

On Othering

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# On Othering

Processes and Politics of Unpeace

Edited by Yasmin Saikia and Chad Haines

 AU PRESS

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*To our non-human friends in conflict zones, who taught us resilience,  
compassion, and the joy of playfulness even in bad times.*

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On Othering

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# Introduction

*I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids—and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me. Like the bodiless heads you see sometimes in a circus sideshow, it is as though I have been surrounded by mirrors of hard, distorting glass. When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination—indeed, everything and anything except me.*

—Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*

*Identity politics has historically been used the most by those who were keen to stigmatise different “races,” those who in the first place did not believe in our common humanity. They worshipped difference, which they weaponised.*

—Achille Mbembe, “Thoughts on the Planetary”

Peace is elusive. It eludes us as a lived reality, as forms of violence intensify, driven by “weaponised” differences between you and me, us and them, Self and Other. Peace also eludes us epistemologically, flitting between seeking an inner balance that then radiates out to our wider world—a call for the cessation of armed violence, a recognition of structures of violence institutionalized in systemic inequalities, a demand for social justice and equal rights, and an imagining of a world without countries and religion where all live a peaceful life. Peace eludes us, yet it also inspires us to act, though often that action leads to further states of non-peace. Peace is “maintained by the

constant threat of war” or sought through war and conflict or becomes a justification for exploiting and oppressing others.<sup>1</sup> Peace is, more often than not, the inspiration for creating non-peace, or what Dalia Gavriely-Nuri terms “peace in the service of war.”<sup>2</sup>

The Other is the foundation of non-peace but also of peace, of living in respect of our differences. The following chapters untangle the contradictory mapping of the Other as an enemy and as our emancipation from our violent tendencies. *On Othering: Processes and Politics of Unpeace* examines the processes of Othering that destabilize the possible shared wholeness of humanity. Dehumanizing others who are different and weaponizing this process allows people to see and think of others as less than human creatures against whom violence is justified, as philosopher David Livingstone Smith argues in *Less Than Human: Why We Demean, Enslave, and Exterminate Others*.<sup>3</sup> Discursive violence against the Other using extreme negative representations and articulations of “enemy” and “evil” is a psychological tool as well as a political and social weapon that weakens the human community, breaking people into multiple factionalized societies. Critical reflection on the process of Othering and humanistic actions for mending our broken Self–Other relationships are necessary for renewing a vision for peace. Thus, the following chapters are anchored on two themes: one, highlighting the Othering process evident worldwide that constructs differences for discriminating against people who are deemed “inferior” and denies them human dignity; and two, exploring how to move beyond the divisions among people for building positive relationships for peace, recognizing that socio-cultural differences are a positive value, not something to be feared, oppressed, or erased.

The contributors to this volume document a diversity of Othering projects and explain how peace is undermined or lost in our fear and policing of those different from ourselves and, in so doing, undermine our basic humanity. Instead, they urge us to reimagine peace as a lived ethic among strangers, more than an acceptance and tolerance of multicultural differences. Human relationships are a crucial element for attaining and maintaining peace. Difference is more than an attribute of the Other, more than an epistemological acknowledgement of Self and Other; rather, it is an embodied experience that acknowledges we are not fully ourselves without the Other, that we are intricately interconnected, and that what makes us human is the difference, which is our unique identity. In this embodiment of difference, peace flourishes.

This book is not about conflict resolution but rather about the potential—and challenges—of positive human interaction. Here we move beyond the traditional academic study of peace. While certainly integral to peace, conflict resolution and social justice often map the Self and Other as discrete entities, so that the Other becomes a target for violence, discrimination, and oppression. Thus, at the heart of non-peace is the imagining of the Other as someone to fear and loathe, unequal to “us.”

*On Othering* also pushes the borders of a second understanding of peace as a state of mind and self-awareness where peace is a psychological and spiritual discourse that emphasizes self-realization and harmony. Such an understanding of peace as an inner state, while integral to living in peace, often reinforces the Self as a discrete entity, seeking harmony through connecting with our common humanity. No doubt, when we strip away our social makeup and cultural differences, we are just human beings. We acknowledge, however, that our social and cultural diversity is also what makes us human. We express ourselves through our cultural values and norms; we do not reside in some Rawlsian “original position,” free from history and culture. These create a rich diversity of ways of being human, and we celebrate this as the expression of peace. Thus, our work does not reduce all peoples simply to generic humans but endorses cultural, religious, and gender varieties while extending basic human dignity to all people. It also, which is unusual in most peace studies, extends acceptance and rights to non-humans.

So far, the twenty-first century has proven to be tumultuous. In every sphere of life, there is division, and the rising temper of intolerance is polarizing communities, people, and nations. In civil discourses, the breakdown of communication is evident in face-to-face exchanges and on social media. Hateful articulations and vicious confrontations have become the dominant form of interaction; laying the blame on the Other for everything wrong is the weapon of choice. Citizens use violence against one another to prove their political and religious differences; they mock others’ religions and satirize beliefs in the name of free speech; states racialize and discriminate among their citizens; immigrants are represented as infiltrators and criminals; refugees are seen as culturally polluting; international coalitions are suspected as purveyors of foreign ideology infringing on national sovereignty; corporations are on a rampant march to exploit the natural environment as consumable objects, and so on and so forth. It is a dismal reality and a violent world that we have created and inhabit.

How do we shift from polarization to unity among people and nations, humans and non-humans? Our aspiration is a horizon, but without a dream, we cannot bridge the chasm between “us” and “them.” Moving from abusive disregard to accepting the Other is a challenging demand, but this demand is an urgent need we must address for our survival. Renewing the bonds of connections among people and the value of interrelationality among humans and between humans and non-humans is a moral as well as an existential concern. Our book is an attempt to respond and contribute to this moral and human reimagination.

In *The First Fifty Years of Peace Research*, David Dunn recognizes that the loss of community and social order is the greatest failing of our times as the state-centric conflict management approach has become the conventional wisdom.<sup>4</sup> Taking this viewpoint, generally peace scholars have suggested several key factors that are necessary for peace maintained by the states, including greater economic co-operation, binding treaties for nuclear disarmament, settling territorial boundary disputes, increasing citizens’ participation, addressing issues of gender equity, climate change, and other “big issues” that require the intervention of formal structures of states and governments. These are laudable high-policy goals; however, somewhere along the way, the importance of revitalizing the community and human relationships within and beyond their community has been sidelined. We agree that the participation of states and international organizations is critical, but the problem of loss of community requires more than paperwork. It is a human concern calling for human involvement at the level of the everyday. Without concerted human engagement, the mantra of the violent and evil Other is easy to produce and reproduce by state and non-state actors, distracting, and unravelling the human community. Renewing faith in the human community is a value we, as human beings, must find and pursue. *Peace and the Other* makes a call for this human turn in which we all can be involved.

## **Other as the Foundation of Peace**

Recognizing that peacelessness is a shared condition, for true peace to take root in our world, the following chapters point us toward the commonsense approaches of valuing differences, understanding the socio-historical contexts of people’s lived conditions, and appreciating the depth of our interconnection with one another. Collectively, we suggest that valuing difference is not merely



a matter of “multiculturalism” but must aim for a deeper reorienting of our understanding of difference.

The key ingredient in the shift to peacefulness is moving away from hierarchical, vertical thinking and the institutions that produce it to horizontal imaginings of “us” along with “them.”<sup>5</sup> In horizontal thinking, differences are not threatening but rather are valued as something worth knowing. There is a verse from the Qur’an that sums up how in the Other is the possibility of peace: “We have made you tribes and sub-tribes that you may recognize (and do good to) one another.”<sup>6</sup> This understanding of the Other as the locus of knowledge and, ultimately, peace through good acts can be a very powerful approach to developing horizontal thinking.

A critical inquiry into the processes of Othering illuminates the change in thinking that is necessary for recognizing the humanity of the Other for peace. At its foundation, the Othering process, as documented in the following chapters, is dehumanizing. This is true when we Other one another, as well as when we imagine nature as an object less valuable than the human species. Recognizing dehumanizing processes provides tools to interrogate structures that thrive on Othering and undo peace.

The problem of Othering is not specific to a single place or people, but rather a global phenomenon. The imagery of shared humanity is not wishful thinking but is an enormously powerful idea for redirecting energy from destructive to peaceful activities and outcomes. Erich Fromm understood horizontal thinking as a “being mode” of existence. Among other psychological states, Fromm saw peace in the Other through being in solidarity, being joyful, and being creative as opposed to acts of peacefulness rooted in our desire to acquire, where we objectify our world and thus see things as distinct from one another, as discrete entities to possess, use, throw away, or even kill. The structures of our consumer society and the rise of “selfie-ism” drive us toward having things, relationships, and emotions that feed into a violent relationship between ourselves in the world around us.<sup>7</sup>

As an orientation toward fellow humans, as a way of imagining our relationships and interdependence with one another, and as a mode of valuing our rich and diverse human heritage, peace is not easily definable. It is a value and ethics of living that is at once universal yet particular, with diverse expressions in different communities according to their culture and circumstances. A singular, fixed definition of peace itself would be counter to the very notion of peace ascribed to in this collection. For some, peace is simply about

living side by side; for others, it can be reconciliation, healing, pluralism, or amity, and so on. Yet, for others, it might be a struggle for justice. The capacious understanding of peace foregrounds the possibility of bringing together disparate Others, overcoming differences, and practising relationality. Narratives of superiority and inferiority that produce vertical relationships among communities—dividing, compartmentalizing, and piling them one on top of another—must give way for horizontal interactions allowing the multiplicities of communities to thrive without overcoming or suppressing another. This may sound utopic, but in our times the extreme polarity between “us” and “them” calls for new imaginations for bridging the chasm.

Our approach is humanistic, based solidly in the humanities and human social sciences. As such, we draw on the philosopher René Girard’s theory of mimetic desire, which in essence is a theory of conflict and a prism for understanding the causes of interpersonal clashes and encourages the search for solutions to address them.<sup>8</sup> The negative emotions and attitudes toward the Other based on envy, rivalry, prejudice, and hate allow for justifying and supporting a war against another group in the name of protecting good from evil, as Girard argues. Through mimetic imitation, one can also develop an affinity with Others as fellow humans. Thus, mimetic theory cautions against lurking violence because of negative desires against the other scapegoated for destruction, and, simultaneously, this awareness opens pathways for thinking about how we can work with differences for accepting the Other as human. Awareness of this negative and positive possibility, as we argue in the book, is critical for peaceful living with internal and external Others as well as friends.

Girard’s theory of mimesis turns to Christianity as the only way to protect man from the consequences of mimesis.<sup>9</sup> Unlike Girard who emphasizes only Christianity as saving mankind from imitating the violent ways of others, we emphasize that different religions and value systems should be appreciated for overcoming the hubris of the Self. By focusing on interpersonal human relations as the primary location for peace, our approach moves beyond the surgical and instrumental methods of “positive” or “negative” peace developed by Johan Galtung.

Johan Galtung has developed a powerful thesis of a twelve-step approach to peace, which draws from both Western and Buddhist philosophies and practices.<sup>10</sup> He emphasizes that positive peace can prosper only where there is the absence of organized group violence alongside the commitment to equality, the absence of exploitation, and a positive relationship between groups

and countries, which is the purview of state actors controlling the exchange of values, such as commodities, services, knowledge, people, etc. In other words, he argues that peace thinking will only emerge if there is at the same time “a value on the absence of violence and perception of (at least potential) presence of violence.”<sup>11</sup> Galtung’s overemphasis on structure and typologies of violence privileges the utilitarian value of “elite talk” among national and international peace actors for making peace and encouraging peace thinking. Peace thus becomes a technostrategic project.

Galtung’s positivist model has remained very powerful in informing scholars working in the field of peace studies. They use Galtung’s typology of violence and “steps method” for evaluating social systems and creating stochastic patterns for assessing peaceful and unpeaceful societies. Feminist scholars of peace critique this method of peace as overlooking gender and social constructions of violence.<sup>12</sup> Kenneth Boulding, another giant in peace research, argues that the approach to “positive” and “negative” peace produces a creative tension between them.<sup>13</sup> In peace studies classes at Arizona State University our students usually express confusion how there can be negative peace, for them it is not peace at all.

Coming from a humanistic perspective, we argue that the sociological and “scientific” methods for evaluating peace overlook and leave a big void in understanding human thoughts and perceptions that influence both violence and peace. People are not automatons who follow patterns and trends without reflection. The theories of agency, dialogue, and interpersonal contact, including overcoming anger and hatred of the Other through a reasoned and faith-based approach developed by John Paul Lederach and Desmond Tutu are powerful ways of thinking for improving human relations for peace.<sup>14</sup> Thus we argue that at the centre of peace and peace studies is creating the conditions for positive human relationships. The management of the relationship between people cannot be a top-down approach, but human development for understanding Self and the Other must be horizontal in its basic orientation. Thus, instead of seeing peace as an object, as something “to have,” we focus instead on peace as a way of “being,” thus reaffirming that sustainable and deep peace requires valuing the Other because all human relationship is communal and interdependent.

Moving beyond the self-centred assumption that “we” are “good” and “they” are “evil” and the rugged individualism symbolized in the West by a figure like Robinson Crusoe, which pairs with the Hobbesian image of an

anarchical world of violent and destructive Others out there, the contributors to this book argue that co-operation and integration among people is essential for creating shared histories and appreciating lived realities. As the philosopher Kim Sterelny argues, for 97 percent of human history, we lived in equality with one another.<sup>15</sup> While the social structures and cultural patterns that fostered equality are long lost, those values and a renewed commitment to living in appreciation of one another should be part of our lived world.

The human reality is a desire for peace with and through the Other, despite structures that define us as discrete entities. While war, violent conflicts, oppression, marginality, and inequality are prevalent and capture headlines, the vast majority of the world's population forge peaceful lives, even in the face of grave oppression. We see in the work of architect Teddy Cruz and political theorist Fonna Forman the values of difference informing new imaginings of borders in conflict. Their work begins with the premise that “border walls, and border policies, are often self-inflicted wounds on the border-builders *themselves* since they frequently interrupt the environmental, economic, and social flows that foster the health and sustainability of the larger region.”<sup>16</sup> It is neither naïve nor utopic to reimagine the walls and borders of conflict and heightened differentiation when we recognize that our well-being is undermined by those walls.

Peace with the Other is not a romantic image of the homogenization of society or a “melting pot” metaphor. Peace is also not a multicultural national identity, a symphony of cultures that together form a beautiful whole. Multiculturalism is itself predicated on acts of differentiating those who belong within the symphony and those whose presence is an unwelcome din. It is also predicated on a bounded unit, a nation, a country, a territorialized society with policed borders, and a kind of gated community in which an experiment of cultural appreciation is practised. But the gates are locked to allow the experiment to unfold.

With rapid climate changes, devastating natural disasters, and the ensuing displacement of people, peace studies must acknowledge the place of the non-human Other as well. The lived natural environment and the critical role of balance for sustaining human and non-human lives are essential for sustainable peace. When we place the natural environment within the frame of peace, we see similar patterns of vertical thinking that must be reimaged, taking a more “cosmo-centric” perspective, as Frédéric Neyrat argues in this collection.

Building positive relationships for peace is not a new idea. Religious, philosophical, historical, and even scientific discourses show the connections among the varieties of species and acknowledge that they constitute one whole. It is this way of thinking about the connections of our world that can free us from negative discourse. As Yasmin Saikia and Fabio Perocco point out in their respective chapters, we do have the human capacity, both as individuals and as collectives and assemblies, for positive relationships with the Other and for bringing those relationships to bear on the Self–Other continuum.

Siep Stuurman's path-breaking book *The Invention of Humanity* informs our suggestion that common and shared humanity is not a singular concept but a plural way of recognizing and acknowledging the multiple ways people have expressed their humanity and the humanity of the Other.<sup>17</sup> Accepting the Other, even foreigners and rivals, as equal fellow human beings, not destructive strangers, is a powerful idea that disrupts the current and extreme polarization of people and cultures. Stuurman's viewpoint is that the concept of humanity is not a European one, but a universal idea shared by multiple cultures and people, and it is evident in multiple time periods and societies, even the ones that Europeans considered barbaric and uncivilized. However, it is not a widely accepted approach. Rather, the idea of the Other as a disrupting, if not corrupting, force is the generally held view and it is also evident in scholarly conceptions of society. Much contemporary thought is rooted in the classical approach of Emile Durkheim's theory that postulates community as a bonding force, encoding social integration and solidarity. It is this understanding of community that scholars such as Samuel Huntington employ to map clear distinctions between us and them and perceive the Other as a threat that must be kept out of "our" community, with an inherent "clash" between Self and Other, as he argues consistently in all his scholarly work.<sup>18</sup> In particular, Huntington argues that there is an unbridgeable divide between the civilized Western and the uncivilized Islamic worlds. In various chapters in the book, we show how Huntington's divisive idea of community as a bounded unit works as a mechanism of self-identification rather than as a socio-historical reality. We engage the literature on how ideas of a fixed, often primordial identity are in fact imagined and operationalized to create fractures between the Self and Others. To develop this conceptual understanding, we draw upon Charles W. Mills's foundational philosophical idea that hierarchical social ordering is a way to maintain an imagined hierarchy of privilege for some and reducing Others to sub-humanness.<sup>19</sup> In *The Conquest*

of America: *The Question of the Other*, the Bulgarian-French philosopher Tzvetan Todorov argues that the relation to the Other is both process and function created and determined by the Self. In the Spanish conquest of America the European Self failed to “discover” the Other because they could not accept the equality of the Other who was different.<sup>20</sup> This approach is evident throughout the history of Western colonization of the so-called Third World where it tried to impose Western values and culture and transform the non-Western communities because in Western colonial view the Other was less civilized and constituted a lower category of humans. Again, in a more recent book, *The Fear of Barbarians: Beyond the Clash of Civilizations*, Tzvetan Todorov and Andrew Brown argue for the dignity of the Othered, particularly the Muslims in Europe, who are repeatedly demonized without engaging in a dialogue.<sup>21</sup> The perspective of unbridgeable differences with the Other and a mentality that differences must be feared is rooted in a historical process that has come to claim a hegemonic, universal position—but, we argue, it is just a claim. To change this inimical outlook and to generate a different possibility, boundary-crossing through co-operation is necessary. Co-operation, Frederick Bird and colleagues argue, is the foundation for developing global ethics.<sup>22</sup> As Richard Sennett posits in *Together: The Rituals, Pleasures and Politics of Cooperation*, a moral commitment to uplift one’s community through a sense of “togetherness” is necessary so that co-operation among people can enable conversations face-to-face and online.<sup>23</sup> Empathetic interaction with others requires us to look beyond ourselves to develop “dialogue skills,” which can be far more powerful in placing “us” in close relation to “them,” and is a way of letting others see us within our context for improved understanding. However, making the normative into a universal political and public ethics is not ideal for advancing peace because the tendency would be homogenization rather than allowing the multiplicities of cultural and religious traditions of humanity to flourish and inform local communities according to their specific conditions, histories and circumstances.

Judith Butler offers a realistic warning of the challenges we face in attempting to create “a people” guided by common ethical purposes and/or practices. The modern democratic world “community” is partial and exclusionary, she argues, and “There is no possibility of ‘the people’ without a discursive border drawn somewhere”—which we think is an important issue to bear in mind; however, we cannot remain confined to a bordered way of thinking.<sup>24</sup> Borders among people need not be rigid divisions but can be a space that does not

foreclose the possibility of encounters and exchanges. The human capacity to invent and find its humanity must be accepted as a fluid, continuous journey.

Freedom from the Othering menace is not simply a political problem: it is an existential and practical demand for human advancement. In his study of early Islamic communities, Franz Rosenthal noted in *The Muslim Concept of Freedom Prior to the Nineteenth Century* that freedom was considered a “basic principle for all children of Adam—or, as is occasionally added: as far as Muslims are concerned.”<sup>25</sup> Connected to and parallel with freedom, is the concept of Muslims’ relationship to others/strangers. As Rosenthal argues, in early Islamic societies, there is no term or concept of a stranger as an Other. Free people viewed others, who were free like them, as neighbours, some close and others far away, whom they encountered at home or during their travels. The concept of stranger/*agnabi* “existed and did not exist” in Muslim lands.<sup>26</sup> The ethics of hospitality and giving refuge to strangers who are treated as guests (evidently practised in all Muslim communities throughout history, particularly in Arab and Afghan communities, so much so that even Osama Bin Laden found refuge among the Pathans in Afghanistan and Pakistan) evolves from seeing the stranger as a wayfarer/sojourner and even a neighbour. Unleashing this friendly imagination of the stranger/Other as not a fearful Other, but someone nearby and next door, a fellow traveller, is the first step to creating horizontal relationships and to bringing into existence the “reality” of living as a hospitable human community, as a society of humans in a shared, peaceful world. Emmanuel Levinas, Zygmunt Bauman, Hannah Arendt, and several others have written extensively on this topic. Bauman powerfully argues against the Western philosophical idea of freedom rooted in the privileging of the sovereign individual and our entrenchment behind walls with the emergence of consumer society, suggesting that outsiders are perceived as an ontological “threat and a nuisance,” an opposite perspective Rosenthal suggests is at root in Islamic thought.<sup>27</sup>

The shared space of a social “public” world cannot come into being by mere contemplation or complaint; transformation requires action, as Judith Butler argues in *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*.<sup>28</sup> The theory of assemblage and acting on it for change fosters ethical connections and the recognition of the precarity of the Other. Political scientist Seyla Benhabib postulates in her insightful book, *The Rights of Others*, that ensuring rights owed to the Other is a step toward enabling a positive and inclusive assemblage of people.<sup>29</sup> We agree on this, but argue in our book that these rights

have to work in tandem with human dignity. There are millions of people in our world today who are not recognized as citizens of a defined state but are stateless, displaced, living under occupation, sometimes as illegal immigrants and refugees, and are dispossessed. How can these people enjoy rights and be part of the public sphere when they are not even regarded as fully human? Is it possible to find within the asylum seekers housed in our own neighbourhood the prospect for peace rather than reproducing fear and hatred?

## Othering as Peacelessness

At the root of non-peace is an imagination of difference as a threat: that a dangerous Other is out there, a being whose life is not as worthy as one's own, a creature who must die or be oppressed so one can be free and live in peace. Socio-cultural differences justify violence toward this imagined Other-as-threat and, through a variety of rhetorical and discursive representations, rally a community of people who are (imagined as) similar against the Other. This destructive dynamic between the discourses of Otherness and acts of violence legitimizes oppression, distilling fear, and, in the end, often becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy when those who are oppressed strike back and seek to undermine their oppressors—Timothy Grose's discussion of the condition of the Uighurs in this book illustrates this problem well.

There are multiple social processes through which the Other as fearful manifests itself. Unsavoury, biased, and discriminatory rhetoric is the foundation of the Othering project. The images employed are rooted in a second process, that of bordering between Self and Other, of imagining ourselves as discrete social entities. These distinct boundaries between "us" and "them" are employed to justify building social boundaries, manifested in such policies as border walls, apartheid states, and other forms of segregation. Modes of separation between the Self and the Other are never between two communities regarded as equals; rather, the difference is inherently hierarchical. We construct walls to protect our identity and the social fabric because we imagine the Other as inherently inferior. Their difference will pollute and corrupt us because they are not as good, not as advanced, modern, or civilized as we are. Each of these three processes becomes a social act of keeping the Other at bay.

In his classic work, *Orientalism*, Edward Said documented how the construction of the "Oriental," often an Arab/Muslim Other, was an inherent part of the Western Self. The West imagined the Other as the antithesis of Self to



claim a global space of superiority that came to define the Western colonial project and postcolonial imperialism.<sup>30</sup> The imagination of the Orient, Said argued, preceded the West's colonization of the East and the Middle East, serving not as an *ex post facto* justification but rather as a driving force of colonialism. The Orient was perceived as less civilized, as chaotic, as irrational, rooted in traditionalism and spiritualism as well as socially static and politically despotic. The Orient required the West to colonize it in order to liberate it. The image of the Other as less than the Self was the driving force of conquest and occupation—of non-peace.

In *Islam in Liberalism*, Joseph Massad furthered Said's argument, reflecting on how Islam "is an internal constituent of liberalism, not merely an external other, though liberalism often projects it as the latter."<sup>31</sup> That without the (imagined) Islamic Other, the liberal West would not exist, that it was required as its antithesis through which "Europe as a modern identity was conjured up."<sup>32</sup> Daniel Jonah Goldhagen asserts that Nazi Germany was driven by antisemitic sentiments structured within social policies and practices where "language is mass murder and elimination's medium."<sup>33</sup> The imagined Other as a threat leads to imagining the body of the Other as worthy of violence.

But racism, anti-Semitism, and Islamophobia are not merely discourses through which one projects a particular image of Self; they are predicated on particular worldviews and reproduce those perspectives as natural. Camille Burge's chapter on anti-Black racism and Chad Haines's chapter on Islamophobia both tackle this problem head on. In his seminal work, *Europe and the People Without History*, the anthropologist Eric Wolf traces the histories of material interconnections, trade routes, and cultural borrowings between diverse communities and civilizations. For Wolf, a perspective of cultures and civilizations as "billiard balls" ricocheting off one another provided the West with a history of uniqueness that propagates the popularly held view of civilizational superiority and historical exceptionalism.<sup>34</sup> History, however, is a series of interconnections and borrowings, adaptations and appropriations. The perspective of cultural borders as necessary provides the historical foundations of discrete ethnicities, nations, and civilizations. Walls are the physical manifestation of this bounded view of history and culture.

Those who fear the Other argue that raising walls and boundaries is necessary to securitize and protect from the enemy hordes. The political scientist and government policy adviser Samuel Huntington made it clear in his final book, *Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity*, that new

immigrants, who happened to be Brown and Black (non-Europeans), were undermining American values through their failure to integrate and to mould themselves to the Anglo-Protestant cultural ethics that made America great.<sup>35</sup> Huntington's argument of the cultural Other is an inherent part of not just the United States' national ethos but of every nation that imagines itself as a distinct cultural entity with clear borders between us and them. The manifestation of exclusionary nationalism is about maintaining some semblance of national purity. It attempts to create peace inside for the select few who are members of the nation, often at the cost of others, not just their exclusion. This pattern of violence to create peace is repeated over and over around the world, in each nation-state through cultural and physical genocide, elimination, expulsion, and segregation. But this violent Othering is not tenable or sustainable in our globally connected world. Yet it is the dominant mode of political organization and social imagining—a territorially bounded community with some shared values, histories, cultures, religions, and/or languages that has particular rights to a good, peaceful life. Others may have these rights but only in their own bounded communities.

The modern nation-idea as a community with a singular identity predicated on a sense of some shared culture gives rise to “minorities”—the cultural Other within a territorial nation-state. Various countries devise distinct social practices for dealing with minority populations and, in some cases, absorb them through acculturation, which is also a process of cultural erasure. In more extreme cases, structures of apartheid and segregation are devised to separate communities so that the ruling class can thrive and keep the marginalized groups “under control.” In other cases, the elimination of minorities is achieved through deportation or, worse, genocide. Recognizing that no country is comprised of a single cultural group, non-peace prevails in coping with, and finding a place for, minorities. What that looks like for Indigenous populations in settler colonial countries like South Africa, Australia, Canada, the United States of America, and Israel is different from what ethnic minorities experience in countries such as Sweden and Japan, which, again, is different from countries where minorities are mapped as religiously different, such as the Copts in Egypt or Muslims in India. Each country has its own means of marginalizing and oppressing minority populations.

Multiculturalism, as a mode of tolerance, slips into easy cultural essentializing, reducing the Other to a type. This reductivism gives rise to what Mahmood Mamdani calls “Culture Talk,” which assumes “every culture has

a tangible essence that defines it, and it then explains politics [and all other social behaviours] as a consequence of that essence.”<sup>36</sup> The discourses of tolerance, multiculturalism, and cultural acceptance do not in and of themselves undo assumptions of difference as a negative; rather, they create systems of regulating difference, according to Wendy Brown in *Regulating Aversion*.<sup>37</sup> Apartheid and segregation, for example, are forms of accepting cultural differences and then policing those differences to protect the purity of Self and secure well-being.

Exclusionary nationalism is currently compounded by the rise of “selfism,” an imagining of a discrete Self, a sort of collectively practised narcissism that prompts moral and ethical “withdrawal from other people.”<sup>38</sup> We find ourselves in a double bind, seeing in the Other only whatever might gratify us, and commodifying our differences by turning them into objects; this entices fear and builds walls to keep the unwanted Other out, as Sennett asserts in *The Fall of Public Man*. When the Other is reduced to an object, a discourse, their true nature is “invisible,” just as the narrator in Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* experiences.

Focusing on the Othering of nature, novelist Arundhati Roy and ecologist Satish Kumar identify this mindset as “speciesism,” reflecting the hierarchical mapping of Self and Other, where our sense of interdependence is lost.<sup>39</sup> As Amit Baishya argues in his chapter in this book on Roy’s *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, the loss of relationship with the non-human Other is a process in which rampant urbanism and conspicuous consumption play a vital role.<sup>40</sup> The Self becomes a severed entity, an island unto itself, disconnected from an interconnected natural world and an exclusive unsustainable community. The fixation on the human Self normalizes a value of Self and regards those like me as good, indeed superior, and the non-human as inferior, objects in the service of the consuming human.

The discourse of the Other drives two interrelated social phenomena: building walls (physical or social) to maintain separation and enacting one’s superiority—thinking vertically or hierarchically—toward the Other, marginalizing them through such practices as denying them rights. The inferior human Other is denied basic civil rights through disenfranchisement from electoral processes and democratic representation or denying them equal opportunities. Systemic discrimination is driven by structures such as nationalism, capitalist accumulation, and colonialism/imperialism. Unless these structures are addressed, non-peace will prevail.

## Structures of Othering

Images about the Other harden our attitude toward them and produce unfounded “realities,” as Edward Said argues in *Orientalism*. This provokes a discourse that emphasizes a different way of seeing the underlying and often unacknowledged dependency between Self and the Other. Modernity unleashed a number of social processes that have unravelled our human interdependencies—capitalism, colonialism, and the rise of the nation-state idea as the hegemonic mode of political organization. For peace to be achieved, peace studies as a field must acknowledge and engage the deeper structures of modernity and history that create walls and vertical thinking.

Underneath the human experiences of non-peace in our everyday lives lie historical forces and processes that reshape/d our relationships with one another. Too often, peace efforts work as band-aids. They are much needed in moments of extreme violence and bring an end to the conflict, but rarely do such efforts address the root causes that continue to spew hate, oppression, and outbursts of violence. Such acts of peacemaking are usually state-driven, creating peace treaties and accords without addressing the culpability of states in the violence.

On-the-ground peace activists fill in the gaps by reaching across communities in conflict to foster understanding and tolerance. People-to-people peace initiatives and interfaith and inter-ethnic community-building efforts bridge differences and allow communal work to occur. Such efforts are strategic, particularly in areas with extensive violence, such as the Balkans, Afghanistan, India–Pakistan, Somalia, and other conflict hotspots around the world. However, the forces that drove the cleavages between different communities in the first instance are rarely addressed in such peace initiatives, and the possibility of new conflicts continues to fester below the surface.

The dynamic of vertical thinking reflected in these peacemaking practices is naturalized in the modern-day era of nation-states and institutionalized globally through the long histories of colonialism and imperialism. Many of the conflicts we are experiencing today—for example, between India and Pakistan and between the Hema and Lendu in the Congo—are colonial legacies. We live in a postcolonial world where borders and divisions that were mapped and instituted by foreign occupying forces rewrote the nature of community, belonging, and neighbourliness. The very people whose communities were destroyed by occupying forces are today the migrants who face the third wave

of discrimination as they attempt to seek out economic livelihoods and peaceful lives in other countries. First, they were conquered and divided by invaders and colonizers; then they were marginalized and oppressed as minorities by the postcolonial nation-states; and, finally, they find themselves the victims of anti-immigration protests in their new homes.

Modern colonialism and imperialism, extremely violent versions of vertical thinking, are rooted in a “world system” that was forged in tandem with the expansion of European powers, starting in the late fifteenth century. Colonialism was driven by capitalist economic expansion and a “civilizing mission” that “rested upon the twin fundamental assumptions of the superiority” of European culture and of “the perfectibility of humankind,” and implied that “colonial subjects were too backward to govern themselves and that they had to be ‘uplifted.’”<sup>41</sup> The project, at least in its early manifestation, was to convert the colonized subjects, the Brown and Black people of the world, to European liberalism. One of liberalism’s foundational beliefs is in the equality of people. Thus, those deemed inferior had to be transformed and civilized to be made equal. Equality in this framework was not inherent in the humanness of people but rather in their cultural expressions and in their mental capabilities. As Thomas Macaulay argued in his famous “Minute on Indian Education” in 1835, “a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia.” By doing away with “traditional” socio-cultural practices and creating a class of subjects who were “Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect,” the British would fulfill their duty of advancing Indians to a higher civilization.<sup>42</sup> Of course, by creating such a class they would also advance their ability to rule over the masses.

The rhetoric of extreme Otherness that propelled Europeans onto the world stage as “civilizing” colonizers reinforced unequal global economic structures. Colonies were conquered and parcelled out based on agreements between European powers to feed their emerging industrial capitalist economies. What emerged was a “complex hierarchical system controlled by the capitalist mode of production,” mapping core regions with peripheries and semi-peripheries where labour and raw materials were extracted and new markets for products were created.<sup>43</sup>

European colonialism created structures of dependency, as Albert Memmi argues in *The Colonizer and the Colonized*.<sup>44</sup> Its persistent reflection is evident in the decolonized postcolonial world. The unfree human condition of today,

whether in the West or non-West, is the product of a long history of oppression, inherited behaviours, and repressive policies that continue to produce extreme Othering. As colonized people sought independence and built new nation-states, they remained within the global hierarchical structure of cores, peripheries, and semi-peripheries, their economies dependent on exploitative relations with the former colonizers.<sup>45</sup> As documented in the following chapters, postcolonial societies have recreated this entrapment in the present. The irony is that those who Other in the present were victims of Othering in the past as they forge postcolonial nation-states in a highly fractured, unequal, and disparate global sphere.

The very idea of the modern nation-state that emerged with the decline of colonial empires legitimizes vertical thinking and institutionalizes differences to benefit the hegemonic community that defines the nation around its values and interests, thus reproducing the structures of governance inherited by the colonial state. The oppression does not only include ethnic and religious minorities but people of different orientations, such as lesbians and gays, and our natural environment. The nation-state idea encodes a singular national identity that places some at the margins or outside the nation while simultaneously propagating a moral orientation of the nation. Here in the Phoenix, Arizona, area, where the editors of this volume are based, there are ongoing anti-immigrant protests taking place that are also a regular part of the political scene across Europe. In India, Muslims are lynched on the suspicion of having beef, or for marrying non-Muslims, and even labelled as “illegal migrants,” “invaders,” or worse, “termites” who are destroying the nation. But such Othering is not restricted to India, as the Uyghurs in China, the Rohingyas in Myanmar, the Hema and Lendu in the Congo, the Christians in Iraq, African and Middle Eastern migrants across Europe, and many other groups can attest. In every one of these countries, minority communities are facing violent oppression. The Other—be they ethnic, religious, moral, or natural—are excluded from national imaginings of the Self.

Globally, economic shifts and geopolitical manipulations create extreme instability, placing billions of the world’s population in precarious conditions. Digging deep into the histories of colonial encounters is important for charting pathways to peace, as it was a formative site for producing negative images about the subject/Other by the master/European Self that circulated back to the metropolitan centres, influencing and bolstering the still-ongoing

Othering process and finding expression in anti-immigrant policies, hatred toward refugees, discussion of safeguarding European culture, and so on.

Under the neoliberal regime of globalization, coming to the forefront since the 1980s, the precarious status of these marginal populations has become more acute. First colonized, then marginalized within their postcolonial nation-states, and today regarded as disposable labourers, people at the margins live in non-peace. Many are forced into displacement, seeking out political and economic opportunities elsewhere. As refugees and migrants, their lives take on a different precarity, becoming the unwanted Other. The presence of the precarious Other disrupts the image of Self and unleashes nationalist movements, such as the Britain First movement in the United Kingdom and the Proud Boys and Minute Men in the United States. While these groups are manifestations of the most extreme anti-immigrant positions across Europe and North America, governments are imposing stricter policies against immigrants and policing immigrant communities as inherently suspect, a trend that Kathryn Cassidy and Alexander Aviña document in their chapters.

While this history of conquest, exploitation, marginalization, and oppression is well known and documented, placing it within the context of peace-making is a challenge. How does one attempt to foster peace by dredging the past? Many peace activists, in fact, find it counter-productive to engage in history; rather, they focus on the present moment and look forward to a different future. The history of oppression, discrimination, and violence makes it difficult to bridge divides between communities. We cannot change colonialism or nationalism, nor can we overlook these factors because much of the world lives in conditions of latent violence and non-peace due to the vertical thinking of colonialism, imperialism, and nationalism.

As the chapters in this volume indicate, socio-cultural differences do not have to lead us down the path of Othering—of reducing Others to essentialized, stereotypical notions, or confining them to “culture talk” or ignoring complex histories. More significantly, the chapters draw our attention to various ways we can start to imagine difference as something to celebrate rather than fear.

## The Book

The chapters in the book span a range of humanities disciplines: history, philosophy, religious studies, anthropology, literary and cultural studies, human rights law, and gender studies. These diverse approaches help us understand how and why we have a global crisis of peace in local, national, and international arenas. The historical perspectives offer *longue durée* views on how people create divisions and separations and how they struggle to overcome them. The anthropological and ethnographic methods adopted in several chapters dig deep into human experiences and meanings in the struggle for living side by side with others, while the chapters using the methodology of human rights law and gender studies search for human understanding through reconciliation, justice, and accountability. Finally, the religious studies approach offers pathways to reflect on the significance of values for peace as a lived, ethical relationship that includes both human and non-human Others.

Putting these approaches and methods in dialogue with each other in the book produces an inquiry into, and connection between, two processes—Othering and unpeace and the ethical responsibility necessary to renew the commitment to peace. Our ethics of peace suggests an awareness that the Other and Self are parts of one whole. This awareness may not be so evident in the twenty-first century; precisely for this reason, we need to reflect on how we got to the place of amnesia, forgetting the relationship that we owe to the Other for preserving Self and peace.

Paying attention to the values, cultures, and actions of those who are rarely seen as peace actors—women, minorities, immigrants, refugees; in short, the invisible people—we shift the study of peace from high-rise buildings where international organizations and national governments broker peace and instead situate peace on the ground as a lived activity and a fluid negotiation among people who know its value and suffer the impact of its loss. *On Othering* extends the conversation and opens new areas for exploring behind the scenes the conditions of Othering that undo and deny sustainable peace.

Each chapter in this book provides an important instance of the Othering process and shows how the phobic relationship can become the site for emerging human awareness of relationality. It is an active engagement generating a language of peace as a felt and actionable possibility in which scholarship and activism come together.



The chapters look behind the screen at the concept of common humanity to see the gaps that exist in the lived world. They drive home the importance of learning about peace from a variety of locations and cultures and show how the different perspectives speak to the same human desire—for human recognition, social harmony, dignity, and peace. We draw upon the works of several scholars and situate our research in conversation with them but also offer new insights on what needs to be done at a practical level for peace with the Other.<sup>46</sup>

Part 1 of the book focuses on the Other within, exploring the processes of marginalization of minority populations. Sinologist Timothy Grose lays bare the extreme violence being waged against the Muslim Uyghurs of western China. He places the policies within China's broader concern for mapping minorities as inherently inferior to the dominant Han Chinese and exposes the contradictions of forced acculturation, which includes rape and "re-education." Grose suggests that the policies create permanent inferior classes who live in continuous states of non-peace. In her chapter on the Miya Muslims of Assam, India, historian Yasmin Saikia traces the historical discourse of Muslim Otherness first by the British colonists and later by the Hindutva extremists (right-wing religious nationalists) who now dominate national and regional politics in Assam. Saikia documents the dehumanizing politics of Othering based on religion but offers a prospect for laying the foundations of peace in the lived Assamese culture. She suggests a local way of being with the Other expressed in the cultural form of *xanmiholi* (accommodation and fusion) that had developed historically and survived despite colonial divisions of communities. *Xanmiholi* queries the power of people's history to counter the politics of the state for a singular Hindu identity and make Assam Muslim-free. Human geographer Kathryn Cassidy's chapter takes us to the United Kingdom, where minorities are subject to various forms of "everyday bordering" that limit their access to goods and services provided through welfare programs, thus deepening their precarity. Everyday bordering includes a diversity of practices, including policing of identity cards that create a lived anxiety among minority communities. Cassidy emphasizes a variety of everyday practices such as care, love, and support within and between communities that challenge border-making. Looking at Muslim migrants in Italy, sociologist Fabio Perocco reflects on the socio-cultural shifts taking place due to Europe, overall, becoming a site of immigration. This creates diverse responses, including cultural or ethnic-racial selection, policies promoting

temporariness, social alienation (*Entfremdung*), and ethnocentric assimilation. Within this context, the Muslims in Italy seek out ways of “rooting” themselves in the place but find themselves as a racialized underclass.

Taken together, the chapters in part 1 critically engage how the national imaginary disrupts and limits our capacity for seeing the Other in our midst as worthy of equal respect. The Other cast as “outsiders” are denied the benefits of the social systems unless they erase their previous identities and assimilate within the national political body to the point of forgetting their past. Or, as in the case of the Uyghurs in China, they are expunged from the Chinese national community although they have no other home than China. The expectation of conversion of the minorities to the dominant culture driven by the political ideology of majoritarianism and rooted in a sense of superiority have become state projects in China and India, as Grose and Saikia show. However, at the local level, particularly as reflected in the chapters by Cassidy and Saikia, human ethics and values are evident; their sources may be cultural or social interactions, but the outcome is care, respect, and equal inclusion of the Other within.

In part 2, the contributors examine how sexuality, gender, race, and religion are Othered. Gender studies scholar Nikoli Attai looks at the personal voices of queer asylum seekers from the Caribbean to Canada and The Netherlands, providing a narrative of living as double Other—racialized and queer, with the additional marker of being an immigrant. Attai importantly raises the question of how asylum seekers find themselves in a system of indebtedness for the help they receive, reproducing hierarchical structures rather than full accommodation. Chad Haines combines religious studies and anthropological methods to discuss American variants of Islamophobia, highlighting one expression of it through a number of interviews he conducted with right-wing extremist Jon Ritzheimer, a member of the Oath Keepers and Three Percenters. Ritzheimer organized an armed protest against the Phoenix Islamic Center in 2015 because, according to him, Islamic values can never be fully accepted as American values. Haines places this exclusionary perception within the larger realm of Western liberal thought, rooted in the Enlightenment and the long history of racialized exclusion. In the next chapter, Alexander Aviña takes a historical perspective to document the making of the “killing machine” of the juridical-political system along the US–Mexico border and the “right to disappear” those deemed as criminally and illegally Other. Hauntingly, Aviña unveils the finding and identifying of human bones

in the desert as a pathway for forging a peaceful future—by recognizing the humanness of the victims and the sheer inhumanity of the system that forced them to disappear in the desert. In her chapter, Camille Burge weaves her personal story of growing up Black in a highly racialized environment in the United States and her research on the experiences and meaning of chronic Othering experienced by Black Americans. Burge documents how shame, anger, and fear come to define the inner experience of being hyper-Othered and marginalized. She argues that to overcome the lived reality of peacelessness of Black Americans, we need to delve deeper than mere recognition of injustices—we need to address them head on and acknowledge the past wrongs as a step for Blacks and whites to live in dignity and equality. Finally, in this section, Maryam Khan’s chapter reflects on her own positionality as a devout Muslim and racialized South Asian queer woman with a disability. Khan questions the relationship between “normative” Muslims and queer Muslims in North America and highlights various Muslim liberationists and feminists who chart a path forward for building positive and peaceful relations within the highly diverse North American Muslim community.

These chapters address the diverse experiences of people at the margins in North America. Each chapter engages directly with the issue of postcoloniality, the carceral state, and racialized structuring that was bequeathed by European colonialism. Using different methodological approaches, the chapters unravel how liberal discourses of freedom, democracy, and inclusion are employed to create peacelessness and how the victims of global violence are doubly victimized as outcasts when they arrive on the shores of North America. In the case of Black Americans, this double victimization is imposed on them when they dare to speak back and attempt to expose the racial injustices of American history.

The chapters in part 3 of the book explore the relationship between humans and non-humans and the Othering of the environment that leads to the destruction of the lived world around us. Taking as his starting point Donna Haraway’s idea of “multispecies flourishing,” literary scholar Amit Baishya, in his chapter, argues that peace is neither the condition of non-violence nor a naïve expression of mutual coexistence and friendship but a “messy and laborious process of making kin within quotidian networks of obligation and responsibility.” Baishya traces the loss of such peace and its possibilities for the future through a reading of Arundhati Roy’s *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*. As with Aviña’s discussion of the disappearance

of humans on the US–Mexico border, Baishya draws our attention to the disappearance of vultures and sparrows in Delhi and the spiralling effect that has on everyday life. Frédéric Neyrat takes a philosophical look at the root of such disappearances in the natural world within the human phobic attitude toward the environment. He reflects on the interweaving and interfeeding of Earth-phobia and eco-fascism. Neyrat is both pessimistic and optimistic about our ability to overcome the mass destruction of the environment in our days of COVID-19. The optimism lies with our capacity, as yet not fully recognized, for forging terrestrial alliances—breaking down the borders between Self and a cosmic Other. Yet the fear of the spread of the COVID virus through interaction requires “social distancing” and serves as a reminder of the work that lies ahead for true peace among humans and between humans and non-humans. In the final chapter of this section, legal scholar Rebecca Tsosie uses a human rights lens to reflect on how colonization and globalization disrupted and continue to disrupt the intergenerational sustainability of Indigenous communities in North America. This sustainability is directly tied to their presence on ancestral lands, forging a didactic interdependence between the environment and community, reproduced over generations. The reduction of the environment to an object for exploitation undermines not just nature but ourselves. Tsosie calls for reconciliation and a “centring Indigenous values in the effort to restore the land, the water, and the way of life” if we are to have a peaceful future.

The authors in the final section grapple with the philosophical question of who are *we*? with an emphasis on the “we,” not “I,” as part of a congregated whole, but “we” as humanity, together, on Earth and in the cosmos. Are we discrete species divided by imagined demarcations between different groups, or do we have the capacity to transcend speciesism and reconnect with the natural environment that sustains us? Importantly, the final chapters chart a path beyond just documenting the destruction and loss to weaving paths for transcending our destructive ways by valuing and learning from different cultural worlds that embody values of harmony, respect, and equality.

Taken as a whole, the chapters open up dialogue, first, for recognizing the depth of injustice and destructiveness in the Othering projects and, second, for providing hope for charting peaceful futures by transcending the borders of Self and Other and valuing difference.

## Notes

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- 42 Thomas B. Macaulay, "Minute on Indian Education," February 2, 1835, in Bureau of Education, India, *Selections from Educational Records, Part 1: 1781–1839*, ed. H. Sharp (Calcutta: Superintendent, Government Printing), 109, 116; available at [http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealc/pritchett/oogenerallinks/macaulay/txt\\_minute\\_education\\_1835.html](http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealc/pritchett/oogenerallinks/macaulay/txt_minute_education_1835.html).
- 43 Wolf, *Europe and the People Without History*, 296; for details on making peripheral markets in the "colonies," see chapters 10–12.
- 44 Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957).
- 45 Immanuel Wallerstein's classic study *The Modern World System* maps out this history, with volumes 1 and 2 tracing economic shifts within Europe and volume 3 focusing on the colonizing project. The contemporary imperialist global economic system is well documented, many studies drawing on Wallerstein's work and on the work of Andre Gunder Frank, particularly his *Latin America: Underdevelopment or Revolution: Essays on the Development of Underdevelopment and the Immediate Enemy* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1969).
- 46 Other scholars have addressed our concerns but in different ways. We find that Judith Butler's *The Force of Nonviolence: An Ethico-Political Bind* (New York: Verso, 2020) raises important concerns about the need for a new imaginary of

nonviolence to guide human dependency and recognition of one another in positive terms. However, Butler's analysis falls short in grounding this idea in actual real-world conditions and in examining how violence against the Other becomes the undoing of peace for the self. *Otherness: A Multilateral Perspective*, ed. Susan Yi Sencindiver, Maria Beville, and Maria Lauritzen (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2011) provides a new inquiry into the representations and nature of Self–Other relationships in art, literature, and culture, and opens the conversation for a multidimensional exploration of otherness. We have found this interdisciplinary approach helpful in bringing together a variety of methodologies and perspectives from different disciplines in our book. Finally, Jean François Staszak's intense probing into Other/Otherness (2020) in the *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography* makes evident the deep spatial divides between people that stigmatize certain groups for discrimination and devalue their lives. He emphasizes the asymmetry in power relationships in the construction of the Other but does not make the connection between the othering processes and peacelessness. We argue in this book that the sense of superiority of the self does not depend solely on articulations and highlight that it is backed by the political, social, and cultural power of those constructing the discourse.



Part 1

# **The Other Within**

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# 1 Hosting the Hostage

## Hospitality, the Uyghur Other, and Chinese State-Imposed Peace

Timothy A. Grose

The success of China-based polities and their ability to maintain peace have, to a certain extent, rested on the ability to manage ethnic and cultural difference. To be sure, as an inherently fluid and protean socio-political designation, the “Other” has shifted, been inverted, and even undergone fundamental redefinition several times from China’s imperial past (221 BCE–1911 CE), to the Republican Period (1911–1949), and in the People’s Republic (1949–present). Broadly speaking, the insider-vs.-outsider dichotomy was sketched along cultural—and not necessarily racial—contours, as has been the case in European colonial projects.<sup>1</sup> “Sinicization” through the acquisition of certain cultural competencies (such as the Chinese language, agrarian lifestyles, and Confucian humanism) was possible, but not forced, for “barbarian” (Ch. *yi*) Others of the past—mostly nomadic peoples who lived on the peripheries of the Middle Kingdom’s sedentary core. Today, it is expected among the fifty-five ethnic minority groups (Ch. *shaoshu minzu*) who live within the borders of the People’s Republic of China. Indeed, connecting these otherwise disparate historical and political processes is a persistent strategy of acculturation: these projects intended, and intend, to transform.

Yet state-imposed cultural transformation is intentionally an endless pursuit. Similar to the process of creating British subjects in colonial India who were, as Thomas Macaulay famously put it, “Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect,” the “Other” will

never, and can never, be made fully “Chinese.”<sup>2</sup> Rather, Chinese Communist Party (CCP) policies toward ethnic minorities—similar to imperial strategies directed toward these groups’ “barbarian” ancestors—seek to suspend the “Other” in a permanent position of “inferiority.” In other words, they are always “on their way” to integration.<sup>3</sup> The liminal status of ethnic minorities neither being fully alien nor Chinese demands constant state intervention as the groups attempt to play catch-up to the more “advanced” Han people. This process invokes Homi Bhabha’s ideas about mimicry: ethnic minorities in China are eternally “a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite.”<sup>4</sup> Cultural elements the state deems threatening must be hollowed out but can never be fully replaced with a solid Chinese core. Put another way, ethnic praxes in China do not forge unity and equity among the Han majority and fifty-five minority groups, they reify their differences.<sup>5</sup>

In the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, the CCP has dispatched civil servants—mostly Han people—to equip Turkic Muslim Uyghurs with a socio-cultural blueprint to become more Chinese than they are currently. These work teams eat, sleep, and labour alongside local families as they “gift” (Ch. *song*) them kindness and knowledge about policy, law, and Chinese culture. Within the context of state-mandated family visits, this chapter explores how the CCP infiltrates Uyghur homes using low-level bureaucrats who then co-opt vernacular understandings of hosting to impose Han cultural norms and transform Uyghur persons. Drawing upon Chinese-government reports on inter-ethnic activities in the region and firsthand accounts of Han civil servants, this chapter will demonstrate that the CCP’s attempt to require Han people to share intimate moments and spaces with Uyghurs as they provide them with new ethnic markers—for example, Chinese language, Han sensibilities, and a “correct” political outlook—is not meant to fully integrate these “Others” into the Chinese mainstream or create ethnic equity. Instead, the campaign reproduces, reinforces, and officializes “Otherness” and imposes “negative peace”—that is, one attained by force—while it neglects Indigenous models for relatives (Uy. *tughqanlar*) that potentially hold the key for meaningful peace.<sup>6</sup>

## Guests, Officials, and Bandits: Muslims from the Imperial to Republican China

The integration of Muslim “Others” into Chinese society has been uneven and is ongoing. To be sure, the history of Islam in China is complex and each community’s experiences and relationships to the state and majority populations are distinct to time and location. Yet Muslims have largely remained on the geographic and social peripheries of Chinese metropolises since they first arrived in the Middle Kingdom nearly fifteen hundred years ago. Muslims established their first permanent settlements during the Tang Dynasty (618–907) when the reopening of important Silk Road routes attracted Arab and Persian Muslim “foreign guests” (Ch. *fangke*) to bustling trade hubs at Chang’an (Xi’an), Guangzhou, and Quanzhou. However, in the imperial capital at Chang’an, Muslims were isolated. They were confined to semi-autonomous foreign quarters, restricted to designated markets to conduct business, and discouraged from fraternizing with local Chinese.<sup>7</sup> The Mongols relocated large numbers of officials from the Near East and Central Asia—many of whom professed Islam—to serve the Yuan Dynasty (1279–1368). As Mongol subjects, the statuses of Muslims changed from “foreign guest” to *semu*, or members of “assorted categories of people.”<sup>8</sup> However, Muslim support for the (“alien”) Mongol overlords as well as their commonly assigned administrative duty to collect tax bred animosity among Chinese.<sup>9</sup> Relations improved somewhat during the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644). Muslim officials continued to be valued civil servants in the imperial bureaucracy, Islamic religious elite found ways to integrate Islam into a Confucian cultural milieu, and Muslim families began adopting Chinese surnames.<sup>10</sup> Despite Muslim attempts to embrace Chinese elements of their identity, however, neo-Confucian literati endeavoured to reestablish the Ming as a cultural Chinese dynasty and remained suspicious of Muslims. In fact, to dissolve their ethno-religious identities, Emperor Ming Taizu (r. 1368–1398) mandated that all Muslims marry ethnic Chinese but later relaxed the requirement.<sup>11</sup> Relations deteriorated during the late Qing Dynasty (1644–1911). Muslim-led—but not necessarily Islamist—revolts broke out in Yunnan (1856–1873), Gansu (1862–1877), and Qinghai (1895–1896) resulting in the deaths of millions.<sup>12</sup> Meanwhile in Kashgaria (modern-day Xinjiang), a warlord from the Khanate of Kokand named Yaqub Beg overpowered the already weakened Qing garrison and established an Islamic emirate (1865–1877). It would take a massive military campaign

led by Zuo Zongtang to defeat Yaqub Beg's army and claim the region under the Qing.<sup>13</sup> Xinjiang was annexed as a province in 1884.

In ways similar to the Qing, the Nationalist government (1911–1949) recognized Hui (Muslims) as one of the five nationalities of the Republic of China. However, Sun Yat-Sen and his successor, Chiang Kai-shek, adopted an assimilationist approach to China's ethnic diversity, which essentially viewed Muslims as (Han) Chinese converts to Islam.<sup>14</sup> This rhetoric aligned with the Nationalists', or Guomindang's (GMD), goals of assimilation: ethnic difference was to be ignored before it was eradicated.<sup>15</sup> Internally weak and preoccupied with an encroaching Japan, however, the GMD government was largely unable to incorporate non-Han into the national fold.<sup>16</sup> After years of civil war, the GMD was defeated by the Communists in 1949.

### **Becoming Pomegranate Arils: Muslims in the People's Republic of China**

To set themselves apart from the assimilationist approach of the Nationalists, the CCP initially recognized, created where it never existed, and celebrated China's ethnic diversity. Inspired by Marx, Lenin, Stalin, as well as British imperial practices in India, the CCP attempted to create a "scientific" taxonomy of non-Han peoples shortly after coming to power.<sup>17</sup> This "identification" project (Ch. *minzu shibie*) recognized fifty-six distinct ethnic groups, ten of which are classified "Muslim." Uniting the disparate populations into a "great family" (Ch. *da jiating*)—though one that prioritized the Han majority—would not be easy. Mao recognized the dangers of Han chauvinism and the fragility of ethnic unity. Therefore, with the exception of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), the CCP initially adopted a gradual approach to amalgamation (Ch. *ronghe*)—that is, the fusion of all ethnic and ethno-national groups into an all-encompassing nation, but one that retains mostly Han elements.<sup>18</sup> Since the Reform Period (1976–present), CCP leaders have offered a package of entitlements to ethnic minorities, including a bonus-point policy on the country's college entrance examination, relaxed enforcement of the "one-child" policy, and legal protection under various anti-discrimination laws.<sup>19</sup> These measures intend to reduce socio-economic disparity between majority Han people and marginalized ethnic minorities.

Now under the leadership of general secretary of the CCP Xi Jinping, the Han-dominated Party-state has adopted a tribal cultural nationalism that

views some forms of ethnic and religious diversity as political threats.<sup>20</sup> To be sure, sporadic episodes of violence have disrupted even superficial peace in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region for over a decade. On July 5, 2009, peaceful protests in the region's capital city, Ürümqi, spiralled into three days of rioting, which claimed 197 lives and resulted in over two thousand injuries and the disappearances of hundreds.<sup>21</sup> In the years following the "7-5 Incident," the CCP has labelled otherwise unrelated attacks at a police station in rural Turpan, in front of Beijing's iconic Tiananmen Square, inside the Kunming Train Station, and at a coal mine in Aksu, as co-ordinated global terrorism. Much as the Indian government has done among Muslim minorities and the dominant Hindu majority in Assam (see Saikia, this volume), the Chinese government instrumentalizes fear of violence to simultaneously strengthen popular support among the Han majority and strike terror into Uyghur communities.

Framing the incidents as global terror (and not local grievances), the CCP has decided to act with urgency and impunity when dealing with the Uyghurs.<sup>22</sup> As such, Xi Jinping urged for the construction of a "great wall of iron" to protect the region from what leaders consider an existential threat to China's territorial integrity, remarks that inspired the CCP to pass legislation called the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region's Articles on Eliminating Extremism.<sup>23</sup> Officials formally redefined extremism as "propositions and conduct using distortion of religious teachings or other means to incite hatred or discrimination and advocate violence."<sup>24</sup> Under the new law, activities as mundane as refusing to eat non-halal food, removing cable connections to state television, or maintaining a pious appearance are considered extremist and are severely punished. Anti-extremism measures are violently enforced. Since 2016, the CCP interned as many as one million Uyghurs in "concentration re-education centers."<sup>25</sup> Chinese officials—who first angrily denied the program's existence—now publicly insist they are providing essential vocational training for individuals influenced by the so-called three evil forces—extremism, radicalism, and terrorism—that threaten stability.<sup>26</sup> The few families spared from the atrocities of re-education endure a form of house arrest akin to quartering. To this end, the CCP has conscripted over one million Han civilians and sent them to live with Uyghurs in arranged homestays.<sup>27</sup> Once a Uyghur space impenetrable to the state high-tech surveillance apparatus, the home has been repurposed by the CCP as a site for acculturation.<sup>28</sup>

The CCP is confident that its pernicious approach to transforming the Uyghurs will help bring ethnic harmony to fruition. In fact, the government encourages all remaining people in the region to act as if they are pomegranate arils. In 2019, listeners who tuned in to Xinjiang People's Radio Uyghur language station for its morning broadcast were inundated with five public service announcements that spanned over three minutes of programming. Aired in succession and repeated several times throughout the day, the first four announcements emphasized the importance of loving China and demonstrating this patriotism by adopting "civilized" (Uy. *medeniy*) behaviour, following general secretary of the CCP Xi Jinping's leadership, and celebrating the seventieth anniversary of the People's Republic of China. However, the theme and tone of the final announcement shifted from patriotism to ethnic unity:

One instance of family (Uy. *tughqanliship*) connectedness, and we will be relatives (Uy. *tughqanlar*) forever. Let's embody ethnic unity as if we are members of one family (Uy. *bir a'ilik kishiler*). Come together, visit each other, and show genuine kindness. Let's embody ethnic unity as if we are members of one family. We should be thankful for the Party, listen to its words, and follow it. Every ethnic group needs to join tightly as if they are pomegranate arils.

Invocations of family are central to this public service announcement: the message does not simply promote random acts of kindness; it commands ethnic groups who have historically held different understandings of "family" and different positions vis-à-vis the Chinese Party-state to behave as if they are relatives.<sup>29</sup> The pomegranate metaphor is confounding. As a model for ethnic unity—and peace—a pomegranate is only effective if tightly bound by a hard rind that constricts its inner membrane. Only with the tight control of these exterior and interior systems do the seeds remain tightly folded into one another. In the case of the People's Republic, a pomegranate system of inter-ethnic unity only works if there is a Han-dominated police state to hold the seeds together.<sup>30</sup> This strategy may impose unity but not peace.

## Hosting and Gifting Among Uyghur and Han

Yet in ways similar to the pomegranate, the CCP is demanding unity by exerting force. Indeed, Uyghurs and Han people rarely interact, let alone



welcome one another into their homes.<sup>31</sup> To smash physical and symbolic ethnic barriers created and maintained by Uyghurs and Han people, officials have implemented mandatory house calls. Programs such as “explore the people’s conditions, benefit the people’s livelihood, and fuse with the people’s hearts” (Ch. *fang minqing, hui minsheng, ju minsheng* or *fanghuiju*) have conscripted over one million Han civilians and sent them to live with Uyghurs in arranged homestays.<sup>32</sup> The “fanghuiju” initiative has been expanded to reach ethnic minority families across Xinjiang. In 2014, the first year of the program, 200,000 civilian workers embarked on this campaign; in 2016, an additional 110,000 civilians journeyed to the region as part of a similar campaign called “United as One Family” (Ch. *jie dui renqing*).<sup>33</sup> According to a May 30, 2018, Xinjiang TV News broadcast, from 2016 to May 2018, these sent-down workers—referred to sometimes as “big brothers and big sisters”—made 24 million house visits, conducted 33 million interviews (read: interrogations), and organized over 8 million ethnic unity activities. Depending on efficiency and extensiveness of each house call, work teams visit six to ten households per day; some work teams pay daily visits to every household for ninety days.<sup>34</sup> Government reports from Hoshut County and Onsu County Aqsu Prefecture uncovered by Human Rights Watch indicate, respectively, that work teams must visit each family fourteen times every month and stay in the homes of local residents no fewer than eight days each month.<sup>35</sup>

## Hosting—and Holding Hostage—the Other

As agents of an authoritarian state, work teams could easily force themselves into Uyghur homes unimpeded; yet they assume, albeit briefly, the identity of unassuming and gracious guests. Indeed, hospitality is the unstable fulcrum on which the CCP’s call to create familial bonds across ethnic boundaries is placed.<sup>36</sup> To properly perform the temporary role as guests, civilian workers are expected to commit to a code of conduct. A manual used in Kashgar Prefecture instructs work teams to: (1) knock first; (2) greet the family; (3) observe door etiquette; (4) display proper comportment; (5) hug children; (6) respect elders; (7) receive items with two hands; (8) say “thank you”; (9) leave if you have inconvenienced the family; and (10) end the visits with a “goodbye.”<sup>37</sup> In addition to these basic guidelines, each team carries out at least one practical act of kindness—that is, assistance, care, or a congratulations—during each visit to further build rapport with their assigned families.<sup>38</sup>

Deception helps work teams gain access to reluctant families. A classified manual for work teams suggests devising a “staggered” (Ch. *cuoshi*) schedule—visitations in the evening, on weekends, and during holidays—to make sure working families are monitored.<sup>39</sup> One civilian worker recommends allowing a local (in other words, Uyghur) female cadre knock on the door because a woman—the individual who customarily remains in the home during the busy farming seasons—is likely going to greet the visitor. The Han woman worker further claims that households are unlikely to accept visitors if the patriarch is gone. However, following these steps prevents any unwanted “awkwardness” regardless of who may answer the door.<sup>40</sup> In another attempt to gain access to Uyghur families, work teams sometimes inspect homes late at night.<sup>41</sup> Called on by uninvited guests, local families have little choice but to provide their visitors with a room or their own bed.<sup>42</sup>

Once inside the home, work teams shower their families with gifts. The “United as One Family” campaign carries out the “four commons, four gifts” strategy (Ch. *si tong, si song*). Literally, the phrase “four commons, four gifts” refers to civil servants eating, living, working, and studying alongside Uyghur families while they gift them kindness and knowledge about policy, law, and culture.<sup>43</sup> However, gifting takes other forms and is central to the success of the “United as One Family” campaign. Indeed, work teams rarely arrive empty-handed. They present their “hosts” with rice, furniture, clothing, and school supplies—gestures that enmesh Uyghur families in a suffocating social bond forged from material and emotional debt and repayment, or “human feelings” (Ch. *renqing*).<sup>44</sup> Although *renqing* operates within the complex realm of—largely Confucian-defined—interpersonal ethics, it can be unpacked by analyzing the dynamics of gift-giving. In her canonical book on social relationships in China, Mayfair Yang explains, “Gifts require reciprocity, and so do relationships; therefore, the ethics of gift-giving are extended to all human relationships.”<sup>45</sup> In other words, the material gifts are commodified objects of the CCP’s compassion.<sup>46</sup>

Having set the traps and baited them with gifts, the work teams can spring them. According to the expectations of *renqing*, when Uyghur families accept the gifts—voluntarily or reluctantly—they become indebted to the work teams and by extension the Party in a sudden inversion of the host-guest relationship. According to Pitt-Rivers’s theories about hospitality, sent-down workers intentionally violate and invert the law of hospitality. In the most obvious example of role reversals, work teams supply food, prepare it for their

Uyghur “relatives,” and share these meals on tables provided by the government.<sup>47</sup> Becoming the recipients of state *renqing*, similar to impoverished Han people who receive regular cash stipends from the government, Uyghur families incur social and political debt.<sup>48</sup> This seemingly casual gesture is an exercise of power: it demonstrates that Uyghur “hosts” are incapable of providing for their government-dispatched Han “relatives.”<sup>49</sup> As such, dependency is transferred from the Uyghur community to the Han-dominated Party-state.

Now relegated to the role of guests inside their own homes, Uyghurs are expected to reciprocate by displaying gratitude, co-operation, and compliance. To be sure, work teams do not expropriate domestic space, but they effectively occupy and repurpose it for government use. Indeed, in the company of civilian work teams, Uyghurs families no longer exercise agency over domestic affairs. To display proper guest etiquette (and, more importantly, avoid harsh punishment), Uyghurs cannot refuse to answer questions from their government-appointed hosts. Meanwhile, work teams keep meticulous records of their assigned families.<sup>50</sup> A standardized form ensures no bit of information is overlooked.<sup>51</sup> Workers must determine an individual’s ethnic status, age, income, political affiliation, religious beliefs, education level, relationship with the “targeted population,” and even the materials used to build the person’s house.<sup>52</sup> A typical record resembles the following entry recorded on April 1, 2014:

Ali Ayshan. Thirty-six years old. Resident of village group nine. Household of three. Earns 6000RMB/year from an orchard; earns an additional 10,000RMB driving a taxi. Family has already received the “affordable housing” subsidy. Individual has attended Aqsu technical school and has a secondary-school education. He hopes to earn a living breeding livestock.<sup>53</sup>

This entry permanently documents this Uyghur person as Other. He is rural, under-educated, poor, relies on government support, and clings to the trades of his ancestors: animal husbandry.

A bilingual phrase book for fanghuiju work teams provides another window into home visits. After teaching the workers basic greetings and introductions, the phrase book offers instructions on how to obtain each family’s information. Sentences include: How many people are in your family? Do your children attend school? Do you like studying Chinese? How much money do you make? Can I take a family picture? and How many people attend

mosque?<sup>54</sup> Directing these questions primarily to villagers in underdeveloped rural towns elicits responses that will reinforce stereotypes of Uyghurs: they are poor, uneducated, and religious.<sup>55</sup> This status is then archived in searchable government databases, effectively officializing Uyghurs' difference.<sup>56</sup>

Having been pried open by government agents, the house can be scoured for manifestations of "extremism." Signs of this deviance include practices as mundane as using the greeting "*Assalamu Alaykum*" (Peace be upon you,) maintaining a pious appearance, keeping a Qur'an at home, engaging in unsanctioned religious practices, and even owning a tent.<sup>57</sup> Once the team enters the house, it inspects for warning signs. The work manual from Kashgar Prefecture provides an extensive list of questions: Does the family have guests from another locale? Do they have too many knives or cleavers? Do they choose to watch VCDs instead of state television? Have they hung religious articles in the home?<sup>58</sup> One work team member noted that "some families had sought after knives without QR codes from remote stores while others discarded radios provided to them free of charge from the government. They're apparently influenced by extremism and don't want things from the government. This village has deep problems. I won't go into detail here."<sup>59</sup> An individual's "stubborn" commitment to these behaviours is likely grounds for internment.

These searches contribute to the further "Othering" of Uyghurs. Combing through Uyghur homes for manifestation of "extremism" preordains Uyghurs as inherently prone to anti-state activity. This is by design. As has been the case in the Islamophobic depictions of Muslims in Europe and the US (see Perocco, this volume; Haines, this volume), media in China sensationalizes the threat of Uyghur "terrorism" to incite fear and stir-up Han nationalism.<sup>60</sup>

## Transforming Recalcitrants into Patriots

After gaining access to Uyghur families and recording their basic information, work teams can now transform them. The process begins with "correct" political thought, which is established through "thought work" (Ch. *sixiang gongzuo*) and "thought reform" (Ch. *sixiang gaizao*). These programs can be understood as the collection of the Party's vast resources and agents for spreading its political messages to the masses.<sup>61</sup> This massive enterprise includes large-scale institutions, such as media, schooling, entertainment, and penal facilities, but also more personalized interventions between officials

and individuals such as one-on-one talks (Ch. *tanxin*), group meetings (Ch. *tanxinhui*), and public performances of patriotism.<sup>62</sup>

According to the CCP, Uyghurs can cultivate correct political thought by engaging in ritualized political behaviour. In other words, the CCP must construct “nationalized” Uyghur bodies.<sup>63</sup> As such, officials require Uyghurs to participate in public flag-raising ceremonies. In June 2017, officials announced the “Three Initiatives” (Ch. *san ju cuo*), a policy that designated Mondays—10 or 11 a.m. Beijing time depending on locale and season—for the ceremony.<sup>64</sup> This weekly performance of loyalty is highly prescriptive. Attendees must arrive ten minutes before the hour, line up in straight rows, and stand quietly. In Aqto County’s Mushitage District, residents organize themselves according to their residential building number.<sup>65</sup> Individuals must remove their caps, discard their headscarves, and stand at attention in order to guarantee the “solemnity” (Ch. *zhuangyan*) of the event.<sup>66</sup> Attendees can neither whisper nor walk idly. The national anthem is then sung in Putonghua, China’s national language.

Attendance is mandatory for most members of the community. All government officials, “sent-down” workers (*fanghaiju*), Party members, Party activists, retired officials/veterans (Ch. *silao renyuan*), and individuals over eighteen must participate.<sup>67</sup> A document circulated in Qaraqash warns that individuals who miss the ceremony without reason will be rectified (Ch. *zhenggai*): one offence results in a meeting with a government official; two absences result in mandatory night school; and a third offence carries a penalty of “concentration re-education” (Ch. *jiaozhi zhongxin jiaoyu zhuanhua*).<sup>68</sup>

After the flag is raised, government officials lecture to the attendees for at least thirty minutes. This time provides an opportunity to communicate the Party’s ideals to a captive audience. In Pichan County’s (Ch. *Shanshan*) *Shuangshuimo* district, cadres delivered a speech about the importance of “ethnic unity” and “eliminating evil” to over four hundred people.<sup>69</sup> A May lecture in Aqto County covered the three evil forces—extremism, separatism, and terrorism—and “Two-Faced People” (officials who parrot the Party line in public but are suspected of engaging in the three evil forces).<sup>70</sup>

Officials believe formulaic expressions of patriotism will strengthen Uyghur loyalty toward China and the Party. The motto “every household is gifted a flag, each family hangs the flag, everyone studies the national anthem, every village hoists the flag, and we are constantly thankful for the Party” (Ch. *Jijia song qi, huhu gua guoqi, renren xue guogge, cuncun sheng guoqi, shishi*

*gan dang en*) demonstrates this apparent connection.<sup>71</sup> In fact, a government report from Guma County (Ch. *Pishan*) claims that the weekly activity aids residents in “deeply establishing an affinity with the fatherland.”<sup>72</sup> A resident of Bazhou told officials that “every day I see the flag, I also see the Party and feel excited.”<sup>73</sup> Furthermore, the CCP uses these weekly events to make patriotic spectacle. Similar to state-organized national holiday celebrations in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, the weekly flag-raising ceremonies project CCP authority on Uyghurs and remind them they are Chinese citizens.<sup>74</sup> The Party mobilizes these communities, forces obedience, and imposes meaning upon the participants through post-ceremony lectures.

