

# VIOLENT

## NATIONS: 1984's OTHERING OF SIKHS

### ABSTRACTS

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professional, technical, assembly-line and dehumanized. Resistance to such violence might have to be sought not merely in inter-state negotiations, global diplomacy and in formal politics but also probably at grassroots level through non-state actors and movements combatting the dehumanization and routinization of violence. The focus has to shift from the official and historical narratives to individual and collective memories and attempts to enter the life stories and experiences of those who do not make history but are victims of it. At that level, borderlines between the oppressors and the oppressed, the objective reality and the experienced reality, and the historicized past and the mythical past begins to dissolve. What survives after a life-altering violence is perhaps the resolve to reinstate a moral universe within the algorithm of everyday life, bypassing the cultures of the nation-state and realpolitik.

#### Keynote

##### ***Forgetting the Unforgettable: The Voices of Silence and Memory Outside History***

The nature of violence has been changing in the world and so should be our response to it. Works on genocide, riots and pogroms show that violence has become more

### PANEL 1: POLITICAL–HISTORICAL FRAMES

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a Sikh separate state, *Khalistan*. I have previously argued that Sikh nationalism may be seen as a discourse which 'interpellates' (Althusser 1971) Sikhs as subjects of a 'national' community centred on the *Khalsa Panth* in contrast to conventional approaches to the study of Sikh ethno-nationalism, based on Western theories of nationalism, which regard territoriality to be an inevitable feature of the nationalist discourse (Shani 2008). Furthermore, I suggested that this notion of 'embodied sovereignty' was more suited to the needs of our globalizing world than the emphasis on territorialized sovereignty upon which the movement for *Khalistan* is based. What was perhaps not foregrounded in my analysis of Sikh nationalism, however, was an engagement with the dynamics of *re-territorialization* (Deleuze and Guattari 1987): how the 'sovereign power' of the colonial and post-colonial Indian states had helped shape the de-territorializing logic of Sikh identity by forcing it into the tropes of 'religion' and 'diaspora', both of which locate Sikh identity in well-established discourses of 'faith' and 'homeland'. Underscoring the processes of re-territorialization has been the deployment of overwhelming violence as encapsulated in Partition and, particularly Operation Blue Star, which was designed to render the Sikhs a pliable and compliant minority in a 'secular' India based on Orientalist readings of Hindu civilizationalist values of tolerance and religious pluralism.

##### ***Khalsa Panth or Khalistan? Re-considering the non-territorial dimensions of Sikh Nationalism***

This paper seeks to critically re-examine the discourse of territoriality which underpin the demand for

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Delhi-centred powers i.e. the Moghul state, the British imperial state and the Indian nationalist state. The experience of sovereignty enjoyed during the 50 year rule of Ranjit Singh and successors from 1799-1849 further empowered the distinctive Sikhs national identity which was seen co-terminus with composite Punjabi identity signified by that first and only Punjabi sovereign state ever to come into being. The competitive identity nationalism between the Hindus, Muslims and the Sikhs during the colonial rule further sharpened Sikh identity especially in relation to the Hindu majoritarian Indian nationalism. This tension between the Sikhs and the idea of unified Indian nationhood went through various mutations in the post-colonial India with questions of language, rights over natural resources such as water and fiscal federalism emerging at different points of time as the main issues over which the tensions between the Sikhs and the centre/India manifested themselves. The accumulation of these tensions took a qualitatively different turn when the Indian state used its armed power to enter the Golden Temple complex in 1984 to subdue the dissident Sikh armed groups housed in the complex. This caused a violent rupture between Sikh subjectivity and Indian state's ideological paradigm. Every event since then but particularly the memorialisation of Operation Bluestar is the arena of contestation. This paper will explore those fault lines - the strength, durability and the fragility of those fault lines, and will attempt to map out the future scenario of these fault lines.

