

Why does the subject speak? Prejudgement in fieldwork with Naxalites and Hindu rioters

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This article explores the shifting trajectory of dramaturgical encounters with ‘subjects’ in two disparate contexts of violence in contemporary India: Naxalites in Jharkhand and Bihar; and participants in the 2002 riots in Gujarat. It argues that why (and thereby what) the subject speaks has to be located within the larger text of performances in the ‘field’, involving the prejudgement (in a Gadamerian sense) of both researcher and subject. Limits and possibilities to prior knowledges of both predetermine outcomes of interaction and inform the enterprise of doing theory in troubled contexts.

The ‘reflexive turn’ in anthropology, marked by its self-conscious shift in the 1980s from interpretation of cultural texts to scrutiny of the relations of their production, discursive aspects, or ‘epistemic contingency’ (Boyer 2015), irrevocably unsettled the authorial voice in ethnography. Poly-vocal accounts meticulously detailed discourses, dialogues, or confrontations, transforming erstwhile cultural ‘texts’ into speaking subjects who see as are seen, evade, argue, probe back (Clifford 1986: 14).¹ With contexts of armed conflict and violence also emerging about this time as important ethnographic settings, ‘voices’ of those who had encountered, suffered, or resisted violence assumed criticality, providing insight into its experiential dimensions.

If anthropology of violence has since looked closely into many nuanced questions of representation, or problems of speaking for the subject, I suggest here that the existent lens of scrutiny on the researcher be stretched to examine not just one’s own history, location, ideological positions, and politics, but also to ask: *why does the subject speak?* Arguing that the question of ‘why’ the subject speaks has urgent ethical and significant epistemological ramifications not addressed by consent, or mere acknowledgement of speech as negotiated, subjective, powered, or incongruent, the article revisits aspects of my own anthropological fieldwork in two radically disparate sites of political violence in contemporary India: with participants in the 2002 riots in Gujarat; and with Naxalite armed cadres in Jharkhand and Bihar. Tracing through a comparative lens the shifting trajectory of dramaturgical encounters between researcher and subject, the article details how understanding and often determination of a field is linked to these uncertain performances. It argues that why (and therefore what) the subject speaks must be

located within the larger text of encounters between researcher and subject, involving the prejudgement (in a Gadamerian sense) of both. The researcher's prior 'knowledge' of the location, history, and politics of the subject, and the subject's continuous (but not necessarily consistent) assessment of the researcher's performance, predetermine possible outcomes of interaction, and inform the enterprise of doing theory.

In troubled fields, such as the contexts worked with in this article, these questions are perhaps further complicated when the subject is not the survivor of ethnic violence (see particularly Das 1990; 2000; 2003; Malkki 1995), but its actor. For the survivor, often not just bodily (and materially) brutalized by experience of pain or loss, but also suffering more fundamental disruption of social and cosmological order, sharing of trauma has been seen as part of the reconstructive project, of a return to self and sociality; narration itself becomes relief, and 'being witnessed' can hold out the hope of healing and justice. But why does the perpetrator speak? Is that telling, while deeply aiding the researcher's academic activity, in any way 'worthwhile' or useful to her own interests? What may compel the speech of foot soldiers of an armed guerrilla group fighting against state power, whose discourses put them at deep risk of reprisal not just by the state, but by the very group they are members of? In what ways does the anthropologist's own prejudgement about the subject, or of the site (kind) of violence under study, intervene with what will be said – or withheld? These questions also assume criticality in light of the veritable binaries of care and condemnation that may simultaneously inform the anthropology of collective violence, wherein alongside the work of collecting the subjective narratives of suffering, we often seek to explicate (if not expose) the structures or regimes from which violence emanates.²

I find Gadamer's notion of understanding as a linguistically mediated, dialogic, practical, situated activity useful in my attempts ahead to chart probable answers to questions such as the above. Following from his interest in 'fore-structures' of understanding, or the anticipatory structures that allow what is to be interpreted or understood to be grasped in a preliminary fashion (Gadamer 2006: 268-78), I (re)deploy 'prejudgement' as a heuristic tool to clarify the prior hermeneutical situatedness of both subject and anthropologist. As such, if these fore-structures – which do not refer to purely individual prejudice and cannot be explained away by epistemic limitations inherent in the (always already powered) ethnographic encounter – are nevertheless structured by the historical, cultural, psycho-social formations of 'modernity' and its inevitable 'other/s', I was possibly no exception. Finally I borrow extensively from Erving Goffman's (1959) ideas on dramaturgy in small group interactions to attempt to make sense of and contextualize the text of my own engagement with the Naxalites, and with those who participated in the 2002 violence against Muslims in Gujarat.

As quick background, the Naxalite movement originated from a localized struggle against oppressive agrarian relations in Naxalbari, West Bengal, in 1967. The Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) revolutionaries who organized the original protests fragmented soon after into several militant groups, including CPI (ML) Liberation, CPI (ML) Party Unity, and CPI (ML) People's War. Another breakaway faction of the original CPM, the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC), built a revolutionary base in West Bengal, Assam, Tripura, and later in Bihar and Jharkhand. Renamed Maoist Communist Centre of India (MCCI) in 2003 after a merger with the Revolutionary Communist Centre of India (Maoist), it nevertheless continued to be mostly referred to in areas of its influence as MCC. MCCI and People's War merged in 2004 to form the CPI (Maoist), counted by the Indian government as amongst its deadliest internal security threats.³ The 2002

violence in Gujarat refers to the retributive pogrom that followed after a railway coach carrying mostly *kar sevaks*⁴ back from Ayodhya was set on fire, allegedly by an irate Muslim mob in Godhra, killing fifty-nine Hindus. In the months that followed, over 2,000 Muslims were killed in horrifying violence across Gujarat; at least 100,000 more were displaced and rendered homeless, or raped, mutilated, and burned.⁵ (While the 2002 attacks drew attention both in India and abroad for the brutality and precision of their methods, for their symbolic purpose and ideological agenda, and for the widely documented backing and support of the then ruling right-wing dispensation in the state, Gujarat has been the site of bitter communal conflict and episodes of violence over several decades now [Breman 1993; 1999; Engineer 1992; Pinto 1995].⁶)

Based on my own long ethnographic engagement with both contexts, I have previously examined aspects such as the shifting histories of participation in the contemporary Maoist movement, the ideological structures and patterns of violence in Gujarat, and the politics of mobilization in the two ideologically disparate movements (see Chitralekha 2010; 2012). My attempt here is restricted to a retrospective effort to detail how the complicated, shifting process of that documentation occurred over the course of a series of dramaturgical encounters in these ‘fields’, where both the subjects of my study and I continuously anticipated, postured, and play-acted to the (imagined) expectation of the other. Relatedly, I also attempt to draw attention to linkages between the subject’s speech and the prejudgement of both subject and researcher.