The events also effectively force Uyghurs to stand side by side with officials, Party members, law enforcement personnel, and their assigned relatives, most of whom are Han. The scene, the subject of regular photo ops, presents an idealized, yet translucent image of unity. Although the flag ceremony brings Han and Uyghurs together, the union is forged using force. The arrangement of bodies reproduces a social hierarchy, which indexes Uyghurs as ethnic and political Other. Standing behind neatly dressed Han officials and an occasional Uyghur bureaucrat, lay Uyghurs are publicly displayed as society’s underlings.

## Giftng Civilization

According to the CCP, Chinese civilization can remedy major social and cultural deficiencies in Uyghurs. Although CCP policies are not simply derivative of imperial practices, the belief that non-Chinese “barbarians” could become civilized by adopting Chinese modes of livelihood, or *laihua*, has been at the centre of several successive Chinese “civilizing projects.”<sup>75</sup> As cultural beacons, sent-down workers provide the Party-state with live-in tutors to guide Uyghurs toward Chinese civilization. Work teams use visits to teach Uyghur families standard Chinese language, the Chinese national anthem, socialist values, and Xi Jinping thought.<sup>76</sup> However, work teams are also to focus on teaching family planning policies, instilling ethnic unity, and reviewing laws on religious practices.<sup>77</sup> According to a report posted by the Qaghiliq County, explaining CCP policies using simple language and “drip irrigation” (Ch. *diguan*) teaching methods will help residents realize that their good days have not serendipitously fallen from the sky but that “the origins of these good days are the Party’s good policies.”<sup>78</sup>

Civilian work teams are also instrumental in spreading Han cultural norms in Uyghur villages. Few tasks are more important than introducing major holidays and ensuring every village celebrates them. Spring Festival (Ch. *Chunjie*) activities require weeks of preparation and hundreds of hours of work. In Ürümchi's Baiyanghe Village, preparations began February 5, 2018—ten days prior to the New Year—after the weekly flag-raising ceremony and public lecture. Then work teams helped residents create “New Year’s couplets” (Ch. *chunlian*) depicting the “happiness” character (福) and delivered extras to elderly residents.<sup>79</sup> Night classes introduced Uyghurs to the festival’s basic customs: on what day would it fall that year and what should one should eat?<sup>80</sup> In Kashgar’s Yengisheher County, local officials held the “Ethnic Unity—One Family” New Year’s Gala. Residents performed in skits titled “I’m going to meet Chairman Xi,” staged drum and fan dances, and sang songs such as “We thank the Party.”<sup>81</sup> Not to be outdone, work teams in Yeken taught residents how to perform a dragon dance.<sup>82</sup> Meanwhile, work teams throughout the region assisted residents in hanging New Year’s couplets outside their homes.<sup>83</sup> Upon delivering couplets to one household, a civilian worker told his assigned relative, “This couplet is meant to say that after we became ‘relatives’ our affection is deeper and our hearts are closer.”<sup>84</sup> The composition of this newly forged “blended” family is not one of “*tughqan*” or close relatives; rather it is an asymmetrical Han-big brother-Uyghur little brother relationship that is characteristic of China’s “big family.”

The New Year’s festival usually concludes over a communal meal typical of Han families. From northern Xinjiang’s cities to its southern oases, work teams held *jiaozi* dumpling-making parties for local residents.<sup>85</sup> An official from Kashgar praised similar *jiaozi* events held the previous year:

Today everyone is making *jiaozi* of all different colours, and we are eating the filling of “ethnic unity” *jiaozi*. We are living happy and beautiful lives. This event has also strengthened the resolution of both Party members and the masses to love the fatherland, show gratitude towards the Party, and listen to their words, and follow them.<sup>86</sup>

These events capture the prevailing objectives of the government-arranged family visits. Work teams attempt to bring Uyghurs into the fold of China’s “great family,” but in the marginalized roles as obedient children to the CCP and respectful younger siblings to their older Han brothers and sisters. Furthermore, a *jiaozi* feast taps into prevailing principles of Traditional

Chinese Medicine: food presumes the power to transform the person. Eating *jiaozi* is not only symbolic of acting Chinese: it is a step toward becoming Chinese. But the widespread observance of *halal* dietary practices in these communities, one of the few religious observances the CCP respects, reminds Uyghurs and Han people of their differences, even when they celebrate these festivals together.<sup>87</sup>

## Conclusion

Government-imposed inter-ethnic mingling in Xinjiang relegates Uyghurs to guests in their own homes. Their Han hosts then provide totalitarian “care” to these families.<sup>88</sup> Formerly one of the few Uyghur spaces that existed beyond the government’s high-tech surveillance state, the home has been thrust to the centre of CCP human intelligence collecting activities.<sup>89</sup> Hospitality, regardless of how hostile or ambivalent it may be, nevertheless create new zones of encounters. Therefore, this social convention possesses the potential to engender mutual respect, strengthen feelings of belonging, and establish positive peace, that is, the facilitation and development of shared feelings of humanity.<sup>90</sup> However, the CCP’s approach does not pursue peace; it does not intend to increase tranquility; nor does it hope to promote individual well-being. It seeks stability (Ch. *wending*) and the partial transformation of Uyghurs. The consequences will be great: the elimination of ethnic markers that Uyghur have identified as essential to their identities and have transmitted for generations. Unlike imperial dynasties of the past, the Party-state does not provide a choice for Uyghurs, or other ethnic minorities, to acculturate on their own terms while it shares control with Indigenous elites. It will not loosen its grip to allow local governing practices to handle day-to-day affairs or non-Han cultures to thrive.<sup>91</sup> Yet if the CCP respects the promises it extended to Uyghurs in the Law of Regional Ethnic Autonomy (self-government and freedom to develop their own languages, religions, and cultures), stops its mass incarceration program, and leaves Uyghur homes, positive peace, created through tughqan networks, is within arm’s reach.<sup>92</sup>

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## 2 The Ubiquitous Other, or the Muslims of Assam

### Is Peace Possible?

Yasmin Saikia

*One hundred crore infiltrators have entered our country and are eating the country like termites. Should we throw them out or not?*

—Amit Shah, current Home Minister of India

During the 2019 general election campaigns in India, Amit Shah, of the right-wing nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), repeatedly reduced immigrant Muslims in Assam to the status of “termites,” promising that a BJP government would “pick up infiltrators one by one and throw them into the Bay of Bengal.”<sup>1</sup> One of the largest Muslim communities in India, the Muslims of Assam were recently estimated to constitute nearly 40 percent of the state’s population—some 14 million people out of a total population of more than 35 million.<sup>2</sup>

Casting Muslims as the Other has a long history in Assam. The designation of Muslims as outsiders was useful for the imperial British, as sowing communal division supported the colonial policy of divide and rule. This process of Othering has been reinforced in the postcolonial period by the growth of Assamese nationalism and fears of a loss of identity in the face of ongoing migration from East Pakistan and subsequently Bangladesh, which achieved independence in 1971. Among other things, the depiction of Muslims as foreigners has allowed the Assamese to construct a historical narrative according to which Assam remained unconquered by the invading Mughals, in contrast

to the fate of Indians beyond its borders, while at the same time enabling them to present Assam as a bastion of Hindu India.<sup>3</sup> This image in turn bolsters the Assamese claim to be “genuine” Indians and destabilizes the colonial narrative surrounding the so-called Assam Frontier inhabited by “uncivilized,” “rude,” “Mongoloid,” and otherwise backward “tribes.” More recently, the BJP government has invoked this narrative in support of its anti-Muslim policies. In 2020, for example, Assam’s chief minister, Sarbananda Sonowal, urged indigenous Assamese communities and “genuine” Indians to unite against “Mughal aggression” in order to defeat the “conspiracy of illegal foreigners.”<sup>4</sup>

Excluding Muslims from the Assamese imagination is supported by powerful agents both inside and outside Assam. The rhetoric of Muslim outsidersness serves as a foil to divert public attention from the failures of the government and conceal the exploitative ventures that serve the interests of a few. What about the rampant exploitation of the natural environment and the various illicit businesses run by syndicates and mafias? Every day, the local media reports on these and other problems affecting the people, but the government does little to address them.<sup>5</sup> This inaction has fuelled grassroots resistance associated in particular with the Krishak Mukti Sangram Samiti (KMSS), a peasant organization, founded in 2005, that has tackled an array of specific issues, from corruption to the construction of massive hydro-electric dams in seismically unstable areas. Although this emerging resistance has generally shunned partisan politics, it became somewhat more visible during the state elections of 2021 when peasant leader Akhil Gogoi, founder of the KMSS, and Pranab Doley, secretary of the Jeepal Krishak Shramik Sangha, a farmers’ rights organization, ran for seats in the legislative assembly.<sup>6</sup> The movement has steadily been generating what I call a politics of refusal: a refusal to accept religion as a tool of division, environmental and natural resource exploitation, and the disempowerment of the people. Instead, the forum promotes the idea of Assam as a *shared homeland* for everyone. Assam belongs to the Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, and everyone else who lives there, this voice asserts. This vision of inclusion offers hope for a way forward to create peace for the Self and the Other. However, at present, this is only an ideal vision: the fracturing of communities continues in both political discourse and action.

In precolonial times, the people of Assam came together along the pathways of historical and everyday encounters, producing a blended culture that became the mainstay of the Assamese heritage. I have written elsewhere

about the concept of *xomonnoy* (union) that produced a culture of *xanmiholi*, which envisions Assam as an inclusive place of blended communities that prioritizes positive human relationships.<sup>7</sup> This creative, assimilatory fusion is a lived experience of the people, a product of human associations that survives despite assaults on it. For nearly six hundred years (1228–1826), the Ahom rulers, whose kingdom extended all across northern Assam and into the foothills of present-day Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh, forged a composite community, recorded as the “we” community in the *buranjis*, the chronicles of the Ahom kingdom. This community included a variety of plains and hills people, as well as immigrant Brahmins, converted Hindus, and Muslim settlers. Xanmiholi facilitated the success of the Ahom kingdom.

Today, however, people are forgetting xanmiholi, which has left Muslims, in particular, vulnerable. Within the Muslim community, two groups are targeted for different purposes—the *goriya*, who have resided in Assam for centuries and have assimilated into Assamese culture, and the *miya*, whose ancestors migrated to Assam from the British province of East Bengal beginning early in the twentieth century. The goriyas have since been reduced to “Mughal” invaders and their heroic history in service of the Ahom kings declared fictitious, while the miyas are deemed “Bangladeshis” and targeted for detention and deportation. In this chapter, I hope to contribute to healing the bitter hatred directed at the Muslims of Assam, the miyas in particular, by focusing on xanmiholi, which I present as a cultural and ethical site for living in peace together as Assamese.

In exploring the fraught issue of peace with the Muslim/Other, I begin by inquiring into the negative politics of exclusion that divides communities into indigenous “insiders” and immigrant “outsiders.” Although the roots of this division run deep, the BJP has, in its push for a homogeneous Hindu India, sought to reconfigure the concept of citizenship so as to deny Muslims—the miyas, in particular—a home in Assam. Integral to this project have been the updating of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Assam and the Indian government’s subsequent passage of the 2019 Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), which I discuss in the first section below.

The Hindutva ideology and policies grounded in it have created an existential crisis for the miya Muslims, which I discuss in the subsequent section. Today, the miyas live their lives as pariahs, despised as “filthy (*geda*), illegal immigrants,” or “Bangladeshis,” and reduced to subhuman status. In December 2017, a report submitted by members of the Committee for

Protection of Land Rights of Indigenous People of Assam ridiculed the miyas as “land-grabbing illegal Bangladeshis” who in the Lower Assam districts have spread “like the invading swarms of ants” and “fall on any kind of vacant land like the vultures on the corpse, leaving nothing and swallowing everything.”<sup>8</sup> Building on the rhetoric of infestation, the BJP government has developed its own divide-and-rule policy that pits the “immigrant” miyas against the longer-established Assamese-speaking goriya and other groups of Muslims, who are now categorized as indigenous (*khilonjia*). On the one hand, the BJP uses the tool of fear and threatens the miyas with loss of citizenship; on the other hand, they bribe miyas with monetary promises to win their votes during elections. The unstable status of belonging creates extreme anxiety among Muslims in Assam and is the central concern of the second section of this chapter.

In the conclusion, I illustrate the potential for inclusion by bringing another immigrant group, the multiethnic “tea tribes,” into the discussion. After a century of neglect and exploitation, the tea tribes are slowly integrating into Assam’s socio-cultural and political landscape—providing a model for the inclusion of other groups and for peace in Assam. Whether religion will come in the way of fostering belonging for the Muslims in BJP’s Assam remains a troubling question.

Sociologist Keith Tester calls for a politics of action for creating positive change and for moving beyond contemplation to address the problems of the human condition. Assam requires bold actions to move beyond hating the Other to forge peace. This is possible with the empowering knowledge of xanmiholi, a priceless local resource. As a local historical process of community interaction, exchange, and blending, xanmiholi undermines the inhospitality of the politics of othering. I say this not to privilege it nostalgically, but rather, borrowing from Maurice Blanchot, to argue that the rupture caused by the Othering so prevalent in contemporary rhetoric is a disaster but that, because it did not exist in Assam’s past, it cannot preclude peace in the future. Again, following Tester, I suggest that xanmiholi can produce positive actions so that “the world might be able to be made to become something different; or at least . . . be experienced in different ways.”<sup>9</sup>

People in Assam have a commonsense knowledge that accepting the Other is an ethical and moral responsibility. This knowledge reaffirms the scholarly reflections of Jacques Derrida, Zygmunt Bauman, Emmanuel Levinas, and many others who have addressed the responsibility we owe to the Other.

Unforgetting xanmiholi is critical to refusing to hate the Other and to devising constructive actions to move forward. Like all who believe that humanity can do better, I am hopeful that the Assamese will rediscover the spirit of xanmiholi to create a new and peaceful future.

## Constructing the Problem

The Othering of Muslims in India and Assam is anchored in the BJP's ideology of Hindutva.<sup>10</sup> Hindutva imagines India as a nation homogeneously peopled by Hindu citizens and, in so doing, displaces Muslims and casts them as outsiders. Like Northeast India more broadly, Assam is targeted by the BJP's Hindutva because of the relatively high percentage of Muslims in the state. Multiple caste groups and tribal communities constitute the Hindu community, which is the majority. Muslims are the largest of the minority groups in Assam, while Christians, Buddhists, Sikhs, Jains, and, in theory, Parsis make up the others. (Although Parsis are one of India's official minority groups, Assam actually has no Parsi population.) The people share one common factor—their homeland, Assam—and are emotional about the place and their place in it. Each community claims belonging within the historically and culturally hybrid Assamese family that evolved through exchanges and interactions over a long period of time.

The BJP government has pointed to Assam's close proximity to Bangladesh in an effort to whip up the deeply lodged fear of "infiltration" by illegal Bangladeshi immigrants.<sup>11</sup> The government has effectively reinforced the narrative of infiltration by publicly emphasizing that Assam's Muslim population consists predominantly of Bengali immigrants, variously labelled "miya" or "Bangladeshi"—a term that came into use following the Assam Agitation (1979–85), a struggle for Assamese identity that was initially directed against all outsiders but later settled on the Bengali Muslims as the quintessential outsiders. To end this "infiltration," the government proposes to fence the border with barbed wire, catch Bangladeshis at the border, and identify, detain, and deport the illegal Bangladeshi immigrants who are already inside Assam. Hinduizing Assam and isolating the Muslims as illegal Bangladeshis are simultaneous processes.

An aggravated sense of the Other thus exists in Assam. The Muslim "termites" who are deemed *ghuspaithiye* (infiltrators) must be exterminated, as Amit Shah suggests in the chapter epigraph. The BJP's approach is not

merely political: it is ideological. India, they say, should be a “Hindu Rashtra,” a Hindu nation, encompassing the territory known as Akhand Bharat, “undivided Bharat,” with the term “Bharat” invoking the ancient Sanskrit epic *Mahābhārata*, Extending from Afghanistan through to Northeast India, and encompassing Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, and Bangladesh, Akhand Bharat nullifies the partition of India in 1947 and effectively creates a new, Hindu empire.<sup>12</sup> Mohan Bhagwat, the head of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangha (RSS), does not clarify what the status of Muslims in the imagined Akhand Bharat will be, but he promotes the idea of reuniting the entire subcontinent. By way of explanation, he claims that “people who got separated from India, leaving their tradition and culture, forgetting their ancestors, were unhappy since the beginning . . . even people of Pakistan were saying that it was a mistake.”<sup>13</sup> The Assam room in this national house will shine as pure Hindu. The BJP has anchored this ideological position on the platform of the RSS, which, in turn, draws inspiration from the Brownshirts of Nazi Germany.

In keeping with its Hindu nationalist project, the BJP has undertaken to reclaim land, particularly from miya cultivators, and return it to the indigenous people of Assam.<sup>14</sup> Two dominant narratives—invasion and displacement—convey a disturbing message about the Muslims as aggressive and illegal occupiers of Assam’s land, and because their original home is outside Assam and even India itself, they are deemed treacherous and destructive. Even the Assamese-speaking Muslims, who are now officially considered indigenous, are simultaneously labelled as Mughal outsiders, while the miyas are the Bangladeshi “infiltrators.” These labels were popularized during the state elections of 2021 and became part of the public discourse, a development in which the television media played an important role. Beyond the media discourse, a religious tinge was given to this discussion by self-styled Hindu ideologue Satyanarayan Borah, of the RSS, who called for the economic and social strangulation of Muslims because they were outsiders.<sup>15</sup>

In pursuit of its desire to be rid of these loathsome infiltrators, the BJP was keen on the plan to update the National Register of Citizens (NRC) in Assam, as doing so would identify illegal immigrants, as distinct from citizens. The process of updating took place from 2013 to 2018, but when the final NRC list was released at the end of August 2019, the government rejected the result because, contrary to their expectations, more than half of those whose citizenship could not be documented were Hindu Bengalis, rather than Muslim.<sup>16</sup> This setback called for a sweeping remedy: the Citizenship Amendment



Act (CAA), which the national government passed on December 11, 2019, in order to assure Indian citizenship to all undocumented Hindus and other non-Muslims who had migrated to India from Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan.

Its blatantly anti-Muslim character notwithstanding, the CAA is a hugely unpopular solution for the Assamese. Subnationalist (*jatiyotabadi*) groups reject the CAA on ethnic and linguistic grounds. Progressive Assamese groups also reject the CAA because they do not agree with the BJP's religion-based approach to citizenship. They continue to believe in Assam's secular past. Irrespective of their reason, soon after the CAA became law, the Assamese took to the streets to protest. Two things changed the course of mass activism in Assam. First, the national media shifted its attention to Delhi's Shaheen Bagh, where Muslim women had organized a peaceful sit-in to protest against the CAA. By making opposition to the CAA a "Muslim protest," the media gave a religious colour to the people's struggle.

Second, COVID-19 broke out. Shortly after the outbreak, a hyped-up narrative began circulating about how the virus had been brought to Assam (and elsewhere in India) by Muslims who had attended a meeting of the Tablighi Jammāt in Delhi. The government's public naming and shaming of the conference attendees from Assam emboldened the divisive forces within the state. In daily press briefs, Himanta Biswa Sarma, then the minister of health, read the names of each Muslim man or woman infected with COVID-19, even going so far as to detail their "bad behaviour" in quarantine hospitals, and urged the Assamese public to shun and isolate the contagious Muslims. People set up barricades with signs reading "No Muslim Entry" and "Corona Jihad"—anti-Muslim slogans that symbolized and represented the internalization of the government's rhetoric.

Assam is at a critical juncture; it must choose between its multivalent, heterogeneous local pasts and a homogenous Hindu identity. The new, politically constructed image of the Muslim Other cannot serve Assam and the Assamese in the long haul. The lived history of xanmiholi, tried and tested over centuries, offers an alternative way of thinking about and being with the Other. To me, this local resource holds the key to the future and the possibility of living in peace with one another.

Defining "Assamese" opens a complex issue of belonging and citizenship. Many non-Assamese, although they might be citizens of India and have lived in Assam for multiple generations, are not accepted as Assamese. The

Assamese are pitted against the non-Assamese, making “indigenous” versus “settler” a political issue. The BJP’s new vision of Akhand Bharat, which defines Assam in religious terms, further complicates the political situation. How did this politics become so powerful? Blaming the colonials after seven decades of independence does not resolve the problem. Postcolonial politicians endorse the colonial agenda of religious Othering, and the virus of hatred is spreading.

### The Char-Chapori Miyas: Insider or Outsider?

The Muslims who inhabit the *chars* (islands formed by sand and silt deposits) and *chapori* (sandbanks) of the Brahmaputra River are variously called *miyas*, *pamua* (farmers), or *charua* (char residents), and are also labelled “Bangladeshis.” The term “char-chapori miyas” simply references the lands on which they live, which seems preferable to me. Ironically, elsewhere in India, *miya* is an honorific title given to a man of superior social standing, a “gentleman.” In Assam, however, the term is used pejoratively—although in recent years several *miya* poets have embraced the name to highlight their pride and dignity despite the degradation they suffer.<sup>17</sup> I am using the term *miya* similarly, in the spirit of a refusal to accede to the politics of Othering and dehumanization. When I refer to char-chapori miyas, I do so with the hope that knowledge about the Othering process and the everyday lives of the miyas will motivate discussion and calls for redress and a reaffirmation of our mutual humanity.

The chars are scattered along more or less the entire length of the Brahmaputra River. Some of the present-day chars are more than a hundred years old, and there are over two thousand of them, but not all are habitable. Although many Nepalis and other communities also migrated and settled in the chars, the chars have become synonymous with the miyas. Majuli, located in the district of the same name, is Assam’s largest char, but since miyas do not live there, it is not called a char. Instead, it is promoted as a living museum of the Assamese culture.

The chars occupy roughly 4.6 percent of Assam’s total land area. At 690 persons per square kilometre, the population density is more than double the state average of 340 persons.<sup>18</sup> Many of the chars are located in districts with a high percentage of Muslims, namely, Dhubri, Goalpara, Bongaigaon, Barpeta, Darrang, Morigaon, and Nagaon (see figure 2.1). Altogether, the

chars fall within a total of fifty-nine rural development blocks, which are home to roughly 9.35 percent of Assam's total population—the most illiterate population in India.<sup>19</sup> Few have primary schools, dispensaries and/or health care centres, or business establishments. In 1993, the government established a Directorate for Char Areas Development; after nearly three decades, there is no published documentation on this “development.” Geography and social neglect combine to produce a dearth of knowledge about the people and the chars. They are forgotten spaces, disconnected from the mainland.

In October 2019, I visited the chars of Lakhipur and Morisakundi, in Barpeta district. Conditions were pathetic. Houses were precariously made of bamboo and thatch, and poverty was evident in people's torn and dishevelled clothes. Young children played aimlessly, their one-room schoolhouse closed for lack of a teacher. There was no mosque, graveyard, or marketplace. A run-down shop was the only public space. Both chars were desperate places, and people had little to say about the development they have experienced. Parvin Sultana, a char-chapori scholar, laments that char miyas have become the “nowhere” people living in “missing villages” that no one cares about.<sup>20</sup>

In Lakhipur and Morisakundi, people were gravely concerned about the future, particularly for those left out of the NRC roll of July 2019. Almost everyone I talked to told me that their ancestors came to Assam more than a hundred years earlier. They had colonial land documents as proof, which they had guarded carefully even when they lost all their other belongings in floods. The authenticity of these documents has been called into doubt by the government of Assam, which adjudicates their claim to citizenship. To me, the reduction of their lives into bits of paper was even more disturbing. Even those whose names do appear on the citizen rolls fear that they can be declared “foreigners” and thrown into jails and/or government detention centres until deported.<sup>21</sup> They do not know where they might be sent because they have no home except Assam. Those who continue to have voting rights are desperate not to lose their status as citizens, which they know the BJP government can take away.

In the Assamese view, the chars are a “mini Bangladesh,” and the char dwellers are “Bangladeshis.” The tag “illegal immigrants” relegates them to the bottom of the Muslim/Other pile in Assam. The char-chapori miyas know in their hearts that they are abandoned people. Even the char lands at times discard them. The chars are precarious islands created by the Brahmaputra River. The floods erode the chars; with each passing year, as floods intensify,



**Figure 2.1.** Assam, with its national and international borders. Districts shaded grey are those in which Muslims are the majority population, a distribution that reflects historical patterns of migration from colonial Bengal. Today, the miya Muslims struggle for bare survival on the shifting chars and chaporis of the Brahmaputra River.

the people's condition worsens. When the Brahmaputra changes course, the char inhabitants must migrate to new areas, where they encounter new problems as "infiltrators." Their woes are unending, yet they are blamed as the "culprits" who rob the Assamese of their identity, land, and culture. Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has stated that harmony will not be possible as long as Muslims are unwilling to protect "our Sankari Culture."<sup>22</sup> The lumpen, underprivileged miyas are blamed as scheming, treacherous thieves who threaten the Assamese people.

These images of the alien and hostile miya were undone for me during the COVID lockdown in Guwahati, Assam's largest city, from late March to July 2020. My firsthand experiences made me appreciate their humanity, expressed in the face of acute danger to their health and life. At the break of dawn, they came in their country boats, braving the Brahmaputra's turbid waters to provide food to the townspeople. Our neighbourhood survived because of them. Several miyas, young and old, offered support in a variety of different

ways. A disturbing question emerges for me about my own community: how did we, the Assamese, become so ruthless toward the miyas? A combination of factors, such as fear of the Other, Assamese self-deception, the economic marginalization of the India's northeast, the BJP's Hindutva rhetoric, and the expectation of reward for denouncing the miyas are hastening the demise of humanity in Assam.

Originally, "miya" was the name given to Muslim peasants who migrated to Assam early in the twentieth century primarily from the Mymensingh district of East Bengal—although, since then, the term has come to be applied to Bengali Muslims more broadly, not in any historical sense but rather as a political label used to cast Muslims as outsiders. During the period of colonial rule, Hindu landlords owned almost all of the arable land in Mymensingh, and the Muslim peasants were landless. Becoming landowners in Assam was thus an attractive option to these peasants, and since movement within British India was open and encouraged, they came to Assam in the hope of improving their condition. Although the migration of Bengali Muslims to Assam began slowly, during the partition of Bengal (1905–11) the migration of both Muslim and Hindu Bengalis increased. Educated Hindu Bengalis took up jobs as "babus" (clerks) in the colonial administration, while the peasants, mostly Muslims, took to cultivating the land. Besides growing rice, the newcomers were encouraged to cultivate jute; as a cash crop, it increased the revenues of the colonial state. By 1919–20, the immigrants claimed more than 106,000 acres for cultivating jute.<sup>23</sup>

The early immigrants settled in the islands in the western districts of the Brahmaputra Valley, initially in the Goalpara area, which was adjacent to East Bengal. They cleared the uninhabited land and brought it under cultivation and were good neighbours to the local people. In 1927, the colonial commissioner of Assam, B. C. Allen, described their land thus: "Near the river the land as a rule is low and is covered with reed jungle, much of which has in recent years been taken up by hardy immigrants from Bengal, who are trained to snatch a living from places which an up-countryman would consider to be quite unfit for human life."<sup>24</sup> As one can imagine, the chars were not a prime property for the Assamese. No one wanted to live in the middle of the river or start new agriculture in the sandy, unstable banks. Today, however, the government has plans to develop the permanent chars as the site for small industries. The miyas are excluded from these entrepreneurial projects. In the arithmetic of electoral politics, however, the "immigrant" miyas, who

outnumber the Assamese Muslims, have proved useful. On the one hand, the poverty-stricken miyas are branded as illegal immigrants, and the Assamese public is provoked into viewing them with anger and contempt. On the other hand, the BJP courts them with promises of financial benefits, in hopes of winning their votes. The party aims to divide the Muslims in Assam against each other and prevent them from building trust among themselves or from voting as a unified political bloc. But before I discuss the Assamese Muslim condition, we need to understand the history of miya exclusion.

Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, the immigrant peasant population grew and spread into new areas in central Assam, notably the districts of Kamrup, Darrang, and Nagaon.<sup>25</sup> In 1920, the colonial administration introduced the “Line System,” which restricted the areas in which Bengali-speaking Muslim immigrants were allowed to settle, thereby segregating miya villages from those of indigenous Assamese. The miya peasants nevertheless moved beyond the lines of demarcation because the Assamese were willing to sell land to them and because “the local administration was found to be increasingly indulgent” in dealing with the settling of land.<sup>26</sup> Isolated from their neighbours, the Assamese felt threatened by the rising numbers of Bengali immigrants, seeing them as land-grabbing “Muhammadans.” The animosity grew more intense following the 1937 elections, when the Muslim League formed a minority government in the province. Between 1937 and 1946, the government encouraged migration into presently uncultivated areas of western Assam as part of its “Grow More Food” program, which was widely seen as a strategy to increase the Muslim population.<sup>27</sup>

Although the colonial government had initiated the migration of Muslims from East Bengal, they laid the blame for the demographic changes in Assam on a “Muhammadan invasion” that was altering the culture, language, and religion of the Brahmaputra Valley. This emboldened the Hindu Mahasabha (the religious platform of the RSS) to stoke tensions, claiming the existence of “alarming reports of forcible occupation of lands in mass-scale by Muslims.”<sup>28</sup> Organizations such as the Assam Sangrakhani Sabha (Assam Protection Society), the Jatiya Mahasabha (People’s Assembly), and the Indian National Congress party made it a public issue to resist the Bengali Muslim invasion. In 1941, when Assam’s Muslim population numbered 1,696,978 against 3,222,377 Hindus, people were alarmed.<sup>29</sup> Statistics and terms like “native” and “outsider,” which the colonial British had used for administrative purposes, acquired new value for manufacturing “facts” for politics and expanding

the boundaries of interpretation. The economic grievances of the Assamese were aggravated by reminders of the struggle between the Bangla (Bengali) and Asamiya (Assamese) languages that raged between 1836 and 1873—but instead of blaming the Hindu Bengali babus, who were both the proponents and beneficiaries of the Bangla language in Assam, the Assamese people directed their anger and fear at Bengali Muslim immigrants. The term “Bengali” came to be equated with the term “Muslim,” and the much-hated miyas became the embodiment of negative connotations: adjectives like criminal, dirty, litigious, greedy, licentious, thieving, smelly, and so on were heaped on top of “foreigners” and “invaders.” The rhetoric of indigeneity versus outsider-ness that emerged produced cleavages among the Hindus and Muslims and an atmosphere ripe for violence.

In these circumstances, one could hardly expect those viewed as outsiders to embrace Assamese culture and language. Yet that is what the char-chapori miyas, in their earnest effort to assimilate, did. Unlike Bengali Hindu immigrants, immigrant Muslims adopted Assamese as their mother tongue, thereby earning themselves the name Na-Asamiya (or Na-Axomiya), “new Assamese.” In so doing, they increased the percentage of Assamese speakers from 31 percent in 1931 to well over 56 percent in 1951, paving the way for Assamese to become Assam’s official language in 1960.<sup>30</sup> Both the language and the Assamese community benefited from the support of the char-chapori miyas, but the benefactors themselves did not. Speaking Assamese could not wash off the stigma of being immigrants. Nor were the Assamese communities interested in sharing their homeland: they continued to devise new ways to depict the miyas as strangers. As Zygmunt Bauman argues, building on the work of Georg Simmel, the stranger is someone who has come and does not go away. This is what the Assamese feared: the miyas would never go away unless they were driven out. Driving out the immigrants was the fundamental goal of the Assam Agitation in the early 1980s, and, in the BJP’s Assam, this objective has been incorporated into official policy.

Although the ethnonationalist Assam Agitation of the early 1980s started as an economic and cultural struggle against non-Assamese “foreigners,” it went through a sea change after the RSS entered the fray and the term “Bangladeshi” gained currency. Miyas now found themselves condemned as illegal foreigners. On February 18, 1983, Assamese peasants and members of local tribal communities torched the miya village of Nellie, in the Nagaon district of central Assam. The violence swiftly spread to other Muslim-majority villages,

killing thousands of miya peasants and their families. Fear crippled the Muslim mind, while the Assamese Hindus assumed ownership of Assam. The Assamese Hindu claim to be the primary citizens of Assam created another rift, this time with a plains tribal group called the Bodos.

In 1993, the Assamese government attempted to placate the Bodos, who were angry not only about being placed in a position secondary to the Assamese but also about encroachments onto their lands by miya peasants and were agitating for an independent state. The government set up an autonomous administrative district governed by the Bodoland Autonomous Council. The 1993 Bodo Accord stopped short of formally demarcating Bodoland territory, however, and in 2003 another agreement was signed—which, while it did define Bodo territory, proved to generate a new round of conflicts. In this ongoing cycle of violence, the Bodos periodically directed their anger at the neighbouring miya villages, most notably in major pogroms that took place in 1994, 2012, and 2014.<sup>31</sup> In the meanwhile, academics, government officials, and journalists produced numerous statistics to “prove” that the Bangladeshi immigrants were overwhelming the local people. The welter of numbers confused the public, as intended. Adding to the confusion, rumours proliferated, public discourse became the site for lamenting Assamese losses, and the yarn of the story grew until the government’s version of the “truth” was publicly accepted. No longer perceiving any distinction between the two, people now freely talked about the “Bangladeshi miyas” as their “enemies.”<sup>32</sup>

Disillusioned with upper-class goriya Muslim politicians who had previously won election from miya constituencies but had failed to adequately represent their interests or offer them protection from potential deportation, the miyas were drawn to a new political party that promised to stand up for the rights of the marginalized and vulnerable: the Assam United Democratic Front (AUDF). The party was founded in 2005 by a coalition of Muslim minority groups under the leadership of the wealthy businessman and Islamic scholar Badruddin Ajmal and was then relaunched in 2009 as a national party, the All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF). A prominent member of the Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind, a well-respected organization of Islamic theologians and scholars, Ajmal forged a combination of politics and religion that captivated the miya imagination, assuring them inclusion and support.<sup>33</sup> In multiple conversations with miya voters, I learned that, although the majority had voted for the BJP in the general elections in 2016 for fear of reprisals against their community, they are more comfortable with the AIUDF



representatives, who sport long beards, wear tunics and ankle-length pyjamas, speak a Bangla dialect, and observe Islamic religious rituals. However, some were astute enough to understand that the AIUDF makes them more vulnerable by communalizing politics and galvanizing support for the BJP among the Hindu majority and tribal groups.

Another profound development that has pushed the Muslims to the brink is, of course, the CAA. The government responded harshly to the surge of protests, attempting to silence the opposition. In December 2019, on the very eve of the passage of the CAA, Akhil Gogoi—leader of the Krishak Mukti Sangram Samiti (KMSS), which was a formidable presence in anti-CAA activism—was accused of having Maoist connections, arrested, and imprisoned. Two days later, another KMSS leader, Biju Tamuli, was arrested, followed by a third, Sashi Sensowa, in January 2020.<sup>34</sup> The government also strangled media coverage of the CAA protests, going so far as to black out the Internet.<sup>35</sup> It strives to change how people know themselves and applies new rhetoric of hatred for writing a new version of history emphasizing the story of two opposing groups—indigenous and outsiders. There is no “we” in this story.

As outsiders, immigrant Muslims have now been targeted for removal. Under the terms of a new land policy, miya lands are designated “encroacher” property, confiscated, and returned to local people or acquired by the government for other purposes. The consequences of this new policy became brutally evident in September 2021, when thousands of miya settlers were violently evicted from their homes and land in the village of Dhalpur, in Darrang district. This was not the first such eviction, however—merely the latest in a series.<sup>36</sup> The motive is to narrow the circles of inclusion and expand the boundaries of exclusion.

In addition, the BJP government has split Assam’s Muslim population into two broad categories, each containing more than one community. In July 2022, the government declared the Assamese-speaking Muslims, constituted by the *goriya*, *moriya*, *deshi*, *julha*, and *syed* communities, to be indigenous, while the Bangla-speaking miyas and the Muslims of the Barak Valley were deemed to be immigrants.<sup>37</sup> The Barak Valley Muslims are not, in fact, immigrants: they were originally from the Sylhet district, which was part of Assam until 1947 (when it became part of East Pakistan). All the same, as Bangla speakers, the Barak Valley Muslims are, like the miyas, viewed as a threat to the Assamese and are thus excluded from the indigenous Muslim groups.

The ancestors of the indigenous Muslim communities were present in Assam well before the start of the twentieth century. The goriyas emerged as a Muslim group during the period of Ahom rule and are sometimes mentioned in the buranjis. The moriyas, who were traditionally brass workers, also originated during the precolonial period and were distinguished from the goriyas by the British. The deshi and julha communities, which differ largely in terms of line of descent and place of origin, are also well established and live alongside miyas in the Dhubri, Goalpara, and Kokrajhar districts of western Assam. As I discovered during a field visit to Kokrajhar, an intense rivalry exists between the deshis and miyas, as is particularly evident in the politics surrounding Panbari Mosque, the oldest mosque in Assam, which is controlled by the deshi community but receives huge numbers of miya pilgrims who donate generously to the coffers of the mosque.<sup>38</sup> In addition, some julha groups reside in the “tea belt” of eastern Assam, having been transplanted there by the British from Bihar and eastern India. The BJP government also created a brand-new community, labelled *syed*, made up of the descendants of various Sufi teachers who arrived in Assam many centuries ago but were not otherwise closely related.<sup>39</sup> Nowhere else in the world is there a Muslim community called *syed*.

Assamese Muslims differ in terms of their occupation, level of education, and social standing. Goriyas, who have thoroughly assimilated into Assamese Hindu society, rarely marry into moriya or julha families.<sup>40</sup> In colonial Assam, the goriyas held a commanding position because they were better educated than the moriyas and julhas and had been an established community for several centuries, during the period of Ahom rule. As a goriya Muslim and a historian, I have tried to trace the origins of this community, but its history is obscure.<sup>41</sup> Nothing exists, except occasional family *silsilas* (genealogical histories). The buranjis do, however, include stray references to goriyas in the royal Ahom administration. While not explicitly named, they are distinguished from the “Bongals,” outsiders from the west who arrived with the invading “Badshah’s army” (that is, the Mughals).<sup>42</sup> It appears, then, that even in the precolonial period, goriyas abdicated their past when they became Assamese. Today, no one recognizes the loss of their history as a disappearance, an unmourned “social death.”<sup>43</sup> Rather, it is their assimilation into Assamese society that is variously celebrated for political purposes or weaponized against them. The erasure of history allows for the making and remaking of their place in Assam as suits the purposes of

powerful others. Those who were once “Mughal invaders” have been transformed into an indigenous minority group by government decree.

In addition to fragmenting the Muslim community, the government is pursuing another divisive strategy. In late March 2022, Assam’s chief minister, Himanta Biswa Sarma, brought forward a proposal for a new approach to defining minority groups, one based on individual districts rather than entire states—an approach “clearly directed at benefitting Hindus in the Muslim-dominated districts.”<sup>44</sup> As the majority community in Assam, Hindus are presently ineligible for the government financial assistance available to minority communities—even if they happen to live in a district where the Hindu community is actually in a minority. Under a district-by-district system, however, Hindus who reside in Muslim-majority districts would be considered a minority group, to their obvious benefit. By the same token, miyas and Barak Valley Muslims living in the Muslim-majority districts of Hailakandi and Karimganj would no longer be able to claim minority status as Muslims, to their obvious detriment. The designation of minority groups is up to the central government, and Sarma’s proposal is currently under review by the Supreme Court—but, if adopted, it would draw another line of divide between the “indigenous” Assamese Muslim minority and the much larger community of “immigrant” Muslims.

Especially coming on the heels of the district-by-district proposal, another source of concern is Sarma’s announcement, early in June 2022, that the Assamese government intends to issue “minority certificates” to members of minority groups so as to provide them with official proof of their eligibility for financial aid and access to social welfare programs. Many Assamese Muslims live in rural areas and do agricultural labour. Education is a luxury that few can afford, and lack of education, coupled with scant opportunities for employment, has contributed to economic stagnation. Some thus view minority certificates, with their attendant benefits, as a doorway to economic and educational opportunities. Many of the indigenous Muslims are keen to partake of the government benefits and distance themselves from the other Muslim groups. Yet many other Muslims are skeptical of the idea. They see in it a BJP strategy designed to garner electoral support and undo the stronghold of the AIUFD and Congress-led alliances in Muslim-majority districts, as well as to shatter Muslims into multiple communities and reinforce the gap between the Assamese Muslim minority and the far more numerous miya and Barak Valley Muslims.<sup>45</sup>

Isolating the Muslim groups from one another marks the slow death of the Assamese Muslim community. Little by little, the fragmentation is orchestrated from the outside, until Assamese Muslims no longer have a sense of unity and the community becomes unrecognizable to itself as a community. Because of their elevated status both educationally and professionally, the goriyas had long been the most influential Muslim group. Their social place as nobles and administrators in the Ahom kingdom and later their high-ranking jobs in the colonial administration had allowed them to position themselves as the main representative community of the Muslims of Assam. Today, divided and pushed to the margins, the goriyas, who once proudly claimed to be “pure Assamese,” are being reduced to silence: they are observing their own demise. They had died in history once before by forgetting their past because they wanted to fit into the Assamese world. Today, the goriya Muslims are dying because they want to escape their Othering—dying without power, without unity, and without a way out. The shattering of Muslims, however, is more than a matter of one community. It threatens to weaken and ultimately obliterate the shared humanity of “we” in Assam.

### **Xanmiholi in the Future**

More than seven decades after independence, the politics of Hindutva has legitimized the colonial policy of divide and rule and the Othering of Muslims has become an act of patriotism. The BJP’s agenda requires forgetting the lived memories of xanmiholi. The Assamese have accordingly suppressed their local struggles; they have effaced the local histories, memories, and traditions upholding xanmiholi and are streamlining their desires to accord with the BJP’s vision of creating one nation, one people, one history of loyal Hindu Indians. Hindus who have not embraced this vision are deemed to be the enemy and are blamed for destroying Assam and India. Convincing the people of Assam that Hindutva will save them from the Muslims and demanding the sacrifice of former relationships with Muslims for a manufactured Hindu national identity allows Assam to be recast as an integral part of India and inserted into the narrative of Hindu power.

In turn, the BJP sees an opportunity to establish power in Northeast India, with Assam as the gateway to the region. The party’s most immediate goal is to ensure electoral victory. The target communities are the tea tribes and the plains tribes. Within these two groups there are no Muslims. Muslims working

in the tea industry are labeled *Julha* and are excluded from the tea tribe community. However, the converted Christians within the tea tribes and plains tribes are not excluded. The tea tribes and plains tribes constitute over a third of Assam's population, and they can play a decisive role in Assam's politics. Therefore, the BJP as well as the Indian National Congress party woos them with infinite promises of future opportunities for their support.

Like the *char-chapori miyas*, the tea labourers migrated to Assam during the colonial period. Unlike the Bengali immigrants, they did not move to Assam of their own free will. They were coerced, abducted, and physically forced to relocate by contractors and recruiters, who transported them from east and central India to work in the "tea gardens," where hellish indentured servitude awaited. They became "coolies," beasts of burden, for the thriving capitalist tea industry that grew rich on their backbreaking labour. The ostentatious lifestyle of the planter class contrasted starkly with the coolies' pitiful lives. Such contrasts illustrated the absolute power of the colonial regime over local people's lives.

Despite the abjection of tea garden life, the "coolies" numbered "well over a million" in 1919. Together with some 300,000 settlers from East Bengal, about 104,000 Nepalis, and another 100,000 casual visitors and temporary labourers from places such as East Bengal, Burma, and Bihar, the total population of "foreign and foreign extraction population" in Assam stood at 1,837,000 in 1921, or 28 percent of the total population of the state. Of this total were 1.3 million tea labourers.<sup>46</sup>

The inclusion of tea labourers as a community in Assam developed gradually. Despite low wages, by 1920 nearly 50,000 labourers whose work terms had expired owned land outside the plantations. As Assamese historian Jayeeta Sharma observes, "Relations with local society became less abrasive, although still marked by caste disdain," a shift of attitude evident in "the locals' gradual acceptance of 'garden *baat* (the plantation dialect)' as a form of the Asomiya language."<sup>47</sup> These labourers became the nucleus of Assam's tea tribe communities. Nobody sought to drive them out. While their social interaction with the Assamese was negligible, they rejected the derogatory term "coolie" and instead called themselves "tea tribes," the name given them by the state, or "Adivasis" ("original dwellers"), or *baganiya*, an Asomiya term meaning "garden people."<sup>48</sup> The case of the tea tribes offers a model for the inclusion of other groups in the spirit of a new *xanmiholi*, etching the path toward a humanistic future in Assam.

Today, the tea tribes are estimated to account for roughly 7 million of Assam's more than 35 million people—nearly 20 percent of the population. Their presence in electoral politics is immense. Recognizing that their support can be decisive in elections, both the Congress Party and the BJP make lucrative promises. One of the tea tribes' demands is their inclusion on the list of Scheduled Tribes, which will guarantee them "reservation" status with respect to political representation, access to higher education, and job hiring, along with a number of other constitutionally mandated benefits. They still await the fulfillment of this demand.<sup>49</sup>

There are also various plains tribal groups, who, as of the 2011 census, made up about 12.5 percent of Assam's population and can play a significant role in state politics. Assam's former chief minister, Sarbananda Sonowal, is, for example, from the Sonowal Kachari plains tribe community, now administered by the Sonowal Kachari Autonomous Council. The community is at this point thoroughly integrated into Assamese society, and the Sonowal Kacharis speak Assamese as their first language. The Bodo tribe, whose drive for independence was mentioned earlier, is similarly governed by the Bodoland Territorial Council, established in 2003. In 2020, the Bodos signed a further peace agreement with the Assam Government, and the Bodo language became an "associate official" language in Assam, alongside the Assamese language. Given their long history of oppression, including the plains tribes as part of the larger Assamese community is not only prudent but essential.

At the same time, the BJP has taken full advantage of the penetration of RSS cadres into tribal communities via humanitarian relief work, in which the RSS has been engaged for some time now.<sup>50</sup> Through projects such as establishing village schools, health care clinics, and vocational training centres, along with a variety of village social welfare projects, the RSS has drawn plains tribes' communities more closely into the Hindu fold. Influenced by the ideology of Hindutva, they learn to see their miya neighbours and even the Assamese Muslims as enemies.

The Assamese Hindus, who dominate Assam's politics, are divided in their approach toward the BJP. Generally, they support local or regional Assamese parties and reject control by Delhi (regardless of whether Congress or the BJP is in power). Winning the Assamese Hindu community over and rallying them together on a common national platform is the BJP's project—for which identifying the Muslims, particularly the miyas, as the alien Other is crucial.

Subdividing and certifying the “Assamese Muslims” as minorities and differentiating them from the Bangla-speaking miya and Barak Valley Muslims not only breaks up the Muslims into smaller communities, but it also makes them more vulnerable.<sup>51</sup> The char-chapori miyas, the largest Muslim community in Assam, are the most exposed and politically harassed. Despite embracing the Assamese language and choosing Assam as their homeland, they remain excluded. The fear that miya Muslims will change Assam’s demographics and consequently the balance of political power is a driving factor behind isolating them and discriminating against them. The BJP seeks to remove all miyas from the electoral roll to reduce the number of Muslim voters and to marginalize the community politically.

Hafiz Ahmed’s poem, “Write Down ‘I am a Miya,’” written in the context of the NRC, captures the agony of the miyas who, despite their century-plus contribution to Assam’s economy in the form of back-breaking labour, have been stripped of their rights as citizens and are now the targets of hate.<sup>52</sup> The fate of the Barak Valley Muslims, as well as the goriyas, is moot. They are distinguished from the other Assamese groups, and the Barak Valley Muslims are not even recognized as an indigenous community of Kachar origin, although their Kachari Hindu counterparts are. Muslims are strangers no matter how hard and how long they try to become part of the Assamese. What is ironic, though, is that Bangladesh is the fourth largest remittance source for India, and more than one million Indians are working there illegally.<sup>53</sup> Yet no one in Assam appears to be aware of this, whereas invented stories about Bangladeshi infiltration changing the demography and culture of Assam are a matter of daily discussion.

The colonials bequeathed to the Assamese a consciousness, whether real or imaginary, of the Other, expressed in the opposition between indigenous/outsider or native/stranger. The emotion invested in the construction called “Assamese” has taken many shapes and forms since then. In the postcolonial period, it became particularly evident in the founding moments of India (1947) and the struggle for Assamese subnational identity (1979–85). Assam has played out the ritual of hunting and humiliating the Muslims, particularly the miyas, as illegal Bangladeshis. The BJP government has extended the hatred to the other groups of Muslims as well. In 2006, the Sachar Committee Report on the social, economic, and educational status of the Muslim community in India established that the Muslims were on the lowest rung of the socio-economic ladder, even lower than the Dalits, who stand at the very

bottom of the caste hierarchy. Muslims' lack of opportunities for education and economic advancement, their experience of the everyday, routine violence carried out in the name of political cleansing in India and Assam, and now the threat of their removal from the register of citizens have made them the perfect strangers. Those of us who are not in their situation must remind ourselves that we can only dimly understand their daily trials. All the same, this understanding can help us to step beyond the blinkered view of politics and perceive a different way to be: in peace with the Other. Demanding assimilation is not enough. Tolerating difference does not erase aversion toward the Other because it does not remove the stain of Otherness.<sup>54</sup>

An authentic desire for inclusivity requires a new way of thinking coupled with positive actions that move away from narrow identitarian politics and expand the circle of a humanistic awareness of the Self. In Assam, this is a tall order in the current moment of hatred of the Other. Nonetheless, inclusivity is possible if we approach it in small chunks, as the story of the tea tribe illustrates. Unshakable confidence in one's identity as Assamese is possible when one can be Assamese and simultaneously a part of the human community. This is not watered-down Assamese-ness that I am calling for but an unclouded, easily recognizable Assamese identity that reaffirms the xanmiholi past and brings it forward into the future. A new xanmiholi human community is possible, for this is the Assamese way of being in peace with the Other.

## Notes

- 1 Quoted in Devjyot Ghoshal, "Amit Shah Vows to Throw Illegal Immigrants into Bay of Bengal," *Reuters*, April 12, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/india-election-speech/ amit-shah-vows-to-throw-illegal-immigrants-into-bay-of-bengal-idUSKCN1RO1YD>. For Shah's comments quoted at the chapter opening, see "Amit Shah: 100 Crore Infiltrators Entered Country, Eating It Like Termites," *Vartha Bharati*, September 24, 2018, <https://english.varthabharati.in/index.php/india/ amit-shah-100-crore-infiltrators-entered-country-eating-it-like-termites>. A crore is 10 million, so 100 crore is one billion. According to the Government of India, India's Muslim population is 20 crore, or 200 million. Ambika Pandit, "Muslim Population in 2023 Estimated to Be 20 Crore: Lok Sabha," *Times of India*, July 21, 2023, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/ muslim-population-in-2023-estimated-to-be-20-crore-lok-sabha/articleshow/101996898.cms?from=mdr>. The claim that one billion Muslims have infiltrated into the country is a hyperbole without evidence to support it.



- 2 See “Janagosthiya Samannay Parishad Asom Starts Census of Indigenous Assamese Muslims,” *The Sentinel*, April 17, 2021, <https://www.sentinelassam.com/topheadlines/janagosthiya-samannay-parishad-asom-starts-census-of-indigenous-assamese-muslims-534146>. At the time of the 2011 census, Muslims accounted for 34.22% of the population of Assam (with Hindus making up 61.47%): “Assam Hindu Muslim Population,” Population Census 2011, <https://www.census2011.co.in/data/religion/state/18-assam.html>. Only two states in India have a larger percentage population of Muslims: Lakshadweep (96.6% in 2011) and Jammu and Kashmir (68.3%): “Muslim Population in India,” Population Census, 2011, <https://www.census2011.co.in/data/religion/2-muslims.html>.
- 3 This narrative draws on two broad historiographical traditions that conspired to sideline the history of Muslims. In 1912, the newly founded Kamarupa Anusandhan Samiti (KAS), or Assam Research Society, embarked on a project to recover and promote Assam’s Hindu heritage. As an antiquarian society focused on documenting the Hindu cultural and religious tradition of Assam, the KAS collected materials dating back to the days of the Hindu kingdom of Kamarupa, which flourished from the mid-fourth century to the twelfth century in the Brahmaputra valley, an area subsequently occupied by the Ahom kingdom and is today the commercial and political center of Assam with Guwahati as the capital city of the state. With the development of another institution, the Directorate of Antiquarian and Historical Study (DHAS), founded in 1928 and headed by the well-known historian S. K. Bhuyan (1892–1964), a new trend of historical writing emerged, one grounded in the *buranjis*—the chronicles of the Ahom kingdom, written later in the precolonial period. Drawing on the *buranjis*, Bhuyan wrote many books that aimed to establish the greatness and valour of the Ahom kings in their struggles against the invading Mughal armies. For further discussion, see Arupjyoti Saikia, “History, Buranjis and Nation: Suryya Kumar Bhuyan’s Histories in Twentieth-Century Assam,” *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 45, no. 4 (2008): 473–507, esp. 482–84.
- 4 “Mughal Aggression Still On, Says Assam CM Sarbananda Sonowal,” *The Hindu*, October 10, 2020, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/mughal-aggression-still-on-says-assam-cm-sarbananda-sonowal/article32819866.ece>. See also Prasanta Majumdar, “Assam Polls: BJP Likens Ajmal’s Party to Mughals, Says Don’t Give into Their Aggression,” *New Indian Express*, October 12, 2020, <https://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2020/oct/12/assam-polls-bjp-likens-ajmals-party-to-mughals-says-dont-give-in-to-their-aggression-2209299.html>.
- 5 Syndicates backed by powerful political actors control illicit businesses in coal, betel nuts, eggs, cows, logging, brown sugar, drugs, and wildlife poaching. Environmental groups are concerned about the oil and gas drilling ventures of

OIL (Oil India Limited), which has caused irreparable environmental damage in eastern Assam; the mining activities of COAL India Limited (CIL); and the government's Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise (MSME) policy, which gives local land to outside investors. In view of such actions, the government's rhetoric about protecting Assam's environment, natural resources, and local culture and enhancing its economic potential do not ring true.

- 6 "Activists Akhil Gogoi, Pranab Doley to Contest Assam Polls with Few Thousand Rupees in Pockets," *Economic Times*, March 26, 2021, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/elections/assembly-elections/assam/activists-akhil-gogoi-pranab-doley-to-contest-assam-polls-with-few-thousand-rupees-in-pockets/articleshow/81705482.cms?from=mdr>. Gogoi won election to one of the seats in the Sivasagar (or Sibsagar) district.
- 7 See Yasmin Saikia, "The Muslims of Assam: Present/Absent History," in *North-east India: A Place of Relations*, edited by Yasmin Saikia and Amit R. Baishya (Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 111–34; *Fragmented Memories: Struggling to be Tai-Ahom in India* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010); and *In the Meadows of Gold: Telling Tales of the Swargadeos at the Cross Roads of Assam* (Guwahati: Spectrum Publications, 1997).
- 8 Committee for Protection of Land Rights of Indigenous People of Assam, *Final Report*, submitted by Rohini Kumar Baruah, Anil Kumar Bhattacharyya, Ajoy Kumar Dutta, and Romesh Borpatragohain, December 30, 2017, <https://pratidintime.sgp1.digitaloceanspaces.com/2018/05/BRAHMA-COMMITTEEM-Report.pdf>, 28, 9, 179. See also "B'deshis Have Swarmed into Assam Like 'Ants,'" *The Sentinel*, July 30, 2017, <https://www.sentinelassam.com/top-headlines/bdeshis-have-swarmed-into-assam-like-ants/>.
- 9 Keith Tester, *The Inhuman Condition* (London: Routledge, 1995), x.
- 10 Vinayak Damoodar Sarvakar, the founder of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangha (RSS) popularized this idea in his book *Hindutva: Who Is a Hindu?* (Bombay: Veer Sarvakar Prakashan, 1923). Madhav Sadashiv Gowalkar, also of the RSS, likewise made a strong appeal for a theocratic Hindu state inhabited by Hindu people in *We and Our Nation Defined* (Nagpur: Bharat Publications, 1949).
- 11 On the politics of Bangladeshi immigrants entering India illegally and stealing jobs, see Navine Murshid, *India's Bangladesh Problem: The Marginalization of Bengali Muslims in Neoliberal Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023).
- 12 The concept of Akhand Bharat is taught in the Vidya Bharati schools run by the right-wing Hindu nationalist Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangha (RSS). There are presently about 12,750 of these schools throughout India, with an

enrollment of nearly 33 million students (“Spread of Vidya Bharati,” accessed April 8, 2023, <https://www.vidyabharatialumni.org/spread>). In this view, Pakistan and Bangladesh are illegally occupying Indian land. The BJP presents this same idea in public forums. On June 14, 2020, cabinet minister Nitin Gadkari—speaking in the context of recent skirmishes along India’s disputed border with China, and taking the opportunity to refer back to the 1971 Indo-Pakistani War—announced in a public meeting in Gujarat that India does “not want land either of Pakistan and China,” tacitly blaming China and Pakistan as the aggressors (“India Does Not Want Land of China or Pakistan: Nitin Gadkari,” *NDTV India*, June 14, 2020, <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/nitin-gadkari-says-india-does-not-want-land-of-china-or-pakistan-2246204?pfom=home-topstories>). This is a very clever way of injecting the public with a dose of hostility toward India’s neighbours.

- 13 “Akhand Bharat’ the Undisputed Truth, Says RSS Chief Mohan Bhagwat,” *The Hindu*, April 1, 2023, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/people-in-pakistan-unhappy-believe-partition-was-mistake-says-rss-chief/article66686787.ece>.
- 14 The reclamation of land was among the recommendations of the Committee for Protection of Land Rights of Indigenous People of Assam, chaired by Hari Shankar Brahma. See, for example, Vivan Eyben, “Brahma Committee Recommends Strict Implementation of Land Laws,” *NewsClick*, May 12, 2018, <https://www.newsclick.in/brhma-committee-report-recommends-strict-implementation-land-laws>. In its December 2017 report, the committee stated: “Wherever unauthorized occupation has taken place by encroachment, the Government has a duty to clear such encroachments. And above all, occupation or settlement of land should be made only to the indigenous persons and there can be absolutely no ground to allow foreigners to be settled in any land,” adding that the “first and foremost duty of the government in such cases is to detect and deport them” (*Final Report*, December 30, 2017, <https://pratidintime.sgp1.digitaloceanspaces.com/2018/05/BRAHMA-COMMITTEEM-Report.pdf>, 74). These proposals were subsequently supported by another high-level government committee, convened in September 2019 and chaired by B. K. Sharma, which recommended that the “vast tracts” of char lands be cleared and then surveyed with a view to resettlement (*Report of the Committee on Implementation of Clause 6 of the Assam Accord*, February 10, 2020, <https://cjp.org.in/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Clause-VI.pdf>, 58).
- 15 There are many videos of his speeches on YouTube. In one of them, he explicitly denounces Muslims as foreigners in Assam and warns them either to conform to Hindutva or to leave Assam: see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v>

=faTi6uJoD-c, accessed on February 6, 2024. Himanta Biswa Sarma added another twist to this narrative on February 8, 2024, when he stated on the floor of the Assam State Assembly that Muslims of the Ahom kingdom are converts who should return to Hinduism to enjoy the benefits of land grants made by the BJP government. For a video of his speech (in Assamese), see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fjw8ZNuwX18>.

- 16 On the history of the NRC, see K. V. Thomas, “The Politics of NRC and Its Pan-Indian Dimensions,” December 6, 2019, Centre for Public Policy Research, <https://www.cppr.in/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/The-Politics-of-NRC-and-its-Pan-Indian-Dimensions.pdf>, 6–7.
- 17 On the emergence of miya poetry, see Jebeen Yasmeen, “Bengali Muslims in Assam and ‘Miyah’ Poetry: Walking on the Shifting Terrains of ‘Na-Asamiya’ and ‘Infiltrator,’” *Journal of Migration Affairs* 1, no. 2 (March 2019): 69–84, esp. 74–75. As Yasmeen points out, the use of the term *miya* helps to build a sense of political identity and self-empowerment, while it also calls on the surrounding society “to confront the humiliation it has meted out to a whole community for a long time and start a dialogue that is overdue” (75).
- 18 Abdul Kalam Azad, “Char Residents of Assam,” *India Exclusion Report, 2018–19* (New Delhi: Centre for Equity Studies and Three Essays Collective, 2019), <http://indiaexclusionreport.in/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Char-Residents-of-Assam.pdf>, 42. As Azad notes, the residents of chars currently inhabit under 4 percent of Assam’s cultivable land—and this small portion is rapidly eroding in annual floods. For further reading, see Manoj Goswani, *Char Settlers of Assam: A Demographic Study* (Guwahati: MRB Publishers, 2014).
- 19 Martin Rabha, “Status of Muslims in Higher Education in Assam: With Special Reference to Goalpara, Darrang and Kamrup (Rural) Districts,” working paper presented at “Conference on Rural India 2019: Towards Inclusion of the Marginalized,” VikasAnvesh Foundation, November 7–9, 2019, Pune, <http://www.vikasanvesh.in/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Status-of-Muslims-in-Higher-Education-Assam.pdf>, 2.
- 20 See Parvin Sultana, “The Nowhere People: Tales of the ‘Missing Villages’ in Assam,” *The News Mill*, August 2, 2020, <https://thenewsmill.com/2020/08/nowhere-people-missing-villages-in-assam/>.
- 21 The main detention centre is at Matia, in Goalpara district. The largest such facility in India, it opened early in 2023. See “Assam: First Batch of ‘Foreigners’ Shifted to Matia Detention Centre,” *The Wire*, January 30, 2023, <https://thewire.in/government/assam-first-batch-of-foreigners-shifted-to-matia-detention-centre>; and “India’s 1st Illegal Immigrant Detention Camp Size of 7 Football Fields,” *NDTV*, September 12, 2019, <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/assam>

-detention-centre-inside-indias-1st-detention-centre-for-illegal-immigrants-after-nrc-school-ho-2099626.

- 22 Bikash Singh, "Muslims Constitute 35% of Assam's Population, They Cannot Be a Minority, Says CM Sarma," *Economic Times*, March 16, 2022, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/muslims-constitute-35-of-assams-population-they-cannot-be-a-minority-says-cm-sarma/articleshow/90245598.cms>. The term "Sankari" culture is associated with the Ekasarana Dharma, a form of Vaishnavism promulgated by Srimanta Sankardeva (1449–1568) that became popular among the non-Brahminic masses in Assam. The Ahom rulers did not adhere to the Ekasarana Dharma but adopted the Sakta form of Hinduism that was dominated by the Brahmin priests. The Ahom kings Rudra Singha (1686–1714) and Siva Singha (1714–44), and the latter's consort, Phuleswari Konwari, were patrons of this form of Hinduism. On the Ahom court of the period, see Sumayak Ghosh, "Two Kings in the Tungkhungia Court? Love and Courtly Culture in Early Eighteenth-Century Hindustan," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 42, no. 2 (August 2022): 348–55. The contestations between the two forms of Hinduism became intense and led to the Moamoria Rebellion (1780–1810), a protracted revolt of the followers of Sankari Hinduism against the Ahom rule. See Saikia, *In the Meadows of Gold*, 128–29, 226. Nonetheless, today, Sarma, although he is a Brahmin, makes frequent reference to the Sankari culture as the culture of the "genuine" Assamese.
- 23 Kaustavmoni Boruah, "'Foreigners' in Assam and Assamese Middle Class," *Social Scientist* 8, no. 11 (1980): 44–57, at 51. See also Debarshi Das and Arupjiyoti Saikia, "Early Twentieth Century Agrarian Assam: A Brief and Preliminary Overview," *Economic and Political Weekly* 46, no. 41 (October 8, 2011): 73–80. As they note, by the time of the Second World War, Assam had become India's third largest jute producer (76–77).
- 24 B. C. Allen, "Assam," *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts* 75, no. 3892 (1927): 764–86, at 765.
- 25 For an insightful account of the gradual settlement of Alopatis in Barpeta district, see Mofidur Rahman, "Historical Account of *Char-Chapori* Muslims in Assam Vis-à-Vis the Muslims of Alopatis: An Introduction," chap. 3 in "Living at the Margin: A Comparative Study on Majuli and Alopatis River Island, Assam," PhD diss., Department of Political Science, Gauhati University, 2018, <https://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in:8443/jspui/handle/10603/267643>.
- 26 Amalendu Guha, *Planter Raj to Swaraj: Freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics in Assam, 1826–1947* (New Delhi: Indian Council of Historical Research, 1977), 207. See also *Report of the Line System Committee*, vol. 1 (Shillong: Assam Government Press, 1938), 1–4.

- 27 Makhhanlal Kar, *Muslims in Assam Politics* (Delhi: Omsons Publications, 1990), 68. See also Cai-fong Chan, “British Colonial Policy on Frontier Areas Adjoining Assam and Burma: With Special Reference to the Crown Colony Scheme,” *Journal of the Japanese Association for South Asian Studies* 13 (2001): 76–106, at 95, 105n99 for the reproduction of Lord Wavell’s statement on this issue.
- 28 Suryasikha Pathak, “Tribal Politics in the Assam: 1933–1947,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 45, no. 10 (March 6, 2010): 61–69, at 63.
- 29 Kar, *Muslims in Assam Politics*, 7.
- 30 Ahmed Abu Naser Sayad, *Nationality Question in Assam: The EPW 1980–81 Debate* (Guwahati: Omeo Kumar Das Institute of Social Change and Development, 2006), 122. As Yasmeen notes, the national literary society, the Assam Sahitya Sabha, supported the efforts of the miyas to assimilate and accepts them today as Na-Asamiya (“Bengali Muslims in Assam and ‘Miyah’ Poetry,” 73).
- 31 On this violence, see, for example, “Atrocities Against Assam Muslims Must Cease, Demand Indian Americans,” *Mills Gazette*, May 9, 2014, <https://www.millgazette.com/news/indian-muslims-press-statements/10403-atrocities-against-assam-muslims-must-cease-now-demand-indian-americans/>; and Yasmin Saikia, “Blame ‘Em, Bludgeon ‘Em,” *Outlook India*, February 5, 2022, <https://web.archive.org/web/20210113120234/https://magazine.outlookindia.com/story/blame-em-bludgeon-em/281846>. For an analysis of the Bodo movement, see Monoj Kumar Nath, “Bodo Insurgency in Assam: New Accord and New Problems,” *Strategic Analysis* 2003 (October–December): 533–45.
- 32 I was in Assam in March 2020, when the COVID pandemic hit, and was unable to leave until the lockdown ended. During that time, I had the opportunity to engage a variety of people on the miya problem and almost all expressed fear of the “Bangladeshis.” I befriended a couple of miya boatmen and, after the lockdown was lifted, invited them to my apartment, much to the shock of my neighbours and the staff of the building. It was not the fear of COVID: they were certain that the “Bangladeshis will steal and rob the residents,” as one of my neighbours put it. Another remarked, however, that she was able to see that “the Bangladeshis are just like us.” In a fleeting moment, the distance between “them” and “us” was overcome—but, in the face of the rampant anti-Muslim sentiment, it seemed that my neighbour was expressing an insight that was new to her, and I was doubtful that this moment of shared humanity would last.
- 33 On the AIUDEF, see Monoj Kumar Nath, “Muslim Politics in Assam: The Case of AIUDEF,” *Studies in Indian Politics* 7, no. 1 (2019): 33–43, esp. 35–38.
- 34 See Avik Chakraborty, “KMSS Leader Held for CAA Violence,” *The Telegraph*, January 20, 2020, <https://www.telegraphindia.com/north-east/kmss-leader-sashi-sensowa-held-for-caa-violence/cid/1737546>. Gogoi’s arrest was widely reported,

- but for his own comments, see Abhishek Saha, “Akhil Gogoi Rules Out ‘Maoist’ Links, Calls Arrest ‘Ploy to Delegitimise Movement’ Against Citizenship Law,” *Indian Express*, December 18, 2019, <https://indianexpress.com/article/north-east-india/assam/akhil-gogoi-interview-citizenship-act-assam-protests-6172858/>.
- 35 On the government’s repressive response to CAA opposition, see Nazimuddin Siddique and Roshni Sengupta, “Assam: Anti-CAA Protests and the Silence of the Media,” *The Polis Project*, January 15, 2020, <https://www.thepolisproject.com/read/assam-anti-caa-protests-and-the-silence-of-the-media/>. “The heavy hand of the State,” they write, “has left five protestors and several injured with the police firing live bullets on unarmed crowds.”
- 36 For an in-depth look at these evictions and the evolution of land policy in Assam, Teesta Setalvad, “Assam Discord,” *Frontline*, October 22, 2021, <https://cjp.org.in/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/FL-EBook-22-10-2021-pages-4-13.pdf>. Assam’s new land policy, promulgated in November 2019, was based on the final recommendations of the Committee for Protection of Land Rights of Indigenous People of Assam, popularly known as the Brahma Committee. The committee stipulated that the government should reclaim land currently occupied by “encroachers,” who would then be evicted. The committee gave scant attention to the question of where those evicted might be resettled.
- 37 See, for example, Kabir Firaque and Tora Agarwala, “Assam’s Muslims: Why Some Have Been Declared ‘Indigenous’ and Some Left Out,” *Indian Express*, July 13, 2022, <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-who-are-assam-indigenous-muslims-8022121/>, which includes a description of the five groups as defined by the Assamese government. See also Pallab Bhattacharya, “Fresh Churn for the Muslims of Assam,” *Daily Star*, April 26, 2022, <https://www.thedailystar.net/views/opinion/news/fresh-churn-the-muslims-assam-3012371>.
- 38 I learned this during a conversation with several board members of the mosque on January 28, 2023.
- 39 That said, the majority of syeds in Assam claim to be the descendants of Azan Faqir (also known by his birth name, Shah Miran), the most famous Sufi teacher in Assam. He lived during the seventeenth century, but his lineage is unknown, nor is there any record of him in the buranjis. It is only in the poetry composed by his followers that we get a glimpse of his religious orientation and work.
- 40 Abu Nisar Md. Irshad Ali, “Marriage Among the Assamese Muslims,” in *North East India: A Sociological Study*, edited by S. M. Dubey (Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 1978), 111–23.
- 41 My own family traces its history back to immigrants from Delhi who arrived in Assam in 1604. On the settlement of goriya Muslims in the Ahom kingdom,

- including my family, see Saikia, “The Muslims of Assam,” in *Northeast India*, ed. Saikia and Baishya, 119–23.
- 42 See Saikia, Chronicles III, IV, and V, in Saikia, *In the Meadows of Gold*, 57–137. Ironically, the term “Bongal”—originally the name given to people from the Mughal province that today includes Bangladesh—came to refer to any outsider.
- 43 I borrow this term from Orlando Patterson, who coined it with reference to the condition of Black slaves in the United States, who were widely viewed as not fully human. See Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).
- 44 Pallab Bhattacharya, “Fresh Churn for the Muslims of Assam,” *Daily Star*, April 26, 2022, <https://www.thedailystar.net/views/opinion/news/fresh-churn-the-muslims-assam-3012371>. For an extended discussion, see also Utpal Parashar, “Assam CM for District-wise Definition of Minority,” *Hindustan Times*, March 31, 2022, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/assam-cm-for-district-wise-definition-of-minority-101648666846530.html>.
- 45 See Nayan Kumar Moni, “Beyond Common Consciousness: Understanding the Rise of Separate Identity Consciousness Among Indigenous Muslims of Assam.” *Asian Ethnicity* 25 (2024), published online January 3, 2024.
- 46 G. T. Lloyd, *Census of India, 1921*, vol. 3, *Assam*, pt 1: *Report* (Shillong: Government Press, Assam, 1923): 5, 44.
- 47 Jayeeta Sharma, “‘Lazy Natives,’ Coolie Labour, and the Assam Tea Industry,” *Modern Asian Studies* 43, no. 6 (2009): 1287–1324, at 1318.
- 48 Sharma, “‘Lazy Natives,’ Coolie Labour,” 1321. As Sharma notes, “Adivasi”—literally “dweller from the beginning”—conveys a political message. The term came into use in India during the 1930s as an expression of solidarity among indigenous tribal groups, and its use by tea workers is an assertion of a shared identity.
- 49 See Risha Chitlangia, “Congress MP Slams BJP over Delay in Awarding ST Status to 6 Indigenous Communities in Assam,” *The Print*, July 25, 2023, <https://theprint.in/politics/congress-mp-slams-bjp-over-delay-in-awarding-st-status-to-6-indigenous-communities-in-assam/1684450/>.
- 50 On the humanitarian agenda of the RSS, see Syeda Ambia Zahan, “The Bitter-Sweet Hindutva Experiment Deep in Tribal-Dominated Northeast India,” *Outlook India*, May 30, 2022, <https://www.outlookindia.com/national/the-bitter-sweet-hindutva-experiment-deep-in-tribal-dominated-northeast-india--news-199256>.
- 51 Miya lawyer Aman Wadud explained to me that “the miyas are the shield for the goriyas. Once the BJP weakens the miyas, they will attack the goriyas, but the goriyas are not paying attention to this because they are so keen to be loved and accepted by the BJP.” Personal communication, February 2, 2024.



