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Writing Violence

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NATIONALISM IS ABOUT THE LOVE of the nation, and this is often a self-sacrificing love, as Benedict Anderson (1983/1991, 141) insists. However, the dark underside of patriotic love is rooted in fear and hatred of the Other, and this is often also expressed in sacrificial terms. Contrary to what Anderson seems to claim, nationalism cannot be understood without these dark undercurrents, which are constantly repressed and represented as "anomalies." As we know, history is the grand narrative of the modern nation-state. Both in the colonizing and colonized regions of the world, it is a story of liberation from oppression. The dark stories of terror and bloodshed are only memorized to be interpreted as either necessary steps toward liberation or "incidents" that might as well be forgotten. The official history of Indian nationalism, as told in Indian education, is the progressive story of the liberation of the people from foreign domination, thus the narration of patriotic love. But there is also a subtext that tells the story of partition, of hatred and violence between Hindus and Muslims. The subtext is that of events, of incidents that are called "communal" in order not to let them disturb the text of the emergence of freedom, of a normal, liberated nation-state. They have to be given meaning by the narrative frame of the emergence of a liberal nation-state. It is not so much that their memory is totally obliterated, that they are repressed, but that they are memorized as fragments of a story of which the unitary, rational subject is the liberal nation-state. This narrative strategy in dealing with the past is also useful in dealing with the present. The suppression of civil riots by the state—often causing more victims than the riots themselves—is thus generally called a "return to normalcy." Civil riots are illegitimate and worrisome incidents that are "senseless" because they threaten not only the

state's monopoly of physical force, but also its narration of its own legitimacy. Government, not violence, is therefore the term the state uses for its own employment of physical force.

Liberal government allows for debates in the public sphere and for the expression of the will of the people in elections, but, according to its own theory, it has to monopolize violence by suppressing violence between individuals and groups in society. In this way, the theory presupposes a distinction between the free expression of opinion and the use of violence, between speech acts and other acts. However, words can hurt and the role of insults, slander, rumors, and propaganda is quite important in the dynamics of civil violence. When slogans like *Babar ki santan: jao Pakistan ya kabristan* ("Babar's offspring [Muslims]: go to Pakistan or to the graveyard!") can be uttered freely in the streets and in writing, physical violence is just the next step and hard to prevent. More profoundly, when college and university teachers educate their students in a history of oppression by Muslims of Hindus, the discursive premises of violent acts have been laid. Finally, since words are often the main object and result of our studies—even when visual material also "tells the story"—we have to realize that the narrativization of violence in victims' accounts, police reports, media representations is what we have to interpret.

Briefly, in this chapter, I examine a limited number of narrative strategies in recent writings about "communal" violence in India. The issues I want to address are the following. First of all, I want to examine the ways some of these writings deal with the question of "religion" in Hindu-Muslim riots. Secondly, I want to examine the way social scientists write about "the state" when they interpret this kind of violence. Finally, I want to explore the role of narrativity in accounts of violence.

Let us start by looking at a fairly typical argument that derives its interpretive authority from the victims' stories, saying that what appears to be religious is not religious at all, that violence does not come from the people, but from the state. I take as a random example what the former BBC correspondent in India, Mark Tully, has recently written about the Ahmedabad riots between Hindus and Muslims in 1990. The summary of events is taken from Tully (1991). On April 3, 1990, a Muslim was stabbed to death in the old city of Ahmedabad. Within an hour of that murder, four Hindus were stabbed in separate incidents. A curfew was imposed in the immediate vicinity. Over the next three days, the trouble built up, with police opening fire to disperse groups throwing stones at each other. On the fourth day of the riots, April 6, twenty-three people were killed and

seventy injured. Curfew was extended to the other areas of the city with a record of communal violence. Then, on April 7, a rumor swept through the city that the priest of the Jagannath temple had been killed. That created another round of violence, which was stopped by the army on April 14.

The violence was interpreted in the Indian press as caused by religious fundamentalism. Tully, however, spoke to poor Muslims in the city who blamed politics, not religion. In his view, most editorial writers don't speak to poor Muslims and so are easily carried away by the fashionable fear of fundamentalism. He ends his discussion of the Ahmedabad riots by writing, "the politicians and the press continue to blame the riots on religious fundamentalism. This may be convenient for the politicians and fashionable for the press, but according to the victims—who ought to know best —it's just not true. The victims of the riots don't even know the meaning of the word 'fundamentalism,' but they do know that it is not religion that divides them" (Tully 1991, 267). So, if it is not religion that divides Hindus and Muslims, what is it? In the view of the poor Muslims interviewed by Tully, it is the economy and politics that divide people into rich and poor, and the poor get killed. Tully elaborates this view by arguing that politicians make use of the underworld—heavily involved in bootlegging—to create riots between Hindus and Muslims whenever it suits them politically. Moreover, police and the underworld are hand in glove. Besides the political reasons for Hindu-Muslim riots, Tully looks at economic causes, such as large-scale unemployment due to the crisis in the textile mills.