‘Knowing’ when the subject is the perpetrator

We had never met before, but I already knew Bhanu Chhara Rathod.⁷

Little over a year after the violence that racked Gujarat in 2002, when I walked into Patia *gali* (street), I was searching for a middle-aged man whose name and acts of violence had in some ways come to symbolize the killings in Ahmedabad. Rathod himself had assumed almost mythic proportions in that telling and re-imagining of brutality, vengeance, and the limits of human monstrosity. Facing charges of multiple counts of murder, rape, and sexual assault in the 2002 riots, he had been named repeatedly in fact-finding reports, witness testimonies, and survivor accounts, but was particularly remembered by witnesses, mostly neighbours, for the macabre murder of Naroda resident Kauser Bano and her near full-term foetus, which was allegedly wrenched out, swirled on the edge of a sword, and finally burnt alive with the mother. When I met him – first at his home, just out from jail on bail, and over later meetings – he was suspicious, confrontational, lewd, suggestive: sometimes all at once, the text of his narrative veering sharply between demands to know my ‘true identity’, crude or provocative personal remarks, vehement denial of any role in the events at Naroda, and eventually complex justifications of the ‘morality’ of what happened.⁸

In our first meeting, Rathod insistently reinforced his personal achievements. ‘I am a gold medal AMTS [Ahmedabad Municipal Transport Service] driver ... always number one in class. I knew a little English ... my Maths is good even now’. The Chharas, a marginal community in Gujarat, have over the years eked out a living from illegal liquor brewing, theft, and trade in stolen goods. Labelled and stigmatized in public perception as a ‘criminal community’, moving into, and surviving in, alternative occupations continues to be an uphill battle for them.⁹ The youngest member of an impoverished Chhara family in Ahmedabad, Rathod, too, struggled against such stark economic, and more debilitating social, odds through childhood, and dropped out of school after sixth grade to work full-time in a factory, but his narrative held no

mention of those experiences or of discrimination. Instead, he said (repeatedly, in an unstructured and mostly unprompted narrative) that they (his family) were ‘upper castes’ and reiterated his scriptural knowledge. ‘We are Rajputs ... upper castes ... Rathods ... I am a learned man’. Rathod had been described to me before we met by a close relative of his as a man who gave much importance to *puja pat* (colloquial for Hindu ritual prayers) and who scrupulously adhered to Hindu rituals. When I first visited their Naroda home, his family (wife, a son, and three daughters) was preparing for the impending *Janamashtami* festival (marking the birth of the Hindu deity Krishna), which he said would as always be celebrated by them in style. While Rathod’s ostentatious religiosity possibly had roots in a process of sanskritization of the Chharas that predates his own contact with Hindutva, a close relative reflected that his need to be seen as a good Hindu brought him closer to Hindu nationalist groups in the area. Rathod said he was happy he had been able to help the ‘Hindu *samaj*’ (community), quoting from the *Mahabharata* (the ancient epic that includes the Hindu philosophical and religious text Bhagvad Gita), using mythic allegory (of how Krishna justified Arjuna’s war against his brothers, the *Kauravas*, as a dutiful action to vanquish evil) as a metaphor for his own killing of the ‘Mussalman *bhais*’ (brothers): ‘Why do you think it happened? Whenever there is evil on this earth, God comes down in human form ...’.

Rathod killed himself in October 2005, about two years after we last met at his home in Patia *gali*. His death was reported by most newspapers at the time as a suicide based mostly on circumstantial evidence, his recent history of depression, and his family doctor’s assessment. When we met last, barely a year after the gruesome Naroda killings and rapes – many of which he had spearheaded – Rathod’s extended narratives had held no trace of regret, unease, or doubt about his violent practice.¹⁰ But, play-acting to the larger-than-life persona of righteous and victorious avenger, he seemed frequently bewildered by the *repercussions* of his heroic actions. Incarcerated in prison for a few months and (evidently much to his surprise) suspended from his job on account of cases filed against him by Muslim survivors, Rathod had asked angrily, ‘Is this India or Pakistan? This situation makes me wonder if I am Hindu or Muslim’. His son Mahesh, also accused (and now convicted) of several of the gang rapes in the Naroda violence, explained they had expected more help from the VHP (Vishwa Hindu Parishad – the Sangh Parivar organization¹¹ widely held responsible for instigating, and often leading, much of the rioting in 2002). ‘All they gave our family was 1,800 rupees [about \$30], ten kilos of grain and some oil’.

Unsaid and possibly harshest amongst these unexpected sanctions was the awkward, unarticulated, yet visibly perceptible ‘loss of face’ that Rathod experienced, not for the hackings and killings (recounted as self-defence or heroic slaying of dangerous enemies), but for the unspeakable sexual aspects of his participation, which could not be as readily acknowledged in intimate, familial, domestic domains. Accused among other things of parading Muslim women and children naked before raping, hacking, and burning them, in his own narratives he swerved sharply from gloating, almost megalomaniac, self-glorification, to angry denial of that history. In the course of one of our meetings, he said with a sly smile, ‘Yes, they [Muslim survivors] have accused me of doing things you wouldn’t do with your Mister’ (husband), and moments later (angrily), ‘I have daughters. How can I rape?’

I start with Bhanu Chhara Rathod because my prior ‘knowing’ of the subject of my research, the broken, fissured, fluctuating, but nevertheless perpetually unfolding

text of his narrative, and his suicide not long thereafter, in many ways hold forth the troubled questions of dramaturgy and epistemology, method and ethics that I grappled with through the course of my fieldwork in Gujarat after the riots. Why did Rathod speak? What was in it for him? Had he relied on an empathy which was missing? Why did the text of his narrative change as we continued to meet? I had not lied about my project in Gujarat (saying my research was an attempt to understand the violence from the standpoint of the Hindus), but did my careful phrasing in fact amount to deception? Did my performance/s and (shifting) role-play in a sense predetermine the possibilities of each dramaturgical encounter with those such as Rathod, with implications for the telling of truth? Does mere acquisition of verbal or documented consent complete ethical obligations of research in troubled contexts, or does the matter of *why* the subject actually speaks merit acknowledgement as both an epistemological and ethical problem – more so when the subject is the perpetrator of violence? Why would those who killed in the Gujarat riots speak to a researcher studying ethnic violence?