- 52 For Ahmed's poem, see "I Am 'Miya'—Reclaiming Identity Through Protest Poetry," *Sabrang India*, July 3, 2019, <https://sabrangindia.in/i-am-miya-reclaiming-identity-through-protest-poetry/>. As an assertion of political identity and also a form of protest, miya poetry has provoked backlash from the Assamese. In 2019, for example, during the months leading up to the passage of the CAA, legal complaints were filed against a group of miya activist-poets, including Ahmed, for allegedly fomenting violence through their poetry. See Geetanjali Gurlhosur, "On the Riverine Islands of Assam: The Resistance of Miyah Poetry and the Women Writing It," *Ritimo*, April 4, 2022, <https://www.ritimo.org/On-the-Riverine-Islands-of-Assam-the-Resistance-of-Miyah-Poetry-and-the-Women>.
- 53 "Bangladesh Becomes 4th Largest Remittance Source for India," *Daily Industry*, June 7, 2022, <https://dailyindustry.news/bangladesh-becomes-4th-largestremittance-source-for-india/>.
- 54 See Wendy Brown, *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006) for an important argument against tolerating Others as a policy of differentiating rather than including them.

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### 3 **Bordering and Everyday Peace with the Other**

Kathryn Cassidy

The routine violence of bordering regimes has become deeply embedded in the heart of communities, disrupting the conviviality of everyday life in plural, cosmopolitan cities as more and more people are forced to check others' immigration status to determine their access to a range of services.<sup>1</sup> In this chapter, I explore what the emergence of this everyday bordering, that is, the embedding of immigration checks into everyday encounters with state and non-state actors, means for everyday peace with "the Other."<sup>2</sup>

As Philippa Williams has acknowledged, peace is not "trouble free" but "a process which is always complexly and intricately intertwined with forms of violence."<sup>3</sup> Williams' understanding of everyday peace is useful here, as it incorporates analysis of human agency's role in producing peace in the everyday context, including how and why actors differentially orientate themselves toward others.

In this chapter, I draw upon examples from the United Kingdom to illustrate how the advent of everyday bordering has intersected with existing inequalities that form part of what Galtung terms "negative peace," that is, an absence of particular forms of "spectacular violence." The chapter is based upon participant observation with an activist organization in the northeast of England and analysis of data from secondary sources, including parliamentary debates, media, and third-sector reports and briefings.<sup>4</sup> Through this analysis, I elucidate the violences that operate through policy-making and into the operationalization of the border and immigration regimes in the United Kingdom. However following Harry Bregazzi and Mark Jackson,<sup>5</sup> I balance

critique of everyday peace through a focus on violence by illuminating everyday peaceful actions that are extending and proliferating within the hostility of everyday bordering. I highlight just some of the socio-spatial relations that produce non-violence. Through these acts of care, love, and support, I show how unmasking the violence of everyday bordering does not always have to challenge claims to peace with the Other.

## Everyday Bordering in Britain

In research undertaken between 2013 and 2017 as part of the EUBorderscapes project funded by the European Union, my colleagues Nira Yuval-Davis, Georgie Wemyss, and I elaborated the concept of everyday bordering. At the time, the UK government was developing and introducing legislation to create a “hostile environment” for a group they called “illegal immigrants.”<sup>6</sup> Until the 1990s, most of the United Kingdom’s bordering regime focused on filtering people either before or when they reached its borders. As Don Flynn has explained, in a global context, the United Kingdom was generally considered a difficult country to enter—but once you arrived and effectively crossed the border, you could build a life for yourself.<sup>7</sup> However, the end of the 1990s saw a shift toward internal surveillance, initially of refugee communities and movements, which has become more pervasive and encompassing with successive legislation.

Internalized bordering has historically turned residents into what Nick Vaughan-Williams has called “citizen-detectives” with a focus on combating terrorism.<sup>8</sup> Internal structures drawn into bordering regimes include the welfare state and the labour market; certain migrants have received limited access to state support or had no recourse to public funds at all, while others were given little or no access to employment opportunities. For asylum seekers, whose status the state has not yet determined and who are subjected to some of the most stringent restrictions on their everyday activities,<sup>9</sup> this has often meant temporary suspension in limbo or grey zones and an inability to access employment and many forms of state support.<sup>10</sup> Internalized bordering expanded to incorporate some European Union (EU) migrants following its 2004 and 2007 enlargements. Access to social security was restricted and, after 2007, Romanian and Bulgarian citizens were unable to freely access the labour market.<sup>11</sup> Everyday bordering policies have been supported by high-profile media campaigns following UK Border Force workers on raids,<sup>12</sup>

which have embedded symbolic violence against particular groups in popular discourses.

Despite a clear trajectory toward developing internalized bordering in the United Kingdom, the announcement of the “hostile environment” policy in 2012 denoted an explicit intensification of these processes and practices.<sup>13</sup> Subsequent legislation in 2014 and 2016 embedded immigration checks in the privately rented housing sector and banks; extended existing checks in employment, social security, marriage/civil partnerships and health care; increased sanctions for employers, landlords and National Health Service (NHS) trusts who failed to identify those whose immigration status precluded them from accessing these services; and introduced a range of new offences, such as driving without being “lawfully resident.” This marked shift increasingly differentiates processes and practices of everyday bordering from the more familiar “firewall bordering,” or filtering of would-be border-crossers prior to and at territorial borders through visa and visa-free regimes.<sup>14</sup>

“Everyday bordering” specifically refers to the introduction of immigration checks into more and more routine encounters and the co-option of more and more UK residents into administering these checks—residents who are neither trained by nor work for the UK state and for whom the sanctions, should they fail to carry out these checks correctly, have also become increasingly severe. As we shall see, everyday bordering not only restricts access for those without lawful immigration status, whose ability to survive in the United Kingdom the legislation seeks to curtail, but also for other non-citizens and settled populations whose identity documents are confusing to everyday border workers or who are unable to prove their status.<sup>15</sup>

Everyday bordering is not unique to the United Kingdom; there are examples of the increasing internalization of border regimes in other countries, such as the United States,<sup>16</sup> Denmark and Turkey.<sup>17</sup> However, the speed of these changes in the United Kingdom, alongside the way the hostile environment policy has come to dominate political and popular discourse, has made everyday bordering the focus of a vast body of research across the social sciences.<sup>18</sup> In particular, there is interest in how everyday bordering exacerbates existing inequalities and contributes to the violences of everyday life for minoritized people in the United Kingdom.<sup>19</sup>

## Everyday Violence, Everyday Peace

For a number of decades now, scholars have been involved in highlighting that peace cannot be assumed to exist in the absence of spectacular violence. Slavoj Žižek, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida, amongst others, have all theorized violences beyond those of conflict and war.<sup>20</sup> A lack of spectacular violence can in fact conceal the uneven relations, which are foundational to certain forms of violence. An absence of spectacular violence was conceptualized by Johan Galtung as a “negative peace.”<sup>21</sup> For Galtung, “positive peace” is tied to social justice. It would involve an absence also of the slow violences of inequality, which, as we shall see, everyday bordering very much perpetuates. As Gyanendra Pandey suggests,<sup>22</sup> we need to understand this “routine” violence as both material and rhetorical. Indeed, one of Žižek’s contributions to this body of thought was to suggest separating the subjective violence of actions from the objective violence of society’s foundations. Žižek further defines objective violence as comprising symbolic violence, for example, language, and systemic violence, emanating from political and economic systems.

Rachel Pain, in particular, has been developing feminist understandings of violence and war that transcend their association with armed conflict within and between states.<sup>23</sup> She argues that a focus on spectacular violence has drawn attention away from the most prevalent violence across the world—domestic violence—which is rooted in and connected to other forms of violence. This “complex of violence” for Pain entangles differing forms of violence, which she sees as relational. However, as Phillipa Williams has argued in relation to India, “the focus on violent events means that actual lived realities . . . characterized by intercommunity everyday peace, risk being occluded.”<sup>24</sup> Therefore, if we are to extend our understanding and analysis of peace to incorporate “hidden” everyday forms of violence, we must also ask how peaceful actions intersect with violence in the context of socio-spatial relations. Violence is not only relational to its differing forms but also to peace.

Everyday bordering in the UK subjects some groups and individuals to the daily violences of inequality and forms part of a structure of unequal power and life choices. Socially produced harms, such as those experienced through everyday bordering, are naturalized discursively and materially. Slow violence “occurs gradually and out of sight, [it is] a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all.”<sup>25</sup> As Pain has argued, slow violence is also “spatially

disproportionate” and more likely to be felt by those who are already “made vulnerable.” Although often invisible, its impacts are much greater than spectacular violence. For Laurie and Shaw, violence is therefore not a subjective condition but conditions subjects; violent conditions exist but are only *felt* by certain groups, hence the assumption by majoritized populations of a dominance of peace.<sup>26</sup> Such violence remains in the minds of those who have been subjected to it long after the conditions are removed.<sup>27</sup>

Here I think it is important that we seek to unpack the essentializing ideas of bordering, rather than simply replicating them, by exploring everyday bordering as something that impacts more than just migrant or minoritized communities. The dispossession of everyday bordering is not only felt by migrants and racialized minorities (although the impacts upon them are often much greater) who are subject to immigration checks in everyday life but also by those who have been working in antiracist and other struggles for decades to de-border everyday life and build greater social justice for migrants and racialized minorities. Everyday bordering, therefore, has disrupted an imagined trajectory toward a more equal society. While peace may always be in a process of becoming, it can also be in a process of unbecoming; that is to say, the movement toward positive peace is neither linear nor assumed.<sup>28</sup> Any study that attempts to understand peace must “expose the conflicts and injustices that pass as ‘putative peace,’ to expose the violence of peace.”<sup>29</sup> However, an analysis of peace cannot begin and end with violence but should explore the complex intertwining and connections between violence and peace as they unfold in everyday encounters.<sup>30</sup>

## The Violent Inequalities of Everyday Bordering

In this section, I show how everyday bordering both extends existing inequalities and creates new ones in the United Kingdom. In order to do this, I focus on two different groups: settled populations from the former British Empire who became involved in the so-called Windrush scandal, and asylum seekers, whose right to remain in the United Kingdom remains undetermined. In doing so, I show why the violent, hostile conditions of everyday bordering are not equally felt.<sup>31</sup> This is important in understanding the potentialities of peace with the Other in multicultural societies, where immigration checks in a range of everyday encounters may be felt differently, depending on the social positioning and situated gaze of those checking/being checked.<sup>32</sup>

## Settled Minoritized Communities and the Windrush Scandal

The term “Windrush generation” has been used to refer to West Indian adults and children who arrived in Britain from the Caribbean between 1948 and 1973, initially through free movement (from 1948) and then from 1963 with increasing restrictions on their rights to move to and settle in the United Kingdom.<sup>33</sup> Free movement was facilitated by the Commonwealth of Nations, a global association of member states that had previously comprised much of the British Empire. The term Windrush comes from the name of a passenger ship, the HMT *Empire Windrush*, which was one of the first to bring a large group of West Indians (more than 1,000) to the UK after the end of the Second World War. After settling in the United Kingdom, many of the Windrush generation and their descendants were subjected to the routine violences that comprise negative peace, from racist hate crimes perpetrated by the majoritized population to structural and institutional racisms that reduced social mobility and embedded socio-economic inequalities that persist today.

After the introduction of the United Kingdom’s everyday bordering regime through the 2014 and 2016 Immigration Acts, some of the Windrush generation found it impossible to prove their status in the United Kingdom and were denied access to employment, health care, housing, and state support, which in turn led to destitution, deportation, or even death in some cases.<sup>34</sup> Everyday bordering required UK residents to prove their immigration status in a wide array of everyday encounters and placed the burden of proving that status on these individuals.<sup>35</sup> This was particularly problematic in the case of the Windrush generation, for whom the frequent changes in legislation during their settlement period created complexity, furthered by a 2009 decision (enacted in 2010) to destroy landing cards—the only record of the date of arrival of thousands of people from the Caribbean.

The impacts of everyday bordering on the Windrush generation became the focus of a political scandal in 2018, which eventually led to the resignation of the then home secretary, Amber Rudd. However, popular and media engagement with the scandal replicated the idea that the Windrush generation had been incorrectly “caught up” in policies that were targeted at “illegal immigrants” and sought to de-border a group of people who had been incorrectly “bordered.”<sup>36</sup> The Windrush generation exemplified violent inequalities being felt by a group who were not the “Other” constructed in popular and political discourses surrounding the “hostile environment”



policy. Theresa May's designation of some people as "illegal migrants" has proved pervasive in UK public and political discourse. May, the home secretary responsible for the hostile environment policy, made a number of claims pertaining to this "group."

In her speech introducing the first piece of legislation to the House of Commons in October 2013, May stated, "We will do everything we can to make it harder for illegal migrants to establish a settled life in the United Kingdom when they have no right to be here."<sup>37</sup> This established that the "Otherness" of this particular group warranted depriving them of the opportunity for any form of settled life. In particular, she went on to contrast these migrants with those she describes as "legitimate," elucidating the "arche-violence" that Derrida refers to as being sited in language:<sup>38</sup>

Finally, the Bill will clamp down on those who live and work in the United Kingdom illegally and take advantage of our public services. That is not fair to the British public, and it is not fair to the legitimate migrants who contribute to our society and economy.<sup>39</sup>

This legitimacy is defined not only by legal status but also by "contribution" to "our" society and economy. Later in the same speech, the then home secretary extended this logic further to generate a clearer distinction as being one of paying into the public purse. Here, "hard working taxpayers" are defined as having to "compete" with this Other, directly envisaging conflict between these groups:

It is frankly ridiculous that the Government has to operate such a complex system to deal with foreigners who fail to abide by our laws. It is ridiculous that the odds are stacked in favour of illegal migrants. It is unacceptable that hard working taxpayers have to compete with people who have no right to be here.<sup>40</sup>

The rhetorical elements of this routine violence are evident in the reference not only to foreigners but to the possession of "our laws." This violence extends to the suggestion that the current system is favourable to those without status in the country at the expense of "taxpayers." Such an assertion is entirely false. Those forced to take up work without the right to do so are most often at a huge disadvantage, which is not only compounded by existing laws but created by them.<sup>41</sup> This sleight-of-hand, which focuses on the individuals systematically excluded and made vulnerable to exploitation as the "Other" and

hinders a more just and fair society, must be understood as a key impediment toward a positive peace with the Other. While such foci remain, systemic barriers are obscured and fail to be addressed, and the prospects for positive peace are diminished.

The contributory focus—that is, the lack of paying into shared resources through tax—is common in discourses surrounding migration and was reflected back in the scandal that surrounded the Windrush generation’s treatment;<sup>42</sup> in both the words of Donald Biggs, one of the victims, and the media coverage of the scandal:

I daren’t go anywhere or do anything—I didn’t want to be stopped and told I was an illegal immigrant. A solicitor told me: Immigration could knock on your door any time and you could be taken into detention if you don’t get this sorted. It frightened the living daylights out of us. I’d paid taxes here for decades. The more I think about it the more it makes me angry.<sup>43</sup>

Here, one of the Windrush generation explains how he was afraid of being classified as an “illegal immigrant” but also refers to the contribution he had been making for decades in the form of taxes to demonstrate how he was not the “Other” that the policy sought to exclude and unsettle. In a further report published in February 2020, the journalist responsible for researching and uncovering the scandal refers to the Home Office’s “mistake in wrongly classifying thousands of Commonwealth-born people who came to the United Kingdom as children in the 1950s and 1960s as illegal immigrants.”<sup>44</sup> The claim that this is the institution’s error is incorrect and further obscures the violence that the exclusion represents—an exclusion that was known, perhaps not specifically, but in general terms. Member of Parliament Sarah Teather referenced this exclusion while the legislation was being discussed in Parliament:

These are the sort of people I worry will fall foul of the Bill because they struggle to provide their documentation. We know that there are a lot of people who fall through the net when they are first given refugee status and end up destitute. They make up the bulk of the people whom the British Red Cross deals with in terms of food parcels because they cannot prove their entitlement to benefits. A significant number of people have the right to stay but will struggle to be able to prove it.<sup>45</sup>

The comment by the MP for a London borough demonstrates that there were some people with status who were unable to prove it because they did not have documentation from the Home Office. Prior to the new legislation, some of them were already being forced into destitution, unable to get a job or any form of state support. Therefore, the legislation was understood to create and further the inequalities central to negative peace, intensifying the routine violences of everyday life for minoritized groups. This analysis suggests we should view the legislation's impacts on the Windrush generation not as a mistake but as an accepted part of the systemic violence against minoritized communities in contemporary Britain.

### Seeking Asylum

One of the groups subjected to routine violence—material and rhetorical—in the United Kingdom are those who seek refuge under international human rights laws. The systemic harms of the UK asylum process are well documented in a range of academic literature.<sup>46</sup> A society that continues to create and support institutions, processes and practices that harm some of its members in this way cannot be understood as peaceful.

Asylum seekers have increasingly been subjected to rhetorical violence, which focuses on and questions the “genuineness” of their claim. Questions of genuineness in relation to asylum are present in public and political debates on immigration. The term “genuine asylum seeker” is often juxtaposed with so-called “economic migrants”:

More than 300,000 people have crossed the Mediterranean to Europe so far this year. These people came from different countries under different circumstances. Some are economic migrants in search of a better life in Europe; many are refugees fleeing conflict. It is vital to distinguish between the two.<sup>47</sup>

Public discourses of genuineness are often shaped by policy programs, which seek to define and support “vulnerable” refugees. Since early 2014, resettlement schemes have brought refugees living in camps—initially from Syria—directly to the United Kingdom, thus seeking to reduce exploitation and human trafficking. The Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS—also known as the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Programme) prioritizes the elderly, the disabled and victims of sexual violence and torture. In addition, the UK

government also introduced a scheme for resettling vulnerable children (and their families) fleeing conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa. And the Dubs Amendment to the 2016 Immigration Act agreed to resettle unaccompanied refugee minors living in Europe.<sup>48</sup> All of these schemes created particular definitions of vulnerability, which emerge in popular discourses surrounding the “genuineness” of asylum seekers.

Discourses of genuineness intersect with the ongoing convergence of asylum and terrorism, which has been developing since the mid-2000s.<sup>49</sup> Those designated as “Other” are often met with suspicion as governments attempt to manage perceived risks.<sup>50</sup> These regimes of immigration and border control that prioritize the vulnerable cast doubt on the claims of those unable to seek refuge via these resettlement routes and place them at risk of systemic harms during the asylum process. Due to everyday bordering, these systemic violences are experienced more and more in everyday life, and frequently perpetrated on the state’s behalf by a range of everyday actors, from doctors’ receptionists who refuse to register asylum seekers for care to which they are entitled to check-out staff who refuse to accept Home Office-issued payment cards.<sup>51</sup>

Therefore, state violences against asylum seekers in the United Kingdom are also material. Denied access to both the labour market and to social security/state support, the vast majority are forced into destitution. It is only then that the state steps in and affords support, but only as exception and outside of the parameters supporting the rest of the population. For example, they are housed in accommodation primarily located in areas of social deprivation, which often does not meet basic health and safety requirements and which, during the COVID-19 pandemic, were exposed as unsafe shelter during lockdown measures.<sup>52</sup> In addition to the forced displacement associated with accommodation, reporting regimes for asylum seekers discipline their mobilities. State levels of cash support are well below those of the general population; some asylum seekers receive no cash support at all. They receive access to health care but often experience difficulties in accessing needed care.<sup>53</sup> Many also live with the threat of being detained—the United Kingdom is one of the few countries with no time limit on immigration detention.

Importantly, as everyday bordering has intensified in the United Kingdom, the state has also co-opted more and more UK residents into enforcing its bordering regime through immigration checks in everyday life. State and systemic violence toward asylum seekers has become routinized in everyday encounters.

From refusing to open bank accounts to requesting unnecessary documentation for primary health care registration and controlling how asylum seekers spend their limited cash, an army of untrained immigration officials b/orders asylum seekers in the United Kingdom.<sup>54</sup> What are the prospects for everyday, positive peace within such a regime? Below, I present examples of how communities are responding to everyday bordering and carving out new spaces for creating positive peace with the Other in everyday life.

## **Disordering Everyday Bordering and Building Positive Peace**

In this section, I want to explore how the violent inequalities of everyday bordering in the United Kingdom have shaped potential spaces for building positive peace. Ince argues that “anti-fascist organizing can be unpredictable, following the shifting ideologies and dynamics of its opponents.”<sup>55</sup> This is also evident with efforts to disorder state bordering, as actions emerge as responses to new and existing bordering processes and practices. Accounts of everyday co-operation prevent the dominance of elite voices in narratives surrounding border regimes. We “must attend to the entwinement of Selfhood and Otherness in multiple spaces and times.”<sup>56</sup> Part of building positive peace can be in the shifting of the epistemological gaze to read for peaceful acts in everyday life at a time when positive peace seems distant. Everyday encounters are sites of contestation comprising acts of violence and peace.

### **Borderwork, Peacework**

Firstly, I want to focus on how forcibly conscripting UK residents into state borderwork actually leads to a proliferation in borderwork, more broadly conceived, and presents opportunities for everyday peacework. Rumford reminds us that the making of state borders has never been solely the work of the state—its institutions and actors.<sup>57</sup> Making territory integral to the state has long engaged a range of different social actors.<sup>58</sup> Some have supported and engaged with the central government’s political project of belonging that underpins border regimes;<sup>59</sup> others have challenged this or presented alternative political projects of belonging.<sup>60</sup>

However, for many, especially those from the majoritized population whose belonging is rarely (if ever) questioned, engagement with borderwork

was limited to passively accepting state bordering regimes; that is to say that they were not actively involved in the labour of state political projects of belonging, either by administering state bordering regimes or taking a position on who does or does not belong in the United Kingdom, which would lead them to actively support or oppose state bordering regimes. Everyday bordering legislation and the surrounding mediation of it have made it more difficult for some in the majoritized population to continue their tacit complicity in the violent inequalities of bordering regimes. This has been particularly evident in the delivery of health care, where professional bodies and other organizations have become outspoken critics of everyday bordering. The Royal College of Midwives (RCM) collaborated with the non-governmental organization Maternity Action to investigate the impact of charging regimes on midwives. Charging is the main mechanism the UK government use for bordering the NHS and some of its services. In a foreword to the report that resulted from the collaboration, RCM Chief Executive Gill Walton stated:

Cost Recovery in the NHS is not new, but recent legislative changes in England have made the NHS part of what is known as the “hostile environment.” This report has found that midwives resent being made part of Cost Recovery architecture, finding it an anathema to the professional ethics of midwifery.<sup>61</sup>

Not all health professionals have the same active level of engagement in state borderwork. For example, questions about immigration status are often embedded in administrative regimes, with borderwork primarily undertaken by reception staff in primary care settings and specialist staff in Overseas Visitors offices in secondary care. Midwifery has received attention as one of the few areas in which healthcare professionals directly collect/ask patients about their immigration status in “booking appointments.”<sup>62</sup> The RCM has taken a position opposing midwives’ involvement in state borderwork and opposes state bordering within health care more broadly on the grounds of both individual and public health:

The RCM is committed to supporting our members to deliver the best care they can, and Cost Recovery is a barrier to this. We believe that maternity care should be exempt from NHS charging altogether to protect and promote maternal and newborn health. The current charging regime needs to be suspended until the government can prove this

policy is not doing any harm and jeopardising our shared ambition to make England the safest place in the world to have a baby.<sup>63</sup>

The questions midwives are expected to ask during a booking appointment might be understood as a form of borderwork, in that they seek to define who is chargeable for care; however, the RCM's active opposition to their forced involvement can be considered peacework, as the organization seeks to address inequalities in access to health care and health more broadly.

The British Medical Association (BMA) argues that it is a doctor's role to explicitly challenge state bordering within the NHS:

The BMA called on the government to publish the findings of its own review into the effects of migrant charging, which it launched back in 2017, but this request has been denied. We can only assume that this is because the results confirm what clinicians at the front line already know—that mistakes, injustice, and avoidable suffering have been caused not for financial benefit, but merely to help the government look tough on immigration. As doctors, we must continue to speak out against this policy, which harms us all: vulnerable people are denied care, public health is compromised, and the founding ethos of the NHS is undermined.<sup>64</sup>

In both examples, the active engagement of healthcare professionals with bordering emerges from the embedding of borderwork into the healthcare system. Everyday bordering not only increases routine violence but, in engaging more residents in borderwork, acts as a spur to challenging this violence.

In addition to successes in debordering care and having charges removed or waived in individual cases, there have also been examples of wider systemic changes resulting from challenges to borderwork in the healthcare system. In 2017–2018, the BMA joined a number of other organizations, such as Doctors of the World and Liberty, in calling for the end to data sharing between the NHS and the Home Office, as part of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), which came to light in January 2017. Following an inquiry by the Health and Social Care Committee, which was launched in January 2018, the MoU was withdrawn in November 2018.<sup>65</sup> Led by a number of organizations, the Vaccines for All campaign in 2021 was widely supported across the public and third sectors and was successful in extending the UK's free COVID-19 vaccine program to all residents and reducing barriers to accessing the vaccine for some groups of migrants.<sup>66</sup>

I want to reframe these actions and efforts to disorder bordering regimes as alternative approaches to building positive peace, that is, I argue that they operate at a nexus of borderwork and peacework. Labouring at this nexus involves disordering existing orders and borders, and recognizing that peaceful conditions for some may be experienced violently by others. Ending these violences and building positive peace entails accepting that disorder is integral to these processes and practices of building positive peace. There is no clear point at which positive peace is achieved and the struggle for it can end, for as Don Flynn points out, there has been a regression:

The difference between now and 15–20 years ago is that people felt they were on course for integration. It might be slow; it might be, you know, step by step. . . . And, you know, by and large it contributed to probably what is quite a good record as far as the UK is concerned. [The UK] was generally considered to have a better record in terms of the integration of its migrant communities. I think we really have to be concerned that we have more or less put a full stop to that now. That people who find themselves in a difficult situation with their immigration status cannot be quite so optimistic that over time they will find a way to sort it out. That life will gradually become better. That they will extend their circles of friends and contacts. That they will feel more and more part of the community that they are living in.<sup>67</sup>

Prior to introducing the hostile environment policy, those engaged in this struggle to disorder bordering regimes sensed that while there may be no clear trajectory toward positive peace, over time individuals could escape the violent inequities within bordering regimes. Therefore, part of the shifting dynamics of bordering regimes involves both the violent conditions created and the efficacy with which a bordering regime closes routes or opportunities to exit these routine violences. Everyday bordering marks a shift in the levels of everyday state violence as described in the previous section not solely by creating violent conditions but also by ensuring that those violent conditions are felt over sustained periods by more and more people, whether or not they are the intended targets of the policy. Consequently, it greatly increases the violences of everyday peace in the United Kingdom. Perhaps we should not be surprised, therefore, at the agonism and disorder that everyday bordering has created. Lynn Staeheli has argued that both disorder and its suppression can threaten democratization.<sup>68</sup> Should we not also consider that



disorder might threaten everyday peace—but that its suppression, particularly when it permits the proliferation of routine violence, may also present a more immediate threat to everyday peace with the Other?

### **Peace Within Agonism**

Creating space for disorders leading to positive peace requires openness to potentiality, as often “the outcome of struggle is not predetermined,”<sup>69</sup> and multiple publics may be formed that can sometimes be in conflict with one another. However, as Bregazzi and Jackson argue, it is important to pay attention to the forces of love, care and conviviality that permeate everyday life to avoid foreclosing possibilities for positive peace.<sup>70</sup> While there may be an obvious draw toward highlighting the agonism that emerges in response to the violences of everyday bordering, paying attention to peaceful acts within violent contexts opens space for better understanding the shifting dynamics of peace with the Other. In this section, I will explore these peaceful acts by analyzing the work of one organization, the Migration and Asylum Justice Forum, which emerged in the northeast of England in 2015 in immediate response to the 2014 and then the 2016 Immigration Acts. This group is a pertinent case study because, while they were founded on agonistic principles, specifically aiming to create space for migrant-activist political subjectivities, they were only able to sustain their campaigning and advocacy through acts of love and care that supported and sustained relationships between the members—from both mobile and non-mobile populations.<sup>71</sup> Analyzing the forum’s work enables us to explore how struggles and conflict related to everyday bordering may also be imbued with and shaped by peace.

The Migration and Asylum Justice Forum was founded upon a pre-figurative politics: they sought greater justice for migrants—particularly asylum seekers—through wider social and political change and operated on principles of equity and justice that were very much aligned to positive peace. For example, the forum sought to centre the voices of minoritized and marginalized people impacted by everyday bordering and understood their role as supporting people from these backgrounds to drive the forum’s work. This meant that, wherever possible, those with recent or current lived experience of the United Kingdom’s immigration and asylum regimes held elected roles. Those without this direct experience were there to support and listen. I saw this approach in action at a meeting in 2018 when an asylum-seeking

member, Artur, grew irritated with what he thought was a majoritized population member's attempt to dominate the conversation. He confidently turned to the speaker and said, "You come here because you want to help us, right? So why don't you be quiet and listen while we tell you what we need?"

From 2017 until the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, the forum met every two weeks. These encounters exemplified the love and care that underpinned their work. Members brought food, made each other hot drinks, and cared for each other's children to enable parents, especially asylum-seeking members, to participate. Although the forum referred to the gatherings as "organizing" meetings, they were about much more than simply organizing campaigns and actions. How the food offers were tailored demonstrated the care and thought that went into them. Cakes were baked for different food intolerances/allergies; fresh fruit was provided after a discussion about the poor quality of food bank parcels and concerns about obesity-related health problems; food was appropriate to the range of different backgrounds of the members. These small offerings recognized and challenged the physical harms emerging from the structural violence of the asylum system, where most were unable to maintain a healthy diet on the equivalent of just over £5 a day.<sup>72</sup>

Members also demonstrated concern for each other's physical and emotional well-being through accompaniment on visits to Home Office reporting centres.<sup>73</sup> On these visits, a member from a majoritized background would accompany the reporting member to the centre. Although they could not enter the centre and had to remain outside, the member provided support on the journey and, in practical terms, would quickly learn if the reporting member had been detained. Accompaniment "puts bodies that are less at risk next to bodies that are under threat, as a sort of 'unarmed bodyguard.'" <sup>74</sup> It has been used in an array of settings, from its roots in Gandhi's Shanti Sena (or "Peace Army") to the US Civil Rights Movement and by Peace Brigades International. Migration and asylum support groups in the US have used access to and being with migrants at threat of deportation to "communicate solidarity and compassion, as a way to monitor the treatment of detainees, and to enable spiritual and emotional connections with them."<sup>75</sup> Koopman describes this coming together of bodies to "build alternative, non-violent securities" as "alter-geopolitics," which necessitates building connections with those who may have been considered "Other" in order "not just to stay alive and be safe, but to live well, to live with dignity and justice."<sup>76</sup>

In addition to caring for the physical health of members, the Migration and Asylum Justice Forum also sought to improve participants' mental health and well-being. Everyday interactions between the members were replete with small acts of love and care. In the group's social media chats and in meetings, members praised each other's efforts and achievements. They avoided criticism even when among different underpinning values and ideals. This was exemplified in an event in late 2018. The forum held a public screening and debate, and one of the members—an asylum seeker called Raman—gave a speech about his hopes when he came to the United Kingdom and his personal experiences of the asylum system. During a break, Elias, a member of the audience who had collaborated with the forum in the past, took Raman to task, telling him his “dreams” were not the right ones and what he should be aspiring to instead. Raman stood up for himself, but Elias became insistent and domineering. Some other members of the forum—mostly those without asylum-seeking backgrounds—swiftly moved to support Raman by approaching and asking if he was alright and congratulating and thanking him for his speech and involvement in the event. After Elias left, several reiterated their thanks and told the Raman to ignore Elias' intervention.

On another occasion, I was involved speaking with two female members of the forum outside of the usual meeting. One, Ella, confessed that she had removed herself from the WhatsApp group and other social media because she was struggling with her mental health. The other, Jane, spoke at length about her own struggles with her mental health, offering empathy and support and sharing hope as her own mental health had greatly improved. In 2019, members of the forum rallied around another member, Brian, when his wife, another long-standing member of the group, was diagnosed with dementia. Brian received practical support with shopping, getting his wife to various medical appointments, and with duties he had taken on in the forum itself. In these encounters and many others, members showed each other love and compassion on a range of issues. This was also apparent in the weekly meetings, when asylum-seeking members shared their fears, anger and frustration and others responded with hugs, a comforting hand, a sympathetic smile or even tears.<sup>77</sup>

This is not to say that everyone experienced the Migration and Asylum Justice Forum as a supportive environment or that there were no conflicts between members. However, as one member, Jim, explained,

I think we all just try to remember what everyone is going through and let some behaviour go for the greater good. I mean I think [Raman] has had arguments with everyone in the forum by now. He and [Artur] have had some big arguments in the past but the next time you see them, they are best friends.

For Jim, the forum's campaigning and struggle were best served by a lack of internal conflict and underpinned by solidarity, which Featherstone has argued is a generative spatial political practice that constructs "relations between places, activists, diverse social groups."<sup>78</sup>

## Conclusions

In her recent reflection on van Houtum and van Naerssen's seminal text on "Bordering, Ordering and Othering," Chiara Brambilla suggests that it is time for border studies to "migrate towards an alternative politics of hope."<sup>79</sup> For Brambilla, this would open the discipline to the possibilities of the complex becomings of social and political order that underpins bordering regimes. I have sought to begin just such a migration in this account of the relationship between everyday bordering and peace with the Other. Academic scholarship analyzing the United Kingdom's hostile environment policy and recent changes to the immigration regime has been dominated by accounts of its violences, both in terms of its symbolic underpinnings (illustrated here through analysis of public and political discourse pertaining to "illegal immigrants" and asylum seekers' "genuineness") and the increases in routine violence emerging from intensifying internalized bordering. This "increase" is both in terms of the intensity and volume of routine violence and in the number of UK residents now forcibly incorporated into administering this violence on the state's behalf.

However, it is at this point, in incorporating more and more residents into everyday acts of violence against the Other, that I have argued that everyday bordering reveals possibilities for a politics of hope, and with it comes opportunities for building positive peace with the Other. Drawing on the example of healthcare professionals, I show how some of those residents who have been mandated to undertake everyday bordering are transforming borderwork into peacework, actively challenging the inequalities emerging from everyday bordering and seeking to overturn the legislation

fuelling it. Everyday acts of peace have also proliferated within struggles across mobile and non-mobile populations. Love and care underpin the work of the Migration and Asylum Justice Forum. The forum not only fights for positive peace but creates it within members' mundane practices. In this analysis, everyday bordering produces a key set of processes and practices shaping the intertwining of violence and peace comprising everyday peace. Recent changes in bordering policies mark a shift in both (un)becoming and in the complexity of these entanglements, making negotiating difference within everyday life in the United Kingdom not only ever more difficult, but also increasingly unavoidable.

## Notes

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- 8 Nick Vaughan-Williams, "Borderwork Beyond Inside/Outside? Frontex, the Citizen–Detective and the War on Terror," *Space and Polity* 12, no. 1 (2008): 63–79, at 63.
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Part 2

# **The Marginal Other**

Gender, Sexuality, and Race

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## 4 Muslims in Italy

### Rooting and Pluralism, Inequalities and Islamophobia

Fabio Perocco

Originally a continent of emigration, after the Second World War Europe became a continent of immigration—from within Europe and from outside. In 1950, foreign-born immigrants in Western Europe (people whose nationality differs from that of the country they live in) amounted to 4 million; in 1971, they were around 11 million; in 1982, 15 million; and in 1995, around 20 million.<sup>1</sup> In the 1990s, the world of immigration in Europe widened and took on a marked demographic, national, linguistic, and cultural heterogeneity. From a simple though no longer silent presence, immigration became a structural element of European societies. One example will suffice: in the mid-1990s, out of 55 million French, around 18 million had foreign-born parents or grandparents.<sup>2</sup> How about today? Well, on January 1, 2022, the number of residents in an EU28 country who did not hold EU citizenship was 23.8 million (5.3 percent of the EU28 population).<sup>3</sup> In addition, 13.7 million persons living in one of the EU Member States were citizens of another EU member state. If we consider the country of birth, including both residents born in a country that is not part of the EU and residents born in an EU country that is not the one they live in, on January 1, 2021 the number jumps to 55.4 million of foreign-born persons.<sup>4</sup> In Germany, a key country in Europe, currently 25 percent of the population has a migration background (Migrationshintergrund). When you consider such figures, it becomes hard to define yourself as “a real Finn” or “100 percent French.”

This immigration, which is unprecedented in the history of modern Europe, has been a powerful factor of social transformation in European societies. These numbers describe the great transformation of Europe in recent decades in all aspects of social life: demography, workplaces, urban landscape, social relationships, cultural dynamics, religion, and artistic production. For Europe this is a quantum shift, which is made even more radical when you consider that until not so long ago, in several European countries the program was to “cleanse” European-Aryan people of contamination by “inferior races” and Jews and thus eliminate them from Europe.

This transformation is the result of the social rooting of immigrant populations, which is the symbol of their social resistance, individually and collectively, to being exploited and to the conditions under which they live. The shift from “work immigration” to “settlement immigration” and “family immigration” has turned temporary foreign workers into stable residents and has turned temporary migrations (circular, seasonal, alternate) into permanent immigration.<sup>5</sup> This has indeed entailed not only a radical shift in the makeup of immigrant populations but also a transformation among immigrants at the level of identity, personality, or values. It also occasions an unexpected transformation within European countries themselves, many of which have tried to counter their own transformation in several ways: cultural or ethnic-racial selection, policies promoting temporariness and countering rooting, social alienation (*Entfremdung*), and ethnocentric assimilation. However, immigrants’ push for stabilization and rooting has been so strong that no major events or policies since the economic crisis of 1973–1974 have managed to reverse this trend—not the subsequent policies to curb immigration and favour the return of emigrants, nor the global criminalization of immigration and making it increasingly precarious over the last two decades, or today’s war on migrants.<sup>6</sup> Because there are such deep and structural causes behind contemporary migration, no containment policies, walls, or barbed wires can curb it. In this way, social rooting has gone from effect to cause, potentially leading to a further stabilization of immigrants “in transit” and therefore a further and powerful factor of transformation of European societies. Yet several European countries have continued to deny that they are immigration countries, and some still define immigrants as temporary guests.<sup>7</sup> Others have followed policies of neo-assimilationism, exclusion, segregation, subordinate inclusion, and ethnicization without recognition; today, almost all European nations are affected by the rise of institutional racism. Such apparently

irrational reactions aim at influencing the *direction* and *speed* of the social transformation produced by immigration and at hindering human exchange on an equal basis. These responses also hinder solidarity between natives and immigrants to maintain a segment of the population in a condition of social inferiority and subalternity in the form of a racialized underclass.

These contrasting trends and forces may be observed in Italy, particularly in relation to the situation of Muslim immigrants, who are a plural and rooted presence but at the same time opposed and stigmatized.

## A Plural Presence, an Obscured Pluralism

In Italy, the settlement of Muslims is recent and is linked to the arrival of migrant workers from Arab countries in the last three decades.<sup>8</sup> In the last fifteen years—in the wake of the arrival of new workers, refugees and asylum seekers, family reunification and natural reproduction—this population has grown: in 2018 there were 1.6 million Muslims, two thirds of whom reside in northern Italy, and who come mostly from Morocco (440,000), Albania (226,000), Bangladesh (141,000), Pakistan (106,000), and Egypt (111,000).<sup>9</sup>

From the point of view of national origin, it is a strongly plural presence, which has settled and stratified over time: in the 1980s and 1990s, immigrants came mainly from the Maghreb, Egypt and Senegal; in the 2000s, they were joined by Balkan Muslim populations; populations of West, Central, and East Africa, where Islam is practised;<sup>10</sup> populations from the Middle East (Iraq, Palestine, Syria, Turkey); and populations from the Indian subcontinent (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan). To this we shall add a marked demographic heterogeneity: in several cases there is a balance between men and women (Albania, Morocco); the percentage of children and youth, born or raised in Italy, is significant (above 20 percent), and the number of elderly people reunited with family or who have grown old in Italy is not negligible (around 10 percent).<sup>11</sup> There is also a relevant social heterogeneity in terms of territorial origin (metropolis, city, countryside; urban, rural, rural–urban environment), social class (from sub-proletariat to middle class), and education level (from illiterate to highly educated people). Also, migratory projects, social practices, and lifestyles are quite varied.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, Muslims constitute an extremely heterogeneous section of the community, representing dozens of different nationalities, languages and dialects, cultural traditions and local cultures, political orientations, religious

affiliations (Sunni/Shia), specific religious currents, somatic traits, lifestyles, and cultural practices—so much so that it is not an exaggeration to say that in Italy (and in Europe) such a composite and heterogeneous population has never been seen. This is a tiny cross-section, through a sort of miniature social transfer, of the large plurality that characterizes the Islamic world. And due to the marked regional pluralism of Italy, Muslim immigration and Islam have manifold expressions.<sup>13</sup>

However, this plurality is constantly obscured by institutions, the political sphere, and the mass media.<sup>14</sup> A triple process of demonization, spectacularization, and overmediatization of Muslims methodically represents them as an undifferentiated monolith; the dominant discourse generalizes and involves all Muslims in an intangible unity (the Islam-whole), obscuring internal pluralism and the changes within this population. The public discourse represents them through the characteristic traits of a total-Islam, a crystallized and all-consuming religious dimension (the *Homo islamicus*, imbued with religion) and a total pervasiveness of the community.

## Rooting and Rejection

Muslims, like the majority of immigrants in Italy, have experienced a deep process of social rooting; with their insertion into the labour market, they have achieved a progressive, albeit difficult, social, housing and administrative stabilization. They are the first, largest, and most rooted and organized extra-European population in Italy for work reasons. They have created relationships in the workplace, they have forged links with the area and local people, and they have enlarged and consolidated their presence in the public space.<sup>15</sup> The cultural capital of this population has grown, transformed, and diversified. This has made them less docile, less open to self-compression and exploitation, tougher, and more resistant to the social conditions imposed by the labour market and the local context; this has increased their social value and social cost and has fed both their demands for equal treatment and their critical positions toward inequality and a fate of social inferiority. In raising the issues of working and living conditions reserved for immigrants, rights, discrimination, recognition, and respect for countries of origin and by rejecting both assimilationism and segregation, they have made clear that they do not want to be treated as second-class citizens. This has materialized



in the workplace and in the public space with the demand for better living conditions, recognition of one's identity, and respect for one's origins.

Within this process of rooting, Muslims have followed diversified and flexible forms of social inclusion in the different local contexts of Italian society: local contexts that are diversified in terms of economic development, urban structure, and political cultures. The stabilization of Muslims has taken place in a diffuse and flexible manner, adapting to the economic, social and cultural features of the national context. Several Muslim strategies of interaction can be observed in the public sphere; local societies have responded to them with a mixture of reticence and suspicion, openness and solidarity, with each context of interaction bounded by cultural, political, and historical particularities. The social rooting has produced—like it or not—the transformation of the demographic, social, cultural, and religious frameworks of the country. Think, for example, of the religious scenario: in Italy today, there are about seven hundred places of Islamic worship (prayer rooms, mosques), differentiated in terms of national, political, and religious references.<sup>16</sup> This was something unthinkable until a few years ago in a country where for centuries the national identity and the urban landscape coincided with the Catholic religion and where, until a few decades ago, the idea of a single pure superior race/civilization was cultivated.

In conjunction with such processes of insertion, relationships and contact with local and other immigrant populations has expanded. Multiculturalism has progressed slowly but incessantly during daily life: work, friendship, and love relationships have increased. Daily multiculturalism has inevitably widened, day after day, in apartment blocks, schools, places of work, and leisure time. New forms of social and solidarity links were created within a trend toward shared life, symbiosis and exchange. This has contributed to the transformation of social relations and cultural dynamics, and to diversification and hybridization.

This is the very opposite of the expectations and demands of the production system, of governments and labour and migration policies, which require a temporary workforce, possibly unrooted, precarious, and with few rights—cheap, isolated, docile, and to be used according to the needs of the production system, thus avoiding the social and political costs of immigration. Muslim immigrants have become a wanted but not welcomed population. The increase in anti-Muslim racism and in anti-migrant Islamophobia aimed at

countering their rooting, pushing them back to the margins, and diminishing their social value is no coincidence.<sup>17</sup>

Different social forces oppose these processes of transformation, trying to influence the direction and/or the speed of social change. Muslims are the object of a set of policies, practices and discourses aimed at devaluing and marginalizing them. The social inclusion of Muslims is often hindered and is continuously described by institutions, political parties, and the mass media in problematic and negative ways: Muslims are considered bearers of ways of life which are incompatible with European ones; as a threat to both secularism and the Christian identity; as a threat to modernity and tradition; as an isolated and self-referential entity and total and all-encompassing, encapsulated in the religious dimension; and cast as responsible for the failure of democracy, multiculturalism, and even the return of racism. Muslim immigration is systematically placed, by public policies and the dominant discourse, under specific headings: demographic invasion, cultural colonization, the Sharia-zation of Europe, uncompromising diversity, and absolute incompatibility with Italian values. The discourse points to the impossibility of integration because of “their culture,” and presents Muslim communities as closed enclaves—angry, regurgitating discomfort, violence, religious fanaticism, and extremism.

Communities are described as organized, demanding, and critical: the dominant discourse and institutions identify and include these populations under the category of “Muslims,” starting a top-down process of Islamization of social issues. They are the object of a process redefining them as “the other Muslim” in a completely negative and derogatory sense of the term, as “the Other” *par excellence*. Protests, struggles, claims as workers, as migrants, as young people, were turned by the dominant discourse and institutions into Islamic issues, into “the Islam problem,” into “the Muslim immigration problem” within a top-down Islamization of social issues. The set of anti-Muslims policies, practices and discourses is systemic: it is the system of Islamophobia. A structural aspect of the Italian (and Western) society, with deep historical and cultural roots, Islamophobia is organic to the inferiorization and marginalization of Muslims, and functional to the legitimation and reproduction of social inequalities that affect Muslims structurally in Italy and in Western countries.

## Inequalities, Racialization of Exclusion, and Islamophobia

In Italy, as in the rest of Europe, the current condition and social position of the Muslims is heterogeneous. However, because of the interaction, accumulation, and transmission of inequalities, most Muslims find themselves in the lowest, poorest, and most precarious section of the working class. Muslims have higher rates of unemployment and underemployment than the majority of the population (and often than the rest of the population of foreign origin) and are more likely to be confined to the lower levels of the labour market. On average, they have lower levels of education, higher rates of poverty, a worse overall health profile, and a higher concentration in destitute urban areas and in poorer-quality housing. In 2014, the unemployment rate for Italians was 12.2%, for EU citizens 15.7%, and for non-EU citizens 17.4%, but the top five in the unemployment rate ranking by nationality were Morocco (27.3%), Tunisia (24.3%), Albania (22.7%), Pakistan (20%), and Egypt (19.4%).<sup>18</sup>

Islamophobia plays an important role in this regard: the depiction of the Islamic culture and religion as directly responsible for this situation and Muslims as victims of their own culture contributes to transforming this population into a backward religious minority.<sup>19</sup> At the same time, this population is a segment of the working class with a migratory background and foreign origins: it is doubly disadvantaged as foreign and Muslim, penalized because of its class position (migrant workers), its faith (Muslim), and its countries of origin being once under the rule of colonialism (dominated nations).

In this framework, xenophobia (racism against foreigners, as aliens), Arabophobia (racism against Arabs, as a cursed and damned race, the enemy based on “racial” difference) and Islamophobia (racism against Muslims, as the other absolute, based on religious difference) contribute jointly—through a multiple discriminations—to producing inequalities, to worsening deprivation and social compression, and to consolidating an excluded social segment on a religious basis. This *combined inequality* results from the interaction of the different dimensions of social inequality (work, income, housing, education, and health inequality) with the interaction of xenophobia, Arabophobia, and Islamophobia. This multifaceted interaction is the driving force of a process of production and accumulation of inequalities that structurally affect Muslims.

At this juncture, Islamophobia has gained primacy over xenophobia and Arabophobia. As a central element of contemporary racism and as a

structuring factor of the current nationalisms, Islamophobia has become the most important element in the unequal reproduction of this social segment, plays a major role in crystallizing inequalities, and provides plenty of ideological support that paves the way for a range of discriminating policies and practices, whose outcomes and results it subsequently legitimizes.

A means for maintaining and legitimizing such inequalities is racialization: Muslims are defined as a “race” or a “semi-race,” that is, “the Muslim race,” through a social process in which the factors of race, culture, and faith overlap, and the religious dimension is racialized and the Islamic culture is naturalized.<sup>20</sup> Through this process, an extremely heterogeneous population is depicted as a unitary subject and as an exception.<sup>21</sup> The idea of a “Muslim exception” allows for the normalization of a religiously “racialized” underclass. By naturalizing inequalities—ascribing them to the nature of the Islamic culture—Islamophobia crystallizes the “Muslim issue” as the major matter of concern, the culprit of all the social issues related to immigration, under which all social issues are subsumed and turned into elements of a clash of civilizations caused by the culture of the Other. This exception is normalized by identifying Muslims as victims of their own culture and by pointing to their “way of being” as the cause of the social exclusion they suffer, thus ultimately blaming their exclusion and marginalization on them. In turn, this results in the culturalization and racialization of Muslims’ social condition, regardless of its relation to Islamic culture and religion.

This dual process of racialization and marginalization draws on a broad and diverse set of social actors: best-selling authors, mass media, far-right parties and anti-Islam organizations, and state institutions. In Italy, the literary genre of anti-Islam publications—one of the most active sectors in the industry of Islamophobia—is quite widespread.<sup>22</sup> This branch produces bestsellers that reiterate and revise the set of elements that have historically converged in a caricatural representation of Islam and Muslims. Within it is a literary strand of publications, for example the Eurabia fantasy series, which is dedicated to promoting stereotypes of inferiority and conspiracy theories about Muslim immigration; in the Italian context, a popular and visceral style prevailed over a “scientific” and learned style.<sup>23</sup>

Besides the prevalence of works by Islamophobic foreign authors that have been translated into Italian, Italy has itself produced a fair number of them. The most famous is Oriana Fallaci: her work concerns the cultural colonization of Europe by Islam and the spiritual decline of Europe; in *The*

*Rage and the Pride* (2001) and *The Force of Reason* (2006), she warns the West about the serious threat presented by Muslim immigrants because of their cultural backwardness and spiritual inferiority. The works of Magdi Allam, an Egyptian-born journalist, naturalized Italian, and convert to Catholicism, are also widespread, such as *Bin Laden in Italia* (2002), *Jihad in Italia* (2003), *Kamikaze Made in Europe* (2004), *Islam: Siamo in guerra* (2015), *Io e Oriana* (2016), and *Stop Islam*.

Works such as these exert a significant influence both on the common reader and on the other actors of Islamophobia, with which they interact dialectically. For example, in the 1990s, mass media specialized in producing negative discourses around immigrants through the distorted use of the concepts of Otherness and diversity, identifying in the Muslims their most notorious representatives. In 1997 a popular talk show (*Pinocchio*) unveiled to the Italian public the presence of Muslims in the country and contributed to fixing the characterizing features of Muslim immigration: Islam as a total, uniform, unitary order; the Islamic religion as an obstacle to integration; Muslim communities as closed entities, as isolated, self-referential enclaves. This has resulted in an increased focus on Muslim immigration and a growing suspicion of Muslims, fuelled by mass media that depict their presence as unnatural, troublesome, and threatening. Through a systematically hostile register, Muslims migrants came to be depicted as radically different: an ancestral, organic kind of difference and diversity that must be kept distanced and isolated. The “integration of Muslim immigrants in the national society” was a priori regarded as problematic and impossible because of “their culture.” In the 2000s, the picture changed in concert with international events. Violent press campaigns have specifically targeted local contexts, individual and collective subjects (representatives of local communities and associations), and aspects of social life (mosques, the veil, the burkini, the Muslim diet). The focus on Muslim immigrants has become more and more constant, insistent, and obsessive.

Muslims have been depicted as a global threat, which in turn has fuelled feelings of dislike and refusal; Muslims, depicted as a pathology, are associated with images of strangeness, isolation, and self-exclusion. The mass media have turned them into public enemy number one, obscuring their daily life and real conditions of existence through countless distortions, generalizations, and reductionism. Muslim immigration has become the object of a racialized regime of representation, functional to its subordinate inclusion: using the

discursive routines of emergency and security issues, the mass media have promoted the exclusion and marginalization of Muslim immigrants from social life while encouraging the adoption of special and urgent control policies, which has sometimes resulted in central and local governments actually adopting restrictive measures. The media industry of Islamophobia has been untiringly devoted to the social and symbolic inferiorization of Muslim immigrants, thus contributing to their subordinate condition.

Italy has been at the forefront in Europe in terms of anti-immigration and anti-Islam parties; the main reference here is the Lega Nord (Northern League). Born at the end of the 1980s in the name of autonomism, neoliberalism, and anti-southern Italy racism, it was a leading agent in the spread of the discourse on Muslim immigration as a global threat and as a carrier only of backwardness, obscurantism, and ineptitude. For the past twenty-five years, Lega Nord has been a firm opposer of Muslims' rooting and integration—considering them aliens, impossible to integrate, lacking both skills and willingness to integrate—and has been one of the major political forces in the country. It has frequently participated in government coalitions, holding key ministries and functions of the state at both central and local levels and governing several cities and regions in northern Italy.

The party's late-1990s hostility against Muslim immigration became, in the 2000s, pillars of its propaganda and line of action. Lega Nord promotes itself as the defender of national identity, guardian of the Italian people's Catholic identity, and custodian of modern progress, which is threatened by "Muslim obscurantism." It especially claims to be the champion of the cultural tradition of local communities in northern Italy, of the "motherland" threatened by cultural globalization and international migration.<sup>24</sup> Lega Nord has permanently placed the topic of "Islamic invasion" among the pillars of its political communication and focused its political action (especially at the local level) on mobilizing against Islam's presence in public space. Several party chapters, members, supporters, and local administrators have harshly opposed the public presence of Muslims (Islamic cultural associations, prayer halls, mosques, halal food in schools and canteens, afternoon schools in Arabic, after-school care for children) and Muslim celebrations (Īd al-Adah, Ramaḍān, Īd al-Fitr) by organizing marches, torchlight processions, pickets, mobilizations, desecration of areas to be turned into mosques, municipal interpellations, messages to newspapers, signs, and graffiti.<sup>25</sup> Several local administrations governed by this party have adopted provisions (municipal resolutions, regulations, bans,

etc.) limiting Muslims' private autonomy and rights or denying the recognition of Islam in the public sphere.<sup>26</sup>

Lega Nord's hostility toward Muslims is a structured, long-term activity, considering the following dates: on June 23, 1995, the president of the Chamber of Deputies in the Italian Parliament, Irene Pivetti, a prominent member of Lega Nord, privately took part in a "redress rosary" organized by the Lepanto Cultural Centre following the opening of a mosque in Rome; in 2018 and 2019, Matteo Salvini, the explicitly anti-Islamic leader of Lega Nord, took to kissing a rosary at campaign rallies and other public events.<sup>27</sup> A decade earlier, during the national meeting of the party in 2008, in front of tens of thousands people, Salvini made the following comments:

I want a revolution against illegal immigrants. . . . I want the streets cleaned up from all these ethnic groups that are destroying our Country. . . . I want a revolution against nomads, gypsies. . . . I had two nomad and gypsy camps in Treviso destroyed. . . . I want to eliminate all the gypsy children that rob the elderly. . . . I want double zero tolerance! . . . I want a revolution against those who want to open mosques and Islamic centres. . . . They can go pray in the desert. . . . No more Muslims! They are to go back to their countries! . . . They can go piss in their mosques! . . . I want a revolution against those who tolerate headscarves and burkas. . . . I don't know who hides behind those headscarves and burkas: there could be someone with balls or with a machine gun in between his legs. . . . I don't want to see black, yellow, brown, grey teachers for our youth. What do they teach? The culture of the desert? The culture of those who chase lions or those who chase gazelles in order to eat them?<sup>28</sup>

Lega has influenced the public significantly, even those who don't identify with the party: its stances have influenced the other parties and both national and local government policies on migration and integration.<sup>29</sup> Its white supremacist slogans have been endorsed by various sectors of society (but not by the Catholic Church), and some have found their way into the programs of majority parties, influencing the political agenda. Over the last decade, groups and movements from the traditional neo-fascist right wing have joined in (Fiamma Tricolore, Forza Nuova, Casapound), which has led to an exponential regrowth in demonstrations and mobilizations against migrants and the places of Islam.

National institutions, at both central and local levels, have helped in the spread and application of Islamophobia. They did this in two ways: “passively,” by not acting, not legislating, and not applying anti-discrimination rules against verbal and physical attacks, threats, and abuse, thus indulging anti-Muslim racism; and “actively,” by promoting exclusion and discrimination within public policies and local integration policies, in rights regulations, and in rules on private autonomy.

A remarkable example can be found in provisions against the opening or presence of mosques/prayer halls.<sup>30</sup> The war on mosques has not only involved political mobilization and citizens’ groups at the local level, but also administrative-bureaucratic harassment by municipalities.<sup>31</sup> Many cities concocted elaborate bureaucratic tricks to hinder, curb, or stop the opening of prayer halls. Their main reasons concerned traffic and road issues (that is, the lack of parking spots), hygiene/sanitary issues, or technical/structural issues in the buildings and problems in the intended destination of use. Since 2000, there have been several bans, denied permits, and evictions, culminating in Regional Law no. 2 of the Lombardy region in February 2015, also known as the “anti-mosque law.”<sup>32</sup> Drafted as formally valid for all religions (with which the Italian state has or has not agreements), it has dire effects for Muslims’ freedom of worship through prerequisites and elements that hinder the opening of prayer halls, including additional controls by a part of the regional council and the possibility for municipalities to hold advisory referendums on whether to open mosques. Similar provisions using urbanistic tools as elements of discrimination were then approved by other Italian regions. The Veneto region, legislating on the management of landscape and territory, approved Regional Law no. 12 in 2016.<sup>33</sup> This law, which never mentions Islam, provides municipal administrations with effective urbanistic tools to hinder or deny (through indirect discrimination) the authorization to open mosques/prayer halls.

From these examples we can infer that Islamophobia, as a material relation of oppression, is a structural element of the system of social relations and social life in Italy. In particular, institutional racism, Italian-style, has state-sanctioned Islamophobia among its distinctive features.



## Conclusion: Between Lights and Shadows

Over time, Italian society and immigrant Muslims have developed important processes of rapprochement and exchange that have matured in workplaces, schools, and places of daily life. However, at the same time, three problems can be observed: (1) a problem of social relations between the Italian society and immigrant Muslims, marked by repulsion, rejection, and exclusion of the latter; (2) a problem of public representation of Muslims, as the dominant discourse systematically paints Muslims in a distorted manner using inferiorizing stereotypes; and (3) a problem of recognition of Muslims in the public space and in the public sphere.<sup>34</sup> Italy, which has not yet come to terms with the history of its creation as a nation, is struggling to accept Islam and to incorporate it into its history and collective consciousness.

On one hand, slowly, day after day, daily multiculturalism has made its way into the sharing of the same physical and social spaces, into the sharing of the same material condition of working class. Sometimes this sharing has become a mixture, a dynamic projection toward new identities that transcend their origin. This has materialized in mixed unions and marriages, in new relationships of friendship, in sports associations, in new forms of solidarity and social bonds, and in Islamic-Christian relations promoted by the progressive component of the Catholic Church. On the other hand, these experiences and dynamics of exchange and mutual integration have interested only a part of Italian society, whereas the majority of the parties, the mass media, state institutions, and a good part of the local population are unwilling to accept Islam as a component of Italian society and unwilling to recognize Islam in the public sphere—so much so that Islam, despite being the second-largest religion in Italy, has no legal recognition as a religion by the Italian state. Despite Islam's importance in Italian religious and social life, the Italian state has officially recognized the following congregations by signing an agreement that allows, among other things, directing portions of taxes to these entities: the Catholic Church, the Waldensian and Methodist Churches, the Evangelical Lutheran Church, the Union of Jewish Communities, the Union of Adventist Christian Churches of the Seventh Day, the Assemblies of God, the Holy Orthodox Archdiocese of Italy and Exarchate for Southern Europe, the Christian Evangelical Baptist Union of Italy, the Italian Buddhist Union, the Apostolic Church in Italy, the Italian Hinduist Union,

and the Italian Buddhist Institute Soka Gakkai. It has no such understanding with any representative of Islam.<sup>35</sup>

This situation has repercussions for all immigrants and the local population. Islamophobia, as a form of racism (the highest form of racism in the neoliberal era), negatively affects all immigrant populations and throws shadows of suspicion over them. Moreover, it leads large portions of local populations to accept discrimination and racism, thus creating a deep, unnatural division among the people. The systemic Islamophobia directly affects Muslim immigrants and simultaneously poisons local populations, who are encouraged (from above) to dig an unbridgeable chasm.<sup>36</sup>

For these reasons, the stance on Muslim immigration is an important bench test for the working class and a major challenge for radical and class-centred antiracism. The alternative to building bridges among people and solidarity is pogroms, interracial clashes, and war among the poor. Peace is not obvious; it is a non-obvious process. Because it is not taken for granted, the achievements and successes of peace must be continually protected, preserved, and guarded to avoid subsidence and setbacks. Racism, as a social relationship of domination and an ideology of legitimization of domination, is a weapon of mass division, an instrument for the destruction of relationships and experiences that operates under the banner of equal exchange, co-operative encounter, and reciprocal integration.

The social transformation linked to migration is filled with positive potential, including the possibility of overcoming national lacks and national antagonisms, and of freeing society from a scrap, a rattletrap, like nationalism. However, this potential can be revealed only if racism and discrimination fall; unfortunately, racism and discrimination have intensified precisely to block social transformations and prevent this potential from being realized. Therefore, solidarity and peace, equality and friendship between peoples, or confrontation and enmity between peoples, is a central issue for those who aspire to peace and egalitarianism and for those who oppose to them. As far as I am concerned, I know which side to be on.

## Notes

- 1 Klaus Bade, *L'Europa in Movimento* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2001); available in English under the title *Migration in European History*, trans. Allison Brown (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 2003). To these figures, naturalized immigrants and

their descendants shall be added, as once they obtain citizenship they are no longer included in the statistics on foreigners. In countries such as France or Great Britain, naturalized foreigners outnumber foreigners.

- 2 Bade, *L'Europa in Movimento*, 378.
- 3 “Migration and Migrant Population Statistics,” Eurostat: Statistics Explained, [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Migration\\_and\\_migrant\\_population\\_statistics#Migrant\\_population:\\_23.8\\_million\\_non-EU\\_citizens\\_living\\_in\\_the\\_EU\\_on\\_1\\_January\\_2022](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Migration_and_migrant_population_statistics#Migrant_population:_23.8_million_non-EU_citizens_living_in_the_EU_on_1_January_2022).
- 4 Idos, *Dossier Statistico Immigrazione* (Rome: Idos, 2022), 60.
- 5 For a more complete discussion of this shift, see Abdelmalek Sayad, *La double absence* (Paris: Seuil, 1999).
- 6 See the following books for in-depth discussions of increasingly precarious status of immigrants: Mohammad Chaichian, *Empires and Walls: Globalization, Migration, and Colonial Domination* (Chicago, IL: Haymarket, 2014); Tim Marshall, *Divided: Why We're Living in an Age of Walls* (London: Elliott and Thompson, 2018); Migreurop, *Guerre aux migrants* (Paris: Syllepse, 2007).
- 7 Saskia Sassen's *Guests and Aliens* (New York: The New Press, 1999) offers a comprehensive analysis of worldwide immigration.
- 8 Islam has ancient roots in Italy. However, toward the end of the nineteenth century it had almost completely disappeared; it has reappeared in recent decades as a result of labour immigration.
- 9 Muslims account for 30 percent of foreigners in Italy. For further information, see Fondazione Ismu, “Immigratie Religioni in Italia [Immigrants and Religions in Italy],” 2019, <http://www.ismu.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/CS-ISMU-Immigrati-e-religioni-in-Italia-2019.pdf>. These figures do not include immigrants who have obtained Italian citizenship, immigrants who are not registered with the municipal registry office, or undocumented migrants. Italy does not require one to declare one's religion: the above data are obtained from an estimate based on the percentages of religious affiliation in the countries of origin and applied to the nationalities in Italy (basically a statistical criterion applied to the countries of origin that identifies the main religion and minorities on the basis of government data). As for the Albanians—overall around 430,000 people—these criteria and data could be quite arbitrary.

The primary regions of settlement in Northern Italy are, respectively, Lombardy, Emilia-Romagna, Veneto, and Piedmont.

- 10 The African countries from which these immigrants arrived include Nigeria, Niger, Mali, Sudan, Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, Cameroon, Chad, Ghana, Burkina Faso, and the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire.

- 11 These figures are taken from “Le comunità migranti in Italia: Rapporti 2020 [‘Migrant communities in Italy’: 2020 Reports],” *Integrazionemigranti.gov.it: Vivere e lavorare in Italia*, <https://integrazionemigranti.gov.it/it-it/Dettaglio-approfondimento/id/30/Le-comunita-migranti-in-Italia-Rapporti-2020>.
- 12 Annalisa Frisina, “Young Muslims of Italy: Islam in the Everyday Life and the Public Visibility of a New Generation of Muslims,” in *Annual Review of Sociology of Religion*, edited by Giuseppe Giordan (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 329–51; Chantal Saint-Blancat, “Italy,” in *The Oxford Handbook of European Islam*, edited by Cesari Jocelyne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 265–310.
- 13 For further context, see: Enzo Pace and Khaled Rhazzali, “Muslim Communities in a Catholic Country: The Case of Italy,” in *Islam in the West*, edited by Abe Ata and Jan Ali (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 237–55; Chantal Saint-Blancat, ed., *L’islam in Italia. Una Presenza Plurale* (Rome: Edizioni Lavoro, 1999); Chantal Saint-Blancat and Fabio Perocco, “New Modes of Social Interaction in Italy: Muslim Leaders and Local Society in Tuscany and Venetia,” in *European Muslims and the Secular State*, edited by Jocelyne Cesari and Sean McLoughlin (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 99–112.
- 14 Regarding evidence on public images of Muslims, see Alfredo Alietti and Dario Padovan, *Islamophobia in Italia. Rapporto Nazionale 2018*, (Ankara: Seta, 2020), <https://setav.org/en/assets/uploads/2020/04/R156It.pdf>; Marco Bruno, *L’islam immaginato. Rappresentazioni e stereotipi nei media italiani* (Milan: Guerini e Associati, 2008); Laura Cervi, Santiago Tejedor and Monica Gracia, “What Kind of Islamophobia? Representation of Muslims and Islam in Italian and Spanish Media,” *Religions* 12, no. 6, (2021): 1–17, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12060427>; Bruno Cousin and Tommaso Vitale, “Le magistère intellectuel islamophobe d’Oriana Fallaci,” *Sociologie* 1, no. 5 (2014): 61–79; Enzo Pace, “Giochi di specchi. L’immagine dell’islam nei media,” in *Islam plurale*, edited by Mostafa El Ayoubi (Rome: Com Nuovi Tempi, Roma, 2000), 19–33; Fabio Perocco, “Dall’islamofobia al razzismo antimusulmano,” in *Razzismo di stato. Stati Uniti, Europa, Italia*, edited by Pietro Basso (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2010), 467–91; Fabio Perocco, “L’enjeu ‘Islam’ en Italie,” in *Religion(s) et identité(s) en Europe. L’épreuve du pluriel*, edited by Antonela Capelle-Pogăcean, Patrick Michel and Enzo Pace (Paris: Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, 2008), 141–57; Andrea Pin, “Islam in Italy,” in *State, Religion and Muslims*, edited by Melek Saral and Şerif Onur Bahçecik (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 302–46; Viviana Premazzi, “Young Muslims and Islamophobia in Italy: What is at Stake?” *Culture e Studi del Sociale* 6, no. 1 (2021): 51–64.
- 15 Significant unionization and an important associative phenomenon with different aims and characteristics have taken shape in several cultural, political,

religious, support, and advocacy associations. Mosques and prayer rooms have played an important role in the process of rooting, as they are much more than just places of worship. They are also, for the mass of secularized immigrants, a point of reference, a place of exchange, and of sociality—one of the few doors open to immigrants where they can find material and moral support.

- 16 For further discussion of faith-based integration, see Enzo Pace, “Religious Congregations in Italy: Mapping the New Pluralism,” in *Congregations in Europe*, edited by Christophe Monnot and Jörg Stolz (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2018), 139–56; Enzo Pace, “Religious Minorities in a Society Monopolized by Catholicism,” in *Minorities and Populism: Critical Perspectives from South Asia and Europe*, edited by Kaul Volker and Ananya Vajpeyi (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2020), 217–30. The information on Islamic places of worship needs to be seen in the context of other data on places of worship in Italy related to immigration, as it shows not only how immigration has restored the weight of religious pluralism in Italy, but, above all, the size of the Muslim presence in the country: 355 Orthodox parishes and monasteries, 38 Sikh temples, 500 Nigerian Pentecostal and charismatic churches, 350 Ghanaian Pentecostal and charismatic churches, and 650 pastoral centres for Catholic immigrants (Pace, “Religious Congregations”).
- 17 In the context of several Islamophobias that have existed in the world.
- 18 Ministero del Lavoro, *Quinto Rapporto Annuale. I migranti nel mercato del lavoro in Italia* (Rome, 2015), 32–33, [https://www.lavoro.gov.it/temi-e-priorita/immigrazione/focus-on/ingresso-e-soggiorno-per-lavoro-in-italia/Documents/V%20Rapporto%20annuale%20Mdl%20Migranti%202015\\_%2006.pdf](https://www.lavoro.gov.it/temi-e-priorita/immigrazione/focus-on/ingresso-e-soggiorno-per-lavoro-in-italia/Documents/V%20Rapporto%20annuale%20Mdl%20Migranti%202015_%2006.pdf).
- 19 For a broader discussion of Islamophobia in Europe, see Simon Dawes, “Islamophobia, Racialisation and the ‘Muslim Problem’ in France,” *French Cultural Studies* 32, no. 3 (2021):179–86, <https://doi.org/10.1177/09571558211028202>; Giulia Evolvi, “Hate in a Tweet: Exploring Internet-Based Islamophobic Discourses,” *Religions* 9, no. 10 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel9100307>; Olivier Le Cour Grandmaison, “Immigration, islam, ‘identité nationale’ : vieux débats, vieux démons,” *Topique* 114 (2011): 93–106, <https://doi.org/10.3917/top.114.0093>; Ayhan Kaya, *Islamophobia as a Form of Governmentality: Unbearable Weightiness of the Politics of Fear* (Malmö: Malmö Institute for Studies of Migration Diversity and Welfare, 2011); Arun Kundnani, “Integrationism: The Politics of Anti-Muslim Racism,” *Race and Class* 48, no. 4 (2007): 24–44, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0306396807077069>; Arun Kundnani, *The Muslims Are Coming! Islamophobia, Extremism, and the Domestic War on Terror* (London: Verso, 2014); Laura Mijares Molina, Johanna Martine Lems, and Virtudes Téllez Delgado, “Constructing Subaltern Muslim Subjects: the Institutionalization of Islamophobia,”

- Revista De Estudios Internacionales Mediterráneos* 24 (2018), <https://doi.org/10.15366/reim2018.24.001>; George Morgan and Scott Poynting, *Global Islamophobia Muslims and Moral Panic in the West* (London: Routledge, 2016); Aaron Ponce, "Excluding Europe's Muslims: Symbolic Boundaries and Anti-immigrant Attitudes Along a Racial-Ethnic Hierarchy," *Humanity and Society* 43, no. 4 (2019): 375–402, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0160597618814884>; Salman Sayyid, "Islamophobia and the Europeaness of the other Europe," *Patterns of Prejudice* 52, no. 5 (2018): 420–35, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0031322X.2018.1512481>.
- 20 On the process of normalizing inequality through racialization, see Jocelyne Cesari, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of European Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Steve Garner and Saher Selod, "The Racialization of Muslims," *Critical Sociology* 41, no. 1 (2015): 9–19, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0896920514531606>; Fred Halliday, "Islamophobia Reconsidered," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 22, no. 5 (1999): 892–902; Nasar Meer, "Racialization and Religion: Race, Culture and Difference in the Study of Antisemitism and Islamophobia," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 36, no. 3 (2013): 385–98, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2013.734392>; Saher Selod, "Citizenship Denied: The Racialization of Muslim Men and Women post 9/11," *Critical Sociology* 41, no. 1 (2015): 77–95, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0896920513516022>; Saher Selod and David Embrick, "Racialization and Muslims," *Sociology Compass* 7, no. 8 (2013): 644–55, <https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12057>.
- 21 See Chantal Saint-Blancat and Ottavia Schmidt di Friedberg, "Mobilisations laïques et religieuses des musulmans en Italie," *Cahiers d'études sur la Méditerranée orientale et le monde turco-iranien* 33 (2002): 91–106, <https://doi.org/10.4000/cemoti.725>.
- 22 See Nathan Lean, *The Islamophobia Industry* (London: Pluto Press, 2012).
- 23 For examples of a more "scientific" and learned, see Hans Magnus Enzensberger, "The Radical Loser," January 12, 2005, <http://www.signandsight.com/features/493.html>; Bruce Thornton, *Decline and Fall: Europe's Slow-Motion Suicide* (New York: Encounter Books, 2007).
- 24 For Lega Nord, Alain de Benoist has been an important cultural reference, especially regarding the relationship between cultural globalization/ethnonationalism and the absolutization of cultural differences (cultural racism and differentialism).
- 25 On November 21, 2000, the mayor of Rovato (Brescia) decided that "non-Christians" should maintain a distance of at least 15 metres from the small town's church. On December 17, 2000, Lega Nord organized a large demonstration against Muslim immigration and against illegal immigration in Milan, which was attended by approximately 20,000 people.