##### ***India and the Sikhs since 1984: Mapping the Fault lines***

The distinctive identity of the Sikhs as a people with a self-view of themselves as 'sovereign' with their homeland as Punjab has had a long history of tension with

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therefore bound to a manufactured myopia. Earlier this year documents were released that revealed the British Government's (limited)

##### ***1984's Slow Violence: Re-animating or Competing with Europe's Heart of Darkness?***

Governments lie and only decades later release documents that tell (some of) the truth. The socio-political present is

collusion with the Indian government on planning the storming of the Darbar Sahib complex well before in the events of June 1984. Despite having become an independent nation in 1947, Indira Gandhi still sought the advice of Margaret Thatcher via secret intelligence and Special Service agents. It is hard to deny that the government's military assault to be anything but a subterfuge. Why not then talk about current politics as an actively duplicitous and deceptive enterprise, with its agents, moles and false flag operations? The existence of taboos, constructed like forts to protect official versions of violent events, is rarely acknowledged as *points of departure* for critical reflection. What are the social forces mitigating against ethically just speech? Behind the West's liberal-democracy is a continuation of the rhetoric of the *civilized-barbaric* asymmetrical relation in its numerous institutional (political, juridical, mediatic, security, scholarly) guises: *freedom-slavery*, *capitalist-worker*, *white-black*, *secular-religious*, *modern-traditional*, *developed-underdeveloped*, etc. This paper attempts to locate the inheritance in India of this duplicity and violent European governance within a broader frame than its surface 'good vs evil' (staged) play could reveal. The expansion of the critical vision must include discourses of modernity, colonization, nation-building, and their false-flag covert/black operations. Once this broader vision has been outlined we begin to see how India either re-animates or competes with Europe's violent colonial past of deception, dispossession, displacement and destruction – with the tragic effect of globalizing and reinscribing the moral abyss of a heart of darkness at the core of each Nation's despotic and democratic governance. Key to altering this tragic predicament is the active acknowledgment, documentation and public discussion of the dynamics of slow violence that exists beyond the spectacular violence, i.e. moving from the mediaticized "war on terror" to the occluded "bloodletting" of geopolitical and mineral resources. The acknowledgement that democratic and/or autocratic modern nation states are *structurally, institutionally and pathologically* violent if not genocidal against their own people demands the creation of new, diverse *sangats* ("collectives") – that do not operate merely within the fault lines of violent governance, but on those very lines to re-create the public space anew such that the bystander now chooses to stand by the one who resists. This shift, as Rothberg (2009) argues, is one that moves from an *ethics of testimony* to the cultivation of the *Counterpublic Witness*, able to employ a *non-competitive* memory that houses *multiple* directions and narratives.

## PANEL 2: CRITICAL-THEORETICAL FRAMES

### Dr. Arvind-pal Singh Mandair

(University of Michigan, MI)

### *Typologies of Violence and the Event-Nature of '1984'*

In this paper I look at the representation of Sikh militancy in the post-1984

period as a specifically "religious" violence by various forms of State apparatus. The

reproduction of this discourse of 'religion-making' was particularly evident in the work of media journalists, political administrators, and academic experts specializing in the study of conflict between "ethno-religious" agents and secular democratic nation states. My intention is not to exonerate instances of actual violence perpetrated either by militants or state apparatus, but to unmask the hidden relationship between conventional typologies of violence and the discourses of 'religion-making'. One motivation of this unmasking is to expose the deeply problematic stance of modern government which privileges the secular standpoint as uniquely positioned to promote tolerance, pluralism and protection of minorities in democratic societies. A second motivation is the need to find different ways of thinking about the significance of '1984' for Sikhs, specifically its event-nature. Thirty years on, while many in the Sikh community continue to remember '1984' primarily as an event of genocidal state violence and an invasion of Sikh sacred space, I want to suggest that such representations involve enunciations of religious identity which only enhance the State's ability to affect and control the powers of imagination and interpretive capacity of the public. Rather I point to ways in which Sikhs can begin to see '1984' not simply as an actual event but more productively as an "incarnation of something *sublime* or *untimely*" (Deleuze). One implication of this move would be to allow the public perception of *Sikhi*(sm) to shift from its current pigeon-hole (as a 'religion') towards the idea of *Sikhi*(sm) as a "vestigial state" (Goldenberg, 2014), that is, as the institutional and cultural remainder of a sovereignty surviving within the jurisdictions of contemporary governments.

