

Narratives of Mourning in the Shadow of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act: State Violence and Contested Sovereignty in Contemporary South-Asian Writing

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Over the past 10-15 years, the imaginative geography of much contemporary South-Asian writing is marked by a series of fault lines, which provide a spatial representation of the order of postcolonial sovereignty, and the security apparatus of the state. Such a spatial representation can offer an important counterpoint to the violent techniques of governmentality that states use to maintain sovereign power over a designated territorial space. If checkpoints and borders attempt to naturalize the political geography of the state through the spatial and juridical performance of sovereignty, novels, graphic novels, and memoirs can help to make intelligible the contested histories of contemporary political geography. While much of this writing was published in the early 2000s, the urgent questions it raises about the suspension of legal protections for particular constituencies continue to speak to the exclusionary techniques of state sovereignty, as exemplified in the controversial Indian 2019 Citizenship Amendment Bill and the National Register of Citizens, which was first implemented in the Indian state of Assam in 2003.

In the contested spaces of Kashmir and North-East India, the legal and spatial dynamics of postcolonial sovereignty foreground the ways in which law, violence and territory are bound together. The Indian government's introduction of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA, 1958) and its repeated use of this law-which-suspends-the-normal-rule-of-law to shore up its sovereignty exemplify the limits of the Indian Union and its democratic claims. As the historian Ananya Vajpeyi has argued:

[...] the AFSPA was first imposed ostensibly to secure territories that were not fully integrated into the Indian Union; to bind the not-India that lay at India's peripheries into the Indian geo-national imaginary. But after being applied for half a century and with an ever-expanding scope, the AFSPA has only confirmed the rupture between what is and is not India. What is so astonishing is [...] that the rest of the country carries on as though it is possible to gloss over the reality of military rule as a temporary aberration and a mere enclave in what purports to be the world's largest democracy (38).

If the AFSPA is framed as a "temporary aberration" and a "mere enclave" in the dominant rhetoric of Indian nationalism, literary texts, films and memoirs can help to shed light on the violent techniques of

military control and power that the government of India has employed to assert its sovereignty over the territory and area it deems to be disturbed. In so doing, such narratives can help to contest the liberal myth of India as a nation-state with an undifferentiated and representative democratic process.

The techniques of military control that operate in contemporary Kashmir offer a powerful example of the disciplinary structures of power and surveillance that the government of India employs. As the journalist Majid Maqbool makes clear in an article for the Al Jazeera website:

In one of the remotest villages in Bandipora, about 72 kms from Srinagar, the capital of Indian-administered Kashmir, an old two-storey wooden house sits on a picturesque hilltop. It is surrounded by coils of barbed wire interspersed with empty alcohol bottles. It is no longer a home; the Indian military have turned it into a military camp. But before the military paint, troops and barbed wire arrived, it was the most beautiful house in the village. Not anymore. Now an Indian soldier sits in the garden, close to the road and beside a neglected flower bed. On the table next to him is a worn-out register where he notes the number of every vehicle entering the village. Any person going into or leaving the village must register at the camp. Vehicles are checked, the purpose of the visit enquired and multiple entries made in the soldier's book (Maqbool).

The “worn out register” that documents the movements through this military checkpoint can be read in different ways: it could be taken to register the way in which the order of military writing asserts power and control over the vehicles and bodies of people who pass through the space of the checkpoint; it also registers the way in which the Kashmir landscape is worn out by the techniques of Indian military sovereignty; and, if we read the phrase against the grain, it may even be taken to mean that the violent register of India's postcolonial governmentality in Kashmir is itself “worn out.” What is more, the contrast between the “picturesque” setting of the village on the one hand and the coils of barbed wire and empty alcohol bottles on the other raises questions about the Nehruvian myth of Kashmir in India's national narrative — a myth that used the genre of the picturesque to frame Kashmir as a synecdoche for the nation. For Nehru in *The Discovery of India*, Kashmir was one of his “favoured spots [...] where loveliness dwells and an enchantment steals over the senses” (570). Nehru also repeatedly stated in public statements to the Indian parliament, to the United Nations, and to the press that the future of Kashmir should be decided by the Kashmir people by referendum or plebiscite (Roy “Seditious Nehru”). Yet this romantic framing of Kashmir was also part of Nehru's political vision of a unified India — a vision that has been secured through a violent and oppressive military occupation rather than by the democratic means promised by Nehru during the late 1940s and early 1950s.

I begin with an account of a military checkpoint in Kashmir in order to suggest that the Indian government's methods for

consolidating its sovereignty over areas such as Kashmir and North-East India can be traced back to the history of British colonial rule, its techniques of counterinsurgency, and the legacy of partition. In a related discussion of partition as a general political technique of territorial control employed across a range of national, colonial and postcolonial contexts, Joe Cleary has suggested that partition was the means by which some former British colonial governments managed the transition from colonial sovereignty to postcoloniality. This is not to say that partition was directly attributable to a colonial power for, as Cleary points out, “the impetus for partition stemmed from a minority community within the colonial state that feared the anti-colonial national movements about to assume power would imperil their interests and identity” (4). In this respect, partition also produces challenges for postcolonial sovereignty. The UN partition plan for Palestine of 1947 laid the ground for a conflict in which the Palestinian population was effectively denied sovereignty over their land and territory. In a similar way, the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947 created a situation in which the sovereignty of Kashmir was left unresolved and in dispute, as we will see.