- 26 Examples include the 2008 petition against offering an Arabic language course for the children of immigrants in the primary school in Sant'Agostino (west of Ferrara); the demonstrations in Treviso in December 2002 against the creation of an Arabic school and against the celebrations for 'Īd al-Fitr, the demonstrations against Īd al-Aḏḥā in Montebelluna in February 2003 and against the creation of an Islamic cemetery in Udine in November 2008.
- 27 Salvini's use of the rosary recalls the 1571 Battle of Lepanto, in which the naval forces of the Christian Holy League faced off against those of the Muslim Ottoman Empire. In preparation, Pope Pius V asked Christians to recite the rosary, and the Holy League emerged victorious.
- 28 I have selected salient fragments from Salvini's address to the national gathering of the Lega Nord in Venice: "Festa dei Popoli—Gentilini," September 14, 2008, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_WCZNQJkV3E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_WCZNQJkV3E).
- 29 The majority of Italian institutions are not very much in favour of Islam and Muslim immigration. See the statement by Silvio Berlusconi at the Berlin summit of September 26, 2001, when, as the head of the Italian government, he claimed that Islam is inferior and the Western world is superior: "They are lagging behind 1400 years."
- 30 Mobilizations took place in Bologna, Genoa, and Padua, where movements were created at the local level for a referendum against mosques.
- 31 A constant feature of anti-mosque mobilizations is physical and symbolic violence, insults to religion, humiliation and vilification of religious symbols, the desecration of others' values, and de-humanization. Often demonstrations concluded with desecrating lands or buildings by parading pigs and spreading their urine and dung, as happened in Lodi (October 2000), Padova (November 2007), and Genoa and Bologna (2008). There have been attacks, raids, and damage throughout the whole country: in January 2003, the entry door of a prayer hall in Imola (Bologna area) was damaged by a Molotov cocktail; December 2006 saw a fascist raid—including posting a pig's severed head—against the working site of a mosque in Colle Val d'Elsa (Siena area) after a torchlight procession attended by around five hundred people (a few months earlier, in May, Oriana Fallaci stated in the *New Yorker*: "I'll blow it up! I'll go to my anarchist friends, take explosives with them and blow it up"). In April 2006, the entry door of Parma's prayer room was damaged, and swastikas were painted on the walls; in July 2006, the door of the prayer hall in San Remo was disfigured with swastikas; in 2007, there were attacks against prayer halls in Abbiategrasso and Segrate (Milan area); in 2008 and 2012, cherry bombs and firecrackers were thrown in the prayer hall of Battipaglia (Salerno area); in February 2008, there was a bomb attack against the mosque of Milan (via

Quaranta); in August 2011, there was an arson attack against the Islamic cultural center in Bologna; in October 2013, a fascist blitz attacked the prayer room of Ravenna; in March 2014, a raid damaged the inside of the prayer hall in Rieti and burned the Qur'an; in February 2015, an arson attack hit the prayer hall in Massa Lombarda (Ravenna area); in December 2015, a cherry bomb hit the prayer hall in Montagnana (Padua area); and in 2016, the prayer hall of Bergamo was damaged, and a cherry bomb used against the prayer hall of Padua (Arcella).

- 32 "Principi per la pianificazione delle attrezzature per servizi religiosi" [Principles for the Planning of Religious Services Premises], Regione Lombardi, <https://www.regione.lombardia.it/wps/portal/istituzionale/HP/DettaglioServizio/servizi-e-informazioni/Enti-e-Operatori/Territorio/governo-del-territorio/principi-pianificazione-attrezzature-servizi-religiosi/principi-pianificazione-attrezzature-servizi-r>.
- 33 "Modifica della legge regionale 23 aprile 2004, n. 11 'Norme per il governo del territorio e in materia di paesaggio' e successive modificazioni" [Amendment to Regional Law 23rd April 2004, no. 11—Rules for the management of the territory and on landscape], Regione del Veneto, <https://bur.regione.veneto.it/BurvServices/pubblica/DettaglioLegge.aspx?id=320306>.
- 34 With respect to the lack of recognition of Islam, it is worth noting the absence of Muslims, who are for the most part the subject of the debate.
- 35 In any case, Italy is aware of Islam as an internal phenomenon, and this realization contributed to the re-discovery of the country's collective memory of a Catholic identity and to the renewal of the debate on unresolved matters such as the relationship between religion and the state. The recognition of Islam as a public religion has not been dealt with very decisively in Italy, with the debate often shifting to more general matters, especially the deficit of internal integration that has long been ailing Italy and the frailty of the Republic's founding pacts between liberals, Catholics, and socialists (Enzo Pace, *La nation italienne en crise*, Paris: Bayard, 1998).
- 36 For a discussion of the way in which colonialism dehumanizes the colonizers and de-civilizes the colonizers, see Aimé Césaire, *Discours sur le colonialisme suivi de Discours sur la Négritude* (1955) (Paris: Présence Africaine, 2004).



## 5 Global North Homoimperialism and the Conundrum of Queer Asylum

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*I'm out now and living very open again. And I'm even more out than I was before. It's going to be hard to go there [back home] to live. I do miss my friends and my family. I do not miss the lifestyle of Jamaica. I do not miss the homophobia. I probably miss the country, the physical country itself but going back there to live is a no-no. Definitely not. Maybe for a quick visit and that's it.*

—Jamaican refugee in Canada, 2013

On April 19, 2018, queer human rights activists gathered at the University of Toronto as part of a symposium on LGBT refugees and migration held by the Mark Bonham Centre for Sexual and Diversity Studies.<sup>1</sup> Speakers from Rainbow Railroad and the 519 Community Centre, among other organizations, spoke about wide-ranging issues affecting queer refugees outside and within Canada. In addition to the popular glowing tributes about the safety that Canada offers to queer people, some participants spoke about the hardships they face when they enter cities like Toronto as refugees. One presenter, for instance, made a passionate plea to activists and other stakeholders to understand how newcomers are impacted by limited access to housing, employment opportunities, and health care services, all of which are compounded by the difficulties in becoming integrated into the Canadian society. Another, who arrived in Toronto from Nigeria in 2017, wondered, “Why am I

not settled now?” He spoke at length about being homeless, being unable to find employment or a stable place to live and having little access to racially and culturally sensitive mental health services. A trans woman also provided an emotional account of being attacked in Antigua and having to flee to Canada. While Canada represents all the dreams that she could not achieve in her homeland, she reflected, “There are times when I think, did I make the right choice? Things have been so hard, especially how I am getting by in Canada as a trans woman of colour. . . . Although services are available, LGBTQ newcomers of colour are at a disadvantage because we do not know how to access the services available to us.”

### **Canada: A Queer Safe Haven?**

These narratives stand in stark contrast to the testament in the opening epigraph that situates the Global North as a queer safe haven, where in this context the Jamaican refugee praises Canada for providing the safety and comfort that was not presumably available at home. In *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*, Ann McClintock’s theorizes the interrelation between race, gender, and sexuality in the context of European colonization and imperialism. Further, she examines how racial hierarchies, gender stereotypes and norms of sexual behaviour were reinforced, exploited, and imposed to control women, the colonized, and the industrial working class. While McClintock does not comment explicitly on the impact of these colonizing structures on homophobia among the colonized, her theorization proves useful for thinking carefully about how narratives like these are refracted through lingering racial hierarchies, and gender and sexual structures that persist in the Caribbean (and everywhere impacted by European colonization). These kinds of narratives of wanton violence position the region as an anachronistic elsewhere that remains “prehistoric, atavistic and irrational, inherently out of place in the historical time of modernity,” while leaving unaccounted, the impacts of European Empire on the moral, cultural and political psyche in these spaces.<sup>2</sup>

I have been documenting these stories of despair as part of ongoing research that theorizes the ways that queer people engage a politics of hope as they negotiate and resist homophobia, transphobia and discrimination in the Anglophone Caribbean and its diasporas. Indeed, they also inspire my discussion in this chapter, as I interrogate some of the deeply complicated

experiences that queer refugees from the Caribbean confront as they search for a “better life” elsewhere. I offer this analysis to rethink notions of peace and liberation as a means to focus on what happens when queer refugees enter Canada and The Netherlands as “Others” in relation to settler colonial and multicultural legacies that work to structure relationalities. How are they impacted by the prevailing racial, political, cultural, and social dynamics in these assumed “safe” havens? This question is often maligned or disregarded in mainstream, Global North international human rights activism, which relies heavily on white, neoliberal ideas about queer rights for persons elsewhere. Joseph Massad’s theorization of the gay international’s sexual identity politics is useful here for situating this politics as a way to understand how the world ideas for queer liberation emerges. In *Desiring Arabs*, Massad examines how Western ideas and human rights activism influence sexual identity politics and define “not only Arab nationalist responses, but also and especially Islamist ones, and what implications these would have for the sexual desires and practices of contemporary Arabs.”<sup>3</sup> This trend he attributes to the gay international’s mobilization to “defend the rights of ‘gays and lesbians’ all over the world and to advocate on their behalf.”<sup>4</sup> He finds that the gay international propagates a largely white, male, Euro-American discourse that “describes” and “explains” their distant interpretations of Arab and Muslim sexuality against their ideas of a contemporary gay world.<sup>5</sup> This inevitably produces palatable versions of Islam and queerness and reinforce the imperialistic nature of human rights politics. Massad argues further that the gay international invokes an incitement to discourse that produces homosexuals in specific contexts and represses same-sex desires that “do not assimilate into Western sexual epistemologies.”<sup>6</sup> This incitement, he continues, “divides the world into those who support and those who oppose gay rights.”<sup>7</sup> This argument, when applied to the current landscape of human rights activism in the Anglophone Caribbean is highly provocative, as it acknowledges the very particular ways that queer life is referenced on the one hand, and exposes the inherent silencing of the creative and transgressive ways that queer people actively negotiate violence and discrimination.

The Global North as a safe space for queer people therefore emerges in initiatives spearheaded by many organizations run by mostly white gay men and queer refugees from various parts of the world. I speak as a queer person from the Anglophone Caribbean, living in North America, and working closely with community activists and working-class trans people from the

Caribbean and in Caribbean diasporas across the world. Some queer liberation initiatives in the Anglophone Caribbean have allowed countries like Canada and The Netherlands to enter the region as a formidable “gay international” force through the deployment of human rights interventions, be it activism or asylum policy, that continuously frame the region as salvageable or “underdeveloped on the one hand, while reinforcing Canada [and The Netherlands] as manager[s] of global imperialism” on the other.<sup>8</sup> This helping imperative through queer-rights talk imagines the Caribbean region as barbaric by introducing ideas about what it might mean to save queers based on white, neoliberal notions of queer liberation. Global North human rights defenders have invested heavily in the region and their own queer imperialism, which, as Jamaican scholar-activist Carla Moore theorizes, enacts a queer liberal hegemony by those who purport to be the holders of queer legitimacy and who justify their intervention with colonialist development rhetoric.<sup>9</sup> To do so, it utilizes members of the queer Caribbean diaspora to transport this politics to the region, a process in which Caribbean queers residing in places like Canada often become transformed into what I theorize in my work as “native experts” about these conditions.

“Native experts” are persons from the Anglophone Caribbean (and elsewhere) who have relocated to countries like Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, and The Netherlands. They have been positioned within white neoliberal queer discourses as holders of exclusive knowledge of the realities in their countries of origin. In Canada, they are made to speak the language of the human rights defenders who assist them, where narratives of death, disease, and escape from a violently homophobic region becomes the de facto rhetoric. Other stories are delegitimized in relation to these, and if the dominant narrative is contested, conflicting opinions are shut down and struck out of the conversation. This concept of “native” is indeed fraught with contention, and, as Trinh T. Minh-ha explains in her interrogation of anthropological studies of the Other, the very classification of someone as “native” emphasizes “*their* being born inferior and ‘non-Europeans.’”<sup>10</sup> In this arrangement, native experts become “the handicapped who cannot represent themselves and have to either be represented or learn how to represent themselves. Whatever the issue, they are entrapped in a circular dance where they find themselves a pace behind the white saviours.”<sup>11</sup>

Examples of native-expert narratives abound. For example, *Envisioning LGBT Human Rights* (hereafter *Envisioning*), a Canadian queer human rights

initiative, propels a narrative of rescuing queers based on an idealized notion of what Canada has to offer. As part of its global mandate, it conducts participatory action research to ascertain the international landscape of LGBT human rights and to determine Canada's response to situations beyond its borders. This project explicitly focuses on "Commonwealth countries that maintain criminal code sanctions against same-sex intimacy, working with partners in selected countries where such laws are currently being challenged (India, Uganda, Kenya, Botswana, St. Lucia, Jamaica, Belize and Guyana)."<sup>12</sup> In 2013, the Society Against Sexual Orientation Discrimination in Guyana and Envisioning partnered with Guyanese artist Ulelli Verbeke to produce a photo-text essay called *Capturing LGBT Migration from the Caribbean to Canada*, which was launched by Envisioning at the Canadian Gay and Lesbian Archives (now The ArQuives) for Toronto's 2014 World Pride. In this piece, Verbeke photographed queer people who still reside in or left the Caribbean in search of safety or, more precisely, to avoid death. The subjects in the Caribbean remain anonymous through their framing—back toward the camera, heads bent, or ambiguous body parts being shown—while those in Canada are photographed with broad and confident smiles. Each picture is accompanied by a short quotation that reinforces Canada as a safe haven. For example, Dud (face toward the camera), a refugee from Guyana now living in Canada, explains, "I totally empathize with people's plights while they're living there. That's why I can never, ever go back. I have absolutely no desire to."<sup>13</sup> Annon, also from Guyana (back toward camera), lays blame for the incessant homophobia on the government: "When we look at the struggles of the huge gay movement in the Global North in terms of the gay revolution it requires a lot of work. And if we are looking to give equal rights to the LGBT community, then a lot more has to be done. And we can only do that with the support of the government."<sup>14</sup>

These kinds of dynamics are made tangible in David Murray's pioneering scholarship on homonationalism in the Canadian context where he establishes a clear link between the native-expert narratives (that I trace in my work) and International Refugee Board (IRB) culture that legitimizes particular stories of queer despair. In *Real Queer? Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Refugees in the Canadian Refugee Apparatus*, Murray argues that Canadian asylum narratives

reinscribe the homonationalist queer migration to liberation nation  
narrative undergirding the refugee apparatus, in that Canada is

constructed as a new, liberated, home nation for sexual and gender minorities, while former home nations (mostly from the Global South) are constructed as backward and primitive because of their rampant homo- and transphobia.<sup>15</sup>

Murray explores the complicated navigations that queer asylum seekers need to make when they arrive in countries like Canada on sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) claims. Focusing on some of the processes that queer refugees must go through to authenticate their queerness to immigration officials, he explains,

Few SOGI claimants arrive in Canada thinking of themselves as “refugees,” and some do not think of themselves as members of a particular sexual minority or gender identity group or may not recognize or identify with sexual minority terms as they are defined and organized in Canada. However, in the period leading up to their IRB hearing, the SOGI refugee claimants must learn relatively quickly how to “be” or at least “occupy” one of these LGBT identity categories authentically, as their hearings are dedicated to assessing the credibility of their claims to be members of a particular social group, who have faced persecution in their country of origin. They are reminded repeatedly by their lawyers, peer support group leaders and one another that there are a number of components, characteristics and assumptions utilized by IRB members to determine the credibility of an SOGI refugee claim, and if they learn and understand these assumptions and characteristics associated with “LGBT” identities, and integrate them into an appropriate narrative of identity formation and persecution based on that identity, then they stand a better chance of a successful hearing.<sup>16</sup>

Murray goes on to examine the experiences of several refugees from various parts of the world, including gay men from Uganda and the Caribbean. He walks the reader through the various ways they perform or are made to perform their queerness once they are under investigation by the IRB and gives vital insight into some of the messy negotiations that queer people must engage in, like confronting homelessness, lack of access to sustainable employment and health care, and segregation among asylum seekers when they bring with them deep-rooted histories and ways of engaging with each other.

Readily visible in this discourse are a validation and celebration of queer rights within a particular queer neoliberal framework; one that “presumably

makes Canadians feel proud of their nation's status as a gay-friendly refuge."<sup>17</sup> My research continues to reveal that native experts, formerly Othered queer subjects in their countries of origin, are one of the main ways that such limiting performance queerness is maintained. And as Sima Shakhsari argues usefully, such figures "have been traditionally excluded from the heteronormative imaginations of the nation, and thus willingly take the opportunity to insert themselves into national imaginations in diasporic reterritorializations" as saved queers in the Global North.<sup>18</sup> But what are the ethical responsibilities of those who are positioned to speak about these imagined violent safe places? Rinaldo Walcott questions this in *Queer Returns: Human Rights, the Anglo-Caribbean and Diaspora Politics* as he grapples with the ethical responsibilities of those who "speak to somewhere and from another place . . . as displaced subjects both inside and outside of the region."<sup>19</sup> Walcott allows us to see this in the work done by these diaspora activists and native experts whose work "measure[s] citizenship in the exact and minute terms of heterosexual citizenship [and] provides space for elites within states to self-express . . . produce and police sexuality on singular terms forcing sexual minorities into a one size fits all model."<sup>20</sup> This, he contends, "does not work for the poor."<sup>21</sup>

Bearing in mind what Walcott asks, it is not my intention to diminish the experiences of queer refugees who find their way to places like Canada and The Netherlands. Rather, I am interested in how their stories of frustration disrupt an idea of "good life" in the Global North. I wonder what might it mean to recognize that human rights as a singular-focused framework is an insufficient strategy for seeking queer liberation? Further, I posit that real, complicated and nuanced experiences need to inform and destabilize the homoiempire culture of liberatory queer human rights policy and activism. And as Caribbean feminist scholars Angelique Nixon and Rosamond King argue, this work must be attentive to the embodied experiences in ways that seriously contemplate the ways that transnational flows of power remain deeply informed by queer people's historical, social, cultural and political circumstances.<sup>22</sup> The following queer refugee experiences provide a glimpse of why this is a necessary ethical responsibility of human rights defenders of the "queer Other."

## Asylum on Whose Terms?

My ongoing ethnographic research has revealed that, despite compelling narratives of queer refugee freedom in Canada and The Netherlands, many queer people continue to face significant economic, social, cultural, and interpersonal hardships. These are mostly tied to the larger political and racialized landscapes that define people of colour and particularly Black people's relationship to these queer asylum spaces. I began documenting queer Caribbean refugee stories in 2019 to understand the complexities of the refugees' experiences once they arrive in Canada and The Netherlands.<sup>23</sup> While refugees have expressed gratitude for being able to leave their home countries, newfound peace and happiness seem to be deferred because of many other mitigating factors. In what follows, I turn to interview data from queer people from Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago to reveal this pressing reality.<sup>24</sup> While this sample limits the representation of refugee realities, it is nevertheless reflective of some of the experiences of many queer refugees and points to the critical need for further documentation and a better understand better the hardships that non-white queer refugees experience when they arrive in the Global North. I explore emerging refugee stories under two main themes: finding work and financial support and love and sex relationships.

### Finding Work and Financial Support

Well, to be honest, work not really hard to find but I should say good jobs are hard to find. But work on the whole, like not really hard to find. But if you looking for something that will suit probably like what you did back home or something that suits your education, or qualifications or things like that, you might have a bit of a problem because coming to Canada all your education stuff needs to be assessed and . . . they still will require you to add certain things to it. . . . Or they may even . . . want you to pay. It's expensive, that's another thing too. . . . They have to contact the institution back in your country, the institution has to send certain forms and different things like that. So that can be a bit ticklish or be hard because, um, sometimes some of these people leave flee to these country without any of these information or document. . . . So some people just end up doing factory work, doing cleaning jobs and things like that just to make ends meet.



Anthony, the respondent above, has been living in Canada for approximately five years after leaving Trinidad and Tobago because of the discrimination and violence he experienced.<sup>25</sup> Once he received refugee status after a year in Canada, he needed a stable income to support himself, having arrived with no financial support or resources. Despite being a qualified nurse in his home country, he learned that all his education and experience were deemed invalid and that he had to start over in order to stay in the medical field.

Things were extremely hard for him for his first few years, and he was often at a point where he had to find any kind of work “just to make ends meet, just to put food on the table to get by.” One way that he and his other refugee friends managed this financial crisis was by registering with the provincial unemployment relief program called Ontario Works (OW) to get a monthly stipend. Anthony explains:

Well, refugees could, um, with their refugee ID can . . . get registered with Ontario Works . . . which that be . . . like ah kinda stipend they will get for each month. But with OW they encourage you to like get up and go find work. They also try to get you connected to like public programs; because OW have programs like maybe classes, for instance, for someone who may come from a country who don't speak French or don't speak English. If you might want to do cooking, sewing and things like that, they have classes and things for that. So that's how OW gets you connected . . . and they help as much as it can. The money is not much.

Much like Anthony, Earl from Jamaica experienced extreme poverty after arriving in Toronto, with little hope for assistance from the numerous Black queer groups that cater to refugees. Since his arrival on March 14, 2016, he constantly struggled to find employment, finish university, and find stable housing. In our interviews and interactions, he always became extremely emotional because of the profound sense of regret and loss that he feels. On one occasion, he exclaimed,

Until this day I am living like damn second-class rat. Nothing accomplished! I've experienced what poverty and true isolation is over some homophobic threats in Jamaica. My life was economically more progressive in Jamaica. I was not socially isolated, and I had real proper guys to interact with despite them going through the same psychological issues due to the Caribbean society. Now I waste a way in an over-rated, overpriced ice waste land like a dingy rat.

What makes Earl's situation unique among other research participants is that he has been diagnosed with severe clinical depression and mild schizophrenia and remains heavily medicated. This has affected his ability to maintain stable employment or to attend school as regularly as he needs to maintain his funding through the provincially funded Ontario Student Assistance Program. In fact, he temporarily lost this funding and was being forced to withdraw from his undergraduate classes despite only needing to complete four courses to obtain his bachelor's degree. This continues to take a serious toll on him as he contemplates going back to Jamaica, which he now appreciates as the better place to be:

Canada is not designed for people like me. [It is] designed for hyper-sexually persecuted men and pretenders who are obsessed with North American gay life pictured on TV. If you don't fit that, you get fucked! Even an impotent straight guy is able to find a decent woman and his life improves in all aspects. I ran from the frying pan into the fire. Still, I burn in the façade.

[I] ran from homophobic family to live like a john crow [a vulture] in Canada. Ran from proper housing, shelter that I volunteer for years to help sustain and upgrade my future blueprints to expand; to now come to a foreign land to deal with daily fuckery.

From dam riches to rags

From being affectionate with guys to be[ing] socially isolated and despised by guys

To eating daily 2 or 3 times to eating 0 or 1 time.

From learning to drive and planning to [but now] can't even afford a bicycle

From saying, I paid the utility bills for 3 months in advance to eluding creditors and struggling to pay my landlord rent.

Earl's reality is frightening. Over the years, I've tried to work as closely as possible with him to ensure that he's connected with health care resources and mental health crisis personnel. However, this too has been a struggle because of the highly racialized, sexualized, and politicized nature of health care in Canada and Toronto that diminishes equitable and culturally appropriate access for many Black populations in the country.

Earl and Anthony's experiences only begin to scratch the surface of the kinds of crises that queer refugees in my research experience in Canada. Similarly, Dirk, who had recently relocated from Trinidad and Tobago and was

working closely with newcomer communities with one of the main LGBTIQ+ organizations in Toronto, reiterated this reality:

Some organizations have support, so they run programs for mental health. But the thing is that . . . in the Caribbean there's a stigma around mental health, right? Cause you see . . . if you have a mental health [issue], yuh crazy. Mental health does not always look like . . . what we see. We all have, you know . . . I probably have a range of mental health conditions going on with me right now. But you know, but I'm functioning. So it's how do we communicate that to these communities, so they understand what it is [so] they are not afraid to access mental health support because there is a stigma around accessing mental health support. A stigma around accessing substance use support as well.

These deeply complex dynamics are further complicated when queer refugees enter Canada as racialized and sexualized subjects, and, as I explore next, refugees in Amsterdam face a similar struggle due to systemic barriers that disproportionately affect them when they try to settle in. Annabelle, a trans woman from Trinidad and Tobago, moved to The Netherlands in 2016 after almost being murdered by an online acquaintance. Based on a promise of new life and an opportunity to transition safely, she was full of hope that Holland would offer all that she needed for a happy and safe life. However, she learned quickly that this was not going to be the experience that she anticipated. In reflecting on her financial situation, she lamented,

Here I feel so frustrated. . . . When I moved to Limburg to the new refugee camp, I was there for like a week before I was even registered to be there. Regardless of that, I am not a needle in a haystack, I am not a pin, I am not a strand of hair; I am a whole entire human being with flesh and blood. How do you forget me in a system for a whole bloody week? It's those things that I feel like just has me feeling frustrated.

They put you in this house and is like, okay, you could shut up now because you have a house and is like they forget about you. So [sighs], I think my unhappiness comes from me not having a sense of direction here. Like I know that they say within three years you have to pass your *Inburgeringsexamen* [examination on Dutch language, culture, and society]. That's not enough for me to have an aspiration for the direction of my life; that's not enough for me. So, I don't know if I'm being

critical, or if my feelings are valid to be honest, eh, but I am absolutely miserable here.

You know, the government is always coming down on us; oh, refugees are not doing nothing and blah, blah, blah. But y'all are not giving us the opportunities to do it too, like is like they want us all to be like a bunch of hotel cleaners, fast food workers, street cleaners and delivery girls and boys. . . . [I] read articles and I see what they think about us! I know people who came from Iran that were fucking doctors, but because they don't know fucking Dutch they have to go work in a fucking hotel as a teller as a bellboy. . . . It's fucking ridiculous!

These kinds of frustrations are further compounded when queer people go to Canada and The Netherlands and try to find love, or even use love, relationships, or sex encounters as a way for coping and achieving some financial stability.

## Love and Sex Relationships

Let's be honest. In those days, I'm actually trying to get out of Trinidad. So this was my opportunity to leave. I got my visa within two weeks. He pulled some strings got me my visa. He left the Wednesday; the Friday morning, I was on that plane heading out. I got to Canada. When I got to Canada, I quickly realized that the guy wasn't what he said he was. He was a drunk, an extreme drunk. He was divorced with four kids, and he was very abusive, to which, I grew up in an abusive home and it's something I would never tolerate. It so happened that the guy . . . tried to throw me out of the house because he wanted to have a threesome with me and another guy. And . . . I knew nothing about these things yet [laughs]. Like, I've done it before, but I knew nothing like it in a relationship. I thought this guy was going to be my partner. He was going to be my saviour. He was going to be my hero. And it turned out that I literally was just his boy; he owns me. So whatever he wanted to do, I had to do. Um, I had a friend in Toronto that I used to call to help me to get out of the situation [but] to no avail; my friend never helped.

As he relates, Kyle left Trinidad in 2012 based on a promise of love, happiness, and a better life with his newfound lover but this quickly turned into a nightmare. Recognizing that this arrangement was deeply fetishistic on

his partner's part and isolating when his friend abandoned him, he left and sought refuge with other newfound friends in Alberta. But all this happened after a violent encounter with his lover that landed him in prison with the threat of deportation:

One night on May 4, 2007, the guy proceeded to throw my stuff out. And then reach[ed] at me . . . [and] started to choke me and reach into my pocket for his keys . . . well, for my keys . . . the keys that he gave me when I came. And we got into an altercation, a physical altercation; it got to the point where he became hospitalized. I ended up in the Edmonton Remand Centre. I had to call a lawyer who insisted that I plead guilty. I kept telling my lawyer that I do not want to plead guilty because if I plead guilty, I have nothing to go back to in my country and I came here for a better life. I was promised a better life, and I don't feel like if this is a better life that I'm getting.

I was in Remand for six weeks and one day before my case came up, I met a paralegal. We just started talking and she advised me as to what I should do to stay out of this situation to be able to stay in Canada; because she believed what I said about the situation . . . about the altercation. She advised me to stand up and speak to the judge in front of everyone. And I did just that. I poured my heart out, I poured my soul out because I really believed and knew that I came to Canada for a better life and it's what I should be getting. I won my case. The case got thrown out, and she advised me to go seek asylum in Canada. I went in, I sought asylum and got accepted into the refugee program within three days.

Earl has also had his share of disappointment with relationships since arriving in Toronto. His mental health struggles and asexuality makes his interactions with men extremely difficult. Or as he explained to me more succinctly,

We are fresh meat for them, and they just want your dick and ass and give you cash, then kick you out after. Anyone who rejects this stereotype gets ostracized with not much support. Most refugee gays are like crab in a barrel, all about drama and fuck. That's ok but what else is there to offer than risking people's health and drama? I am homophobic asexual/gay asexual. I guess the system doesn't know how to fit me in or puts me as a progressive straight man or slightly queer guy.

Earl points to several interesting and complicated dynamics as a Black queer man entering a highly racialized city and having to confront this new reality

of being fetishized both within and outside his community of queer refugees. Unfortunately, at the time of our interview, he became “socially isolated and despised by guys.” Further, he recognized that his life was more progressive in Jamaica, where he “was not socially isolated and had real proper guys to interact with despite them going through the same psychological issues due to homophobic Caribbean society values.”

An interesting occurrence was also happening in Holland at the time of my research, where, because they were receiving meagre financial assistance from the state, refugees often had to resort to sex work to survive. Keagan, a gay man from Trinidad highlighted this:

So, a lot of the trans girls, even some of the gay boys, they turn to sex work. . . . I personally know people that do that and credit card, credit card scams and fraud, and stuff like that, because especially the trans girls people have this notion, Oh, you get everything but when they come here and realize how hard it is they turn to men and these kinds of activities to survive.

Annabella too, shared her thoughts:

So, I don't [do] it but sex work is a big thing. Especially if you're a queer person of colour. I mean, there's a high demand for it. It's ironic as fuck but there's a high level of fetishism here. And then it's so racist to say, like, oh my god, like, you guys are fetishizing us but you're so fucking racist toward people of colour.

Even in the organizations out here that are supposed to be helping us, they aren't as innocent as you think. So there's one called [name omitted] and then there's another affiliation called [name omitted]. I know people who had court cases and the most [they] have done for them is written a letter. That's not enough you know, but yuh want to have sex with them after yuh parties and have orgies at yuh house with everybody. That's crazy.

Carl from Jamaica felt that Holland's highly sexualized culture came with its seemingly natural affinity with sex:

The first world is the first world. Everyone up here is into drugs and sex and parties, and all of these things are things that are not in the Caribbean, so when we come here, it's almost like culture shock and some people dive into it in a bad way and some people sort of experience it

and then go on with their lives. It comes with a whole bag of negativity. But it's the first world kind of living. The Caribbean is slow and laid back and living here is like a culture shock.

A lot of refugees are into prostitution because here you know, my god, it's ridiculous. Being Black here is sort of like being a forbidden candy that white people just want to try. So it's really difficult to not get into prostitution here if you need money. So if you sit down here with no money and ten, twelve old men a night messaging you to sleep with you, obviously you going to get into prostitution at some point. So most of the refugees here get into prostitution and that's how they make their money. I don't judge them for it; no one in The Netherlands will judge you because here it's like a regular job. Here it's . . . legal, this is a regular job, so I don't judge people. I just believe that if you doing prostitution let it be for a bit and put things toward something that's better for you. Prostitution comes with constantly taking drugs and you get lost. You don't use the money for anything good, you use it just to buy more drugs.

While Canada appears to be more reserved in relation to Amsterdam in these recollections, evident here is the way that Black queer refugees are fetishized and sexualized and become deeply embedded within economies of sexual pleasure. These relationships continue long-standing racialized relations of power that situate Black bodies as hypersexual and hot-bodied.<sup>26</sup> Further, these relations fulfill a white fantasy, as tourism scholar Ian Strachan theorizes: Caribbean people are “supposedly beast-like, the object of sexual fantasy, the site of devious promiscuity.”<sup>27</sup> Through these gazes an “exoticization of the Black slave body and ‘untouched paradise’” continue legacies of colonization.<sup>28</sup> However, as these refugees show, this is unacceptable if we really wish to achieve the elusive goal of peace and freedom for queer people.

## **Toward Queer Freedom**

While these stories are disheartening, they also provide useful insight into the kind of work that is still needed in our quest for queer freedom. But how could we envision peace in ways that are attentive to these kinds of deeply complex experiences among queer Caribbean refugees in Canada and The Netherlands? I propose that human rights defenders and their funders need, first, to acknowledge that current rights frameworks premised on the demise

of a dying queer subject elsewhere is insufficient for representing queer realities. Second, native experts need to ensure that the dark underbelly of queer asylum be recognized to nuance the first world's generous self-positioning as a queer safe haven. Third, funders and activists from outside the Caribbean region (and elsewhere) must work closer with organizers on the ground, in the countries that they continue to situate as barbaric and savage. I have reflected on this necessity elsewhere, and my research continues to reveal that we must strive to honour these ethical responsibilities to ensure a more effective engagement with issues of queer peace and freedom.<sup>29</sup>

But how do we attend to this conundrum when, as queer-of-colour scholar Sarah Ahmed argues, the promise of a “a good life” that “gives us images of a certain kind of life, a life that has certain things and does certain things” is illusory.<sup>30</sup> Evident in these experiences is a scenario where queer refugees enter these countries through already predetermined measures of progress and legitimacy in their quest for peace and freedom. By establishing these indicators, human rights as a framework regulates what denotes not just a happy life and queer peace but also what constitutes a good life. This predetermined good life, Ahmed reminds us, involves the regulation of desire.<sup>31</sup> However, as she asks further, “Can we rewrite the history of happiness from the point of view of the wretch?”<sup>32</sup> Ahmed continues to explore the viewpoint of the wretch:

If we listen to those who are cast as wretched, perhaps their wretchedness would no longer belong to them. The sorrow of the stranger might give us a different angle on happiness not because it teaches us what it is like or must be like to be a stranger, but because it might estrange us from the very happiness of the familiar.<sup>33</sup>

The queer refugees in my research (and that of others) are acutely conscious of their alienation in their quest for peace and freedom, and it is important to pay closer attention to and devise ways to ensure that they become less entangled in the kinds of highly racialized and deeply problematic relationships that are fostered in transnational spaces like Toronto and Amsterdam. Further, in this quest for peace for those who are Othered and deemed different or less-than, human rights activists in the Global North must invest energy and resources to understand and reflect on the deeply complex contours of queer life. They must also interrogate their ethical and moral responsibilities in attending to problematic sexualization and fetishization of those they assist.



In fact, they can draw on and learn many lessons from the community groups and activists fighting for change in the Caribbean. While conflicts between native experts and regional activists continue to foster tenuous relationships, native experts must understand that their validation and celebration of queer neoliberal human rights discourse “presumably makes Canadians feel proud of their nation’s status as a gay-friendly refuge,”<sup>34</sup> while overemphasizing “the hegemonic narrative about gay persecutions” elsewhere.<sup>35</sup>

Caribbean feminist scholar-activists offer a useful remedy to this debacle and a way to refocus on what queer freedom can look like in a Caribbean context punctuated by violence and discrimination. I return to Nixon and King, who for instance offer *embodied theory* as a methodology and praxis for honouring queer people’s situated knowledge and experiences. This they posit, facilitates an approach attuned to people’s realities where they are located across intersections of race, class, gender and sexuality, among others. As such, organizing and advocacy must “encompasses the importance of community organizing and attention to the local . . . and consult local [and regional] archives and to collaborate with local [and regional] scholars, community-based researchers, and other experts in meaningful ways.”<sup>36</sup> With this in mind, the embodied approach to queer freedom in the Caribbean is one, as Nixon and King explain,

that does not ignore the reality of bodies—either of the people being studied or of those doing the analysis. We too often, for instance, talk about sex without any mention of pleasure, as is clear in the heavily used term “MSM (men who have sex with men),” which privileges global north epistemologies, HIV/AIDS work, and the international non-governmental funding complex over local language and ways of knowing. Embodied theories pay particular attention to the material reality of the body—how the body’s need for sustenance and safety can drive the decisions of everyone in every sector of a society.<sup>37</sup>

We should also take seriously feminist legal scholar Tracy Robinson’s provocation that Caribbean people’s imagined lives are an integral aspect of how we envision belonging in the region. Or as she argues succinctly, being attuned to imagined lives ensures that “we hear in one another’s contributions a tangible embodied analysis that responds with words and ideas we already own.”<sup>38</sup> It is particularly important for activists, scholars, and funders to provide a space for queer people located within the region and its diasporas to actively

share their experiences. In adopting an embodied theory approach proposed by these Caribbean feminists, we can retell stories using the experiences, language, and ideas that “address the tensions and contradictions of [their] daily lives . . . to destabilize received representations of experience [and] facilitate the political consciousness and the political communities that are necessary in order for us to revisit varied and far-reaching forms of domination.”<sup>39</sup> In doing so, we recognize that silenced stories do not necessarily equate to silent existence. We must therefore work toward ensuring that other non-Global North realities are respected and honoured, and that we foster solidarities across difference.

## Notes

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- 3 Joseph A. Massad, *Desiring Arabs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 47.
- 4 Massad, *Desiring Arabs*, 161.
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- 11 Minh-ha, *Woman Native Other*, 59.
- 12 Envisioning Global LGBT Human Rights, *Envisioning LGBT Refugee Rights in Canada: Is Canada a Safe Haven?* September 2015, 6, [https://ocasi.org/sites/default/files/lgbt-refugee-rights-canada-safe-haven\\_o.pdf](https://ocasi.org/sites/default/files/lgbt-refugee-rights-canada-safe-haven_o.pdf).

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- 15 David A. B. Murray, *Real Queer? Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Refugees in the Canadian Refugee Apparatus* (London: Rowman and Littlefield International, 2016), 136.
- 16 Murray, *Real Queer?* 45.
- 17 Kyle Jackson, "The Construction of Black Jamaican Masculinity in a Neocolonial Imaginary: Canadian 'Homohegemony' and the 'Homophobic Other,'" *Caribbean Review of Gender Studies* 8 (2014): 209–34, at 217.
- 18 Sima Shakhshari, "From Homoerotics of Exile to Homopolitics of Diaspora Cyberspace, the War on Terror, and the Hypervisible Iranian Queer," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 8, no. 3 (2012): 14–40, at 27.
- 19 Rinaldo Walcott, *Queer Returns: Essays on Multiculturalism, Diaspora and Black Studies* (London, ON: Insomniac Press, 2016), 3–4.
- 20 Rinaldo Walcott, "Queer Returns: Human Rights, the Anglo-Caribbean and Diaspora Politics," *Caribbean Review of Gender Studies* 3 (2009): 1–19, at 12.
- 21 Walcott, *Queer Returns*, viii.
- 22 Nixon and King, "Embodied Theories," 6.
- 23 This chapter draws on this research and documents the queer Caribbean refugee experiences that are left out of mainstream international queer human rights activism.
- 24 The prominence of queer refugees from Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago in my research is representative of the larger numbers of persons seeking asylum from these Caribbean countries as opposed to others in this historical moment. In most of the (independent) Anglophone Caribbean, same-sex sexual intimacy still remains sanctioned by law under various Sexual Offenses Acts. The exceptions are the Bahamas (1991), Belize (2016), and Trinidad and Tobago (2018), St Kitts and Nevis, Antigua and Barbuda, and Barbados (2022) who have all amended or challenged sodomy laws for various reasons and with different degrees of social acceptance. Ongoing colonial laws carry varying penalties for engaging in same-sex activities, ranging from between two and ten years' imprisonment in Guyana, to ten years in Jamaica, while in Trinidad and Tobago offenders could have served up to a lifetime sentence. Because of these laws, the Anglophone Caribbean is often described as one of the worst places to be queer in this historical moment.
- 25 I use pseudonyms for all research participants.
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- 31 Ahmed, *Promise of Happiness*, 4.
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- 34 Jackson, “The Construction of Black Jamaican Masculinity in a Neocolonial Imaginary,” 217.
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- 38 Tracy Robinson, “Our Imagined Lives,” in *Sex and the Citizen: Interrogating the Caribbean*, edited by Faith Smith (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011), 201–13, at 209.
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## 6 Unfree Muslims

### Islamophobia and the (Im)Possibilities of Muslim Belonging in America

Chad Haines

On the sunny and hot Friday afternoon of May 29, 2015, Abdullah, a Somalian refugee living in Phoenix, Arizona, and his family and friends made their way to the Islamic Community Center of Phoenix (ICCP). They were greeted by a throng of protestors, all white, mostly men, and many heavily armed. The police cordoned off the crowd, allowing the Muslims, who were mostly immigrants and refugees, Brown and Black, residing in the poorer western neighbourhoods of Phoenix, to enter the mosque for their Friday congregational prayers. However, the sight of the protestors' signs and the sounds of their chants were not blocked. The organizer of the protest, Jon Ritzheimer, wore a tee-shirt expressing his own feelings: "Fuck Islam." That pretty much set the tone of the protest.

The protest was one of many, given the rise of violence against Muslims across the United States following the 9/11 terrorist attacks. From 2001 till 2015 there were on average 150 to 200 documented Islamophobic attacks annually, with spikes following Muslim-perpetrated violence in Europe or North America. However, from 2015 on, anti-Muslim hate crimes doubled.<sup>1</sup> This was the era of Donald Trump, from when he first started to run for US President. Trump seemed to tap into anti-Muslim sentiment and encouraged Islamophobic spectacles, such as Muhammad cartoon drawing contests. His rhetoric, framed by his campaign slogan of "Make America Great Again" situated Muslims, and other minorities, as outside, if not directly undermining,

America's greatness.<sup>2</sup> Donald Trump's policies and rhetoric naturalized the spurious "Clash of Civilizations" thesis popularized by Samuel Huntington in the 1990s.<sup>3</sup> Huntington mapped out a foreign policy of aggression against various Muslim-majority countries and linked a global economic and military (terrorist) threat to America by an (imagined) "Islam-Sino" partnership. His concern was with security. And security, or fear of terrorism, was the expressed driving force of most anti-Muslim violence following the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. However, I suggest, underlying the issue of security are assumptions and values of a radical difference between America and Islam that many perceive as inherent and utterly incompatible. That is, the fear of Islam is not of terrorism and security, but rather a perceived understanding of Islam as being inherently counter to American liberal values.<sup>4</sup>

Over the past ten years, though certainly drawing upon much earlier ideas inherent in the long history of Orientalist discourses about Islam, Muslims are no longer imagined as redeemable: they are unsavable. In this discourse, they do not belong, not just because they are a security risk (something that can be countered and corrected) but because their religion and worldview are inherently oppressive and deny individuals freedom—thus, completely un-American. For the new brand of anti-Islam agitators and Islamophobes, Islam can never be reconciled with American values; thus, Muslims can never be true Americans. "Like the Inquisition . . . the modern secular Euro-American worldview rejects the possibility of multiple paths to the 'pursuit of happiness'" and freedom, making the Otherness of Muslims absolute.<sup>5</sup> Like communism and socialism, Islam is the antithesis of freedom, which is the cornerstone of what makes America great, so the argument goes.

This brand of anti-Islamism is connected to another movement questioning the place of Islam in the United States—emanating from some Muslims themselves. A number of leading Muslim American activists are demanding an Islamic Reformation similar to the Protestant Reformation of Christian Europe. The idea is to forefront American liberal values and relegate religious practices and beliefs to the private sphere. In effect, they are out to convert Muslims to Americanism. However, unlike the Islamophobes, the Reformers do believe there is a place for Muslims in America but only once Islam is transformed into a liberal, American religion. For them, although Islam has questionable capacity to be American, it can be accepted if relegated to the private sphere and reduced to a second-class ideology.

These Muslims naturalize the division of “good Muslims” and “bad Muslims,” the latter being those who threaten Western liberal, secular values and lives.<sup>6</sup> They accept the popular discourse that bad Muslims have “hijacked” Islam but some good Muslims are redeemable. Still, for the Reformationists, such as Ayaan Hirsi Ali and Zuhdi Jasser, there remain inherent problems with Islam that must be transformed for Muslims to assert their place in the liberal West, which is defined as fundamentally superior to “tradition-bound” Islam.

In this chapter, I trace out the Muslim as Other in America, reflecting on the intrinsic intolerance of American liberalism toward those deemed as non-liberal Others. By focusing on freedom as the focal point of contemporary expressions of Islamophobia, I question how peace with the Other must be reimagined away from liberal and nationalist projects and re-envisioned as a communitarian ethic. As detailed in the introduction to this volume, liberalism is predicated on vertical thinking, on mapping hierarchical differences between a much superior liberal West and an inferior Islam that is bound by tradition, predicated on dogmatic prescriptions of social behaviour, and rooted in irrational thinking. Islam, in the construction of liberalism, denies freedom of the individual and thus Muslims require to be freed from their religion.

## Placing Islamophobia

“I am not *Islamophobic*,” declared Jon Ritzheimer when I interviewed him about his anti-Islam protests. In his imagining, phobias are rooted in an irrational fear, and for Ritzheimer, there is nothing irrational about hating Islam. While Ritzheimer’s critique of the term is an expression of his hate toward Islam, academically speaking, Islamophobia as a descriptive label of particular kinds of hate tends to be vague and undefined, covering a gambit of conceptual frames, though all focusing on particular sets of behaviours. Despite the vagueness of the term and lack of conceptual clarity, it is widely used and circulated in popular media and even in academia. Islamophobia has become a convenient catch-all term used by a variety of organizations monitoring hate, such as the Council of American-Islamic Relations Islamophobia Watch Department and the UK website for documenting “anti-Muslim bigotry,” Islamophobia Watch.<sup>7</sup>

There are multiple conceptual frames employed to define Islamophobia that I map into four broad categories: as acts of hate, as a discursive representation,

as an expression of racism, and, finally, as a mode of governmentality. Many academic studies merge these different ways of understanding Islamophobia, providing significant analyses to power, government policies, and a virtual “industry” of producing anti-Islamic messages, often driven by racist ideologies. These studies interrogate what Mahmood Mamdani calls “Culture Talk”—the assumption “that every culture has a tangible essence that defines it, and it then explains politics as a consequence of that essence.”<sup>8</sup> As a critique of the simplistic historical reimagining of Samuel Huntington’s “Clash of Civilizations” thesis, Mamdani documents how the geopolitics of the American “War on Terror” and its long history in the Cold War, reconstructs global antagonisms, arguing that “it is no longer the market (capitalism), nor the state (democracy), but culture (modernity) that is said to be the dividing line between those in favour of a peaceful, civic existence and those inclined to terror.”<sup>9</sup> For Mamdani, the distinction between Islam and the West is imagined to be modernity and Islam’s incapacity of being modern. Many of the tropes and images employed by Islamophobes and Reformationists document Islam’s apparent traditionalism and anti-modern ideas and practices. I suggest these assumptions are predicated on the idea of freedom because modernity, in their eyes, is an evolution toward greater and greater freedom of the individual, something Islam does not accept, in their estimation.

Mamdani’s political history reminds us that, counter to Huntington’s assertion that Islam is anti-democratic, Muslims around the world have and continue to clamour for more democratic participation. Only, countries like the United States and France seem to have a greater aversion to Muslims being democratic. From Algeria to Palestine (where the United States rejected election results), from the Arab Spring to the military and monarchic dictators of Pakistan and Saudi Arabia (where the United States supports oppressive dictators with extensive military aid), over and over again, Western “democracies” undermine democratic movements and possibilities in Muslim-majority countries. Despite this history of undermining or outright denying Muslims democratic polities, the myth of Islam’s rejection of democracy is naturalized in the discursive imagining of Islamophobes, like Huntington, who argues that “Western ideas of individualism, liberalism, constitutionalism, human rights, equality, liberty, the rule of law, democracy, free markets, the separation of church and state, often have little resonance in Islamic, Confucian, Japanese, Hindu, Buddhist or Orthodox cultures.”<sup>10</sup> For Islamophobes, Islam is so incompatible with modernity, so counter to liberal values of equality,



liberty, and fraternity, so inherently dictatorial in its demands on adherents, so oppressive of women, that, regardless of history, Muslims are incapable of desiring democracy. Lack of freedom is the leitmotif of Islamophobia.

In what we might consider “popular Islamophobia” as distinct from Huntington’s “academic Islamophobia,” fear becomes the dominant theme. In these representations, Islam preaches violence as encoded in the Qur’an, in the life of the Prophet Muhammad, and in Islamic history. Academic studies of this variant of Islamophobia focus on analyzing the discursive construction of the Muslim Other, following in the path of Edward Said’s ground-breaking *Orientalism* and his later work, *Covering Islam*.<sup>11</sup> Such studies focus on the media, political cartoons,<sup>12</sup> and Hollywood movies. Some studies dig behind the circulation of anti-Muslim imagery and media rhetoric to identify key actors and funders of the “Islamophobia Industry.”<sup>13</sup> These studies interrogate popular perceptions of Americans toward Islam, Muslims, and Arabs in particular, and attempt to delegitimize the self-proclaimed “experts” of Islam predominately producing and circulating anti-Islamic messages, commentators such as Daniel Pipes, Robert Spencer, Steven Emerson, Frank Gaffney, and David Yerushalmi.

The discursive constructions of Islamophobia draw upon a variety of framing techniques to depict Islam as violent and manipulative, with the capacity to construct a liberal façade behind which lies a diabolical menace to Western civilization. Through cherry-picking, stereotyping, and false causalities in their depiction of Islam, “experts” such as Daniel Pipes focus attention on the uniqueness of Western civilization and on Israel as a frontline state in the battle against Islam. Pipes continuously repeats catchphrases and loaded terms to create an illusion of an evil totality—terms such as “jihad,” “Islamists,” and “Sharia.” Even the titles of Pipes’s articles imagine the (Islamic) barbarians at the gates of Western civilization: “Islamic London,” “Willfully Ignoring the Jihad against America,” and “Islamist Violence Will Steer Europe’s Destiny.”<sup>14</sup>

Though written two years after the Boston Marathon bombing, “Willfully Ignoring the Jihad against America” argues against those who depicted the act as “terrorism returns,” as the headline in the *USA Today* declared on April 13, 2016. Pipes does not see the bombing as an isolated event but rather a series of terrorist acts perpetrated against Americans but ignored by the media and others. With no data to support his claim, he asserts that “Islamic inspiration *often* serves as the motivation of Muslim-on-*infidel* attacks around the globe” (emphasis added; the catch phrase “infidel” creates a sense of victimhood

by all non-Muslims). He further states that “Americans—including *USA Today* headline writers—barely know about the steady drumbeat of attacks, leaving them unaware about the scope of ideological Muslim-on-non-Muslim violence currently underway.” Here, again without any actual data, Pipes creates a specialized knowledge, enlightening the rest of us about the reality of Islam. Later, when he does provide examples of Muslim violence, he offers no insights into motivations, connections, or support from external terrorist networks. One such example is the gruesome beheading of two Coptic Christians in New Jersey by a Muslim man in 2016. Pipes hints that the motivations for the act are unknown; therefore, he argues Islamic terrorism is mystifying and erratic, and therefore all the more terrifying. What Pipes fails to include in his article is that the perpetrator was a well known violent criminal with a long criminal record, including two armed robberies.<sup>15</sup> Was his heinous crime motivated by Islam or by his own psychological bent? None of this appears to matter, for according to Pipes, given that the perpetrator is Muslim, all Islam is guilty, in its totality.

Also missing from Pipes’s judgement against Islam is comparative data. For example, do individuals of other religious traditions perpetrate crimes against those they see as fearful and consider to be non-believers at the same rates as Muslims? Is this a general pattern or one only Muslims are prone to? Obviously, for the Islamophobes, such information is irrelevant. The erroneous assumption that Muslims only act based on their belief in Islam, combined with the loaded catch phrases and terms, creates an image that Muslims are automatons of a fascistic religion.

Muslims themselves become targets of violence by individuals who internalize their fear of Islam. Never asking themselves if following their own hateful ideology makes them unfree, such perpetrators become the foot soldiers of Islamophobia. According to the Pew Research Center on Religion and Public Life, between 2014 and 2017, Americans “warmed up” to Islam from 40% to 48%. However, that is still less than half the population, meaning that, at the time, 52% of Americans had negative feelings about Islam. Furthermore, Muslims ranked the lowest of all the other religious groups that Americans felt “warm” toward: atheists (50%), Mormons (54%), Hindus (58%), and Jews (67%).<sup>16</sup> The survey was conducted in January 2017, before Donald Trump was inaugurated as the forty-fifth president of the United States, after which many observers acknowledge an increase in hate acts directed toward Muslims. Even before, despite the increasing “warmth” toward Muslims, hate

crimes against Muslims increased. In 2016, there were 127 reported hate crimes, up from ninety-one the previous year and fifty-six in 2014—much higher than reported in the year after the 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001.<sup>17</sup>

These increasing acts of violence against Muslims in the United States parallel similar trends of an increase in other forms of discrimination in the workplace, in schools, and on the streets. Mosques are increasingly vandalized and Muslim women who choose to wear the veil, the ultimate sign for Islamophobes of the lack of freedom in Islam, are “freed” by having their veils ripped off in public by good Samaritans trying to save them.<sup>18</sup> In these various acts of violence, direct and indirect, Islamophobia becomes a form of racism. The racialized history of Islamophobia exposes the deep roots of the racist nature of the American state from its foundations in slavery to the “Black scare” of the 1960s, as Edward Curtis argues.<sup>19</sup>

Along with Curtis, a number of scholars map Islamophobia as a form of racism, recognizing that “as a social construct not based on phenotype, race and thus racism [are] not limited to biological categories.”<sup>20</sup> America is assumed to be white and Christian and practices a “racial agnosticism” in which Americans “forget or whitewash the past in order to safeguard American innocence and reinforce the status of American ideals as universal and American opportunity as perpetually open to all who are willing to avail themselves.”<sup>21</sup> Open to all, that is, except followers of Islam, socialists, Asians who spread the coronavirus, and any other undesirable imagined at any given time, such as Irish and Italians a century ago before they too entered the echelons of whiteness.

Anti-Black racism in the United States is deep, running through our national veins; it is a part of who we are as a country. Racism toward Blacks is institutionalized in the US Constitution, our electoral practices, and our judicial system. However, this systemic racism against Blacks is related to, but different from, the hatred mingled with fear held toward Islam and Muslims. For the majority of Muslims in the United States, there is no history of slavery, no being considered only three-fifths of a human to be counted for political representation, no segregated neighbourhoods. There are, however, similar experiences of discrimination and policing on the street and in everyday life that link anti-Black racism and Islamophobia.

The association with whiteness and the assumed inherent, uncritical correlation between white-Anglo-Saxon-Protestant culture and being American, and the dismissal of Islam and Muslims, falls along a variety of fault

lines—civilizational, racial, modern, and ideological. Underling each of these primary fault lines is a belief in freedom that the Other has not yet achieved or is incapable of realizing. The accumulative effect is to map Islam as inherently un-American and thus, for many, un-Western. The fundamental assumption is of an America and a West that is not just white, but Christian and liberal, inheritors of a great civilization traced to ancient Greece and articulated in modernity through the Enlightenment and liberal thought. Islam is thus not just the Other of the West but an inherent part of it, even as it is rejected.<sup>22</sup>

Racism, as Curtis and others note, is not an anomaly of wrong beliefs, intricately interwoven into the national imagination and institutionalized into systems of discrimination. Rather, racism is a form of governmentality, an integral part of the modern, liberal, capitalist state.<sup>23</sup> That is, racism and Islamophobia, along with anti-Semitism and anti-immigrant sentiments, are strategic to the expansion and deepening of state powers, penetrating the everyday lives of people. Racism, in its various expressions, is constructed through a Foucauldian “regime of truth” that functions “as a tool to support and sustain how people act in the social.”<sup>24</sup>

What Foucault delimits is that such state powers are not merely coercive but are productive. While there is extensive state policing of Muslims, particularly with the very unfree, illiberal Patriot Act passed after 9/11, the real mechanisms of control are constituted into ideas of citizenship and national patriotism, creating ways for Americans to police one another to advance the American ideal. Here is where Islamophobia becomes more than a mere discourse of Orientalist representations and becomes actions carried out by “patriots” on the ground; Islamophobia is transformed into a lived code of discrimination and varying degrees of violence.

The “Islamophobia industry” inspires acts of hatred against Muslims by producing and circulating vitriolic anti-Islamic messages. The industry comprises layers of actors who feed one another, creating a greater sense of legitimacy, at least in their eyes, and self-righteousness.<sup>25</sup> On one end of the loop are the “experts” such as Daniel Pipes, Richard Spencer, and Steve Emerson, who circulate information on the evils of Islam and the illiberal behaviours of Muslims. They act as pundits for conservative news programs, directly feeding media images and giving context to particular events.<sup>26</sup> These experts justify the hatred of Islam that is then amplified by a series of social media activists, such as Pamela Geller. Geller’s role in the Islamophobia industry is not just as amplifier but as provocateur. Geller provides fodder by

“proving” how illiberal and scary Muslims are, in her estimation, by orchestrating spectacles to elicit violent responses by Muslims. One of her most infamous provocations is the annual Muhammad cartoon drawing contests, such as the one in Garland, Texas, on May 3, 2015.

Dubbed a “free speech event,” Geller solicited drawings of the Prophet Muhammad to put on display and arranged for the far-right Dutch politician Geert Wilders to be the keynote speaker. Of the event, Geller wrote, “There should have been Cartoon Exhibits all over the free world, to show the jihadists and their stealth allies in groups that are doing all they can to intimidate the West into abandoning the freedom of speech that we will not kowtow to violent intimidation.”<sup>27</sup> For Geller, on one side is freedom, on the other, Islam.

The event did, in fact, provoke a counter action by two young men, spurred on by an online Islamist provocateur. The two men from Phoenix, AZ drove to Garland with guns and body armour. They did not make it far from their car when they were shot and killed by local security guards. Both men, Elton Simpson, a convert with online connections to a number of radical Muslims aligned with the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, and Nadir Soofi, regularly attended prayers at the ICCP. It is for this reason that Jon Ritzheimer organized his protest at ICCP on May 29, three weeks after the failed attack on the “First Annual Draw Muhammad Contest.”

Pipes, Emerson, Geller, and Ritzheimer all play different roles in the production and circulation of anti-Islam messages and images. Ritzheimer, though, takes Islamophobia a step further, making it an action, spewing hatred directly at Muslims, protesting with guns in front of their mosques. Islamophobia is a lived reality, not just a discourse of hate, fear, and suspicion. As a realm of anti-Muslim actions, Islamophobia parallels anti-Black racism in the United States but diverges from it in that Islamophobia is predicated on the assumption that Islam is an ideology, that it has a political agenda. For American Islamophobes—and remembering that they come in all ideological and political stripes themselves: alt-right, conservative, liberal, and progressives—Islam is the problem, not Muslims. Islamophobia is thus more akin to anti-communism and anti-Antifa than it is to anti-Black racism. Perhaps in Europe, Islamophobia is different—particularly in the United Kingdom and France, where there are larger pockets of Muslims residing, longer histories of migration, and of sordid pasts of colonial conquest and oppression. In the United States, Islamophobia is about the inherent un-Americanness of Islam.

The Islamophobic experts, provocateurs, and foot soldiers work in tandem to expose how Islam is counter to the American values of freedom, democracy, and equality. As Ritzheimer asserted during our interview, Islam is “this full-blown ideology of a way of life how everything needs to be.” Geller’s “freedom of speech” event exposed just how non-freedom loving Muslims are, driven by their Islamic ideology. Ritzheimer and others imbibe that approach and act on it on the streets.

## Taking Islamophobia to the Streets

Jon Ritzheimer served in the Marines in Iraq on several tours of duty as part of the US occupying forces. He was dishonourably discharged for obtaining a tattoo on his arm, a violation of Marine policy. When he returned to the United States, Ritzheimer was angry and “still needed a purpose. I needed, you know . . . I got that warrior mentality, that warrior spirit. I needed a cause, if you will. And I set my crosshairs on Islam. And it was very easy to do.” He went on to elaborate how “we were indoctrinated from boot camp and, and they don’t turn that off. So the veteran when he comes home is naturally inflicted. And I’ve been battling with that; I still battle with that to this day.” He was trained to be a soldier, to defend the country based on who the state deems as a threat, to kill the enemy, to take the lives of other human beings.

What Ritzheimer was never able to do is see the Other as similar to himself; that was not part of his training. In fact, just the opposite—the enemy has to be seen as less than you, as less deserving to live, as someone worthy of being exterminated. He was trained to kill and had been dismissed from his mission unceremoniously. Ritzheimer was angry, he was “indoctrinated,” and he needed a purpose but was unable to see that perhaps some of those he felt most threatened by were themselves angry and searching for a purpose, that perhaps they acted out in ways similar to Ritzheimer—with violence against the Other. For Ritzheimer, his anger is *his*, unique, an individual’s mental state. That of Muslims, however, is collective, by dint of their being Muslim, followers of Islamic ideology (whatever that might actually be or mean). He is free to make choices, but they, the Muslim Other, act out Islamic ideology, according to him and many others. Muslims are not individuals but part of a collective horde that needs to be stopped.

So, when the attack on Geller’s event in Texas occurred and the two perpetrators were traced to the Phoenix Mosque, Ritzheimer was compelled to take

action, acting on his Marine instincts “to do good and do right.” He obviously was not alone when he staged his armed protest outside the ICCP. He was joined by a few dozen others, a mixture of people including some “Marine buddies” of his, all sharing the belief that Islam was inherently evil and Muslims did not belong in the United States.

Ritzheimer’s experiences in Iraq loom large in his recounting, troubled by his experiences there and his return to civilian life, though he never provided specific details. He says,

I went to Iraq a few times, came back very angry and a devout atheist at the time. But intrigued with what I saw over there believing it was Islam. So who would send someone to put a bomb on their kid and send him out? Or send their kid out to try and kill other people? Was it money? What was pressing these people?

He never made it clear what exactly he witnessed, how many kids he saw with bombs or fighting, particularly as Iraq is not known for having child soldiers. In fact, according to Human Rights Watch, the only groups using child soldiers were two Kurdish militias in northern Iraq, both of whom were aligned with the US occupying forces.<sup>28</sup> In short, what he claims he “witnessed” were undoubtedly fed to him by a machinery of disinformation, one that he was either inclined to listen to and believe or one that was imposed on him through the Marine Corps to vilify and dehumanize Muslims.

As with the self-declared experts on Islam and radical Muslims in the United States, facts are not important. The threat, for them, is not really about security; it is about values. Security is a convenient trope that reflects on just how uncivilized and intransigent Muslims are. The real threat is the erosion of American values of liberty, democracy, equality, and freedom. Fear of terrorism and the loss of life are convenient rallying cries to galvanize the American public into very “unfree” actions. That is, liberal America has always been more than willing to act illiberally to advance its liberal credentials—coups, invasions, and occupations, all deepening domestic security apparatuses to “protect” Americans. This embodies Ritzheimer’s own political ideology, for which he spent a year in a federal prison for taking part in the 2016 armed occupation of the Malheur Wildlife Refuge in Oregon with Ammon Bundy and other libertarian, anti-government extremists. Ritzheimer is a member of both the Oath Keepers and the Three Percenters, organizations that have come to greater attention following the January 6 Capitol insurrection of 2021.

Following the mosque protests in 2015, Ritzheimer went through a period of self-reflection. He confesses that, in looking back, “I am not that guy anymore. At all. I was so unhinged. I was just lost. And consumed with anger and hatred. But it is definitely not me anymore. And I’ve got a different perspective, if you will.” He has reached the point where he knows how he conducted himself at the protest was wrong. Recounting, he reflected, “Looking back, wearing that shirt was not right. I lost the moral high ground with it. Would Jesus do that? I think he would go to their doorstep and tell them it was wrong, sure. But would he wear a shirt that said, ‘F Islam’? Probably not.” He even told me he was willing to return to the mosque and offer a public apology for his actions in front of the community. However, while he admits his tactics were wrong, he holds on to the underlying beliefs that drove them—that there is something inherently wrong with Islam, that it is un-American, and that it is counter to the ideals of freedom enshrined in the US Constitution. Muslims, he says, he can accept, but not Islam. If they keep their religion to themselves, perhaps, just perhaps, there is a place for Muslims in America. But he has his doubts that such privatization of religion is possible for Muslims.

Today, Ritzheimer’s “crosshairs” are no longer focusing in on Islam. His battles of returning America to its original, foundational values inscribed in the Constitution and the life and thoughts of the Founding Fathers are focused on government overreach, particularly the judicial system, and are driven by two experiences. The first is his conversion from atheism to born-again evangelical Christianity. The second emerges from his experiences of being with Ammon Bundy and others at the Malheur Refuge Center and his time in prison. Both experiences have influenced Ritzheimer’s approach to Islam today and raise a number of questions on the multiple strands, or manifestations, of Islamophobia.

In the months after the Phoenix Mosque protest, Ritzheimer started to question his atheism. Through a Messianic Jewish friend (who was part of the later occupation in Oregon) and others, Ritzheimer began to open himself to the possibility of believing in Jesus Christ. After the ICCP protest, threats against his life were made, and he moved his family to San Diego, while he remained at their house outside Phoenix.

On September 11, 2015, he was driving to San Diego alone to be with his family to celebrate his daughter’s birthday. The drive, following Interstate 8 from Gila Bend, through Dateland, Yuma, and into California, cuts through a desolate, barren desert landscape. As he related to me, along the drive,



alone, he started to beseech God for guidance. His emotions overtook him; he pulled over to the side of the highway, kneeled, and began crying, praying, asking God for a sign so that he could accept Him into his heart. Finally, recomposing himself, he continued the drive, still in doubt, still hoping for a sign. As he crossed over the hills heading into coastal southern California and reception for his mobile phone strengthened, he checked his news feeds. The first post was a headline that a construction crane collapsed in the holy city of Mecca—auspiciously, for Ritzheimer, on the anniversary of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. This was his sign from God.

In the accident inside the Haram Sharif, the mosque surrounding the sacred al-Ka'ba, 111 Muslims were crushed to death, all of them pilgrims from around the world, many of them poor peasants achieving the once-in-a-lifetime dream of visiting Mecca. "I was not happy there was death," Ritzheimer told me. "But here I am one of the most notorious, outspoken people against Islam. Just got done asking God for a sign and pouring my heart out and on this day of all days, September 11. I'm just like . . . it was too much to be just coincidence to me. And I felt an instant *whoosh!* All of my anger, all of my everything just kind of *vawhoosh* and I was just like shocked; it felt like I was hit by lightning." From that day forward, Ritzheimer has identified as a Christian. While he is sorry that lives were lost, the reality is, for him to be saved, to find God, 111 Muslims had to die and nearly 400 be seriously injured.

There is a deeper meaning to that event for Ritzheimer as well, one that freed him from his anti-Islam mission, allowing him to refocus his energies on anti-government activities. For Ritzheimer, the crashing crane in the most holy of Islam's sacred sites meant that he no longer had to advocate against Islam, because "God's got this!" It turns out that in his vision, God too is an Islamophobe.

In my interview with Ritzheimer, he also related how his finding Jesus Christ in his life mitigates how he expresses his hatred, though the hatred remains. Today, as a born-again Christian, Ritzheimer differentiates between Islam and Muslims. He hates Islam but loves Muslims and wants them to be saved too. He is now motivated to save Muslims from themselves. If they want to stay practising Islam, he claims, he has no problem with that, as long as their faith remains fully private; if they want to be American, then they must accept the idea that America comes first. While his own extreme views against the government are seen by many as highly problematic, for him, they are expressions of his patriotic duty to abide fully and truly to the

US Constitution. In this configuration, the Constitution, as a text, is read literally, it is a fundamentalist interpretation that Ritzheimer and his fellow libertarian activists hold onto. This sort of dogmatism is only acceptable when directed toward the United States of America, the American flag, and the US Constitution—obviously, not the Qur'an.

Again, we find an inherent contradiction in the expression of freedom and unfreedom. Muslims are criticized for blindly following a text that dictates how they should behave and think. Because Muslims blindly follow the Qur'an, and because according to the logic of these libertarian activists, the text is flawed and violent, they are justified in committing violence against Muslims to protect "our way of life," "our values," "our freedom." These ideals, they argue, are enshrined in the US Constitution, which is sacrosanct, untouchable; a fixed text with a singular interpretation that we must rigidly—dare I say, blindly—abide by to achieve a great society. In short, the logic of this expression of Islamophobia is that we must behave the way Muslims are perceived to behave—dogmatically following a text with no individual agency.

Through his conversion, Ritzheimer shifts his focus away from Islam toward Muslims, though today he is more concerned about the deteriorating nature of the American government. His energies are focused on taking direct action against the state, leaving the purification of Islam to God. But he does remain concerned about Muslims, and his new approach is aligned with a more mainstream attitude toward Islam—for it to be truly Western, American, modern, liberal, there must be a "reformation."

The sentiments behind Ritzheimer's conversion reaffirm the basic mapping of Islam as something *other* than rational, civilized, modern, and American/Western—the values held across the political and ideological spectrum in the United States. In mapping Islam as America's illiberal Other, Islamophobes like Ritzheimer, Geller, and Pipes show the impossibility of Muslims ever being American.

But the question is whether such an impossibility is rooted in the supposed inherent evils of Islam or in the inherent racist incapacity of Americans and Western liberalism to accept those they imagine as the non-liberal Other? How tolerant is liberalism truly? How free are Muslims to be Muslim in Western liberal societies? Or more poignantly, As W. E. B. Du Bois famously asked of African-Americans, "How does it feel to be a problem?" But the question that is never asked is, why is American liberalism predicated on

seeing everyone else as “a problem”? Why are American values so inherently intolerant of anyone who is not liberal?

## Land of the (Not So) Free

The twisted reality of Islamophobia is that, in imagining Islam as an unfree ideology, one then grants oneself the right to deny Muslims any and all freedoms. That denial of freedom is encoded through governmental security mechanisms enacted through domestic and foreign policies. One of the most sweeping denial of freedoms in the United States is the 2001 Patriot Act, which contains provisions for surveillance, arrest, and special courts.<sup>29</sup> On the foreign front, as mentioned, the United States has a long history of denying freedom and democracy to Muslim-majority countries. The US supported the 1953 coup in Iran that imposed the Shah as the ruler; provided extensive support to Pakistan’s military dictator Zia ul-Haq (ruled 1977–1988), who was the third largest recipient of military aid after Israel and Egypt and who oversaw the Islamization of Pakistan; and provided support to Egypt under Hosni Mubarak (ruled 1981–2011). There is also their support for countless other places with problematic human rights records, such as Saudi Arabia. A second mode of denying freedom to Muslims is through vigilante actions, such as those of Ritzheimer. For Muslim Americans, Islamophobia is a lived reality; their lives are reshaped based on fear of violence for being Muslim. It is estimated that as many as 250,000 hate crimes have been committed a year, since 2001, against Muslims, most of them unreported: that is over 650 a day.<sup>30</sup> One should add that many victims of anti-Muslim hate crimes are not even Muslim, but rather Sikhs, such as the murder of seven Sikhs in Wisconsin by Wade Michael Page in 2012.