It is a bit disingenuous of Tully to say that the political economy explanation of communal violence has escaped the Indian press, since they do not speak to the victims of riots, while he does. In fact, the political economy explanation is perhaps the most generally accepted at least in the Indian English-language press, and it cannot have escaped anyone in India. The question seems to be how that political economy is related to religion or, very simply, how Hindu-Muslim riots are related to socially structured economic inequality or class. Tully's sharp division between relevant political economy and irrelevant religion does not answer that question. Another interesting element in his account is the argument that the state—both politicians and police—is heavily involved in creating communal violence. Again, there seems to be a sharp dichotomy at work in this analysis, this time between state and society. In such accounts, the state becomes an external, autonomous agent, while, of course, the general feeling in India is that the roles of citizen and state official are highly conflated. Finally, Tully privileges the victims' narrative. The victims ought to know best, as

he says. He does not attempt to confront the victim's narrative with that of the aggressor, nor with police reports. It is also important to note that the victims' account is taken after the riots had stopped. Tully does not seem to consider that this might have an effect on the narrativization of past violence.

It should be clear that it is not at all my intention to dissect and deconstruct Tully's text. It is a fine journalistic piece, which has considerable merits but cannot go very deep. I take it as an example of common-sensical writing about communal violence in India, which yields some important themes for further exploration. Let me reiterate these before I examine them one by one. The first is the role of religion. The second is the role of the state. The third is the role of narrativity in accounts of violence.

Religion

Hindu-Muslim riots continued after partition, although on a very limited scale under the Nehru regime, until 1964. After that, there was an increase in rioting and, in the 1980s, a growing Hindu political factor in north Indian politics. A number of movements have tried to organize and strengthen radical Hinduism. Most attention has obviously gone to so-called "communalist" organizations, such as the RSS (Rasthriya Swayamsevak Sangh), but, in fact, mainstream parties, such as Mrs. Gandhi's Congress Party, also attempted to take advantage of it (A. Banerjee 1990, 46). In the 1980s, Hindu political activism became a formidable phenomenon on the Indian political scene, resulting in a revitalized Hindu-Muslim antagonism, which in its intensity resembled the pre-partition years. The developments of the eighties have been described at length elsewhere (van der Veer 1994b), but I want to draw attention to some aspects of its climax in 1992.

On December 6, 1992, two closely linked radical Hindu movements organized a rally in the north Indian pilgrimage center Ayodhya. One of these movements was the major opposition party in India, the Indian People's Party (BJP). It had won the 1991 state elections in Uttar Pradesh, a state of a hundred million people in which Ayodhya is located. The other movement, the World Hindu Council (VHP), had a leadership of Hindu monks and was Hinduism's largest transnational movement with branches in, among other countries, the United States, Britain, and Holland (McKean 1994, 1995). The publicly announced aim of the rally was to destroy a sixteenth-century mosque in Ayodhya that allegedly was built on

the birthplace of Rama, one of the major gods in the Hindu pantheon. Despite this public announcement, the rally was allowed by the authorities; and under the eyes of the gathered press, and without much hindrance by the huge paramilitary police force present in Ayodhya, activists started to demolish the old structure, until, after a day of hard work, only rubble remained; and a question: Why didn't the police intervene? A high-ranking police officer told the press that the police could have easily intervened and prevented the demolition. However, they had not received orders to do so. Naturally, they did not get any orders from the state officials of Uttar Pradesh, since Uttar Pradesh was governed by the BJP, which was behind the demolition. The paramilitary forces, however, were under the direct command of what in India is called "the center," that is, the union government in Delhi. Why did the Center not act? Well, the story goes that India's prime minister, Narasimha Rao, was just taking a nap and, since he is a very old man, nobody would want to disturb him. When he woke up, the demolition had already proceeded too far.

I do not relate this story to show a certain indecisiveness on the part of the Indian government, since on the next day the Center did act very decisively by dismissing the governments of four states in which the BJP ruled. It put the leadership of the two movements (BJP and VHP) in jail for a few days and banned a few radical movements, both on the Hindu side and on the Muslim side. In that way, the union government reestablished the supremacy of the Congress Party, which had been seriously challenged by the BJP. Nevertheless, all these political actions did not prevent virtual civil war from breaking out in many parts of the country, in which thousands (mostly Muslims) were killed; nor did it do anything to prevent relations between Hindus and Muslims reaching their lowest point since partition. Very significantly, many Muslims had by now totally lost their confidence in the liberal state and its institutions, since politicians did not seem to be willing to protect the rights and lives of the Muslim minority.

This story is in many ways simple and straightforward. It shows the extent to which the so-called secular Congress Party and the institutions of the Indian secular state were complicit in the destruction of a Muslim sacred place by Hindu radicals. Clearly, the Congress Party stood to gain when the demolition of the mosque enabled it to dismantle the political power of its opponent. A story told in this way gives a narrative of demystification. It shows from the standpoint of the cynical, well-informed observer that what seems a religious conflict is in fact a political game. It is very important to tell such stories, since they show the political dynam-

ics of conflictual situations, but it does not answer the question as to why this mosque could become an issue in the first place. To answer that more complex question, the game-theory is often replaced by a story that is perhaps even simpler or, at least, more gratifying to a Western audience. That story has it that the forces of secular modernity are up against the forces of religious obscurantism (otherwise called fundamentalism). Nehru and the successive leaders of the Congress Party up to Narasimha Rao who want to bring India into the world of modern progress are opposed by Muslim, Hindu, or Sikh extremists who dream of religious nation-states. That second story, dignified by forms of Weberian modernization-theory, is so much part of Western mythology (otherwise known as common sense) that it is constantly broadcast by the mass media when they report about world events in Egypt, Iran, Algeria, India, Sri Lanka, and other places. It is a story that is hard to question, since any alternative story is often felt to be a relativist attack on equality, liberty, and fraternity.

