Introduction
Toward Post-Terrorism?

In Italo Calvino's immortal tale "Making Do,"[1] the puny subjects of a mighty kingdom are at the mercy of their ruthless king, who bans everything within the reach of his Crown. Since there isn't much to do, his subjects gather at the town square and invent a game called "tipcat" to *kill* their time. Days pass, years go by, and they still keep playing tipcat. The king asks his constables, just to reassure himself of his powers, what his subjects are up to. "Playing tipcat, your Majesty," is the irremissible answer. "I've had enough of this stupid game," yells out the king. "I'm banning the damn thing." The constables arrive at the square to announce the edict, "Hey Ho, listen out." "Can't you see we are busy playing tipcat?" "Precisely," one of the constables blurts out: "Tipcat is banned in our kingdom with immediate effect." In shock, the subjects pause their game for a moment, and having realized that they have no further means of killing their time, they march to the king's palace in a single file, kill the king, and return to the town square to resume their game of tipcat.

Albert Camus would have been proud of the tipcat rebels for leaving the throne empty. Before the regicide of 1793, Camus wrote in his justly famous collection of essays *The Rebel*, "the followers [of regicides] were interested in attacking the person, not the principle, of the king. They wanted another king and that was all. It never occurred to them that the throne could remain empty for ever."[2]

An empty throne was all that beckoned the subjects of post-Saddam Iraq, shrouded by a shadow emperor, half a dozen contenders, and about a million dead bodies strewn unevenly across the battle lines some two decades later, out of which emerges our peculiar creature with questionable credentials: "Whatsitsname."[3] An oddball junk dealer decides to collect human junk for a change, from the rotting body parts lying round the neighborhood of Al Bataween, and sews them into a corpse. A sorcerer breathes life into this effigy of assorted flesh. Once the body – an allegory of the miserable dissimulation Iraq has become – begins to regain the

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memory of its various parts, it embarks on a vengeance-fueled mission reminiscent of Marvel's comics in the streets of Baghdad, targeting American checkpoints, hotels frequented by European guests and diplomats, the Iraqi national police, and the local militias. It never occurred to the invading force that the mere presence of an empty, unoccupied throne could wreak so much havoc, and one could have attacked the principle of the throne, not just that of the king.

Attacking the idea of the throne is what inspires an ordinary man who arrives in Mumbai in the mid-1990s, only to be terrorized by the local mob. A rebel with no greater cause than salvaging his honor, he unleashes a reign of terror upon the occupants of the throne and becomes a legend. When Ram Gopal Varma, the maverick Indian director, who is always in the habit of reciting a random quote from Ayn Rand, was asked how he came upon the character of Satya[4] in his eponymous landmark film, his answer did not disappoint the audience: when someone is killed accidentally, we have in our culture to recount the moments immediately before the death, what the person ate or said or did, but what of the killer? What did he eat for his breakfast, what was his day like? "I was trying to intercut the moments of the man who died with those of the man who killed him. Then it suddenly struck me that you always hear about gangsters only when they either kill or die. But what do they do in between?"[5]

Insurgent Cultures is about what happens to the likes of tipcat rebels, Frankenstein insurgents, or regicidal followers between killing and dying. Who had won the last tipcat tournament? Did a fight ensue between the tipcat rebels as to who would keep the trophy? Did they rebel for the wrong reasons but got the right result? Did Satya rebel for the right reasons but got the wrong result? Could Whatsitsname repent? What did he eat for his breakfast every morning before he embarked on his reign of terror? Besides its overt political undertones, *Insurgent Cultures* raises such questions of affective and aesthetic significance to gain a deeper understanding of the lives led by the agents of violence not just between killing and dying, but even before they arrive at the decision to kill. Instead of focusing on the victims alone, as a good deal of statist discourses do, the book turns to the agents of armed rebellions and asks the perturbing question: What happens if we see the agents of violence themselves as the victims of another order of violence? This is a point at which the elephant in the room, namely, terrorism, grumbles for attention: "politically motivated violence perpetuated against noncombatant targets."[6]

By dint of this definition – the most frequently reproduced legal lexicon of our times – Satya could be labeled a lone-wolf terrorist, Whatsitsname