At the core of this essay is a consideration of the way in which contemporary South-Asian fiction and non-fiction has foregrounded the violent means by which the Indian government shores up its sovereignty over Kashmir and North-East India. While much of the essay focuses on representations of the checkpoint and militarized spaces in Kashmir, the turn to the framing of the gendered body of the activist in North-East India in the final section of the essay seeks to complicate discussions of postcolonial sovereignty that fetishize the necropolitical power of the state. By considering how contemporary South-Asian writing has attempted to address the militarization of both Kashmir and the North-East, then, the essay expands on Rajeswari Sunder Rajan’s account of an anti-statist imagination in much contemporary South-Asian fiction and non-fiction. With reference to the ways in which the government of India’s Armed Forces Special Powers Acts (1958, 1990) and the government of Jammu and Kashmir’s Public Safety Act (1978) provide a para-legal context for extra-judicial killings and torture, the essay considers how recent literary representations of Kashmir such as Naseer Ahmed and Saurabh Singh’s graphic novel *Kashmir Pending* (2007), Basharat Peer’s memoir *Curfewed Night* (2010), Mirza Waheed’s novel *The Collaborator* (2011) and Salman Rushdie’s *Shalimar the Clown* (2005) not only document the crossing of the Line of Control by so-called insurgents, but also raise questions about the violence of state sovereignty by mourning the lives and deaths of those who dare to challenge the Indian state’s spatial performance of sovereignty. To further clarify how such narratives work to contest the spatial performance of sovereignty, reference will also be made to the distinct,

but related case of the government of India's use of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act in the North-East, and the ways in which figures such as the Manipuri freedom fighter Irom Sharmila have challenged the Indian government's techniques of counter-insurgency through non-violent techniques of resistance such as hunger strikes. In so doing, I suggest that postcolonial narratives of mourning offer an important counterpoint to the necropolitical logic of India's performance of sovereignty over the contested spaces of Kashmir and North-East India. What is more, by reading the contemporary South-Asian fiction of Salman Rushdie, Mirza Waheed, and Naseer Ahmed and Saurabh Singh alongside the non-fictional narratives of Bhasharat Peer and Deepti Priya Mehrotra, the essay suggests that a consideration of a range of different literary and non-literary genres from South Asia can expand and deepen our understanding of the challenge of representing lawful state violence. Clearly, the specific formal codes of Anglophone postcolonial fiction, memoir, and the graphic novel both foreground and contest the violence of state sovereignty in quite different ways, whether that is through the parodic language and fictional worlds of the postcolonial novel, visual-verbal dialogue in graphic novels, or the use of testimony in memoir. Yet when the testimonial force of these different forms of writing are considered together, we can begin to understand in more precise ways how the supposedly exceptional violence of the state has become a routine part of everyday life in Kashmir and the North-East.

Writing lines of resistance to the line of control

The Line of Control denotes an imaginary political boundary between Indian, Pakistani and Kashmiri nationalisms. For Ananya Kabir, the Line of Control is a sign of Kashmir's suspended sovereignty after 1947, a sovereignty that is registered differently in different maps. The "official Indian map [...] subsumes the entirety of pre-1948 Jammu and Kashmir" and therefore reinforces the claim that "Kashmir is an integral part of India"; the Pakistani government atlases "graphically render its stand that Kashmir represents the "unfinished business" of 1947 by leaving Pakistan's official map literally without an eastern edge"; and "[i]nternational maps [...] show the territories of India and Pakistan, and sometimes China, as overlapping around Jammu and Kashmir." This tangle of "thick, thin, and broken lines effaces another map: that of a hoped-for independent Kashmir" (Kabir "Cartographic" 48). It is this "hoped-for independent Kashmir" and the suspension of the question of Kashmiri sovereignty that the Line of Control works to foreclose, as we will see.

The Line of Control and the Indo-Pak border have also provided a rich resource for Bombay cinema, graphic novels and memoirs, as well as literary fiction. As Sharmila Sen has suggested, films such as *Dil Se*,