Nevertheless, it might be interesting to come to an alternative reading of the events in Ayodhya, as a step toward an understanding of what I would provisionally call "postcolonial modernity." The Hindu activists who destroyed the mosque, Prime Minister Narasimha Rao, and the millions who watched the events in Ayodhya on CNN, all of them are obviously fully modern, that is, they all participate fully in the material conditions and discursive practices of the modern world system of nation-states. There is no reason to say that any of them is caught in a time warp, "medieval or backward" as compared to others who are the bearers of reason and progress. However, their positions are different, because they are the product of different histories. I would argue that a singular, universal history of modernity does not exist, although I do accept that Western history since the nineteenth century has had an overriding importance in the making of the modern world. Since the nineteenth century, then, religion has been the site of difference on which the struggle for alternatives to Western modernity in many parts of the colonial world took place. In that very struggle new religious discourses and practices have emerged that, in a highly complex and unsatisfying move, have been placed in the category of fundamentalism—a term derived from U.S. Protestantism—precisely because they are different from the dominant secularized, privatized religious forms of the late-twentieth-century West. I prefer for at least some of these new discourses the term "religious nationalism," since they articulate discourse on the religious community and discourse on the nation.

The role that religion plays in nationalisms in many parts of the world

is often felt to be an embarrassing anomaly for those who adhere to a Weberian modernization theory. Nationalism has to be connected to secularism to be truly modern and enlightened. "Politicized religions" threaten both reason and liberty. The post-Enlightenment urge to define religion as an autonomous sphere, separate from politics and economy, is, of course, at the same time also a liberal political demand that religion "should" be separate from politics. In that sense, Weber's theory and Nehru's political program share the same premises. However, it is precisely the effect of the normalizing and disciplining project of secular modernity that religion becomes so important as source of resistance. What is often forgotten in theories of nationalism is that the very forces of centralization and homogenization that are integral to nationalism always create centrifugal forces and resistances based on assumed difference.

Whatever the success of the political demand that religion should be apolitical in Western societies (and this is in fact an open issue), it is unwise to try to understand religious nationalism as a flawed and hybrid modernity (compare Fox, above). Rather, one should try to understand it, as one does with the nationalisms of Europe, as a product of a particular history of at least one century. That particular history is in this case one of Western colonial domination and to say this is not to blame colonialism for producing a flawed religious nationalism, since there is nothing flawed here, but to say that the postcolonial predicament can only be understood in relation to the colonial transformation of the societies I am talking about (see Freitag, above). What is regarded there as religion might be quite different from what modern Christians or modern liberals regard as religion. Surely, the question is how religious power—institutions and movements—produces religious selves and religious models for correct behavior. Part of what I refer to here is the socialization of religious identity and difference. As Talal Asad has observed, it is not mere symbols that implant true religious dispositions, but power ranging from laws and other sanctions to the disciplinary activities of social institutions. It is not the mind that moves spontaneously to religious truth, but power that creates the real and material conditions for experiencing that truth: this is what Augustine catches in one word, ***disciplina***. Power does not only work positively in inculcating certain truth, but also negatively by systematically excluding, forbidding, and denouncing (Asad 1993, 34, 35).

Clearly, one of the sites in which religious selves are produced is the family, but one should not essentialize early socialization in the family (about which we know little) to the extent of forgetting, as the Freudians

do, that the family is a part of a larger political economy. More in general, religious discourses and practices (symbols, rituals, disciplines) have to be looked at historically. To give a brief example: the meaning of the cow symbol for Hindus must have changed in the last decades of the nineteenth century when it became the focus of political action against both the British and the Muslims. What I want to argue is deceptively simple. Of course, a young Hindu learns that the cow is a goddess, but only a century ago he/she also learned that the cow is a symbol of a Hindu nation threatened by "outsiders." This is a very flat reading of that historical shift, but it is important to grasp that what constitutes Hindu identities has not remained the same over time, is not a transhistorical essence that can be salvaged from the sordid details of daily life.

