SOUTH ASIAN HISTORY AND CULTURE
https://doi.org/10.1080/19472498.2019.1649942

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

New histories of political violence and revolutionary terrorism in modern South Asia

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ABSTRACT

This book round table discusses two recent monographs on political violence and revolutionary terrorism in late colonial India, Kama Maclean's *A Revolutionary History of Interwar India: Violence, Image, Voice and Text* (2015) and Durba Ghosh's *Gentlemanly Terrorists: Political Violence and the Colonial State in India, 1919–1947* (2017). Maclean's *A Revolutionary History of Interwar India* uncovers how revolutionaries in Punjab and northern India reshaped the goals and tactics of the Indian independence movement, especially the policy of nonviolence. Ghosh's *Gentlemanly Terrorists* explores the relationship of political violence in Bengal to the development of the modern nation-state in India. Both Ghosh and Maclean rethink the conventional narrative of the Indian freedom struggle and connect local developments in South Asia to global trends in anticolonial resistance and to larger conversations about the relationship between democracy and surveillance. In the five review essays, Daniel Elam, Rishad Choudhury, Mou Banerjee, Rohit De, and Michael Silvestri assess the impact of these two monographs on South Asian history, legal studies, histories of religion, studies of anticolonial movements, and British imperial historiography. In their responses, Maclean and Ghosh assess the challenges of writing histories of revolutionaries in the present in relation to the anticipated futures of the revolutionaries themselves.

Keywords
revolutionaries; terrorism; Bengal; Punjab; British empire

Introduction

Renewed global interest in political violence and revolutionary terrorism has yielded vibrant interdisciplinary discussions on the subject in interwar South Asia. This book round table emerged out of a conference round table that was held at the Annual Conference on South Asia in Madison in October 2018 on two recent monographs, Kama Maclean's *A Revolutionary History of Interwar India: Violence, Image, Voice and Text* (2015) and Durba Ghosh's *Gentlemanly Terrorists: Political Violence and the Colonial State in India, 1919–1947* (2017).

Kama Maclean's *A Revolutionary History of Interwar India* uncovers how North Indian revolutionaries reshaped the goals and tactics of the Congress movement, especially the policy of nonviolence. Reconfiguring the political landscape of the independence movement, Maclean advances new ways to use visual and oral sources to tell revolutionary histories. Durba Ghosh's *Gentlemanly Terrorists* explores the relationship of political violence in interwar Bengal to the development of the modern nation-state in India. Complicating the history of colonial constitutionalism as a gradual expansion of rights and representation, Ghosh shows how constitutional reforms that aimed to

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promote liberal governance in India were always tied to emergency legislation. Both Ghosh and Maclean rethink the conventional narrative of the Indian freedom struggle and participate in interdisciplinary conversations concerning political violence, nationalism, and law. As Maclean notes in this book round table, the two monographs contribute to a recent 'revolutionary turn' in the historiography of modern South Asia. However, as both Ghosh and Maclean discussed during the conference round table in Madison in October 2018, this recent revolutionary turn masks the challenges of research on revolutionaries and underground movements.

In the following pages, Daniel Elam, Rishad Choudhury, Mou Banerjee, Rohit De, and Michael Silvestri assess the impact of both monographs on South Asian history, legal studies, the study of religion, and global histories of violence and anticolonial resistance. A theme addressed by the reviewers is the simultaneous absence and overabundance of archives on revolutionaries and the interwar period's uncomfortable relationship to public memory in postcolonial South Asia. Specifically, the secrecy surrounding the revolutionaries' actual underground activities in the 1920s and 1930s was matched by the mountains of paper produced by colonial officials and popular visual artists and presses. While Durba Ghosh tracks the regime of paper within the colonial state, as well as Bengali revolutionaries' life narratives, Kama Maclean uncovers the regime of paper outside of the state, especially visual art surrounding the HSRA. The five reviewers also point towards new questions and research possibilities that both books open-up. The five review essays are followed by Ghosh and Maclean's responses.

In the first review essay, Daniel Elam adroitly places both monographs in interdisciplinary conversations on revolutionary politics and anticolonial movements. Elam illustrates the diverse ways in which Ghosh and Maclean recovered the politics of the revolutionaries themselves, in all their specificity and enduring ambiguity. Moreover, he encourages scholars of South Asia to build on these two monographs to consider 'new protocols' for scholarship on revolutionaries that foreground conjecture, beguilement, and ambiguity, not only as archival lacunae, but as revolutionary strategies. In turn, he evokes the historical presentism of the revolutionaries themselves – and the creative ways in which they deployed historical references in their politics- to encourage scholars to interrogate their own political commitments in the present.

In the second review essay, Rishad Choudhury deftly demonstrates how the afterlives of the revolutionaries have much to tell us about the fraught relationship between democracy and surveillance in postcolonial Bangladesh, Pakistan, and India. In tracking the futures past of the revolutionaries, Choudhury turns our attention to the paradoxical relationship of the revolutionaries' locales of origin in Punjab and eastern Bengal to their postcolonial legacies in India. Maclean and Ghosh interrogate the archive itself as a central character in the drama of political violence in South Asia, while acknowledging the role of the colonial bureaucracy in providing the revolutionaries with more geographical breadth and ideological coherence than they often possessed. In turn, Choudhury encourages historians to further explore 'what can these archives reveal about the postcolonial political arc of not only India, but the subcontinent as a whole?'

In the third essay, Mou Banerjee compellingly situates both books in conversations (and lacunae) within the history of religion in South Asia. With evocative examples drawn from both books, as well as the larger historical canvas, Banerjee illustrates the relevance of the two monographs to scholars of religion, broadly construed. She encourages historians to engage not only the posthumous attribution of religious symbolism to revolutionaries, but also the religious affiliations and imagery that provided the ideological scaffolding for revolutionary violence during the interwar era. Paraphrasing Banerjee (from the Madison conference), why is religion so important for those who would later remember the revolutionaries, but not for the revolutionaries themselves? If many of the revolutionaries 'cleaned up' the memory of their activities after 1947 for public commemorations, Banerjee gestures to the important work of historians in returning to the 'messiness' of those earlier histories.

In the fourth review essay, Rohit De adeptly addresses the role of regional politics, gender, and unstudied archives in both monographs. De foregrounds the innovative ways in which Ghosh and

Maclean tease out the many paradoxes that shaped revolutionary politics including 'the non-violent and violent; and the liberal and revolutionary strands,' as well as the simultaneous visibility and invisibility of the revolutionaries, then and now. In turn, he flags how both *Gentlemanly Terrorists* and *A Revolutionary History* utilize understudied archives, including the accounts of women and visual sources, to rethink India's independence movement. De draws out how the threat of revolutionary violence for British officials, alongside its appeal for some Indians, sometimes had a greater impact than the actions of the revolutionaries. De productively challenges historians to 're-provincialize' the revolutionaries in order to better understand 'what makes Punjab and Bengal particularly fertile grounds for revolutionary activity.'

Finally, in the fifth review essay, Michael Silvestri skillfully places the two books in the wider landscape of British imperial historiography, especially ongoing discussions over the impact of 'resistance and dissent' in reconceptualizing the British empire. Silvestri frames Ghosh and Maclean's recent monographs as destabilizing an older historiography of revolutionary violence in India as a story of failure. In its place, Silvestri demonstrates that these revolutionaries were adept at revealing the ideological fissures in the empire that they opposed. Silvestri argues that specific counter-terrorism tactics developed in interwar India shaped global patterns of state surveillance and violence in the following decades. In conclusion, he challenges historians of the British empire to build on Ghosh and Maclean's monographs to forge a better framework for integrating 'popular reception, revolutionary self-perceptions and the responses of the colonial state.'

In their responses to the five review essays, Ghosh and Maclean connect the anticipated futures of the revolutionaries in interwar India to the challenges of writing histories of revolutionary violence in the present. In her response, Ghosh situates *Gentlemanly Terrorists* both within a 'revolutionary turn' in South Asian studies and in conversation with a multi-generational body of scholarship on liberalism in the British Empire. In her response, Maclean generously places the development of *A Revolutionary History* in the context of wide-ranging interdisciplinary exchanges, while also encouraging scholars in the present to develop 'a more dynamic model of violence in colonial contexts.' Engaging the five reviewers, both Maclean and Ghosh propose new avenues for scholarship on revolutionaries that cross over into the post-colonial era. Likewise, they encourage the growing body of scholarly work on imperial anxieties to fully address the insecurities of the British empire's revolutionary opponents and 'how deeply damaging colonial occupation was for the colonized,' in Ghosh's compelling formulation.