Henna, *Border* and *Refugee* have used the border between India and Pakistan as a trope through which to explore and raise questions about cultural and political divisions between India and Pakistan, often through the popular generic codes of romance, the thriller or domestic drama. In Vidhu Vinod Chopra's film *Mission Kashmir*, Altaaf, the foster son of a police officer, disappears across the border and then returns to India as a terrorist bent on personal revenge. What prompts his border crossing is Altaaf's realization that it was his foster father who massacred his entire biological family during a police raid. In this respect, Altaaf's narrative can be read as an allegory of the partitioned nation, and the loss of a certain paradisiacal idea of Kashmir. During the sequence in which Altaaf crosses the border back into India from Pakistan, the viewer is temporarily placed in the position of a border guard, who witnesses the transformation of Altaaf/Kashmir from a subject of romance at the start of the film to a subject of terror (Sen 215–16). For Sharmila Sen, this border-crossing scene represents a transition between Bollywood's Kashmiri romance and Kashmiri terrorism. But the camera's focus on the Line of Control at the moment of Altaaf's illegal crossing also positions the viewer in relation to the scopopic regime of Indian narratives of counterinsurgency that seek to police the Line of Control. In this respect, the film contributes to what Arundhati Roy has called "Bollywood's cache of Kashmir/Muslim-terrorist films [which have] brainwashed most Indians into believing that all of Kashmir's sorrows could be laid at the door of evil, people-hating terrorists" ("Azadi" 58). It is a striking irony that the fictionalized Indian military interrogation center depicted in Roy's second novel, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017), is located in the Shiraz cinema, Srinagar, a space in which faded posters of old films coexist with brutalized prisoners and "faint sounds that came through the grand wooden doors leading to the auditorium [which] could have been the muted soundtrack of a violent film" (*Ministry* 331). Roy's miming of the spectacular logic of counterinsurgency in *Ministry* may suggest a critique of the militarization of Srinagar and of Kashmir more generally, as Alex Tickell has argued in a powerful reading of the novel, but it also draws attention to the limits of the novel and of cinema as aesthetic forms that can do justice to the lived experience of state violence in Kashmir.

If *Mission Kashmir* and *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* try in very different ways to reproduce the techniques of counterinsurgency associated with the checkpoint, Naseer Ahmed and Saurabh Singh's graphic novel, *Kashmir Pending* (2007), frames the recent history of military conflict in Kashmir as a dialogue between Mushtaq and Ali, two inmates held in Srinagar jail. Much of the narrative focuses on the reminiscences of Mushtaq, the elder of the two prisoners, who was imprisoned for possessing live ammunition during a checkpoint search. This use of a prison narrative to frame an analeptic sequence of visual

and verbal story panels might encourage readers to view *Kashmir Pending* as a graphic novel that is critical of an Indian military that seeks to subjugate the Kashmiri population. Such a reading is reinforced by subsequent references to an emergent condition of Indian military rule. One small visual panel depicts five white-silhouetted figures carrying rifles and patrolling an empty Srinagar street (Ahmed and Singh 15). This street, which forms the backdrop of the image, evokes an idea of Kashmir under a state of military siege – an impression that is reinforced by the caption which declares that “troops could arrest, kill, or rough up any person on mere suspicion” (15). The caption implies that a state of emergency has been declared in which the military is legally empowered to repress the population with impunity. The repetition of this image in a larger scale visual panel at the bottom of the page develops this preoccupation with the escalation of military violence. Here, the white silhouettes in the earlier frame are replaced by more fully drawn figures, coloured in red, and inscribed with black lines detailing the soldiers’ military uniforms, defensive bodily postures and stony facial expressions. This visual repetition of a street under military siege and the contrast between the outlines of military figures in the first image and the more realistic drawings of soldiers in the second image may be taken to highlight the representational status of the narrative as a work of graphic fiction; it might also evoke the impressionistic status of the narrator’s memory; or it could be read as a visual comment on the temporality of India’s military sovereignty over Kashmir. By repeating the same image of soldiers patrolling a Srinagar street, the narrator questions the exceptional character of violent military repression, and suggests that such brutal techniques of governmentality have become normalized.

Such moments of critical reflection on India’s military occupation of Kashmir in *Kashmir Pending* are, however, eclipsed by Mushtaq’s decision to renounce violence as a means of achieving sovereignty for Kashmir, and by his apparent failure to convince his fellow prisoner, Ali, to do the same. In a dramatic denouement, Ali murders two armed policemen on a military patrol using a bomb that is strapped to his body. Ali’s apparently unexpected act of extreme violence could be understood as an attempt to assert sovereign power over his own life and death in the face of a totalizing military occupation. Yet this violent act of resistance to military occupation is contained by Mushtaq’s suggestion that Ali is manipulated by his political leaders (Ahmed and Singh 84), and by the prologue, in which a younger Ali throws stones at Indian soldiers patrolling a river – an act that prompts one soldier to make the proleptic comment: “Kid’s going to run into trouble someday” (Ahmed and Singh 4). Such narrative techniques work to construct a psychological profile of Ali as a terrorist, and to divorce his individual actions from both the military occupation of Kashmir and the extraordinary legal powers that are granted to the

Indian military to secure the territory and population of Kashmir. This ending also raises questions about the temporal connotations of the title of Ahmed and Singh's graphic novel. Does "pending" announce the perpetual deferral of the idea of an independent Kashmir and its subordination to the sovereign time and geographical integrity of the Indian state? Or might it also signal the emergence of a different temporality –of an as yet unarticulated history of the oppressed that takes account of the ways in which military violence has become normalized in an effort to resolve Kashmir's suspended sovereignty?