This is not to say that the shift in the meaning of this symbol is one of the indexes that Hinduism has become "politicized" in the second half of the nineteenth century. Again, "politicization" and "depoliticization" of a separate sphere called "religion" is precisely the result of the Enlightenment discourse of modernity that assigns religious faith to the private domain as a matter of personal beliefs without political consequences in the public sphere. Religious discourse and practice in the political arena has come to be seen in the West as a transgression of what religion is supposed to be. There is a strong feeling that violent conflict between religious communities is a violation of the "original intent" of the founders of the religions involved or of God himself. "Real" religion produces harmony and tolerance and can thus be sharply distinguished from "politicized religion," politics in religious disguise. In important ways, this entire mode of thinking is the result of a specific historical development in Europe in the wake of the religious wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

These interpretations of religion cannot account for the central role of power and violence in religious discourse as well as in religious expansion and conversion over the centuries. This is much more accepted in the analysis of Islam than in that of Hinduism. Tolerance is the prevailing trope in discourse about Hinduism and in that of the modern Hindu as well. There is a strong consensus from, say, people like Nehru to people like Advani that Hindu civilization is basically tolerant. The radical Gandhian thinker Ashis Nandy argues about Gandhi that "traditional Hinduism, or rather *sanatan dharma* was the source of his religious tolerance" (Nandy 1990, 91), and the VHP tells us that Hinduism is "a parliament of religions and the very antithesis of violence, terrorism and intolerance" (McKean 1992, 33). One of India's leading social scientists, Rajni Kothari, denies that

Hinduism is a religion. India is "a country built on the foundations of a civilisation that is fundamentally non-religious" (Kothari 1992, 2695). In the aftermath of the December events in Ayodhya, he argues that the BJP and VHP want to make pluralistic Hindu society into a "Semitic" religion, that is, an aggressive, organized, hegemonic monotheism like Islam. Kothari ends up by not only criticizing this "semitization" of Hinduism, but also by demanding from the Muslims that they give up "a religious approach to their survival in the present and prospects in the future" (Kothari 1992, 2698). In short, Hindus have a pluralistic, tolerant "civilization" and Muslims have a fanatic "religion" and the problem is that Hindus are becoming like Muslims instead of the other way around.

This consensus along the political spectrum in India is ultimately founded on a nineteenth-century construction of "Hindu spirituality" and, as such, a product of a collusion between orientalism and Hindu nationalism (S. Sarkar, below). The point here is that modern Hindus have come to interpret hierarchical relativism in Hindu discourse—there are many paths leading to God, but some are better than others—in orientalist terms, as "tolerance." This leads, in a universalist version, to an inclusion of all religions in the Vedanta, the spiritual "essence" of Hinduism in its philosophical form, as in the philosopher-president Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan's famous formula: "The Vedanta is not a religion, but religion itself in its most universal and deepest significance" (quoted in Halbfass 1988, 409). In the more narrow version of the VHP, this interpretation stresses "tolerance" within but excludes the religions that "came from outside" and are intolerantly bent on converting Hindus.

Power and violence are as crucial to Hindu discourse and practice as they are to Islam (Pinch, above). At the risk of repeating myself I want to emphasize that they express themselves not in a transhistorical way. Surely, if one wants to understand the religious imagery of Rama as it is appropriated by the BJP, one would not want to go back to the twelfth century. The emergence of the idea of "the rule of Rama" in Indian politics today does not show a continuity, but a significant rupture. The link between the Rama cult and divinization of kingship is not at all obvious in modern Hindu religiosity. It has to be inserted in the religious field through the gradual nationalization of religion, particularly in the middle class, and thus it has to be understood as a modern, ideological move. One has to realize that the BJP does not want to introduce Hindu kingship; indeed it is a "People's Party." It was Mahatma Gandhi who began to use the concept of *Rama-raj*, the rule of Rama. He used it interchangeably with the term

for "self-rule" or independence (*swaraj*). In his view, "Ramaraj was not only the political Home Rule but also *dharmaraj* . . . which was something higher than ordinary political emancipation" and, distancing himself from notions of Hindu kingship: "Ramraj means rule of the people. A person like Ram would never wish to rule" (quoted in Lutgendorf 1991). Gandhi emancipated in a democratic move the notion of "the rule of Rama" from its "royal" aspects and, further, relates it to a "higher" utopian goal, namely the transformation of society by religious reform. Surely, it is not kings politicians are interested in, but a Hindu public of voters. The demand of the BJP for Rama-raj is a demand for rule by what is called "the Hindu majority." It is opposed to alleged privileges given to minorities and specifically against pampering the Muslims. Rama-raj certainly also has a utopian aspect, a demand for clean, uncorrupted politics, jobs, and prosperity for every Hindu. This is obviously very similar to the messages of political movements in most parts of the world, while the minority complex of the majority is also not an exceptional phenomenon (Tambiah 1986). Both the secular state, as controlled by the Congress Party, and the Muslims are seen as "foreign" to Hindu India.

Power and violence in Hindu discourse express themselves most clearly in a politics of space (S. Sarkar, below). The appropriation of the Rama cult by Hindu nationalism signifies the articulation of sacred space and national territory. Communal violence in India has to be understood in the context of the politics of sacred space. Riots and rituals have come to be linked in the construction of communal identities in public arenas (Freitag 1989a). Ritual processions through sensitive areas often end in full-scale riots. Often one is confronted here with "rituals of provocation." A symbolic repertoire, derived from the ritual realm of animal sacrifice, is often used to start a riot: a slaughtered cow in a Hindu sacred space or a slaughtered pig in a Muslim sacred space. Riots often contest boundaries between communities whose notions of public space are related to personhood and community. Irving Goffman speaks of "territories of the self," which can be invaded by specific rituals of violation. Therefore, the form of killings, the mutilation of bodies, the murder of adult men in front of their wives and children is so important not only in the creation of maximum terror, but also in violating the physical and moral integrity of the victimized community. In the anti-Muslim riots in Surat and Bombay after December 6, 1992, the victims were forced to utter *Jai Shri Ram* ("Hail to Lord Rama") before they were killed or raped (Engineer 1993, 263; S. Chandra 1993a, 1883). Public space itself is, to an important extent,

constructed through ritual and rioting: one ends up having Muslim areas, Hindu areas, and mixed areas.