What we talk about when we talk about revolutionaries

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Kama Maclean's *Revolutionary History* and Durba Ghosh's *Gentlemanly Terrorists* confront and provoke three interrelated challenges to scholarship on anticolonialism. Those are, briefly put: questions of evidence, questions of history, and questions of commitment. Taken together, I think these concerns offer us new protocols for approaching our work.

I. 'to recognize "how it really was"'[1]

To offer a history of revolutionary anticolonialism is to offer a history of evidence: to reveal how we arrive at what qualifies as evidence, corroboration, and proof. Of course, this has been one of the central driving questions of South Asian history and postcolonial theory, but these books mark a crucial moment in South Asian historiography, when we can no longer afford to simply 'ignore,' 'distrust,' 'read against,' or 'critique' the colonial archive. The imperial state and its records (then and now) have consistently forced its subjects to engage with them, and the relationship between

colonial surveillance and anticolonial action has always been one of negotiation and interplay, not simply negation and suppression.[2]

The interwar period is especially murky, marked not only by a self-conscious rupture from its own demarcated past, but also its erasure and foreclosure by World War II, decolonization, and the Cold War. In most cases, the archives we possess of revolutionary activism from this period are incomplete or missing altogether; in the best of cases, we possess revolutionary and bureaucratic documents that are purposefully unintelligible. The subjects of this moment thought and operated in political vocabularies often foreign to the ones we use today, even though the words might have remained the same. This is why it has been so necessary to offer genealogies, as Maclean and Ghosh do, of terms like 'revolutionary' and 'terrorism' that both clearly relate to their present use but are not synonymous with them. Briefly, these also include, from other scholars working closely with Maclean and Ghosh: 'love,' 'atheism,' 'youth,' and, of course, 'violence.'[3]

'Revolutionary' is an especially difficult term, forged in a sometimes playful and sometimes hostile relationship with British surveillance, Indian moderates, and international supporters. It is an identification with French, Russian, and Irish histories, but its proud recuperation was made possible by the illicit circulation of *Political Trouble in India* and the Rowlatt Report.[4] As Ghosh shows, the British (and then postcolonial Indian) category of 'terrorism' was a justification, in advance, of state-sanctioned violence. Moreover, 'terrorism' names a prediction of future action which *only* creates and enforces its own corroboration.

We have tended to replicate this logic even while claiming to distrust the colonial archive. We understand an action to be 'revolutionary' or 'terrorist' only when it has been predicted or determined to be so by the British Raj.[5] The revolutionaries themselves were doing plenty of things *they* deemed revolutionary but which were not among the Raj's predictions: reading, transforming the jail into an ashram, watching movies, and experimenting with studio portraiture.[6] This is why Ghosh's revolutionary terrorists are also gentleman; this is why Maclean's moderate Congress Party is also, covertly, revolutionary. That a *badhralok* could also be a *badmaash* is at the heart of both colonial confusion and anticolonial strategy.

Historians otherwise sympathetic to the revolutionary cause have preferred to omit ambiguity rather than render beguilement central to the anticolonial project. Maclean's expansive archive pushes us closer to a better protocol. By taking iconography and oral histories as corroborative evidence, she reveals social practices, modes of circulation, and moments of affiliation that have been brushed off as confusing or unreliable. As Maclean notes in a recent essay, the desire for a narrowly construed corroboration haunts and potentially undermines the historian's ability to reinvestigate the past 'as it really happened.'[7] Revolutionary anticolonial agitators and their sympathizers thought seriously about both publicity and secrecy, and, navigated these terrains with agility and sophistication.

A 'revolutionary history' in this sense might push us beyond mere corroboration. Revolution circulated first by rumor and second by manifesto – and then once again by whispers, rumors, boasts, and lies. Can a 'revolutionary history' be made to incorporate these acts, even at the risk of speculation and conjecture?

II. 'that which is fulfilled by the here-and-now'

The revolutionaries practiced, as both Maclean and Ghosh describe, a 'politics of impatience.' This stands as a direct response not only to the British Raj's alluring (and false) promise of a slow liberal lurch towards independence, but also against M.K. Gandhi's seemingly infinite 'experiments with truth' and his assertion of politics without guarantee.[8] This is why violence/non-violence is an improper axis along which to articulate the differences between the revolutionaries and their adversaries.

What 'violence' is, or what counts as 'violence,' was at the center of anticolonial debates in the 1920s. We cannot, therefore, cleanly associate the 'terrorists' or the 'revolutionaries' with the 'politics of impatience' solely on the basis of their affiliation with 'violence.' It is unclear, in most anticolonial writing, that 'violence' *per se* secures any particular timeframe for a desired event (independence, revolution, *satyagraha*). On the contrary, what seems particularly compelling about interwar radical anticolonial thought is that it operated in the absence of a promised outcome. *Inqilab zindabad* declares revolution for the perpetual present, a never-ending 'now.'[9] The 'cult of the bomb,' in its 1910 iteration, declares violence on the present in order to *revive* – not avenge – the past.

How can we imagine – as the revolutionaries and others suggest – impatience as not simply a demand for a result or an event, but rather a *politics onto itself*? That is, a revolutionary politics is revolutionary by virtue of its perpetual impatience. It is neither satisfied with the present (liberals) nor unsatisfied with the future (Gandhi). Instead, impatient politics is a constant and consistent demand for revolution – *inqilab zindabad* – and therefore in line with a total reformulation of an historical imagination.

III. 'to take control of a memory'

Commitment, Theodor Adorno writes, is a plea for a world that might, and *should*, be otherwise.[10] We have begun to take stock of the revolutionaries' commitments, and this project is far from over. But what are ours?[11]

A temptation to align our contemporary present with the interwar period looms over all of these projects. Presentism, that 'morally complacent and methodologically suspect' mode of analysis, has dogged the histography of anticolonialism since Indian and Pakistani independence.[12] If we are too eager to find clues about our own political moment from the colonial archive, we will miss the specificity of both. We can admit that we our political commitments are rooted in the present while nevertheless rigorously historicizing the subjects of our analysis.

And yet, the revolutionaries stump us again. There were no better presentists than the revolutionaries, for whom all of literature and history were up for the taking. Only under the HSRA's pen could Auguste Vaillant's anarchist declaration – 'it takes a loud voice to make the deaf hear' – refer to a smoke-bomb and a gunshot. No one but Bhagat Singh could watch *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in 1929 and decide it was required viewing for revolution. A proper commitment to a revolutionary history requires us to imagine the world otherwise: then and now. To historicize the revolutionaries requires us to embrace their presentism. To recuperate them for the present requires us to return to them the global vibrancy- and ambiguities- of their historical moment.

The futures past of anticolonial archives

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Though focused tightly on the interwar era, Maclean and Ghosh's monographs shed significant light on the afterlives of anticolonial violence in South Asia. This shared analytical intention is born of visions internal to the pasts they examine. As they argue, a proleptic politics, predicated on freedom in the future, became a ruling obsession for those who pursued violence against the Raj. Thus, between 1928 and 1931 in the Punjab, Bhagat Singh and his acolytes rooted their agitations and aspirations, in Maclean's felicitous phrase, in 'a politics of impatience.'[13] From 1919 to 1947 in Bengal, maintains Ghosh, *bhadralok dacoits* similarly pursued terror with imminent objectives in mind, 'most importantly, new futures.'[14]

I wish to keep vivid the tensions the authors so astutely probe between past and postcolonial present, a temporal span ultimately bridged by the 'former futures' of revolutionary thought in British India.[15] Whether as popular memory ('imperatives … reflected in "history"'[16]), or as political genealogy ('a history of the present'[17]), both authors foreground the implications of political violence in nationalist and statist recall alike in India. To this end, they deploy two methods. First, as histories mediating the present, their narratives self-consciously stage the archive as central dramatis personae. Second, as much as they highlight what was remembered, they deftly delineate much that was forgotten. And, in the end, it is in these lapses that we discover how decolonization, despite the burdens of history, still represented a breach from it.