Given American history and social reality, it is hard to imagine the country as anything but inherently racist and intolerant. No doubt that idea is disturbing to both conservatives and progressives. The difference is that conservatives tend to see American history not as racist and discriminatory but as an increasing infringement on their own freedoms over the decades. Progressives, on the other hand, accept the horrific crimes against humanity committed by the country but imagine American history as constantly improving upon itself. Though founded in slavery, so many progressives would argue, we overcame it. Though democracy was anything but democratic in the early days of the republic, over the decades more and more people have been granted the right

to vote. While it remains contested terrain, the progressive national vision maintains the country is progressing, improving its racist, discriminatory, sexist, and violent/oppressive record.

Thus, the past and the future are battlegrounds for conservatives and progressives. But underlying both imaginings are certain assumptions about the liberal values that form the foundation of the nation; these are sacrosanct. One sees them as being eroded away from an idyllic past; the other sees them as guiding principles striving to be achieved in an idyllic future. In both scenarios, though, there are forces that corrupt the liberal ideal of America, and that take the nation off course from being truly free. Today, one of those forces is Islam.

According to comedian and TV commentator Bill Maher, “In the Muslim world [extremism] is mainstream belief.”<sup>31</sup> While Maher is a talking head with a long history of sexist and racist comments, he claims to be progressive and concerned with advancing liberal ideas. He sees Muslims as illiberal and, thus, a problem. Such an imagining is quite prevalent in progressive and leftist thinking in the United States, particularly in feminist thought. The so-called War on Terror unleashed following the 9/11 terrorist attacks became a means of “saving brown women from brown men.”<sup>32</sup> Muslim Afghan women particularly were silenced, reduced to victims of an oppressive culture. Colonial history, regional geopolitics, and US imperialist interests in the region were easily ignored in celebrating the “liberation” of Afghan women from their burqas.<sup>33</sup> This discourse is resurfacing today, following the Taliban victories in Afghanistan in August 2021.

Saba Mahmood clearly documents liberal unease with religious conservatives, particularly Muslims. Western/liberal feminists assume “that there is something intrinsic to women that *should* predispose them to oppose the practices, values, and injunctions that the Islamist movement embodies.”<sup>34</sup> There is a rejection of alternative moral and ethical lives predicated on modes of sociality, modesty, and deportment, as embodied by many Muslim women. As a result, Muslims are imagined as lacking the free will or self-realization so intrinsic to Western liberal thought. Rather, they are conditioned by their tradition, Islam, which is then deployed to explain all acts and behavioural peculiarities performed by any Muslim. Whatever a Muslim does, by dint of being Muslim, Islam is the explanation of their actions, as detailed in the analysis of Daniel Pipe’s depictions earlier.

When Western feminists question why a woman would choose her own oppression by following the tyranny of tradition rather than pursuing her self-realization with individual autonomy, the answer is easy—Islam.<sup>35</sup> As Mahmood points out, there is an uncritical assumption in progressive liberal thought about liberation, freedom, and individual agency that is predicated on a binary with an unliberated, unfree, non-individual Other.

Whether conservative or progressive, in the United States there is “a civilizational discourse that identifies both tolerance and the tolerable with the West, marking non-liberal societies and practices as candidates for an intolerable barbarism that is itself signalled by the putative intolerance ruling these societies.”<sup>36</sup> For progressives, the future is to liberate those entrapped by illiberal ideologies and cultural traditions, who continue to live lives defined by irrational cultural practices, who are not free. For American conservatives, the issue is not saving Muslims from themselves but rather reforming them to accept the principles of the Founding Fathers of the United States to save America, or, to use the slogan of former President Trump, “make America great again.”

That exclusionary paradigm is comprised of various tracts, in which each foundational value of liberalism provides a map of alterity, of Self and Other, of liberal and illiberal, of free and unfree, of rational and irrational. There are, however, inherent contradictions to achieving the goals of saving liberalism from Islam. In addition to sweeping surveillance and extrajudicial powers (including the assassination of American citizens), to save Muslims from themselves, the state attempts to ban and regulate Muslim behaviour. While in the United States there is no “veil ban” as in France, there is a rise of anti-Sharia laws being passed by state legislatures. While the threat of “creeping Sharia” has never been truly documented, the implication on the erosion of freedoms is clear. In France, as Joan Scott asserts, the headscarf ban was

conceived of . . . as a valiant action by the modern French state to rescue girls from obscurity and oppression of traditional communities, thus opening their lives to knowledge and freedom, even if it meant expelling them from school. The contradiction—that legislation designed to provide choice ended up by denying it—was not perceived as such by the law’s champions. This was because of their faith in the superiority of their philosophy, their equation of it with universalism, progress, and civilization.<sup>37</sup>

Freedom, then, is framed within the nation, a national ideal, something for the members of a nation. Those outside, invaders, immigrants, “illegals,” those who want to erode “our freedoms and values,” and those who undermine our ability to be “great” are afforded the status of being unfree until and unless they convert themselves, reform themselves, or transform themselves into members of the nation, holding the same values, same aspirations as normatively imagined. Freedom today is constrained, entrapped within the nation. It is not a universal value or a means of struggling against oppression, but rather a debased idea; freedom today is a warped reflection of an idea, trapped inside a funhouse of “freedom of choice.”

## Conclusion

As agents of the nation, freedom and liberalism in general provide a pathway for imposing unfreedom on others deemed outside the nation. This imagining of the Other as unfree and then imposing unfree acts upon them because of their lack of freedom is the condition of peacelessness. The lack of peace is not an inherent quality of the Other, but rather an imagining of the Other through the lens of the nation and employing the state and various modes of governmentality to dictate and define the place of the Other. Through the liberal nation, the Other is forever a condition of conflict that needs to be managed, segregated, and/or converted.

Does the Other always have to be a threat? Does the Other always have to be imagined as the site of non-peace? Is it possible to transcend the Kantian notion of our human propensity for evil that then requires restrictions, policing, and ultimately Othering? The nation-idea is predicated on a divisive imagining of community, of some belonging and others not and being a potential threat. While Benedict Anderson linked the nation to the idea of an “imagined community,” in reality, there is no community encapsulated within the nation-idea except one bounded, segregated, and dependent on policies and practices of exclusion.

What the liberal imagination lacks, confined within the bounded structures of the nation-idea, is a sense of collective freedom. To move toward peace, collective freedom must be inclusionary in its imagining, an understanding of a collective oneness. While never a socio-historical reality, the Islamic concept of *ummah*, of community, is one step in realizing our human potential. Yes, within Islam, that illiberal, unfree, violent Other, are values and

ethics that provide the possibilities for human peace, for a people's peace.<sup>38</sup> Rather than erase the ethical values of diverse cultural traditions, rather than mapping them in a hierarchal structure, rather than binding them to particular communities, we need to enter into a dialogical relationship between Self and Other.

Jon Ritzheimer as a nationalist is unable to see beyond the greatness of America's foundations and uses his Christianity to construct a superiority of traditions. He was willing to walk across the street during his violent protest of the Phoenix Mosque and shake hands with the Imam, yet he is willing to return to the mosque and apologize. Ritzheimer is far from an ideal model of imagining people's peace, but within him is the kernel of possibility, predicated on a human ethic of concern and respect. Once we break down the walls of the nation-idea that we have internalized into our own worldviews, peace will find a place in our world. Once we stop limiting our ethical values only to our community and start seeing the human potential in the Other as well, peace will find a place in our world. Once we free our own hearts from the unfreedom of hatred, peace will find a place in our world.

## Notes

- 1 Based on data collected by the Organization for Security and Cooperation's Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights: <https://hatecrime.osce.org/united-states-america?year=2020>.
- 2 Fazia Patel, "The Islamophobic Administration," Brennan Center for Justice, April 19, 2017, <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/islamophobic-administration>; see also Mohsin Hassan Khan, Farwa Qazalbash, Hamed Mohd Adnan, Lalu Nurul Yaqin, and Rashid Ali Khuhro, "Trump and Muslims: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Islamophobic Rhetoric in Donald Trump's Selected Tweets," *SAGE Open* 11 no. 1 (2021): 1–16.
- 3 Samuel Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 (1993): 22–49.
- 4 The term "liberal" leads to much confusion in American discourse. Predominately, "liberal" is used to indicate the left side of the political spectrum associated with the Democratic political party, progressives, and socialists. The term also implies the prevailing philosophical orientation of Western thought emerging from the Enlightenment. I use the term "liberal" throughout this chapter with this latter connotation. When referring to left-leaning politics, I employ "progressive" or "leftist," though neither is particularly accurate as

an all-encompassing term. The chapter is concerned with liberal philosophical ideas, particularly as relating to individual freedom and liberty, values inherent in both right- and left-wing political ideologies in the United States. As discussed later, although the Left and Right diverge in their relationships to the past and the future, both sides uphold these values, and others such as democracy, equality, and tolerance, as inherent in an imagined American ideal.

- 5 Anouar Majid, *Freedom and Orthodoxy: Islam and Difference in the Post-Andalusian Age* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), xi.
- 6 For a critique of this binary rooted in Western thinking, see Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* (Lahore: Vanguard Books, 2005).
- 7 The website was discontinued in January 2015, but remains online as a resource at <http://www.islamophobiawatch.co.uk/>.
- 8 Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim*, 17.
- 9 Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim*, 18.
- 10 Huntington, "Clash of Civilizations?" 40.
- 11 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979); Said, *Covering Islam* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981).
- 12 Peter Gottschalk, *Islamophobia and Anti-Muslim Sentiment: Picturing the Enemy* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2019).
- 13 Nathan Lean and John Esposito, *The Islamophobia Industry: How the Right Manufactures Fear of Muslims* (London: Pluto Press, 2012).
- 14 Daniel Pipes, "Islamic London: 'Run, Hide, Tell,'" *Gatestone Institute*, February 5, 2018, <http://www.danielpipes.org/18201/islamic-london-run-hide-tell>; "Willfully Ignoring the Jihad against America," DanielPipes.org, June 15, 2015, <http://www.danielpipes.org/19400/willfully-ignoring-the-jihad-against-america>; and "Islamist Violence Will Steer Europe's Destiny," *The Japan Times*, October 10, 2018, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2016/10/19/commentary/world-commentary/islamist-violence-will-steer-europes-destiny/>.
- 15 John Heinis, "Jersey City Man Gets 2 Life Sentences for Gruesome Murders, Decapitations," *Hudson County View*, September 22, 2016; [hudsoncountyview.com/jersey-city-man-gets-2-life-sentences-for-gruesome-murders-decapitations/](http://hudsoncountyview.com/jersey-city-man-gets-2-life-sentences-for-gruesome-murders-decapitations/).
- 16 Pew Research Center, "7. How the U.S. General Public Views Muslims and Islam," July 27, 2017; <https://www.pewforum.org/2017/07/26/how-the-u-s-general-public-views-muslims-and-islam>.
- 17 Katayoun Kishi, "Assaults Against Muslims in U.S. Surpass 2001 Level," Pew Research Center, November 17, 2017; <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/11/15/assaults-against-muslims-in-u-s-surpass-2001-level/>.



- 18 See <https://islamophobia.org/reports/cairs-2021-mid-year-snapshot-summary-report-of-anti-muslim-bias-incidents/> for a summary of anti-Muslim violence and discrimination in the first half of 2021 alone.
- 19 Edward E. Curtis IV, "The Black Muslim Scare of the Twentieth Century: The History of State Islamophobia and Its Post-9/11 Variations," in *Islamophobia in America: The Anatomy of Intolerance*, edited by Carl W. Ernst (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 75–106.
- 20 Curtis, "The Black Muslim Scare," 76; see also James Carr, *Experiences of Islamophobia: Living with Racism in the Neoliberal Era* (London: Routledge, 2018).
- 21 Sherman Jackson, "Muslims, Islam(s), and American Islamophobia," in *Islamophobia: The Challenge of Pluralism in the 21st Century*, edited by John Esposito and Ibrahim Kalin (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 93–106, at 94.
- 22 Joseph Massad, *Islam in Liberalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).
- 23 Curtis, "The Black Muslim"; Tariq Masood and N. Meer, "The Racialization of Muslims," in *Thinking Through Islamophobia: Global Perspectives*, edited by Salman Sayeed and AbdoolKarim Vakil (London: Hurst Publishers, 2010), 69–83; Steve Garner, *Racisms: An Introduction* (London: Sage Publications, 2010); Craig Considine, "The Racialization of Islam in the United States: Islamophobia, Hate Crimes, and 'Flying while Brown,'" *Religions* 8, no. 9 (2017): <https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/8/9/165>.
- 24 Carr, *Experiences of Islamophobia*, 19.
- 25 See Lean and Esposito, *The Islamophobia Industry*; Arun Kundnani, *The Muslims Are Coming! Islamophobia, Extremism, and the Domestic War on Terror* (New York: Verso, 2015); Wajahat Ali, Eli Clifton, Matthew Duss, Lee Fang, Scott Keyes, and Faiz Shakir, *Fear, Inc.: The Roots of the Islamophobia Network in America* (Washington, DC: Center for American Progress, 2011) <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/fear-inc/>; Aboubakar A. Bokar, "The Political Economy of Hate Industry: Islamophobia in the Western Public Sphere," *Islamophobia Studies Journal* 5, no. 2 (2020): 152–74.
- 26 An example would be when Steve Emerson informed CBS's news audience following the terrorist attack on the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building on April 19, 1995, that "Oklahoma City, I can tell you, is probably considered one of the largest centers of Islamic radical activity outside the Middle East." He went on to assert that the bombing "was done with the intent to inflict as many casualties as possible. That is a Middle Eastern trait." Despite being completely incorrect on predicting who was responsible for the terrorist attack (it was the homegrown terrorist Timothy McVeigh), Emerson went on to establish quite

- a career, particularly after 9/11 when he became an informant for the FBI on Muslim radicals in the United States.
- 27 As quoted in Max Fisher, "Don't Call the Hateful Muhammad Art Exhibit Attacked in Texas a 'Free Speech Event,'" *Vox*, May 4, 2015; <https://www.vox.com/2015/5/4/8545831/texas-attack-pamela-geller>.
  - 28 Human Rights Watch, "Iraq: Armed Groups Using Child Soldiers," December 22, 2016; <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/12/22/iraq-armed-groups-using-child-soldiers-o>.
  - 29 Hina Shamsi and Alex Abdo, "Privacy and Surveillance Post-9/11," *Human Rights* 38, no. 1 (2011), 5–9, 17; Derek H. Davis, "The Dark Side to a Just War: The USA Patriot Act and Counterterrorism's Potential Threat to Religious Freedom," *Journal of Church and State* 44, no. 1 (2002): 5–17.
  - 30 Brian Levin, "Explaining the Rise of Hate Crimes against Muslims in the US," *The Conversation*, July 19, 2017; <https://theconversation.com/explaining-the-rise-in-hate-crimes-against-muslims-in-the-us-80304>.
  - 31 Council of American Islamic Relations, "Bill Maher," October 5, 2017; <https://islamophobia.org/islamophobic-individuals/bill-maher/>.
  - 32 An argument made by Lila Abu-Lughod, in which she draws on Gayatri Spivak's discussion of colonial feminism in her "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Its Others," *American Anthropologist* 104, no. 3 (2002): 783–90, at 784.
  - 33 See Tariq Ali's *The Clash of Fundamentalisms: Crusades, Jihads and Modernity* (London: Verso Books, 2002) for a study of the historical contradictions of the US's illiberal foreign policy toward Muslim countries.
  - 34 See Saba Mahmood, *The Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 2 (emphasis in original).
  - 35 Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 11.
  - 36 Wendy Brown, *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 6.
  - 37 Joan Scott, *The Politics of the Veil* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 125–26.
  - 38 See Yasmin Saikia and Chad Haines, ed., *People's Peace: Prospects for a Human Future* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2019).

## 7 Killing Machine

### How Mexican and US States of Exception Turned Revolutionaries and Migrants into Bare Life, 1969–1996

Alexander Aviña

*I got no face, no name, I'm just a killing machine  
I cut the population down, if you know what I mean.*

—Judas Priest, “Killing Machine,” 1978

Isabel Ayala Nava survived two killing machines and died at the hands of a third. Born in the Mexican state of Guerrero, she joined a peasant guerrilla organization in late 1973 and fell in love with the communist schoolteacher who led the struggle. That union produced a baby daughter in September 1974, in the midst of a brutal systematic campaign of state terror waged by the Mexican state against the burgeoning guerrilla movement and its supporters. In late November, soldiers disappeared her and her baby, passing them through a series of clandestine prisons and camps. After nearly three years of illegal detainment—during which the young *guerrillera* suffered rape and torture—Ayala Nava and her daughter, Micaela, left Military Camp 1 in Mexico City and “reappeared.” More than six hundred *guerrerenenses* never did. At some point in the 1980s or 1990s, she fled Guerrero and migrated to the United States, having survived the deadly journey across the US–Mexico border that many thousands have not. When she learned of a growing human rights movement that demanded justice and the return of loved ones disappeared by

the Mexican state, Ayala Nava went back to Guerrero to actively participate, organize, and provide witness. On July 3, 2011, as she left a church service with her sister on the outskirts of Acapulco, assassins gunned them down. Ayala Nava and her sister joined the tens of thousands of Mexicans killed, victimized by a government-led “War on Drugs” that, in practice, is a bloody state of exception—or, to express it differently, a killing machine.<sup>1</sup>

A myriad of social theorists, philosophers and legal scholars have considered how a “state of exception”—the temporal or permanent suspension of the rule of law by a sovereign power in the face of a perceived threat—deprives certain individuals and/or communities of legal rights.<sup>2</sup> They are reduced, according to philosopher Giorgio Agamben, to “bare life”: deprived of all legal protections by a legal act, susceptible to multiple forms of violence including death, banished to a zone of lawlessness.<sup>3</sup> For Agamben, understanding/locating states of exception and their production of bare life reveals the kernel of (Western) law and sovereignty, a foundational component that is constitutive of political power and the normative legal regimes that sustain it.<sup>4</sup> Nazi concentration camps represent the “hidden paradigm of the political project of modernity”—a camp paradigm that has spread and proliferated to become “the new biopolitical nomos of the planet.”<sup>5</sup> Agamben draws a straight line to the United States’ so-called War on Terror, identifying Guantánamo and Camp X-Ray as sites where “bare life reaches its the maximum indeterminacy”; thus, to him, revealing that the state of exception has become the rule. The “juridico-political system” has become “a killing machine.”<sup>6</sup>

This chapter analyzes the historical formation of the killing machines—the states of exception—that Isabel Ayala Nava survived in 1970s Guerrero and the US–Mexico borderlands. But to understand why the Mexican state would disappear individuals in the 1970s and then re-disappear their bones in 2001 (for example) or the historical palimpsest of settler colonial violence that is the US–Mexico border, we must engage with *and* go beyond Agamben’s normative definition of sovereignty, democracy and politics.<sup>7</sup> A model that posits social peace as the normative baseline, underscored by the realization of individual subjectivity and “the achieving of agreement among a collectivity through communication and recognition,” fails to account for those other projects of sovereignty fundamentally structured by a politics of death.<sup>8</sup> The colony, the slave ship, the sugar plantation, the frontier, the reservation, the counterinsurgent “zone of protection” all constitute other sites of “maximum indeterminacy” that, to quote philosopher Achille Mbembe, also

“constitute the *nomos* of the political space in which we still live.”<sup>9</sup> And these sites, these systems, can only function as permanent states of exception in which sovereignty is expressed nakedly as “the right to kill” and “where ‘peace’ is more likely to take on the face of a ‘war without end.’”<sup>10</sup>

In Guerrero and the US–Mexico borderlands, the right to kill assumed a more specific expression: the right to *disappear*. The thousands of disappeared persons in both spaces—and the expression of sovereignty via the right to disappear individuals deemed disposable and hence subject to a lasting, haunting death—links these two states of exception. These two histories suggest that to disappear presupposes the prior reduction of entire communities to banishment and bare life. Using the theoretical literature on states of exception, and influenced by the work of Black intellectuals and artists who situate the *nomos* of our times in the histories of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, I analyze the historical processes that shaped the making of bare life in Guerrero and the Arizona–Mexico border. I argue that state construction of peasant guerrillas and undocumented migrants as “criminals,” “lawbreakers,” and “aliens”—a criminality often cast in civilizational, racial, and counter-insurgent terms that then produces a forfeit of rights—shaped and enabled violent state responses and strategies. Reducing its victims to bare life, the killing machines jailed, tortured, raped, killed, and disappeared “bandits,” “cattle-rustlers,” “subversives,” “illegals,” and “aliens.”<sup>11</sup>

Additionally, this chapter suggests that both 1970s Guerrero and the Arizona–Mexico borderlands represent, to borrow from journalist Charles Bowden, laboratories of the future.<sup>12</sup> Considering the ongoing Mexican “War on Drugs” (with its more than 90,000 disappeared since 2006) and the use of elite Border Patrol units with deployment experience in Iraq and Afghanistan to momentarily disappear protestors in US cities like Portland, the future is *here*.<sup>13</sup> The lines between “frontiers” and “metropolises” have blurred; they always were. As such, the histories recounted in this chapter have something political to teach us. That these spaces constitute literal (Arizona–Mexico borderlands) and politically imagined (Guerrero) faraway frontiers further enabled the violence that created bare life. Much like the European colonies that Mbembe analyzes, historically and politically, these spaces “are similar to frontiers . . . the zone where the violence of the state of exception is deemed to operate in the service of ‘civilization’”—and its late modern cousin, national security.<sup>14</sup> These “frontier regions” and the histories of the communities

that inhabit them suggest that states of exception are the rule—not the exception—coming soon to a place near you.

In what follows, I begin with a discussion of the bones—that is, the consequence of bare life—in which I connect three histories separated by time and space but united by the perilous search for peace and justice. I then shift the focus to the state terror and violence in Guerrero, Mexico, during the 1970s, before ending with an analysis of how US federal government policy in the 1990s transformed the Sonoran Desert into what anthropologist Jason de León termed a killing machine of migrants. The desert, he argues, “is a remote *deathscape* where American necropolitics are pecked onto the bones of those we deem excludable.”<sup>15</sup> We thus turn to the bones.

## The Bones and the Excludable

*. . . and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were dry.*

—Ezekiel 37:2

In responding to a question from literary scholar Patricia Saunders about the limits of historical knowledge, representation, and archives in reconstructing the story of the *Zong*—an eighteenth-century British slave ship—poet NourbeSe Philip remarked, “I want the bones . . . ‘give me the bones’ I say to the silence that is so often what history presents to us . . . the bones actually ground you.”<sup>16</sup> The bones, Philip seems to imply, offer the possibility of materially remembering individuals in history that populate archives more as spectres than as clearly identifiable historical agents, or, in the case of the *Zong*, solely as commodities, as measurable units of valuable goods and capital “lost” at sea, harnessed in the service of calculating insurance claims brought forth by the slave ship’s owners. If the archive is—in the entirety of the history of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, of American slave plantation regimes, of the persistent legacies of racial capitalism and the continuity of post-emancipation slavery configurations that went by other names across the Americas—a “death sentence, a tomb, a display of the violated body, an inventory of property,” to quote Saidiya Hartman, can the bones help in the writing of disappeared or undocumented histories?<sup>17</sup> Can the bones help historians, in following Philip’s orders, “defend the dead?”<sup>18</sup>

In a different time, in a different place, Tita Radilla has answered in the affirmative. The daughter of Rosendo Radilla, a *campesino* community leader detained and disappeared by Mexican soldiers in the southern state of Guerrero in August 1974, Radilla and her family have waged a decades-long struggle seeking to locate the remains of her father.<sup>19</sup> When interviewed in July 2008 during the forensic excavation of a former military base in Atoyac de Álvarez, Guerrero in a search for clandestine graves, she remarked: “they say the bones talk . . . the bones will tell us what happened to them. . . . I know my father was at the military base.”<sup>20</sup> The bones talk; give us the bones. For Radilla and the hundreds of thousands of Latin Americans who lived through the disappearance of loved ones during the region’s “long Cold War,”<sup>21</sup> finding the bones may lessen or disrupt the anguish and uncertainty that torture the survivors long after the enforced disappearance. The brutal suspension of time, the continuing terror enacted with the disappearance of a loved one, might end, and the mourning begin. Yet, as Radilla notes in the same interview, she wants more, perhaps something akin to Hartman’s desire: “I want to say more than this. I want to do more than recount the violence that deposited these traces in the archive.”<sup>22</sup> Tita Radilla wants justice.<sup>23</sup> And she wants to defend the hundreds, possibly thousands, of other disappeared Mexican dead.

“The entire border is a carpet of human remains,” César Ortigoza told journalist Aura Bogado in late 2018. Ortigoza, a migrant who entered the US in 1989, helped create a group called Los Armadillos that combs the most inaccessible parts of the US–Mexico borderlands searching for lost migrants: alive and dead. César is a committed volunteer who balances his full-time job as a maintenance man with his weekend searches, accompanied by more than a dozen other members of Los Armadillos. The organization has a prominent presence on Facebook, helping to connect with the concerned family members of migrants who haven’t received news of their loved ones. Family members like Eliseo Cárdenas Sánchez, who stumbled upon a photograph of his father’s identification card next to a small pile of bones on Facebook. His father had disappeared in 2008 after trying to cross the border. Most recently, Los Armadillos found remains in Arizona’s Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument, including a tiny spinal column. “The bones,” Ortigoza said, “the bones were so small.”<sup>24</sup>

## State of Exception in 1970s Guerrero

In 1960s and 1970s Guerrero, the long-ruling authoritarian Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) unleashed a killing machine. A constellation of military, paramilitary, and police agents carried out enforced disappearances as a way to terrorize an insurgent rural population into submission and to preemptively defuse any additional rebellious leanings in a region rich with living legacies of peasant resistance and struggle. To “annihilate”—the term used by a 2006 report presented by the office of the Special Prosecutor for Social and Political Movements of the Past (Fiscalía Especial para Movimientos Sociales y Políticos del Pasado, or FEMOSPP)—two separate peasant guerrilla movements, soldiers, police, and death squads tortured, raped, jailed, and/or disappeared thousands of *guerrerenses* beginning in the late 1960s up to the early 1980s. These practices of state terror represented neither random outbursts of military violence in the context of a communally backed peasant revolution nor the work of a few rotten state “apples.” Rather, practices like enforced disappearance demonstrated a systemic application ordered by the PRI civilian leadership and implemented by state security forces to annihilate armed movements supported by dozens of peasant communities and urban barrios located mostly in coastal Guerrero.

That high level of popular support proved problematic for both PRI politicians and military officials, as it transformed entire communities into potential enemies of the Mexican state. The region thus became a counterinsurgent “zone of lawlessness” that combined state terrorism with socio-economic development and state institution building to drain popular support from the guerrillas.<sup>25</sup> That state agents tortured and disappeared actual *and* potential guerrillas, terrorized actual *and* potential guerrilla-supporting communities, suggests that the Mexican state was interested in the eradication of both actualized and potential instances of revolution against its oligarchic rule. State terror aimed to contain and prevent revolutionary challenges. To disappear individuals also meant the disappearance of resistance, utopias, and communal networks; of insurgent pasts, presents and futures.

In Guerrero these insurgent memories and utopias consistently fueled popular movements and resistance. Rosendo Radilla, in his corrido “El Guerrillero,” succinctly summarized how the 1960s unfolded in the southern state: “*Señores, I am a campesino / from the state of Guerrero / they took away my rights and turned me into a guerrilla.*”<sup>26</sup> Throughout the decade,



“civic insurgencies” challenged violent *cacique* (boss) political and economic domination at the local and regional levels.<sup>27</sup> These sorts of movements demanded, in general, an actually existing pluralistic political democracy (in contrast to the one-party authoritarian rule of the PRI) and social and economic justice. In 1960–1961, a broad, multi-class civic movement succeeded in deposing a corrupt and violent governor using massive protest marches, constant petitioning of Congress, and the occupation of public spaces—not before soldiers massacred more than twenty protestors in December 1960. A subsequent electoral effort to organize an opposition political party and run candidates for municipal and state-level positions ended in accusations of PRI-led fraud and yet another massacre. The bloody suppression of an electoral movement that called for “the democratization of the political system of the *ejido* [communal landholding], municipality, district, state, and nation”<sup>28</sup> led one of its leaders—schoolteacher and future guerrilla Genaro Vázquez—to the conclusion that “the electoral path does not solve [working-class and campesino] problems and the secret, universal vote is a bourgeois trick.”<sup>29</sup>

In the years that followed during the governorship of Raymundo Abarca Alarcón (1963–1969)—a former military doctor closely aligned with local caciques and key national political figures—agrarian conflicts and political protests intensified.<sup>30</sup> The state legislature passed laws in 1965 that effectively criminalized any political activity and dissent that threatened to provoke “social dissolution.”<sup>31</sup> State police or military forces attacked entire peasant communities for supporting opposition political parties or protecting local forestry resources from politically connected caciques,<sup>32</sup> assassinated campesino leaders who organized rural unions independent of PRI control,<sup>33</sup> imprisoned state university students who led a strike against the governor-aligned university rector,<sup>34</sup> and massacred more than thirty-five copra farmers in Acapulco in August 1967 when they tried to seize their union headquarters from corrupt leaders.<sup>35</sup> Months before, in the small coastal city of Atoyac de Álvarez, another massacre occurred when state police forces opened fire on a group of parents protesting an unpopular school principal. A communist rural schoolteacher named Lucio Cabañas barely survived that attack and fled to the mountains.<sup>36</sup>

After a decade of massacres, two socialist peasant guerrilla movements led by Vázquez and Cabañas emerged in the late 1960s: an armed revolutionary response to the PRI’s use of outright violence and coercion to smash popular movements that had organized and acted within the political and

legal confines of the 1917 Constitution. Such practices of state terror helped transform students, rural schoolteachers, campesinas, campesinos, military deserters, veterans of the 1910 Mexican Revolution, and rural communities into revolutionary subjects seeking the radical transformation of Mexican society. Indeed, they sought a new revolution. They fought until late 1974, when soldiers defeated the last remnants of the Cabañas-led Party of the Poor (PDLP) (a number of smaller revolutionary organizations would keep fighting until the late 1970s; PDLP survivors would regroup and resurface during the 1980s). To accomplish this military victory, the civilian leadership of the PRI had responded by turning the region into a counterinsurgent “state of siege” where military power gradually became sovereign power able to determine who could live and who had to die.<sup>37</sup>

### “Packages” and the Language of Bare Life in the Archives

*Te vas a ir de marinero . . . o te vas a ir de minero.*

*(You’ll either go as a sailor . . . or a miner.)*

—Simón Hipólito, *Guerrero, amnistía y represión*, 139

*Los “guachos” nos amenazaban diciendo que íbamos a ir a darles banquetes a los tiburones.*

*(The soldiers threatened us by saying that we would be the feast for sharks.)*

—Testimony of Maximiliano Nava Martínez, FEMOSPP, *Informe Histórico a la Sociedad Mexicana*, 621

In offering a longer periodization of the Mexican government’s use of state terror after 1940, historian Gladys McCormick identifies three distinct periods: 1946–1962, 1962–1968, and 1968–1982.<sup>38</sup> While the last period proved most violent and prolonged—and when the *systematic* practice of enforced disappearance begins, according to human rights groups and the FEMOSPP report—the previous two provide evidence of PRI experimentation

with different forms of repression and terror mainly in the countryside and provincial cities. Such forms included attempts to co-opt dissident leaders or the application of targeted violence—threats, surveillance, kidnapping, imprisonment, torture and/or assassination—as a way to disarticulate protest movements from the top down. The *Dirección Federal de Seguridad* (DFS, a political police force created in 1947 with the help of the US Federal Bureau of Investigation “as an instrument for controlling the population”) and the Mexican military played key roles in this process of violence calibration—roles that only expanded in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>39</sup>

Beginning in late 1967, violence calibration became counterinsurgency in Guerrero, with public and private facets. In its public manifestation, PRI officials and military/political intelligence worked to depoliticize revolutionary armed struggle by publicly framing military and police operations as anti-crime “War on Drugs” campaigns against “bandits” and “cattle-rustlers.” In this public construction of a criminal subject, historian Camilo Vicente argues, the apolitical delinquent erased the dissident.<sup>40</sup> From 1967 to 1970, military doctors and even barbers embedded within small military units travelled into the highlands to wage “social labour” campaigns that included free medical care and vaccinations, intending to win hearts and minds. The general who recommended these campaigns argued that the “vaccine of the [1910] Mexican Revolution best inoculates against the viruses of Communism and Clergy spread by bad Mexicans who sought to infect the consciousness of the poor masses.”<sup>41</sup> Five hundred soldiers “dressed as doctors,” as the PDLP mocked them in a May 1969 communique, collected information on the whereabouts of the guerrillas while providing the sort of medical care that campesinos in the region had long demanded.<sup>42</sup>

As the armed actions of the guerrillas gradually assumed offensive dimensions at the end of 1969—mostly in the form of police ambushes, kidnappings of hated local caciques, and bank “expropriations”—the military responded by inaugurating the practice of enforced disappearance. Soldiers detained and disappeared schoolteacher Epifanio Avilés Rojas in May 1969, who was accused of participating in a guerrilla bank “expropriation” in Mexico City.<sup>43</sup> Months later in October, another modality of violence emerged, according to a government spy: soldiers from the 48th Infantry Battalion executed two campesinos in extrajudicial fashion “after their detainment in the town of Huehuetán.”<sup>44</sup> In subsequent military campaigns, Operation Friendship (1970) and Operation Spider Web (1971), soldiers used torture, rape,

and disappearances as a way to gather intelligence and discipline “restive” communities—all publicly presented as counter-narcotics operations.<sup>45</sup>

In the years that led to the final military defeat of the PDLP in December 1974, the PRI maintained and expanded the public, criminalizing dimension of counterinsurgency.<sup>46</sup> “Social labour” turned into sustained economic development and state investment during the presidency of Luis Echeverría (1970–1976)—a subtle admission that something was indeed rotten in the southern state.<sup>47</sup> As a local politician bravely told the president, “for the federal government to support and help the state of Guerrero, we need many Lucios.”<sup>48</sup> At the same time, the private terroristic aspect of counterinsurgency also expanded in response to guerrilla military actions that civilian and military officials interpreted as a growing insurgent threat. Thousands of soldiers poured into the state.<sup>49</sup> Nominally, the target remained the same: rural and urban communities located in coastal and central Guerrero, particularly in the municipality of Atoyac de Álvarez.

A key turning point occurred in the summer of 1972 when PDLP guerrillas ambushed two military convoys. Fully recognizing the group as a popularly supported guerrilla force in secret military and DFS documents, officers developed operations that aimed to militarily annihilate the guerrillas by isolating them from their peasant base of support.<sup>50</sup> To achieve that separation, the military (with state police serving as auxiliaries) used tactics that “tortured entire highland communities”: the forced re-concentration of rural hamlets in municipal capitals, arrest and imprisonment of entire barrios, the violent persecution of entire families related to Cabañas and captured guerrillas, public torture and executions of individuals in front of their communities, controlling and restricting the availability of foods and medicines in municipalities believed to support the guerrillas, the pillaging of campesino homes and individuals, forcing campesinos to work as snitches (*madrinas*) against their own communities and families, and the broader establishment of a regional state of siege that prevented farmers from working on their coffee and maize plots.<sup>51</sup> Yet, despite such tactics, popular support for the guerrillas continued to grow. By November 1973, in the midst of Operation Firefly, a new term first appeared in military correspondence, one whose usage would become both ubiquitous and systematic for the next year: the package.<sup>52</sup>

Dated November 22, 1973, encrypted message #17136 describes a series of planned military manoeuvres based “on information provided by packages.”<sup>53</sup> Rather than list the names of captured individuals—in this case mostly

likely Raúl Morales Loeza (disappeared) and Pedro Adame Ramírez (detained and tortured)—high-ranking military officers reporting to superiors in Mexico City from late 1973 to early 1975 consistently used “package” to denote captured individuals believed to possess intelligence on the guerrillas. The “revision of packages” likely meant interrogation and torture;<sup>54</sup> “injured packages” referred to hurt individuals detained by soldiers;<sup>55</sup> individuals coerced into identifying guerrilla supporters at military checkpoints became “identifier packages;”<sup>56</sup> “archived packages” were individuals imprisoned, put away somewhere within a labyrinthine network of clandestine jails and torture centres.<sup>57</sup> By August 1974, officials expanded the term to describe suspected individuals not yet in military custody: “based on information provided by packages, we are organizing an ambush to intercept packages attempting to flee the region.”<sup>58</sup> Anyone and everyone living in coastal Guerrero could be and become a “package.” More than anything, it was this terrorizing of an entire civilian population that enabled military and police forces to identify, encircle, isolate, persecute and annihilate the PDLP by the end of 1974. In this biopolitical calculation, some had to die for the majority to live.

What did these “packages” suffer? After detainment, torture: severe beatings, the rape and sexual assault of women, electrocution, hanging men by their testicles, the insertion of water hoses in the anus that filled victims with water prior to physical assault. Torturers also used psychological methods, threatening to disappear the victims by throwing them into the Pacific Ocean or in one of Guerrero’s many cave complexes.<sup>59</sup> Some testimonies recalled how torturers used children to force their parents to talk by placing guns to their heads.<sup>60</sup> This systematic violence occurred in secret prisons located on military bases in Guerrero or Mexico City and in police “safe houses” in Acapulco. Sometimes the torture occurred on basketball courts in highland communities, in front of the entire population.<sup>61</sup> Charred bodies that began to appear on the outskirts of Acapulco in early 1974 demonstrated another sadistic form of public torture: forcing detainees to drink gasoline before setting them on fire.<sup>62</sup> After imprisonment and torture, some victims managed to survive, released by their military or police captors and bearing profound physical and psychological marks that would afflict them for the rest of their lives. Estela Arroyo “said her father ‘came out of jail, but he came out dead.’”<sup>63</sup> Others never came out.

How many did soldiers and police disappear? A final FEMOSPP investigation and report, amid much controversy, lists nearly 800 from the mid-1960s

to 1982, with more than 600 cases of enforced disappearance occurring in Guerrero. The Association of Relatives of the Disappeared and Victims of Human Rights Violations (AFADEM), a courageous group co-led by Tita Radilla that traces its origins to the mid-1970s and has collected many testimonies, presents a higher number at 1,300 nationally. Gustavo Tarín, a police enforcer and torturer during the 1970s based in Guerrero, testified in 2002 against his former military commander and estimated fifteen hundred disappearances in the southern state alone.<sup>64</sup> These estimates—based on an incomplete, curated “archive of terror” hesitantly provided by a hostile state and the brave testimonies of victims and survivors willing to risk death to become part of the “archives of pain”—are most likely conservative. How many cases have not been reported?<sup>65</sup> How many of the victims were buried in unmarked, clandestine graves, like the bodies of two PDLP guerrillas discovered in 2014 by investigators working for the Guerrero Truth Commission (Comisión de la Verdad del Estado de Guerrero, or COMVERDAD)?<sup>66</sup> How many of the disappeared were thrown into the Pacific Ocean from airplanes and helicopters during an estimated thirty “death flights?” Where are the “black lists” that recorded the names of the disappeared, according to survivors, Tarín, and the Air Force officers who piloted the “death flights”—death flights that actually *increased* in number after the defeat of the guerrillas in 1974 and continued until the late 1970s?<sup>67</sup> A photograph of Marcelo Juárez Serafín, a fifteen-year-old guerrilla captured by soldiers after the killing of Cabañas on December 2, 1974, represents perhaps the only known photographic evidence of a victim of enforced disappearance in Guerrero.<sup>68</sup> We don’t have the bones, “for their graveyard is the ocean.”<sup>69</sup>

In the absence of bones, we are left with military documents that describe the detainment and “revision” of “packages”—like the documents dated August 25, 1974 that refer to the capture of Rosendo Radilla and six other “packages” at different military checkpoints.<sup>70</sup> We are left with the testimonies of people like Rosendo’s son, Rosendo Radilla Martínez, who as a young child watched soldiers violently take his father off the bus they were riding. He remembers his father asking the soldiers why they were taking him. And he remembers their response: for writing *corridos* (ballads) about the guerrillas. “That’s a crime?” his father retorted. “No, but you’re fucked anyway.”<sup>71</sup>

## By Way of Conclusion: Bare Life in a Desert of Bones

*What does it mean to defend the dead?*

—Christina Sharpe

More than 7,000 migrants have disappeared trying to cross the most dangerous parts of the US–Mexico border since the late 1990s. Sometimes their bodies are recovered: 2,771 in southern Arizona alone between 2000 and 2014. And these are conservative estimates. Scholars like Jason de León, Roxanne Doty, Reece Jones, and Corey Johnson, who use Agamben’s work to help understand this level of border death and suffering in “spaces of exception,” point to the federal policy of “Prevention through Deterrence” (PTD).<sup>72</sup> Implemented in the mid-1990s after federal officials deemed successful local Immigration and Naturalization Service efforts in deterring “unauthorized border crossings” in major urban centres (the building of walls in transnational cities like El Paso and San Diego), PTD would strategically use “the natural environment . . . as the foundation for border policy.” Forcing migrants to attempt their crossings away from major urban centres, through dangerous and inhospitable natural environments such as the Sonoran Desert, became official policy; indeed, policy makers weaponized extreme environments as a way to deter migrants—or to render them invisible—knowing the dangerous and potential deadly consequences. As de León argues, “one way for the government to measure the efficacy of PTD is via a migrant body count.”<sup>73</sup> Culpability for migrant deaths was displaced onto the natural environment while those same deaths allegedly served as a deterrence to potential migrants—the expression of bare life in the desert, in a space of exception, in a zone of lawlessness. Indeed, the Border Patrol still uses the death of migrants attempting to cross the border as an indicator of the success of their policies.<sup>74</sup> Within this necropolitical matrix, the bodies of migrants and asylum seekers who survive the desert are caged in private detention prisons, generating value and profits for both the companies and their shareholders.<sup>75</sup>

How many more died or disappeared in the decades prior to PTD? And why? During the late 1970s, a journalist from the *Arizona Daily Star* talked to migrants captured by the Border Patrol while trying to cross into Arizona. “The trail up here is littered with the bones of Mexicans,” they told him.<sup>76</sup> During the mid-1970s, white vigilantes terrorized migrants trying to cross through the California–Mexico border, shooting them from the flatbeds of their trucks;

“dozens of bodies were found in shallow graves” in the San Diego area.<sup>77</sup> By the late 1970s, migrants encountered snipers and the KKK’s “Border Watch” patrols—led by a 27-year-old David Duke—who wore shirts that read “White Power.” One Border Patrol agent told a reporter that his colleagues gave the KKK the “red carpet” treatment when they arrived in the San Ysidro borderlands, even encouraging them to capture migrants. Historian Greg Grandin recounts that Border Patrol agents reported “finding pitfall traps, modelled on the punji traps Vietnamese would set for US soldiers, in the swampy Tijuana estuary, an area of the border vigilantes started calling Little Nam.”<sup>78</sup> If the California–Mexico wall did not keep out migrants—parts of which were made from helicopter landing pads used previously in Vietnam—the pitfall traps in “Little Nam” stood guard.

Decades later, a new generation of paramilitary border vigilantes shaped by another cycle of US imperial adventures would bring their faraway wars to the border and migrants. In the mid-2000s, Minutemen reported seeing “Middle Eastern guys with beards” and finding “Arabic–English dictionaries in the sand.” One of these vigilantes drew a parallel with another instance of settler colonialism—one that has exported border wall, policing and counterinsurgency technologies to the US and Mexico for decades—when he remarked, “this is our Gaza.”<sup>79</sup>

The type of violence recounted in this chapter suggests that states of exception, far from constituting temporary anomalies within state projects of sovereignty that claim the mantle of democracy, represent the rule. “Conflict and the state of exception,” Gareth Williams argues for Mexico, “reveal how society functions.”<sup>80</sup> I extend that argument to the US today. In particular, the practice of enforced disappearance reveals the core of sovereign power. The body of the disappeared, as political theorist Banu Bargu argues, “becomes the surface upon which sovereignty imprints its mark—a mark written with an ink that erases itself as well as the surface out of existence.”<sup>81</sup> How then can we interrupt and abolish the material and cultural processes that render certain communities and individuals as “Being-outside, and yet belonging?”<sup>82</sup> I think about my role in this, as the son of undocumented Mexican migrants who crossed the border multiple times from the 1970s to the early 1990s, braving terrible suffering and violence. What is my/our responsibility in writing these histories? In her work on the afterlives and ongoing impact of slavery on Black diasporic communities, literary scholar Christina Sharpe provocatively asks, “what does it mean to defend the dead?”<sup>83</sup>



Those who search for the bones and the disappeared lead the way. “The dead will bring us along,” said María de la Luz López Castruita, mother of Irma Claribel, disappeared in 2008 in the northern Mexican city of Torreón.<sup>84</sup> These peace workers courageously invite us to reimagine and work toward the actualization of justice and peace in the face of hostile state power. For surviving relatives of disappeared persons in Mexico since the 1970s, defending the dead means recovering both the physical remains of their loved ones *and* their memory. It means organizing hunger strikes, searching for clandestine graves in dangerous locations, pressuring recalcitrant and hostile political/police authorities and risking their lives.<sup>85</sup> It means organizing and pressuring state authorities to end the legal and political impunity enjoyed by those who staff and run the killing machines. The courageous testimony and praxis of the surviving victims of these killing machines go beyond Agamben and his political pessimism by asserting that the possibility of justice depends on the active, dangerous recovery of disappeared persons and their historical memory. At the very least, finding a loved one disrupts the prolonged, punishing uncertainty that afflicts the surviving long after the act of disappearance. As Tita Radilla told me, “We want the truth no matter how painful.”<sup>86</sup>

Justice, in other words, requires defending the dead. And without justice, as Black Lives Matter protestors most recently affirmed in radical fashion throughout dozens of US cities in 2020, there can be no peace. Against the “sovereign politics of erasure” that work to ensure that these histories remain silenced and the disappeared remain disappeared, we need the memories, we need the bones, we need the names, we need the clandestine graves, we need to defend the dead.<sup>87</sup> The very condition of possibility for peace depends on remembering, on memory. Facing two “Visceraless” states for “which bodies are not a matter of care but a matter of extraction,” as Mexican writer Cristina Rivera Garza argues, we write to remember and to testify.<sup>88</sup> We cannot and will not forget.

## Notes

I deeply appreciate the incisive, generous suggestions and feedback provided by Yasmin Saikia, Chad Haines, and the rest of the participants at the “Peace with the Other” conference. Thank you also to my colleague Tracy Fessenden for her generous commentary on an earlier version of this chapter.

- 1 Laura Castellanos, *México armado, 1943–1981* (Mexico City: Era, 2007); Felipe Fierro Santiago, *El último disparo: versiones de la guerrilla de los setentas* (Atoyac de Álvarez, Guerrero: Colección ATL, 2006); Andrés Becerril, “Isabel Ayala, la niña que decidió seguir a Cabañas,” *Excélsior*, July 6, 2011; Margena de la O, “Víctimas de la Guerra Sucia que el Estado convierte en victimarios,” *La Silla Rota*, February 10, 2019; and conversations with historian Adela Cedillo (University of Houston).
- 2 See, among others, Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Carl Schmitt, *Theory of the Partisan: Immediate Commentary on the Concept of the Political* (New York: Telos, 2007); Walter Benjamin, “Critique of Violence,” in *Selected Writings*, vol. 1, 1913–1926, edited by Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 236–52; Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977–1978* (New York: Picador, 2007); Michel Foucault, “*Society Must Be Defended*”: *Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975–76* (New York: Picador, 2003); and Achille Mbembe, “Necropolitics,” *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (2003): 11–40. My interpretation is also heavily influenced by Gareth Williams’s original, critical analysis of twentieth-century Mexican history and state formation as a permanent “state of exception.” See Gareth Williams, *The Mexican Exception: Sovereignty, Police and Democracy* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011). Historian Claudia E. G. Rangel Lozano puts forward a similar convincing argument, using Agamben’s theories on sovereignty. See Claudia E. G. Rangel Lozano, “La voz de los sobrevivientes: las cárceles clandestinas en México, una radiografía (1969–1979),” in *México en los setenta: ¿Guerra sucia o terrorismo de Estado? Hacia una política de la memoria*, edited by Claudia E. G. Rangel Lozano and Evangelina Sánchez Serrano (Guerrero: Universidad Autónoma de Guerrero, 2015), 51–77.
- 3 See Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998).
- 4 Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 4.
- 5 Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 123, 176.
- 6 Agamben, *State of Exception*, 86. For a convincing counter to Agamben’s analysis of Guantánamo, see Derek Gregory, “Black Flag: Guantánamo Bay and the State of Exception,” *Geografiska Annaler/Swedish Society for Anthropology and Geography* 88, no. 4 (2006): 405–27.
- 7 Carlos Montemayor, *La guerrilla recurrente* (Mexico City: Random House Mondadori, 2007), 68. In April 2001, a human rights organization (AFADEM) reported the existence of a clandestine grave behind a house in coastal Guerrero

that the Mexican military occupied from 1972 to 1974. Two weeks later, without providing notice, agents from the federal Attorney General's office excavated the grave and removed at least twenty-six skeletal remains.

- 8 Mbembe, "Necropolitics," 13.
- 9 Mbembe, "Necropolitics," 14. "Zone of protection" refers to the imprisonment of 300,000 Filipino civilians in camps during the US war of colonial conquest in the Philippines after the 1898 Spanish-American War—a forerunner of the "strategic hamlet." See Andrea Pitzer, *One Long Night: A Global History of Concentration Camps* (New York: Little, Brown, 2017).
- 10 Pitzer, *One Long Night*, 23; and Foucault, "Society Must Be Defended," 241.
- 11 In using the term "killing machine," I do not mean to suggest totalizing, exclusively murderous states of exception—both 1970s Guerrero and 1990s Arizona–Mexico included certain biopolitical calculations. In Guerrero, this calculation proved more explicit: to riff off Michel Foucault, in order for most to live, some had to die. In the desert borderlands, the biopolitical motivations of US capital (the need for cheap, exploitable, expendable labour) clashes with the necropolitical police actions that include the destruction of water supplies left by humanitarian organizations for migrants. For a history of this clash, see Kelly Lytle Hernandez, *Migra! A History of the US Border Patrol* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).
- 12 Charles Bowden, *Juárez: The Laboratory of Our Future* (New York: Aperture, 1998).
- 13 "Number of Disappeared in Mexico Rise to over 73,000," *Associated Press*, July 13, 2020; Ed Pilkington, "'These Are His People': Inside the Elite Border Patrol Unit Trump Sent to Portland," *The Guardian*, July 27, 2020.
- 14 Mbembe, "Necropolitics," 24.
- 15 Jason de León, *The Land of Open Graves: Living and Dying on the Migrant Trail* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015), 3, 84.
- 16 Patricia Saunders, "Defending the Dead, Confronting the Archive: A Conversation with M. NourbeSe Philip," *Small Axe* 12, no. 2 (June 2008): 68–69. The *Zong* is specifically remembered for the actions of its captain in November 1781 and the ensuing legal case. After navigational mistakes and the lack of potable drinking water sickened some of the slaves, the captain drowned nearly 150 slaves to ensure that the ship owners could claim lost "cargo" and collect insurance money.
- 17 Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe* 12, no. 2 (June 2008): 1–14, at 2.
- 18 M. NourbeSe Philip, *Zong! As Told to the Author by Setaey Adamu Boateng* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2011), 25.
- 19 Radilla, interview with the author, May 16, 2007.

- 20 Gerardo Torres, "Mexico Looks for 'Dirty War' Graves on Army Base," *Reuters*, July 8, 2008.
- 21 Greg Grandin, "Living in Revolutionary Time: Coming to Terms with the Violence of Latin America's Long Cold War," in *A Century of Revolution: Insurgent and Counterinsurgent Violence During Latin America's Long Cold War*, edited by Greg Grandin and Gilbert M. Joseph (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 1–44.
- 22 Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 2.
- 23 Torres, "Mexico Looks for 'Dirty War' Graves;" Gloria Leticia Díaz, "Tita y la guerra sucia," *Proceso*, December 14, 2011.
- 24 Aura Bogado, "Lost on the Border: A Decade Later, a Man Finds His Father's Remains on Facebook," *Reveal News* (August 23, 2018).
- 25 Williams, *The Mexican Exception*, 176–77.
- 26 Andrea Radilla Martínez, *Voces Acalladas (Vidas truncadas): perfil biográfico de Rosendo Radilla Pachecho* (Mexico City: Nueva Visión, 2007).
- 27 See, in this regard, Tanalis Padilla, *Rural Resistance in the Land of Zapata: The Jaramillista Movement and the Myth of Pax Priísta, 1940–1962* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008); Robert Alegre, *Railroad Radicals in Cold War Mexico: Gender, Class, and Memory* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014); Jaime Pensado, *Rebel Mexico: Student Unrest and Authoritarian Political Culture During the Long 1960s* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013); Enrique Condés Lara, *Represión y rebelión en México (1959–1985)*, 2 vols. (Mexico City: BUAP/Miguel Angel Porrúa, 2007); Wil Pansters, *Politics and Power in Puebla: The Political History of a Mexican State, 1937–1987* (Amsterdam: Cedla Edita, 1995); and Alexander Aviña, *Specters of Revolution: Peasant Guerrillas in the Cold War Mexican Countryside* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).
- 28 Archivo General de la Nación [hereafter AGN], Dirección Federal de Seguridad [hereafter DFS] 100-10-16-2-62, file 1, 9.
- 29 Francisco Gómezjara, "El proceso político de Jenaro Vázquez Rojas hacia la guerrilla campesina," *Revista Mexicana de Ciencias Políticas y Sociales* 88 (April–June 1977): 111–14.
- 30 For a more detailed recap of this period, see Aviña, *Specters of Revolution*, 92–105.
- 31 Rangel Lozano, "La voz de los sobrevivientes," 58–59.
- 32 AGN, Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional [hereafter SDN], 74/299/388–390; AGN, SDN, 81/244/29, 168; AGN, DFS 63-3-67, file 25, 169.
- 33 AGN, DFS 11-136-66, file 14, 70–71, 103–105; AGN, Dirección General de Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales [hereafter DGIPS], 500/5/53–55.

- 34 AGN, DFS 100-10-1-66, file 22, 170-171, 218-219; 226-228; 247-248; AGN, DGIPS, 500/5/166-170.
- 35 AGN, DGIPS, 1488A/3/57-67, 98-100.
- 36 AGN, DFS 100-10-1-67, file 24, 99-101.
- 37 Mbembe, "Necropolitics," 11, 30.
- 38 Gladys McCormick, "The Last Door: Political Prisoners and the Use of Torture in Mexico's Dirty War," *The Americas* 74, no. 1 (2017): 59-61. I would argue for the singular importance of 1956-1961, years that witnessed intense worker, student, teacher and campesino mobilizations throughout the country. Internal military publications cite the "outbreak of subversion" in those years that necessitated better military training, improved armament and transportation, and counterinsurgency plans. Jorge Luis Sierra Guzmán, "Armed Forces and Counterinsurgency: Origins of the Dirty War (1965-1982)," in *Challenging Authoritarianism in Mexico: Revolutionary Struggles and the Dirty War, 1964-1982*, edited by Adela Cedillo and Fernando Calderón (New York: Routledge, 2012), 184-85.
- 39 Aaron Navarro, *Political Intelligence and the Creation of Modern Mexico, 1938-1954* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2010), 183-85. See also Sergio Aguayo, *La charola: Una historia sobre los servicios de inteligencia en México* (Mexico City: Grijalbo, 2001).
- 40 Camilo Vicente, "Verdad de Estado y discursos de la contrainsurgencia," *Contemporánea: Toda la historia del presente* 4, no. 8 (July-December 2017). See also Camilo Vicente, *Tiempo suspendido: una historia de la desaparición forzada en México, 1940-1980* (Mexico City: Bonilla Artigas, 2019).
- 41 AGN, DGIPS 549/3/3-4.
- 42 AGN, DGIPS 549/3.
- 43 AGN, DFS 100-10-16-2-70, file 2, 315. Police detained another guerrilla involved in the bank operation, Juan Galarza Antúnez, and tortured him to death.
- 44 AGN, DGIPS 550/1.
- 45 AGN, SDN 77/232/96; SDN 93/278/147-148, 154, 181-182; SDN 93/279/26-31, 40-50. For counter-narcotics explanations given to the press, see SDN 91/276/86.
- 46 An infamous example of this public discursive counterinsurgency that sought political de-legitimization is President Echeverría's fourth address to the nation in 1974, during which he referred to urban guerrillas as "terrorists," as "slow learners," and as the "products of broken homes" with an inclination "for drug use," a "propensity for sexual promiscuity," and a "high degree of feminine and masculine homosexuality." Cámara de Diputados, Centro de Documentación, Información y Análisis, *Informes presidenciales: Luis Echeverría ÁA* (Mexico

City: Congreso de la Unión, 2006), <http://www.diputados.gob.mx/sedia/sia/re/RE-ISS-09-06-14.pdf>, 179–81.

- 47 AGN, SDN 93/279/26–31; SDN 98/292/19–21.
- 48 Silvestre Hernández Fierro, interviewed in Fierro Santiago, *El último disparo*, 118–19.
- 49 Estimates range from 5,000 to 25,000 troops. The largest figure would have constituted nearly a third of the entire Mexican army in the 1970s. Estimates for participating state police range in the thousands. Jorge Luis Sierra Guzmán, *El enemigo interno: Contrainsurgencia y fuerzas armadas en México* (Mexico City: Universidad Iberoamericana/Plaza y Valdés, 2003), 59–65.
- 50 AGN, SDN 98/292/19–21.
- 51 AGN DFS 100-10-16-4, file 5, 96–106; 140, 187–188; 313–318; DFS 100-10-16-4, file 6, 188–89; AGN, SDN 376/1253/49–53; SDN 80/238/31; SDN 36/100/21; Fiscalía Especial para Movimientos Sociales y Políticos del Pasado [FEMOSPP], *Informe Histórico a la Sociedad Mexicana* (Mexico City: FEMOSPP/Procuraduría General de la Nación, 2006), 592–655.
- 52 AGN, SDN 97/288/5, 43. On the basis of my research in the SDN collection and on the FEMOSPP report, the first use of the term “package” appeared on November 22, 1973. Journalist and historian Juan Velez Díaz located an earlier use of the term, however, in a military document dated May 2, 1971, during Operation Spider Web. Velez Díaz, “Los militares de la ‘guerra sucia,’” *Proceso*, November 7 (pt. 1) and 8 (pt. 2), 2003 (an earlier installment of this report appeared in *Proceso* on September 1, 2002).
- 53 AGN, SDN 97/288/43.
- 54 AGN, SDN 100/299/503, 519, 639, 672–73, 680.
- 55 AGN, SDN 100/299/503.
- 56 FEMOSPP, *Informe Histórico*, 598.
- 57 AGN, SDN 99/294/185–186, 208; 99/295/12.
- 58 Military report, September 6, 1974, quoted in FEMOSPP, *Informe Histórico*, 597–98.
- 59 Testimony of Maximiliano Nava Martínez, FEMOSPP, *Informe Histórico*, 621; Simón Hipólito, *Guerrero, amnistía y represión* (Mexico City: Grijalbo, 1982), 139.
- 60 FEMOSPP, *Informe Histórico*, 613–14.
- 61 As occurred in the communities of El Quemado, Rio Santiago, Los Piloncillos, San Andrés de la Cruz, and Corrales de Rio Chiquito. See Aviña, “A War Against Poor People: Dirty Wars and Drug Wars in 1970s Mexico,” in *México Beyond 1968: Revolutionaries, Radicals and Repression During the Global Sixties and Subversive Seventies*, edited by Jaime Pensado and Enrique Ochoa (University of Arizona Press, 2018), 142–45.

- 62 AGN, DGIPS 1067/3/18–19; FEMOSPP, *Informe Histórico*, 615.
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- 64 Jorge Alejandro Medellín, “Muere militar implicado en la guerra sucia,” *El Universal*, July 8, 2005.
- 65 I borrow the terms “archives of terror” and “archives of pain” from historian Kirsten Weld, in *Paper Cadavers: The Archives of Dictatorship in Guatemala* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).
- 66 Comisión de la Verdad del Estado de Guerrero, *Informe Final de Actividades* (Chilpancingo, Guerrero: COMVERDAD, 2014), 52.
- 67 FEMOSPP, *Informe Histórico*, 629, 649–50; Gloria Leticia Díaz, “La ‘foto del recuerdo’ y al mar,” *Proceso*, December 1, 2002.
- 68 Comisión de la Verdad del Estado de Guerrero, 60; AGN, SDN 98/293/153. Radiogram #15596, sent from military zone commander General Eliseo Jimenez Ruiz to Secretary of National Defense General Hermenegildo Cuenca Díaz, reported the deaths of Cabañas and three guerrillas—including “Roberto,” the alias used by Juárez Serafín. This document contradicts the photograph of the young guerrilla, taken after the battle that he survived.
- 69 Saunders, “Defending the Dead, Confronting the Archive,” 69.
- 70 FEMOSPP, *Informe Histórico*, 606.
- 71 Tita Radilla, interview with the author, Atoyac de Álvarez, May 16, 2007; “Publica la Secretaría de Gobernación la semblanza de Rosendo Radilla, el campesino desaparecido por el Ejército en 1974,” *El Sur de Acapulco*, February 24, 2013.
- 72 de León, *The Land of Open Graves*; Roxanne Doty, “Bare Life: Border-Crossing Deaths and Spaces of Moral Alibis,” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 29, no. 4 (2011): 599–612; and Corey Johnson and Reece Jones, eds., *Placing the Border in Everyday Life* (London: Routledge, 2016).
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Columbia, MO. Many thanks to historians Benjamin T. Smith and Jake Newbury for providing me with documents from this collection.

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- 81 Banu Bargu, “Sovereignty as Erasure: Rethinking Enforced Disappearances,” *Qui Parle: Critical Humanities and Social Sciences* 23, no. 1 (2014): 35–75, at 63.
- 82 Agamben, *State of Exception*, 35.
- 83 Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 10.
- 84 Dawn Paley, *Guerra neoliberal: desaparición y búsqueda en el norte de México* (Mexico City: Libertad bajo palabra, 2020), 170.
- 85 For a history of these efforts in Mexico, see Evangelina Sánchez Serrano, “AFADEM: Desaparecidos: Presentación,” in *Desaparición forzada y terrorismo de Estado en México: memorias de la repression de Atoyac, Guerrero durante la década de los setenta*, edited by Andrea Radilla Martínez and Claudia E. G. Rangel Lozano (Mexico City/Chilpancingo, Guerrero: Universidad Autónoma de Guerrero/Plaza y Valdés, 2012), 177–210; and, Vicente, *Tiempo suspendido*.
- 86 Radilla, interview with the author, May 16, 2007. Also quoted in Aviña, *Specters of Revolution*, 180.
- 87 Bargu, “Sovereignty as Erasure,” 63.
- 88 Cristina Rivera Garza, *Grieving: Dispatches from a Wounded Country* (New York: The Feminist Press at CUNY, 2020), 168.



## 8 There Are No Signs

### Feeling Black in a Post-Jim Crow America

Camille D. Burge

“What’s the difference between the racism and prejudice you experienced in the 1950s and 1960s, and what you see and experience today?” I posed this question to civil rights activist Diane Nash in January of 2018 while having dinner with her along with the Villanova University Martin Luther King Jr. Day Planning Committee. Nash is best known for being the chairperson of the student sit-in movement in 1960 in Nashville, Tennessee, where she organized many protests that ultimately led to the desegregation of Nashville’s lunch counters. It was because of her tireless efforts and negotiations with the local government that on May 10, 1960, Nashville, Tennessee, became the first major southern city to formally desegregate lunch counters. Around that same time, she and other students from the South assembled in Raleigh, North Carolina, and founded the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee. After the sit-ins, Nash played an integral role in coordinating the 1961 Freedom Rides across the Deep South. When responding to the question about the differences between racism during Jim Crow and now, Nash took a deep breath, peered over her wire-rimmed glasses, and said, “There are no signs.” I, along with several others at the dinner table, gasped aloud, but we proceeded to nod our heads in silence and agreement as Nash unpacked her answer about the segregation and discriminatory treatment that Black Americans face daily.

“There are no signs.” These four simple words encapsulated my entire lived experience as a Black person in a post-Jim Crow America—namely, that

even though the signs clearly demarcating the spaces that whites and Blacks could occupy are long gone, explicit and implicit racism reigns supreme in every corner of the United States, resulting in an inescapable Othering based on the colour of one's skin. This chronic skin-deep "Other-ness" that Black Americans feel is not new. It is written into our founding documents, codified in our pieces of legislation, reinforced by the judicial system, and deeply ingrained in the minds of the masses.<sup>1</sup> Because of this chronic Othering, Black Americans' lived experiences have been and continue to be powerfully sculpted by race. From slave codes to Black codes and from Jim Crow to mass incarceration, the United States has created restrictive laws at every level of government to curtail the freedom, political power, and economic and educational opportunities of Black people.<sup>2</sup> After all, it was Black veterans who were not afforded the same educational and home ownership opportunities in the GI Bill as their white counterparts.<sup>3</sup> It was local, state, and federal housing policies that mandated residential segregation, which has contributed to the differential rates of home ownership between Blacks and whites as well as the demographic and socio-economic makeup of suburban and inner-city areas.<sup>4</sup> Black students in schools are three times more likely to be held back as their white peers, and they also suffer harsher penalties for the same offences than their white counterparts in the educational system.<sup>5</sup> It is Black people who are incarcerated disproportionate rates when compared to white people who are found guilty of similar offences, to the point that one out of every thirteen Black Americans has lost their voting rights at the hands of felon disenfranchisement laws.<sup>6</sup> In addition, Black people are twenty-one times more likely than their white counterparts to be shot by the police.<sup>7</sup> From the time of slavery to present day, Black people have been and continue to be treated differently simply because of the colour of their skin.<sup>8</sup>

Given Blacks' differential treatment based on race and their negative emotional experiences, it is rather difficult to imagine the conditions under which Black and white people in America might ever attain some semblance of peace. All the same, in keeping with the goal of this volume, I seek here to envision what peace between opposing groups might entail. I adopt the definition of peace proposed by antiracist gender scholar Jennifer C. Nash. Peace, she argues, "is a radical call for freedom from oppressions, and a bold challenge to rethink how we live together in ways that not only honor each other's dignity but that recognize and redress the violence that has marked—and

continues to mark—the everyday. Peace, then, is an ongoing call to imagine living otherwise.”<sup>9</sup>

If Black and white Americans are to answer that call, they must come to understand what underlies the impulse to violence. The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. stated, “One day we must come to see that peace is not merely a distant goal that we seek but a means by which we arrive at that goal.”<sup>10</sup> In what follows, I attempt to explain those means toward peace. I begin with the Civil Rights construction of peace, which requires economic and social justice for all. Recognizing that this vision of peace may never be realized, my second goal is to provide concrete steps that I believe we can take as a nation to get us closer to that vision by focusing on the actions of individuals, groups, and institutions: the adoption of an antiracist framework, which involves dismantling racism at the individual, interpersonal, institutional, and structural levels. I then discuss how the adoption and implementation of a truth and reconciliation commission might lead to peace. Since institutional and interpersonal steps toward peace may be adopted by some but not the masses, I then focus on how Black Americans might go about pursuing and finding inner or personal peace in a nation that, regardless of the steps taken toward peace, will more than likely continue to view them as the Other.

## Feeling Black

How does it *feel* to be Othered in the only country one has ever known? How does it feel to be tethered to a country and a majority group of people who will never see you as an individual? Or to encounter people who will balk at the idea that your ancestors ever contributed anything to make America great and whose laws were never meant to protect you but rather intended curtail your access to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness? This is the reality of Black Americans in a post–Jim Crow America. One of my most prominent strands of research examines the role of emotions in Black politics and how they shape attitudes toward groups, politicians, policy opinions, and various types of political participation (voting, donating money to candidates, signing petitions, wearing/displaying campaign paraphernalia, and so on). Drawing on findings from focus groups and original survey experiments from 2012 through 2017, I reframe my understandings of Blacks’ emotions, especially the experiences of pride, shame, anger, and fear in the context of being Othered in America.

## Pride, Shame, and Anger

From historical and contemporary perspectives, pride, shame, and anger often encapsulate the Black experience in America. It was Marcus Garvey who implored Black people to be proud of their African heritage,<sup>11</sup> psychologist Claude Steele who wrote about the intense sense of shame and internalized racial oppression among Black Americans,<sup>12</sup> and the words of preachers and activists that told Black people it was okay to be angry at legal and societal discrimination.<sup>13</sup> Narratives surrounding these three emotions are often found across disciplines like history, sociology, literature, and Africana studies.<sup>14</sup>

What is pride? Richard Lazarus defines pride as “the enhancement of one’s ego identity by taking credit for a valued object or achievement, either our own or that of someone or group with whom we identify—for example, a compatriot, a member of the family, or a social group.”<sup>15</sup> There are several ways that pride can be generated. Alvin Zander, Richard Fuller, and Warwick Armstrong write state that “a member’s sense of pride can be affected by his group’s achievements.”<sup>16</sup> Mascolo and Fisher state that pride can be generated “by appraisals that one is responsible for a socially valued outcome or for being a socially valued person.”<sup>17</sup> When describing what about being Black made them feel proud, participants in my 2012 focus group studies used the following words and phrases: resiliency, survival, ability to overcome, ability to rally around certain issues, accomplishments, strength, endurance, love for each other, and resourcefulness. For example, Barbara stated,

Our ability to overcome *in spite of* all the ways that we have been oppressed throughout the years and while folks say y’all need to be happy, discrimination don’t exist anymore we got a black president, they need to wake up and smell the coffee and we are still succeeding despite that . . . against all odds.

Janet, along with several others, cited the importance of the strength of Black people:

Yea, I think our strength and Black people particularly I’m thinking about the fact that we didn’t come here as voluntary immigrants we were forced to come here and yet we succeeded given whatever the circumstances we had to face. . . . We succeeded and I think that’s a tremendous source of pride.

Despite being chronically Othered via tremendous legal, explicit, and implicit racial discrimination, many of my focus group study participants focused on their feelings of pride and the myriad ways in which members of their racial group have been able to overcome oppression.

While finding strength and pride in the ability to overcome oppression is one side of the lived experience of Black Americans, being Othered in America also results in a great deal of shame. Shame is defined as “an all-consuming experience of the self as fundamentally flawed or defective.”<sup>18</sup> Shame is also defined as “an affective reaction that follows public exposure (and disapproval) of some impropriety or shortcoming.”<sup>19</sup> Upon feeling this emotion, the goal is maintenance of others’ respect and/or affection, preservation, or positive self-regard. Psychology scholars have found that shame emerges among Black children during early childhood development because at a young age, Black children in the United States are taught implicitly and explicitly that white skin is better than darker skin.<sup>20</sup> In a study of 250 Black children now known as the infamous “Doll Tests,” Clark and Clark found that Black children do draw distinctions between Black and white dolls and have a strong preference for wanting to play with the white doll, ascribing more positive characteristics to the white doll than the Black doll.<sup>21</sup> There are no tangible signs to tell Black children that their skin is less desirable, but they internalize the stereotypes, myths, and misinformation that society communicates to them about the inferiority of their group.<sup>22</sup> Extant literature in psychology and sociology suggests that members of groups with negative stigmas, especially Black people in America, are more likely to internalize these feelings of shame and oppression.<sup>23</sup> These messages have done true damage to Black people, which is why campaigns like “My Black Is Beautiful” and “Black Girls Rock” are necessary, as they provide a national platform to help correct these widespread, inculcated, and internalized feelings of inferiority.

Being Othered requires and/or implies that Black Americans have been lumped into one large group: stereotyped as violent, lazy, prone to criminality, and different from the seemingly more virtuous characteristics of white Americans. In “On Being Ashamed of Oneself,” W. E. B. Du Bois argues that Black people are “ashamed and embarrassed because of the compulsion of being classed with a mass of people over whom they have no real control and whose action they can influence only with difficulty and compromise and with every risk of defeat.”<sup>24</sup> Psychology literature suggests that individuals might feel ashamed when they witness others who share their group identity

engaging in behaviours that are seen as revealing a flawed social identity. In other words, just as through my own misdeed I feel ashamed of who I am, when a group member engages in a wrongdoing, I might feel ashamed of who *we* are.<sup>25</sup>

Research in psychology finds that feelings of shame are especially pronounced when members of stigmatized groups engage in behaviours that confirm negative stereotypes of the group.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, my findings from the focus group study reveal that Black people experience shame when they witness members of their racial group engaging in activities that confirm negative stereotypes of the group; they cited several examples: poor appearance, lack of knowledge of self-worth, lack of belief in self, poor choices, giving up, dependence on welfare, indecency in public, disrespect/ignorance, prizing athletics over academics, Blacks not reaching back to help other Blacks, lack of priorities, excuses, negative portrayal in the media, Black-on-Black crime, and blaming others for their place in society. Robert stated, “with this society, I think their public appearance, the saggy pants . . . the pyjamas.” Catherine stated, “Men and women not taking care of their kids or running to welfare or running to food stamps. They’re like let me pop out a kid . . . who’s going to pop out a kid just cause? That’s crazy . . . no.” Karen stated, “I’m ashamed by the welfare system and how trickling generations are just in that cycle and they don’t want to do anything to get out of it.” Being Othered and tethered to a group with a negative stigma causes an internalized sense of shame and oppression.