Local level politics is crucial in the dynamics of communal violence. However, one should not forget that nationalism is by definition a supra-local affair and that the spatial notion of national territory is crucial in it. This is a public space that is symbolic of the sovereignty of the Indian citizens. The Kashmir problem today, the Indo-Pakistan war of 1965, and the Bangladesh war of 1971 have kept the question of the loyalty of Muslim citizens to national sovereignty alive. This question is constantly revived by the Indo-Pakistan cricket matches and by the repeated demand by Hindu communalists that Indian Muslims better go to Pakistan. While this is of course well-known, what is less understood is the connection made between religious notions of sacred space and nationalist notions of territory. Hindu nationalists claim that there is an eternal unity of India, ritually constituted by pilgrimage networks. That motherland of all "sons of the soil" is a sacred space demarcated by Hindu shrines and sacred rivers and mountains. The ritual processions and the Ayodhya campaign of the VHP and BJP throughout India were aimed precisely at ritually constructing that notion of territory (Davis, above). Most of these processions, using an elaborate ritual repertoire, symbolically excluded Muslims from Hindu-Indian territory and were accompanied by widespread rioting, the massacre of Bhagalpur in Bihar in 1989 being the best known.

The political use of the Rama cult by the BJP and the VHP is not a "logical outcome" of a continuous, cultural narrative of Hinduism. It is the result of a series of particular, historical processes over the last century. The countryside was demilitarized in the nineteenth century with the result that militant sadhus and faqirs do not play a significant role in political violence anymore (Pinch, above). At the most general level, the great shift in the nineteenth century is the laicization of institutionalized religion. A lay Hindu and Muslim public had come to occupy a sphere that was previously the domain of sacred specialists. To put it very crudely, warfare between religious specialists was replaced by civil warfare between lay communities. To understand this shift one has to look at the creation of a public sphere in which communal representation, the politics of numbers and voting blocs, has resulted not in a "politicization" of religion but in a change in religious power and the nature of violence related to it.

The State

In many accounts of religious nationalism, religion is merely a smoke screen, "false consciousness," "opium of the masses," and thus appropriately called "communalism." So let us go from dreams to reality. An important element in that reality is the state and, indeed, as many would argue, the state has done it. In the colonial period, it was the divide-and-rule politics of the colonial state that first created religious communities and then set them up against each other. By dividing Indian civil society along religious lines, the state had a perfect raison d'être—to ensure order. When it increasingly failed to perform that function, it was replaced by two nation-states, India and Pakistan, in which the rulers derived their legitimacy from "the people." The postcolonial state, however, inherited the divisions in civil society that had been created by the British. Politicians depend on votes, and the electoral process almost forces them to exploit the religious divisions in society. This is enhanced by the fact that the Indian state has increasingly turned to reservation policies for so-called backward classes in order to change access to education and government employment. This is part of what one might call the penetration of the modernizing state in civil society, and Ashis Nandy (1990), for example, sees this as a disruption of the social fabric of society and thus the cause of violence. In themselves, reservation policies should not affect Hindu-Muslim relations, but both in the Ahmedabad riots of 1985 and in the violence surrounding Mandal recommendations and the Babri Masjid controversy in 1990, the discomfort of the higher castes about reservation policies was rapidly transformed by Hindu politicians into anti-Muslim rioting, since it was regarded as a threat to Hindu unity.

The above summarizes part of conventional writing on both the history and the present state of communal affairs in India. One of the problems with it is its dependence on a political science boundary between state and society. The state is conceived as an autonomous entity, outside of society. It is seen as a structure of intentions, plans, policy-making that has effects on an external society. Timothy Mitchell has recently argued that this topological metaphor is misleading, since it tends to reify both state and society. He suggests that "the state should be addressed as an effect of spatial organization, temporal arrangement, functional specification, and supervision and surveillance, which create the appearance of a world fundamentally divided into state and society. The essence of modern politics is not policies formed on one side of this division being applied to or shaped

by the other, but the producing and reproducing of this line of difference" (Mitchell 1991, 95). His argument is that the distinction between state and society is not only an analytical tool that enables one to look at the centralizing role of powerful institutions that claim monopoly of legitimate force. More importantly, "methods of organization and control internal to the processes they govern create the effect of a state structure external to those processes" (Mitchell 1991, 77). At the same time that power relations become internal as disciplines, they appear to take the form of external structures.