The subtitle of Maclean's book immediately gestures to her archive. Simultaneously, it bursts out of cover and flyleaf to animate the very substance of her study. Like the figures behind the Hindustan Socialist Republican Army (HSRA), her sources of 'image, voice and text' are made up of much fugitive material. Expertly guiding readers through the dense desiderata of revolutionary disturbances in the Punjab, she brings together bazaar paintings, oral histories, and proscribed pamphlets to demonstrate how militant ideologies captured popular imagination through to the height of Gandhian Civil Disobedience in the 1930s. The charisma and mystique of a Bhagat Singh or Chandrashekhar Azad were chiefly cultivated, she notes, through pathos-laden, 'angry art': graphic martyrologies stressing self-sacrifice.[18] This '"unarchived"' archive is what also allows Maclean to clarify how patriotic memory sedimented in a predominantly illiterate society.[19]

Ghosh takes the exact opposite tack. Her paper trail is that of a hypervigilant, security state, caught in the grips of graphomania. While revolutionary autobiographies quickened one view of violence (chs. 2 & 6), in the end it was the Raj that literally wrote into existence an institutional-bureaucratic regime to contain and conceptualize insurgency. In turn, this ensured that the erratic activities of Bengali radicals acquired a coherence they in reality lacked, scripted as they were into a 'documentary "papereality" that instantiated the threat of terrorism.'[20] Ghosh elucidates how the relics of that archive linger in anti-terror laws within India's democratic dispensation, ordinances whose juridical lines of descent dovetail from the Defence of India (1915) or Rowlatt (1919) acts. Indeed, with 'terrorists' recast as postcolonial 'revolutionaries,' and surveillance registers on 'anarchists' used to identify 'freedom fighters' with pension benefits, the archive still bristles as 'a live concern.'[21]

Yet like all archives, these too have their vanishing points. Amnesias, pervading both the pictorial 'mute evidence' and the textual 'mountain of material,' assume particular pointedness here due to the nature of decolonization in South Asia.[22] Partition, the authors show, established radically different pathways to revolutionary history. The nerve center of the HSRA was Lahore, yet 'communal logic' dictated that it was later scarcely commemorated in Pakistan.[23] East Bengal was the birthplace of prominent militant societies like Anushilan Samiti and the site of such celebrated acts of revolt as the Chittagong armory raid. Yet, their proponents were subsequently honored in West Bengal, not in East Pakistan, nor in Bangladesh.[24] Given these ruptures in remembering, we may ask, what can these archives reveal about the postcolonial political arc of not only India, but the subcontinent as a whole?

Can we, for example, intimate a paradoxical connection between the act of disremembering the HSRA archive, with its promise of an anticipated freedom – the 'Pakistan disconnection,' as Maclean terms it – and the fraught history of violence in that country and the military-bureaucratic state that rose to curb it? Arguably exceeding the intensity of insurgencies in Srinagar or Jharkhand, it is after all anti-state violence in Baluchistan or Khyber Pakhtunkhwa that has continued to lacerate Pakistan. Further, that the active deployment of martial law, use of military tribunals, and suspension of habeas corpus has underwritten authoritarian regimes in Pakistan (and after 1975, in Bangladesh) is well-known. Many have sought the origins of these developments in the institutional logic of a colonial 'garrison state' or the intellectual inheritance of a 'jurisprudence of emergency.'[25] However, Maclean's study perhaps provides a shrewd reminder

that, as fickle as they are, memory and ways of accessing revolutionary pasts may have played a hand in producing such postcolonial formations.

The question appears germane, too, from the flip-side: democratic developments across South Asia. Ghosh judiciously underlines how extraordinary anti-terror legislations progressed with the expansion of the colonial franchise, thereby prefiguring an ambivalent liberal-democratic order in India. Pakistan's record of illiberal governance, however, masks how the very idea of that nation acquired formative coherence at the peak point of electoral democracy in British India, as a campaign slogan to whip up Muslim constituencies in Punjab and Bengal in the 1945 elections. As for the death of that idea, that too resulted from the first Pakistani elections held on the basis of universal franchise in 1970. Martial law and bloody civil war swiftly followed. Again, can we suggest that these trajectories partly resulted from the forgetting of radical futures? The revolutionary career of Trailokyanath Chakrabarty is instructive here. Though he chose to remain in East Pakistan, and even titled his memoirs *Freedom Struggle of Pakistan and India*, Ghosh points out how he was honored only in Calcutta. No equivalent memory exists in Dhaka or Karachi.

These may be excessively speculative questions, premised as they are not on how pasts were preserved, but forgotten. Nonetheless, they spring from the insights Maclean and Ghosh themselves forward on political violence and their entanglements with the past, present, and former futures. The critical accent on archives is also vindicated in how they have endured as artefacts. Imagery has made an almost-pop icon in Singh; Guevara-like t-shirts with his silhouette carry pan-Indian appeal. As for Bengali radicals, they are really only honored in West Bengal; their more powerful legacy buried in the opaque letters of the law. As for the futures they desired? When a version of it arrived, Punjab and Bengal both witnessed another disturbing but differently directed orgy of violence. But while Partition falls outside the exploratory range of both studies, in following the long shadow of colonial violence they breathe brilliant life into an insight advanced by its arch-theorist. 'Decolonization,' stated Fanon, is necessarily a process of 'total disorder.' Its violent character and later legacies become clearer, though, when viewed through the prism of the colonial past, the 'history-making movement' that ultimately constitutes it.[26]

Specters of saintly rebels: religion as the absent presence in discourses of political violence and revolutionary terrorism

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Definitive contributions to the emerging historiography on terrorism and political violence within the framework of nationalist politics, Durba Ghosh and Kama Maclean's monographs are exhaustively researched, elegantly argued, and beautifully written. The expert interplay of narrative arc and critical apparatus make for riveting reads, and act as masterclasses in the conception and execution of their central theses. As is often the case with scholarly works of such distinction, there remain only very minor critiques to be made. It is my privilege to ask Ghosh and Maclean to engage a little more with a lacuna that I think exists, perhaps intentionally, or maybe not, in their works.

By this I mean their lack of direct engagement with the aspect of religion and religious mythopoiesm, both in revolutionary propaganda and in the magical transmutation of revolutionaries into martyred saints in popular memory. In order to address this lacuna, I pose the following questions: Why is myth-making always entangled in the creation of saints in the political lexicon of South Asia? Why do we remember historic actors only in the act of worship? In this moment of worship, in the creation of a religion of political veneration, who do we forget and what do we remember? If we leave out political theology as a meaningful category of historical analysis, what do we risk in terms of balanced analysis?

To address these questions, I will begin with two examples drawn from the larger historical canvas of the two monographs. Aurobindo Ghosh, revolutionary ideologue turned saint of Pondicherry and exemplar to practitioners of terrorist extremism that flowered in Bengal during the Swadeshi movement, understood the impulses behind such affective and bloody sacrifice for the nation more acutely than perhaps any of his contemporaries. The nuance in his search for an ethical polity, Sugata Bose noted in his analysis of Aurobindo, was entirely masculine – Aurobindo was determined to free his motherland through the application of *brahmatej*, the divine power invested in all selfless devotees.[27]

Another largely forgotten ideologue from the same era, was the Hindu-Catholic Brahmabandhab Upadhyay. His rabble-rousing journal, the *Sandhya*, published seditious articles that delved into the sentimental aspect of nationalist myth-making. Upadhyay directly referred to another strain of Bengali-Hindu religious piety, the cult of mother-worship, in articles such as 'Ma-Kali'r Boma' or Mother Kali's bombs. These articles led to his prosecution for sedition in the court of the fearsome British judge Douglas Kingsford. It is of course the same Kingsford, who was the actual target of the bombs thrown by Khudiram Bose and Prafulla Chaki, a crime for which Khudiram would be hanged in 1908. The public mythology around the teenage revolutionary would be immensely strengthened in popular memory by the folk song, *Ekbar bidai de Ma, ghure ashi* – 'Mother, bid me goodbye only this once, for I shall come back,' the Hindu motif of rebirth that crystalized the essential immortality of the soul of the martyr.