Undeniably, anger has also been at the core of being Black and Othered in America. Anger is defined as “a belief that we, or our friends, have been unfairly slighted, which causes in us both painful feelings and a desire or impulse for revenge.”<sup>27</sup> Anger is a negative emotion wherein blame for undesirable behaviour and resulting undesirable events is directed at another person or group. Anger produces a desire to regain control, remove the obstruction, and if necessary, attack the source of injury.<sup>28</sup> Banks states, “Anger is experienced when a person has been threatened and, more importantly, when an individual is certain about who’s responsible (or blameworthy) for the offense.”<sup>29</sup> Lazarus states that if we blame someone for a wrongdoing, it requires that we believe that the individual engaged in the slighting could have acted differently, that they had control over the offending action. The individual or maybe group of people that we are blaming is the appraisal that grows out of the context of threat and frustration.<sup>30</sup>

What is it about being Othered in America that angers Black people? *Black Rage*, written by two Black psychiatrists in 1968, was devoted to understanding why Black people in America were angry and why they chose to express that discontent through protests and riots. In this work, Grier and Cobbs state that Black people in America are angry about the “unwillingness of white Americans to accept Negroes as fellow human beings.” In fact, the entire message in *Black Rage* is “that despite the passage of five Civil Rights bills since 1957, despite the erosion of legal supports for segregated institutions, despite greater acceptance of Negroes into our major institutions, both public and private, it is still no easy thing to be a Black person in America.” These psychiatrists further argue that “the civilization that tolerated slavery dropped its slaveholding cloak but the inner feelings remained . . . [that] the practice of slavery stopped over a hundred years ago, but the minds of our citizens have never been freed.”<sup>31</sup> Until Black people have equality with white Americans and are treated like human beings, they will continue to be angry.

Focus group study participants pointed to the following sources of anger as a result of being Othered: being guilty by association, the assumption of ignorance, and being the exception to the rule. The anger about societal treatment described across the focus groups mimic what we find in the literature on Black anger. In regard to stereotypes, Cose devotes an entire chapter to discussing how Blacks are often “guilty by association.”<sup>32</sup> This notion of being guilty by association stems from individuals ascribing negative characteristics to members of the Black community simply because of the colour of their skin. The best illustrations of these phenomena were expressed by Janet, when she recalled two separate instances in which she was stereotyped as a criminal in a department store and a single mother of unruly Black children:

There’s a store that used to be here called Cain-Sloan. . . . I could not walk in that store without being followed around. If I’m in here I can buy whatever I want. . . . You need to talk about Ashley Judd about that. It’s just the stereotype. . . . It’s the assumption that I can’t afford it or that I’m going to steal it.

I think that what angers me are stereotypes. I’m trying to think of the time when I was an angry Black woman was several years ago. . . . I was living in California and I was at the Stanford Mall this very upscale hoity-toity mall. I was in some shop and then there’s these two Black kids that came in by themselves. . . . They were being kids . . . not doing anything wrong . . . just being rambunctious kids and the shop keeper

was very snooty like, “You need to do something with your kids.” I’m like do you see a rang on my fanger anywhere?! What makes you think that those are my kids?! I mean I went off . . . *ALL THE WAY OFF!* I was angry and I was like why did I get so angry about that? It’s sort of a natural assumption . . . at the same time . . . did you see the kids come in with me? My kids would have been controlled you know.

Cheryl made an interesting statement to this effect when she said,

I had a white woman tell me that she understood exactly what I went through as an African American because she went through it as a woman every day and when I got through explaining to her that she could never ever understand what it felt like to not be able to take this off . . . to not be able to present in front of somebody else and they not see you coming, you can’t begin to know how I feel; after I was done her nose was bleeding and I didn’t hit her . . . but there is just no way she can feel that.

I fielded a study with fifteen hundred Black Americans in the fall of 2017 to better understand the emotions of Black people during the presidency of Donald Trump. When provided with an open-ended prompt about how they felt as Black Americans in the current political climate, many respondents focused on the unequal treatment by law enforcement being a source of anger. When writing about anger, one respondent stated,

I always expected this country to want to make progress toward living up to its ideals of giving effective equality, liberty and justice to everyone. The rise of Donald Trump and his ilk has led me to question my beliefs in the essential goodness of the American people. The blatant excusing of police brutality against Black people also makes me angry and sad on a regular basis. I’ve come to the conclusion that I might be better off living outside of the United States, a place where I was born and raised—I’ve come to feel the equal treatment that my ancestors fought for over generations might never be realized and I am quite disillusioned.

Another respondent stated,

Police brutality is something that angers me extremely. The people that are supposed to protect us seem to be doing the most harm. I got pulled over a few weeks ago and was genuinely afraid of what would



happen. That should never be the case. I'm angered at the fact that they created Blue Lives Matter in a result of the Black Lives Matter campaign. Being Black is not a choice, being an officer is. They can take their uniform off; we can't change our skin colour. It's insulting.

Another respondent echoed those sentiments when they stated,

It angers me when I think of police brutality because the police are supposed to protect and serve the people regardless of race but they have forgotten about those terms and have lost all respect because of all the killings of black men, women, even children who would want help or anything to do with them honestly.

The reason why Black people are angry in America is because they have been Othered since their arrival to America in 1619. As Grier and Cobbs note, Black people have never been treated like equal human beings in this society; all Black people in America have been asking for is equality.<sup>33</sup> What does that equality look like in practice? Equal funding for schools. Equal opportunities to receive home loans. Equal treatment before the law. Equal treatment in social spaces. It means that if a white person sees a Black man jogging in a neighbourhood, they let him jog, because you would never shoot at or suspect a white man jogging in your neighbourhood of a crime.<sup>34</sup> If you see a young Black boy playing with a toy gun in the park, you let him play, because you do not believe he poses a threat.<sup>35</sup> If a Black man in a park asks a white woman to leash her dog, she leashes it because the sign tells her to—she does not call the cops to weaponize her whiteness.<sup>36</sup> It means that I, as a Black woman, can get pulled over by the police and not have to worry about dying. Until Black people have equality before the law and in practice, Black people will continue to be angry.

## Fear

How might fear factor into the experience of being Othered? Fear is a vital response to physical and emotional danger—if we didn't feel it, we couldn't protect ourselves from legitimate threats. Lazarus states that fear involves threats that are concrete, sudden, and related to imminent physical harm.<sup>37</sup> As it pertains to fear, one third of respondents in the 2017 study focused on police brutality against Black people, the lack of fairness in the criminal justice system, and the rise of racism and prejudice in the aftermath of the election of

Donald Trump. Although this state-on-citizen violence is not new, especially as it pertains to Black Americans, the proliferation of social media outlets has led to the recording, posting, and subsequent reposting of these atrocities to the broader world within a matter of seconds, thus allowing individuals who have only heard about these instances of violence to actually see them in either real time or just moments after their occurrence. Below are two archetypal examples of these fear responses:

Police brutality is affecting the black community. I fear for future black children growing up in this world.

I am afraid and appalled by the blatant racism being fostered as a result of this presidential election. I feel that with the Trump victory in the presidential election many people felt it gave them the right to openly discriminate against minorities. There has been an increase of violent incidences against minorities. The idea that the USA is a white country seems to be the message being sent. I am afraid for myself, my family and all the minorities in this country. Any progress made is being rolled back and eliminated. The worst is to see or hear any minority praising these actions.<sup>38</sup>

The chronic Othering of Black people in America has led many white people to fear Black people, but it is Black people who truly suffer the consequences. Historically, Black Americans have been portrayed as inferior to white people, and this negative portrayal has had deleterious consequences for how white Americans perceive Black Americans. While acknowledging that human faculties defy empirical study, Thomas Jefferson wrote in *Notes on the State of Virginia*, “I advance it therefore as a suspicion only, that the blacks, whether originally a distinct race, or made distinct by time and circumstances, are inferior to the whites in the endowments both of body and mind.”<sup>39</sup>

What followed the publication of Jefferson’s opinions in the late 1700s was a well-tuned white elite propaganda machine, consisting of white politicians, religious leaders, artists, scientists, and academics, which substantiated these claims of Black inferiority. Indeed, Burrell states that “one of the greatest propaganda campaigns of all time was the masterful marketing of the myth of Black inferiority to justify slavery within a democracy.”<sup>40</sup> From slavery throughout the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, white and Black people were inundated with portrayals of Black people as lazy, shiftless, lawless,

violent, and dumb; it was these characterizations and depictions of Blacks that helped to justify their oppression and Othering.<sup>41</sup>

Black people live in fear for their lives because being Black in America can get you killed. It does not matter how many degrees a Black person has attained, nor what their level of income is. When Black people built thriving, self-sufficient towns during Reconstruction (1865–1877), white people who were afraid of their progress and independence burned them down.<sup>42</sup> Historically, a Black person accused of a crime could be jailed and/or lynched without a trial.<sup>43</sup> If a Black person is walking down the street with a hoodie on, someone can view them as threatening and put an end to their life.<sup>44</sup> As we have seen time and time again, a police officer can arrest and kill a Black person without serving any jail time. Fear is a rational response to constantly being Othered because it is a response to physical or emotional danger. Black people have faced a great deal of both since their arrival to the United States.

## No Justice, No Peace

“No Justice, No Peace” is a popular chant at protests, which suggests that, if there is injustice in an institution (for example, the criminal justice system via policing and rulings of the courts, education, health care, etc.), there will be civil unrest. But what will it take to truly *know* justice and *know* peace in America? What are the prospects of peace between Black and white people in America? On March 18, 1956, the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. delivered a sermon titled “When Peace Becomes Obnoxious” at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church. During this sermon, King drew distinctions between positive and negative peace. He viewed negative peace as Black people accepting injustice and exploitation for the sake of maintaining good and peaceful race relations with whites:

If peace means accepting second class citizenship, I don't want it. If peace means keeping my mouth shut in the midst of injustice and evil, I don't want it. If peace means being complacently adjusted to a deadening status quo, I don't want peace. If peace means a willingness to be exploited economically, dominated politically, humiliated and segregated, I don't want peace. In a passive non-violent manner, we must revolt against this peace.<sup>45</sup>

King argued that we should focus on positive peace, which involved the presence of justice and goodwill. Black and white people in America should seek to live in positive peace with one another. This positive peace is reflected in Nash's definition of peace as "a radical call for freedom from oppressions, and a bold challenge to re-think how we live together in ways that not only honor each other's dignity but that recognize and redress the violence that has marked—and continues to mark—the everyday."<sup>46</sup> With this definition in mind, I will explain the all-encompassing vision of peace promoted by activists from the Civil Rights Movement: economic and social justice for all Americans. I will also discuss the ways in which that work is being championed by the Poor People's Campaign in the present day. Considering that this version of peace may never be realized, I then provide concrete steps surrounding the actions of individuals, groups, and institutions that can get us closer to peace: the adoption of an antiracist framework and the establishment of a truth and reconciliation commission. I conclude by providing a few suggestions for how Black Americans can find inner and/or personal peace should all the previous attempts at corporate peace fail.

Activists during the Civil Rights Movement had an ambitious vision for peace in America: economic and social justice for all. Immediately after securing a wide range of civil rights for Black Americans via the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Voting Rights Act of 1965, leaders of this movement pivoted to human rights for all Americans. Fannie Lou Hamer stated it eloquently:

What would I look like fighting for equality with the white man? I don't want to go down that low. I want the true democracy that'll raise me and the white man up . . . raise America up . . . a deeply integrated, loving community rather than segregated chaos; hope rather than despair—raising up America and making the world over.<sup>47</sup>

In *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* Martin Luther King Jr. echoed those sentiments by stating, "Equality with Whites will not solve the problems of either Whites or Negroes if it means equality in a society stricken by poverty and in a universe doomed to extinction by war."<sup>48</sup> These leaders called for a revolution of values as they sought to unite poor and marginalized people across the United States.

This idea of human rights for all Americans has the potential to lead to a great deal of peace. Why? If people have equal access to a living wage, health care, equality before the law, and equality in social spaces, oppression

is unnecessary, because each person will receive some baseline approximation of justice and equality. This vision of peace is still alive and well through the work of the Poor People's Campaign, led the Reverend William Barber. This campaign focuses on ending the interlocking injustices of systemic racism, poverty, ecological devastation, and the war economy/militarism.<sup>49</sup> While this vision of peace is the most desirable, there are other options that seem more reasonable in the short-term.

One of the first steps to achieving peace is the adoption of an antiracist framework. An antiracist is a person who opposes racism and promotes racial tolerance. In *How to be an Antiracist*, Ibram Kendi writes,

To be antiracist is to think nothing is behaviorally wrong or right—inferior or superior—with any of the racial groups. Whenever the antiracist sees individuals behaving positively or negatively, the antiracist sees exactly that: individuals behaving positively or negatively, not representatives of whole races. To be antiracist is to deracialize behavior, to remove the tattooed stereotype from every racialized body. Behavior is something humans do, not races do.<sup>50</sup>

Being antiracist requires that the individual is fighting against racism at all levels: individual, interpersonal, structural, and institutional. Individual racism refers to the beliefs, attitudes, and actions of individuals that perpetuate racism in implicit and explicit ways. Interpersonal racism occurs between individuals, usually in public expressions of racism that often include slurs, biases, and hateful words or actions. Institutional racism occurs in organizations and involves the discriminatory treatment, unfair policies, and biased practices based on race. Structural racism is the overarching system of racial bias across institutions and society that gives privileges to white people and disadvantages to people of colour.<sup>51</sup>

For Blacks and whites to live in peace, the majority of people have to be willing to adopt an all-encompassing antiracist framework. This is not an impossible feat. Conversations surrounding being antiracist burst onto the national scene in the aftermath of a series of high-profile police murders of Black men and women in May and June of 2020. White Americans are learning about the ways in which racism governs a great deal of their individual and interpersonal actions; they are also learning how to check their motives and actions and are being called out on social media platforms when they engage in racist behaviours. A number of Fortune 500 companies have made

powerful statements on the importance of diversity and inclusion. Along with these statements, many organizations are acknowledging the effects of institutional racism and making plans to bring about greater equity within their organizations. The adoption of an antiracist framework is plausible.

In addition to antiracism, peace in America requires a truth and reconciliation commission to officially address America's racist history. Nash's definition of peace requires that individuals "recognize and redress the violence that has marked—and continues to mark—the everyday."<sup>52</sup> Several countries have established truth and reconciliation commissions to investigate the role of government and key actors during human rights violations. The most notable Truth and Reconciliation Commission comes from South Africa. The commission was a "courtlike body established by the government in 1995 to help heal the country and bring about reconciliation of its people by uncovering the truth about human rights violations that occurred during the period of apartheid."<sup>53</sup> The United States has never embarked on such a truth-telling journey. We must tell the truth about American history and what has happened to Black people since arriving to these shores. A commission needs to be convened to examine the legacy of government-sanctioned slavery and to make recommendations for changes in criminal justice, education, health care, and economic systems.<sup>54</sup> Black and white people overwhelmingly view inequality in different ways. That is, many white people focus on individual attributions (being lazy, unintelligent, untrustworthy, etc.) for Blacks' inequality with white Americans; the overwhelming majority of Black Americans focus on structural attributions of inequality like racism and discrimination.<sup>55</sup> For peace to occur between Black and white Americans, the United States must address the violence of the past and examine how that shapes the current lived experiences of Black Americans.

The National Memorial for Peace and Justice created by the Equal Justice Initiative is a thriving example of how truth-telling about past events can foster dialogue about the connections to contemporary issues and place the country on a path to reconciliation. Opened to the public on April 26, 2018, "The National Memorial is the nation's first memorial dedicated to the legacy of enslaved Black people, people terrorized by lynching, African-Americans humiliated by segregation and Jim Crow, and people burdened with contemporary presumptions of guilt and police violence."<sup>56</sup> The first step of any recovery program is admitting one has a problem. For far too long, many white people in America have been unwilling to recognize that there is a systemic

racism problem in America. A truth and reconciliation commission would help this process and lead to greater levels of peace.

Though I believe that steps can be taken to mitigate discrimination and reduce racism, anti-Black racism will always exist in America. Since anti-Black racism will always exist, it requires that Black Americans take steps to protect themselves from that impending reality by finding a modicum of inner and/or personal peace. As previously mentioned, being Othered in America leads to a great deal of negative emotions like shame, anger, and fear. Speaking to a therapist who allows individuals to freely and openly discuss their emotions and experiences might be helpful. Involving oneself in large Black social networks might also provide spaces for affirmation (for example, attending a Black place of worship, attending Historically Black Colleges and Universities, or joining organizations devoted to the support and/or liberation of Black people, like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People or the Urban League). Consuming literature, media, and art about Black history might also lead to peace. Reflecting on Black history and the sacrifices individuals made for current generations might also bring about peace because it reminds individuals of the sacrifices and resilience of our ancestors, progress that has been made, and provides hope for a better future.

## Conclusion

I am deeply conflicted about the prospects of peace between Black and white Americans. Diane Nash's statement—"There are no signs"—which she used to describe contemporary racism, provides me with a rather bleak outlook and leads me to believe that there will never be peace between these two racial groups. I am a thirty-four-year-old Black woman and have experienced numerous microaggressions and explicit racism in my lifetime growing up near an active Ku Klux Klan chapter in Georgia and working as a young adult in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. When I was a child, a close friend asked me to stop scratching a mosquito bite because I was going to rub my black skin off on her. While growing up in the predominately white suburb of Alpharetta, Georgia, our neighbouring high school had nooses hung in the gym with racial slurs spray-painted in public areas. Several white students in my high school put a hit list together, containing the names of Black students they wanted to kill. After holding the door at the post office for an elderly white woman in the suburbs of Philadelphia, I was asked if I needed work. Upon declining the

invitation, the woman stated, “I’m sure I can pay you more than the family you’re working for out here.” I said, “No ma’am. I’m fine. I’m a professor at Villanova,” to which she replied, “You’re a PROFESSOR?” I said, “Yes, ma’am.” Her gaping mouth led me to believe that she may have never interacted with a Black person that was not in a service position. These three examples are an incredibly small sample of my racial encounters in a post-Jim Crow America. Malcolm X once stated, “You can’t separate peace from freedom because no one can be at peace unless he has his freedom,”<sup>57</sup> Black people in America lack many freedoms. We are now legally allowed to occupy certain spaces (such as schools, neighbourhoods, and restaurants) but we are not free to simply exist and live our lives as individuals. We are constantly and chronically “Othered,” stereotyped, and rarely given the presumption of innocence. With that lack of freedom comes the seeming impossibility of living in and maintaining some semblance of peace with the group that has been and continues to oppress us.

I wrote the first draft of this essay in July 2020, at a time of civil unrest in the United States. Not only was the coronavirus having a disproportionate impact on Black communities, but the February killing of Ahmaud Arbery by white vigilantes, followed by the police murders of Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and Rayshard Brooks led to weeks of protests throughout the country, calls for adopting antiracist attitudes, and suggestions to reallocate police funds to other endeavours. I am deeply troubled that I continue to march for the same equal rights that my parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents fought for during their lifetimes. It is because of my lived experiences that I fear the peace we strive for might never be realized. When racism has such deep roots in America, we do not need any signs to tell us where we, as Black people, can and cannot go, because we are constantly Othered and reminded every single day.

However, just like my ancestors, I remain hopeful that peace might happen someday. In *Where Do We Go from Here?* Martin Luther King Jr. states, “It is necessary to love peace and sacrifice for it.”<sup>58</sup> The multigenerational and multiethnic coalitions protesting in 2020 give me hope for a different future and, quite possibly, peace. Peace between Blacks and whites will require a great deal of individual, interpersonal, institutional, and structural change. Black people cannot dismantle a system steeped in white supremacy that they did not create. Peace in the United States will require a number of white people to make sacrifices for it; they will have to do the introspective work and give up their racist ideals and actions, they will have to confront the racist history of



this country, and most importantly they will have to recognize their privilege and be willing to sacrifice it to live in a more equitable society.

## Notes

- 1 In fact, the first mention of enslaved Africans in the United States Constitution comes in Article 1, Section 2, Clause 3, which is also known as the Three-Fifths Clause. The clause, which concerns the allotment of seats in the House of Representatives allowed to each state, provides that, for the purpose of calculating a state's population, "to the whole Number of free Persons" shall be added "three fifths of all other Persons," namely, African slaves. In other words, a slave counted as three-fifths of a person.
- 2 On the history of the institutionalization of anti-Black racism in the United States, see especially Douglas Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II* (New York: Anchor, 2012), which traces the complicity of legal and corporate institutions in fostering racism by tracing the history of Green Cottonham, who was convicted of "vagrancy" in 1908 and subsequently sold into leased labour. See also Andrea Flynn, Dorian T. Warren, Felicia J. Wong, and Susan R. Holmberg, *The Hidden Rules of Race: Barriers to an Inclusive Economy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2017), esp. chapters 1 and 3; Ibram Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America* (New York: Bold Type Books, 2016); and Manning Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion: The Second Reconstruction and Beyond in Black America, 1945–2006*, 3rd ed. (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007).
- 3 Regarding the GI Bill, see Ira Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action Was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2005), esp. chap. 5, "White Veterans Only."
- 4 On segregated housing, see Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* (New York: Liveright, 2017). With regard to home ownership and demographics, see Flynn et al., *The Hidden Rules of Race*, esp. chapters 1 and 2.
- 5 See Lindsey Cook, "U.S. Education: Still Separate and Unequal," *US News*, January 28, 2015; <https://www.usnews.com/news/blogs/data-mine/2015/01/28/us-education-still-separate-and-unequal>; Decoteau J. Irby, "Trouble at School: Understanding School Discipline Systems as Nets of Social Control," *Equity and Excellence in Education* 47, no. 4 (2014): 513–30.
- 6 For discussions of the history and development of Black incarceration, see Michelle Alexander, *The New James Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of*

*Colorblindness* (New York: New Press, 2010), 193; James Forman Jr., *Locking Up Our Own: Crime and Punishment in Black America* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2017); Bryan Stevenson, *Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption* (New York: One World, 2015); and Jeff Manza and Christopher Uggen, *Locked Out: Felon Disenfranchisement and American Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), esp. chapter 2, on the racial origins of felon disenfranchisement, and chapter 7, which deals with the impact of disenfranchisement on political participation.

- 7 Ryan Gabrielson, Eric Sagara, and Ryann Grochowski Jones, “Deadly Force, in Black and White,” *ProPublica*, October 10, 2014, <https://www.propublica.org/article/deadly-force-in-black-and-white>.
- 8 Among the many books that discuss the treatment of Black people in America, see, in particular, James Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (New York: Vintage International, 1953); W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), in *Writings: The Suppression of the African Slave-Trade / The Souls of Black Folk, Dusk of Dawn, Essays*, edited by Nathan Huggins (New York: Library of America, 1986); Michael Eric Dyson, *Tears We Cannot Stop: A Sermon to White America* (New York: St. Martin’s Publishing Group, 2017); Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (New York: Random House, 1952); Nikki Giovanni, *Black Feeling, Black Talk, Black Judgement* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1968); Marable, *Race, Reform, and Rebellion*; Cornel West, *Race Matters* (New York: Vintage, 1994); and Richard Wright, *Native Son* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1940).
- 9 Nash quoted in “What Does Peace Mean?” Columbian College of Arts and Sciences, George Washington University, December 9, 2015, <https://columbian.gwu.edu/what-does-peace-mean>.
- 10 Martin Luther King, Jr., “The Casualties of the War in Vietnam,” speech presented at The Nation Institute, Los Angeles, February 25, 1967, [https://aavw.org/special\\_features/speeches\\_speech\\_kingo2.html](https://aavw.org/special_features/speeches_speech_kingo2.html).
- 11 Marcus Garvey, “Address to the Second UNIA Convention” (1921), *Black Past*, September 28, 2011, <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/1921-marcus-garvey-address-second-unia-convention/>.
- 12 Claude M. Steele, “A Threat in the Air: How Stereotypes Shape Intellectual Identity and Performance,” *American Psychologist* 52 (1997): 613–29.
- 13 Henry Highland Garnet, “An Address to the Slaves of the United States” (1843), *Black Past*, January 24, 2007, <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/1843-henry-highland-garnet-address-slaves-united-states/>; Malcolm X, “The Ballot or the Bullet” (1964), *Black Past*, July 10, 2010, <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/speeches-african-american-history/1964-malcolm-x-ballot-or-bullet/>.

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## 9 Building Bridges Between Queer and Normative Muslims

Maryam Khan

*My prayers, worship practices, sacrifices, life and death are all devoted to the Creator, Inheritor and Ruler of the worlds.*

—Qur'an 6:162–63

In diasporic Muslim North American contexts, queer Muslims often occupy a marginal existence—at the fringes of Islam and Muslimness.<sup>1</sup> Queer Muslims face Othering in many forms, as individuals who are considered *haram* (forbidden) and who need to be “fixed,” hidden, and, at times, altogether eliminated from the folds of Islam and its discourses.<sup>2</sup> Since queer Muslims are not seen as embodying and living Islam, envisioning a peaceful coexistence with normative Muslims can be a difficult endeavour fraught with many challenges.<sup>3</sup> For example, queer Muslims face challenges compounded by sexual and gender diversity, in addition to the religious, socio-political, historical, and cultural challenges surrounding internal politics in the larger Muslim diaspora that can get in the way of peaceful relations.

In this chapter, I propose several strategies that might allow normative Muslims and queer Muslims to make peace.<sup>4</sup> Two overarching questions guide my discussion: Is the umbrella of Islam and Muslimness big enough to host diverse perspectives? Is peace even possible between normative and queer Muslims? I argue that peaceful coexistence and relations can be possible between normative and queer Muslims through critical engagement with Islamic liberationist, feminist, and sexuality-affirming readings on Islam

by theologians and scholars such as Amina Wadud and with the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi regarding compassion, tolerance, and non-violence.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, my own positionality and experiences as a devout Muslim and racialized South Asian queer woman with a disability, will ground these perspectives.<sup>6</sup>

## Holding Multifaceted Contexts and Truths

### Who Is Speaking?

Contexts are important because they identify and situate whose voice gets heard in Islam, the power and privilege imbued in what's being said, and the location of the speaker.<sup>7</sup> For Muslims living in Canada, the politics of identity, belonging, Islamophobia, racist Othering, and embodying Muslimness play out in relation to the nation-state's colonial, religious, socio-political, economic, cultural, and historical contexts framed by modernity, neoliberalism, right-wing populism, and secularist forces, articulated through civilizational differences, cultural clashes, progress, and rights rhetoric.<sup>8</sup> One way these forces intersect and ensure gendered and raced representation of Islam and Muslimness can be seen in contemporary discourses on *niqab* and *hijab* bans, the policing of Muslim women bodies, the evidence of Islamophobia, racist immigration policies, and violence against Muslims.<sup>9</sup> For example, Jasmin Zine, a Canadian Muslim scholar who writes about Muslim women, argues that such contemporary discourses are located in "the discursive roots . . . historically entrenched within Orientalist representations that cast colonial Muslim women as backward, oppressed victims of misogynist societies."<sup>10</sup>

In the international realm, Islam and Muslims are not viewed favourably, especially as it relates to the treatment of women and queer Muslims. For example, Bucci's research on domestic violence experienced by Muslim migrant women in Italy finds high rates of intimate-partner violence; this is compounded by Islamophobia amid the Catholic patriarchal culture of Italy.<sup>11</sup> In this study, approximately half of Italian participants believed that Islam involved oppressive, anti-woman, and barbaric practices. Muslim Othering plays out amid geopolitical discourses that pit Muslims and Islamic societies against modernization and progress, as these are measured through pink testing, LGBTQ+ rights, and women's rights.<sup>12</sup> Often, nation-states like Canada and the United States accuse Islam and Muslim societies



of resisting queerness and enforcing state-sanctioned violence against queer individuals. One Dutch politician, Geert Wilders, deployed fear and engaged in civilizational rhetoric to promote his political party's anti-Muslim immigration agenda. *Fitna*, a seventeen-minute film produced by Wilders, describes Islam as fascist, homophobic, violent, patriarchal, and dangerous to the Dutch way of life.<sup>13</sup>

Canada and the United States have long-standing colonial and imperial relationships with the Muslim world, characterized by many North American organizations and political groups (LGBTQ+, feminists, the oil industry, faith-based missionaries, and so on) imposing their superior values and beliefs as progress and rights. Efforts made by non-governmental organizations lobbying for changes to colonial laws in Muslim contexts that criminalize same-sex relations are often countered by North American (some Pentecostal) organizations that support conservative interpretations of the Qur'an and approaches to Islam that squelch the rights of and the protection of sexual minorities in Muslim societies.<sup>14</sup> Farid Esack cautions Muslims residing in the West to remain cognizant of their power and privilege when calling for Islamic reforms in the Muslim world:

North Americans' location as privileged citizens of an empire that was aiding and abetting Muslim dictatorships in perpetuating the very injustices that we were opposing and . . . the inability to recognize how the prioritization of reforming Islam and taking on the Muslim community in the absence of a struggle against imperialism and neo-colonialism, were effectively playing into the hegemonizing project of the Global North.<sup>15</sup>

As someone who is embedded in these contexts, I recognize the imperial power and privilege my voice propagates. My calls for Islamic reform and approaches to Muslimness are situated in my intersectional identity (embodied queerness, disability, race, ethnicity, and so on) and the journey to decolonize white supremacist structures and practices in daily life. I speak from places of privilege afforded to me as someone who works in academe and lives in the West, and who is able to perform queerness and Muslimness in relative comfort. My family of origin accepts most expressions of my queerness. I do not believe that my disability and queerness are punishments or tests from the Creator. I recognize that a queer Muslim living elsewhere in the globe will contend with different contexts.

For believers, it is an arduous task to balance and not to demonize some Muslims' practice of Islam while talking about the politics of Muslimness in North America. I am not attempting to placate Western imperialist, colonialist, and populist anti-Islam agendas. I am also not attempting to incite racism, Islamophobia, and xenophobia.

Yet anyone, especially queer Muslims when talking back against injustice, can be labelled a troublemaker who is trying to change Islam. I have heard such statements on many occasions from family and friends. My sister used to call my Islam by a pejorative term: *fislam* as in *fake Islam*. Unfortunately, my experiences with normative Muslims over the years have left me cautious and at times fearful that I will be harmed in some way. I realize that this may be similar to other queer Muslims' experiences in North America while navigating ethno-racial, cultural, socio-political, religious, spiritual, and positionality differences.<sup>16</sup> At the present time, the situation remains that queer Muslims are exhaustingly arguing for sexual and gender parity, while dancing diplomatically around Muslim bi-trans-homophobia and trying not to be identified as Western puppets. Who is listening to queer Muslims? How can conversations of making peace transpire without acknowledging the liminal and marginal position occupied by many queer Muslims? Is there a way to hold these multiple truths and contexts without excusing one behaviour for another?

Normative Muslim bi-trans-homophobia is real. This needs to be acknowledged. Patriarchal Muslim authorities have branded sexual and gender diversity as a "cancer" slowly devouring Islam and Muslims while eroding individual and societal morality.<sup>17</sup> Additionally, Pepe Hendricks asserts that "the existence of homophobic hate rapes (often referred to as 'curative' or 'corrective' rape), particularly targeting vulnerable lesbians, reflects the disproportionate relationship between citizen rights enshrined in the law and the everyday social reality experienced by queer folks" in Muslim societies.<sup>18</sup> Research conducted with thirty-eight queer refugees in Austria and The Netherlands (90 percent identified as Muslim from the Middle East, North Africa, or Asia) found that almost two thirds of participants experienced post-traumatic stress symptoms related to their queer identities.<sup>19</sup> The most distressing experiences included physical and psychological violence in trying to escape persecution, threats at gunpoint, rape and sexual assault, and verbal aggression. Other experiences during migration included shame, sex work for survival, public humiliation, discrimination from government officials, racism

and Islamophobia, denial of identity with documentation, isolation, suicidal ideation, and lack of job opportunities. These experiences demonstrate that, for queer Muslim refugees, racial and gendered violence is a common experience that leads to trauma and psychological distress.

Even though I have lived my existence in relative safety and have managed to avoid being the recipient of extreme violence, whether from the larger queer or the normative Muslim and diasporic communities, I still am not immune to systemic and everyday violence (slurs, microaggressions, assault, privacy infringement) aimed at Canadian ethno-racial and sexual minorities. So I tread with caution while attempting to foster a critical dialogue between normative and queer Muslims while also calling out Islamophobia, racism, ableism, cisgenderism, and bi-trans-homophobia as it shows up.

### Whose Islam?

The contemporary body of knowledge on Islam and sexual and gender diversity is a record of diverse perspectives, often competing for limelight and dominance in the battle to represent Islam and Muslims in North America. Depending on who you talk to about sexual and gender diversity in Islam, you'll get a different response. Usually, the dominant (normative) perspectives win, as these coincide and are closest to normative Muslims' happy security in their cis-heterosexual, able-bodied, and sanist approaches to Islam and expressions of Muslimness. Below, I detail two divergent perspectives on Islam, Muslimness, sexual and gender diversity: those of normative Muslims and the other or alternate perspectives usually favoured by queer Muslims.<sup>20</sup> While discussing these perspectives, I will concurrently outline some key challenges faced by the internal diasporic Muslim world in Canada and the United States and the larger contexts and relationships between Muslims and non-Muslims:

- The normative Muslim response usually is this: *Islam doesn't allow homosexuality. It is a great sin.* Often, when pressed further, we might hear: *There is no such thing as gay Muslims, and there aren't any back home.*
- Normative Muslims believe that the Qur'an explicitly states that same-sex relations are abhorred in Islam by drawing on the following references in the Qur'an, which discuss Lot and his community's interactions:<sup>21</sup>

“Do you approach males among the worlds and leave what your Lord has created for you as mates? But you are a people transgressing.”<sup>22</sup>

“The mighty Blast overtook them before morning. We turned the cities upside down, and rained down upon them brimstones hard as baked clay.”<sup>23</sup>

“And Lot! (Remember) when he said unto his folk: ‘Will ye commit lewdness such as no creature ever did before you?’ Lo! Ye come with lust unto men instead of women. Nay, but ye are wanton folk.”<sup>24</sup>

- Some *hadith* (teachings of the Prophet) are reported to say the following with regard to same-sex relations:

“Doomed by God is who does what Lot’s people did [that is, commit homosexual acts].”

“No man should look at the private parts of another man, and no woman should look at the private parts of another woman, and no two men sleep [in bed] under one cover, and no two women sleep under one cover.”

“Whoever has intercourse with a woman and penetrates her rectum, or with a man, or with a boy, will appear on the last day stinking worse than a corpse; people will find him unbearable until he enters hell fire, and God will cancel all his good deeds.”<sup>25</sup>

The process of Qur’anic exegesis is a complex task. Most people do not know how interpretations were and are made, other than by male Muslim jurists. Who was and is involved? What works were and are consulted? Men’s interpretive religious authority as a right is not questioned in matters related to exegesis; normative exegetical processes have assumed women’s biological and moral inferiority.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, interpretation is imagined as an objective task, and somehow the interpreter is placed outside his socio-political, historical, and cultural understandings during the process. The interpreter does not issue a statement listing beliefs and values that are the basis of his interpretive method and process. Thus, a false sense of objectivity is applied to the interpretation of religious texts. In fact, when Qur’anic exegesis was attempted for the above-mentioned verses, Muslim scholars took the lead from Jewish and Christian counterparts to determine the meanings behind the story of Lot, Sodom, and Gomorrah.<sup>27</sup> Progressive and liberatory Muslim scholars

argue that the destruction of Lot's community was not a result of same-sex relations, but due to the people abhorring the Creator's divine guidance. Lot's wife's demise also resulted from rejecting the word of the Creator. The verses speak out against the abuses of power, rape, harassment, and the confinement of Lot's guests.<sup>28</sup>

The Prophet was vehemently against anyone writing out his teachings for fear that people would place his teachings above the Qur'an. Authenticating the hadith is also a complex process and is not foolproof. It is easy to falsify records and what's reported to have been said by people surrounding the Prophet Mohamed.<sup>29</sup> Muhsin Hendricks, an imam who identifies as queer, argues that the "*hadith* contain many inconsistencies, contradictions and distortions of facts. As definitive and reliable sources of Islamic law they are deeply problematic. It is no surprise that hate crimes against queer individuals, including the justification for their execution, stems largely from the *hadith*."<sup>30</sup> Interpretations of the Qur'an and hadith that promote oppression and prejudice against women and queer individuals do not follow the message of infinite acceptance, mercy, and love of the Creator. Instead, these alienate humans from the Creator.

Importantly, Islam is not just *one* thing: there's no such thing as the one and true Islam. Suggesting that Islam is monolithic, static, clear, and anachronistic is rooted in Orientalist thought.<sup>31</sup> There is extensive theological and sociological literature on differences in gender—men's Islam vs. women's Islam.<sup>32</sup> Much has also been written about differences across the jurisprudential schools of Islamic thought, about sexual and gender diversity, and about specific geographic locations.<sup>33</sup>

Wherever Islam has flourished, the tradition has adapted to a myriad of regional languages, cultures, and histories.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, there are many approaches to the practice of Islam (Ahmadiya, Shia, Sufi, Ismaili, and Sunni, to name a few), as well as diverse cultural, spiritual, and socio-political orientations of Muslimness as it is expressed in specific Muslim communities across the globe. Islam and Muslimness encompass not only a religious dimension but also intersecting social, cultural, economic, and spiritual dimensions. Under the ritualist and religious umbrella of Islam, there is consensus on these basic principles: believing in one Creator, establishing prayers and worship to the Creator, fasting during Ramadan, giving charity, and performing pilgrimage around the *kabah*.<sup>35</sup> There are many paths to the Creator. Who is to say that Sunni approaches to Islam and Muslimness, which are pervasive in

parts of Bangladesh, Morocco, and Yemen, are interchangeable and the same? They are not. Overall, the practice of Islam and embodiment of Muslimness shift based on one's unique position (geography, race, gender, sexuality, ability, age, history of land and people, colonial and imperial histories, and so on). When normative Muslims utter generalizing blanket statements about Islam's official stance on sexual diversity and women's reproductive rights, among other topics, they are evoking a monolithic, static, and stale representation of the faith tradition and its practice situated in specific contexts.<sup>36</sup>

### **Homosexuality, Same-Sex, What?**

Homosexuality as a construct and discourse, as theorized by Foucault, did not originate in the Muslim world. In other words, homosexuality according to Foucault is a particular way of organizing and thinking through sexuality as an avenue of identity and subject-making of the deviant and abnormal, which is different from the heterosexual, the considered "natural" attraction and way of being sexual.<sup>37</sup> Referring to sexual and gender diversity purely as homosexuality is a modernist Eurowestern construction. For these reasons, the term "homosexuality" is not a part of Qur'anic and Islamic parlance:

Terms such as homosexuality, bisexuality and heterosexuality, by which modern society classifies human sexuality, are not used in the Qur'an. Nonetheless, a theme of sexuality, sexual permissibility and sexual prohibition pervades the Qur'an. It addresses a heterosexual audience, and is largely silent about non-heterosexual sex. It is important to recognize that this does not automatically imply condemnation of the latter.<sup>38</sup>

Afsaneh Najmabadi points out that the recognition of the homosexual based on a sexual act was not native to Iranian society. For example, Iranian men would engage in same-sex behaviours and acts before their marriage to women. Being homosexual did not exist as a category of identity.<sup>39</sup> In Pakistan, males and females engaged in same-sex attractions and acts, which was not perceived as a way of identification, since men still got married and had children with their wives and the wives continued to bear children and engage in sexual acts with their husbands.<sup>40</sup> In many ways, it is true that homosexuals and gays do not exist in Pakistan and Iran, as it relates to an identity label with legal rights. However, things are changing; in fact, there

are now LGBTQ+ Muslim individuals in Iran and Pakistan. There are many reasons explaining the rise of queer identity politics in most Muslim societies and regions that is beyond the scope of this paper.<sup>41</sup> However, same-sex relations and sexual and gender diversity are not new to Islam, Muslim societies, and Muslimness. Extant literature supports historical accounts of gender non-conformity, female and male cross-dressing, female and male same-sex acts, and attractions in literary, cultural, and religious writings.<sup>42</sup>

### **Pluralism and Inclusivity: Building Bridges**

There is a notable wave building in North America that challenges the stance on sexual and gender diversity that is propagated by normative Islamic institutions and authorities. This wave has its origins in critical, liberatory, feminist sexuality, and gender-sensitive approaches to Islam and Muslimness.<sup>43</sup> An overarching aspect of these approaches is inclusivity and pluralism—meaning that Islam is universal, for everyone, and has its foundations in love, peace, and freedom from injustice.<sup>44</sup>

Some literature asserts that queer Muslims can and do rectify issues related to ethnicity, faith, and family, negotiating with religious, ethnic, cultural, and diasporic familial and community expectations.<sup>45</sup> Most of this literature exposes the difficulties queer Muslims encounter, such as fleeing persecution and violence at the hands of patriarchal Islamic authorities and family members, forced marriages, deaths, suicides, isolation, mental health issues, abandonment of Islam, hiding sexual and gender identity, feelings of loss, shame, and guilt. Due to these reasons, among others, some queer Muslims assert that sexuality and faith are mutually exclusive and, therefore, cannot coexist.<sup>46</sup>

Nestled within these perspectives are strategies used by queer Muslims to hold the truths of sexuality, gender identity and expression, and Islam concurrently without sacrificing one for another. For example, Pepe Hendricks argues that, through the use of the Islamic legal principle of *ijtihad*, which allows jurists to interpret texts purely by means of independent critical thinking, Muslims can engage in “the struggle to bring about social justice and transformation,” in which “there is a need to exert critical interpretation and independent reasoning to enrich our thoughts and spirit.”<sup>47</sup> Moreover, *ijtihad* can pave the way for new “legal rulings that are compiled based on changing times, new interpretation of readings and altering circumstances.”<sup>48</sup>

As part of the larger exegetical processes or *tafsir* of the Qur'an, Scott Kugle discusses critically re-examining references to the story of Lot and situates these processes in their contexts of rape and toxic masculinist framings.<sup>49</sup> In a similar way, Andrew Yip's research with queer Muslims shows that a "critique of traditional interpretation of specific passages in the texts" was used alongside a "critique of interpretative authority of religious authority structures and figures"; and then a "re-casting [of] religious texts" to reconcile faith and queerness.<sup>50</sup>

Below, I discuss some strategies that can possibly help peace germinate between queer and normative Muslims by drawing on my interpretation of Qur'anic and Gandhian teachings. For some readers, this combination may be analogous to blasphemy and heresy. But before issuing a *fatwa* or religious judgement and dismissing these as musings of a queer Muslim, I invite you to heed the Qur'anic injunctions never to stop seeking knowledge and to keep your mind open to various forms of knowledge.<sup>51</sup> I am also painfully aware of the anti-Black attitudes that Gandhi espoused during his years in South Africa, at a time when he had yet to reject the legitimacy of the British Empire, as well as his habit, in his old age, of sleeping naked with young women as a test of his ability to remain celibate—a practice at best unsavoury to modern Western sensibilities.<sup>52</sup> Yet by drawing on his teachings about non-violence, compassion, self-sacrifice, and the need to hold onto the truth, I am not claiming that he was a saint: he was, like us all, a flawed human being. It is, I believe, vital to "take whatever provides you with value and insight, and leave the rest."<sup>53</sup>

### Knowing Yourself

When thinking about peace and peaceful relations, it is imperative to focus on the Self and not the Other. Peace with the Other can be envisioned only when there is self-awareness and knowledge about who you are and where you lie, sit or stand. One of the core teachings of the Creator is to work continuously on oneself to do good and to repel evil by good deeds.<sup>54</sup> This may involve practising self-compassion, being mindful of your intentions and actions, or living a pious life. It may also include seeking and attempting to understand varying knowledges (corporeal workings, engagement with poetry, scientific discoveries) from diverse standpoints—for example, thinking about how one's practice of Muslimness (as, for example, a South Asian queer born-Muslim



woman) may look different from someone else's based on social location (such as a Black queer Muslim woman convert).

Where does your moral compass and ethics point? Is it to exert pressure on others to conform to your Islam and ideals? In the Qur'an, emphasis is placed not on changing the behaviour of other people but rather on changing your own. The Creator will hold you responsible only for your actions and thoughts.<sup>55</sup> Often, normative Muslims will exercise great efforts to curtail and regulate queer Muslims' lives instead of focusing on their own Islam and Muslimness. Everyone has a conceptualization of their own truths. It is important to live your truth and allow others to do the same. A teaching about modesty in the Qur'an provides a good example of this. The verse in question urges the observers of "immodesty" to "lower their own gazes."<sup>56</sup> Here, the focus is on your deeds and life as the observer to curtail your own actions and not to impose your beliefs, which often appear in the guise of good intentions, on humans whom you imagine require salvation.

Regardless of his personal shortcomings, the principles that drove Gandhi's activism point to a way of existing in the world that can nurture compassion, truthfulness, and peaceful relations across religious, class, ethnic, and gender divides. Gandhi taught that, above all, those who seek change must first look to themselves and embody the qualities they wish to instill in others. Gandhi was committed to the practice of *ahimsa*, a Sanskrit word meaning "non-violence" or "non-injury." Living in accordance with *ahimsa* requires self-restraint: it means that even when you are yourself the target of violence, you must refrain from responding in kind. Baiju Vareed argues that, while *ahimsa* literally means non-harm, "in a broader sense it means loving one's opponent to the point of not wishing her or him any harm. While truth is the end, non-violence is the means and they are irrevocably bound to each other."<sup>57</sup>

Living according to the ideal of doing no harm can be a complex and life-long process. It is hard to imagine ourselves as perpetrators of harm. Everyone wants to be perceived in a good light and does not want to believe that their lifestyle is coming at a cost to someone else. I've struggled with this over the years and continue to contemplate how my existence in this world comes at a cost to creation. For example, my house is built on stolen Indigenous land.<sup>58</sup> I use resources (water, food, land, technology) without much consideration as to how my relaxed use impacts the natural world and humans globally. There are too many examples to list. It is impossible not to do harm because

harm is a part of everyday existence. I've been thinking about the next level beneath do no harm, which can involve coming to terms with my existence and its costs and trying to minimize these harms to human, animal, and plant life. This position allows me to acknowledge that, as a human, I will make mistakes. Being compassionate with my personal limitations can help with actualizing self-compassion in everyday life and possibly empathizing with those who harm me. We could all ask this question: how can I try to achieve love for my opponent or empathy and compassion without having these elements in my own life?

### **Anyone Can Answer Islam's Call**

Islam as a faith tradition and the Qur'an can be accessed by anyone seeking to understand their message and live by their principles. How can the Qur'an and Islam speak to everyone if they are represented and meant for only a few? One need not be a member of a given race, ethnicity, or class to believe in Islam or to engage with the Qur'an because the message of Islam, through the holy book, is universal, not limited by time, space, or geography.<sup>59</sup> Amina Wadud points out that the Qur'an's goal is not to create a duplicate society and circumstances present at the time of its revelation in seventh-century Arabia: "Rather, the goal [of the Qur'an] has been to emulate certain key principles of human development: justice, equity, harmony, moral responsibility, spiritual awareness, and development."<sup>60</sup> Another important aspect that cannot be overstated is that each Muslim approaches the sacred text from their unique position; thus, there cannot be a sole "right" interpretation of the Qur'an. So why is it that some normative Muslims deny queer Muslims the right to practice Islam and call themselves Muslim?

A good friend once shared that one can find anything in the Qur'an; it all depends on one's quest and desires. One can look for love, and it's there. If normative Muslims are coming from the perspective that the Creator's mercy, love, and kindness are accessible to anyone who wants it, then peaceful relations with queer Muslims can germinate. Within the Islamic tradition, it is believed that the Creator has ninety-nine names that speak to the Creator's oneness and love but also the ability to act as an avenger and restrictor. There is flexibility and multiplicity in the Creator's ways, and certain aspects may be difficult for humans to reconcile. A peaceful coexistence can emerge from both sides (normative and queer) if there is openness and freedom from judgment.

I cannot tell a fellow Muslim what they believe is wrong and un-Islamic since I do not live their life.

There are many normative Muslims who insist that their interpretation of women's rights, children rights, divorce laws, and such is the right and correct interpretation. This is untrue. The concept of *ijtihad*, mentioned earlier, allows each Muslim to wrestle with the sacred text and arrive at their own understanding of how the Qur'an can be applied in their life. Islam does not have any go-betweens on the path connecting the Creator and the believer. One can feel, embody, read, and interpret the Qur'an based on one's beliefs and life experiences. Why would I believe in something that has no relevance to my daily life in Canada? Asma Barlas, in her study of patriarchal readings of the Qur'an, points out that

the Qur'an does not even associate sex with gender, or with a specific division of labor, or with masculine and feminine attributes (e.g., men with intellect and reason and women with instinct and emotion); rather, "since they manifest *the whole*," the Qur'an does not endow humans with a fixed nature. Moreover, its account of human creation from a single Self, its definition of moral agency and subjectivity in terms of "ethical individualism," and its emphasis on the equality before God of the moral praxis of both men and women not only confirms that the sole criterion for differentiation in Islam is ethical-moral and not sexual but also allows for a mutual recognition of individuality.<sup>61</sup>

This "recognition of individuality" is pivotal in connecting belief with how one walks in this world. The spiritual, moral and ethical imperative is what sets humans apart, not one's genitalia, gender expression, or sexuality.

## Unity

Unity or *tawhid* is core to the Islamic faith. Unity signifies the interconnectivity and interdependence of all diverse creation (inclusive of the universe, humans, non-living entities, anything beyond human conception and within it) to the Creator who is the sole, timeless originator.<sup>62</sup> Because this unity is revealed in the Creator's oneness and presence in everything in everyday life, it makes sense to follow this oneness, in tandem with all creation, irrespective of the positionality that may pertain to Muslims (race, gender, sexuality,

ethnicity, for example).<sup>63</sup> Beholding all creation as intentional includes sexual and gender diversity since the Creator does not make mistakes. The concept of unity can be used to empower one's faith to respect and be inclusive of all types of diversity (such as neurodiversity, mental health, non-normative expressions of sexuality and gender). Indeed, many verses in the sacred text speak to honouring the Creator through recognizing and celebrating diversity. Muhsin Hendricks points to places in the Qur'an that support the Creator's plan to include sexual diversity, such as: "And among His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the variations in your languages and your colours: Verily in that are signs for those who possess knowledge."<sup>64</sup>

## Trustee and Trusteeship

Amina Wadud considers that all creation is purposeful and that all humans, irrespective of race, gender identity and expression, sexuality, disability, and so on are considered divine and have the purpose of being *trustees* (Khalifas) of the land, each other, wealth, and resources: "Part of Allah's original plan in the creation of humankind was for man to function as a *khalifah* (trustee) on earth."<sup>65</sup> Acting as trustees acknowledges that the human presence on Earth is temporary, relational, and impermanent. As the Creator does not distinguish based on positionality facets but on one's deeds, Wadud argues that trusteeship cannot be observed in the abstract but requires action: "One cannot stand on the sidelines in the face of injustice and still be recognized as fully Muslim, fully *khalifah*. I have accepted the responsibility and continue in the struggle."<sup>66</sup> This call to unite intention and action is powerful and makes it incumbent on me as a fellow Muslim to act on social justice beliefs—toward validation and existence of queer Muslims as full humans.

Gandhi also talked about humans as trustees on this earth and that everything belongs to the Creator: "All wealth does not belong to me: what belongs to me is the right to an honourable livelihood, no better than that enjoyed by millions of others. The rest of my wealth belongs to the community and must be used for the welfare of the community."<sup>67</sup>

## Truthfulness

Gandhi discussed the importance of being truthful in everyday life and holding steadfast to that truth. According to Gandhian principles, the truth

resides deep in one's being and can be accessed by truly listening to one's inner guide—the inner teacher that resides inside every human. However, being on a journey to seek out truth cannot violate another human's dignity or integrity.<sup>68</sup> For example, practising one's Islam cannot violate or oppress another human (as in believing that only a select few humans deserve mercy, being judgemental, or responding to evil vis-à-vis evil).

The Creator's breath animates all humans and works as the inner guide and teacher.<sup>69</sup> As Amina Wadud notes, "The third and final step in the creation of humankind is . . . the breathing of the Spirit of Allah (*nafkhat al-ruh*) into each human—male or female."<sup>70</sup> Years of societal prejudices and harmful ideas (like believing the Creator only loves some people) have shrouded the inner guide in darkness. If the Creator resides in everyone, how can one's truth outweigh another's? Truth has to be embodied in one's actions, spirit, thought, and emotions. My truth is that I am from the Creator and will return to the Creator.<sup>71</sup> All creation in life is sacred, purposeful, and meaningful.

By truly listening to one's divine inner guide, the Creator's own breath can make one *more* conscious of the Creator, and when one becomes aware of this, peace, love, and contentment, this enhances the knowledge that *I am not really alone*. Having an awareness and consciousness of the Creator in one's life and aspiring to a pious existence is called *taqwa*. The opening prayer to this chapter is a constant reminder to be present mentally, spiritually, emotionally, and physically with the Creator, in tandem with creation. I say this prayer multiple times a day and reflect on the intentional connections made between thought, emotion, body, spirit, and action; and with other humans, my work, land, and all creation—seen and unseen. All actions I engage in are forms of worship, so I *have* to be careful about intentionality and action. Indeed, this very chapter is an act of worship. The most beautiful aspect of this prayer connects me and my being, everything that I am, and the good I do is because of the Creator's love and blessings. The prayer reminds me that I do not stand alone. I am loved. I am forever connected to the Creator, whose strong link makes the connections between my fragmented positionality selves and embodied experiences.

It can take many decades, perhaps centuries to build relational bridges between diverse individuals and communities (that is, between queer and normative Muslims to foster respect, relationality, faith, and trust). The work of building strong relational bridges is an arduously frustrating and uplifting set of tasks or rather a journey. One way of entering this work is through

fortifying your relational, social, and resource capital by getting to know personal strengths, capacities, and limitations. Many individuals, irrespective of religious affiliation, are not good friends with themselves and their inner guide. Becoming friends with your (self) can be an avenue for reflection, truth-seeking and truth-telling. As a social work educator, I spend most time in personal and communal reflection seeking clarity and truth. As the individual does not/ cannot exist without the community. Therefore, getting to know yourself cannot transpire in isolation, and be solely rendered as an individualistic task and framework.

One thing to remember is that the self/selves can be a good trickster, so being accountable to more than your many selves, in good company is a necessity. Answering the call of social justice, equity, truth-telling, and pluralism can happen in a multitude of ways that honour the individual and community. I believe that pluralistic and liberatory perspectives on Islam and Muslimness can expand the Islamic umbrella to include and validate queer Muslims. The strategies of knowing yourself, responding to Islam's call, identification with relational unity, engaging in trusteeship and truth-telling are merely raindrops in the ocean of this work and journey. Given this, being on this journey is difficult which requires constant work. I do not speak as an expert, yet a lay Muslim calling on other lay Muslims walking the same path to walk in solidarity. Are you up for the challenge? If yes, I will meet you halfway on the bridge to building peaceful relations between queer and normative Muslims.

## Notes

- 1 By Muslimness, I am referring to ideas, values, identity, clothing, artifacts, beliefs or tenets, principles or rules, and practices that demonstrate a person's adherence to and affinity for Islam, and its subsequent performance(s) in the context of Islamic pluralism. For a further exploration on Muslimness, see an in-press chapter from Khan, Maryam. "The Absence and Presence of Female Same-sex Eroticism in Muslim Societies and Islam." In *Queer/Muslim/Canadian: Identities, Experiences and Belonging*. Edited by Momin Rahman and Maryam Khan. Springer International Publishing, 2024. For more information, see <https://link.springer.com/series/15246/books>.
- 2 I use the term "queer" to denote sexual and/or gender identities and ways of being that deviate from the status quo of cisgenderism, cisheteropatriarchy,

heteronormativity, and heterosexuality. On the lived experience of the othering that queer Muslims face, see Shaheed Alvi and Arshia Zaidi, “My Existence Is Not Haram’: Intersectional Lives in LGBTQ Muslims Living in Canada,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 68, no. 6 (2019): 993–1014, doi: 10.1080/00918369.2019.1695422.

- 3 See, for instance, Maryam Khan, Giselle Dias, and Amanda Thompson, “Mapping Out Indigenous and Racialized Critical Community-Based Perspectives and Experiences in the Time of COVID,” *Intersectionalities: A Global Journal of Social Work Analysis, Research, Polity, and Practice* 9, no. 1 (2021): 188–98.
- 4 In subsuming Muslims under the two headings “queer” and “normative,” I do not mean to erase the multiplicity of nuances and differences that each category enfolds—differences that reflect an individual’s social location or positionality, cultural origins, ideological preferences, life experiences, and so on. On queer Muslim subjectivities, see, for example, Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).
- 5 See, especially, Amina Wadud, *Qur’an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman’s Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), and *Inside the Gender Jihad: Woman’s Reform in Islam* (Oxford, UK: Oneworld Publishing, 2006).
- 6 I am, in addition, an uninvited guest who lives on the traditional unceded territories of the Neutral, Anishinaabe, and Haudenosaunee Peoples. For the *settler versus guest* discussion see, Ruth Koleszar-Green, “What Is a Guest? What Is a Settler?” *Cultural and Pedagogical Inquiry*, 10, no. 2 (2018): 166–77.
- 7 In this context, see the work of Farid Esack, exemplified in “Progressive Islam—A Rose by Any Name? American Soft Power in the War for the Hearts and Minds of Muslims,” *ReOrient* 4, no. 1 (2018): 78–106, doi: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.13169/reorient.4.1.0078>.
- 8 The concepts discussed here are complex and exploring them in detail is beyond the scope of this chapter. On right-wing populism, see Bart Cammaerts, “The Mainstreaming of Extreme Right-Wing Populism in the Low Countries: What Is to Be Done?” *Communication, Culture and Critique* 11, no. 1 (2018): 7–20, at 3–4, doi.org/10.1093/ccc/tcx002; on secularism, cultural clashes, progress, and rights rhetoric, see Fatima El-Tayeb, *European Others: Queering Ethnicity in Postnational Europe* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 1–42 and 81–120; on neoliberalism and modernity, see Fatima El-Tayeb, “Gays Who Cannot Properly Be Gay’: Queer Muslims in the Neoliberal European City,” *European Journal of Women’s Studies* 19, no. 1 (2012): 79–95, doi: 10.1177/1350506811426388; on homonationalism, rights rhetoric, and progress, see Jasbir K. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*

- (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 1–114; on modernity, see Momin Rahman, *Homosexualities, Muslim Cultures and Modernity* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 27–47.
- 9 Denise Balkissoon, “The Quebec Mosque Shooting: Je Me Souviens,” *Globe and Mail*, January 24, 2018, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/>; Sarah Shah, *Canadian Muslims: Demographics, Discrimination, Religiosity, and Voting*, Institute of Islamic Studies Occasional Paper Series (Toronto: The University of Toronto, 2019), 6–7; Jasmin Zine, “Unveiled Sentiments: Gendered Islamophobia and Experiences of Veiling Among Muslim Girls in a Canadian Islamic School,” *Equity and Excellence in Education* 39 (2006): 239–52, at 240–44, doi: 10.1080/10665680600788503.
  - 10 Zine, “Unveiled Sentiments,” 240.
  - 11 Linda Bucci, “An Overview of the Legal and Cultural Issues for Migrant Muslim Women of the European Union: A Focus on Domestic Violence and Italy,” *Crime, Law and Social Change* 58 (2012): 75–92.
  - 12 Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*, 37–77.
  - 13 Geert Wilders cited in Hatim El-Hibri, “The Extreme of the Mainstream: Fitna and ‘Dangerous Islamic Media’ in The Netherlands,” paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association, Chicago, May 21–25, 2009.
  - 14 Belinda Beresford, Helen Schneider, and Robert Sember, “Constitutional Authority and Its Limitations: The Politics of Sexuality in South Africa,” in *Sex Politics: Reports from the Frontlines*, edited by Richard Guy Parker, Rosalind P. Petchesky, and Robert Sember (Rio de Janeiro: Sexuality Policy Watch, 2004), 197–246, at 213.
  - 15 Esack, “Progressive Islam—A Rose by Any Name?” 88–89.
  - 16 Maryam Khan and Nick J. Mulé, “Voices of Resistance and Agency: LGBTQ Muslim Women Living Out Intersectional Lives in North America,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 68, no. 7 (2021), 1144–68, doi: 10.1080/00918369.2021.1888583.
  - 17 Ibrahim, “Homophobic Muslims,” 955.
  - 18 Pepe Hendricks, “Queer Muslim Love: A Time for *Ijtihad*,” *Theology and Sexuality* 22, nos. 1–2 (2016): 102–13, at 103 (emphasis in the original), doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13558358.2017.1296691>.
  - 19 Edward J. Alessi, Sarilee Kahn, Leah Woolner, and Rebecca Van Der Horn, “Traumatic Stress Among Sexual and Gender Diverse Refugees from the Middle East, North Africa, and Asia Who Fled to the European Union,” *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 31 (2018): 305–15.
  - 20 For a comprehensive review, see Scott Kugle, *Homosexuality in Islam: Critical Reflection on Gay, Lesbian, and Transgender Muslims* (Oxford, UK: Oneworld,



- 2010); Scott Kugle, *Living Out Islam: Voices of Gay, Lesbian, and Transgender Muslims* (New York: New York University Press, 2014); Nadeem Mahomed and Farid Esack, "The Normal and Abnormal: On the Politics of Being Muslim and Relating to Same-Sex Sexuality," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 85, no. 1 (2017): 224–43, doi:10.1093/jaarel/lfw057.
- 21 See Khalid Duran, "Homosexuality and Islam," in *Homosexuality and World Religions*, edited by Arlene Swidler (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1993), 181–98.
- 22 Qur'an 26:165–66, cited in Duran, "Homosexuality and Islam," 182. There is an explanatory note attached to "worlds" that states, "Are there, out of all Allah's creatures, any besides you who commit this unnatural act?" (514).
- 23 Qur'an 15: 73–74, cited in Duran, "Homosexuality and Islam," 182.
- 24 Qur'an 7: 80–81, cited in Sherifa Zuhur, *Gender, Sexuality and the Criminal Laws in the Middle East and North Africa: A Comparative Study* (Istanbul: Women for Women's Human Rights (WWHR), New Ways Publishing, 2005), [https://kadinininsanhaklari.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Cinsellik\\_Ceza\\_3\\_2.pdf](https://kadinininsanhaklari.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Cinsellik_Ceza_3_2.pdf).
- 25 All three hadith are cited in Duran, "Homosexuality and Islam," 12.
- 26 Asma Barlas, "Believing Women" in Islam: *Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 14.
- 27 Kugle, *Homosexuality in Islam*, 60–61.
- 28 Junaid Jahangir and H. Abdullatif, *Islamic Law and Muslim Same-Sex Unions* (New York: Lexington Books, 2016), 99–105.
- 29 Barlas, "Believing Women" in Islam, 3.
- 30 Muhsin Hendricks, "Islamic Texts: A Source for Acceptance of Queer Individuals into Mainstream Muslim Society," *Equal Rights Review* 5 (2010): 31–51, at 33.
- 31 Said, *Orientalism*, 99, 141.
- 32 See, among others, Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 1992); Barlas, "Believing Women" in Islam; Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); and Ziba Mir-Hosseini, "Islam and Feminism: Whose Islam? Whose Feminism?" *Contestation: Dialogue on Women's Empowerment Journal* 1, edited by Hania Sholkany, <http://www.contestations.net/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/contestations1.pdf>.
- 33 On same-sex relationships in Islamic legal thought, see Kecia Ali, K. (2006). *Sexual Ethics and Islam: Feminist Reflections on Qur'an, Hadith, and Jurisprudence* (Oxford, UK: Oneworld Publications), 75–95. See also Pepe Hendricks, ed., *Hijab: Unveiling Queer Muslim Lives* (Cape Town: The Inner Circle, 2009); Muhsin Hendricks, "Islamic Texts"; Kugle, *Homosexuality in Islam*; Jahangir

and Abdullatif, *Islamic Law and Muslim Same-Sex Unions*. Regarding specific geographic areas, see Jamal, *Jamaat-e-Islami Women in Pakistan*; and, for Egypt, Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*.

- 34 Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman*, xii–xix.
- 35 Kadri, *Heaven on Earth*, 19–35.
- 36 Ziba Mir-Hosseini, *Journeys Toward Gender Equality in Islam*, (London: One-world Academic, 2022), 28–42.
- 37 Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 2, *The Use of Pleasure*, trans. Robert Hurley (1985; New York: Vintage, 1990), 43, 101. Foucault's work highlights that "homosexuality" was constructed as an opposite of heterosexuality. The construction of the "homosexual subject" emerged in legal discourse, as someone who committed the crimes of same-sex acts and attractions and those not performing up to the standards of gender roles. Such individuals were regulated through medicine, especially psychiatry and psychology, where interventions were being determined to suppress and treat this "abnormality" and sexual deviance.
- 38 Muhsin Hendricks, "Islamic Texts," 37.
- 39 See Afsaneh Najmabadi, "Types, Acts, or What? Regulation of Sexuality in Nineteenth-Century Iran," in *Islamicate Sexualities*, edited by Kathryn Babayan and Afsaneh Najmabadi (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 275–95.
- 40 See Badruddin Khan, "Not-So-Gay Life in Pakistan in the 1980s and 1990s," in *Islamic Homosexualities: Culture, History and Literature*, edited by S. O. Murray and W. Roscoe (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 275–96.
- 41 Many NGOs in the Muslim world seeking gender parity, women's rights, sexuality rights and diversity are also working toward demonstrating solidarity with the global LGBTQ+ rights movements, with challenges in historical and contemporary colonial and imperial attitudes. See Ghassan Moussawi, "[Un]critically Queer Organizing: Towards a More Complex Analysis of LGBTQ Organizing in Lebanon," *Sexualities* 18, nos. 5–6 (2015): 593–617, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460714550914>.
- 42 Sahar Amer, "Cross-Dressing and Female Same-Sex Marriage," in *Islamicate Sexualities*, ed. Babayan and Najmabadi. 72–119; Scott Kugle, "Sultan Mahmud's Makeover: Colonial Homophobia and the Persian-Urdu Literary Tradition," in *Queering India: Same-Sex Love and Eroticism in Indian Culture and Society*, edited by Ruth Vanita (New York: Routledge, 2002), 30–46.
- 43 For an excellent critical discussion on the politics of liberal, progressive, and moderate Islams in North America, see Esack, "Progressive Islam—A Rose by Any Name?"; for gender-sensitive approaches to Islam, see Barlas, "Believing Women" in Islam; Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective*

of *Interreligious Solidarity against Oppression* (Oxford, UK: Oneworld, 1997); Pepe Hendricks, *Hijāb*; Muhsin Hendricks, "Islamic Texts"; Jahangir and Abdul-latif, *Islamic Law and Muslim Same-Sex Unions*; Kugle, *Homosexuality in Islam*; Kugle, *Living Out Islam*; and Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman*.

- 44 Esack, *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism*, 105.
- 45 Ayisha A. Al-Sayyad, "'You're What?' Engaging Narratives from Diasporic Muslim Women on Identity and Gay Liberation," in *Islam and Homosexuality*, edited by Samar Habib (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood Publishing, 2010), 373–93; Momin Rahman and Ayesha Valliani, "Challenging the Opposition of LGBT Identities and Muslim Cultures: Initial Research on the Experiences of LGBT Muslims in Canada," *Theology and Sexuality* 22, nos. 1–2 (2016): 73–88, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13558358.2017.1296689>.
- 46 Asifa Siraj, "On Being Homosexual and Muslim: Conflicts and Challenges," in *Islamic Masculinities*, edited by Lahoucine Ouzgane (London: Zed Books, 2006), 202–16; Siraj, "The Construction of the Homosexual 'Other' by British Muslim Heterosexuals," *Contemporary Islam* 3, no. 1 (2009): 41–57, doi: 10.1007/s11562-008-0076-5; A. Siraj, "Isolated, Invisible, and in the Closet: The Life Story of a Scottish Muslim Lesbian," *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 15, no. 1 (2011): 99–121, doi: 10.1080/10894160.2010.490503.
- 47 Pepe Hendricks, "Queer Muslim Love," 103.
- 48 Pepe Hendricks, "Queer Muslim Love," 103.
- 49 Kugle, *Homosexuality in Islam*.
- 50 Andrew. K. T. Yip, "Queering Religious Texts: An Exploration of British Non-heterosexual Christians' and Muslims' Strategy of Constructing Sexuality Affirming Hermeneutics," *Sociology* 39, no. 1 (2005): 47–65, at 51, doi: 10.1177/0038038505049000.
- 51 See Qur'an 2:282; 58:11; 20:114.
- 52 These are, of course, complex issues. As a young lawyer, trained in London, Gandhi arrived in South Africa imbued with the hierarchical attitudes characteristic of imperial Britain. During his roughly two-decade stay in the country, Gandhi fought tirelessly for the civil rights of Indians, while at the same time holding derogatory opinions regarding Blacks, whom he regarded as inferior to Indians—attitudes for which he has been labelled a racist. His background does not, however, excuse racism: it merely contextualizes it. There was much for him to unlearn. For a powerful critique of Gandhi's career in South Africa, see Ashwin Desai and Goolam Vahed, *The South African Gandhi: Stretcher-Bearer of Empire* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2015). See also Soutik Biswas, "Was Mahatma Gandhi a Racist?" *BBC News*, September 17, 2015, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-34265882>.

With regard to Gandhi's sexuality, his puritanical views, including his insistence on abstinence (for Gandhi, procreation was the sole acceptable purpose of sex), are grounded in the long-standing tradition of *brahmacharya*—the ascetic practice of self-restraint, especially in regard to sex. In its origins, the ideal of celibacy reflects the patricentric belief that semen is a source of power and must therefore be stored up rather than ejaculated. All the same, the practice of *brahmacharya* does not require the deliberate creation of temptation so that one can then prove capable of resisting it. Gandhi's "celibacy tests" were, if not wholly unprecedented, then at least suspiciously overzealous.

- 53 Raven Sinclair, "Introduction to Special Indigenous Issue," *Critical Social Work Journal* 11, no. 1 (2010): <https://doi.org/10.22329/csw.v11i1.5810>.
- 54 Qur'an 41:34.
- 55 Qur'an 4:84.
- 56 Qur'an 24:30.
- 57 Baiju Pallicka Vareed, "West Meets East: Gandhian Ethics in Social Work Practice," in *Social Work Ethics: Progressive, Practical, and Relational Approaches*, edited by Elaine Spencer, Duane Massing, and Jim Gough (Don Mills, ON: Oxford Press, 2017), 190–201, at 195. In view of Gandhi's unswerving belief in the power of non-violence, as well as the need for compassion and tolerance, it has been deeply distressing to witness the appropriation of his image by the right-wing Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party, currently in power in India—a party intent not merely on sowing hostility between Hindus and Muslims but on pursuing policies that threaten to culminate in Muslim genocide. It is difficult to imagine how Gandhi, who clung to a vision of a united India in which Hindus and Muslims lived in harmony, would react to such cynical abuse.
- 58 Maryam Khan and Kathy Absolon, "Meeting on a Bridge: Opposing Whiteness in Social Work Education and Practices," *Canadian Social Work Review / Revue canadienne de service social (CSWR-RCSS)* 38, no. 2 (2022), 159–78. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1086124ar>.
- 59 Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman*, xii, 3, 6.
- 60 Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman*, 95.
- 61 Barlas, "Believing Women" in *Islam*, 130. Barlas quotes from Sachiko Murata, *The Tao of Islam: A Sourcebook on Gender Relationships in Islamic Thought* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1992), 43; the emphasis was added by Barlas. For the concept of "ethical individualism" in relation to Qur'anic exegesis, see Barbara Freyer Stowasser, *Women in the Qur'an: Traditions and Interpretations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 17, 85, and 103.
- 62 Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman*, 15, 16, 22.