The Indian military's attempt to police the Line of Control collapses the Indo-Pak border with the Line of Control in an attempt to resolve the question of Kashmir's suspended sovereignty. Such an act of conflation is significant not only because, as Ananya Kabir points out in "Cartographic Irresolution and the Line of Control," the Line of Control foregrounds the contradictions inherent within the authority of the nation's map and the political border that encloses it, but also because it highlights the protean character of the Line of Control, which is defined in and through military checkpoints. The impact of such military checkpoints on the everyday lives of Kashmiris is powerfully evoked in the journalist and writer Basharat Peer's memoir *The Curfewed Night* (2010). An assessment of Peer's memoir can help to shed light on some of the political and aesthetic challenges of representing militarized violence in Kashmir in the contemporary South-Asian novel. In a context where summary execution, torture and disappearance have become the norm, testimonies such as Peer's can help to illuminate the lived experience of state violence in ways that the novel can only begin to imagine.

In an account of the militarization of Kashmir during the early 1990s, Peer reflects on his father's slow and perilous journey from the office in Srinagar to his village:

It became harder for Father to visit home on weekends. He stopped traveling in his official vehicle, as that made him conspicuous. The journey from his office in Srinagar to our village, once a lovely two-hour ride, had become a risky, life threatening affair. Almost every time he came home, it took him around five hours. On a lucky day, his bus would be stopped only every fifteen minutes, and at each military check post, he and other passengers would be made to stand in a queue, holding an identity card and anything else they carried. After a body search, Father would walk half a mile from the check post and wait in another queue for the bus to arrive. On various other days, he barely escaped getting killed (18).

The delay and inconvenience that Indian military checkpoints impose on the daily life of the Kashmiri population is clearly exemplified by the way in which Peer's father's freedom of movement from the office to home is severely curtailed. Here, the sovereign time of the checkpoint is registered through the exercise of military power over the speed at which human bodies are permitted to move through space

and time. What was “once a lovely two-hour ride,” Peer explains, “had become a risky, life threatening affair” (18). That Peer’s father was almost killed by the Indian military even though he works for the Indian Civil Service in Srinagar further underscores the way in which the necropolitical logic of the military checkpoint supercedes the civil rights associated with the political foundations of India’s democracy. Indeed, Peer’s account of his father’s exposure to the lawful violence of the state reveals how Indian-administered Kashmir had become part of a postcolonial state of exception.

If the military checkpoint is a point where the body of the subject is exposed to the lawful violence of the state, in the context of Jammu and Kashmir it is worth noting that contemporary legal regimes and practices of counterinsurgency have a particular colonial genealogy. The Armed Forces (Jammu and Kashmir) Special Powers Act of 1990 can be traced back to the British colonial government’s Armed Forces (Special Powers) Ordinance (1942) –an act that provided the British army with extraordinary powers in order to suppress the Quit India movement. While the Armed Forces (Jammu and Kashmir) Special Powers Act of 1990 confers similar powers on the Indian army, one of the significant differences between the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Ordinance of 1942 and the Armed Forces (Jammu and Kashmir) Special Powers Act of 1990 lies in the geographical delineation of emergency powers. Whereas the British colonial government’s Special Powers Ordinance applied to the “whole of British India” (Armed Forces Special Powers Ordinance 935), the Armed Forces (Jammu and Kashmir) Special Powers Act limited these special powers to so-called “disturbed areas.” By defining Jammu and Kashmir as a “disturbed area,” the 1990 Act defines Jammu and Kashmir as a space of exception in which the civilian population in Kashmir can be raped, tortured, kidnapped and murdered in custody with impunity. The experience of life in such a “disturbed area” is powerfully evoked by Basharat Peer in an account of how the building complex in which his school was located was transformed into a military camp. Following the arrival of military trucks at the complex, Peer details how the soldiers “built watchtowers and sandbag bunkers along the school fence.” While Peer claims that “the soldiers never bothered us,” it is significant that the schoolchildren were given “new rules to follow.” Such rules included the designation of “half of the main school building” as “off-bounds” and the demand that the schoolchildren “carry identity cards [...] and show them every time [they] entered or left the school” (55). This experience of the spatial performance of Indian military sovereignty associated with the checkpoint in the grounds of the school could be read as a profound political lesson in Peer’s narrative of self-formation as a Kashmiri writer and journalist. If, as his father suggests, it is through reading and education rather than the violent forms of resistance associated with the gun that

Kashmir can be liberated from military rule (30), it is also true that Peer's experience of attending a school that is surrounded by a military checkpoint contributes significantly to that education. During his studies at Aligarh Muslim University, for instance, Peer describes how he "heard echoes of Kashmir in the pages of Hemingway, Orwell, Dostoevsky, and Turgenev, among others" (65). Such an unconventional reading of modern European fiction functions as a metacommentary on Peer's own use of the generic codes of the memoir to reveal the violence of India's sovereignty in Kashmir.

Peer's childhood experience of a school education that is overshadowed by military occupation and routine searches at checkpoints can also be read as a commentary on the quasi-imperial relationship between postcolonial India and Kashmir. As Angana P. Chatterji puts it:

Marshalling colonial legacies, the postcolonial state seeks to consolidate the nation as a new form of empire, demanding hyper-masculine militarization and territorial and extra-territorial control. This requires the manufacture of internal and external enemies to constitute a national identity, constructed in opposition to the anti-national and non-native enemies of the nation (96).