In 2003, a year after the brutal ethnic killings in Gujarat, I met, lived with, and documented the histories and ideas of those who had been its perpetrators in different sites: metropolitan Ahmedabad, a Hindu (Patel)-dominated village (Sardarpura in Mehsana district), and an *adivasi* (Bhil) village (Bhiloda in Sabarkantha district). Many were direct participants across categories of immediate ‘role-play’ in the violence, such as mob leaders, killers, rapists, rioters. I also found that the role of two additional categories, ‘local supporters’ and ‘ideological instigators’, was critical to my understanding of why why Hindus killed Muslims across locations in Gujarat.¹² The outcome (or success) of my performances at the time, even if they were an unselfconscious activity, was closely linked to the sites of these interactions; its ‘fronts’ and its ‘settings’ were in retrospect integral to the unfolding of the trajectory of these encounters, and to the details of their text (Goffman 1959: 22–30). It did not go unnoticed by the subjects of my study that I lived amongst them, travelled as they did by foot, bus, or rickshaws, unlike ‘important visitors from Delhi’, who journeyed in cars to meet their Muslim neighbours, and left as night fell. Agnostic for years, in Gujarat I began to wear a *bindi*, a red ornamental mark on the forehead mainly donned by Hindu women. The *bindi*, or *chanda*, as it was locally called, symbolically (and safely) marked me out as ‘Hindu’ as I attempted to immerse myself in these new spaces. Despite an ideological preference for going by a single name (in the hope that that leaves behind caste, as well as both ascribed and assumed patriarchies – of both the father and the husband), in Gujarat I found myself reverting back to a maiden name that denoted prior membership within a linguistic, cultural, and caste community. That I now ‘looked’ overtly Hindu, wore a *chanda*, dressed conservatively in a *salwar kurta* (traditional Indian dress), maybe even that I was fair-skinned, (then) young, and female (and listened attentively), all mattered in the particular social context I was working within at the time in Gujarat; and I was undoubtedly aware of their importance in building and sustaining a credible front for my performance with Bhanu Chhara Rathod, and other participants in the riots of 2002.

Possibly the most powerful front I had in Gujarat was enabled by my acquaintance in the field with a reporter working for a leading Gujarati daily known to be close to the then (and still) ruling right-wing party in the state. This reporter, a Sangh Parivar favourite – and front-line bystander to the butchery in Naroda on 28 February 2002 – agreed to support me in my project of documenting the perspective of those who killed Muslims on the day. I subsequently stayed for extended periods with his family – an

experience that located me as a researcher completely within the inner circle of those involved in the 2002 violence. I met with ideological instigators, mob leaders, killers, and rapists, VHP-appointed lawyers defending the ‘innocent Hindus’, and, perhaps most disturbing, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)/VHP ‘insiders’ in the media (including the reporter who helped me) – those who had had the power to harden propaganda and rumour into irrevocable ‘truths’. Once I had met a few participants through this reporter, or because I had been seen at his home, and he was comfortable with introducing me to the community, I found it easier to introduce myself subsequently through older links to newer subjects. Many participants did find it credible that I would want to know ‘directly from the Hindus’ about the ‘events of that time’, its untold details, and the reasons for their own participation in the violence of those days.

The trajectory of these dramaturgical engagements was often described by the class/status/professional background of the subject; already stratifying in a sense the likely contours and possibilities of their prior knowledge about me. Several of those I met with early on in Ahmedabad city, for instance, were senior leaders of the ruling political establishment in the state, and had instigated, or even spearheaded and led, killing mobs in the city. The text of their narrative, though lengthy and eventually providing some insight into the political (and social-psychological) aspirations of categories of participants such as ‘mob leaders’ or ‘ideological instigators’, was by and large guarded; I had to be careful lest the veneer of interested, admiring student follower develop cracks, and threaten the stability of both our performances. It was mostly different with the killers, and even more so with those I term as rioters: the large numbers of young people who roamed with the killing mobs, participated in their mass frenzy with as much abandon, even threw a few stones and a few petrol bombs, but did not kill, or did not have the chance to do so (see Chitralekha 2012: 165-76; also see 208-48). For them, the name of my university (communicated by way of introduction) triggered no dissonance, unlike for the mob leaders, who almost always related it quickly to the university’s long history of left-wing activism or, worse, more recent advocacy for justice for the victims of the 2002 violence. The narration of their participation, uninformed by the (more firmly formed) prejudgement of those such as mob leaders, was as such also more readily forthcoming, seemingly seeking gratification in that telling, not cathartic but (re-)fulfilling social-psychological needs that also drove their violent practice.

Rathod had been a frontline killer in the riots, and his practice – unlike those who had incited and led the killing mobs – was more than pragmatic action orientated towards political or other material gains. For those who bloodied their own hands in the 2002 violence (a fraction of the marauding mobs, which numbered several thousand), the rare moment provided to be an actor of socially legitimate violence was in itself gratifying, investing the perpetrator with instant social visibility, potency, and power. Babu bhai, for instance (serving a life term in prison for mass murder in the 2002 riots), described often as amongst the Hindutva brigade’s best *gundas* (thugs) in Ahmedabad, carefully displayed a dossier of press clippings about himself and his ‘life’s work’ that he had assiduously collected over several years. Play-acting to my own persona of engaged Hindu listener, he shared the articles, painstakingly collated from both regional and national newspapers, narrating his escapades in the ‘line of duty’ – including the killing, burning, and hacking at Naroda Patia in 2002. Mukesh Rajput recalled with pride that he had been amongst the four men who ripped apart Ehsan Jafri, poet, litterateur, and erstwhile parliamentarian, in the attack on Gulbarg Society, Ahmedabad, on

28 February 2002. Rajput was glad to get on to the right side of influential Sangh Parivar leaders, and guessed his actions would also get him better visibility in his own party (Congress).¹³ But as he narrated, that expectation was not what drove his actions on the day. '*27 ke raath se hi haath me khujli lagi hui thi* (from the night of the 27 itself, my hands were itching) ... I had to do something'.

While a more complex understanding of the kind of factors that may have led to the seeking of (psychological) fulfilment in mob violence was not within the possibilities of my own study, for these few men, suppressed perception of personal (including physical or social) shortcomings, often compounded by unemployment, and anxiousness to prove self-worth, were significant indicators from the fractured, fluctuating narratives I encountered. Rajput said he was 'excited' by the prospect of leading a huge mob targeting Muslims; Prakash, his friend (and Congress party co-worker), believed that for Rajput it was important that many people *saw* him participating in the violence. Rajput's own narrative was riddled with frequent assertions about the extent of his 'power', as well as admissions of his desire to be and be seen as powerful. Narrating how his predilection for (and sizeable collection of) arms grew out of the same need, he recalls that he first took a *chaku* (knife) with him to school, as some boys would open his *dabba* (lunchbox) without his permission. He remembers that it worked like magic, and was the beginning of his relationship with arms. Evidently body-conscious, and keen to impress, he ended one of our meetings with the following instruction: 'I may be only five foot three inches, but don't underestimate me. I can call the shots in many places across Gujarat'.

Prejudgement and precarious performance

Joseba Zulaika, describing his ethnographic research of the ETA violence in his native Basque country, in Itzian, where his childhood friends had become prominent members of a separatist armed movement, addresses the dilemmas and complexities of studying political violence at a local level where the actor of violence has a face, and most people witness and know of politically motivated murder in their neighbourhood. Zulaika asks whether research on political violence can ever justify dialogue with users of political violence (Zulaika 1995, cited in Krohn-Hansen 1997: 235). Though Zulaika's research is in a context of armed group violence structurally disparate from that of ethnic riots in Gujarat, his query does not just raise questions of what differentiates the practice of a separatist nationalist group from the more legitimate 'political violence' of state actors (and even renders the former unworthy of study); it also draws us to the larger problem of how that practice may, in the anthropologist's prejudgement, already be ethically reprehensible, or non-justifiable: as the actions of the Hindu rioters who killed Muslims in Gujarat were perhaps to me.