Both Ghosh and Maclean adopt two particular strategies in speaking about revolutionary terrorism in interwar India. One is in disputing the positioning of the actors involved in and espousing political violence as 'irrational and uncivil', the oppositional countermeasure to Gandhian non-violence. Both historians rightly stress the complicated relationships these gentlemanly terrorists harbored with mainstream nationalist organizations and politicians. To this can be added the aspirations regarding the length of time, commensurate with mounting losses, which would bring about the long hoped-for moment of freedom. In this, the revolutionaries were impatient, Maclean intuits, perhaps due to their youth or their intimations of incipient mortality – unwilling or unable to deal with the long waiting game that the Congress and Gandhi were adept at negotiating. Secondly, the events of 9/11 and its aftermath heralded a decisive change in academic and political perceptions of terrorism and violence, and seems, rightly so, to cast a haunting shadow on these two monographs. This is an era where categories of historical analysis such as terrorism and politically inspired violence cannot be meaningfully untangled from discourses on extremist religious ideologies, xenophobia based on religious identity and paranoid state surveillance.

Maclean expresses this in a pithy manner – ' … the term terrorism … operated discursively then as it does now: to excise violent actions from the circle of reason and justifiability, and to enable the full brunt of state violence to be unilaterally unleashed, regardless of legal niceties.'[28] Ghosh says, 'the events of 11 September 2001 … changed how many of us in the United States began to think about the relationship between violent acts of terrorism and their growing centrality in national and international politics, as democratic governments confronted the challenges of maintaining civil liberties alongside widely felt anxieties about global security.'[29] Both Ghosh and Maclean's books make important points about dealing with political violence as an emergency that exists beyond political, legal and social structures in the spaces of never-ending crises, leading only to the perpetuation of that emergency.

Contributing so richly to historiographies on actors, who were reimagined in their posthumous lives in the popular memories of their postcolonial countries as heroic martyrs and saints, is a double-edged sword. In such cases, the threat of conspicuous presentism – that the sins of future generations retroactively color our understanding of the motivations and actions of past historical actors, is ever-present. As Agha Shahid Ali poignantly wrote, sometimes memory comes in the way of history. The obverse course of action is to write about the cultural expressions of mass-veneration of martyrs through religious affective symbolism, but to consciously leave a lacuna in

terms of definitive attribution. By this I mean the reluctance to name that cultural expression of popular veneration for what it is, which is a deification of those figures who paid with their lives for their choice of extremist violence both as political rhetoric and action against the British Raj. Both these wonderful monographs seem to be poised elegantly in this small space of ambivalence, regarding their choice of thinking about religion as a category of analysis in understanding how public memory is itself created and deployed in the public sphere, also while simultaneously choosing not to take the name of the rose – 'Stat rosa pristina nomine, nomina nuda tenemus.'[30]

Ghosh and Maclean do extraordinary work of demonstrating these complicated relationships. Maclean does this through her visual sources and oral histories, many analyzed for the first time, thereby opening up a completely new archive for historians. And she engages with the visual symbolism of the Islamic idea of annihilation or *fana*, in her astute analyses of calendar-art reproductions that depicted revolutionaries as moths hovering around the flame of self-sacrifice as well as in reproductions that showed the revolutionaries stood shoulder to shoulder with members of the Congress like Gandhi, Nehru and Subhash Chandra Bose.[31] In Ghosh's work, we see how religion and fanaticism were usually evoked as synonyms in colonial classification interchangeably, as evidence in the colonial archive that categorized the mystical propaganda used in the prose of counter-insurgency to appeal to the general public.[32]

The complicit relationship between religion and modern regimes of power works in intricate measures and countermeasures of elision and proclamation. British imperialism perfected the state machinery of surveillance and suppression in its South-Asian laboratory, exported it globally and perpetuated it post-colonially. Even in the contemporary prose of counter-insurgency, this surveillance machinery defines religion and its cultural expressions in exactly this manner, by renaming certain cultural expressions of religion as fanaticism and certain regional patriotisms as sedition. This is aimed at proving that the reasons of state always overpower the centrifugal forces of resistance enacted by the weak, the marginalized and the colonized, who often weaponize their political action with a tinge of religious symbolism. Paradoxically, this very act of providing a religious basis for political violence is used by the majoritarian population to exercise control over the minority.

The specters of colonialism are not that easily laid to rest. Figures like Bhagat Singh and Subhash Bose were communists and socialists in their ideologies, atheists in personal beliefs and dedicated to equality – political, social or religious, in their ideals. They are presently co-opted as calendar saints in the lexicon of the political ideologies of the religious right in India, which holds up these saintly rebels as heroes of majoritarian nationalism. It is at this juncture that historians of the powers and caliber of Ghosh and Maclean can make a definitive difference by engaging in a dynamic and historicized analysis of categories of religion/fanaticism as it relates to revolutionary terrorism and political violence.

Revolutionary lives and afterlives: archive, gender and region

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In November 1953 at the height of the Kenyan Emergency, British intelligence officials wrote agitatedly to the Governor of Kenya complaining that the Indian High Commission had distributed 10,000 copies of Mulk Raj Anand's *The Story of India* to Kenyan schoolchildren. Extracts that provoked outrage included the praise of 'a brave Punjabi lad, Bhagat Singh … who protested against police beatings of Lala Lajpat Rai … made a plot and attacked some police wallahs' and 'in Bengal, brave young girls, also threw bombs on the British officials, these young people loved India'.[33] This complaint was among the many that led to the ouster of Apa Pant, the Gandhian Indian High Commissioner to Kenya, highlighting the challenge the history of revolutionary

violence posed to both the colonial administration's fears of violent contagion and the postcolonial Indian nation state's desire to frame the national struggle as a non-violent one.

Revolutionary terrorism in colonial India poses a curious paradox of being simultaneously invisible and hyper-visible. The revolutionaries were overwhelmingly ineffectual in meeting their stated goals; their gambits are dominated by failed attempts, 'bombs exploding in their hands', assassinations of innocent bystanders and large scale arrest and detentions. Conversely, as Durba Ghosh and Kama Maclean chart in their rich and complex monographs, revolutionary terrorism dominated both administrative and public imaginations at a scale disproportionate to their desired impact.[34] While both monographs draw upon a rich range of sources including newspapers, memoirs, pension files and jail records, at its core each makes visible and historicizes a key underexplored archive, centers gender as a category of analysis and locates terrorism between region and nation.

Archives

Durba Ghosh excavates the dense legal archive of legislation, litigation and bureaucratic rulemaking and locates the origins of the postcolonial state of emergency and the security state in the scare over revolutionary violence. Ghosh demonstrates how the expansion of franchise and representation in South Asia went hand in hand with repressive legislations, be it around the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms and the Rowlatt Act in 1919 or the extension of universal franchise and the adoption of postcolonial preventive detention laws and limiting of free speech on the grounds of security[35]. Contrary to conventional readings, Ghosh shows that emergency legislation was not drafted in the aftermath of a political emergency but often in anticipation. Building on Nasser Hussain's work on hyper-legality, Ghosh shows with extraordinary care how colonial emergencies were addressed not by the mere abrogation or suspension of law, but the enactment of an extraordinary raft of laws that deepened colonial governmentality and control, over people, the press, legislative process, transport systems and the economy. Despite emergency laws signifying extra-legality and suspension of rule of law, the rhetorical demands of colonial legal liberalism and heightened scrutiny placed by non-violent nationalist politicians turned the system of apprehension and detention of revolutionary terrorists into a thick field of rules and regulations determining application and exceptions to the law. The tradition of judicial deference and weak judicial review led to the legislature and the bureaucracy emerging as sites of contestations over categorization.[36] It is this contestation over applicable rules that leads to the legal categorization of Ghosh's gentlemanly terrorists who are distinguished from other kinds of violent detainees through technologies of control marked by their class-status, caste and 'nature' of political activity. Legislatiors and newspapers demanded and ensured allowances for dependents of the 'better class of prisoners', they carried masses of clothes and books from home and local economies of supplying goods to prisoners flourished.