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an international terrorist, and the tipcat rebels domestic terrorists, to say nothing of in-house, outhouse, backyard, basement, cross-border, and alien terrorists. Perhaps the best way to beat terrorism is by adding more and more subcategories to it, to the point that everything and everyone becomes a terrorist and there is an equitable distribution of terror. This is not hogwash; it was an idea tried and tested in the streets of Al Bataween, however imaginatively, whose twisted logic makes even our Whatsitsname cringe:

> Yes, for a year or more he's [Brigadier Majid] been carrying out the policy of the American ambassador to create an equilibrium of violence on the streets between the Sunni and Shiite militias, so there'll be a balance later at the negotiating table to make new political arrangements in Iraq. The American army is unable or unwilling to stop the violence, so at least a balance or an equivalence of violence has to be created. Without it, there won't be a successful political process.[7]

What of the dynamiters, anarchists, nihilists, bandits, and revolutionaries then? Wouldn't they feel left out in a world of duplicated terrorists? That's exactly what happens in another story of Calvino's, fittingly titled "The Black Sheep":[8] in a town of thieves who make a living by stealing from each other by secret consent, arrives an honest man who wouldn't play by the house rules, causing much disequilibrium to the social harmony of the town. Perhaps the same holds true for rebels, rogues, ruffians, and insurgents; in a world of ubiquitous, equitable dissemination of terrorists, they stand out as the more honorable Black Sheep, even if their honesty should disrupt the standing order of the house.

Insurgent Cultures is less about terrorists than those who are affected by them, foreshadowed by them, and transformed by them; it is about the uneasy conflation of terrorism with the myriad forms of insurgency violence in India, Nigeria, Burma, and the Middle East, which are home to some of the longest-running armed conflicts in the postcolonial world. While contending that contemporary discourses on terrorism are inadequate to capture the complex interplay of nativist, nationalist, and secessionist aspirations within these conflicts over indigenous attachments to land, identity, and local ecologies, it builds on emerging conceptual synergies between armed nationalism, affect theory, postcolonial criticism, and debates about world literature. Although a number of social scientists have identified the limitations associated with normative theories of terrorism,[9] their works generally lack the literary-aesthetic impulses necessary for a renewed understanding of the cultural determinants of insurgency violence: communal bonding, ethnic solidarity, empathy,

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vengeance, oppression, and victimhood. *Insurgent Cultures* seizes upon the prolific output of insurgency literature in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks which, curiously but not surprisingly, coincides with the escalation of counterinsurgency operations by the postcolonial states, owing largely to the global war on terror campaign launched by the United States.

Despite the fact that there is a long history of literary responses to armed conflicts in the Global South, there is no monograph-length study on post-independence insurgency narratives to date.[10] In a post-9/11 world replete with war and terrorist parlance, insurgency became an outmoded analytical category – a thing of peasant and agrarian societies – until recently when literary critics such as Alex Tickell, Stephen Morton, Nicole Rizzuto, and Rebecca Gould[11] have begun to draw attention to the legal, lexical, and literary formulations of the concept under European colonialism. Although insurgency is rarely used to describe contemporary forms of violence, the works of Moira Fradinger, Jean Franco, John Mackinlay, and Immanuel Ness[12] have underscored the paradoxical relationship between the social infiltration of violence under dictatorship regimes, security doctrines, and the subjugation of populations to subhuman conditions that not only breed insurgent conditions, but convert entire social groups into passive proto-insurgents. More recently, two literary interventions, namely, Joel Nickels's *World Literature and the Geographies of Resistance* (2018) and Auritro Majumder's *Insurgent Imaginations: World Literature and the Periphery* (2021),[13] take the credit for reinscribing the conception of insurgency into the peripheral imaginaries of the Global South: Nickels's take on insurgencies operating from 'nonstate spaces' in the French Antilles, Black Harlem, and India's tribal belt is complemented by Majumder's delineation of insurgent humanism and its capacity to forge peripheral solidarities across India, the Soviet Union, Black America, Mexico, Vietnam, and China.