My work in Gujarat, as I see it in retrospect, started with prejudice. I had been through disturbing accounts of survivors of and witnesses to the macabre events of February and March 2002, and often before I met my respondents, I 'knew' them. Though I did not conceal my identity or the subject of my research, Hindu perpetrators of violence in these riots, on the other hand, spoke on the premise that I was seeking to understand 'their side of the story' (in itself not untrue), but as such also relied on an ideological correspondence which did not exist. Through the several months of fieldwork in Gujarat, starting from its earliest days in Naroda, to later in Sardarpura village, and even with the Bhils in Sabarkantha district, I found myself struggling to bracket away my own horror and, often, sheer incredulity at what I was listening to;

and the sense of subterfuge, of living a lie even if I had not in fact lied about my work in the region, persisted.

I was shaken beyond what I had come to expect when I first met and heard Mukesh Rajput—a triumphant boast of how he contributed to torturing and hacking to pieces the erstwhile (Congress) Member of Parliament Ehsan Jafri before finally burning him alive. He recalled how he was at the front of a 15,000- to 20,000-strong mob that attacked Gulbarg Society, a middle-class housing complex in Chamanpura, Ahmedabad, and that Jafri had been their primary target: '*Us din, koi daya nahi thi man me* (that day, I felt no pity) . . . I was the first to enter. I have absolutely no regret'. Only a few days before, I had met Jafri's widow, corresponded with his daughter, who was abroad, and with his son, who was then struggling against huge odds in his efforts to identify and prosecute his father's killers. Faced with Rajput's happy confession (the gory details of which are irrelevant to this study), I battled at the time with which was the more valid ethic: helping a fellow citizen secure justice for his brutally murdered dead father, or honouring the promise of anonymity made by a researcher to a respondent in exchange for knowledge. Though neither certain about, nor at ease with, those decisions, I chose the latter, moving on from his account of the events of 28 February 2002 to larger questions important to my work.

Extended acquaintance and proximity with those involved in the violence in Ahmedabad (or with the critical events that led up to it) continued, however, to tear into my notional 'detachment' as a researcher, until, in the end, it cracked completely. My journey in Ahmedabad had begun, for instance, with the reporter from the Gujarati daily, frontline witness to the killings and burnings in Naroda Patia, who understood I was working on a doctoral thesis, but likely believed I was empathetic to the Sangh Parivar's programme in Gujarat. I had said I wanted to understand more, and he said he needed to talk about it himself. From early successful performances by both of us – where I was only an empathetic listener and he was just a helpless bystander seeking cathartic relief in the telling of traumatic experiences, recounting his witnessing of brutalities that would not let him sleep – in later meetings over the following months both of us slipped more often into the dramaturgical 'backstage' (Goffman 1959: 112–14), until, one day, I finally asked what in retrospect was dramaturgically impermissible: 'Did the children have to be killed too?'¹⁴ He replied when snakes have to be finished off, the babies must be killed too (*saap ke saath sapola ko bhi khatam karna padta hai*). Following this rupture, our performances were unstable and precarious (he asked repeatedly who I really was, what I was 'actually' trying to document), and broke down irrevocably after a horrific attempt at molestation at his home on one of my visits. With still fresh memories of prior fieldwork in Jharkhand and Bihar, I could not help remembering that there – once the much more difficult barriers of secrecy and distrust with a guerrilla party were bridged – I had been treated with regard, even chivalry, and was often addressed as *didī* (elder sister), as the Naxalites I found were wont to address most women. Here, within the specific social worlds of my work in Gujarat, my gender identity as researcher mattered more distinctively, making me subject to experiences that were probably uglier than may have been the case if I was not *also* a woman.

In later stages of work in Sardarpura (Mehsana district) and Bhiloda (in Sabarkantha), again I met and worked with many whose worldview and politics I was discomfited by, but whose hospitality I depended on for my research. In Sardarpura, for instance, I lived with members of the influential Patel community, known to have spearheaded the killing of Muslims in the village in 2002. (Thirty-three Muslims – the

official figure, mostly daily wage labourers from the Sheikh community – had been electrocuted to death; most of those who died were women and children.) I was introduced by the head of a Gandhian organization near the village (where I initially lived and worked from), and, despite their evident misgivings, they housed me and made sure I was comfortable. Eventually, even with knowledge of my research objectives, some family members trusted sufficiently in my integrity as a researcher (and my commitment to ensure their anonymity) to speak at length about what happened in the village on 1 March 2002, and to connect me personally to others. Here too, however, as in Ahmedabad, I lived with the uneasy sense of being always watched, and the knowledge that it wouldn't take much for the tide to turn against me. The few times I tried to communicate with the Pathan landowners (the original targets of violence in the village, who, according to locals, escaped attack owing to last-minute logistical issues), I faced suspicion and anger even from my immediate hosts.

Yet, despite – or perhaps particularly in – such politically volatile contexts, the continuity of my research engagement often depended upon my willingness to (attempt to) unravel my own ideological allegiances and standpoint: as in Ahmedabad, where the Gujarati daily reporter (whose family I was also living with at the time) suddenly said one day, 'People are saying I should not trust you. Whose side are you really on?'; or when a senior office-bearer of the VHP based in Ahmedabad (who called himself the 'international leader of Hindus') enquired in the course of a hitherto amicable conversation about which university I was from, and (once I answered) threatened to have me beaten up and thrown out of Gujarat; or in Bhiloda, when a Bhil teenager (also a rioter in the 2002 violence), surrounded by his friends and supporters, asked belligerently, 'First you tell us, what do you think about Muslims?' Established (even if precarious) boundaries of analytical distance and disinterested observance were often disrupted, abruptly catapulting our engagement, with the subject now as avid observer, and researcher as subject. In Sardarpura's high school, I found myself talking more than listening, desperate to convince, to hold up another face of the 'truths' that were being told to me even by children, justifying the 2002 violence. What were meant to be group discussions often turned into bitter arguments between children (from different communities); I found myself unable to hold on to the role of detached observer, mostly getting as passionately involved in the discussions as they were.