Maclean situates the overwhelming public memory and multiple meanings given to the revolutionaries through an impressive analysis of the production, circulation and content of visual images, and a really original reading of oral history, including the often neglected 'satire, hearsay and rumor'.[37] It is hearsay that ties the dialectic of revolutionary violence, as stories about colonial officials rendered them targets and exhortations at the gallows inspired the next set of revolutionaries. It is perhaps this unstable nature of information that leads to the long list of failed and mistaken assassinations. Following the trail of whispers, Maclean historicizes both the production of the oral history collection at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library and the Cambridge Centre for South Asian Studies and notes the silences, ambiguities and erasures that mark the production of 'archived' oral history, for instance the sparse official interview with the pivotal figure of Durgadevi Vohra.

Taken together these archives offer a revisionist reading of the Indian nationalist movement, showing the deep imbrication both in popular memory and political practice of the non-violent and violent; and the liberal and revolutionary strands.[38] Formal legal defence committees and informal legal advice by figures ranging from C.R Das to Motilal Nehru turned the nature of

'emergency governance into one of public debate', framed violent action as virtuous political act and became productive sites of cooperation and assistance between revolutionary and non-violent nationalists.[39] More radically, visual images and rumors produced pantheons of nationalists and imagined close ties between the Congress leadership and the socialist revolutionaries.

These archives reveal both colonial and postcolonial anxieties. As Ghosh shows, the security and intelligence files in West Bengal were reconstructed first as the Intelligence Bureau sought to track anti-colonial revolutionaries as they became postcolonial political activists and later as the Home department transformed them into pensioned freedom fighters. Or as Maclean explains, activists would present themselves as Gandhians to one set of oral history archivists in 1969 and only reveal their revolutionary past to others in 1975, as the 'prevailing zeitgeist' privileging non-violence changed.[40]

Gender

The relationship between gender and political action is a key and powerful category animating both Ghosh and Maclean's narratives. Popular print and personal memoirs produced the image of an active, virile and chaste masculinity, one that was separated from the sphere of the family and domestic responsibilities.[41] Conversely, marriage and householder status operated as a disguise allowing revolutionaries travelling as a married couple to evade colonial surveillance. Women revolutionaries played conventional gender roles and performed the labor of creating alternate families (feeding, hosting, carrying messages and enabling disguise by posing as wives), as well as providing a powerful critique of the state by the very act of breaking gendered norms and taking up violent activities. Ghosh and Maclean provide a powerful account of how women revolutionaries navigated patriarchal authorities and notions of respectability at home, in the revolutionary associations and in prison.[42] Their scholarship, alongside Ania Loomba's *Revolutionary Desires*, offer a methodologically deft way of reading the personal amid the self-consciously public narratives presented in oral histories and memoirs.

Region

Focusing on revolutionary activity in Punjab and Bengal respectively, both works are strikingly complementary and show the centrality of the region in constituting 'nationalist political violence'. The two provincial governments were the laboratory of repressive laws which were later exported to other jurisdictions. Administrative imaginations linked violence to specific regions and sought to insulate them by distributing the detained revolutionaries across an archipelago of detention camps across the country. Yet status-based prison regulations preserved regional identities by ensuring that provisions of regionally specific diets. Bengali *bhadralok* revolutionaries held in Rajasthan were provided with vegetables from Bengal, and fish four times a week transported at considerable cost across the country and ate better than local residents, while Punjabi prisoners in South India demanded jhatka meat, green lentils and ghee for halva.[43] Prisoners and legislators turned these regulations into a right, protesting the provision of rotten fish or inedible vegetables. The demand to be treated according to their status as gentleman and political prisoners was the basis of political action and hunger strikes across the country. Punjabi and Bangla literature, music and popular culture were suffused with narratives of revolutionaries and grounded nationalists regionally. Reading both works together pushes historians to ask what makes Punjab and Bengal particularly fertile grounds for revolutionary activity, given that they had different histories of administration, colonial rule and social structures. What can we make of the emergence of largely Sikh and Hindu revolutionary groups at a time when limited representation was introduced into a Muslim majority province with a significant non-Muslim minority? The waning of the revolutionary movements was marked by the election of two significant non-Congress governments, and the provinces that witness the emergence of 'legitimate' political

violence also were the ones that were vivisected during the partition. While recent scholarship has sought to de-provincialize the Indian revolutionaries amid transnational networks, Ghosh and Maclean's scholarship suggests that it also may be productive to re-provincialize them to understand the relationships between region and the nations.[44]

A revolutionary history of the British empire

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For many years, British imperial historians, much like their counterparts in South Asian history, displayed a marked lack of interest in interrogating the histories of Indian revolutionaries during the final decades of colonial rule. Historians thought they knew everything that they needed to know about the revolutionaries: they had sought to use violence to oust the British from the Raj, they failed miserably in that endeavor and they thus constituted an interesting but not a particularly influential strand of anti-colonial nationalism in South Asia. Imperial historian Richard Popplewell concurred with the judgment of early postcolonial Indian historians who had 'shown that the revolutionaries of the early twentieth century had little immediate impact in their own day, and failed to a considerable extent because of their own breathtaking incompetence.' Although Popplewell's *Intelligence and Imperial Defence* (1995) demonstrated the development of an extensive British imperial intelligence infrastructure directed against the first generation of Indian revolutionaries, he nonetheless adopted an almost apologetic tone in stating that his book devoted more attention to the Ghadar Party revolutionary Har Dayal than Gandhi.[45]

British imperial and South Asian historians alike have since come to appreciate that failed anti-colonial movements could have as much of an impact as successful ones. Revolutionary organizations such as Ghadar, Jugantar and the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association demonstrate the complex, variegated and transnational nature of anti-colonial resistance and reveal much about the structures and ideologies of the empires that revolutionaries sought to overthrow.[46] The scholarship of Durba Ghosh and Kama Maclean has played an important role in revising our historical understanding of revolutionary movements in late colonial India. Both Ghosh and Maclean demonstrate how these revolutionaries were far from marginal to the trajectory of Indian nationalism. Rather, these revolutionaries now appear more cosmopolitan and transnational in their scope, much more influential among nationalist politicians, and possessing greater popular appeal than they had previously appeared to be.[47]

Ghosh and Maclean's books also address key issues on the current research agenda of historians of modern Britain and the British Empire. Broadly, these two works contribute to the project of historians attempting to reconfigure our understanding of the history of the British Empire as a story of resistance and dissent. Indian revolutionaries, whether members of the HSRA or the various Bengali revolutionary organizations, contributed to what Antoinette Burton in *The Trouble with Empire* has recently termed the 'choppy, irregular terrain' of the British Empire. This imperial terrain 'was shaped as much by the repeated assertion of colonial subjects as by the footprint of imperial agents,' and 'constituted by … the very trouble its efforts and practices provoked.'[48]

Ghosh and Maclean's books in particular connect to two recent points of emphasis in British Empire studies: the role of violence and coercion, and the prominence of imperial fears and anxieties. Both authors demonstrate that violence was only one of multiple strategies pursued by revolutionaries in both Bengal and the Punjab. The ways in which imperial authorities construed and constructed the revolutionaries' anticolonial activities as illegitimate – in short, acts of terrorism, full stop – and their various strategies for repressing them also form an important part of the narratives of *Gentlemanly Terrorists* and *A Revolutionary History of Interwar India*. Ghosh lucidly illuminates the extent and longevity of the coercive regime that the colonial

authorities put in place to suppress the 'gentlemanly terrorists' of Bengal. Legislation allowing for the detention without trial of suspected revolutionaries was uniformly drafted as a preventative measure, designed to prevent future terrorist attacks, rather than in response to events. Emergency laws became the norm in interwar Bengal, and indeed expanded and became more detailed; in Ghosh's phrase, 'the emergency seemed to never end.'[49] Maclean in turn points to how 'the militarisation of the public sphere' in Bengal was transferred to the Punjab in the 1930s.[50]