We have already seen how the postcolonial Indian state adopted in a slightly revised form the very emergency laws that the British colonial state had used to counter the Quit India movement in the 1940s in order to contain the popular Kashmiri struggle for political sovereignty in 1990. Such laws are a clear example of the way in which the postcolonial Indian state has marshalled "colonial legacies" to "consolidate the nation as a new form of empire" (Chatterji 96). What is more, by framing Kashmiri civilians as Pakistani infiltrators, the Indian military has been able to present the extrajudicial killing of Kashmiri civilians as part of a legitimate struggle to protect the security of the Indian nation-state from "non-native enemies of the nation" (Chatterji 96). Yet the Indian state's attempt to secure the integrity of its borders through such violent techniques of governmentality is also haunted by the bodies and memories of the disappeared. In a series of reflections on the spatial history of Srinagar, Basharat Peer describes how:

Srinagar is also about being hidden from view, disappearing. Absences and their reminders stand on every other street. Every now and then I would be walking past a small park shaded by thick chinars and notice a circle of women with white headbands and placards. I would stop at times; other times I would walk past with an air of resignation. Between four and eight thousand men have disappeared after being arrested by the military, paramilitary, and police. Newspapers routinely referred to the missing men as 'disappeared persons' and their waiting wives as the 'half-widows'. The government has refused to set up an inquiry into the disappearances, saying the missing citizens of Kashmir have joined militant groups and crossed into Pakistan for arms training. Many Kashmiris believe the disappeared men were killed in custody and cremated in mass graves.

Wives of many such men have given up hope and tried to move on. Others are obsessively fighting for justice, hoping their loved ones will return. The men and women in the park were the parents and wives of the missing men. Dirty wars seem to have a way of bringing mothers to city squares (128).

If the military checkpoint represents the spatial order of India's sovereignty over the lives and deaths of Kashmiri civilians, the presence of the parents and wives of the disappeared in the public spaces of Srinagar offers a crucial counterpoint to such sovereign claims. By contesting the circumstances of such disappearances, these families have also challenged the myth of "enemy encounters" which are often invoked to justify India's security policies in Kashmir. Such a challenge to India's military sovereignty over Kashmir was also manifest in 2007, when bereaved families and local human rights non-governmental organizations protested against the extrajudicial killing of Kashmiri civilians by the Indian security forces and police. As Haley Duschinski explains:

The protests came in the wake of an explosive turn of events in which police officers, under pressure from families and local human rights non-governmental organizations, publicly exhumed a series of bodies identified as 'foreign militants' from several graveyards in Kashmir and performed DNA tests to ascertain their true identities. The tests concluded that the bodies were not those of the foreign militants whose names they had been given in death, but rather Kashmiri civilians—a carpenter, a perfume seller, a shopkeeper, an imam, and a state employee—whose families had been desperately searching for them for months. Protesters carried these bodies, riddled with bullet holes, through the streets in their coffins as they urged the government to bring an end to extrajudicial killings through fake encounters and deliver justice by resolving the thousands of cases of enforced disappearances throughout Kashmir Valley. (111)

The act of carrying bullet-ridden corpses in their coffins through the streets of Kashmir Valley serves as a powerful public challenge to the stories that had been perpetrated about Kashmiri civilians by the Indian military. Such an intervention draws attention to the radical potential of public displays of grief as a performative act that not only questions the truth claims of India's representation of the war in Kashmir, but also counters the necropolitical logic of the postcolonial Indian state's security apparatus.

Ranjana Khanna has suggested that critical melancholia can provide a foil against the routine violence of a postcolonial state that conflates the protection of sovereignty and democracy with the disposability of its citizens. If critical melancholia denotes an ethical and political imperative to recall and remember the bodies of civilians who have been disappeared or framed as enemy insurgents, Mirza Waheed's novel *The Collaborator* (2011) offers a harrowing account of what such a critical project might entail. This novel is focalized through the consciousness of a young Kashmiri man, who reflects back on the gradual militarization of his village in Kashmir; the

disappearance of his childhood friends across the border into Pakistan; his family's decision to remain in the village; and his eventual collaboration with the Indian military. In the first chapter, the first-person narrator—a young man from a Kashmiri village—recounts how he is employed by an Indian captain to collect identity documents, watches and other personal valuables from the corpses of Kashmiri civilians who have been killed by the Indian army:

I look at the first few corpses and am immediately horrified at the prospects of what my first job entails. There are probably six of them ahead of me. Ugly grins, unbelievable, almost inhuman, postures and a grotesque intermingling of broken limbs make me dig my teeth deep, and hard, into my clenched fists. [...] Gradually, I approach one of the more intact bodies, gingerly, eyes reduced to hairline slits, and look for a pocket or bag amidst all the dirt and the crusted blood on his clothes. I find the ID card in his back pocket and in some kind of limp involuntary motion throw it into the nylon army rucksack the Captain gave me last week (Waheed 8).