Guarded life-worlds, immersion, and shifting speech

Sadanand Mahato, an erstwhile student leader who joined and rose to the highest ranks of the banned Naxalite group (then) Maoist Communist Centre (MCC) in Jharkhand, unhesitatingly agreed to a meeting when he received my message that I was a researcher from Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) (well known as a left-leaning university in India). Incarcerated for several years in a central jail in Palamu, Jharkhand, he seemed eager to engage, more than anything else, in an exchange of ideas. As I was about to leave, Mahato slipped a piece of paper into my hands with his address (a remote village in Palamu) and the following question scribbled on it: '*Marxwad kyo fail hua?*' ('Why did Marxism fail?') Like Mahato, Pranav Vidyarthi, too, had joined the movement in its first flush in Aurangabad and Gaya districts of Bihar, and had been arrested and imprisoned in appalling conditions for years on end. Speaking in a dark, dingy room in Aurangabad jail, he nevertheless recounted a narrative that was jubilant, infused with nostalgia, spoken fervently as to someone he, too, had prejudged as a 'comrade'. Intimately associated as he was with the Naxalite struggle to acquire and redistribute *gair*

mazurua (village commons) and ceiling surplus lands in and around his own village,¹⁵ the years of bloodshed had for him a core and local agenda: '*Aisan gaon banavan jai/ Jahan sapno me julmi jamindar na rahe . . .*' ('Let us make a village/ where even in your dreams there is no cruel landlord').

Those such as Mahato or Vidyarthi seemed to grasp our meeting as Bourdieu may have seen it, as an opportunity to testify, be heard, carry their experience from the private to the public sphere, 'explain themselves' (and their work) in the fullest sense of the term (Bourdieu 1999: 615). For Bourdieu, it is the researcher who can create the conditions for 'extraordinary discourse', which might never have been spoken, but which was already there, awaiting the conditions for its actualization, the density and intensity of that speech conveying not just relief, accomplishment, but joy in expression (1999: 614). Questions of the subject's prejudgement of the researcher's location and possibilities for 'understanding', prior association, or empathy with the cause relate with more than usual urgency, however, to the likely course of, or the very possibility of, ethnographic encounters with members of an armed group engaged in guerrilla warfare with the state. Mahato's prejudgement was a consequence perhaps of cultural capital accrued from his own (even if abruptly curtailed) university education, Vidyarthi's followed from his still vibrant memories of a struggle for a more equitable redistribution of land and dignity that had drawn participants and leaders from several universities – including JNU; but the course of many other encounters with Naxalite cadres, even those met with in jails, was not similar.

Jopan Manjhi, for instance, incarcerated at the time of my fieldwork in Dhanbad jail, did not speak, despite my several initial visits, until he had verified for himself (mainly through jail staff he trusted) my background and motives. At the time of his 'capture' and arrest at 21 (in 1996), he had been in charge of two districts in Jharkhand; despite sustained interrogation and third-degree torture, he had revealed little to the police, and at the time of my fieldwork, he was among the rare few whom the party was actively trying to get back into its fold. Over time, both of us posturing and dramaturgically shifting positions to fit each other's expectations, from averring 'full faith in the Naxalite agenda', he began to share how, for him, commitment to the Naxal cause was hardly chosen. Unlike Mahato, who joined in his student years, Manjhi had joined the party at the age of 10; also unlike Mahato, he shied away from discussing contradictions in the worldview or practice of MCC, perhaps seeing it as treason, also perhaps recognizing that such a deconstruction could wrench legitimacy from work that he had not just killed and risked his life for but outside which he knew no other. From his refusal to discuss allegations of MCC's mutually profitable working relations with regional political parties in power – 'these decisions are taken by the central committee' – to later attempts to rationalize its practice – 'if the bourgeois administration can take PC [percentage of development contract money], so will we' – even Manjhi's narrative was nevertheless over time revised in keeping with his (shifting) assessment of what could be suitably (and safely) said to me: 'We have to often live in the homes of these big people . . . for protection . . . we can't turn against them completely.'¹⁶

Not all encounters in fieldwork with the Naxalites were cushioned by the relative predictability of 'verification' possible within the jail. In progressive stages of research in Jharkhand, in Palamu and Latehar districts, and later in the coal-rich Khelari area of Ranchi district, I succeeded in meeting and spending time with armed *dastas* (armed groups) of MCC, as well as sometimes cadres from such *dastas* in adjoining villages. In these sites, the immediate dramaturgical trajectory of our interactions was more

critically linked to what would be told, or withheld. My earliest encounter with a *dasta*, for instance, was in Kotila (Hariharganj block) in Palamu district of Jharkhand. This was amongst the most remote, and possibly poorest, of villages I travelled to in the course of my fieldwork, and the last bus of several taken *en route* there (starting from Daltengunj city) still left us several kilometres away from it. It took many hours of dirt-track trekking, and it was close to midnight, by the time we reached the village. My escort (an MCCI commander in Chattisgarh who had been asked to go into ‘hibernation’ for a while in Jharkhand) had been informed about a wedding feast in this village, to which the local *dasta* had been invited, as was usual practice, but given the unfortunate timing of our arrival, my escort (on whose credibility I was relying) was met with suspicion, and so was I. After my (by then desperate) attempts to garner trust, I was asked to rest for (what remained of) the night with a Lohar family (traditionally blacksmiths; amongst the economically backward castes in India). I woke up an hour or so later to hard knocking: the armed *dasta* I had been seeking to engage with was there, but again, it was only after much questioning, search of my belongings, and interrogation of my proof of identity that we spoke of anything else. Revocation of past associations, an identity card stating current affiliation with a left-leaning university, even my ability to speak Bengali (when tested), probably saved my life in Kotila.

Goffman details the pains taken involuntarily, unselfconsciously, by all parties engaged in an interaction to maintain the performance, whose successful ‘staging’ involves the use of real techniques that ordinary people use constantly to sustain their real social situations (Goffman 1959: 254-5). Fieldwork with the Naxalites had entailed many barriers to traditional ethnographic practice. To begin with, I could not base myself for the entirety of the period in a village, or even a block, but travelled extensively, and often hurriedly, over several months in 2003 within Dhanbad, Giridih, Ranchi, Palamu, and Latehar districts of Jharkhand, and Gaya and Aurangabad districts in Bihar. With increasing surveillance and heightened policing (particularly in the newly formed state of Jharkhand), cadres I did meet spoke despite the difficult conditions, and at risk to themselves. I took time getting acclimatized to the harsh conditions of fieldwork: walking miles at a stretch in uncertain terrain; using the *khet* (agricultural fields) as a toilet; bathing under a public *chappakal* (hand pump); becoming reconciled to having lice in my hair (inevitable in the conditions we were living in); being physically searched (even if by women cadres); abruptly being asked to return unescorted from unfamiliar territory on suspicion of being a police informer; and so on.

In that tentative, stumbling, exploratory phase of fieldwork, I learned (by making mistakes) to signal dimensions of (desired) identity of being ‘only’ a researcher through symbolic cues other than verbal iteration.¹⁷ In the early days, still unfamiliar with a difficult terrain, I had attempted travelling, for instance, to remote locations in (the safety of) hired taxis, then mostly trying to meet with the relatively more accessible leaders of Naxal ‘front’ organizations, including senior members of (then) Mazdoor Sangathan Samiti (MCCI front). Though they willingly met me, and spoke at length, framed as I was then within dramaturgically predictable ‘fronts’ such as means of transport, visible acquaintances/associates in the field (non-governmental organizational workers, rights activists, regional news reporters, etc.), the text of what was elicited, while extended and detailed, stayed within the safe tenets of literate ideology, rhetoric, or polemical debate, pre-limited within the politically safe domain of ‘interviews’ that could be given to ‘visiting’ persona from big cities (activists/intellectuals from Delhi, media personnel, etc.) – far from the layered, more complicated oral

histories I was to encounter later as I unmoored from the safety or comfort of familiar modes and associations.