In the Indian discussion, the problems with drawing the boundary between state and society often emerge in criticism of the role of the state. Seemingly opposite positions about whether the state is too strong (authoritarian and centralizing) or too weak (fragile and ineffective) are often taken by the same writer in discussions of the Indian state. For example, Rajni Kothari has recently argued that "even the repressive character arises out of the fragility of the modern state rather than its power, especially in past-colonial [*sic*] societies. The more fragile and ineffective and powerless a given state, the more repressive it becomes' (1991, 553). One would imagine that in order to be effectively repressive the state needs power. What Kothari perhaps wants to say is that the state does not effect social change in the direction he thinks desirable. One of the main reasons for its falling short of expectation is the erosion of the autonomy of the state vis-à-vis "dominant interests, be they the monied interests in the form of the private sector and its international purveyors trying to influence economic decisions, be they the communal and caste interests seeking to hoodwink the state for sectarian ends, or be they the more professional mafia interests that have spread themselves through criminalisation of the polity at the grassroots" (Kothari 1991, 553). Again, the externality of the state becomes problematic as soon as interest groups to which the writer does not belong become dominant.

An interesting element brought into the discussion of the state by Kothari (and many others) is the international context. This larger context reinforces the trope of externality, since the Indian state is part of a global system that is often understood as even more truly external, indeed "foreign." Kothari argues that there is an "erosion of self-reliant statehood and a growing hold over the state by transnational interests and their technocratic agents" (Kothari 1991, 554). Again, there are interest groups taking hold over the state, but now they are located mainly outside of Indian society with, as collaborators within Indian society, the middle class. This feeling that it is the middle class with its economic ideology of privatiza-

tion that sells a formerly self-reliant society out to world capitalism makes the Indian state seem as foreign as its predecessor, the colonial state. The connection is made with some rhetorical overkill by Jan Breman in his analysis of the causes of the anti-Muslim riots in Surat after the December 1992 events in Ayodhya: "For the flourishing condition of her informalised economy, so praised by the overseas lords of the global syndicate with its headquarters in Washington, the late-twentieth century version of the former East India and other foreign Companies, Surat has paid a high price in recent months" (Breman 1993b, 741). We seem to have come full circle: Communalism has been caused by the colonial state and independence has not liberated Indian society from this problem, imposed on it, as it were, from outside. Instead, it is perpetuated under the neocolonial conditions of late capitalism. The metaphor of "the foreign hand" is routinely used in India to summarize this and other kinds of externalizations of communal troubles. The state dissolves here to some extent in larger economic processes, although it is still the agent of privatization by giving subsidies and tax exemptions and by regulating labor and capital inputs.

In terms of modern political ideas, the state should be the instrument of the political will of the people. The modern state finds its legitimacy in the regular election of the people's representatives. One of the main difficulties here is that the modern state produces through a variety of social disciplines not only the modern individual as a disciplined social subject, but also the community as political agent. The modern state both individualizes and totalizes. This it does by means of classification, of which the census was one of the main examples in the colonial period. The modern Indian state has an elaborate system of communal representation and entitlements that produces both the modern individual and the modern community. It is a constant endeavor to try to determine where the boundary between state and society and also that between individual citizen and member of a community are, since this line is redrawn again and again in the very process of politics. The concept of the state, not as an external, essentialized agent, but as a series of often conflicting disciplines of ordering society, thus continues to be essential.

Narration

I want to suggest that the projection of the state as external is an important trope in the narrativization of violence, to which I will turn now. The trope of externality in analyzing social processes is not only found among

social scientists, but, as usual with social analysis, it is also part of common sense, of the language of ordinary people. To externalize "the state" as an outside force serves a more direct purpose here than is possible to discern in social science writings. The externality of the state shows up in everyday discourse in two different ways: first, in allegations that the state is in the hands of the rival community; and second, in suggestions that the state is outside the locality where people live their ordinary lives, as an altogether autonomous, malicious force that creates trouble.

If the modern political boundary between state and society were unequivocally established (which it cannot be), it would not matter that someone was a policeman and, as a private citizen, a Hindu; but in reality, Muslims complain bitterly and justifiably that they are underrepresented in the police force and that the police force is an instrument in the hands of the dominant Hindu majority. They demand, therefore, to be represented as members of a group in law enforcement just as their separate community identity is recognized by law. On the other hand, Hindu nationalists argue vehemently that the Muslims are pampered by the state bureaucracy, because they are a vote bank for the politicians. The two antagonistic communities perceive the state as captured by the other community, without recognizing that the communities and their boundaries themselves are produced by a variety of social disciplines that make up what we call the state.

The second, related, strategy in everyday discourse is to say that the state is a corrupted and corrupting force outside the community, defined as a local community, as neighborhood. Violence is created by politicians who control access to state licenses, jobs in the bureaucracy, educational opportunities. Their electoral strategies that make use of the state apparatus are the cause of civil unrest and violence. If the people of both communities would be left alone by this third force, the politicians and the police, there would be no trouble.