The narrator's graphic description of the killing fields in the valley of Kashmir is juxtaposed with the Indian military captain's surveillance of the valley of Kashmir through a pair of German binoculars, who sees the military operation "in miniature" as if it were a computer game. By framing the enemy insurgents who cross the checkpoint in miniature through the visual technology of his binoculars, Captain Kadian represents his military operation as a war game in which the dead civilian population are viewed in "toy size" (5). By detailing how the Indian captain renames the corpses by giving them Pakistani names, Waheed's narrator foregrounds the way in which the Indian military represents the extrajudicial killing of Kashmiri civilians as lawful in the terms of the Armed Forces (Jammu and Kashmir) Special Powers Act. In the terms of this necropolitical logic, the dead are re-defined at the checkpoint as foreign infiltrators, regardless of whether they are Kashmiri civilians or armed Pakistani guerrillas. As the narrator explains:

When they need to, [the army] release a list from time to time about a fierce encounter in so-and-so sector on the border that continued for so many hours, went on till the small hours, and so on and so forth. The list of the dead is then sent to the police and the newspapers. The media are never allowed in except for delegations sent by the centre and the governor of Kashmir. And when they want to show off their catch, they film the bodies that have not been conveyed down into the valley, and store the footage for present or future use (13).

In this way, the military represents Indian sovereignty over the dead bodies of the civilian population. If captain Kadian represents the extra-legal force of the Indian military at the Line of Control, it is the Indian governor of Kashmir who provides the public justification for the security measures that are employed in the narrator's village. Significantly, we are told that in his previous jobs, this figure was also responsible for the bulldozing of "the rickety shacks of poor people in

Delhi and Bombay and Calcutta” and “had forcibly sterilized unwitting men in India’s far-flung villages” during India’s state of emergency in the 1970s (116). By giving readers this brief resumé of the governor, the narrator establishes the importance of emergency powers as a technique of governmentality in postcolonial India. In a later section of the novel, the governor proceeds to justify the use of a curfew in the narrator’s village with a patronizing and long-winded public speech delivered in English to a group of bemused villagers that seems to parody the place of Kashmir in Nehru’s *Discovery of India*. The governor begins by describing the necessity for emergency measures in the village by blaming the violence on “external forces,” who are trying to turn the Line of Control into a war zone or a “gateway of militancy,” and proceeds to describe the “rightful place of Kashmir in the sacred vision of India” (Waheed 233). In so doing, the narrator suggests that the governor uses the elite nationalist rhetoric of India’s secular democracy to justify the use of violence and repression as a technique of political rule. Against the use of nationalist rhetoric and the law to justify the routine violence of the Indian state in Kashmir, the narrator attempts to commemorate the deaths of Kashmiris killed by the Indian army by cremating some of the human remains he finds around the Line of Control who have been left by the army to rot. In so doing, he tries to give voice, meaning and dignity to the precarious lives and deaths of the Kashmiri population.

The partition of India and the escalation of violence from the deployment of Indian troops in the Kashmir valley in October 1947 to Pakistan’s cooperation with the Bush administration during the 2001 war in Afghanistan also form part of the historical backdrop to Salman Rushdie’s 2005 novel *Shalimar the Clown*. *Shalimar* traces the circumstances that led to the murder of Max Ophuls, a US ambassador for counter-terrorism, back to a love affair with a Hindu Kashmiri dancer called Boonyi, who is married to Shalimar the Clown, a Muslim from Kashmir. The narrative takes place against the historical backdrop of the militarization of Kashmir—a history that is registered in part through a romantic sub-plot in which Boonyi rejects the unwanted affections of an Indian military general, as we will see. Just as Waheed uses the figure of a hypermasculine military officer to represent the sovereignty of the Indian state at the Kashmir checkpoint in *The Collaborator*, so Rushdie uses the caricatured figure of the Indian general Kachhwaha to represent the lawful violence of Indian sovereignty in Kashmir. This performance of masculinity in both novels could be seen to stage the demands of postcolonial India for what Agnana P. Chatterji has aptly called “hyper-masculine militarization.” What I take Chatterji to mean here is that the violent means by which sovereignty is asserted and maintained over contested territories such as that of Kashmir are often figured in distinctly gendered terms. In *Shalimar the Clown*, for instance, the assertion of

sovereign power is figured in part as an assault on a Kashmiri territory that is framed as feminine. In this figuration, Kashmir is framed as a beautiful territory that has been rendered ugly by military camps and checkpoints –an ugliness that is associated with general Kachhwaha. His military assault on the village of Pachigam is described as a response to the rejection of his expressions of romantic attraction for Boonyi, a Kashmiri dancer from Pachigam: “Pachigam would suffer for Boonyi Kaul’s insulting behavior, for metaphorically slapping her better’s face” (Rushdie 101). Kachhwaha we are told is the descendant of Indian warrior princes, and has also spent time in England; he had “a splendid Rajput moustache, a swaggering Rajput bearing, a barking British voice, and now he was commanding officer of the army camp a few miles to the North-East of Pachigam, the camp everyone locally called Elasticnagar because of its well-established tendency to stretch” (94). Here, the elastic composition of the camp draws attention to the unresolved cartography of Kashmir, and the way in which the checkpoints which define the boundaries of the camp struggle to define the contours of India’s sovereignty. In this respect, Eyal Weizman’s topological account of the Israeli occupation as a frontier space in *Hollow Land* seems apposite to describe the Line of Control:

Against the geography of stable, static places, and the balance across linear and fixed sovereign borders, frontiers are deep, shifting, fragmented and elastic territories. Temporary lines of engagement, marked by makeshift boundaries, are not limited to the edges of political space but exist throughout its depth. Distinctions between the ‘inside’ and the ‘outside’ cannot be clearly marked. In fact, the straighter, more geometrical and more abstract official colonial borders across the ‘New Worlds’ tended to be, the more the territories of effective control were fragmented and dynamic and thus unchartable by any conventional mapping technique (4),

The elasticity of the military camp in *Shalimar the Clown* can thus be understood as an attempt to assert sovereignty over the disputed territory of Kashmir in a fragmentary and haphazard way. In this respect, Elasticnagar (or elastic city) functions rather like a checkpoint in that it seems to emerge in response to a moment of a danger. The elasticity of Elasticnagar is also paralleled by the tautological legal formulations that the Colonel invokes to justify the expansion of the camp onto the villagers’ land:

Elasticnagar was unpopular, the colonel knew that, but unpopularity was illegal. The legal position was that the Indian military presence in Kashmir had the full support of the population, and to say otherwise was to break the law. To break the law was to be a criminal and criminals were not to be tolerated and it was right to come down on them heavily with the full panoply of the law and with hobnailed boots and lathi sticks as well. The key to understanding this position was the word integral and its associated concepts. Elasticnagar was integral to the Indian effort and the Indian effort was to preserve the integrity of the nation. Integrity was a quality to be honoured and an attack on the integrity of the nation was an attack on its honour and was not to be tolerated. Therefore Elasticnagar was to be honoured and all other attitudes were dishonourable and consequently

illegal. Kashmir was an integral part of India. An integer was a whole and India was an integer and fractions were illegal. Fractions caused fractures in the integer and were thus not integral. Not to accept this was to lack integrity and implicitly or explicitly to question the unquestionable integrity of those who did accept it. Not to accept this was latently or patently to favour disintegration. This was subversive. Subversion leading to disintegration was not to be tolerated and it was right to come down on it heavily whether it was of the overt or covert kind. The legally compulsory and enforceable popularity of Elasticnagar was thus a matter of integrity, pure and simple, even if the truth was that Elasticnagar was unpopular. When the truth and integrity conflicted it was integrity that was to be given precedence. Not even the truth could be permitted to dishonour the nation. Therefore Elasticnagar was popular even though it was not popular. It was a simple enough matter to understand (Rushdie 96).

Through this absurd parody of the Colonel's rhetoric, Rushdie encourages readers to recognize how the colonel's speech acts have the force of emergency law – a law which suspends the law in the space of the military camp that used to be a Kashmiri village. The word play on the variant meanings of “integral” – a word that alludes to article one of the constitution of Jammu and Kashmir that declares Kashmir to be “an integral part of India” (Jammu and Kashmir, 3)– evokes a sense of linguistic and territorial instability which the colonel attempts to secure through a series of repetitive and circular formulations. In logic and grammar, the word “integral” denotes linguistic or logical elements that constitute a unity or whole; in mathematics, similarly, the word “integer” refers to whole numbers or undivided quotations (*OED*). The surreal repetition of the word “integral” in this formulation draws attention to the relationship between military violence and signification. Yet this authoritarian attempt to control the play of meaning also suggests that the territory of Kashmir exceeds attempts to name and control it, and in this sense Kashmir can be understood as a topological space or a space of becoming in which the order of Indian military sovereignty, and its control over the population can be negotiated and perhaps even circumvented.

Embodied acts of resistance in Manipur

Wendy Brown has claimed that the Line of Control between Indian-administered Kashmir and Pakistan-controlled Kashmir is designed to “wall in disputed Kashmir territory” (8). Such a “walling in” highlights the limitations of a democratic Indian nation-state that attempts to resolve the question of Kashmir's suspended sovereignty through exceptional violence. It is not only in Kashmir, of course, that such exceptional state violence has become normalized as a technique for extending state power in a particular geographical space. We have already seen how in North-East India, the AFSPA of 1958 provided the legal framework for a state of emergency to be declared in Assam, Nagaland and Manipur. As in the case of Kashmir, the government of India's repressive policies towards these North-East Indian states can

be partly understood as a territorial dispute, which threatens the integrity of India's sovereignty. As Deepti Priya Mehrotra explains in the context of Manipur, the state of Manipur became a sovereign state with a democratic government in 1947; however, in 1949, Manipur's constitutional head of state, the Maharaja, inexplicably "signed the Manipur Merger Agreement, under which Manipur became a Grade C state of the Indian Union" (43). The subordinate political and economic status of North-Eastern states such as Manipur within the Indian Union has led to growing disaffection among the population, and is often invoked as one of the grounds for insurgency. While a detailed assessment of the history of the government of India's policy in the North-East is beyond the scope of this essay, the concluding section of this essay will briefly consider how women in Manipur have used embodied acts of resistance to contest the sovereign violence of the Indian government and military in Manipur. Focusing specifically on Deepti Priya Mehrotra's account of Irom Sharmila in *Burning Bright: Irom Sharmila*, I want to consider how the gendered body has been used as a site for contesting the sovereign violence of the Indian state over the territory and population of Manipur. Mehrotra's non-fictional account of Irom Sharmila's life and struggle may not fit the generic conventions of the contemporary South-Asian novel as it is narrowly conceived. Yet her weaving together of Sharmila's voice and the history of insurgency in Manipur employs narrative strategies and rhetorical techniques that broadly parallel contemporary developments in political non-fiction in India (Sunder Rajan).