The means of documentation employed by the researcher (notepad, recorder, camera – or the choice to rely on linguistically less precise memory) also then perhaps contribute to determine not so much whether the subject will speak or not as the trajectory of that narrative as the chosen modes of representation within the manifold possibilities of self-portrayal, intervening with ongoing (or possible) flows of the subject's narration. Constituting an integral part of the researcher's dramaturgical performance, which may employ myriad, not always consistent, settings in her effort (even if unwitting) to project a consistent front for those performances, it in turn contributes to the hardening (or unsettling) of the subject's prejudgement of the researcher's proclivities, interests, and ideological inclinations. The subject's speech, then, is not just determined by an assessment of its consequences (personal safety, social risk, reprisal, etc.); it also follows the tune of what the researcher may be expected to relate to, or safely hear without a disruption in performance. In my own work, I found immeasurable differences between what was said by (the few) participants who were recorded, what was said (by them) in more informal settings later, and what was conveyed after even the traditional ethnographic staples of pen and pad had been conspicuously put aside.¹⁸

In Kotila I had passed the first barriers to a successful performance, yet, in that initial uneasy (and by then exhausted) interaction with an armed *dasta*, I slipped frequently into Goffman's 'back region', causing frequent disruptions to the dramaturgical persona initially conveyed: I was evidently uncomfortable and abrupt about a rich meal of fish curry and rice sourced by the commander to welcome me (from the wedding in a desperately poor village), asked awkward questions about the party's work in Kotila (which had no large landholdings),¹⁹ and, most unfittingly, seemed more interested in the members who were keenly listening but quiet. My engagement here predictably was limited only to the commander and did not progress beyond discussions on the (literate) ideology of the party, its contemporary agenda, its widening sphere of influence in Jharkhand, and so on. I was requested to start the long trek back at dawn and had little choice but to do so. It was not the same as when I met with other *dastas* in the months ahead, and aside from learning much about the party's organizational structures, or the structural dynamics of its armed groups, some of the richest oral histories I gathered, including of women cadres of MCCI, were in fact with members of the party whom I met within different MCCI *dastas* in Latehar and Khelari districts of Jharkhand (see Chitrlekha 2010). Chances of such immersion within these rigidly structured and necessarily guarded life-worlds were, however, few and far between, and most encounters stayed within the precincts of politically appropriate speech.

In contrast, prolonged stays in villages with deep Naxalite influence brought me closest to the complex forces that were now drawing young people to the party, forces that became visible over time living with the families of some of those in the *dastas*, who housed me despite often not having enough to make their own ends meet. Mahuadabr, for instance, a remote village of barely thirty-five households set in the midst of mountainous, heavily forested terrain in Latehar district, was known to be deep MCCI territory at the time of my fieldwork. The majority of households here were Dalits, and I had surmised that it would be with them that the party would have built its base. It was a party member in another location who had suggested that I visit Mahuadabr, and had made arrangements for me to stay with (I thought surprisingly) one of the few Rajput

families in the village. From being informed stonily as an introduction by my hostess that there were no 'Naxalites' in Mahuadabr, our engagement traversed with the passage of time (and trust) to my eventual understanding of how prolonged malgovernance and sustained neglect of basic welfare institutions had resulted not just in continued impoverishment of the marginalized castes in Jharkhand, but also in pauperization of many amongst even the 'landed castes', an inverted universalization linked directly to the rising number of so-called 'forwards' amongst Naxal cadres. From a context of denial and silence, I began to encounter fractured narratives of bravado, machismo, hope, anxiety, and tiredness, and was eventually late one night 'introduced' by my hostess to her nephew Rinku, a 16-year-old area commander with MCCI in charge of a cluster of villages in Latehar district of Jharkhand; and even later her own teenage son Brijesh, who was with People's War.²⁰

Conclusion

Anthropology of violence has been viewed as involving responsibilities beyond those associated with traditional ethnographic research: the need to write against terror (Taussig 1987); to enable a more just world by exploring 'complex links' between analytical and experiential varieties of knowledge (Green 1999: 6); to locate anthropological text as that which refuses complicity with violence by opening itself to the pain of the other (Das 2003: 297); or, more contested, to call for political activism as an integral part of doing anthropology amid horror (Scheper-Hughes 1995). Arguing for the formation of a 'militant anthropology', Nancy Scheper-Hughes envisioned a new cadre of 'barefoot anthropologists' who must become alarmists and shock-troopers: 'the producers of politically complicated and morally demanding texts and images capable of sinking through the layers of acceptance, complicity, and bad faith that allow the suffering and death to continue without even [a] pained cry of recognition' (1995: 417). So if Joseba Zulaika (1995) wondered if doing research justifies the dialogue consequently entailed with users of political violence, Monique Skidmore, who did research in Myanmar, does in fact see herself as 'an activist-by-proxy'. Her fieldwork interpretations and the very framework by which she determines whom to interview and why are determined by the need (following Taussig) to 'write against terror', evidenced, as she points out, by her avoidance of the Burmese generals and her worry over their anger at her writings. Adopting a methodology that she sees as appropriate for fieldwork conducted in a totalitarian state, she also places herself, as someone opposed to human suffering and authoritarianism, 'in the ethnography' (Skidmore 2003: 5-6).

There could perhaps be ethical objections to an anthropology that advocates ideological partisanship even before it starts; there are important epistemological questions it raises as well. It is, of course, neither possible nor desirable to do away with the researcher in the research: the researcher's location, ideological leanings, ethics, and prior knowledge are linked at the outset to the very bases of her inquiry, with veritably no Archimedean point from which to remove herself from the mutual conditioning of social relations and human knowledge (Rosaldo 1989: 169). But somewhat in line with the (even if now unfashionable) Weberian philosophy of sociological work, whose purpose is to clarify, rather than change, while we can by no means eliminate, our own prejudgements, it seems dangerous to eliminate discomfort with knowing that they exist. How do you 'place yourself' in the ethnography when your respondents are rioters, killers, mob leaders, responsible for unspeakably brutal burning, murder, rape, mutilation of victims, many of whom were women and children whose only error was

to have belonged to a certain religious community? If anthropology is to be activist, it may entail rejection of the epistemological value of factoring in the voice of the perpetrator of ethnic violence into existing discourse, based, as it exists today, mainly on fieldwork with victims of such violence. Or within such an (uneasy) framework, would the anthropologist have to engage in activism *against* the very subjects she seeks to understand? The presence of violence, fear, and silences in everyday lives of people has been the site of significant anthropological work (see, e.g., Das 1990; 2000; Feldman 1991; Green 1995; 1999; Nordstrom & Robben 1995; Skidmore 2003). Skidmore includes her own fear (of the repressive Burmese state) as a 'way of intuiting affective dimensions of the lives of Burmese' with whom she associated, privileging 'the subjective and emotional content of the relationship involving informant, ethnographer, and environment' (Skidmore 2003: 6). But how are these intuitive affective dimensions sought to be forged when it is the subject himself who is the site of the researcher's fear; and when it is the researcher who is shrouded in secrecy and silence? In contexts of horrifying loss and violence, and when the subject is also the perpetrator, what, then, may be the relationship between the researcher's prejudgement about the subject's practice and the production of discourse/knowledge?