To call these externalizations of the state discursive strategies is not to say that they are false, since there is constantly ample evidence of the direct participation of the bureaucracy and the police (or the state) in civil violence and, indeed, one of the great problems is that the police are preponderantly Hindu. The issue, however, is that the composition of the police reflects society; in other words, the police force is not external, but an integral part of society. This explains why a Muslim in Surat who came to the police station to make a statement about the gang rape of his sister was told that his complaint could not be written down because it had happened three days ago (Breman 1993). Such an event cannot be easily explained

by the fact that the police in Surat (and in many other cities in India) are heavily involved in underworld dealings, such as smuggling, bootlegging, prostitution, and illegal building activities, although it is true that they are. It bespeaks a strong anti-Muslim sentiment in the larger population shared by policemen. The cooperation of police and politicians with mafia dons of both Hindu and Muslim communities only enhances the feeling among the general public that the state is a corrupted force that cannot be trusted. In an interesting twist, it is the radical anti-Muslim Hindu movements that claim (and to some extent have the reputation) to be a scourge of the corrupted state. They, however, blame the corruption of the state on the Muslims. Police and politicians thus both partake in corrupt dealings with criminal elements in society (both Hindu and Muslim) and condone anti-Muslim violence as a method to do away with corruption. To say that this is hypocritical is probably not enough. It shows that the liberal state is not simply an abstract theory, but that its contradictions cause great moral unease, to which the anticorruption rhetoric of the Hindu radicals tries to respond.

The externality of communal violence is not only part of the narrative of that violence, but also part of the structure of narration itself. Paul Brass has recently suggested that the interpretation of virtually any act of violence between persons identified as belonging to different groups itself becomes a political act. Basically, what is recognized as violence and what is then categorized as communal violence is an interpretive act. Its acceptance depends on the power to establish truth. The interpretive process generates competing systems of knowledge about communal violence in the media, the police, the judiciary, and the social sciences. Communal violence is only communal violence when it is narrativized as such. A simple example makes the point. When a Hindu boy and a Muslim girl fall in love and decide to run off against the wishes of their respective families, this can easily be narrativized as communal violence: a case of abduction, which can set off a communal riot when that story is spread via rumor or the media. Of course, the opposite may also happen. Social scientists or activists may say that what seems a communal riot is in fact a dispute between two families.

Often these opposite interpretations feed upon each other in significant ways. They are textualizations of violent events that are open to a variety of interpretations, but, as Gyan Pandey (1990b) has argued in his book on the colonial construction of communalism, there are many versions of what happened, but only one version gets an official status and that version is often plotted along the lines of a master narrative. The

official version is often established not so much by marginalizing other accounts, but by the systematic destruction of evidence, as witnessed by Gyan Pandey on a fact-finding mission in the aftermath of the Bhagalpur massacre of 1989 (Pandey 1990b, 563). Not only do the police records (historian's favorite source for studies of violence) ignore the massacre as much as they can, but one of the elements of violence itself is the destruction of evidence. Fire is a favorite instrument in communal riots to destroy the bodies of the victims and the houses in which they lived, so that the story of the victimized community can be more easily disputed. The fetishization of numbers in these disputes is often striking. It is impossible to deny totally that anything happened, but numbers play an important role in the calculus of how "serious" events were. Ironically, it is the politics of numbers in modern democracies that is a motivating force in these events in the first place.

One of the strategies to go beyond the official version is, of course, to listen to the victim's story, as Tully has done in his account and what Jan Breman has also done when he worked in Ahmedabad in the beginning of 1993. In the victims' stories, both in Tully's and in Breman's narration, one often finds the trope of "externality": the aggressors came from outside. Breman (1993a) interprets this as a sign that the victims want to stay on in the neighborhood and try to recreate the imaginary community of the neighborhood (see also Pandey 1991, 563). Only those who have been forced out without any hope of return sometimes allow themselves the story of the closeness of the aggressors: the neighbors did it. In the case of the Surat riots of December 1992, the story is a bit more complicated: the neighbors were from outside. According to Jan Breman (1993b, 739):

> the victims, the next of kin of those who did not survive, and other eyewitnesses are unanimous in naming the "kathiawadi" diamond cutters, the UP "bhaiyas" and the Oriya "malis" operating the powerlooms as the main culprits. As if to confess their guilty implication in the pillage and massacre an exodus took place in the days immediately after the pogrom. On a single day 85,000 tickets were sold at the counters of the Surat railway station, an absolute record, and extra trains had to be brought in to ease the pressure on the overflowing platforms to a somewhat manageable level. Reliable estimates are difficult to come by, but altogether more than two lakh labour migrants are reported to have fled to their home towns and villages far away in order to distance themselves from the scene of pillage and massacre.

Breman points out that this massive exodus could not have been simply one of aggressors fearing retaliation. It is much more likely that these migrant workers themselves had become very afraid of the violent chaos in

which they found themselves. There can be, however, no doubt that migrant workers were predominant among the mobs that attacked Muslims. Rather, the question is how "migrant" were they. Surat is a huge industrial agglomeration in which most of the workers come "from outside." In this kind of industrial city the distinction between "inside" and "outside" does not make too much sense anymore. Moreover, there is considerable evidence that middle-class inhabitants of Surat participated in the rioting and even more in the looting of Muslim-owned luxury stores. Sudhir Chandra has argued persuasively that in Surat the Hindu middle classes massively supported the need for violence to teach the Muslims a lesson they would not forget (Chandra 1993a, 1883). Nevertheless, the attempt to single out the migrant workers, those without a firm footing in the city's middle class, is perfectly understandable as an attempt to maintain the myth of Surat civic solidarity.