In addition to the prominence of imperial violence, historians have recently emphasized the degree to which the trajectories of modern colonial empires were shaped by anxiety, fear and panics.[51] Indeed, the British regime in colonial India has been recently characterized as an 'insecurity state.'[52] Ghosh's detailed and penetrating analysis of revolutionary autobiographies and Maclean's insightful exploration of the vast quantities of visual and print literature produced about Bhagat Singh and the HSRA demonstrate the tremendous appeal of the revolutionaries to the Indian public and the ways in which revolutionary politics impacted the mainstream of Indian nationalism. As revolutionary movements continued to demonstrate tremendous popular appeal and the ability to carry out attacks on the colonial state, emergency legislation, troop deployments and similar measures were not intended simply to suppress revolutionaries, but to reassure a nervous British-Indian population in the face of revolutionary attacks which seemed to imperial observers to randomly target Britons by the 1930s.[53]

From a British imperial perspective, the prominence of imperial violence and imperial anxieties on display in both books helps us to better understand the roots of British counter-insurgency in the post-World War II era of decolonization. Historians have demonstrated how some modern counter-insurgency practices can be traced to the nineteenth-century liberal empire.[54] In turn, Maclean and Ghosh indicate how many of the strategies directed against anticolonial movements in the decades after the Second World War are visible in colonial authorities' responses to the threat of revolutionary terrorism in an earlier period and place, specifically interwar India. As Ghosh shows, a small archipelago of detention camps for the Bengali revolutionaries were created across India in the 1930s, which visiting Quaker observers in the 1930s, much to the consternation of colonial authorities, described as 'concentration camps.'[55] Police officers and civil servants involved in the campaign against the revolutionaries in Bengal and the Punjab took up positions as intelligence officers and advisors with issues of intelligence work, anti-terrorism and counter-insurgency across the British Empire in the interwar period.[56]

The authors of the two books have already analyzed the issues in such depth and clarity that it seems somewhat unfair to ask them to do more. However, given the recent focus on the transnational in both South Asian studies and imperial history, I wondered what they see as the next steps for South Asian and British historians who seek to study the lives and impact of Indian revolutionaries. How do these specific histories of north India and Bengal connect, and how do they connect to histories of anticolonial activism and imperial counter-terrorism outside India? How can we write a history of revolutionary anticolonialism which incorporates popular reception, revolutionary self-perceptions and the responses of the colonial state within a global frame? The imperial anxieties and imperial practices highlighted by both Ghosh and Maclean have implications well beyond South Asia, both elsewhere in the empire and the metropole.

Response

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It is a gift to be coupled with Kama Maclean's ground-breaking book, *A Revolutionary History of Interwar India: Violence, Image, Voice and Text*, which came out a few years before *Gentlemanly*

Terrorists. Her emphasis on Hindi-language texts and visual imagery showed how the history of South Asia can be told from archives that depart from the (largely colonial) archives that I relied on to write *Gentlemanly Terrorists*. Until Maclean's book, the idea that the Congress was involved in revolutionary activity or political violence was controversial; so was the idea that Bhagat Singh and his comrades actively managed their media presence. Maclean's chapter on 'that hat,' brilliantly reconstructs how a material object became synonymous with a revolutionary figure and a politics of subversion.

In tracking what is widely considered a history of failures, the two books take the ideas and practices of political violence seriously and direct attention to the ways that Indian subjects across northern India thought of targeted violence as a way to challenge the state violence that was directed at them.

Our thoughtful and incisive interlocutors have raised a series of themes that mark future directions of what Maclean has called the 'revolutionary turn.' In a prolonged political moment when many types of revolutions are stalled or stymied, our books think with and against the histories of revolutions; in Daniel Elam's words: 'A proper commitment to a revolutionary history requires us to imagine the world otherwise: then and now.'

Although my book is part of a revolutionary turn, the book's arguments engage with a genealogy of scholarship on liberalism, empire, and the state (both colonial and postcolonial). Scholarship by Nasser Hussain, Jinee Lokaneeta, Taylor Sherman, Michael Silvestri, Ujjwal Kumar Singh, and of course, my PhD supervisor, Thomas R. Metcalf, have been critical to my understanding of state violence and surveillance. When self-proclaimed liberal governments turn to repressive practices and putatively defend democracy, a strategy of 'hyperlegality' (Nasser Hussain's word) rather than lawlessness prevails. As Rohit De notes, Bengal and Punjab became 'the laboratory of repressive laws which were later exported to other jurisdictions.'

Two themes – afterlives and in/security – structure my responses to these rich and thoughtful engagements.

Afterlives

Rishad Choudhury's provocation, titled anticolonial afterlives, poses one way of thinking about revolutionary aspirations in the aftermath of decolonization, partition and Indian independence, when liberal *and* radical futures were severely challenged, particularly in the newly decolonized nation-states of South Asia. By ending before partition, neither book engages how the histories of political violence might have had consequences in the partition violence experienced in Punjab and Bengal, the two provinces that are the foci of these monographs. Choudhury and Rohit De explicitly link these two (usually distinct) historiographies of violence and rightly pose whether we can delink revolutionary violence from the traumatic violence of partition that affected these two Muslim-majority regions in which Sikh and upper-caste Hindu revolutionary movements were active.

As a possible response, both Choudhury and Mou Banerjee raise the question of venerating martyrs or revolutionary figures after their deaths; the veneration rituals that were observed in the Punjab and in Bengal were defined as much by religion as by territory. Choudhury astutely notes the reverence shown to Trailokya Nath Chakrabarty in modern-day Kolkata, where he died; but not in Dhaka where he lived until 1970. Near the street named for Trailokya Nath in Kolkata in 1971, a statue to Khudiram Bose was constructed near the High Court in 1972, as a celebration of the 25th anniversary of Indian independence and the liberation of Bangladesh. The confluence of commemorations for the revolutionary terrorist movement around the early 1970s suggests how much of the trauma of Bengal's partition – the loss of the eastern part of Bengal to Pakistan – was replayed in India's support for the Bangladesh liberation struggle. In their commemorative afterlives, figures such as Khudiram and Trailokya offered the possibility of a revolutionary history as a cause for the founding of Bangladesh.

Although Khudiram assassinated the wrong targets in 1908, he became a mythical hero immortalized by a Bengali folk song that later revolutionaries recalled as central to their consciousness. He became a subject of calendar art, as the cover to my book shows. In thinking about the afterlives or revolutionary heroes as martyrs who attracted religious veneration, Banerjee's comments are important reminders about how central religious belief and practice – always at the heart of upper-caste attachments – were to the political projects articulated by the *biplabi*, or Bengali rebels. Even if Subhas Chandra Bose and Bhagat Singh were avowed atheists, they are now widely the subject of public religious rituals that involve garlanding and lighting candles on their birthdays and death anniversaries. Indeed, Bose, when he was jailed by the British in Mandalay jail in the 1920s, advocated that his fellow political prisoners have an allowance to observe Durga Puja and other ritual events.[57] The appearance of Bhagat Singh in Kenya, in De's account, speaks to the ways that revolutionary icons became cultural exports.

In/security

At the heart of revolutionary politics is a state of insecurity that is (paradoxically) linked to a security state. Daniel Elam urges us to think of revolutionary politics as one without a clear future, but rather, a politics that resides in uncertainty and ambiguity. The activities that revolutionaries engaged in – such as reading and writing – were undoubtedly central to being radical even if colonial officials paid closer attention to bombs, assassinations, and robberies that destabilized the order on which colonial governance relied. As Michael Silvestri notes, recent scholarship in British imperial history focuses on the colonial state's anxieties and insecurities; this body of work shows how that the colonial state's reach in various parts of the world was unstable and constituted by the possibility of violence. The unboundedness of the revolutionaries' imagination of political violence rationalized repressive state responses; that's why the emergency never seemed to end, either for revolutionary terrorists or for the colonial officials who hoped to contain the threats posed by political violence.

So what does it mean to argue that colonial subjects, which includes the colonizers as well as the colonized, felt insecure and anxious?