- 63 Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman*, 15.
- 64 Muhsin Hendricks, "Islamic Texts," 36. The author also references, among other passages, Qur'an 49:13 and 36:36.
- 65 Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman*, 23.
- 66 Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman*, xix.
- 67 Mahatma K. Gandhi, "Theory of Trusteeship," *Harijan* 3, no. 6 (1939): 149.
- 68 Mahatma K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography or the Story of My Experiments with Truth* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Trust, 1927).
- 69 Qur'an 38:72.
- 70 Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman*, 17.
- 71 See Qur'an 2:156.

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Part 3

# **Nature as Other**

The Human and Non-human  
Relationship

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## 10 “A Foothold in the Sheer Wall of the Future”

Extinction, Making Kin, and Imagining Peace in The Ministry of Utmost Happiness

Amit R. Baishya

*Everywhere animals disappear.*

—John Berger, “Why Look at Animals?”

*To be present in history, even as nothing more than a chuckle, was a universe away from being absent from it, from being written out of it altogether. A chuckle . . . could become a foothold in the sheer wall of the future.*

—Arundhati Roy, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*

A key idea that I will explore in this chapter is Donna Haraway’s concept of “multispecies flourishing,” which, for me, is a powerful descriptor for peace with the Other.<sup>1</sup> Here, by “Other,” I mean not just human Others but a whole host of non-human Others with whom we enter into relationships of kinship. “Multispecies flourishing” is not peace as a state of suspended war or a fuzzy version of mutual coexistence and friendship that avoids conflict but the messy and laborious process of making kin within quotidian networks

of obligation and responsibility. I wager that Arundhati Roy's second novel, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (henceforth *Ministry*), creates such a storied world in neoliberal urban locales scarred by species-extinction.<sup>2</sup> I consider neoliberalism not simply as an economic ideology but also, in Jason Moore's sense, "a way of organizing nature—as a multispecies, situated, capitalist world-ecology."<sup>3</sup> Spatial redistributions and practices that impact both human and non-human worlds in the contemporary neoliberal city and proliferating instances of environmental racism/asteism are among the primary nodes through which to analyze such organizations of nature.

I begin this chapter with John Berger's comment as an epigraph because it chimes with a few provocations of the "Peace and the Other" symposium held at Arizona State University in November 2019: "What are the social forces, global and local, that otherize the non-human environment and construct them as objects for human exploitation? What values are needed for enhancing human and non-human relationships?" Berger's statement prophetically points toward the ongoing sixth great extinction event. Simultaneously, it is a melancholic appraisal of what Robin Wall Kimmerer calls our predicament of "species-loneliness"—a "deep unknown sadness stemming from . . . the loss of relationship."<sup>4</sup> Extinction events in the Anthropocene and our species-loneliness stem largely from the objectification of the non-human environment, an orientation Martin Heidegger described as *Bestand* (standing-reserve). Heidegger describes this orientation as enframing (*Gestell*), which renders the world into a stockpile of objectified raw materials. How do we abjure these objectifying orientations that enframe the environment, with deleterious effects for human and non-human beings?<sup>5</sup> What "values" are needed for enhancing flourishing multispecies relationships to imagine possibilities of peaceful forms of being-in-common?

Two formulations from animal studies—"dull edge of extinction" and "making kin"—help me explore the violence in treating the environment as *Bestand* and imagine "values" for sustaining flourishing multispecies communities. While popular literature frames extinction as a cataclysmic end event (the "last Dodo," for instance), it also gestures toward longer processes that involve what Thom Van Dooren calls the gradual disappearance of not just a "single life form" but multiple, interrelated "forms of life."<sup>6</sup> Extinction is an entangled process in which one loss impacts many others over a *longue durée*. Van Dooren calls this "the dull edge of extinction," in which there

is “a slow unravelling of intimately entangled ways of life that begins long before the death of the last individual and continues to ripple forward long afterward . . .”<sup>7</sup> To narrativize this unravelling and imagine forms of being-in-common, Van Dooren, Bird Rose and Chrulew call for “storied worlds”—narratives that “can help us to inhabit multiply-storied worlds in a spirit of openness and accountability to otherness.”<sup>8</sup>

Narrating storied worlds also necessitates that we attend to complex, entangled processes of making kin. Haraway writes:

Making kin as oddkin rather than . . . genealogical and biogenetic family troubles important matters, like to whom is one actually responsible. . . . What shape is this kinship, where and whom do its lines connect and disconnect? . . . What must be cut and what must be tied if multispecies flourishing on earth, including human and other-than-human beings in kinship, are to have a chance?<sup>9</sup>

Making kin is not the same as heartwarming notions of interspecies friendship. Haraway’s description of this “wild” category of making kin includes the possibility of contingent queer becomings (“oddkin”) and does not preclude the question of violence in relationality. It necessitates a disavowal of affective investments in genealogical and biogenetic notions of “family” lineages and in following the tracks of one’s obligations to multiple Others in ordinary life.

Focusing largely on Delhi, *Ministry* begins with nostalgia for a lost “natural” plenitude. But Roy extends this initial evocation of nostalgic affect to consider the impact of extinction events in the era of accelerating neoliberalism, connect species-extinction with the urban precariat’s decreasing visibility, and imagine an alternative utopian space of multispecies cohabitation through the portrayal of Jannat (Paradise) Guest House. Significantly, Jannat emerges as a safe space for the human and non-human marginalized that comes into being over and around an abandoned Muslim graveyard in Shajahanabad, Delhi. A space of death becomes the locus for the renewal of life and the formation of an alternative commons. This movement from a space of death to a locus for renewed life constitutes the linear trajectory of the novel’s otherwise sprawling plot. *Ministry* begins with an invocation of species-extinction—that of vultures and sparrows. Toward its closure, we encounter the following poem:

How  
to  
tell  
a  
shattered  
story?  
By  
slowly  
becoming  
everybody.  
No.  
By slowly becoming everything.<sup>10</sup>

Telling a “shattered story” is initiated by moving from a space of death to a space of life and through exploring entanglement: “becoming everybody” and “becoming everything.” Human and non-human selves, otherwise lacking “footholds in the sheer wall of the future,” take refuge in the vibrant multispecies community that is Jannat. No wonder then that the last scene in *Ministry* features “Guih Kyom” (dung beetle in Kashmiri) as an important constituent of world-making in Jannat. The rest of this essay mimes this movement from species death to multispecies life by focusing on the extinction of vultures and sparrows, the metaphorical bleed between species-extinction and disappearing people in neoliberal cityscapes, and the formation of a multispecies commons in Jannat.

## Multispecies Communities: Losing Vultures and Sparrows

*Ministry* begins with a coda that narrates the extinction of white-backed vultures (*Gyps bengalensis*) from Indian cityscapes:

At magic hour, when the sun has gone but the light has not, armies of flying foxes unhinge themselves from the Banyan trees in the old graveyard and drift across the city like smoke. When the bats leave, the crows come home. Not all the din of their homecoming fills the silence left by the sparrows that have gone missing, and the old white-backed vultures, custodians of the dead for more than a hundred million years, have been wiped out. The vultures died of diclofenac poisoning. Diclofenac . . . given to cattle as muscle relaxant, to ease pain

and increase the production of milk, works—worked—like nerve gas on white-backed vultures. Each chemically relaxed, milk-producing cow or buffalo that died became poisoned vulture bait. As cattle turned into better dairy machines . . . vultures’ necks began to droop as though they were tired and simply couldn’t stay awake. Silver beards of saliva dripped from their beaks, and one by one they tumbled off their branches, dead.

Not many noticed the passing of the friendly old birds. There was so much else to look forward to.<sup>11</sup>

An important moment that positions *Ministry* as a critical reflection on neoliberalism is the reference to diclofenac and its connection with bovines. Bovines, despite their veneration as *gau mata* (mother cow) by the hard-line Hindu right, are treated as *Bestand* (not sentient animals, but “dairy machines”). Their cyborg bodies (“chemically relaxed”) are nodes in a neoliberal production line geared toward satisfying increasing consumerist needs. The key point about diclofenac is the molecular and cellular rearrangement at the level of bovine corporeality, a form of violence that by reducing animal bodies to mere standing-reserve impacts existing multispecies relationships and creates conditions for non-peace. This molecular rearrangement leads cows to be mere *Bestand*, to be milked productively by humans. But this rearrangement has an even more deleterious underside: for vultures, diclofenac worked “like nerve gas.” Van Dooren writes: “In vulture bodies, diclofenac causes painful swelling, inflammation, and eventually kidney failure and death. Today, it is thought that 97 percent of the three main species of vulture in India (*Gyps indicus*, *Gyps bengalensis*, and *Gyps tenuirostris*) are gone.”<sup>12</sup> Vultures, ancient beings that gesture toward an inhuman dimension of time prior to the era of *anthropos*—“custodians of the dead for more than a hundred million years”—are almost wiped out.

There are other avian entities in this passage too. *Ministry* begins with scenes of leaving home (flying foxes) and homecoming (crows). But the crucial element is what follows the corvid homecoming—“Not all the din of their homecoming fills the silence left by the sparrows that have gone missing.” The “din” of the corvid homecoming cannot replace the silence in the wake of the disappearance of the sparrows. This blink-and-miss reference to sparrows, one of the most ordinary urban animals, may seem insignificant if we do not consider the illustrations on the last page and

the back cover of the original hardcover edition of *Ministry*. Just as we exit the space of the plot, we notice a small illustration in the style of Mughal miniatures. This image is repeated in the back cover. Inset in these illustrations are a perched vulture and sparrow about to take flight. The extinction of vultures and sparrows opens *Ministry*; a visual representation of these disappeared avian figures close the text. What do we make of this double invocation of species loss, both narrative and visual, at the beginning and end? The answers, I suggest, lie in the material impact of species loss on extant lifeworlds depicted in the novel and the metaphorical significance of animals like vultures and sparrows in *Ministry*.

Polyvalent metaphorical associations circulate around vultures. Since scavenging is viewed as a debased activity, vultures have often been associated with filth and greed. Concurrently, the mention of “friendly birds” reminds us of cultural-religious figures in South Asia, like Jatayu or Sampati in the *Ramayana*—avian figures associated with nobility and wisdom.<sup>13</sup> Anand Vivek Taneja also narrates how vultures are venerated as “saintly animals” by Muslims and Hindus alike in contemporary North India.<sup>14</sup> On a material level, vultures’ disappearance has had ripple effects in multispecies communities in India. Vultures disposed of the carcasses of livestock. The death of the vulture in India, Samanth Subramanian writes, is “also the death of how we cope with death itself.”<sup>15</sup> Disposing of carcasses, they also halted the spread of diseases like anthrax (the high acidic content in vulture stomachs naturally destroy pathogens).<sup>16</sup> Moreover, what was once the task of vultures has now fallen on other scavenging species, like stray dogs and rats, leading to a significant population explosion in such species. The increase in stray dogs increases the risk of zoonotic diseases like rabies, while rats carry the danger of plague. Unsurprisingly, the rural populations and the urban poor are more vulnerable to such zoonotic outbreaks. Vultures have also existed symbiotically with humans in India.<sup>17</sup> Van Dooren writes that

the mass death of vultures is having economic impacts on some of India’s poorest people. These people, often referred to . . . as “bone collectors,” have made a living gathering the dried bones of cattle and selling them to the fertilizer industry. In the absence of vultures, these bones are now often incompletely scavenged, requiring either extended periods of time before collection or for people to collect the bones themselves.<sup>18</sup>

While Van Dooren successfully shows the entangled pathways of humans and vultures in a multispecies lifeworld, this passage exposes the limits of his vision. He fails to mention that the “bone collectors” belong to Dalit communities. Caste remains an absent vector.

As contrasts, I provide two examples from Dalit autobiographies to consider the ambivalent relationships humans share with vultures in such multispecies lifeworlds structured by caste. Here is Hazari, a “bone-collector,” who was born and grew up in a village in Uttar Pradesh during colonial rule and belonged to the Chamar caste:

Our livelihood came from the work we did in town . . . disposing of the dead animals . . . we watched in the same way as the vulture watches, there is no difference between the vulture and the sweeper in this respect. As soon as . . . a cow, horse or goat died, we brought it to a field to skin it. We took the meat for cooking and eating, and the skin when dry to be sold. We left the carcass for the vultures to clean, and, when the vultures had finished, we collected the bones.<sup>19</sup>

And here is Daya Pawar, the author of the Marathi autobiography *Baluta*, who belongs to the Mahar caste:

News that an animal had died in the wilds did not take long to get to the Maharwada. It would pass along faster than the telexes of today. When the vultures and kite began to circle, like aeroplanes, the Mahars would locate the fallen animal. They would rush to get there before the birds picked the carcass clean.

How many vultures? Fifty or so. Their wings flapping, they would make strange sounds. . . . Annabhau Sathe has compared vultures to the velvet-jacketed sons of money-lenders. If you threw a stone at them, they'd flap and move away . . . but their greed drew them back to the body. They probably hated the Mahars. After all, we were snatching food from their claws.<sup>20</sup>

While my intention isn't to conflate heterogenous experiences of caste, the figuration of vultures is crucial. In Hazari's narrative, vultures and the “bone collectors” are presented in a relationship of symbiosis. In Pawar's, the vulture-human relationship is ambivalent and tense. While the symbiotic element is present (vultures as a form of media—note the reference to telex and aeroplanes), the avians and humans compete for the same resources. Vultures

orient the community toward the presence of carcasses. But they are also replete with negative metaphorical and anthropomorphic associations—they were like the “velvet-jacketed sons of money-lenders” who would move when a stone was thrown before greedily circling back. Vultures and humans make kin in a violence-laden relationship of interspecies competition over scarce resources.

On July 11, 2016, Vashram Sarvaiya, along with his brother Ramesh, his cousin Ashok and relative Bechar, were skinning a cow in Gujarat’s Una district when they were accosted by Hindutva *gau-rakshaks* (cow protectors) who accused them of killing the cow. The video of their public flogging went viral and forms part of an escalating pattern of violence by Hindutva forces against Dalits and Muslims in contemporary India. (Incidentally, India’s nearly \$12-billion leather industry is heavily reliant on Dalit and Muslim labour. India is also a major exporter of beef.) The Una violence sparked massive protests, forcing Narendra Modi to condemn it after a substantial period. Reporter Maya Prabhu visited one of these skinning fields necessary for the leather industry in Chamaria Para in Rajkot, Gujarat. This skinning field full of animal carcasses, he writes,

is a tip called Sokra, and it is the most apocalyptic place I’ve ever seen. Hundreds of stray dogs swarm the rubbish embankments, and wade hip-deep in a sewage lake to cool off. Years ago there would have been vultures wheeling on updrafts, perching on sun-blached rib-cages. A horde of vultures could pick clean a bull’s carcass in half an hour, say Chamaria Para’s older skinners. But India’s vulture population has been in crisis since the 1990s, so the carcass dump is a grim exhibition of the stages of decay.<sup>21</sup>

The horror-stricken “apocalyptic” attribution stems from class/caste-privilege emerging from an insulation from such locales and activities that Dalit communities have traditionally performed. Crucial here is the depiction of the skinning field as a necro-ecosystem replete with filth (“sewage lake”) and animal forms representing death and squalor (stray dogs, vultures). The description of the “apocalyptic exhibit of decay” notes the vultures’ disappearance and its impact in this entangled lifeworld. Earlier, vultures “wheeling on updrafts” would pick a carcass clean; their absence, mourned by the skinners, means that the skinning field appears like a museum of horrors for the *savarna* observer—a “grim exhibition” of various “stages of decay.”



While diclofenac has largely been blamed for the disappearance of vultures, the reasons for the disappearance of sparrows (*Passer domesticus indicus*) is a subject of debate. Over the last two decades, many states in India have reported declining sparrow populations. A 2015 study lists, in addition to “the increase of monoculture crops” and the “replacement of native plants with introduced species,” the following possible reasons for this decline: “Introduction of unleaded petrol which produces toxic compounds such as methyl nitrate, use of pesticides in agriculture, effect of electromagnetic radiation from cellphone towers, eradication of agricultural land, loss of nesting sites due to changes in urban building design, competition among other species of birds, declines in insect populations.”<sup>22</sup> Neoliberal urbanization has impacted the food supply of sparrows, who are voracious feeders. Moreover, straw, an essential component of sparrow habitations, has become scarce. Sparrows habitually roost and nest on tiled and thatched roofs, architectural aspects that are disappearing in contemporary urban structures.

In 2008, *Time* magazine named Mohammad Dilawar from Nashik, Maharashtra, as one of its “Heroes of the Environment.” Dilawar tracked Nashik’s sparrow decline and was responsible for building wooden houses for them. He began the Nature Forever society, which spreads awareness about sparrows and helps design strategies to conserve them as an umbrella species. Dilawar laments India’s exclusive focus on conserving charismatic species like tigers while ignoring small ones like sparrows. Comparing sparrows to the figure of the “common man” in Indian democracy, Dilawar says:

Even though the common man, his problems and his welfare is at the centre of the idea of democracy, he is always ignored. . . .

The same is the case with house sparrows. It’s only ignored because it’s common; it has little glamour as compared to other species. There is little awareness with regard to the ecological role it plays.<sup>23</sup>

Dilawar’s comment about sparrows being too “common” evokes familiar reactions to this animal, which has co-evolved in proximity with human beings. Sparrows are the very signifier of commonness, lying somewhere between the status of nature (wild) and culture (domestic). Kim Todd writes:

In a world fascinated by the predatory and breathtakingly beautiful, the sparrow is the type of the common and the humble. There is something generic about it. Picture the basic bird, the stripped-down,

super-efficiency model, and a sparrow probably comes to mind. . . . The Hebrew word that gets translated into the English “sparrow” means “bird” in general. . . . The root of the old English *spearwa* means “flutterer.” Its Latin name, *passer*, was adopted as the root of “passerine,” the name for the largest order of birds.<sup>24</sup>

This attribution of commonness exists in other languages. In my first language, Assamese, sparrows are called *ghorsirika* or *ghonsirika*. *Sirika* means small animal, *ghor* means house, and *ghon* means thick, dense or regular, all attributions of fecundity, commonness and ordinariness, maybe one of the reasons it possesses “little glamour as compared to other species.”<sup>25</sup>

However, this apparent insignificance can be deceptive, as sparrows can be invasive species—indeed, the sparrow has often been treated as a symbol of “pestilence, urban ills and unwanted immigration.”<sup>26</sup> They have been key to the disappearance of local species. Oftentimes, they are treated as vermin and pests (they are often considered avian “rats”), one of the most notorious instances being Mao Zedong’s war against sparrows as one of the four pests (sparrows, mosquitoes, flies and rats) that had to be eliminated. Shapiro writes that Mao’s order was an instance of “environmental authoritarianism” that had a massive and deleterious ecological impact.<sup>27</sup> Designated as capitalist animals who did not work for the grain the peasantry’s hard labour produced, sparrows were killed *en masse* in the latter half of the 1950s. But their extermination had unanticipated effects, since besides grain, they also consumed insects. Locusts and other insects destroyed crops in the following seasons and contributed to the great famine in China (1959–1961). Similar fears have also been evinced about sparrows’ disappearance in India. Since sparrows serve as easily available food for birds of prey, their decline also leads to declining predatory bird populations. They are critical to seed dispersal, thus impacting agriculture. The dull edge of extinction rears its head again as the loss of one species has ripple effects across a lifeworld.<sup>28</sup>

Geographers Jennifer Wolch and Jody Emel write: “animals have been so indispensable to the structure of human affairs and so tied up with our visions of progress and the good life that we have been unable to . . . fully see them. Their very centrality prompted us to simply look away and to ignore their fates.”<sup>29</sup> Following Wolch and Emel’s lead, let us return to the last sentences from *Ministry*’s opening coda. While this segment refers specifically to vultures’ disappearance, it also applies indirectly to the humble, ordinary

sparrow. The linear teleologies of “progress” and “development” in biopolitical modernity impel us to look forward at the seemingly arrow-like progress of time. Everywhere animals disappear, but their “very centrality” prompts us to “simply look away and to ignore their fates.” This looking-away is accentuated by the ordinariness of animals like sparrows, which exist largely as background noise. But the zoopolitical also bleeds into the biopolitical in *Ministry*. Animal extinction is entangled in intimate ways with people rendered disposable and invisible.

### **Disposable Humanity: The Metaphorical Bleed Between Species-Extinction and Precarious Humans**

*Ministry*'s bleed between the zoopolitical and the biopolitical is not a simple comparison between humans and states of animalization; instead, metaphorization operates at two levels: first, the dull edge of extinction reveals the severe impoverishment of multispecies lifeworlds over longer durations, and, second, it shows a connection between species disappearance and the status of disposable humans who are marginalized and instrumentally treated as *Bestand* in the neoliberal city.<sup>30</sup>

The recent exodus of migrant workers from cities like Delhi during the COVID-19 crisis emphasizes their disposability and treatment as *Bestand*. The utter lack of any plans for amelioration, the freezing of payments, social ostracization, and forcing migrants to walk up to 2,000 miles back home are sordid reminders of this unfolding human catastrophe.<sup>31</sup> However, treatment of migrant workers as a standing-reserve, utilized and disposed at will, is no flash in the pan. In the immediate context of neoliberalization, we must turn our gaze back to the clamour to make Delhi a “world-class” city, which has steadily gained ground in the last two decades.<sup>32</sup> The 2010 Commonwealth Games are significant here, as they led to massive investments in infrastructure (including operationalizing the Delhi metro), massively rising consumption patterns, increasing automobility, and gentrification, which included the proliferation of shopping malls.

Another increasingly prominent post-liberalization dimension was the rise of what Amita Baviskar calls “bourgeoisie environmentalism”—judicial activism against problems like pollution prompted by upper-middle-class citizens aimed at enhancing elite lifestyles.<sup>33</sup> This is congruent with “banishing the city’s working-class population out of sight, their labour available

yet invisible.” This occurred in various ways, including closing “hazardous” industries, laying off workers, and demolishing slums. Lalit Batra writes: “The ‘legal and aesthetic pollution’ caused by working-class settlements and factories, according to the idea of ‘bourgeoisie environmentalism,’ denied the ‘citizens’ (read property owners) their legitimate rights in the city. So the idea of reclamation of the rights of the ‘citizenry’ got directly linked to the dispossession of the working classes.”<sup>34</sup> Around one million people were displaced in Delhi between 1998 and 2000. The resettlement colonies were “little more than planned slums” lacking basic amenities and often located near hazardous areas. The Bhalswa resettlement colony, for instance, is right next to a landfill where toxins leak into groundwater. Furthermore, the evictees either lost their livelihood or incurred more expenses in commuting from their resettlement colonies to their places of employment.

The first connection instituted between “falling people” and urban avians in *Ministry* is in the politics of visibility—to extend Berger, everywhere animals and people disappear, but they are hardly seen. The critique of such disappearance of precarious beings, both human and animal, in the face of spectacles carried by the neoliberal electronic media is evident in *Ministry*, when Roy focuses on the anti-corruption protests of 2011 spearheaded by Anna Hazare, referred to bombastically as India’s “second freedom struggle.” Most of these protests occurred in a popular space of gathering: the area near the medieval-era observatory, Jantar Mantar. The televisual media widely covered these protests. But the same area was also the locus of other protests by what Roy calls “falling people” like the slum dwellers, political dissidents and victims of catastrophes like the Bhopal Gas Disaster.<sup>35</sup> The narrator describes the coverage of the protests by the Association of Mothers of the Disappeared from Kashmir, occurring simultaneously with the spectacle of India’s “second freedom struggle.” Thus, “No TV camera pointed at that banner, not even by mistake. Most of those engaged in India’s Second Freedom Struggle felt nothing less than outrage at the idea of freedom for Kashmir and the Kashmiri women’s audacity.”<sup>36</sup> These simultaneous protests are willingly ignored by participants in the epic, linear temporality of progress underpinning the “second freedom struggle.” The “falling people” of various hues become background noise, easily ignored, much like the extinction events that initiate *Ministry*.

*Ministry* also makes specific comparisons between “falling people” and sparrows and vultures. Recall that Dilawar compares sparrows to the

“common man” of Indian democracy—incidentally, a figure rooted in the middle class with a long representational history, from the iconic cartoons of R. K. Laxman to the formation of the populist Aam Aadmi Party (Aam Aadmi means “common man”) during the 2011 anti-corruption protests.<sup>37</sup> But while the semantic range of “common man” can be capacious, *Ministry* emphasizes that populations that have lost their precarious foothold on history fall out of this category to occupy a different world. This distinction is emphasized later, when the denizens of Jannat travel, or rather in another deployment of an avian metaphor, “glide” across Delhi:

They glided through dense forests of apartment buildings, past gigantic concrete amusement parks, bizarrely designed wedding halls and towering cement statues as high as skyscrapers. . . . They drove over an impossible-to-pee-on flyover as wide as a wheat field, with twenty lanes of cars whizzing over it and towers of steel and glass growing on either side of it. But when they took an exit road off it, they saw that the world underneath the flyover was an entirely different one—an unpaved, unplanned, unlit, unregulated, wild and dangerous one, in which buses, trucks, bullocks, rickshaws, cycles, handcarts and pedestrians jostled for survival. One kind of world flew over another kind of world without troubling to stop and ask the time of day.<sup>38</sup>

The neoliberal city’s division into two worlds existing on separate planes, one *flying* over the other, is anticipated in chapter 3, when one of the major characters, the *hijra* (intersex) Anjum, stares into a TV camera and says, “We’ve come from there . . . from the other world (*doosri duniya*).”<sup>39</sup> This chapter goes back to Delhi’s gentrification prior to hosting the Commonwealth Games. In the midst of the celebratory din surrounding neoliberal gentrification, aided by bulldozers that “could flatten history and stack it up like building material,” millions of urban precariat “were being moved, but no one knows where to.”<sup>40</sup> “Surplus” people, not the “common man” dear to Indian democracy, were losing their access to the commons. The comparison with sparrows is explicit:

On the city’s industrial outskirts, in the miles of bright swamp tightly compacted with refuse and colorful plastic bags, where the evicted had been “re-settled,” the air was chemical and the water poisonous. Clouds of mosquitoes rose from the thick green ponds. Surplus mothers perched like sparrows on the debris of what used to be their homes and sang their surplus children to sleep.<sup>41</sup>

The plight of these “surplus” people, resettled in the toxic hazardscapes at the city’s margins, is compared via simile to the plight of sparrows precariously perched in the new metropolis. Both are victims of neoliberal gentrification—the disappearance of sparrows serves as a mirror to the invisibility of the surplus people.

Vultures are linked to the representation of caste especially through the portrayal of Dayachand/Saddam. In “The Doctor and the Saint,” Roy says:

The utopianism that Ambedkar is charged with was very much part of the tradition of the anti-caste movement. The poetry of the Bhakti movement is replete with it. Unlike the nostalgia-ridden, mythical village republics in Gandhi’s “Ram Rajya” . . . the subaltern Bhakti saints sang of towns. They sang of towns in timeless places, where Untouchables would be liberated from ubiquitous fear, from unimaginable indignity and endless toil on other peoples’ land.<sup>42</sup>

*Ministry* has one major Dalit character, who moves from neighbouring Badshahpur to Delhi: Saddam Hussain/Dayachand (Dayachand takes the name Saddam Hussain after seeing a video of the former Iraqi ruler stoically facing death). Dayachand moves to Delhi because his father, who belonged to the Chamar caste, was lynched for the “crime” of skinning the carcass of a cow. Later, as the denizens of Jannat indulge in some flânerie at the swanky Nando Mall, Saddam/Dayachand reveals that it was constructed on a road neighbouring wheat fields where his father was lynched. The link between caste violence and neoliberal gentrification is explicitly instituted. Moreover, as a controlled, postmodern space, the mall signifies a hub of species-loneliness far away from the multispecies lifeworlds Hazari and Daya Pawar describe.

Furthermore, vultures and their visual-olfactory role return through the repeated mention of smell in *Ministry*. In order to appreciate the visual-olfactory aspect of Roy’s work, it is necessary to consider the olfactory trope in a broader context. Maya Prabhu writes: “Chamaria Para, ‘the leather-making area,’ is signposted only by the stink. Part rancid, oily ram’s wool and part rotting meat, the odour hangs diffuse in the air along the shale alleys and thickens at the open doorways of ramshackle warehouses.”<sup>43</sup> Joel Lee argues that caste functions as a “spatial-sensory order” very often predicated through the foregrounding of smell. His term “olfactory map” describes how in caste-geographies “odorants operate [to] underscore the sensuousness of space and the spatiality of sensory perception.”<sup>44</sup> For the *savarna* Prabhu,

“stink” is a spatial signpost that alerts her to Dalit presence and habitations, but as she proceeds, smells orient the subject *away* from the sources. This differs from Pawar’s (*Baluta*) and Dayachand/Saddam’s (*Ministry*) descriptions of finding dead carcasses. Saddam says that the stink orients them *toward* the carcass: “We find the dead cow easily. . . . It’s always easy, you just have to know the art of walking straight into the stink.”<sup>45</sup> The upper castes, however, “all held their noses because of the stink.”<sup>46</sup> The phenomenologies of smell, predicated on caste subject-positions, differently orients inhalers to olfactory sources.

As Lee argues in his essay, such instances of living near malodorous landscapes are examples of “environmental casteism” that have deleterious effects on residents’ health and psyche.<sup>47</sup> In *Ministry*, Roy’s comment about disposable people precariously perched like sparrows refers to this form of “slow violence.”<sup>48</sup> However, the olfactory plays a subversive role later, as “stink” becomes a subterfuge to smuggle Tilo, one of *Ministry*’s central characters, and the foundling infant Udaya Jebeen away from the police. Saddam/Dayachand says:

He would come with a friend who drove a pickup for the Municipal Corporation of Delhi [MCD]. They had to pick up the carcass of a cow that had died—burst—from eating too many plastic bags at the main garbage dump in Hauz Khas. . . . It was foolproof plan, he said. “No policeman ever stops an MCD garbage truck. . . . If you keep your window open you’ll be able to smell us before you see us.”<sup>49</sup>

In multispecies communities where humans and vultures once lived in proximity, smell may possess a different valence than for upper-caste/middle class inhalers. The upper-caste subject’s act of holding their nose is not only a mode of orienting away from biological matter but also a way of marking differences between a “pure” notion of self, opposed to the “polluting” presence of the caste-other. The implication is that objects of disgust/pollution make the subject *pull away*.<sup>50</sup> However, from the obverse angle, the Dalit character uses this same “stink” as a guerilla tactic as he navigates urban space. This leads to a crucial plot twist as a new restored world—a thriving multispecies community in Jannat—comes into being as Miss Jebeen is smuggled under cover of night and stink. Miss Jebeen becomes a beacon of hope and futurity at the end; so the act of “smuggling” her under the cover of darkness and stink leads us directly to the novel’s utopian closure.

## Making Kin: Multispecies Communities in *Ministry*

Roy says in an interview about *Ministry*:

The sprawling structure of this book . . . it's almost like looking at a city whose plans are ambushed. It has unauthorized colonies and illegal entries. People come together in such places.

. . . In a city, you can't walk past a person without wondering who he or she is. . . . All these people have stories. They've come from different places. And this allows them to share their experiences and create a form of solidarity that could not exist in isolated villages.<sup>51</sup>

If bourgeoisie environmentalism and the desire to make Delhi into a “world-class” city necessitates forms of rationalized, exclusionary planning, places of gathering like Jannat ambush such attempts at standardization and urban “beautification.” What elevates *Ministry* from a standard compassionate look at the fates of surplus people who are animalized and brutalized is this attempt at imagining a utopian form of being-in-common offering lines of flight from the neoliberal city's spatial apartheid. Moreover, the distinctive feature of Jannat (Paradise) as a utopian space is that it is where humans and non-humans make kin. Early on, Anjum says about Jannat:

Once you have fallen off the edge like all of us have, including our Biroo (a stray dog) . . . you will never stop falling. And as you fall you will hold on to other falling people. . . . This place where we live, where we have made our home, is the place of falling people.<sup>52</sup>

By the end, Jannat becomes a refuge for other falling “people,” including sexual minorities; castaways; political dissenters; various injured or abandoned creatures, including dogs, goats and crows; and Tilo and Miss Jebeen, both of whom are hiding from the law. If “falling people” become part of easily ignored background noise during spectacles in popular gathering places like Jantar Mantar, Jannat represents an alternative gathering space under the radar of the vacuous bourgeoisie, who shrilly scream about progress and world-class cities. In such alternative spaces, ruined, vulnerable and broken lives are salvaged and cared for, like Saddam's injured crow. Furthermore, echoing Haraway's point about “oddkin,” Jebeen's “family” is a quintessential queer collectivity. Jebeen's parentage is revealed at the end—her mother, Maase Revathy, was a brutalized Naxalite cadre who was likely killed (her father's identity remains unknown,



probably one of the security personnel who had gangraped Revathy). But Jebeen now has a family full of “falling people.” This is not the stereotypical restitution of heterosexual coupling at the closure but a queer and contingent collectivity making kin. As they read Revathy’s letter,

Each of the listeners recognized, in their own separate ways, something of themselves and their own stories, their own Indo-Pak, in the story of this unknown, faraway woman who was no longer alive. It made them close ranks around Miss Jebeen the Second like a formation of trees, or adult elephants—an impenetrable fortress in which she, unlike her biological mother, would grow up protected and loved.<sup>53</sup>

These arboreal and animal similitudes gesture at alternative forms of making kin beyond biogenetic genealogies.

Polyvalent arboreal and animal metaphors are also intricately woven with the portrayal of Jannat, formerly a space of death. We get a brief glimpse of the decrepit graveyard from Tilo’s perspective, just after her return from Kashmir. When she returns years later with Miss Jebeen, she could not recognize it, because it “was no longer a derelict place for the forgotten dead.”<sup>54</sup> The reason for the makeover of this space is Anjum, who after her exit from Khwabgah, the *hijras*’ living space, lives for months in the graveyard as a “ravaged, feral spectre, out-haunting every resident djinn and spirit.”<sup>55</sup> Anjum moves there after the trauma of witnessing the 2002 Gujarat riots. Her transition from a form of death-in-life to a renewed sense of life is initiated by a vertiginous shift of perspective where she becomes like a tree: “She lived in the graveyard like a tree. At dawn she saw the crows off and welcomed the bats home. At dusk she did the opposite. Between shifts she conferred with the ghosts of vultures that loomed in her high branches.”<sup>56</sup>

A “ravaged spectre” communes with the ghosts of extinct animals—their absence is like the lingering pain of an “amputation.” These ghostly communions and her sense of herself as a “*mehfil*, a gathering . . . of everybody and nobody, of everything and nothing” slowly transports her back to the realm of the living. When asked about the funerary rituals for *hijras*, she retorts with statements rich with symbolic and intertextual resonances: “Where do old birds go to die? Do they fall on us like stones from the sky? Do we stumble on their bodies in the streets?”<sup>57</sup> These statements take us back intertextually to Sophie Mol’s questions in *God of Small Things* besides referencing the death of the friendly vultures which very few people had noticed.<sup>58</sup>

As Anjum returns to the domain of the “living,” she begins squatting in the graveyard. She builds a one-room tin shack, adds rooms to this rudimentary structure, and rents it out to people who had fallen off the grid. With Saddam’s arrival, Jannat functions as a funeral parlour, with a criterion that Jannat Funeral Services “would only bury those whom the graveyards and imams of the *duniya* (world) had rejected.”<sup>59</sup> Not only living people or ancient birds who had fallen off the grid but also dead people who did not belong to any grid. Non-human inhabitants like Biroo—“a beagle who had either escaped from or outlived its purpose in a pharmaceutical testing lab”—and Comrade Laali, a red-headed mongrel who gave birth to five puppies and as a “mother” was a great “friend” of Tilo’s, also live in Jannat.<sup>60</sup> The uniqueness of this multispecies *duniya* with multiple modes of making kin is signalled to Tilo when she first arrives with Jebeen: “Anjum spoke as though it was a world that Tilo was familiar with, a world that everybody ought to be familiar with; in fact, the only world *worth* being familiar with.”<sup>61</sup> If the *duniya* (world) outside was rapidly growing exclusionary, this *doosri duniya* (other world) was a new form of world-making. The graveyard had turned into “a Noah’s ark of injured animals.” The soil of the graveyard, “a compost pit of ancient provenance,” had become a thriving vegetable garden. Tilo began a “people’s school.”<sup>62</sup> A new commons came into being.

One of the most important symbols of utopian hope that gestures toward alternative futurities is the infant, Miss Udaya Jebeen. Hannah Arendt writes, “action has the closest connection with the human condition of natality; the new beginning inherent in birth can make itself felt in the world only because the newcomer possesses the capacity of beginning something anew.”<sup>63</sup> If mortality is the central category of metaphysics, natality is the political category *par excellence* as, through newness, it is oriented toward action. It is unsurprising that many global cultural works use natality and the promise of reproductive futurity as the herald for hope and the possibility of a new politics, especially during closures. *Ministry* follows this utopian narrative script where Miss Jebeen ties up many of the significations that cross-hatch the deployment of terms like “life” and “death,” simultaneously facilitating the gathering of a queer collectivity.

Miss Jebeen, who grows up in a graveyard, is named after another Miss Jebeen—the Kashmiri militant Musa’s daughter—who was killed in a protest in Kashmir and lies in another graveyard in Srinagar. At one point, Musa says that in Kashmir, “the dead will live forever, and the living are only dead

people, pretending to be alive.”<sup>64</sup> Musa’s comments about living in Kashmir as a state of entrapment in an eternal present, and of death as a mode of escaping and surviving beyond the state of colonial occupation, are relevant to current necropolitical conditions in the Indian-occupied state. Kashmir, often figured as Jannat in the Indian popular and cinematic imaginary, has become a veritable graveyard. In her essay on *Ministry*’s representation of political and ecological “ruin-worlds” in both Delhi and Kashmir, Rituparna Mitra writes: “In the Kashmir sections . . . we find a compelling engagement with the breakdown of all life into waste by the neoliberal and necropolitical state. Recalling Fanon’s ‘combat breathing,’ living and dying take place under noxious state violence, which seeps into and makes the environment unsustainable and toxic.”<sup>65</sup> Conversely, the graveyard, Jannat, in Delhi’s Shajahanabad, becomes a space of life where, as Tilo says in the novel, “the battered angels in the graveyard that kept watch over their battered charges held open the doors between worlds (illegally, just a crack), so that the souls of the present and the departed could mingle, like guests at the same party.” Life became “less determinate” and death “more conclusive” in this space of multispecies gathering.<sup>66</sup>

But “reproductive futurity” doesn’t have the last word.<sup>67</sup> Sticking to her ecocentric vision of human–non-human entanglements ranging from the biggest to the smallest beings, Roy ends with an image of Guih Kyom, the dung beetle, “wide awake and on duty, lying on his back with his legs in the air to save the world in case the heavens fell.”<sup>68</sup> Entomological studies show that the humble dung beetle may save the world by reducing the scale of global warming. By aerating cow dung pats, dung beetles significantly reduce methane release into the atmosphere.<sup>69</sup> Guih Kyom, defending the world with his legs in the air, offset by a miniature image of sparrows and vultures watching like guardian angels—maybe “things would turn out all right in the end.”<sup>70</sup> This is Roy’s most powerful imagining of “peace with the Other”—conjuring forms of entanglement, being-in-common and making kin in marginal spaces and ruin-worlds.

The editors of this volume write that “interrelationality among humans and between humans and non-humans is a moral as well as an existential concern.” The imagination of a multispecies utopian space like Jannat reveals the moral and existential concerns of *Ministry*. Parsing Erich Fromm, the editors of this volume suggest in their introduction that peace in the Other emerges “through being in solidarity, being joyful, and being creative as opposed to acts of peacefulness rooted in our desire to acquire, where we objectify our world and thus

see things as distinct from one another, as discrete entities to possess, use, throw away, or even kill.” The Heideggerian notion of *Bestand* emphasizes the desire to acquire and objectify through processes of Othering humans and non-humans. In contrast, complex, located actions of making kin through processes of solidarity, joy and creativity in lifeworlds of multispecies flourishing like Jannat reveals how peace can emerge not by an obliteration of Otherness, but through acts and practices of learning to live with multiple Others.

## Notes

- 1 Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 2.
- 2 Arundhati Roy, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness: A Novel* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2017). The quotation in the epigraph is from p. 55.
- 3 Jason W. Moore, “Introduction: Anthropocene or Capitalocene? Nature, History and the Crisis of Capitalism,” in *Anthropocene or Capitalocene? Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism*, edited by Jason W. Moore (Oakland, CA: Kairos, 2016), 6. Neoliberalization in India is usually dated to the opening of the markets post then-finance minister Manmohan Singh’s epochal Union budget in 1991, although shifts appeared in the 1980s during Rajiv Gandhi’s regime as well.
- 4 Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teaching of Plants* (Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2015), 25. For Berger’s comment, see “Why Look at Animals?” in *About Looking* (London: Vintage, 1992), 26.
- 5 Martin Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology,” trans. William Lovitt, in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, ed. William Lovitt (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 17.
- 6 Thom Van Dooren, *Flight Ways: Life and Loss at the Edge of Extinction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 5.
- 7 Van Dooren, *Flight Ways*, 12.
- 8 Thom Van Dooren, Deborah Bird Rose, and Matthew Chrulew, “Introduction: Telling Extinction Stories,” in *Extinction Studies: Stories of Time, Death and Generations*, ed. Thom Van Dooren, Deborah Bird Rose, and Matthew Chrulew (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 3.
- 9 Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 2.
- 10 Roy, *Ministry*, 442.
- 11 Roy, *Ministry*, 5.
- 12 Van Dooren, *Flight Ways*, 47.

- 13 For a description of Sampati's sacrifice that prolonged life and drove death away, see Samanth Subramanian, "Vultures," *Granta* 153, November 19, 2020, <https://granta.com/vultures/>.
- 14 Anand Vivek Taneja, "Saintly Animals: The Shifting Moral and Ecological Landscapes of North India," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 35, no. 2 (2015): 204–21.
- 15 Subramanian, "Vultures" (unpaginated). Parsi funerary rituals, in which corpses are exposed atop *dakhmas*, depended on vultures to remove the flesh. This practice has changed recently with the extinction of vultures.
- 16 Thom Van Dooren, *Vulture* (London: Reaktion, 2011), 40.
- 17 For a sympathetic appraisal of local attitudes to the disappearance of vultures in North India from the standpoint of kinship and moral aspiration, see Taneja, "Saintly Animals," 216–20.
- 18 Van Dooren, *Flight Ways*, 57.
- 19 Hazari, quoted in Subhadra Mitra Channa, "A Reading of 'Untouchable': The Autobiography of an Indian Outcaste," in *Life as a Dalit: Views from the Bottom on Caste in India*, ed. Subhadra Mitra Channa and Joan Melcher (New Delhi: Sage, 2013), 73.
- 20 Daya Pawar, *Baluta*, trans. Jerry Pinto (New Delhi: Speaking Tiger, 2015), 73–74.
- 21 Maya Prabhu, "India's Dalit Cattle Skinners Share Stories of Abuse," *Al Jazeera*, August 25, 2016, <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2016/08/india-dalit-cattle-skinners-share-stories-abuse-160816122203107.html>.
- 22 Manjula Menon, M. Prashanthi Devi, and Rangaswamy Mohanraj, *The Decline of *Passer domesticus* in India and Conservation Priorities* (Chennai: Lambert Academic Publishing, 2015), 6–7.
- 23 Rama Devi Menon, "A Voice for the Sparrow," *The Hindu*, May 13, 2010, <https://www.thehindu.com/features/magazine/A-voice-for-the-sparrow/article16566861.ece>.
- 24 Kim Todd, *Sparrow* (London: Reaktion, 2012), 7.
- 25 Todd, *Sparrow*, 8.
- 26 Todd, *Sparrow*, 8.
- 27 Judith Shapiro, *Mao's War Against Nature: Politics and Environment in Revolutionary China* (London and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 17.
- 28 In his essay on Muslim ecological "ethics of the garden," Taneja writes about the ambivalence displayed by the anticolonial figure Maulana Abdul Kalam Azad toward the common sparrow during his time as a political prisoner in Ahmadnagar Fort. Unlike the "affective inspiration" he derives from bulbuls, Azad's initial reaction to the ubiquitous sparrows with whom he shares his cell is one of antagonism. It eventually turns into a form of living with otherness

encapsulated by the Urdu word *sulh*, which means both accommodation and peace and signifies a modality via which the self is transformed. Azad merges the generalizing ethics of “*bagh men jane ki adab*” (the ethics of entering the garden) with a concern of living with and alongside the particularity of individual sparrows. See Anand Vivek Taneja, “Sharing a Room with Sparrows: Maulana Azad and Muslim Ecological Thought,” in *Cosmopolitical Ecologies Across Asia: Places and Practices of Power in Changing Environments*, ed. Riamsara Kuyakanon, Hildegard Diemberger, and David Sneath (London: Routledge, 2022), 228–42.

- 29 Jennifer Wolch and Jody Emel, “Preface,” in *Animal Geographies: Place, Politics and Identity in the Nature-Culture Borderlands*, ed. Jennifer Wolch and Jody Emel (London: Verso, 1998), xi.
- 30 For a recent comparative study of species extinction and genocide, see Susan McHugh, *Love in a Time of Slaughters: Human Animal Stories Against Genocide and Extinction* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2019).
- 31 See, for instance, Navmee Goregaonkar, “Deserted, Demeaned and Distressed: The Lot of Migrant Workers in the Delhi-Haryana Region,” *The Wire*, May 29, 2020, <https://thewire.in/rights/migrant-workers-delhi-haryana-lockdown>
- 32 For a study of Delhi as a “world class city,” see D. Asher Ghertner, *Rule by Aesthetics: World-Class City Making in Delhi* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).
- 33 Amita Baviskar, *Uncivil City: Ecology, Equity and the Commons in Delhi* (New Delhi: Sage, 2020), 4.
- 34 Lalit Batra, “Out of Sight, Out of Mind: Slum Dwellers in ‘World-Class’ Delhi,” in *Finding Delhi: Loss and Renewal in the Megacity*, ed. Bharati Chaturvedi (New Delhi: Penguin, 2010), 27.
- 35 Roy, *Ministry*, 88.
- 36 Roy, *Ministry*, 119.
- 37 For discussions of the “common man,” see Christel Devadawson, *Out of Line: Cartoons, Caricature and Contemporary India* (New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2014).
- 38 Roy, *Ministry*, 415.
- 39 Roy, *Ministry*, 114.
- 40 Roy, *Ministry*, 102–3.
- 41 Roy, *Ministry*, 104.
- 42 Arundhati Roy, “The Doctor and the Saint: The Ambedkar-Gandhi Debate” in *My Seditious Heart: Collected Nonfiction* (London: Haymarket Books, 2019), 697.
- 43 Prabhu, “India’s Dalit Cattle Skinners.”
- 44 Joel Lee, “Odor and Order: How Caste Is Inscribed in Space and Sensoria,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 37, no. 3 (December 2017): 470.

- 45 Roy, *Ministry*, 92.
- 46 Roy, *Ministry*, 92.
- 47 Lee, "Odor," 486.
- 48 Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 268.
- 49 Roy, *Ministry*, 268.
- 50 Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotions* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 85.
- 51 Ratik Asokan, "The Air We Breathe: A Conversation with Arundhati Roy," *The Nation*, July 17, 2017, <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/the-air-we-breathe-a-conversation-with-arundhati-roy/>.
- 52 Roy, *Ministry*, 88.
- 53 Roy, *Ministry*, 432.
- 54 Roy, *Ministry*, 355.
- 55 Roy, *Ministry*, 67.
- 56 Roy, *Ministry*, 7.
- 57 Roy, *Ministry*, 9.
- 58 Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things: A Novel* (New York and London: Random House, 2008), 328.
- 59 Roy, *Ministry*, 84.
- 60 Roy, *Ministry*, 87.
- 61 Roy, *Ministry*, 310.
- 62 Roy, *Ministry*, 405
- 63 Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 9.
- 64 Roy, *Ministry*, 362.
- 65 Rituparna Mitra, "Precarious *Duniyas* in *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*: Life, Death and Repair in 'Ruin-Worlds,'" *Postcolonial Studies* 5, no. 3 (2022): 380–98 at 385.
- 66 Roy, *Ministry*, 404.
- 67 For reproductive futurity, see Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).
- 68 Roy, *Ministry*, 444.
- 69 Atte Pentilla, Eleanor M. Slade, Asko Simojoki, Terhi Riutta, Kari Minniken, and Tomas Roslin. "Quantifying Beetle-Mediated Effects on Gas Fluxes from Dung Pats," *Plos One*. <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article/comments?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0071454>, August 07, 2013.
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# 11 The Earth as a Phobic Object

## Negative Ecology and the Rise of Eco-Fascism

Frédéric Neyrat

In this chapter, I will test and trace the relation between two hypotheses: first, that the Earth has become a phobic object; second, that eco-fascism, which feeds on phobic attitudes toward the Earth, looms at the horizon of planetary politics.<sup>1</sup> If “the Earth has become a phobic object” is a meta-environmental hypothesis (“meta-” in the sense of proposing a general, theoretical hypothesis about our contemporary relation to the planetary environment), then “eco-fascism looms at the horizon of planetary politics” is a meta-political hypothesis (“meta-” in the sense of offering a view on a possible, and threatening, becoming of politics on the whole planet). Both hypotheses are linked, and the goal of my text is to explain why, and how, eco-fascism feeds on Earth-phobia.

By “hypothesis,” I mean a theoretical tool, an abstraction looking for its concrete proofs or its refutation, a philosophical investigation into our environmental—but also, and inextricably, our political, social, and psychological—contemporary situation. Thinking contemporaneity and its vectors, being able to read the signs able to announce a still-inchoate future, is always risky, always a bet, especially when we are—as we are today, when I rewrite this text, in May 2020, after having read its first occurrence in November 2019 at the conference “Peace with the Other”—in the midst of a brutal, global, unprecedented transformation of society, a transformation that COVID-19 triggered, or more precisely, accelerated. This pandemic

compels me to revisit the way I first formulated my two hypotheses and to expand them, as I will do in the conclusion of this chapter. When I first formulated these two meta-propositions, I was thinking about the rise of nationalism and far-rightist populism in the world, about the weakening—if not the collapse—of democracy in many countries, and I began to think that there was a link between this double erosion of democracy and of the biosphere.<sup>2</sup> My reasoning was the following, which I condense below into five points before developing them in the two first sections, the first devoted to environmental collapse and the second to eco-fascism:

- (1) The deterioration—if not the collapse—of the planetary environment seems more and more unavoidable;
- (2) Governments, which are made up of people who obviously read the newspapers and who have heard about the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reports, do not deny the seriousness of the environmental situation: they know it, and their political choices depend on that knowledge;
- (3) As every year's annual UN climate conference proves, governments do not seem to lean toward an attempt to really stop the causes of climate change, loss of biodiversity, the acidification of oceans, etc.;
- (4) If governments gave up on any serious economic, political, or ecological attempt to tackle the causes of environmental disasters, then they will have to try to deal with their unavoidable effects: famine, riots and several sorts of social unrest, economic uncertainty, the exponential increase in the number of environmental refugees and the nationalist, xenophobic surges coming from it;<sup>3</sup>
- (5) To prevent these social effects from happening, to be able to manage them—even to take advantage of them—governments will proactively undo democracy. Hence what I call “eco-fascism”: that is to say, a new form of fascism that is not first based on the substance-based idea of race or nation but on a rejecting relation to the environment, insofar as the deterioration of the latter—judged unavoidable—threatens the social and economic order, which can be called, without emphasis, capitalism. Eco-fascism does not aim at preserving the biosphere but at preserving a group or a class from the collapsing biosphere.

Eco-fascism, therefore, has a specific form of relation to the environment, which is clearly a negative one: in the eco-fascist frame, the environment is a sort of phobic object, an object of fear and distrust that has to be contained. In the third section, I will propose a genealogy of this phobic relation, which I call “negative ecology,” leading to the eco-fascist war against the environment. If eco-fascism uses the collapse of the ecosphere as a political tool for producing an authoritarian regime, negative ecology reveals a psychological tendency to paradoxically reject what we know perfectly well cannot be rejected, namely, our terrestrial ties—our embodied condition on Earth, our material relation with the ecosphere as living, breathing, and feeling beings. Of course, modernity might be (partially) defined as the anthropocentric form of society built against the non-human world, as human exceptionalism—that is, as a form of denial of our terrestrial belonging; but negative ecology paradoxically recognizes the environmental reality, while trying to neutralize it, to stay away from its frightening reality. At the very (modern) place where there was an ontological divide based on a rejection of relations to the environment, eco-fascism builds political and technological walls that do not deny the environment but include it as the central element of a new form of governmentality. This inchoate form of governmentality has a negative ecology—a phobia of the environment—as its central paradigm.

Negative ecology can consequently be defined as a pathology of Otherness—the Otherness of the Earth, of any terrestrial reality, human bodies and even viruses. In the fourth section, I will argue that, to heal from eco-phobia, we need to create terrestrial alliances—an alliance being neither a fusion with the environment nor its phobic rejection under the form of protective walls. Formed at the occasion of political struggles against the building of a pipeline (like in North Dakota recently) or of an airport (like in Notre-Dame-des-Landes in France, as I explain in the fourth section), these terrestrial alliances might be a good social basis to redirect technology. As philosopher Walter Benjamin helps us understand in the fourth section of this chapter, technology should not be seen as a tool used to master nature and vanquish it (in what would necessarily be a suicidal victory for all of us) but as a mediation helping us to resymbolize our relationship with the planet, that is to say, also with ourselves. If peace is possible with Earth, it will happen not first with a new contract, new rules, and norms but first with a new psychological-existential relation with Earth able to promote, against negative ecology and beyond local struggles, planetary alliances.

## On Collapsology

Recently translated in English, two books illustrate a new trend of thought called “collapsology”: *How Everything Can Collapse: A Manual for Our Times* and *Another End of the World Is Possible: Living the Collapse (and Not Merely Surviving It)*.<sup>4</sup> The argument of these two books is the following: because of the global rise of temperature, loss of biodiversity, the infertility of soils, water scarcity, peak oil, and other depletions, the collapse of our civilization is unavoidable and unmanageable. Every possibility that we might conceive as a way to avoid the planetary collapse is delusional. One might contemplate, for example, sources of energy able to replace oil (once oil will be either depleted or too expensive to be exploited) like solar energy or even nuclear plants; but the authors argue that, to develop any alternative energy in a global context, one needs oil (to transport raw materials and workers through the world, for instance). The “thermo-industrial civilization” is a trap: we cannot escape it, and when we try to escape it, we strengthen the causes leading to global collapse. We cannot, à la Hans Jonas or à la Jean-Pierre Dupuy, use the worst-case scenario as an exhortation to act in the present to prevent the worst-case scenario from happening.<sup>5</sup> Given the inevitability of global collapse—or more accurately, as they explain, the collapses, always plural—the authors of *How Everything Can Collapse* and *Another End of the World Is Possible* consider it necessary to grieve the futures we had dreamt about—futures of progress, easy life, and smart phones—and to modify our representation of human society and of the other-than-humans. Against the individualist and competition-oriented scheme at the core of any survivalist strategy, they insist—leaning on the anarchist thinker Kropotkin—on “mutual aid” and solidarity, that is to say, on the positive aspects of a moral shift that our current civilization makes infeasible: *Another End of the World Is Possible* explores the passage from denial to mourning and from mourning to resilience and spiritual, existential renewals, hence its last line about a “happy collapse.”

We should not imagine that the authors of these influential books just speak for themselves. The idea that the future is rapidly dissolving into global warming is the reason for which movements like Youth Climate Movement or Extinction Rebellion recently emerged and became very popular.<sup>6</sup> These movements are not millenarian. Their members do not use an apocalyptic religious vocabulary; they use the vocabulary of scientists, of the IPCC’s reports, to show that governments do almost nothing to act on the causes of climate

change. Thus, if knowledgeable, responsible citizens, pro-Kropotkin thinkers and activists, are able to diagnose the gravity of the global environmental situation, it would be rationally indefensible to argue that CEOs, leaders of world organizations, and heads of state do not know how serious the situation is. Actually, they know; but they have a different idea concerning the “happy collapse,” another plan—a Plan B that is not about changing the political situation but about escaping it. As journalist Evan Osnos explains in a famous 2017 article titled “Doomsday Prep for the Super-Rich,”

Survivalism, the practice of preparing for a crackup of civilization, tends to evoke a certain picture: the woodsman in the tinfoil hat, the hysteric with the hoard of beans, the religious doomsayer. But in recent years survivalism has expanded to more affluent quarters, taking root in Silicon Valley and New York City, among technology executives, hedge-fund managers, and others in their economic cohort.<sup>7</sup>

Osnos’s article documents how the very wealthy build underground bunkers with air-filtration systems in Kansas or buy houses in New Zealand, which is supposed to be safer than other places in the world: still democratic, self-sufficient in terms of food and energy, and (an interesting feature in an epoch of social distancing) “distant” enough from everything else in the world to be protected from chaos—at least for a while. What Osnos’s article shows is that the financial elite does not think about how to avoid the causes of chaos but about being at least momentarily protected from its consequences. Would it be unreasonable to argue that this nihilistic state of mind is perhaps also at play at the political level?

## The Rise of Eco-Fascism

First, as I have already said, it would be almost impossible to imagine that everyone, from activists to hedge-fund managers, knows, except prime ministers and presidents. It is even not necessary to be a Marxist to know that the political and the economical domains greatly intersect (to use a euphemism). After all, the French president Macron used to be an investment banker. So they know. Even when they seem to deny it, they know—like Trump, calling global warming a “Chinese hoax” and also a “total hoax,” “bullshit” and “pseudoscience” while trying to build seawalls to protect his Ireland golf course from rising sea levels and water erosion. Even when they do not seem to

acknowledge the anthropogenic origin of climate change, they know about its catastrophic consequences.<sup>8</sup>

They know, but they do not act. Or not enough. Or not quickly enough. Just one illustration:

The majority of the carbon emission reduction pledges for 2030 that 184 countries made under the Paris Agreement aren't nearly enough to keep global warming well below 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit (2 degrees Celsius). Some countries won't achieve their pledges, and some of the world's largest carbon emitters will continue to increase their emissions, according to a panel of world-class climate scientists. Their report, "The Truth Behind the Paris Agreement Climate Pledges," warns that by 2030, the failure to reduce emissions will cost the world a minimum of \$2 billion per day in economic losses from weather events made worse by human-induced climate change. Moreover, weather events and patterns will hurt human health, livelihoods, food, and water, as well as biodiversity.<sup>9</sup>

Hence what I call the eco-fascism meta-political hypothesis. According to Karl Polanyi, the "fascist solution of the impasse reached by liberal capitalism" in the 1930s "can be described as a reform of market economy achieved at the price of the extirpation of all democratic institutions." But today the impasse concerns first the ecological situation and only second the market economy as a correlate. By this order of priority (first, the ecological), I do not mean, of course, that what Polanyi calls market economy, or what we can call capitalism or even neoliberalism, is not responsible for the environmental degradation. I mean that the eco-fascist political aim is the following: dealing with the social effects of the environmental collapse while trying to maintain, as much and as far as it is possible, the development of the economy. In 1973, Ivan Illich was already imagining a "managerial fascism," which can be defined as a "bureaucratic management of human survival":

People could be so frightened by the increasing evidence of growing population and dwindling resources that they would voluntarily put their destiny into the hands of Big Brothers. Technocratic caretakers could be mandated to set limits on growth in every dimension, and to set them just at the point beyond which further production would mean utter destruction. Such a *dystopia* could maintain the industrial age at the highest endurable level of output.<sup>10</sup>

Eco-fascism is an authoritarian way to “manage,” as Illich says, the catastrophic consequences, and not the causes, of the collapse of ecospheres—or, if not their collapse, their blatant and probably irreversible deterioration. Such eco-fascism might be nationalistic, but not necessarily. It is true that the massacres in El Paso, Texas in August 2019 and in Christchurch, New Zealand, in March 2019, demonstrated how anti-immigrant white nationalism can be reinterpreted—by those who declare themselves as “eco-fascists”—in terms of anti-refugee environmentalism, calling for mass murder to save trees. Thus, we can understand how classic forms of nationalism might use so-called “protection of the environment” as a way to “protect” the nation (even when this protection is nonexistent, or hides the mere will to increase the wealth of a class on the backs of the nation).<sup>11</sup> But we also need to imagine a new form of nationalism, less based on the affirmation of a conquering national identity and the expansion of its *Lebensraum* (living space) than on the survival of this identity in a collapsing world, in which water is going to be more and more a rare good as global warming leads to the evaporation of water and consequently makes it unavailable. One illustration of this new kind of nationalism: during the campaign for the 2019 European elections, Marine Le Pen—the leader of the French far-rightist party the Rassemblement National—argued during a political meeting that “The local must be given priority over the global.”<sup>12</sup> For Le Pen, the nation is less defined as race than as one implementation of the local, as an “ecosystem” (I still quote Le Pen’s discourse) that must be protected against migrants and refugees seen as “invasive species.” The nation is thus less a substance (*Blut und Boden*) than a sort of immunological protection able to secure the “local,” that is to say, non-global, identity. Note that for the Rassemblement National ideology, the global is not—not openly, at least—synonymous with cosmopolitanism (as it used to be the case in its ideology of the 1980s) but with what attacks the ecological, biological, and economic conditions of survival of “the local.” Hence an emerging political function of the nation casts the nation not as a substantial centre but as an immunizing periphery. In this developing ideology, nationalism would fulfill an immune function, more reactive than active, using ecological discourse to ensure not the maintenance of an identity but of the material conditions of possibility for this identity to persist. Not a living space, but a surviving space. This developing ideology is also clearly at stake in Duterte’s “green authoritarianism”:

Duterte has channeled collective anxiety and resentment not just into a classist drug war and a nationalist assault on liberalism, but also into a performative green authoritarianism that promises to punish polluters (especially poor “squatters”) for subjecting the nation to environmental risk. Similarly, he has co-opted the rhetoric of the climate-justice movement, as for example when he said during an Al Jazeera interview: “Who’s responsible for the climate? Who’s responsible for Haiyan? Who’s responsible for the monsters of tornado? It’s industrialized countries. We had nothing to do with it.”<sup>13</sup>

As we saw in this section, eco-fascism is not a kind of politics aiming at acting on the causes of ecological collapse but rather at managing its consequences. This management demands a restructuring of governmentality to preserve the structure of domination. Eco-fascism would then be a form of politics that, in the future—a future that could get closer and closer due to strong pandemic episodes—would be in charge of the strict rationing of food, energy resources, and modalities of access to transport and communication, in a national framework where there would be no counter-power, only the omnipresent figure of a despot. It is unclear that an eco-fascist government would need to be concerned about the population’s health or subsistence: in times of ecological disaster, the survival of the group in power might depend on drones, robots, and artificial intelligence—any biopolitical concern (about health, hygiene, birthrate, and longevity) being a mere waste of time and energy. Eco-fascism would sign biopolitics’ death warrant. Consequently, the most likely kind of eco-fascism would be the one trying to save the ruling class by eliminating or at least immiserating the rest of the population, only preserving the minimum number of people necessary for the technical maintenance of the capitalist technologies still capable of functioning after major ecological disruptions. In this extreme form of eco-fascism that perhaps only cinema has anticipated, even nationalism would be a waste of time.<sup>14</sup>

## **Birth of Negative Ecology**

The first section seems to offer the following lesson: for the kind of eco-fascist politics I trace here, the main concern is not to preserve the environment but to preserve a group from the environment. For this reason, I propose the concept of negative ecology, which I define first as an attempt to build dams



against the environment itself, in order to save the lives of privileged groups to the detriment of others. In this political frame, the Others are those who are intentionally and blatantly exposed to environmental death—hence the necessity for a strong, and maybe renewed, environmental justice movement.<sup>15</sup> If, therefore, eco-fascism's ecology is negative, this is also because it denies others the right to live. Finally, I think we can add a third meaning to the term “negative ecology”: if even national leaders recognize the threat of a civilizational collapse, then the fact that these leaders intentionally burn forests (as in Brazil) and every environmental rule (as in the United States) should be interpreted as a deliberate acceleration of environmental destructions, a way to accelerate the eco-fascist restructuring itself. In this sense, the governments ruled by Bolsonaro in Brazil, Trump in the US, and Duterte in Philippines (amongst others), can be considered as first steps toward the establishment of eco-fascism.

Philosophically, where does this relation with the environment come from? As I argue, eco-fascism's negative ecology does not deny the environmental situation but recognizes it—thus we need to understand this recognition. The reason for a possible eco-fascist contamination everywhere in the world is that the Earth, understood as Gaia, as the ecosystem of every ecosystem, seems to generate nothing except fear, or “eco-anxiety,” to borrow from Noah Theriault's already quoted essay on the Philippines:

The Philippines has undergone rapacious deforestation, resource extraction, and ecological degradation over the past century, and this has come at the expense of workers, peasants, and the environments that sustain them. Faced with what seems like a constant string of landslides, floods, typhoons, and other disasters, the Philippines is not just one of the most “disaster-prone” countries in the world, it is also one of the most “vulnerable” to the effects of climate change. Surveys have found that some 72% of Filipinos say they are “very concerned” about climate change, and some 85% report they are feeling its effects.<sup>16</sup>

This fear is certainly a planetary fear, even though one should not erase huge differences of perception and exposure depending on populations in question—hence environmental racism, that is to say, the disproportionate impact of environmental hazards on people of colour (like placement of minority communities in proximity to toxic waste). Yet the fear circulates globally and creates a sort of social parataxis (a juxtaposition of unmediated social

realities), with on the one hand overexposure (of minorities, racialized people) and on the Other, overprotection (CEOs building bunkers or Elon Musk dreaming about an escape to Mars). This global fear perhaps explains why a thinker like Bruno Latour completely changed his philosophical perspective: first a lover of technology explaining why we should “love our monsters”—our artificial, “hybridized” creatures—and reject any attempt to criticize technology, he seems now aware of the technological danger and describes Earth as “terrifying,” a source of “horror.” The Earth is more and more seen as a monster, Mother Earth turned into a ghoul—a nightmarish return of a repressed “Nature.” Climate change does not reveal Earth as a beast that we cannot tame but as a Lovecraftian creature that we do not want to face any longer, Medusa longing for our gaze.<sup>17</sup> Unable to find a mirrored shield thanks to which we could see the Gorgon, we just prepare for a blind war against the Earth.

The war against the Earth is not something new and should be understood as the perfect implementation of what Carolyn Merchant called “the death of nature,” which is the military victory of the phallogocentric rationalism that modernity has favoured. Since the seventeenth century, the war against the Earth has had a specific goal: submitting the Earth to a will to reprogramming. For Descartes, nature is no longer “some deity, or other sort of imaginary power” but “matter itself”—a flexible matter that we allowed ourselves to transform depending on our needs and fantasies. If the “book of nature,” to borrow from Galileo Galilei, is “written in mathematical language,” then the Earth—as the terrestrial embodiment of nature—is a page with letters and figures that we can easily digitalize and reassemble in a new form: an Earth 2.0. Earth 2.0 is Earth mastered by the sons of Descartes: the programmers who conceived Google Earth (a 3D representation of Earth based on satellite imagery), the geo-engineers who nowadays promise to master the climate and kill nature for good. Killing nature and generating its digital resurrection are two sides of the same coin, two sides that we need to consider if we want to understand the other dimension of the war against nature: not only its electronic resurrection, its 3D modelling and reprogramming, but also its exploitation, the extractivist economy leading to fracking and fires in the Amazonian rainforest. We might think that nature’s mathematization, thanks to which science and technology can develop, underpins extractivism; but on a psycho-political level, it is more useful to highlight that it is the split between digitalization and extractivism that determines environmental collapse: the more the Earth is subjected to its digital transmigration into a geo-engineered Earth 2.0, the more the real

Earth is seen as a remainder that one would like to flush, hoping that such a “magic” act would either reverse global warming or at least protect the class of magicians and their eco-fascist protectors.

But in parallel with the formation of the Capitalocene—or should we call it the Digitalocene?—and its not disinterested attempt to master the forces of nature, an environmental awareness rose up. As historians Christophe Bonneuil and Jean-Baptiste Fressoz demonstrated, sensitivity to the environment did not suddenly appear in the 1960s with the birth of the US environmentalist movement: environmental sensitivity has accompanied, from the beginning, the development of the Capitalocene, the fabrication of Watt’s engine and the spread of the industrial revolution. For example, Bonneuil and Fressoz explain that, at the end of eighteenth century, people were already thinking about the connection between climate change and deforestation—already in fierce opposition to deforestation, already writing petitions and creating associations denouncing industrial pollution and the maladies resulting from it. But what I call negative ecology is the terrible inversion of this awareness: not the mere production of a split between humankind and “nature,” that is to say, the production of an ontological form of exceptionalism withdrawing humankind from the rest of the world, but a “pragmatic,” concrete, cynical way to use environmental awareness as a form of authoritarian governmentality (assuming that a governmentality that does not really care for its population is not a mere *flatus vocis*). The reason for that form of cynical governmentality is that Earth 2.0 was not able to completely replace the “real” Earth: the digital was not completely able to become an offshore, parallel universe, and cyberspace was not able to completely get rid of the effluvium coming from acidified oceans. The Digitalocene has a leak, which fuels negative ecology.

Does it mean that what I call negative ecology is a planetary destiny, that everybody in the world feels but also fears the environment? This is not the case, as I will explain in the next section. However, to defeat the war against the terrestrial environment, we first need to know what must be confronted.

## Terrestrial Alliances and Planetary Technology

Actually, I see two ways to defeat the war against the Earth: a micro-political and a macro-political one. The first one deals with ecopolitical activism; the second deals with the state and technology to be implemented at the national

and global level. Both should be connected in the future if we want to prevent the war against the Earth from being the best way to fuel the collapse of the biosphere.

The micro-political solution takes place when some people decide to defend their land, their forest, or their lake against geo-capitalist predation, against the building of a dam, an airport, a pipeline (like in North Dakota recently), or an entertainment park. What happens during these political struggles might be termed “terrestrial alliances.”<sup>18</sup> A terrestrial alliance is not a fusion of humans and non-humans or the ontological affirmation that everything is One, but a form of political correspondence between different entities. When in France, at Notre-Dame-des-Landes, activists against the building of an airport used to say: “We don’t defend nature, we’re nature defending itself (nous ne défendons pas la nature, nous sommes la nature qui se défend),” note that in the second part of the sentence, two subjects are at play, *nous* (we) and *la nature* (nature): these two subjects are allied in a struggle, thanks to the struggle, but they do not constitute one merged natural subject. However, I do not mean to suggest that no identification is possible between humans and non-humans (human subjects and a forest, for instance), but I argue that such an identification is what Rancière called an “impossible identification”: an identification precisely happening when one cannot put oneself in the Other’s place, because the Otherness of the Other ultimately also prevents me from identifying with myself. The French activists who cast themselves as the forest under attack are not engaged in a Deleuzian becoming-forest during which the forest and the human subject lose their boundaries: to the contrary, their rallying cry signals the immediate and absolute appearance of a common being in which nature’s Otherness is expressed as Other thanks to a human mediation.

In a situation of terrestrial alliance, we are not so far away from Aldo Leopold’s “thinking like a mountain” recommendation: What is at stake is not to become the mountain but to make the mountain appear as the lasting space-time. It is thanks to such a shift in thinking that the hunter and the wolf can identify with that which cannot be reduced to what they are. This sort of impossible identification is a good way to escape negative ecology’s trap: instead of seeing the Earth—as such, or metonymically present in a specific forest or a lake—as a mere external object to be mastered or to be feared, we can see the Earth as a dimension of alterity that constitutes our political relation to the world. In a terrestrial alliance, Earth’s Otherness is neither seen

as purely external nor dissolved in any oneness. In this sense, a terrestrial alliance is a situation in which fear can be replaced by care or included in care—in care, we fear for the Other because we do not want the Other to die, not because the Other is perceived as a monster to be neutralized. However, how might we use the lessons of these micro-political alliances to imagine a possible change in the technological-economic structure of the state? Is there a macro-political way to prevent governments and heads of state from developing “green authoritarianism” and “managerial fascism”?