What is unfortunately lacking from most accounts we have is the narration by the aggressor. Breman (1993a) reports that the residents of Ahmedabad neighborhoods from which Muslims had been violently expelled resented his inquiries and did not want to say what had happened. Similarly, Hindus in Bhagalpur met Gyan Pandey's team "with studied silence, if not hostility" (Pandey 1991, 563). One could, of course, interpret this as a sign of shame, but I do not think that would be correct. In fact, there are often clear signs of pride that express themselves in the taunting of the victimized community. Provocations and humiliations continue after riots. When I visited Surat in May 1993, Muslims told me that after the riots they were constantly humiliated in the streets as "cowards" who could not protect their families. This had only stopped after the bombing of several buildings in Bombay in April and May 1993. One could say that the aggressors have less need to bring their story to the outside world, while the story is one of the few resources that victims have left. This is nicely captured by the title of Veena Das's essay on the victims of the Delhi riots of 1984: "Our Work to Cry, Your Work to Listen" (1990b).

Obviously, the aggressors would also be careful about openly telling their story to outsiders for fear of retaliation. There is a self-perpetuating element in this violence: the need for revenge on the part of the victimized community, which is only too well understood by the aggressors. According to the logic of communal violence, only revenge can salvage the honor (izzat) of the victimized community, which becomes truly inferior if it is unable to avenge itself. Veena Das (1990b, 387) reports that the male victims of the anti-Sikh riots in Delhi in 1984 constantly talked about their

loss of face and their fear of their own desire for vengeance. They actually wanted to move away from the area because of the pressure to regain self-esteem by revenge.

The story of the aggressors thus has to be inferred from public statements about the other community. Recurrent themes here are that Muslims are not loyal to India, since they do not fully belong; their loyalty is to powers outside of India, primarily Pakistan, but also the oil-producing countries of the Middle East; furthermore, they are a threat to the Hindu community, since their religion prevents them from observing family planning and allows them to marry four wives, so that their number grows much faster than that of the Hindus. A related theme is that Muslims try to induce Hindus with money to convert to Islam, a "dirty" religion in which the cow is sacrificed and eaten. Muslims are also pampered by the state, because they are united as a voting bloc for the Congress Party, while Hindus are divided and thus discriminated against in their own country. Muslims have to realize that they are second-rate citizens as long as they are Muslims, but they can redeem themselves by returning to the national creed, Hinduism. These stories are often related to a precolonial past of Muslim hegemony in which Muslims oppressed Hindus.

These stereotypes can be found in all kinds of combinations, but they do not give direct motivations for violence besides the general one that Muslims have to be taught a lesson, so that they will know their place. They form a general narrative for condoning violence or even incitement of violence, as in the speeches of radical leaders like Sadhvi Ritambara. The direct causes of violence are extremely variable. The riots in Bhagalpur and Surat, to which I have been referring in this chapter, were immediately connected to the Ayodhya affair and thus directly caused by the campaigns orchestrated by the VHP and BJP. While these movements can be said to be directly responsible for the widespread kilings, their more fundamental impact is that the general narrative of Hindu-Muslim relations in India is perhaps not drastically changed, but has become more and more acceptable for public expression in wide sections of the Hindu population. Again, words do matter as does the way they are expressed.

Conclusion

Violence is in my view a "total" social phenomenon. As Marcel Mauss explains in *The Gift* (1974, 76), "these phenomena are at once legal, eco-

nomic, religious, aesthetic, morphological and so on." It is interesting to note, however, that in modern society, this total fact is discursively cut up in different pieces. The economic and political pieces constitute the real elements, while the religious is relegated to the unreal. As I have argued, this depends, to a significant degree, on a discursive construction of Western modernity, in which a modern construction of public and private makes religion a private matter of the individual. Something similar is also true for the way modern power results in the drawing of a boundary between state and society. Unlike religion, however, the state comes to be seen as a very real, but external agent whose actions impinge on society.

It is important to see how closely social science discourse follows common discourse in the narration of violence. The trope of externality is also used by victims of violence, but in a very functional manner, namely to pacify communal relations on the local level. To say that it is the changing economy or the changing maneuvers of politicians or the changing tactics of the police functions as an externalization of violence that is endemic among the common people themselves. It seems to be difficult to regard religion as an external, historical force like the state. Religion makes itself appear as a habit of the heart, the hard core of a community's identity, as a thing that cannot change and is nonnegotiable. To say that the violence is religiously motivated makes it seem inescapable, although, definitely, we know that religion does change, that religious institutions lose functions over time and, sometimes, disappear. But religious discourse tries to deny historical change and derives its power to an important degree from its success at doing so. Indeed, in that sense, religion is ideology, but it does not hide class dominance; it hides its own history, its own dependence on social movements, institutions, and political economy.

There is no true story of violence. Violence is a total phenomenon, but it comes to us as a total fragment (Pandey 1991). Something terrible has happened and there is no plot, no narrative, only traces that lead nowhere.