In the ways that they wrote about themselves, revolutionaries lived in a state of perpetual insecurity, an insecurity that seems to afflict historians of revolutionaries with our urge to ensure our sources can stand the scrutiny of reviewers. Until the moment that the manuscript went into production, I was unsure about including the two chapters on autobiographies written by Bengal's revolutionaries. Many details were – as Elam suspects – were difficult to corroborate through other sources. And yet, how this historical moment is narrated – factually accurate or not – speaks to the aspirations and historical imagination that guided the revolutionaries as they participated in a movement that was secret and underground. Even as the solution to the problem of British occupation was endlessly deferred and emergency legislation expanded, revolutionaries who wrote about themselves were gripped by the insecurity of being irrelevant or having their contributions overlooked or diminished. It was striking that so many of the revolutionaries documented their activities after the risk of arrest or detention had passed. To use a term used by gay liberationists, they 'came out.' In Elam's terms, revolutionaries' 'commitments' remained aspirational; their beliefs an act of faith that is only visible in an archive of their own making. Thinking of revolutionary activity without clear ends would productively destabilize how we think of revolutionary failures.

Silvestri draws our attention to recent scholarship that argues that the British colonial state was perpetually 'troubled,' 'anxious,' and 'insecure.' As I understand this scholarship, anxieties as well as insurgencies and everyday resistance generated coercive state responses such as the massacre at Jallianwala Bagh in 1919. These arguments about colonial anxieties, which are well-represented in the mountains of archival materials in the British intelligence branch anywhere the British set foot, explain why British officials often responded with disproportionate force toward colonized subjects. Yet, I worry that some scholarship that focuses on the anxieties of those who colonized

distant territories overlooks how deeply damaging colonial occupation was for the colonized. The longstanding existence and geographical spread of the British empire shows that colonial occupation enacted daily violence on the minds and bodies of those whose land was dispossessed, whose livelihoods were changed, and whose subjectivities were inscribed exclusively in English. Political violence for Indians, which was considered terrorism to the British, was a deeply intimate act between parties who knew each other well; the idea that *bhadralok* were gentlemen was a widely held belief by Bengali elites as well as British officials. This shared idea about masculinity offered the possibility of political persuasion to a liberal cause. Yet bombs, robberies, assassinations targeted the deepest anxieties of British officials whose safety was threatened. In this way, those who participated in and imagined revolutionary actions showed just how deeply their experiences of terror, anxiety, and insecurity – after generations of experiencing state violence – could be turned on their colonial masters.

Response

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Is a 'revolutionary turn' as tautological as it sounds?

There is undoubtedly a new attentiveness to the episodes, organisations and personalities who pressed for swift change in British India, rejecting the project of political and social evolution for revolution. A 'revolutionary turn' ushered in by the books under discussion here, but also by the work of scholars such as Harald Fischer-Tiné, Ania Loomba and Chris Moffat (with interventions by Daniel Elam, Simona Sawhney, Ali Raza, Gajendra Singh and many others forthcoming), has together complicated the nonviolent exceptionalism that has come to inform narratives of anticolonialism in British India from 1919 to 1947. A revolutionary turn is then *re*turning our gaze to an expanded archive to take note of the neglected histories and legacies of radical anticolonialism in South Asia. I've been particularly grateful for the collective of scholars working on revolutionaries who seem to gravitate towards one another in archives and at conferences around the world, and who have collaborated to bring about this shift in focus. Durba Ghosh in particular has been a generous friend and colleague for nearly a decade; without her incisive work on Bengal (pithily dubbed by a British official as 'the Hamlet in the drama of terrorism'), it would be premature to proclaim any such turn. I also want to thank Andrew Amstutz and the commentators above for their provocative and engaged comments.

Earlier, Daniel Elam and I tried to complicate the frequent association of 'the revolutionary' with violence,[58] and here he makes a stronger case for breaking the connection. And yet the focus on political violence in revolutionary histories is unmistakably a recurrent theme. As I was writing *A Revolutionary History*, it took some time to process the disconnection between the canon of Gandhiana – as shelves of Gandhi-scholarship are named at Teen Murti – in South Asian Studies, and the materials I found in various archives. I was aware that some of my findings were so revelatory that they were positively discordant – something I reflected on in a post-script to the book.[59] There were also the dearly-held public narratives that are enshrined in films, comic books, and in bazaar literature, to write against. It was hard to find a balance between these factors and to craft a coherent narrative, while pushing the boundaries of what we consider as 'evidence', by leaning on rumours and images. As I was researching, I was driven by the excitement of uncovering secret histories which were necessarily parsed in ways that were unintelligible to the colonial state.

I trace my interest in the visual back to my first forays into academia, when I began to study Art History under the tutelage and later friendship of the photohistorian Geoffrey Batchen, at the University of Sydney in the mid-1980s. I abandoned that degree, but my interest in art and the

visual was extended decades later by semi-regular lunches with Jim Masselos, whose art collection and knowledge has been a huge inspiration. Kajri Jain's *Gods in the Bazaar* and Patricia Uberoi's work on calendar art began to show pathways into visual analysis, but it was the contributions by Chris Pinney and Sumathi Ramaswamy that gave me the methodological tools to begin to build what art historian Sugata Ray generously called a 'multi-sensorial history',[60] a generative phrase that has provoked my next project, applying the tools of Sound Studies to explore the Civil Disobedience era.

Daniel Elam pushes me to reflect on commitment. Why do we write these histories, now? Chris Bayly once commented to me that the renewed interest in revolutionary histories was compelled by our present post-9/11 malaise. I think Ghosh engages with this particularly well, in her gesturing to the never-ending emergency powers invoked by the post-colonial Indian government, among others. I don't think I was particularly compelled to write by the War on Terror; nor, unlike Ghosh, can I claim a kinship connection to any revolutionary. I did, however, grow up witness to a certain amount of interpersonal violence and I came to understand its inexorable effects. Outrageous violence has unimaginable long-term consequences – the findings of Trauma Studies have been particularly informative here – and we are only now, as the field shows signs of beginning to decolonize and imperial violence is coming under more scrutiny, developing an appreciation this, as Michael Silvestri indicates here. If understanding the anxieties of the British in India is critical to understanding the imperial habitus; the corollary to this is that we must come to terms with the longer-term legacies of fear and violence.

Mou Banerjee raises the issue of religion, which is, of course, inescapable. In my book I tried to focus on a reasonably tight narrative, so I only reflected briefly on the curious fact that religion was frequently the dialectic in which radical leftist politics was interpreted. The HSRA mounted an extensive critique of religion, and yet their politics were frequently parsed in explicitly religious terms, most notably in the form of the *shahid*, a trope that finds rich articulation in both Islam and Sikhism.[61] A central figure in revolutionary art – by which I mean posters that imagine revolutionary politics – was Bharat Mata, a figure with an explicitly Hindu reference and genealogy. In trying to account for why even an explicitly atheistic politics was, despite itself, returned to a religious vocabulary, I return to a reflection from William Pinch, who insightfully interprets religion as a way of thinking through death.[62] Death was a reality that the revolutionaries of the HSRA imagined, anticipated and welcomed.[63] Although they refuted the consolations of religion, many of their admirers did not, and so religious tropes became a particularly compelling way to express, and more importantly to *visualize*, the revolutionaries' mortality and to lament their young deaths. A rich array of motifs drawn from religious traditions, from Hinduism (poems that imagine Bhagat Singh playing Holi with his own blood) to Christianity (in which Bhagat Singh is rendered as a crucified Christ) were brought to the task of commemorating revolutionary politics. This was ideologically inconsistent, in that it did not chime with the ideology of the HSRA, but it was *affective* – and therefore *effective* – in communicating anti-colonialism. I am not the first to suggest that the prevalence of essentially communal referents in political mobilization helps us to understand pre-histories of partition. The Kanpur riots, which were sparked in the immediate aftermath of Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru's hangings, demonstrated the degree to which the revolutionaries had become absorbed into a Congress, and by extension communal, logic.