"I write of her because she is history in the flesh, being lived out in our times" (Mehrotra ix). These are the words that preface Deepti Priya Mehrotra's account of Irom Sharmila's hunger strike in protest against the government of India's security policies in Manipur. Part history, part prison narrative, part biography, Mehrotra's book situates Sharmila's protest against the Indian state in relation to the social and political history of Manipur as a sovereign kingdom, and the incorporation of Manipur into the Indian Union after independence. By suggesting that Irom Sharmila is "history in the flesh," Mehrotra tries to make Irom Sharmila's protest against the Indian government intelligible as an *embodied* act of resistance in which Sharmila puts her life on the line.

"What is [...] performed in the hunger strike," Ewa Plonowska Ziarek explains, "is the collapse of the distinctions between sovereignty and bare life, will and passivity, potentiality and actuality, the struggle for freedom and the risk of self-annihilation" (100). In the context of anti-colonial insurgency in Ireland during the war of independence in the 1910s and India during the 1930s and 1940s, self-starvation performs a symbolic act of political resistance that involves the subject of colonial rule reclaiming sovereign power over their own body. A similar logic of biopolitical resistance can be identified in Irom

Sharmila's resistance to the Indian government's sovereign claim over Manipur, and the repressive measures India uses to maintain this territorial claim. As Mehrotra explains,

“[...] Irom Sharmila has wielded her body as a weapon. It is a deliberate, well-thought-out move. By fasting without end, she is asserting her right to her body as she sees fit. She is expressing her resistance to injustice and the ‘lawless law’ through defiant inversion of the norm –of eating food” (100).

The connection Mehrotra draws between Irom Sharmila's performative act of “asserting her right to her body” and her opposition to “the ‘lawless law’” sheds significant light on the political status of the Manipuri population vis-à-vis the Indian state. If, as Michel Foucault has suggested, security needs to be understood as a political technique for maintaining sovereignty over territory and population, Irom Sharmila's sovereign act of embodied resistance to the security policies of the Indian state foregrounds the way in which the Indian government has denied the Manipuri population the rights associated with Indian citizenship in its struggle to extend its sovereignty over the North-East. In the language of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, the political technique that the government uses in the North-East is to declare this territory a disturbed area in which the normal rule of law is suspended. As Ananya Vajpeyi puts it:

[...] the AFSPA splits India into a nation and a camp, with the former under the rule of law and the latter in a zone of exception. People, too, become differentiated into two groups, the citizens of India, who have a complete set of rights, entitlements, and protections under the law, and the non-citizens of the Northeast, who lack these very rights, entitlements, and protections, since they are not under the law, but under the regime of the AFSPA (43).

If the “non-citizens of the North-East” are *de facto* stateless people, this is not to say that they are without political agency. For Irom Sharmila's act of fasting can be understood as a form of sovereignty over her body that simultaneously contests the sovereignty of the government of India over the territory of Manipur and the population contained within it. Like Irom Sharmila's hunger strike, the naked protest of Manipuri women in July 2004 against the sexual violation and murder of Thangjam Manorama by the Assam Rifles can be seen to contest the Indian state's denial of the Manipuri population of the right to have rights under the terms of the AFSPA. As Vajpeyi puts it,

the naked protest is a semiotic masterstroke [...] it uses the actual body of a woman to image the abstract body of the citizen; it uses clothes to stand for rights, and thus their absence to stand for rightlessness, and it uses physical powerlessness to trope political powerlessness (42).

Moreover, the slogans that these female protesters inscribed on their banner– “Indian Army rape us; Indian Army take our flesh”– is both a

provocative description and a taunt designed to expose the ways in which the Indian government had normalized military repression and sexual violence in the North-East in the name of counterinsurgency and territorial integrity.

Conclusion

If the spatial stories of narratives of emergency in Kashmir and Manipur help to make sense of the relationship between violence, law and sovereignty in contemporary India, literary and cultural texts can help to shed light on the condition of possibility for justice in the face of such exceptional violence. As this essay has tried to suggest, both contemporary fictions and non-fictions such as *Curfewed Night*, *The Collaborator*, *Shalimar the Clown* and *Irom Sharmila* offer valuable narrative resources for imagining an alternative to a militarized postcolonial sovereignty in which exceptional violence has become the norm. This is not to suggest that such narratives offer a blueprint for effective political intervention. Yet insofar as they convey the fragmented and often traumatic experience of a violent postcolonial sovereignty, these narratives allow us to mourn the lives and deaths of the oppressed, and to challenge the normalization of lethal violence that prevails in areas that the Indian state has deemed to be “disturbed.”

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