Philosopher Walter Benjamin can help us to sketch out a macro-political perspective. Benjamin wrote several texts dealing with fascism, and he always connected fascism with a certain conception of technology and nature. Benjamin’s thesis is the following: in fascism, war is thought of as an expression of an idealized, mysticized nature, an idealization that is also at stake in the fascist representation of the nation, which is seen as natural and pure; that is to say, completely mythical. In “Theories of German Fascism” (1930), speaking of the “landscape of the front” during World War I, Benjamin wrote: “Etching the landscape with flaming banners and trenches, technology wanted to recreate the heroic features of German Idealism.” But what really happened is that technology

gave shape to the apocalyptic face of nature and reduced nature to silence—even though this technology had the power to give nature its voice. War, in the metaphysical abstraction in which the new nationalism believes, is nothing other than the attempt to redeem, mystically and without mediation, the secret of nature, understood idealistically, through technology. This secret, however, can also be used and illuminated via a technology mediated by the human scheme of things.<sup>19</sup>

Against the idealization of nature, which could be also identified as another root of what I have called the Digitalocene and its will to a total virtualization of the Earth, Benjamin imagines another use of technology: a technology that would neither “silence” nature nor give her an “apocalyptic face.” This opposition between two sorts of technology is also at stake in “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility” (1935–1939). In this text, Benjamin famously opposes the “aestheticizing of politics” that fascism practices. “*All efforts to aestheticize politics,*” he writes, “*culminate in one point. That one point is war.*”<sup>20</sup> As he observes in the last line of his text, communism

replies to fascism's aestheticizing of politics "*by politicizing art,*" which is the very thing that Benjamin advocates.<sup>21</sup> What Benjamin calls the aestheticizing (of politics) is clearly linked to the idealization (of nature and the nation) that he was criticizing in his essay on German fascism. In the aestheticizing of politics, technology is used to master nature, a mastery revealing its success in war, which sets "a goal for mass movements on the grandest scale" and mobilizes "all of today's technological resources." But through the politicizing of art, another function would be given to technology: "The destruction caused by war furnishes proof that society was not mature enough to make technology its organ, that technology was not sufficiently developed to master the elemental forces of society."<sup>22</sup>

This passage is so important that we find almost exactly the same sentences in the first page of "Theories of German Fascism." And in "One-Way Street," published in 1928, Benjamin argues that technology should not be the mastery of nature but "of the relation between nature and man."<sup>23</sup> Mastering the relation between nature and human beings, instead of mastering nature, neither requires the extractivist nor the digital annihilation of the Earth that we studied in the previous section but a redirecting of society's "elemental forces." Amongst these forces, one might identify the destruction that Freud named "death drive": Is it not also the death drive that is aestheticized in war, be it a war between nations or a war against the environment? Redirecting our death drive but also our capacity to take care of others and to defend what we love (our life drive) will be only possible thanks to education, which Benjamin associates with technology, understood as a mediation between nature and humankind, and not as a tool for power. In this new aesthetic education of humankind, we could imagine a new Great Narrative (new representations, new values) that society would generate and promote apropos the Earth and its place in the cosmos: let us imagine a technology whose goal would not be to violently *ex-tract* energy from the Earth, but to *in-sert* the Earth into the cosmos; let us imagine a technology that would help us to perceive the correspondences—not the fusion—between human beings and animals, plants, and stones but also super-novae, with whom we share some components. After all, to think like a mountain is to remember that technology shares with mountains a material ground: its geological components. Understood as related to the Earth, technology could be used to shape terrestrial alliances instead of building dams against the environment.

But alas, at the macro-level like at the micro-level, terrestrial alliances cannot happen in a peaceful way. Benjamin knew very well that fascism would not be defeated only with good intentions. This is why, in “Theories of German Fascism,” he both condemns the “mysticism of war” and “pacifism’s clichéd ideal of peace.”<sup>24</sup> Benjamin knew that what he called the politicizing of aesthetics, or communism, would imply resolutely stopping fascism and anything else that destroys the conditions of possibility for justice and happiness. For Benjamin, as for us, the problem is the same: changing the function of technology will not happen without political struggles that modify the economic structure of society. This is why Benjamin wrote that war sets “a goal for mass movements on the grandest scale *while preserving traditional property relations*”; he also wrote that war mobilizes “all of today’s technological resources *while maintaining property relations*” (my emphasis in both).<sup>25</sup> In other words, redirecting society’s death drive away from war and away from any sort of xenophobia or persecution of minorities will not be possible without something able to function as a class struggle aimed at changing the economic structure of property and society. Maybe “class struggle” is not the right term; sometimes I prefer to speak about a stratum struggle, that is to say, a form of political affirmation based on our geological awareness—our ability to “think like a mountain”—and the ways through which we could neutralize the eco-fascist geo-power.<sup>26</sup> Planetary peace will not happen without tectonic shifts.

## Conclusion: Viral Fear or Planetary Alliances?

Will we be able to stop the development and the spreading of the negative ecology underpinning the eco-fascist future? Are we sure that even the social-democrat regimes will not develop their own forms of eco-fascism, using police and the army to reject environmental refugees while building consent about eco-biopolitical rules on the national frame? My fear is that eco-fascism could spread everywhere, in blatant nationalist regimes but also in authoritarian neoliberal democracies.

The pandemic situation in which we were immersed did not seem to trigger a counter-movement able to defeat eco-fascism. In a way, things worsened. Governments did not privilege democratic solutions to deal with COVID-19. In France, for instance, the government decreed an “*état d’urgence sanitaire*” (health state of emergency) that was extended in 2022, suspending freedoms

and giving all the power to the executive branch. Concerning our terrestrial reality, it is worth noting that what one calls “social distancing” is first a physical distancing; nobody prevents you from experiencing social proximity via Skype or Zoom, for it is the body of the Other—as environmental index—that has become a phobic object, the possible carrier of your own death. One question seems, alas, to eclipse all others: What is the technology that will be able to neutralize human bodies (“sheltering” them, that is, severing them from each other) while enabling the unrestrained development of the economy?

This form of proactive neutralization of human bodies had been anticipated by Ivan Illich, in a paragraph that just follows the above quoted line about the “dystopia” that “could maintain the industrial age at the highest endurable level of output”:

Man would live in a plastic bubble that would protect his survival and make it increasingly worthless. Since man’s tolerance would become the most serious limitation to growth, the alchemist’s endeavour would be renewed in the attempt to produce a monstrous type of man fit to live among reason’s dreams. A major function of engineering would become the psychogenetic tooling of man himself as a condition for further growth. People would be confined from birth to death in a world-wide schoolhouse, treated in a world-wide hospital, surrounded by television screens, and the man-made environment would be distinguishable in name only from a world-wide prison.<sup>27</sup>

This nightmarish vision might not have been produced in 1973, but today. Or tomorrow: COVID-19 enabled some virtual economic-technological plans to become real, like remote learning replacing in-class teaching, the development of “telehealth,” of so-called “smart cities” conjuring up artificial bubbles severed from the dangerous, grey reality of the green world, with almost everything being able to be home delivered (for well-off people, at least). As Anuja Sonalkar, the CEO of Steer Tech, a Maryland-based company selling self-parking technology, said in a perfect eco-phobic moment: “Humans are biohazards, machines are not.”<sup>28</sup> COVID-19 fuels contemporary eco-phobia and the war against terrestrial reality, and artificial intelligence might be thought as the best way to implement the negative ecology driving eco-fascism.

In a way, we should not be so surprised that a coronavirus strengthens eco-phobia: deforestation drives wild animals out of their natural habitat



and puts them in contact with domestic farms close to peri-urban areas, a godsend for viruses that can then spread from wild animals to humans. The more biodiversity disappears, the more viral the globe becomes: as ecologist Philippe Grandcolas notes,

This is mainly a problem of simplifying ecosystems, of fragmenting natural habitats where diversity declines. The capacity of infectious agents to be transmitted from one person to another is reinforced, their prevalence increases, their enemies can disappear. . . . In France, we kill hundreds of thousands of foxes every year. However, they are predators of rodents carrying mites and can transmit Lyme disease through their bites. There are no angels or demons in nature, the species can be both at the same time. The bat is not only a reservoir of viruses, it is also a predator of insects as well as a pollinator of certain plants.<sup>29</sup>

As described by Grandcolas, bats perfectly illustrate Otherness, understood as what we cannot define a priori, at the risk of stifling it. Consequently, if we want to defeat COVID-19 and the next virus that will unavoidably come (from a forest or from permafrost thawing), we need to deeply question its condition of possibility: the Capitalocene and its eco-phobia, its rejection of Otherness as a biohazard. To do that, we will need to form planetary alliances: by this, I mean terrestrial alliances able to exceed their local radiance and their national configuration, thanks to a technology commensurate to the planet—a geo-technology, or even a cosmo-technology—put in service of the flourishing of human and other-than-human forms of life. Without these audacious coalitions, I fear that peace will only look like a form of life in digital parameters, for the wealthy ones, at least; for the poor, war will be a daily-life attempt to survive in a collapsed environment, overheated and beset by viruses.

## Notes

- 1 See my article “Feu à volonté: nécro-police, nationalisme réactif, éco-fascisme,” *lundimatin*#206, September 9, 2019, <https://lundi.am/Feu-a-volonte-Frederic-Neyrat>.
- 2 As I make the final corrections to this chapter, my pessimistic views unfortunately seem to be corroborated by the ongoing war in Ukraine.
- 3 In 2018, the World Bank Group reported that “by 2050, without concrete climate and development action, just over 143 million people—or around 3 percent

- of the population across Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and South Asia—could be forced to move within their own countries to escape the slow-onset impacts of climate change”: World Bank Group, “Internal Climate Migration in Latin America,” *Groundswell: Preparing for Internal Climate Migration*, Policy Note #3, 2018, <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/983921522304806221/pdf/124724-BRI-PUBLIC-NEWSERIES-Groundswell-note-PN3.pdf>, 1. For a specific, concrete example, see “Central American Farmers Head to the U.S., Fleeing Climate Change,” *New York Times*, April 13, 2019.
- 4 Pablo Servigne and Raphaël Stevens, *How Everything Can Collapse: A Manual for Our Times*, trans. Andrew Brown (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2020); Raphaël Stevens, Gauthier Chapelle, and Pablo Servigne, *Another End of the World Is Possible: Living the Collapse (and Not Merely Surviving It)*, trans. Geoffrey Samuel (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2021).
  - 5 On this sort of rational catastrophism, see my essay “The Biopolitics of Catastrophe, or How to Avert the Past and Regulate the Future,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 115, no. 2 (April 2016): 247–65.
  - 6 See the website of XR (Extinction Rebellion): <https://rebellion.earth/>.
  - 7 Evan Osnos, “Doomsday Prep for the Super-Rich,” *The New Yorker*, January 23, 2017.
  - 8 Even Putin has ended up acknowledging—in 2019—climate change, even though he continues to deny its anthropogenic origin. See “Nobody Knows Why Climate Changes, Says Putin,” *Brussels Times*, December 19, 2019; and “Russia Announces Plan to ‘Use the Advantages’ of Climate Change,” *The Guardian*, January 5, 2020.
  - 9 Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), 245. On freedom, see pp. 266–67.
  - 10 Ivan Illich, *Tools for Conviviality* (Glasgow: Fontana/Collins, [1973] 1975), 115–16.
  - 11 We should never forget that Nazis were not real environmentalists: protecting nature was a way to justify racial crimes and the doctrine of *Lebensraum*. See Johann Chapoutot, *The Law of Blood: Thinking and Acting as a Nazi*, trans. Miranda Richmond Mouillot (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 23–63, esp. 31–32.
  - 12 Lucie Delaporte, “Le ‘localisme’ signe la victoire des identitaires au RN,” *Mediapart*, April 16, 2019; and Lucie Soullier and Nabil Wakim, “Le virage écolo-identitaire de Marine Le Pen,” *Le Monde*, April 15, 2019. See also Kate Aranoff, “The European Far Right’s Environmental Turn,” *Dissent*, May 19, 2019, [https://www.dissentmagazine.org/online\\_articles/the-european-far-rights-environmental-turn](https://www.dissentmagazine.org/online_articles/the-european-far-rights-environmental-turn).
  - 13 Noah Theriault, “Euphemisms We Die By: On Eco-Anxiety, Necropolitics, and Green Authoritarianism in the Philippines,” in *Beyond Populism: Angry Politics*

- and the *Twilight of Neoliberalism*, ed. Jeff Maskovsky and Sophie Bjork-James (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2019), 182–205, at 195. This essay describes very well the “greenwashing of authoritarianism” in the Philippines and how “Duterte’s engagements in ecopolitics” help to “coordinate collective anxiety about environmental and climatic disruption in service to a broader authoritarian agenda,” how “environmental protection and disaster management have become two of the most important ways in which Duterte performs his commitment to impose public order and discipline” (183).
- 14 Consider Richard Fleischer’s film *Soylent Green* (1973), for instance, which I analyze, among other films, in “Le cinéma éco-apocalyptique. Anthropocène, Cosmophagie, Anthropophagie,” in “Vivre la catastrophe,” edited by Yoann Moreau, special issue, *Communications* 96 (2015): 67–79.
  - 15 On environmental justice, see Gordon Walker, *Environmental Justice: Concepts, Evidence and Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012).
  - 16 Theriault, “Euphemisms We Die By,” 195.
  - 17 On the metaphor of the beast, see Clive Hamilton, *Earthmasters: The Dawn of the Age of Climate Engineering* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), 100.
  - 18 Concerning the concept of alliance and terrestrial alliance, I lean here on the groundbreaking article by Léna Balaud and Antoine Chopot, “Suivre la forêt: une entente terrestre de l’action politique,” *Terrestres*, November 18, 2018, <https://www.terrestres.org/2018/11/15/suivre-la-foret-une-entente-terrestre-de-l-action-politique/>, as well as on their book *Nous ne sommes pas seuls: Politiques des soulèvements terrestres* (Paris: Seuil, 2021). On the idea of “interspecies resistance,” see Katarzyna Olga Beilin and Suryanarayanan Sainath, “The War Between Amaranth and Soy: Interspecies Resistance to Transgenic Soy Agriculture in Argentina,” *Environmental Humanities* 9, no. 2 (2017): 204–29.
  - 19 Walter Benjamin, “Theories of German Fascism,” in *Selected Writings*, vol. 2, pt. 1, 1927–1930 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 319.
  - 20 Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility,” in *Selected Writings*, vol. 4, 1938–1940, 269.
  - 21 Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility,” 270.
  - 22 Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility,” 270.
  - 23 Benjamin, “One-Way Street,” in *Selected Writings*, vol. 1, 1913–1926, 487.
  - 24 Benjamin, “Theories of German Fascism,” 313.
  - 25 Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility,” 269.

- 26 On the idea of stratum struggle, see my article “Marx with the Stars: Notes for an Escape Plan from the Current Era,” *Electra* 1 (Spring 2018): 100–11.
- 27 Illich, *Tools for Conviviality*, 116.
- 28 Quoted in Naomi Klein, “Screen New Deal,” *The Intercept*, May 8, 2020.
- 29 Philippe Grandcolas, “Coronavirus: L’origine de l’épidémie de Covid-19 est liée aux bouleversements que nous imposons à la biodiversité,” *Le Monde*, April 4, 2020.

## 12 **“Peace” for Indigenous Peoples** Land-Based Visions of Reconciliation

Rebecca Tsosie

Within the United States, and globally, Indigenous peoples represent land-based communities that maintain an intergenerational presence on their ancestral territories. This relationship between people and land has a central role in defining each group’s cultural identity and serves as the foundation for a set of values enabling the community’s intergenerational sustainability. Colonization and globalization have disrupted these long-standing relationships; this essay describes some of those harms as they have affected the Navajo Nation and the Hopi Tribe in the Four Corners region of the American Southwest. These two Indigenous Nations have different histories and cultures but have coexisted within the same territory for centuries. In the twentieth century, the US federal government and private corporations incentivized large-scale energy development of tribal lands, disrupting central relationships between the two Indigenous Nations and between the Nations and their lands. The political debates over land use, energy resources development, and water have continued into the twenty-first century and are reaching a critical scale, given the global COVID-19 pandemic and associated stresses. What will it take to heal the relationships between the people and between the people and the lands? This essay invokes the theme of “reconciliation” as a way to identify the human rights issues that have emerged from conflicts over land, water, and natural resources. I will take the position that “peace” with the Other will require centring Indigenous values in the effort to restore the land, the water, and the way of life that has allowed each Nation to maintain an enduring presence as the First Nations of that territory.

## The Relationship Between People and Place

The Colorado Plateau in the American Southwest is a unique landscape of stunning beauty that extends across four states and encompasses over 80 million acres. Best known for the Grand Canyon, a national and international heritage site visited by thousands of tourists each year, the area also encompasses an unseen but sacred landscape of shrines, pilgrimage sites, and natural springs that gives life to the area. This vibrant interaction of land and water enabled countless generations of Indigenous peoples to survive—and thrive—on these arid lands. The Ancient Ones left inscriptions in the rock, marking human journeys through these lands. Overhead, the powder-blue sky extends forever and cloud shadows dance across the sandstone cliffs of these high-desert lands. When the rains come, they might be ephemeral dots of moisture or torrential floods.

This complex and unpredictable landscape is home to many Indigenous peoples, including the Navajo, the Hopi, the Havasupai, and the Hualapai. Today, each tribal government maintains ownership over reservation lands that were carved out of their ancestral lands. More distant tribal communities, such as the Zuni Pueblo of New Mexico, make regular pilgrimages to their traditional sacred places throughout the Colorado Plateau and into the vast chasm of the Grand Canyon. All of these Indigenous peoples have a unique legal status under US law as federally recognized American Indian tribes with long-standing claims to sovereignty, land, water, and cultural rights. In most cases, the tribal Nations trace their ancestral ties to these lands from time immemorial.

While tourists enjoy experiencing the Indigenous cultural heritage of the Colorado Plateau, they often do not understand the harsh legacy of energy development that has contaminated the land, depleted the water, and jeopardized the ability of tribal governments to ensure that the land can adequately support the people's continued survival. The development of coal, oil, gas and uranium reserves began over a century ago, rooted in America's national quest to exploit natural resources for private economic gain. From 1955 to 1975, energy development accelerated on the Colorado Plateau in order to fuel the growth of large urban centres in the West, including Los Angeles, Las Vegas, and Phoenix, which had long since exhausted their own local resources.<sup>1</sup> As Charles Wilkinson notes, the linchpin for this development was Black Mesa, "sacred ground to the Hopi and Navajo" people, who were coerced into leasing

their coal and water to the private corporations and public utility partners who sponsored the energy projects. Peabody Coal Company started mining coal at Black Mesa in 1968, fuelling the creation of several large power plants, including the Four Corners Generating Station and the Navajo Generating Station, both located on the Navajo Nation; the Mojave Generating Plant in Nevada; and the San Juan Generating Plant, adjacent to the Navajo Nation in Farmington, New Mexico. The environmental consequences of this proliferation of coal-fired power plants were treated as an acceptable risk, despite the fact that reservation lands are home to thousands of Navajo and Hopi citizens. The National Academy of Science termed the Four Corners area a National Sacrifice Area in recognition of the development's severe and irreparable environmental impacts. There was no equivalent assessment of the health consequences of this concentration of power plants on area tribal members. Instead, the Navajo Nation and Hopi Tribe received monetary payments for leasing their land and coal reserves, and they also granted the right to use approximately 1.3 billion gallons of pristine groundwater per year to transport coal slurry from mines on the Navajo Reservation to the Mojave Generating Station in Nevada.

Today, climate change and environmental concerns over air pollution have caused the closure of several of these coal-fired power plants, and the others will likely close within the next decade. Energy resources development has shifted to other forms of environmental exploitation. Oil and gas development on tribal lands and federal public lands—including hydraulic fracturing (fracking)—has expanded, and uranium mining has also continued to some extent, despite the current lack of any long-term storage facility in the United States to house radioactive waste.

Mineral development on the Colorado Plateau involves federal public lands managed by agencies such as the Bureau of Land Management and the Forest Service, as well as state and tribal lands. The shared governance of the Colorado Plateau complicates the region's social and political dynamics. All human communities must share land and water and cannot survive without these common resources. The problems arise from the differing goals and needs of the respective claimants.

In the historic process, Indigenous peoples became the Other when the US asserted its so-called “manifest destiny” to colonize and civilize the land of what the colonizers designated as the “New World.” In the words of Chief Justice John Marshall, the “tribes of Indians inhabiting this country were

fierce savages, whose occupation was war, and whose subsistence was drawn chiefly from the forest. To leave them in possession of their country, was to leave the country a wilderness.” Chief Justice Marshall imported the rule of “discovery” from international law, to assert that “discovery gave title” to the first European government to claim lands inhabited by Native people. The Native people had the right to occupy their traditional lands until the European sovereign extinguished this right by “purchase or by conquest.” The United States took title to the land from Great Britain by Treaty, as well as the right to extinguish the “Indian right of occupancy.” Marshall did not question the logic of the European colonizers, who believed that they made “ample compensation” to the inhabitants of the New World by “bestowing on them civilization and Christianity.”<sup>2</sup>

Today, the oppositional dynamics are not so simple. The US holds reservation lands in trust for federally recognized Indian tribes, who are the beneficial owners of their lands and associated natural resources. In that sense, tribal Nations have the full beneficial title to their lands, similar to a private owner, although the legal title to the lands remains with the US.

Although tribal Nations exercise sovereignty over their lands, the legacy of US colonialism has been to incentivize development of tribal lands for the “greater good” of the country, often under the guise of “helping” Native peoples. Throughout most of the twentieth century, the Bureau of Indian Affairs actively incentivized mineral development on tribal lands, asserting that this development would bring jobs and lease revenues to the impoverished tribal communities. Sometimes it did. It also created a need to commodify the land, mineral resources, and water, thus demarcating the respective “ownership” interests of the Navajo Nation and Hopi Tribe and enabling the US to preside over the quantification and sale of tribal resources. In the ensuing legal process, traditional relationships between the Indigenous people and land were reconfigured according to Western hierarchies. Each Indigenous Nation became an Other, as did the land.

## **Energy Development and Environmental Harm**

Throughout the nineteenth century, the US government dismantled traditional tribal governance systems and broke the treaty reservations into smaller parcels that could be leased to non-Indians for farming, ranching, and mineral development. Within this colonial model of land management,



federal bureaucrats made the land-use decisions for tribal Nations (considered “wards” of the federal government), commonly approving leases of tribal land at below-market rates. In 1934, Congressional policy shifted to recognize the agency of tribal Nations as governments. Congress passed the Indian Reorganization Act in 1934, which promoted the establishment of Western-style elected tribal councils that could easily validate lease agreements. Tribal governments were persuaded to consent to intensive development of reservation lands as a means to provide jobs to tribal members and lease revenues for the tribal government.<sup>3</sup> Throughout the twentieth century, the federal government actively promoted development of coal, oil, and gas on tribal lands in the Four Corners region.

The US government also began to actively prospect for uranium, locating some of the richest deposits in the Colorado Plateau. In 1942, the US government began a classified survey of the area and covertly mined uranium on the Navajo Nation.<sup>4</sup> After World War II, Congress passed the 1946 Atomic Energy Act, which established the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC). The AEC controlled all uranium mining, and the uranium had to be sold to the AEC. The AEC contracted with the Vanadium Corporation of America, issuing it a lease to mine on the Navajo Nation. Although the adverse health effects of uranium mining were already known, the AEC assumed no responsibility for protecting worker safety in the mines. Navajo men were neither given protective gear nor informed of the risks of uranium mining without protective gear. At night, they went home to their families with the radioactive dust on their clothes. In 1949, the US Public Health Service began a covert study of the effects of uranium mining on Navajo miners, and a 1952 study confirmed that many had developed lung cancer and experienced high rates of mortality. The study results were not released to the Navajo Nation for fear that it would deter them from approving further leases to mining companies.

In 1971, with the end of the Cold War, the US government passed a law authorizing commercial development of uranium for energy use. The mines on the Navajo Nation continued to operate under private ownership, but the levels of illness and death among mine workers continued to rise. State laws protecting mine workers do not extend to tribal lands, and there were not analogous federal laws. After holding hearings on the severe impacts of uranium mining on Navajo workers, Congress ultimately passed the 1990 Radiation Exposure Compensation Act (RECA), which provided limited compensation to miners or their widows for harms to health and loss of life

that arose from work undertaken between 1942 and 1971. The Navajo Nation was never compensated for the harm to its land and waters.

Today, the lands of the Navajo Nation house hundreds of abandoned uranium mines that have contaminated the air, water, and land. Only one of the estimated one thousand abandoned uranium mines on the Navajo Reservation is undergoing remediation and there is not an available location to move the vast pile of radioactive tailings near Church Rock, New Mexico. In 1979, a mud dam near the Church Rock site failed, spilling over 1,100 tons of uranium tailings and 100 million gallons of radioactive wastewater into the Rio Puerco River. The largest nuclear spill in US history, it caused catastrophic damage to the Navajo people, lands, water resources, and livestock that drank the contaminated water. Although the affected Navajo plaintiffs sought to sue the responsible party, United Nuclear Corporation, in tribal court, the lawsuit was held to be pre-empted by the federal law that limits the liability of nuclear companies for damages and requires lawsuits to be brought in federal court. The company eventually paid a minimal settlement out of court, and the mill was closed in 1982. The Church Rock site was placed on the Superfund National Priorities List in 1983, but it is currently only in the initial stages of clean-up.

As of 2020, there is only one active uranium mill in the US—the White Mesa mill near Blanding, Utah. The White Mesa mill is owned by Energy Fuels, a Canadian Corporation, and it processes uranium from mines across the Colorado Plateau as well as radioactive waste from contaminated sites across North America. The White Mesa mill has become the de facto dump for radioactive waste in the US, and Indigenous communities are at highest risk for exposure. Residents of the Ute Mountain Ute Indian Tribe live within three miles of the White Mesa mill, and members of the Navajo Nation living on tribal land near Blanding, Utah are also nearby. Energy Fuels is currently seeking permission to expand its facility to accept imported radioactive waste from Europe and Japan, despite the fact that the facility has already contaminated the air and groundwater to a level that is unsafe for tribal members living adjacent to the facility.

The Navajo Nation banned uranium mining within the reservation in 2005, citing the historical experience as a practice of genocide against the Navajo people sanctioned by the US government. That ban does not preclude state governments, such as Utah, from allowing uranium mining or the operation of a mill on privately owned lands adjacent to the reservation. In

addition, the state of New Mexico has authorized In Situ Leach Mining for uranium deposits on privately owned lands within the Checkerboard area of the Navajo Nation, where tribal land is interspersed with land held in private ownership. In that area, 99 percent of the population is Navajo and residents rely on the common pool of groundwater that lies beneath the mining sites.

Unfortunately, the lack of effective state environmental oversight with respect to mining on private land adjacent to the reservation means that the Navajo people continue to bear a disproportionate level of harm from uranium development within the Four Corners region, just as the Navajo and Hopi people shouldered the harms of coal mining and the power plants in this region. In each case, US policymakers took the view that it is permissible to “sacrifice” certain lands and resources for the “greater good” of the public. These policymakers envisioned the environment as a non-living entity comprising energy “resources” that must be exploited for economic gain. The resultant contamination of air, water, and land on the Navajo Nation and Hopi tribal lands is considered an acceptable price to pay for the benefits of energy resource development. The economic benefits to the tribal governments are envisioned as adequate compensation for the harms to tribal lands and resources. The harms to human health are rarely discussed, with the limited exception of RECA, which was created for the Navajo uranium miners who could prove that the harms to their health directly resulted from unsafe mining practices.

## **Human Rights and Earth Rights**

US energy development policies have caused significant and lasting impacts on Indigenous territories and on the people themselves. “Environmental justice” for Indigenous peoples entails a recognition that harms to the environment cause harm to the people, and these harms are often inseparable. The cumulative weight of the harms cannot be understood within the existing structure of US law because that law differentiates harm to “persons” from harm to “environment” and uses instrumental standards to assess liability. The deficient legal framework causes a type of epistemic injustice for Indigenous peoples that prevents environmental justice and requires an expanded notion of legal rights.<sup>5</sup> Harms to living persons are addressed through tort law, and plaintiffs must demonstrate the defendant breached a duty of care, causing tangible personal injury. The broader contamination of land and resources

and long-term health exposure to tribal members generally does not fit that model. Moreover, it is very difficult for plaintiffs to sue the US government for harms that arise from insufficient oversight. The complicity of the US and the private energy corporations that developed coal and uranium on Navajo and Hopi tribal lands further complicated the issue of liability for harm, as demonstrated by the events following the Church Rock spill and the federal legislation allowing only limited recovery for specific and proven harms to Navajo uranium miners.

In fact, most of the harms to human health from energy development in the Four Corners region will never be quantified, understood, or compensated under US law. The broader lens of human rights law offers a more accurate appraisal of the harms and is a potential mechanism to overcome epistemic forms of injustice under US law. The United Nation's Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, adopted in 2007 by majority consensus of the UN General Assembly, regards energy exploitation in Indigenous territories as a potential human rights abuse and further counsels against activities that harm the health of Indigenous peoples or result in their removal from their territories.

### **Environmental Justice as Earth Justice**

Environmental harm depends upon violation of specific standards for air and water pollution established under federal law. Most of the years that the power plants and coal mines in the Four Corners region were operating at maximum capacity saw negligible federal regulation. Even after the closure of specific power plants or coal mines, the costs of "restoring" land to an adequate level are prohibitive. Progress could take several decades. Similarly, the groundwater has been badly depleted, and in the context of climate change, desertification of the land is already underway.

From the perspective of traditional Navajo and Hopi customary law, the Earth is alive and shares a fundamental relationship with the people, who must care for the land and water over each generation. In that sense, the Earth is envisioned as a living being with a consciousness and need to purify itself within the cycles of the natural world. Water is like lifeblood, and the confluence of rivers often has a sacred meaning and significance. Within this perspective, it is unwise to dam a river to secure hydroelectric power, and the destruction that dams cause is often considered a desecration.

It is important to note that the basic perspective about the identity and importance of the Earth and water transcends Indigenous cultures.<sup>6</sup> Navajo language and culture is distinctive from Hopi language and culture, and yet the land ethics that arise from each Indigenous tradition describe the Earth's sacred qualities and people's relationships with one another and the Earth. The Navajo Nation's fundamental law describes a Universe bounded by Four Sacred Mountains, each associated with a direction, colours, medicinal plants, and elements. Human beings are allowed to use certain elements (such as coal or wood) to heat fires, and they rely on the land and water to survive. Yet, under the Navajo Nation's customary law, it is considered inappropriate and dangerous to harvest certain elements (such as uranium) or to engage in wasteful uses of the land and resources. This is the basis of the Navajo Nation's current struggle to block a Phoenix-based private corporation from building four dams on and above a tributary to the Little Colorado River, which would pump groundwater to fill the hydro-power project's reservoirs.<sup>7</sup> The goal of the Big Canyon Pumped Hydro Storage Project is to store "surplus electricity" and support electric-grid reliability, ultimately allowing storage of 3,600 megawatts of electricity. This is important for industrial users of electricity in the Southwest, given the recent closure of the Navajo Generating Station, which was the West's largest power plant before its closure in 2019. The rivers in the area will be used instrumentally to service the energy needs of Western cities, just as the lands were used for coal mining.

The Little Colorado River merges with the Colorado River at the mouth of the Grand Canyon, and this confluence site is widely regarded as sacred by all of the tribal Nations that are culturally associated with the region, including the Navajo Nation, the Hopi Tribe, the Havasupai Tribe, the Hualapai Tribe, and the Zuni Pueblo. The act of pumping pristine groundwater to service the Hydro project's reservoir is a further desecration and one that would destroy the precious springs that nurture the Hopi farmers in their centuries-long cultural practices. Not surprisingly, the Navajo Nation and Hopi tribal governments and their attorneys are actively resisting the dam project, even though the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission has accepted the corporation's permit application.

Tribal governments' unity on the dam issue aligns with the cultural traditions of both tribal Nations; it is also notable because the effect of federal policy has been to create opposition and antagonism between them. This is a further harm that must be considered and, ultimately, reconciled.

## The Navajo–Hopi Land Dispute

The Navajo Nation entered a treaty with the US in 1868 that demarcated a certain area of traditional land as their reservation. The Navajo people have a tradition of owning livestock, including sheep, goats, and horses, and many families maintained winter camps and summer camps. As the Navajo Nation's population expanded, the US annexed additional parcels of land into the reservation by executive order. Today, the Navajo Reservation extends across four states and comprises sixteen million acres. Under US federal law, the Navajo Nation is a sovereign government with the right to govern its lands and members. Under the Navajo Nation's customary law, the Diné people are governed by the set of instructions given by the Holy People at their origin. This complex set of cultural instructions orients the people within their Universe, as do the clans that socially organize the Navajo people.

The Hopi Tribe comprises several autonomous villages, including Oraibi, which is widely considered to be the oldest continuously inhabited site in North America and likely dates back 1,100 years or more. The Hopi villages are ancient and situated in place. Families occupy their sandstone homes generation after generation. Hopi people also have a clan system of social organization and have always farmed fields adjacent to their villages using a traditional dry farming technique, which preserves moisture in the soil and allows corn, squash, and melons to grow despite the extremely arid conditions and without the use of irrigation.

The Hopi have never moved from their villages and do not have a treaty with the US because they remained at peace and chose to negotiate and cooperate with the federal government. The Hopi Tribe is also recognized as a separate sovereign government, and the Hopi Reservation was created by executive order in 1882 to encompass the boundaries of the Hopi Tribe's traditional villages and fields. Owing to federal actions in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, the Hopi Reservation became completely encompassed within the Navajo Reservation. The two Indigenous Nations had always coexisted within this territory; they had different cultural life ways and didn't compete for land or resources. For generations, the two tribes traded with each other and intermarried, leading to a rich set of social relationships.

With the accelerating energy development in the mid-twentieth century, however, came a need to commodify the sub-surface mineral resources the

tribes shared. This led to a bitterly contested land claim between the Navajo Nation and the Hopi Tribe that lasted from 1959 to 2005.<sup>8</sup> Within the politics of energy development, each tribal Nation became an Other with respect to the land and each other. The first phase of litigation resulted in a judicial partition of the territory into “Navajo Partition Land” and “Hopi Partition Land.” Over 10,000 Navajo people were on the “wrong” side of the partition line and were relocated from their homes in the largest relocation of individual US citizens in American history. Many Navajo families were left landless due to the failure of the governmental bureaucracy that managed the resettlement process.<sup>9</sup>

The litigation over the western portion of the reservation, an area jointly used by the two tribes, persisted for many more years. In 2005, the final phase of the land claim was resolved by a judicial decision, leading to a Congressional decree that settled the claim. In 2009, after forty-three years, the federal government lifted the administrative freeze on development in the contested area of 1.5 million acres within the Navajo Reservation. The Bennett Freeze had gone into effect in 1966 to preserve the status quo between the two tribes, pending adjudication of their respective rights. In a vast landscape that is home to thousands of people, the administrative freeze prevented house construction and even routine home repairs, such as roof replacement. It also prevented infrastructure development, foreclosing the construction of gas lines and water lines and road construction. Ironically, in an area that supports the energy needs of major Western cities, most Navajo residents lack running water and electricity. The dirt roads are too rough for water trucks and are often impassable when the rain turns dust into mud. Most residents have to drive an hour or more each week to haul water back to their homes. The water is scarce and must be reused many times by intergenerational families who live in substandard homes that lack working kitchens or bathrooms.

### **Current Snapshot: The Impact of COVID-19**

This entire history and the significant level of underdevelopment on the Navajo Nation was largely unknown to most Americans until 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic hit. Even the poorest communities in other parts of the country have access to running water and electricity, inspiring medical professionals to insist upon handwashing and basic sanitation practices such as social distancing and avoiding crowded places. In June 2020, the national news media reported that the Navajo Nation was suffering the highest

incidence of coronavirus cases in the country, surpassing even New York and New Jersey, which were in the midst of catastrophic outbreaks of the pandemic. The virus spread rapidly through the Navajo communities, where multigenerational families share a single home and where most are without running water to wash their hands or electricity for warmth and sanitation. Residents in these rural communities lack ready access to fresh food, water, or Personal Protective Equipment; many had to travel two or even three hours to the nearest grocery store. Many residents did not have vehicles and relied on rides from neighbours—and strangers—to obtain groceries or medical supplies. There are very few law enforcement officers or emergency responders in the area, and many residents have underlying health conditions, such as heart and lung disease and diabetes, that made them vulnerable. Not surprisingly, the virus spread rapidly throughout the communities, causing devastating loss of life in these communities. The Navajo people cherish their Elders; children are taught to take care of their grandparents, who are their teachers and the custodians of ancient and unwritten cultural knowledge. The loss of many Elders and working members of each household has had devastating cultural and social consequences for families and for the close-knit communities on the Navajo Nation.

In the midst of crisis, however, there is also an opportunity to contemplate what is needed to restore these Indigenous communities to health and to the basic set of social goods that most Americans take for granted.

## **Peace and the Other: What Would “Reconciliation” Entail?**

According to Justice Murray Sinclair, who presided over Canada’s truth and reconciliation process with Indigenous peoples in Canada, “Reconciliation is about forging and maintaining respectful relationships. There are no shortcuts.”<sup>10</sup> The key to achieving peace with the Other is to build—or rebuild—the requisite relationship according to a set of principles that achieves and honours the desired ends, including restoring social harmony, physical and spiritual well-being, environmental sustainability, and resilience. Given the history described above, “peace” as “reconciliation” on the Colorado Plateau requires restoring the relationships between the Navajo and Hopi tribal governments and between the people and their environment. It also requires the federal government to create a more just and equitable government-to-government relationship that can secure the well-being of each tribal Nation and restore



the health of tribal lands and waters. This seems like a significant undertaking, given that the federal government continues to exploit the energy resources of tribal Nations for the larger public good, but it is vital to prioritize the needs of the Indigenous Nations that have sacrificed so much to enable the country's development. I will draw upon current developments within international human rights law, as well as Indigenous world views, to construct the parameters of "peace" with Indigenous peoples and their lands.

### Reconciliation and International Human Rights Law

In July 2019, the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples presented a report on the efforts of nation-states to implement the various provisions of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.<sup>11</sup> The report emphasized the centrality of three themes: *recognition*, *reparation*, and *reconciliation*. Recognition of the rights and status of Indigenous peoples is ongoing among nation-states. In the US, the federal government recognizes the sovereign status and land rights of federally recognized tribal governments. The key to respectful relationships is to accord mutuality and respect, for example, through consultation prior to taking actions, such as the construction of dams that would jeopardize tribal rights. The process of reparations is linked to efforts to accord compensatory justice for past wrongs. The US is generally quite reluctant to accord material compensation for what it views as moral wrongs. Instead, Congress must pass legislation to selectively redress instances of proven injustice, such as providing compensation for Navajo uranium miners (or their surviving spouses) who became sick or died from radioactive contamination.

The process of reconciliation is also directed toward reparative justice, but it focuses on restoring broken relationships that have arisen from centuries of injustice in the wake of colonialism. This is the most abstract part of the human rights process, but it is a theme that must be engaged if we hope to repair the wounds that divide us from ourselves, from one another, and from the land itself.

The Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is premised on the need for intercultural justice. The document is the result of over twenty-five years of negotiation between state and Indigenous representatives and includes an Indigenous perspective for recognizing distinctive rights. For example, it recognizes the spiritual relationship between Indigenous peoples

and their territories, which has existed for generations and sustains the people's place-based identity. Spiritual rights are different from religious rights. This concept is unique to Indigenous peoples among the various human rights documents and is closely linked to many Indigenous traditions that describe the people as "stewards" or "custodians"—rather than "owners"—of the land.

The job of a steward is to tend to the land: its forests, watersheds, mountains, and all component parts that sustain the health of the natural system, including the fish and wildlife. Stewardship is often associated with sustainability and with subsistence life ways, such as those of Indigenous peoples in Alaska who look after forests and Caribou herds but do not consider themselves to be owners of the Caribou herds or forests. In comparison, Western property law protects the right of an owner to exploit natural "resources" for their maximum economic value, which is the calculus of a market economy. The disparate values create dichotomies between and among Indigenous communities and with respect to their lands. In the Arctic, this dynamic has pitted Alaska Native corporations seeking to drill oil against Indigenous villages seeking to protect Caribou herds and salmon runs from environmental catastrophe.<sup>12</sup> In the American Southwest, this dynamic has fuelled the development of coal, oil, gas, and uranium extraction on tribal lands, resulting in the massive contamination and underdevelopment that now threatens the well-being of the associated tribal communities. Today, the oppositional dynamic is affecting the precious and scarce water resources in the region, as the litigation between the Navajo Nation and the Hopi Tribe commences to quantify their respective water rights to the Little Colorado River.<sup>13</sup>

The process of reconciliation and achieving "peace" with the Other must not be romanticized. The Navajo Nation and the Hopi Tribe are separate sovereigns with important legal rights to their respective lands and natural resources, including minerals and water. In that sense, they are owners of the land, mineral resources, and water, and, like all owners, may choose to exploit their "share" of the resource and sell or lease it to third parties. However, the oppositional dynamics of ownership create a precarious reality in a time of rapid climate change, where water is the most precious and valuable resource for the future. Traditional Navajo and Hopi community members know how to live with and sustain this fragile resource better than anyone else, and that is an invaluable source of guidance on the road ahead.

## Reconciliation and Indigenous Law

For Indigenous peoples, traditional law is based on the distinctive values and cultural norms of the people. Cherokee Elder Tom Belt, who taught Cherokee philosophy for many years at Western Carolina University, gave a lecture that described the Cherokee term for “law” as related to “health and healing” rather than “justice.” According to Belt, “to live according to the Laws of the Creator is to live a life of health and balance.” In the Cherokee way, no one was an orphan. Every Elder and every child had a family and home, food to eat, and people to care for them.

The comparison of Cherokee law with the treatment of Native peoples under US law is dramatic. Native peoples within the US (and other countries) have been subjected to some of the most cruel and inhumane policies in human history, given the colonization of their lands and the physical and cultural genocide that they experienced. Today, the harms of colonization and historic trauma manifest at the material and spiritual levels. This is the reason for what Chief Justice Robert Yazzie of the Navajo Nation describes as the “loss of hope” in some Indigenous communities, manifested by high suicide rates, substance abuse, and the overwhelming poverty that results in various levels of physical, social, and psychological deprivation.<sup>14</sup>

Of course, the harms of colonization cannot be healed by the colonizer. What is needed is a process of healing that emerges from the actions and consciousness of Indigenous communities and has the capacity to heal the physical and spiritual harms that they experience today. This is the agency of healing that is commonly associated with Indigenous justice systems that were designed to heal conflict within the community through principles of restorative justice rather than Western adversarial systems of retributive justice. The art of peacemaking associated with Navajo Peacemaker courts, for example, is similar to other Indigenous peacemaking traditions, such as the practice of Ho’oponopono among Native Hawaiians. Indigenous peacemaking generally allows each party to express his or her emotions: victims can describe the consequences of injury and the offending party can take responsibility for the action. In that way, the peacemaking process enables each party to release the harsh mental states of resentment and retribution that can compromise healing and create continued violence and suffering. Healing is imagined as a multi-stepped process. As spiritual wounds are addressed,

physical consequences are ameliorated and redressed, leading to restored harmony and balance.

This restorative approach is also associated with various human transgressions in the material world—often unintended—that can compromise individual health and integrity. This is one of the reasons for various ceremonial practices of Indigenous peoples designed to facilitate the respectful “taking” of First Foods, such as deer or salmon, for human consumption. These animals are relatives that give their lives so that human beings can survive; they are revered for this sacrifice and allowing wanton destruction of deer or salmon purely for human greed would be considered a desecration. These ceremonial practices are associated with the physical and cultural survival of Indigenous peoples and serve as a baseline for the notion of respect and relationship that undergirds Indigenous land ethics.<sup>15</sup>

As Belt demonstrated, many Indigenous justice systems are founded upon the original laws given to the people at Creation, which are designed to promote life, harmony, and what today we might refer to as “sustainability.” The Western European nations promoted a false belief that Indigenous peoples lacked laws and therefore could not own property or claim the equivalent rights of a Christian, European nation. The European-derived Doctrine of Discovery became part of US law, justifying the appropriation of Indigenous lands and forcible destruction of Indigenous cultures. This history must be reconciled. The US has the duty of “moral repair,” in the words of philosopher Margaret Walker.<sup>16</sup> Walker has written that many nations refuse to examine the negative aspects of their past, and they may fail to acknowledge government-sanctioned policies that perpetuated genocide or slavery or to assume accountability for current inequities those practices perpetuated. According to Walker, these groups have the “right to truth about the past,” and the government and its institutions have a duty to “remember” the past and to take corrective action to minimize the harms associated with historic policies and current inequities. Governments may insist that all citizens are now “equal” or that modern societies are “post-racial,” but this is not the experience of Indigenous peoples or other marginalized or minoritized groups.

## Decolonization as “Indigenization”: Reconciliation with “People” and Place

The agency for healing must be rooted in Indigenous justice traditions. Today, decolonization requires “Indigenization,” centring the land and Indigenous people in policy discussions and grounding institutions in Indigenous values, even if this requires transforming the state’s institutions and practices. For example, if a state government commits to adaptation planning for climate change, or forest restoration or groundwater management, it must recognize that Indigenous land and water stewardship protocols should become part of state policy-making through co-operative state/tribal efforts. Karuk Tribal Chairman Russell Attebury recently made a statement to this effect after California Governor Gavin Newsom apologized for that state’s past genocidal policies and issued an executive order calling for healing and restoring relationships with the Indigenous Nations of California.<sup>17</sup> Chairman Attebury described the need for the tribal and state governments to work together on environmental issues, combining “Indigenous traditional ecological knowledge with modern science,” including “thousands of years of managing the forests.”<sup>18</sup> In a year when thousands of acres of forest land burned in California’s raging wildfires, the wisdom of Indigenous stewardship became all too clear. The knowledge of stewardship, however, resides with the First Nations of this land, not with the Western colonial nations or their descendants.

To bring the discussion back to the Southwest, the Navajo and Hopi people also maintain significant knowledge about the land, water, and environment that is pivotal to human survival. They are also on the front line of the climate crisis and the challenges associated with poverty, health vulnerability, and environmental contamination. Dr. Karletta Chief, a Navajo soil scientist and professor at the University of Arizona, oversees an environmental and health project designed to identify ways to decontaminate tribal lands and waters after decades of coal and uranium mining and restore sustainable community energy and agricultural practices on the Navajo Nation.<sup>19</sup> In this historic partnership between a state educational institution and a tribal government, Navajo youth are trained to test and treat the water to remove heavy metals. They also assist in developing sustainable community farming practices to support the nutritional health of community members, as these remote communities are located in a “food desert.”

The Navajo Nation and Hopi tribal government will both be forced to make decisions about their mutual water resources as they go through the expensive and adversarial process of active water rights litigation. Under US law, water from common streams must be “adjudicated” into separable “water rights” that can be used by the respective “owners.” There are literally thousands of users of every stream and river in the state. Extractive industries are notoriously consumptive of water. The Black Mesa coal mine on the Navajo Nation is estimated to have extracted 1.3 billion gallons of water annually from the Navajo Aquifer before the mine closed, which amounts to a total of 45 billion gallons during Black Mesa’s life cycle.<sup>20</sup> Peabody Coal Company also used the aquifer’s water at its Kayenta Mine, which closed in August 2019. The Navajo Aquifer is the sole source of drinking water in the region, and the water table has dropped precipitously, making it virtually impossible to access water through conventional wells, which normally access water at a depth of 400 to 500 feet. On the Navajo Nation, the groundwater is now 2,000 to 3,000 feet below the soil, and many springs and wells that once served the communities are completely dry.

The consequences of groundwater depletion are best understood by the tribal members who have lived and farmed these lands for generations. The Hopi people have farmed corn for multiple generations using dry farming techniques that do not require irrigation. For the Hopi people, corn is “central to their culture, religion, and way of life.”<sup>21</sup> There are multiple practices associated with corn, such as selecting the best heirloom seeds and sustaining the complex ceremonies associated with rain and planting. There is also a need to bring everyone together with faith in the cycles that bring rain to nurture the corn. Dependence upon foreign practices, such as irrigation, could contravene traditions, and many traditional farmers resist this type of shift. That shift, however, is what non-Native economists believe is inevitable for Hopi farmers. A recent study prepared by economics faculty at Arizona State University and the University of North Carolina posited that climate change on the Colorado Plateau will necessarily trigger severe drought and the need for supplemental irrigation for Hopi farmers.<sup>22</sup> This is an argument in favour of quantifying tribal water rights as soon as possible. As with all tribal water rights cases, “paper rights” must be implemented through a water project. Much of water’s economic value is tied to the level of engineering required to develop the water resource and ensure delivery to the tribal communities.

Of course, the impacts of climate change come on the heels of the vast exploitation of groundwater caused by the historic mining activities in the area. Former Hopi Tribal Chairman Vernon Masayesva now directs the Black Mesa Trust, a non-profit organized to protect tribal water, and he alleges that the mining activities caused a depletion of the Navajo Aquifer, which fed natural springs throughout the area.<sup>23</sup> Masayesva says that, within the Hopi worldview, “all waters—rivers, groundwaters, glaciers . . . are interconnected, because Earth is like a human body and we survive with all the hundreds of bloodlines circulating through all of our body.”<sup>24</sup> Masayesva says that the federal government and the coal company have an obligation to restore the lands and waters of the area that have been destroyed by mining. While the Hopi culture and religion are inseparably linked to water, Masayesva says that the “Western mind” sees “water as a commodity.”<sup>25</sup> The two perspectives appear to be in tension, and yet the Hopi Tribe must adopt the latter to gain legal rights to use its water under US law.

## Conclusion

What will it take to heal the land and bring the Navajo and Hopi people together for their common survival? Reconciliation requires acknowledging that the landscape and people have been altered and affected by the long-standing history of coal and uranium mining. In the 1970s, a National Sacrifice Area at the Four Corners region seemed like a logical necessity to federal policymakers and the scientists who advised them. Today, we must look at the effects of their decision as we understand the harm to the land, the change in water flow, the impact of climate change, and the increased levels of salinity and toxicity that impair human health.

An ethics of reconciliation must be crafted to restore what was wrongfully taken from Indigenous peoples. Indigenous justice traditions counsel that healing takes place at the level of mind and spirit first, and then at the level of the material world. We must imagine a better future in order to realize that future. Peace with the Other requires committing to restorative and regenerative practices rather than the exploitive practices that have driven energy resources development for so many decades.

Most of all, reconciliation requires building respectful and deliberative relationships between governments and the communities they serve. Sovereignty entails responsibility for the well-being of current and future generations. As

esteemed Haudenosaunee Faithkeeper Oren Lyons asserts, this is the premise of planning for the Seventh Generation, which was a fundamental concept for the Six Nations of the Iroquois Confederacy.<sup>26</sup> For those Indigenous Nations, peace, power and righteousness must converge in the exercise of legitimate governmental authority.

## Notes

- 1 Charles Wilkinson refers to this as the “Big Buildup” in *Fire on the Plateau: Conflict and Endurance in the American Southwest* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 1999), xii–xiii.
- 2 *Johnson v. McIntosh* at 585, 587.
- 3 Rebecca Tsosie, “Climate Change, Sustainability, and Globalization: Charting the Future of Indigenous Environmental Self-Determination,” *Environmental and Energy Law and Policy Journal* 4, no. 2 (2009): 188–255, at 208.
- 4 On the history and consequences of uranium mining on Navajo Nation, see Rebecca Tsosie, “Indigenous Human Rights and the Ethics of Remediation: Redressing the Legacy of Radioactive Contamination for Native Peoples and Native Lands,” *Santa Clara Journal of International Law* 13, no. 2 (2015): 203–72.
- 5 See Rebecca Tsosie, “Indigenous Peoples and Epistemic Injustice: Science, Ethics, and Human Rights,” *Washington Law Review* 87, no. 4 (2012): 1133–201.
- 6 See Rebecca Tsosie, “Tribal Environmental Policy in an Era of Self-Determination: The Role of Ethics, Economics, and Traditional Ecological Knowledge,” *Vermont Law Review* 21 (1996): 225–333.
- 7 See Roger Clark, “Dam Developers Would Pump Ancient Waters for Profit,” Grand Canyon Trust blog post, June 3, 2020, <https://www.grandcanyontrust.org/blog/dam-developers-pump-ancient-Little-Colorado-River-waters-profit>.
- 8 *Healing v. Jones*, 174 F. Supp. 211 (D. Ariz. 1959) marks the commencement of litigation; *Healing v. Jones*, 210 F. Supp. 125 (1962) describes the “jointly owned” character of lands and resources subject to litigation.
- 9 See Josh Moore, “Justice Too Long Delayed on the Navajo Reservation: The Bennett Freeze as a Case Study in the Government’s Treatment of Native Americans,” *Harvard Human Rights Journal* 6 (1993): 222–29.
- 10 Sinclair’s oft-quoted comment appeared on the now-archived home page of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: <https://web.archive.org/web/20200513112354/https://trc.ca/index-main.html>.
- 11 United Nations Human Rights Council, Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, *Efforts to Implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: Recognition, Reparation and Reconciliation*,



- A/HRC/EMRIP/2019/3/Rev.1, presented during the twelfth session of the Human Rights Council, Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, July 15–19, 2019. The report was formally released on September 2, 2019.
- 12 The Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971 was designed to extinguish Aboriginal rights and tribal reservations within Alaska in exchange for creating corporate entities that would exploit oil and other mineral resources for economic gain. The traditional village governments survived, but they are hampered in their exercise of sovereignty by the lack of “Indian country.”
  - 13 See Ian James, “We All Know That Water Is Life: Hopi Tribe Fighting for Access to Clean and Healthy Drinking Water,” *Arizona Republic*, December 20, 2020.
  - 14 Robert Yazzie, “Life Comes from It: Navajo Justice Concepts,” *New Mexico Law Review* 24 (Spring 1994): 175–90.
  - 15 See discussion in Tsosie, “Tribal Environmental Policy in an Era of Self-Determination.”
  - 16 Margaret Walker’s 2006 Homecoming Lecture at Arizona State University is published as “Telling Truths and Restoring Moral Relations,” *Metaphilosophy* 41, no. 4 (2010): 525–45. For a more extensive discussion of her position, see Margaret Walker, *Moral Repair* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
  - 17 See Debra Utacia Krol, “California Governor Apologizes to Tribal Nations for Past Atrocities,” *Indian Country Today*, June 21, 2020.
  - 18 Krol, “California Governor Apologizes.”
  - 19 This collaborative project (“Indige-Fuse”) is funded by the National Science Foundation and evaluates energy, water, and food sustainability at the community level.
  - 20 “Virus-Ravaged Navajo Say Coal Mines Sapped Their Drinking Water,” *Bloomberg Law*, June 17, 2020.
  - 21 Ian James, “Everything Depends on the Corn: Hopi Farmers Point to Global Warming as Their Crops Wither,” *Arizona Republic*, December 6, 2020, 1A.
  - 22 See James, “Everything Depends on the Corn,” citing a study by Michael Hanemann, director of Arizona State University’s Center for Environmental Economics and Sustainability Policy, and Dale Whittington, professor of environmental sciences and engineering at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.
  - 23 Ian James, “Everything Is Drying Up: As Natural Springs on Hopi Land Decline, a Sacred Connection to Water Is Threatened,” *Arizona Republic*, Sunday December 13, 2020, A1.
  - 24 James, “Everything Is Drying Up,” 7A.
  - 25 James, “Everything Is Drying Up,” 6A.

- 26 Rebecca Tsosie, “Indigenous Sustainability and Resilience to Climate Extremes: Traditional Knowledge and the Systems of Survival,” *Connecticut Law Review* 51, no. 4 (2019): 1009–42, at 1013. See also Wallace Coffey and Rebecca Tsosie, “Rethinking the Tribal Sovereignty Doctrine: Cultural Sovereignty and the Collective Future of Indian Nations,” *Stanford Law and Policy Review* 12, no. 2 (Spring 2001): 191–221, at 200.

# Afterword

## Imagining People's Peace

Chad Haines and Yasmin Saikia

Othering lies at the heart of most of the conflicts around the world today, justifying discrimination and violence against those deemed as threatening or whose cultural values are perceived as less advanced and less civilized than one's own. Through hegemonic histories and narratives, differences are portrayed as problematic, highlighting discrete differences to justify violence. As the chapters in this volume document, rather than something to celebrate, Othering identifies differences with suspicion, as traits and behaviours that need policing, or worse, outright erasure. This is the ultimate outcome of Othering. It is not differences per se, for we are all different, but the transforming of differences into something negative that is perceived to be threatening to "our" way of life, "our" society where the "our" is exclusionary, singular, and normative. However, the Other can also be a site for reflective rethinking for developing an ethics of living with difference and accepting that circumstances and conditions separate us. Acknowledging that the Self-Other relationship is a continuum, a challenge that must be continuously worked on and improved can enable the process of peaceful living.

The contributors to this volume set out to explore a number of different expressions of Othering, uncovering the processes of imagining the Other as a social negative. As the chapters demonstrate, many of the claims of Othering are quite spurious, yet they are popularly consumed and circulated, amplified through mainstream and social media. At times, people are motivated to latch on to false claims and untruths about others, creating conditions of violence and oppression. This is particularly evident in the chapters in part 2—Haines,

Aviña, Burge, Attai, and Khan—focusing on different case studies of Othering in North America. But these false differences are not anomalies, rather they are naturalized through a variety of institutional arrangements that map and encode bounded differences. Othering, as the chapters in the book argued, is not merely a rethinking of group identity, of demarcating us and them as discrete entities. They are boundaries for violence, to keep the outsider from infiltrating and changing our societies, as Cassidy and Perocco demonstrate in their chapters in part 1. Even nature is Otherized allowing for regimes of resource exploitation and environmental degradation, as Neyrat, Baishya, and Tsosie argue in part 3.

Othering is more than a politics of identity that demarcates clear differences between Self and Other. Processes of Othering include imagining fixed boundaries that separate Self and Other, socially, culturally, and historically; it is about suspending or ignoring commonalities, interconnections, and interdependencies; and it is about creating a hierarchy of superiority and inferiority between Self and Other, where the Other's cultural values and practices, social organizations, philosophical ideas, and even their blood are deemed impure and corrupting. In part 1, Grose and Saikia show how Othering is about denying interconnections and interdependence, privileging boundary thinking, and, as a result, laying the foundations of unpeace.

Boundary thinking, however, is not merely the production of racists, sexists, and bigots. Boundaries are in fact naturalized through a variety of discourses. That is, boundary thinking is as much at the root of negative Othering as much as liberal ideas of tolerance and acceptance. Boundaries in our geopolitical world of nation-states are an assumed reality, demarcating nations, communities, and civilizations rather than socio-cultural interconnections, flows, and borrowings. Even in academia boundaries are naturalized in our disciplines where national histories are the dominant mode of organizing research and teaching—one studies Chinese history, French history, American history, and so on. Even a course on European history is often organized around the making of German or French or Italian identity, long before any of those ever existed, and certainly long before any conceptualization of Europe existed. Such bounded thinking also occurs in philosophy where Western philosophical thought is never categorized as “Western” unlike Islamic, Chinese, or Indic philosophies that are always qualified and constricted, mapped as inherently different. Western philosophy then takes on an aura of universality, as philosophy, while Islamic philosophy is only that of Muslims, Chinese philosophy

is only that of Chinese. How Greek philosophy shaped Islamic thought which in turn gave birth to Renaissance thinking is rarely acknowledged, and, if so, each component remains as a bounded unit that borrows, but where the flow is not the history, but rather the making of discrete philosophical discourses is the outcome, atavistically projected back in time. We have institutionalized boundary thinking and thus unpeace in our approaches to peace, which is the connecting arc of the case studies in this book. We have situated our dialogue alongside feminist, postcolonial and humanist scholarship that have pushed the boundaries of knowledge as they move across borders both as a method and as epistemological reconceptualizations of the hierarchies of power.

Rather than limit our study to the negative aspects of Othering, we posit that people's peace is possible within the realm of human behaviour. By and large, most people would agree that people are generally civil toward one another, express neighbourly concerns, and have an ethics of living in communities. The majority of people are socially tuned to think of the world as a connected place. This became distinctly evident in the collaboration to create a COVID vaccine and develop human immunity against the virus. Yet we are also prone to think vertically. Vertical thinking is prevalent within the academy, although it is also the site of critical theory and calls for upholding the equality of all knowledge. In everyday life, vertical thinking is even more obvious. Our own neighbours are extremely helpful in times of need. But they also speak of the problem about "those" immigrants, directly to Yasmin, herself an immigrant from India. As we write this afterword, dozens of "patriots" are protesting daily outside a hotel in Scottsdale, Arizona, leased to temporarily house asylum seekers, many of them from Venezuela, others from Afghanistan. They are deemed "illegals," and demands are made to send them back "where they came from." Such protests are a common expression of national belonging not only in the United States but around the world. In the United Kingdom and Italy, as Cassidy and Perocco's chapters argue, the border-making between communities demands a harder stance toward refugees and emigres imposing intense surveillance of the outsiders and creating conditions of unwantedness for people seeking a place to belong because of their displacement from home. The contradiction between the need to be together, peacefully, and yet assume to be superior and better than "them" undermines our basic human capability to ensure people's peace.

Living peacefully cannot be done without an awareness of the humanity of the Other. If we continue to view the Other as below us, radically different

than ourselves, and deem them an enemy and a threat to our “way of life,” we will only deepen the problem of unpeace. This is the core concern of our book. But humans are not the only ones with whom horizontal relationships are important for peaceful living. The natural environment is equally vital. Today, the main threat to peace is generated by the destruction of the natural environment by human exploitation.

We Other the natural environment in multiple ways. First is our attitude toward nature, animal and plant life as inherently inferior species. Humans claim the right to possess them for use, Othering them in the bargain. Not far from our home is a golf course. A few years back the beautiful tall Arizona long-needle pine trees were felled to redesign a links golf course without trees. The desert landscape was changed to look like a coastal one because this is what the consumers wanted it to be. When there is an awareness to “save” the environment, it is seen as an object, once again, for human use. Protecting nature, the advocates reason is good for healthy human lives. The idea of actually living in harmony with nature, in a horizontal relationship, is a rare value.

To live in peace—humans and non-humans—is to live with our differences, and value the ways our diverse lives are interconnected. The question that we must ask is how willing we are to explore the potential and undo the façades of differences that blind us to this living reality. The answer lies in our human agency: We can humanize ourselves and the Other. Peace is a human good for us to find and make, a collective journey for all of us to seek out. We invite each of you to reimagine our relationships with one another and with nature, valuing our differences and our capacity for being human. This capacity is not too far away, it lies within grasp, the task is a mindful awareness of this possibility to mimic affinity to close the gap of Othering.

“The Power of the People Is Greater than the People in Power,” the chant at Tahrir Square in Egypt during the Arab Spring protest in 2011, encapsulates a deep-seated belief that people can change the system and liberate themselves from the vertical oppressive system. The spark for this liberatory moment was lit far away in Tunisia by Tarek el-Tayeb Mohamed Bouazizi, a street fruit vendor, who set himself on fire to protest the harassment he suffered daily at the hands of local authorities. This event became a catalyst for the Tunisian Revolution and the wider Arab Spring that drew millions of people from all walks of life and divergent political, religious, and ideological orientations to demand change in the oppressive political institutions and leaders. Some,

like Egypt, had initial success but it was short-lived after the military crushed the people's movement. Others, like Syria, spiralled into violence, and warfare involving multiple groups, including ISIS, forcing millions to flee. Today, there are over five million Syrian refugees abroad, while several million are internally displaced.

Over the following years, people's protests demanding justice and peace appeared in new places around the world. In the United States, a movement was born based on Black Lives Matter—protesting against the murder of young Blacks, particularly Black men, by governmental and extrajudicial forces across the country. In 2018 in France, the Yellow Vest Movement rallied people in solidarity to counter systems of social injustice. A year later in Hong Kong, ordinary citizens took to the streets to struggle for democracy, and, in 2019, in Assam and Delhi in India, young and old, men and women, surged to the streets to protest against the government's arbitrary decision to change citizenship rules. Muslim women held a continuous sit-in for months in Shaheen Bagh, Delhi, against the Citizenship Act until the COVID pandemic broke out and they were forced to disband. The Farmers' Protest in India that emerged in mid-2020 was thwarted by the government and the massive outbreak of the second wave of COVID in India pushed the farmers to return home to safety and protection.

While the people's struggle for a better, more equitable world continues, the public-political space is, once again, crowded by reactionary forces that are determined to ensure that borders are secure. Opposing the people's quest for justice, equality, and peace, reactionary forces impose draconian crackdowns on democracy and basic civil rights. Right-wing populist movements fill the vacuum fed by outlandish conspiracy theories of the evils of the Other in our midst. They target people who are different; they attack in the streets, and some have driven into crowds of protesting civil rights activists and murdered them. Governments promote new and restrictive immigration laws. Vigilante groups police international borders and beat people they deem "illegal." Such fascist movements have long histories, fed by extreme nationalist ideas of superiority of the Self while undermining and devaluing others. In the past ten years, these forms of rabid nationalism have become mainstream in many countries as extremist groups have taken control of political and administrative power. The global pandemic of 2020 and 2021, which compelled people to segregate from others, abandon the public space, and disconnect, allowed

for fascistic ideas to penetrate deeper into the social fabric of democratic societies in unprecedented ways around the world.

Our work as peace scholars makes us fully aware of these challenges to people's peace, but we also believe that humanity survives against all odds. The present is a bleak time, but humanity is indestructible. This awareness is not simply bookish knowledge: we have seen and experienced this capacity in multiple places, among a wide variety of people, which kindles our hope that, under the debris of extreme nationalism, oppressive governments, and divisions of people, resilient humanity will emerge and thrive again, we hope. How and why do we take this assertive humanistic position? To answer this question, we would like to share with our readers our personal and academic story that enables this faith or *yaqin* (which implies "certainty" and is an expression of deep faith in South Asian Islam as Yasmin's culture teaches her).

When Yasmin took up the Hardt-Nickachos endowed chair position in peace studies at Arizona State University's Center for the Study of Religion and Conflict in 2010, we were aware that we were entering a new scholarly world. It was very encouraging on one hand to be part of a public university's effort to contemplate and develop peace ideas, but, on the other hand, global events were unfolding with the Arab Spring, and everywhere people's search for justice was trampled under the authoritarian boot. The signs of hope were darkened by the dark clouds of uncertainty. However, in our minds, we had a fresh memory of positive human relationships that facilitated a different way of thinking about peace.

The previous year, in 2009, following an intensive six months in Pakistan as two of the first Fulbright Scholars allowed to return to the country following the 2001 US invasion and occupation of neighbouring Afghanistan, we spent a few weeks in Sicily. While there, Chad fell critically ill with an amoebic liver abscess. The care and generosity of the people nurtured Chad back to life. The care was driven by a human commitment to serve those in need; we were the recipients of this care. The care and concern were not limited to the medical staff. Patients and caregivers of patients reached out amid caring for their own and found the time to help translate for Yasmin, attend chapel to pray for Chad's recovery, bring coffee, and, at times, even forsake the doctors' visit to attend to their patients. After several weeks, when Chad was medically escorted back to the United States, the stark difference in the nature of medical care between Italy and the United States became evident to us. In the United States, the care was surgical and technologically driven. Reams and reams of



paperwork had to be completed before admission, the managerial culture seemed more concerned with “evaluation” than care, and medical insurance saved us from bankruptcy.

Italy’s humanistic care stayed with us as a value, as a lived ethic that was very real and part of people’s everyday lives. It made Yasmin’s shift to Arizona State University to lead a new peace research initiative organic, and the imagination of peace from a humanistic perspective took shape. Pursuing the literature on peace quickly made it evident that the humanistic approach in peace studies is not well developed. To give it a shape and form, under the aegis of the Hardt-Nickachos peace initiative, we were able to organize and participate in a number of conferences, workshops, seminars, and reading groups grappling with a diversity of issues on peace. Faculty colloquia on peace research; international conferences on a variety of themes, including women and peace; Islamic ethical values of civility or *adab*; religion and human rights; postcolonial thought and resistance movements; migrants and refugees, and others illuminated new approaches for us. The annual peace lectures and film festivals and workshops with artists, producers, novelists, musicians, and public intellectuals facilitated a variety of dialogues and partnerships with a wide group of scholars, practitioners, and the public. We recognized that a recurring concern for everyone was the issue of the role of people in affecting change for peace. Are people so crushed that they cannot reclaim agency, many asked. Even as the question surfaced, immediately it would be discounted. People’s peace cannot die, everyone would firmly assert. So we were encouraged to reimagine peace with a new vision.

Instead of focusing on conflict management and resolution, transitional justice, truth and reconciliation, and other institutional practices of peace that adopt a tool-box approach, we started our study of peace in people, in acts of everyday ethics. Perhaps, the everyday ethical actions of people that drive and maintain peace are less visible or consciously articulated, but it became evident that people’s capacity to live amicably with others keeps the peace. Coexistence is the bedrock of diverse communities living side by side, and human ethics sourced from secular and religious values maintain peace in the everyday. Paying attention to the rhythms and ebbs and flows of this lived peace gave shape to our concept of “people’s peace.” People’s peace focuses on the humanistic ways of living in peace.

Toward developing the idea of people’s peace, we undertook to write three books. We decided to make it a collective effort rather than develop

single-authored monographs so that a combination of voices could be brought together in unison. The first of the three books was *Women and Peace in the Islamic World: Gender, Agency and Influence* (2015). The second volume is *People's Peace: Prospects for a Human Future* (2019). This book, *On Othering: Processes and Politics of Unpeace*, is the third and final volume emerging from our explorations into the lived ethics of people's peace. These three books are centred on the lived human issues for peace and bring into sharp focus the most important constituency—human beings—who are both the architects and destroyers of peace.

In the first book, we paid exclusive attention to Muslim women who are generally seen by the “important people”—leaders, peace negotiators, internal donor agencies, and even the Western public—as living without agency, needing to be saved from tyrannical Muslim men and obsolete mores of Islamic society. On the contrary, in putting together the book, we encountered case after case of ordinary Muslim women who are the daily actors of peace, particularly in conflict zones. Their voices are not usually heard, and they are silenced. But they continue to do peace work in the shadows, without the spotlight on them. It was a very encouraging and satisfying journey with these women to see and encounter the world of peace through the prism of their everyday lives and work.

Obviously, not all Muslim women are agents of peaceful transformations; many choose to align themselves with conservative religious movements, extremist political ideologies, or even the interests of global imperialists. But those who work on keeping and reviving peace among people draw upon certain values that are inherent in Islam, though certainly not unique to Islam, such as neighbourliness, hospitality, friendship, sociality, forgiveness, and memories of coexistence. Muslim women's lived ethics of peace are at once universal yet particularistic. For Muslim women, who are the greatest victims of violence in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the capacity to become the proponents of peace in their lived local worlds is indeed extraordinary. Muslim women, we realized in writing the book, are one of the heroes of people's peace.

In our second book of this trilogy, *People's Peace: Prospects for a Human Future*, we focused on the broad category of people's peace. We included within our field of vision ordinary men and women who uphold the humane ethics of living together in peace. Beyond the cessation of overt and covert violence, beyond negative and positive peace, there are emotions and attitudes

that enable humans to live peacefully in a community, amid external tensions, which we highlighted in the book. Such peace is not an event but a process that survives beyond and despite war and violence. We delved deeper into religious and philosophical interpretations and applications of people's peace in various sites and chronologies. Ordinary people, we found, do not wait for authorities to issue prescriptions; rather, they attempt to "work things out" at a quotidian level. They succeed at times, but at other times, peace is undone; still, the search continues. "Finding balance" in communities is a continuous and recurring process that is always in motion. This led us to conceive this third volume, *On Othering: Processes and Politics of Unpeace*.

In developing *On Othering*, we took a realistic view of the challenges and limitations of people's peace, recognizing the deep structures of negative and violent Othering that have become acute during this last decade, as explained and illustrated in the different chapters in the book. Othering is the foundation for undoing peace, even when people want peace. The lack of people's peace is not a failing of the people, but the vertical stratification created by those who control the institutions of power and make decisions that confine people within enclosures of "us" and "them" that result in their division rather than fostering the wholeness of peace. We have shown through different case studies and approaches that dehumanizing the Other has to be interrogated within structures that thrive on this strategy and undo peace. Rethinking the foundation of alliances in everyday interactions, as well as organizational networks is key to asserting the people's capacity to live in peace. For us, this imagery of people living in peace is not wishful thinking but a realistic and workable strategy for redirecting energy from destructive to productive and generative outcomes. Thus, while we investigate the hyped-up negative politics of Othering, we also demonstrate with specific examples the deep histories of relationality among humans and non-human Others for building a positive narrative of peace. Relationality inspires an ethical concept of people's peace that includes the Self and the Other.

Taking these three books together with the overarching theme of people's peace opens up unique multidimensional and inclusive approaches to studying peace, through cosmopolitanism, global citizenship, mutual aid, care, and community-building. People's peace pushes us to focus on our interconnections and collective ability to create humanistic communities. Near and far, people have the capacity to forge ethical, horizontal, relationships of care, concern, and belonging. It is the capacity to appreciate our common humanity.

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