Insurgent Cultures capitalizes on this momentum, and makes a leap forward by focusing exclusively on contemporary conflicts, as opposed to anticolonial insurgencies, and by extending its geographical canvas to three subregions: Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. Its departure point, therefore, lies with the thematic shift it identifies in the historical trajectory of theorizing violence: from the dichotomous configuration of armed conflicts as the products of competing ideologies between state, revolutionaries, and other nonstate actors to a more nuanced configuration of the diffused, disintegrated, and disenfranchised nature of armed conflicts among a wide spectrum of political actors. An account of such forms of conflict, the egregious conditions that inspire them, the actors who mobilize arms, and the insurgents who do most of the fighting and dying

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requires a careful reexamination of the received discourses of violence in literary studies. *Insurgent Cultures* undertakes this task by interjecting a series of micro-concepts into the current debates, namely, divine violence, rogue environments, intimate violence, inherited violence, routine violence, subterranean violence; various forms of noncombative political engagement, from enchanted, disenchanted to deep and liberal solidarities; and bonds of violence forged through the unraveling of necropolitical infrastructures as well as thanatopolitics. This fount of conceptual parlance, as opposed to the draconian terminologies in terrorism and security studies – ranging from "lone-wolf" to "wolf-pack" terrorists – forms the basis for the understanding of insurgent cultures in India, Burma, Nigeria, and the Middle East as the product of a *longue durée* of conflicts that led to the construction of violence as a normative cultural practice among state authorities, private armies, and insurgency groups for negotiating their respective claims over identity, boundaries, and civic spaces.

Evidently, such a move requires going beyond the existing templates of Orientalism, terrorism, and Islamophobia in literary studies, and registering the porous formulations of violent actors as rogues, rebels, armed guerrillas, revolutionaries, and insurgents in political science, anthropology, and peasant studies. Although a full gloss of the historical and cultural determinants of these figures is ill-suited for this occasion,[14] *Insurgent Cultures* does not shy away from mobilizing these militant figures and metaphors that could potentially rally under the sign of insurgency, so long as their motive is to express violent opposition to the violence visited upon them. If, thus, terrorism is seen as "politically motivated violence perpetuated against non-combatant targets,"[15] especially when its political motivations are rendered void and unjustifiable, then any attempts at framing insurgency requires the reframing of the very parameters of judging certain forms of violence as just, and others unjust. Although I am fully aware of the fact that a reverse engineering of the term "insurgency" through the heady arsenal of terrorism has its own pitfalls, it has its advantages, too. A reverse engineering, nonetheless, is engineering. And when done with appropriate tools, namely, literary devices in this case, it enables rare insights into cultural determinants of insurgency: the aesthetic and affective trajectories of the insurrectional sublime, as well as the cathartic and intimate uses of violence. As opposed to the *langue* of the law that is frequently deployed by the proponents of terrorism studies to understand global conflicts, *Insurgent Cultures* veers toward the *parole* of violence, an amalgamation of disjointed metaphors mobilized by cultures, nations, communities, families, and individuals who are bound by an insurgent

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cause. Such causes and causations of violence, as the readings in this book show, engender both political and aesthetic imaginaries where armed resistance is conjured up along caste, class, and communal lines of longing and belonging, and where minor victories may trigger a major overhaul of social systems. This semiotic spirit of insurrection is perhaps best captured in Ranajit Guha's formulation of insurgency:

> By the time that colonialism came to establish itself firmly in the subcontinent, it had already at its disposal a well-developed semiotic apparatus which was partly inherited and partly its own invention.... The subaltern masses too, were familiar with this apparatus if only as those whose deference it was primarily designed to enforce and it is by throwing a spanner or two into the works from time to time that they learnt the rudiments of rebellion. Insurgency was a massive systematic violation of those works, gestures and symbols which had the relations of power in colonial society as their significata.[16]

As a literary foray into the phenomena of insurgency, *Insurgent Cultures* is best equipped to trace how the "systemic violation" of "gestures and symbols" is encoded into the violent conflicts on the ground. In fact, it is the very tropological constitution of the figure of the insurgent, in conjunction with other figures such as rebels, rogues, and revolutionaries, that bears the potential for demystifying the semantic coordinates of the terrorist. It would therefore be quite in order to suggest that if the rogue operates by conceit, then the guerrilla takes to arms by sentiment, the bandit by temperament, the rebel by instinct, the revolutionary by intent, the insurgent by consent, and the terrorist by contempt. The dyadic formulations of the consent-seeking insurgent and the contempt-driven terrorist seem to hold; for an insurgency to sustain, it needs a popular base "to continuously replace and regenerate its losses."[17] Those forms of violence that lack a culture of mass mobilization, and rely purely on violence, tend to align with the 'hit and run' modus operandi of terrorism.[18]