This brings me to Rishad Choudhury's provocation: what might revolutionary histories tell us about postcolonial South Asia? Specifically, can the forgetting of revolutionary pasts in Pakistan and Bangladesh be linked to their histories of partition, violence and insurgency, or the prevalence authoritarian regimes? These are important questions which I can't begin to account for here; any response would necessitate more work in Pakistan and Bangladesh respectively, in colonial archives, through textured multi-sensorial analyses, and with attention to the crafting of historical memory. There are still many questions to be asked that might begin to flesh out a response: for example, why did the HSRA have no prominent Muslims in its inner circle? And yet its front

organisation, the Naujawan Bharat Sabha, was particularly strong in Karachi and Peshawar, and did have Muslim recruits. Rohit De gestures towards similar questions: what makes Bengal and Punjab such fertile grounds for revolutionary activity? Despite the provinces' different histories, there are some similarities between Bengal and Punjab. Both were critically important in British India, provinces conquered first and last, respectively, in which there was substantial British investment, both symbolic and financial. Both provinces were subject to particularly gendered forms of colonial discourse – the notoriously 'effete Bengali' and the 'martial races' of the Punjab. Neither province was a stronghold for the Indian National Congress, evidenced most spectacularly by its performance in the 1937 elections. And there were (to address Michael Silvestri's question) connections between revolutionary movements in Bengal and Punjab in the 1930s – Surya Sen and Ananta Singh, for example, are said to have consulted with Chandra Shekhar Azad at a hostel in Hindu College in Delhi, prior to the Chittagong Armory Raid.[64]

In terms of future directions, I hope to see a more dynamic model of violence in colonial contexts being developed. In my conclusion I noted that in South Asian Studies different forms of violence are often explored under an entirely different rubrics – communal violence is therefore seen as unrelated to state violence or anticolonial violence.[65] I think this is beginning to shift: Janam Mukherjee's *Hungry Bengal*, for example, is pathbreaking in the way that it maps the violence of famine alongside rising communal tensions in the province, throwing a novel and compelling interpretation onto the 'Great Calcutta Killings' in 1946, which made partition seem inevitable.[66] Needless to say, there is much more to say about revolutionaries, and no doubt there is much more material in regional archives and in private collections to bring to the task.

Notes

1. All of the section headings are taken from Benjamin, "On the Concept of History."
2. See, among many others: Guha and Spivak, *Selected Subaltern Studies*; Stoler, *Against the Archival Grain*; Arondekar, *For the Record*; and Elam and Moffat, "On the Form, Politics, and Effects of Writing Revolution," 513–524.
3. Respectively, Sawhney, "Death in Three Scenes of Recitation," 202–215; and Elam, "Bhagat Singh's Atheism"; and Moffat, "Experiments in Political Truth," 185–201.
4. See Elam and Moffat, "On the Form, Politics, and Effects of Writing Revolution„.
5. See Moffat, "Bhagat Singh's Corpse," 513–524; and Moffat, *India's Revolutionary Inheritance*.
6. Elam, "The Martyr, the Moviegoer: Bhagat Singh at the Cinema," 81–203; Wolfers, "Born Like Krishna in the Prison-House," 525–545; and Maclean, *A Revolutionary History*.
7. Maclean, "Revolution and Revelation, or, When is History Too Soon?" 678–694.
8. See Gandhi, *Autobiography: The Story of my Experiments with Truth*; and Skaria, *Unconditional Equality: Gandhi's Religion of Resistance*.
9. See Moffat, 2013.
10. Adorno, "Commitment".
11. Simona Sawhney raised this important concern on a panel on revolutionaries at the Annual Conference on South Asia at Madison, WI in October 2012.
12. Dimock, "Editor's Column," 257–263.
13. Maclean, *A Revolutionary History of Interwar India*, 5.
14. Ghosh, *Gentlemanly Terrorists*, 67.
15. Koselleck, *Futures Past*.
16. Maclean, *A Revolutionary History of Interwar India*, 9.
17. Ghosh, *Gentlemanly Terrorists*, ix.
18. Maclean, *A Revolutionary History of Interwar India*, 138.
19. Maclean, *A Revolutionary History of Interwar India*, 221.
20. Ghosh, *Gentlemanly Terrorists*, 245.
21. Ibid., 251–252.
22. Maclean, *A Revolutionary History of Interwar India*, 7; and Ghosh, *Gentlemanly Terrorists*, 246.
23. Maclean, *A Revolutionary History of Interwar India*, 45–46; But see Moffatt, "Infinite Inquilab."
24. Ghosh, *Gentlemanly Terrorists*, 222–224.
25. Hussain, *The Jurisprudence of Emergency*.
26. Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 2.

27. Bose, "The Spirit and Form of an Ethical Polity," 129–44.
28. Maclean, *A Revolutionary History of Interwar India*, 12.
29. Ghosh, *Gentlemanly Terrorists*, x.
30. Eco, *The Name of the Rose*.
31. Maclean, *A Revolutionary History of Interwar India*, Cf. 'The Revolutionary Picture: Images and the Dynamics of Anticolonialism.'
32. Ghosh, *Gentlemanly Terrorists*, 89: 'Appeals, which are frequently poems in mystic language, which extol freedom and self-sacrifice. These are intended to excite religious emotion'.
33. DO 35/5314, 1953 (National Archives, Kew).
34. Maclean, *A Revolutionary History of Interwar India*; and Ghosh, *Gentlemanly Terrorists*.
35. Ghosh, *Gentlemanly Terrorists*, 16.
36. As I argue elsewhere, judicial resistance gets teeth with the emergence of a 'constitutional field' after the coming into force of the Indian Constitution in 1950. See, De, "Rebellion, dacoity, and equality," 260–278.
37. Maclean, *A Revolutionary History of Interwar India*, 1.
38. Neeti Nair offers a complementary account as she traces engagement of revolutionary terrorists with political non-violence. Nair, "Bhagat Singh as 'Satyagrahi'," 649–681.
39. Noorani, *The trial of Bhagat Singh*.
40. Maclean, *A Revolutionary History of Interwar India*, 10.
41. Gaur, *Martyr as Bridegroom*.
42. They both elaborate on the specific argument in other essays as well. Ghosh, "Revolutionary Women and Nationalist Heroes in Bengal," 355–375; and Maclean, "What Durga Bhabhi did next," 176–195.
43. Ghosh, *Gentlemanly Terrorists*, 187–189.
44. For instance, see Elam, "The "arch priestess of anarchy" visits Lahore," 140–154.
45. Popplewell, *Intelligence and Imperial Defence*, 4 and 6.
46. Burton, *The Trouble with Empire*, 218.
47. Fischer-Tiné, *Shyamji Krishnavarna*; Louro and Stolte, 'The Meerut Conspiracy Case in Comparative and International Perspective', 310–15; Ramnath, *Haj to Utopia*; and Sohi, *Echoes of Mutiny*.
48. Burton, *The Trouble with Empire*, 11.
49. Ghosh, *Gentlemanly Terrorists*, 18.
50. Maclean, *A Revolutionary History of Interwar India*, 210.
51. Fischer-Tiné and Whyte, "Introduction: Empires and Emotions," 1.
52. Condos, *The Insecurity State*.
53. Maclean, *A Revolutionary History of Interwar India*, 206.
54. Forth, *Barbed Wire Imperialism*.
55. Ghosh, *Gentlemanly Terrorists*, 197.
56. Silvestri, *Policing 'Bengali Terrorism' in India and the World*.
57. NAI, Home Political File 57/XXV/1926, 'Question in the Legislative Assembly Relating to the Hunger Strike at Mandalay Jail; The Health of Subhas Chandra Bose; The Grant of Allowances for Religious Ceremonies, Clothing, Newspapers, Etc.'
58. Elam and Maclean, "Who is a Revolutionary?" 113–123.
59. Maclean, "Revolution and Revelation, or, When is History too Soon?" 678–694.
60. Ray, "Review of A Revolutionary History of Interwar India," 260.
61. I extend this in Maclean, "Imagining the Nationalist Movement," 7–34.
62. Pinch, *Warrior Ascetics and Indian Empires*, 15.
63. See Sawhney, "Death in Three Scenes of Recitation," 202–15; and Moffat, "Politics and the Work of the Dead in Modern India," 178–211.
64. N. K. Nigam, interviewed by S. L. Manchanda, 1 March 1968, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, Oral History Transcript, Acc. 70, 18.
65. Maclean, *A Revolutionary History of Interwar India*, 232–3.
66. Mukherjee, *Hungry Bengal*.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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