed from the certainties of the past, and attentive to a much wider variety of thinkers whose works remain repressed under the prevailing Euro-centrism of the field of intellectual history. Perhaps, such a beginning will allow us to view heresies from orthodoxy not as signs of deviation or betrayal, but as dialectical processes in which negation is a condition for the development of ideas, necessary proof that the human adventure continues to flourish in the realm of thought.

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