It is, however, not the intent of this book to frame insurgency and culture in essentialist terms. I can understand the temptation, especially for the ethnologically trained, to read the mere juxtaposition of the two terms as an Orientalist throwback, an invitation to villainize the Global South as inherently violent. I would caution against such tendentious reading of insurgency or culture, as though each were a ticking time bomb. Instead, it is in the time that lapses between ticking and explosion, in the worlds inhabited by the insurgents between killing and dying, that insurgent cultures take shape. If, thus, insurgency can be defined as *being-in-surge*, *being-on-the-rise*, like the fount of explosive fire, against some first order of

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violence – be it semiotic, symbolic, or objective – then an insurgent culture is one that internalizes such violent surging up from below as a routine course of communal life, as opposed to a cathartic revolutionary event. In that sense, my usage of insurgent cultures here is inspired by the same ethical bind as its theoretical commitment to register the multiple modalities of violence that pervade contemporary world politics: communalism, factionalism, peasant wars, banditry, nationalist struggles, resource wars, and acts of vengeance. These modalities of violence hold an immense potential to lay bare the theoretical limitations in framing terrorism, or even to separate it from other forms of violence, which are clearly inflected in the way the ongoing "war on terror" campaign has failed to assess or anticipate the latent interplay of cultural, economic, ideological, and organizational factors that forge the means of counter-violence. These means of counter-violence, if misrecognized as motives for terrorism, could have far-reaching effects on public opinion and policy options, as their very misrecognition might constrain access to conciliatory means available for rebels and insurgent groups, thereby setting them on an adverse path toward terrorism.

Mythic Violence and Enchanted Solidarity

What would an autobiography that laments the destruction of peaceful tribal communal life in pre-independence India; a resurrected corpse unleashed upon the streets of post-occupation Baghdad; a reportage narrative that follows the trail of oil money to crime rings, corrupt politicians, and insurgency groups in the Niger Delta; and a spy thriller that uncovers a plot to destroy the Burmese dictatorship have in common? Why India, the Middle East, Nigeria, and Burma? Why now? And why not Liberia, Sudan, or Colombia? For one thing, there is a burgeoning body of insurgency literature emerging from these countries and regions since 9/11 that is too hard to ignore. For another, the four cases feature a sustained pattern of nationalist, secessionist, and resource-driven conflicts that pose a daunting challenge to postcolonial sovereignty. Although the secessionist-nationalist-resource-based nexus in itself may suffice for a comparative inquiry into the four cases, there is a glaring distinction, if not contradiction, between the first wave of literature produced in the wake of the insurgencies (1960s and 1990s) and the literature of the post-9/11 period.

But perhaps the most distinct feature of the insurgencies covered in this book is their colonial underpinnings, the deferred achievement of nationalism arising from the arbitrary mapping of religions, ethnicities, and

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cultures into contained territories. The ensuing struggles not just for demarcating but for *defending* cultural and resource boundaries, precipitated by a slew of policy measures, imperial protectorates, regional mandates such as the Independence Act of 1947 (Burma), the setting up of the Niger Coast protectorate in 1884, the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871 (India), and the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 (the Middle East) have turned these regions into fertile grounds for postcolonial insurgencies. Contrary to the conventional distinctions between religious and secular terrorism, these insurgencies exhibit certain intrasecular tendencies, in which religious, ethnic, or tribal identities are often used as masks, if not markers, of their secular ambitions to secede or gain control over resources in their lands, or assert their rights against majoritarian civic institutions and spaces. This is made evident by the novelty of the insurgent groups whose confounding motives seemed to have taken the world by surprise: Boko Haram, the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) of Burma, and the Niger Delta Avengers. Despite the vast geographical and cultural distances that separate these insurgencies, there are two specific extra-literary themes, namely, "mythic violence" and "enchanted solidarity," that bind the first wave of insurgency literature from India, Nigeria, Burma, and the Middle East.