### Prabhsharandeep Singh

(University of Oxford, UK)

### *Violence & the Creative Act: Language, Space, & Sikh*

*Subjectivity during 1984 Attacks* This year marks the thirtieth

anniversary of state sponsored anti-Sikh violence in India, which includes the

Indian army attack on Sri Darbar Sahib and several other Sikh Gurdwaras, the genocide of the Sikh youth in Punjab (codenamed Operation Woodrose), and the November 1984 genocide of the Sikhs by Hindu mobs. The current paper explores the origin and nature of such violence and the role that the creative act plays in defining Sikh resistance against it. Beginning with a definition of the distinct nature of this violence, I'll analyze how the relationship between religion and violence in pre-colonial South Asia differed from its multiple iterations in post-colonial India, paying particular attention to the continuities of this relationship. I'll try to understand the Sikh revival during 1980s in contradistinction to what we understand as the "return of religion" in the West. The Sikh refusal to acknowledge the legitimacy of socio-politico-religious space of the modern secular Indian nation state is not a phenomenon that emerged out of a theoretical critique. Rather, the Sikh resistance emerged as a creative act, a form of writing that deconstructs the logocentric foundations of Indian nationalism. I'll try to understand how this creative act emerged in the total absence of any theoretical or literary writings, and how language, in the absence of any contemporary works, played a central role in the construction of such a space.

### Prabhsharanbir Singh

(University of British Columbia, BC)

### *The Obscene Underside of Indian Nationalism: Sikh*

*Bodies and Hindu Desires* In postcolonial South Asia, democracy and

secularism are heavily fetishized terms. Their perceived power to cure every social

evil, from communalism to corruption is seldom questioned, and they are rarely seen as potential problems rather than panaceas. Despite the existence of a significant body of academic work critiquing democracy and secularism as being inherently violent and historically contingent, the popular discourse in South Asia remains replete with references to both democracy and secularism as the unquestionable horizons for the politics of our times. Taking my departure from those critiques of democracy and secularism that challenge their inherent potential for the greater good and expose their hidden violent side, I argue that the unusually violent nature of Indian nationalism is not due to the failure of democracy and secularism, but precisely (if partially) because of them. Proponents suggest that democracy and secularism are unfinished projects in the Indian context, and the more they pervade Indian society and psyche, the less

violently they will be expressed. However, I conversely argue that it is precisely because the nation is founded on these concepts that it is so violent. I further argue that the popular will to brutalize the other is the obscene underside of Indian nationalism, and its primary mode of operation is “abject/objectification.” By “abject/objectification,” I mean a process by which a political community tries to reenact the mythic foundational moment through sadistic/sacrificial violence inflicted on the other. Taking my cue from Žižek’s analysis of the psychological motivations of nationalist mass mobilizations, I argue that the popular will is the key to understanding nationalist violence. That is why the popular will manifests itself more through instances of taking pleasure in inflicting brutal violence on its others than through working for causes such as good governance or the equitable distribution of resources. As the election results following the two biggest massacres of minorities in India in 1984 and 2002 show, the popular will is heavily invested with a desire to brutalize the other. I will analyze the violence inflicted on Sikhs in 1984 and the decade following it to show how Sikh bodies were treated as the abject objects reenacting the sadistic/sacrificial violence that founds the nation-state.

### **Dr. Gabriele Schwab**

(University of California, Irvine, CA)

and perpetrators pass on the ineradicable legacies of violent histories across the generations and explore what happens to psychic, cultural, and political life in the process. My analysis draws on a range of critical theories, including psychoanalysis, postcolonialism, and trauma studies, and mobilizes these methodologies to shed light on “networks of interlaced memories.” The interaction of different histories in psychic life and cultural memory, I argue, creates a transference that dynamically engages violent legacies and informs future-oriented political actions in the present.