Gadamer argues that our prejudices, far from closing doors to knowing, are themselves what open us up to what is to be understood. If we are to understand, we must already find ourselves 'in' the world 'along with' that which is to be understood; hermeneutics was the attempt to make explicit the structure of such situatedness. A hermeneutically trained consciousness is sensitive to the text's alterity, but this kind of sensitivity involves neither neutrality nor the extinction of one's self, only the foregrounding and appropriation of one's own 'fore-meanings' – or prejudices (Gadamer 2006: 271-2). Our prejudices through this process of understanding become apparent to us, and can (and must) in turn become the focus of questioning themselves.

Every encounter with others . . . means the 'suspension' of one's own prejudices . . . always something more is demanded than to 'understand the other', that is to seek and acknowledge the immanent coherence contained within the meaning-claim of the other . . . this requires a readiness to recognize the other as potentially right and to let him or it prevail against me (Gadamer 1979: 108).

As Gadamer sees it, then, although we cannot escape our prejudgements, through the dialogical interaction with other horizons, the possibility arises for understanding ourselves, our prejudgements, or our 'tradition', as mistaken. Yet, if I began by already 'knowing' my subjects both amongst the Naxalites and in Gujarat, its text was hardly overwritten. Amongst the Naxalites, I already aspired to summon the 'intellectual love' that Bourdieu (1999) demands of the researcher, the forgetfulness of self, a gaze that consents to understand the subject as they are in their distinctive necessity. In Gujarat, I am not sure I could do justice to 'understanding' (the context to) Rathod or Rajput's practice in the sense that Gadamer envisages, but there were other important spaces (rioters in Danilimda in Ahmedabad, Bhil youth in Palla, the Patel community in Sardarpura, student rioters in Sardarpura, etc.) which in time I (perhaps) became part of, progressively bracketing away the gravitating compulsions of both the life-world/s I belonged to prior to my induction into the field, and those I lived in later. More immersed than I realized then, I found myself looking up historical records, official data, and even police files, trying to contextualize narratives accumulated from Hindu respondents through the course of study about perennial Muslim wrong-doing in

the locality, Muslim ‘bad characters’, numerous atrocities committed by Muslims on Hindus in ‘previous riots’ in Gujarat. At the end of each search, however, I invariably concluded that these remembered histories about offences perpetrated by the Muslim community that I had begun to accept as likely partial truths could not be accounted for except as local threads of a conjectural history connected to (and deriving from) a surviving, powerful meta-narrative of ‘Muslim’ as perpetrator in Gujarat. As opposed to Gadamer’s project of understanding, many of my prior ‘knowledges’ about ‘ethnic violence’ were reinforced in the course of my own work with (Hindu) perpetrators of violence in Gujarat.

If immersion involves an instinctive ‘playing to’ manifest or latent social-psychological needs of the subject, reworking of performance in the face of narratives that may in different circumstances have elicited horror, fear, repugnance, or even ideological opposition amounts to deception: with the subject’s consent, and despite having ‘spoken’ no lies, we deceive the subject who speaks so he may continue to do so. If the troubled question of why the subject speaks involves addressing (as evidenced in previous sections) the perpetual dramaturgical process of the subject’s reflexive factoring of perceived ideological/pragmatic dispensations of the researcher, it also necessitates acknowledgement of linkages of performance with cultural capital and prior knowledge, and the researcher’s manipulation of (perceived) social-psychological-political dispensation of individual subjects. Barring a few such as Vidyarthi or Mahato, highly committed cadres with sentiments rooted in memories of the first flush of a radical social movement who saw me as a comrade, desiring not much more than an exchange of ideas, most ‘Naxalites’ I met were not quite quintessential ‘revolutionaries’ driven by goals of the collective, fighting for the cause of the subaltern. Nor were the rioters in Gujarat driven to act by Hindu nationalist goals. In a globalized and media-shrunken world, where no one – not even the poorest of the poor – is really insulated from the glittering possibilities and racy success stories of those with more access, both groups had succeeded in filling the void of entirely human, universal needs of recognition, achievement, or ‘success’: the majority had in fact participated in violence to fulfil needs as ordinary as a sense of achievement, social status, *izzat* (respect/honour) in their peer group/community, ‘success’, and so on. Ironically, most narratives were infused with bravado, seeking approval and kudos for having done the ‘right’ thing, for having taken, as they may have liked to see it, the road less travelled. The ‘extremist’ politics I experienced closely in both locations was, in many ways, a politics of recognition; linked for many to their willingness to be ‘studied’, or to be the ‘subject’ of interest.

If what is gathered thus is entangled with prejudice and performance, it is still perhaps closer to approximations of truth. If anthropology of violence that does not engage with its participants is at risk of working within, and perpetuating existing, engrained, perhaps highly powered concepts and categories, disinterest or disengagement with the question of *why* the subject speaks has deep epistemological ramifications for theory produced out of such fieldwork. It is at the least less equipped to traverse beyond performances that tell what should be told, to locate the powerful threads of human desire and motivation that tie seemingly distant worlds of violence to ‘ours’, or to register missed realities or radical changes in these troubled life-worlds. As Goffman said, ‘All the world is not, of course, a stage, but the crucial ways in which it isn’t are not easy to specify’ (Goffman 1959: 72); it would be dangerous to not even try.

NOTES

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¹ Questions of authorial reflexivity began to be articulated and incorporated in 'anthropological theory' by the 1980s, most memorably in Clifford and Marcus's *Writing culture* (1986); also see Bourgois (1990); Clifford (1988); Geertz (1988); Marcus & Fischer (1986); Van Maanen (1995). For interesting contemporary discussions, see particularly Das, Jackson, Kleinman & Singh (2014); Eriksen, Garsten & Randeria (2015). Anthropology in sites of violence has been an important part of these dialogues; it was Taussig's earliest work that notably drew attention to the 'epistemic murk' that extends the problem of ethnographic observation and representation beyond the merely philosophical, to where obscurity can become a 'high-powered medium of domination' (Taussig 1987: 121).

² See Jean Klein and Annelise Riles (2005) on 'co-construction' and 'denunciation' as dominant modalities of the discipline's engagement with contexts of collective violence, within which anthropologists are positioned as listeners – sometimes proto-therapists – and attention to perpetrators (usually structures of perpetration of violence) is delivered as critique. (In the context of an anthropology that insists on the primacy of the activity of listening, see Borneman's important reminder, however, on its challenge to intervene simultaneously on the side of accountability, trust, and care for the Other, including the enemy [Borneman 2002: 302].)