Mythic violence refers to the violence carried out by both the sovereign states and nonstate actors whose ultimate ambition is either to preserve the existing law (states) or to establish a hitherto nonexistent law (revolutionaries). Such violence is essentially 'mythical' because, as Walter Benjamin holds, it attains a heroic and iconic status when used for, or in the name of, the greater good.[19] Mythic violence is a quintessential expression of the first wave of insurgency literature, which depicts violence as the product of an unavoidable clash between the newfound postcolonial states asserting, or rather testing, the limits of their authority, and the competing sovereignties of the marginalized groups. Inversely, such an ideological bent, as in the case of Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy*,[20] is portrayed as an insular development, or as a matter of domestic, national, or local concern. The second theme is connected to the first one, wherein marginalized populations such as the Ogoni, the Santhals, and the Burmese insurgents are portrayed as the ultimate casualties of, or rather cannon fodder to, the ideological clash between the state and revolutionary sovereignty. These narrative tropes of victimhood and their unconditional solidarity for the suffering of the marginalized, which the German literary critic Frank Schulze-Engler calls the enchanted solidarity of select postcolonial intellectuals who tend to position their writings in close proximity to "a form of activism,"[21] are endemic to the first wave of insurgency literature.

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Although the Naxalite movement in India began in 1967, with the uprising of the Santhals in West Bengal, its tribal origins can be traced to nineteenth-century British policies that denied land ownership rights to the forest-based Adivasis in Central India. The postcolonial Indian state inherited the *res nullius* principle, which served the interests of nontribal landowners who retained power through a nexus of old feudal structures and caste hierarchies. Against this backdrop, and inspired by the Maoist doctrine of "land to the tiller," the Naxalite insurgency broke into a dozen factions across Bihar and Andhra Pradesh, of which three streams emerged strong, having officially merged into the Communist Party of India (CPI) (Maoist) in 2004. Between 2006 and 2011, a forest region called Dandakaranya covering four states in Central India had become a hotbed of violence and clashes between the state-sponsored private army known as Salwa Judum ("purification hunt") and the insurgents.

The first wave of literary responses to the Maoist insurgency is confined to memoirs, films, and short narratives, which appeared in Bengali, Telugu, and Malayali during the 1970s. Prominent among them were Mahasweta Devi's novella *Mother of 1084* and K. Ajitha's memoir *Kerala's Naxalbari – Memoirs of a Young Revolutionary*,[22] which dealt with caste and agrarian hierarchies and their economic and ideological underpinnings that led to the uprising in the late 1960s and its brutal suppression by the state in the 1970s. These narratives produced a rather prescriptive understanding of the conflict as mythic violence, as a clash between the bourgeois state, its land-owning fraternity that sought to defend the status quo by force, and left-wing intellectual middle classes that mobilized dispossessed tribals and peasants in the name of liberation. This tension is best captured in the words of Devi's narrator in *Mother of 1084*, in which an utterly apolitical, middle-class urban mother of the corpse number 1084 begins to wonder if her son's death could be in excess of any political meaning, "whether by killing him the authorities had been able to destroy the burning faith in faithlessness that Brati and his compatriots had stood for. Brati was dead. His friends were dead. But did that mean the end of the cause?"[23] It is the need to keep the *cause* alive, and to derive a political meaning out of Brati's death, which turns ordinary insurgency into mythic violence. As long as the nobility of the insurgent cause remained alive, so, too, would the juggernaut of state violence.

The conditions for a brewing insurgency could not be more different in the Niger Delta than those of 1960s West Bengal. If "land to the tiller" was the Maoist mantra, then "oil to the owner" became the Niger Delta's mantra. There is not one but three interrelated events in postcolonial

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Nigeria that are vital to our understanding of the ongoing conflicts in the Delta region, which is home to ethnic groups such as the Urhobo, Itsekiri, Ijaw, Ogoni, Obolo Ikwerre-Etche, Isoko, and Ilaje, among others.

The insurgent fire sparked by the state's execution of the local scribe and environmentalist Ken Saro-Wiwa in 1995 flared up the genocide in Ijaw city of Odi in 1999, resulting in the murder of 2,400 civilians by the Nigerian military.[24] Not long after these events, the Warri Crisis of 1997–2003 between the three major oil communities, Itsekiri, Ijaw, and Urhobos, led to an intensification of the conflict over resource ownership, and the sharing of revenues between the federal and regional governments. Like the other three cases in this book, the Warri crisis dates back to colonial contact, in this case, of the Itsekiri with the Royal African Company, the predecessor of the Royal Niger Company, and their trade monopoly with the Europeans under the British protectorate. With the discovery of oil in the Ijaw lands, however, tensions surfaced over which ethnic group would gain the upper hand in the Delta State. Soon after the British departure, the Itsekiri ruler's decision to change the title of his crown from Olu of Itsekiri to Olu of Warri added much fuel to the fire; it was perceived as an extensional threat by the Ijaws and Urhobos, who consider themselves native to Warri. The ensuing tensions culminated in ethnic riots in March 1997, resurfacing again in 2003–2004, with the alleged involvement of hired guns by a consortium of oil companies, including Royal Dutch Shell, ExxonMobil, ChevronTexaco, Agip and TotalFinaElf.[25]