### ***Ghostly Transferences: On Memory and Haunting***

“Ghostly Transferences: On Memory and Haunting” revisits some of the issues discussed in my book *Haunting Legacies* (Columbia UP, 2010). I ask how victims

## **PANEL 3: DECOLONIAL & NEOLIBERAL FRAMES**

### **Dr. Nelson Maldonado-Torres**

(Rutgers University, NJ)

(individualism, reason, freedom, and civilization), on the one hand, and the reality of violence in the last several centuries—particularly in the 20th—, as well as with the ways in which individualism, reason, freedom, and civilization, among other key concepts in the repertoire of modernity have played a role in legitimating such violence, on the other. This presentation will consider various ways of understanding the normalization of violence and permanent war in modernity, particularly focusing on the links between imperialism, state repression, and the colonial experience.

### ***From Sacrifice to Massacre: The Violent Foundations of the Modern/Colonial World***

Any decent critical analysis of modernity has to contend with the tensions between the main banners of modernity

### **Dr. Simon Springer**

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an admonishment of the protests that continue to swell, but rather a recognition that these movements are in fact pushing back against the violent measures that have frustrated and demoralized everyday existence under neoliberalism. There is now considerable room for skepticism with regard to the ‘rising tides lift all boats’ discourse that is perpetuated by proponents of neoliberal ideology, as the free market has categorically failed at producing a harmonious global village. Promises of utopia are confronted with the stark dystopian realities that exist in a growing number of countries where neoliberalization has not resulted in greater peace and prosperity, but in a profound and unmistakable encounter with violence. This paper questions how and why neoliberalizing processes often result in conflict, arguing that neoliberalism itself might be productively understood as a particular form of violence.

### ***The Violence of Neoliberalism***

As austerity measures intensify in the wake of the most recent global financial crisis, it is becoming ever more clear that neoliberalization exhibits a distinct relational connection with violence. This is not

### **Dr. Clayton Crockett**

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forms of violence such as army, police, etc. I am using political theology in the Schmittian sense, as referring to a question of sovereignty and the ability to make exceptional decisions. However, I am arguing that today sovereignty is divided or shared between the force of neoliberal finance capitalism over the last three decades and more traditional forms of coercion on the part of nation-states. In some important respects, nations have their sovereignty challenged, not only by more powerful military nations, but by the manipulations of money and debt. I will briefly survey India’s economic liberalization in the 1980s and then integration into the neo-liberal framework in the 1990s. Finally, I outline a kind of postsecularist situation, that is responsive to the breakdown of normative secularism as a political discourse, that converges with the theoretical perspective of what is called New Materialism. Here I want to think about blood—including Gil Anidjar’s recent text *Blood*—and energy as material realities, both in “literal” and extended senses. This effort provides tools to think about political realities beyond the framework of neoliberal capitalism without simply resorting to the consolidation of the sovereignty of traditional nation-states.

### ***Sketch for a Political Theology of In-debted Nations***

This paper outlines a kind of political theology of nations, based on the asymmetrical conflict between money or financial power and more conventional

### **Dr. Gil Anidjar**

(Columbia University, NY)

emblems or as means, as instruments of war or of justice), indeed, on the kind of means weapons are, and the role that they play in the constitution of the state and its maintenance (newsflash: it is an essential role). Historians, military historians in particular, can tell the history of civilization and of technology, as the history of weapon invention and development, but what would it mean to think of politics from the perspective of weapons? One way of thinking of blood further (I shall rehearse some of that argument), I will try to suggest, is to think of it as a weapon. But what, in the vampire state, is a weapon? And more importantly, what is *not* a weapon?

### ***The Vampire State (What is a Weapon?)***

Since Hobbes formulated the theory of the modern state — which assumes the sword as one of its major emblems — there has not been much reflection on the meaning of weapons (as