³ The movement has inspired sustained academic interest through its various phases and shifts. For landmark early work, see Banerjee (1984); Mohanty (1977); Ray (1988). For ethnographic studies in Central Bihar in the 1990s, see Bhatia (1998; 2005). For contemporary analyses, see particularly Balagopal (2006); Guha (2007); Mukherji (2010); A. Shah (2006; 2013); Sundar (2006).

⁴ Originating from the Sanskrit terms *kar*, meaning hands or work, and *seva*, or service, *kar seva* is historically part of the Sikh religious tradition that calls for performance of *seva* as an act simultaneously of both worship and love. The idea was appropriated during the Ramjanmabhoomi movement to mobilize support for construction of a Hindu temple at the disputed site in Ayodhya.

⁵ Official figures are lower, but see independent reports such as Anand & Setalvad (2002); Chenoy, Shukla, Subramanian & Vanaik (2002); Concerned Citizens Tribunal (2002).

⁶ On Hindu nationalism/the Ramjanmabhoomi movement, see Andersen & Damle (1987); Brass (2003); Hansen (1999); Nandy, Trivedy, Mayaram & Yagnik (1995); Rajagopal (2001). On defining aspects/ramifications of the 2002 violence, see Ghassem-Fachandi (2010); Gupta (2002); Ohm (2012); Sarkar (2002); G. Shah (2006); Shani (2007); Varadarajan (2002).

⁷ Names have been changed to protect identities.

⁸ At least 200 people were killed in Naroda Patia in the 2002 riots in Gujarat; many after being hacked, burnt, or gang raped (see Anand & Setalvad 2002).

⁹ Under British rule in 1871, several nomadic tribes in India were notified as 'criminal' communities that needed to be controlled for the security of the civic people. Post-independence, Chharas were 'denotified' from the list, but police surveillance and social stigmatization continues to this day.

¹⁰ See Tambiah's important work on how processes such as 'routinization' and 'ritualization' help comprehension of why brutalities committed on behalf of the collectivity may not take a crippling psychic toll on the aggressor at the level of the individual or the self (Tambiah 1996: 230).

¹¹ The Sangh Parivar refers to the group of Hindu nationalist organizations affiliated to the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), founded in 1925 in Maharashtra, India.

¹² 'Local supporters' refers to influential community members, without whose consent the riots would not have happened. Similarly, while most participants in the 2002 killings were members of prominent Hindu nationalist organizations, 'ideological instigators' had a specific function in the making of the riots that I have examined closely elsewhere (Chitralekha 2012).

¹³ At the time of my interview with him, he was looking forward to a promised nomination to the post of Youth Congress President from Ahmedabad.

¹⁴ Many of those raped, hacked and burned alive in the 2002 riots were children, targeted and attacked in a deliberative effort unprecedented in its intent and brutality in contemporary India.

¹⁵ Despite important land reform legislation in post-independence Bihar, particularly the Bihar Land Reform Act in 1950 and the Fixation of Ceiling Area and Acquisition of Surplus Land Act in 1961, the region has been marked by persisting linkages between caste hierarchies, feudal agrarian structures and landholding patterns. Redistribution of land has been a pivotal agenda of the Naxalite struggle in the region.

¹⁶ See Anthony Good's discussion on 'inconsistencies' and 'discrepancies' in the testimony of appellants in court hearings for asylum appeals in the United Kingdom (2004: 116). Good's work also draws our attention to the political importance that certain 'expert texts' (anthropological or otherwise) may assume wherein the credibility and plausibility of appellants' stories are likely to be assessed in relation to established (and linear) background information ('objective evidence') on the contexts of trouble and violence from which escape is sought.

¹⁷ See Allen Feldman's discussion of 'methodological precautions' he took to enable research in Northern Ireland: neutral spaces for interviews; avoiding long-term visual appropriation of any social milieu; restricting mobility between adversarial spaces (only the police and the army moved in such a manner); and demonstrating that there were things, places, and people that he did not want to know (Feldman 1991: 12).

¹⁸ Also see the shifting, nuanced, but seemingly still always guarded encounters between Margaret Trawick and young LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) cadres in Batticaloa, Sri Lanka. These exchanges, interspersed with *summa* (interpreted by Trawick as play or 'just kidding') speech, were gathered by her outside, though in close proximity to, the armed camps (2007: 198-9). Elsewhere Trawick writes of her instinctive reluctance to record, take notes, or take pictures at an LTTE burial (though the party itself was videotaping the ritual along with its weeping and lamenting), sensing that those gestures would make her 'more of an outsider' (2007: 244-5).

¹⁹ Palamu was even until the early 1990s fertile ground for the Naxalite struggle for land redistribution. The region by the time of fieldwork, however – following several bloody exchanges between private armies of the landed classes and the Naxalites – did not have very many large landowners left. In these circumstances, and more so after the state crackdown on 'liberated areas' after the formation of Jharkhand, the Naxalite struggle was transformed to essentially a battle against police forces.

²⁰ Based on such epistemological vicissitudes gathered in the course of prolonged (and deeply varied means of) fieldwork with the Naxalites (see Chitralkha 2010), I would venture to problematize 'interviews' of Naxalite leaders (see, e.g., Ganapathi 2010), or articles such as by well-known author and activist Arundhati Roy (2010), who met with members of a *dasta* in Dantewada, Chattisgarh. Ostensible from its text, both engagements were channelled through, and occurred with the consent of, the CPI (Maoist) leadership. I found deep differences between what was said or communicated by cadres in an organizational setting – within a *dasta*, for instance – and when met with individually, *outside* the organizational context, through kin, family, or trusted friends. While learned barriers of secrecy, suspicion, and fear are evidently inherent in the communicative lives of members of guerrilla organizations, the sheer rigidity of hierarchies within the *dasta*, the unrelenting discipline with which they are maintained, and, most of all, consciousness of being watchfully observed by one's peers or, worse, seniors, make it very difficult, if not impossible, to break through barriers of 'literate ideology' (Ray 1988), programmed speech, and protocol.

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Pourquoi le sujet parle-t-il ? Préjugé dans l'enquête de terrain auprès des émeutiers naxalites et hindous

Résumé

Cet article explore la trajectoire sinueuse des rencontres dramaturgiques avec des « sujets » dans deux contextes de violence différents dans l'Inde contemporaine : des naxalites du Jharkhand et du Bihâr et des participants aux émeutes de 2002 dans le Gujarat. Il explique que la raison pour laquelle le sujet parle (donc ce qu'il dit) doit être resituée dans le grand texte des performances sur le « terrain », impliquant le préjugé (au sens gadamérien) du chercheur aussi bien que du sujet. Les limites et possibilités des connaissances

antérieures de l'un et de l'autre prédéterminent les résultats de l'interaction et informent le travail de théorisation dans les contextes troublés.

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