While these internal rifts between the so-called oil communities remained alive, a number of insurgency groups emerged from the political void created by the Nigerian civil war of 1967–1970. Despite their support of Igbo nationalist leader Colonel Odumegwu Ojukwu's bid for the secession of Biafra (including the entire Niger Delta region), many Delta minorities feared that they might come under an Igbo-dominated state once Biafra was created.[26] Isaac Adaka Boro, the Ijaw leader who staged a mutiny within mutiny by declaring the Niger Delta People's Republic in 1966, laid the groundwork for the insurgency outfits to come: the Ijaw Youth Council in 1998, and the Niger Delta People's Voluntary Force (NDPVF) in 2004. With the support of NDPVF and other groups such as the Niger Delta Ijaw Communities, an umbrella organization named the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) formed under the leadership of Mujahid Dokubo-Asari and Henry Okah in 2005. Since 2016, another group called the Niger Delta Avengers has moved to the center of the triangulated violence between the insurgents, the oil companies, and the Nigerian state.

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The first wave of literary responses such as J. P. Clark's *Wives Revolt* (1991) and *All for Oil* (2000), Isidore Okpewho's *Tides* (1994), and Ken Saro-Wiwa's *A Month and a Day* (1995)[27] were chiefly concerned with the sociocultural and ecological costs of the aggressive oil exploration in the region since the 1970s. Holding the collusion between the state, local elites, and the foreign oil companies responsible for breeding socioeconomic disparities, these works extend their enchanted solidarity to the suffering of the Delta minorities, as evinced in the myriad roles assumed by their protagonists as ecoactivists, ecofeminists (*Wives Revolt*, *Tides*) and poetic, sometimes autobiographical personas fighting for social justice, as epitomized, for instance, in Nnimmo Bassey's poem, with its telling title: "We thought it was Oil but it was blood":[28]

We thought it was oil
But it was blood

Dried tear bags
Polluted streams
Things are real
Only when found in dreams
We see their Shells
Behind military shields
Evil, horrible evil gallows called oilrigs
Drilling our souls
...

This we tell you
They may kill all
But the blood will speak
They may gain all
But the soil will RISE
We may die but stay alive
Placed on the slab
Slaughtered by the day
We are the living
Long sacrificed
...

The imagery of organic insurgency evoked by Bassey's poem – the soil rising, the dreams of the Delta subjects boring holes into the pipes of the oil companies – is also a salient feature of other works of the first wave, most notably Ibiwari Ikiriko's *Oily Tears of the Delta* (2000).[29] If oil and tears become one, and if the oil in the soil is the blood of the "long sacrificed" Delta subjects, then "the soil will RISE" with each drill into

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"the souls" of the Delta lands. Not only do the naturalist metaphors in these works evoke a sense of organicity, but in doing so, they lay sovereign claims to the land in which the coming together of blood and oil turns the Delta soil into a combustible agent, a fertile ground for stoking insurgent fire. In spite of their arresting symbolism, the appeal for returning to an organic past in these works yields a limited understanding of the complex grievances of the Delta minorities – from environmental, health, and economic to civic infrastructure – and endorses a mythic violence driven by indigeneity, cultural sovereignty, and militancy.

The confluence of militant and cultural nationalist ambitions is also endemic in other contexts such as Burma where conflicts surrounding ethnic attachment to land and resources are rife. Like Nigeria, Burma is an ethnically diverse nation, made up of a majority of Burmans and a host of minority ethnic groups such as the Karen, Shan, Kachin, and Karenni. In 1947, when the British laid down plans for independent Burma, full autonomy was guaranteed to the minorities, but following the assassination of their nationalist leader Aung San, post-independence Burma under the leadership of U Nu had failed to honor the devolution of power. Soon after Burma's independence in 1948, marginalized groups such as the Karen, Wa, Kachin, and Shan each founded separatist movements claiming autonomy. Clashes between the state and insurgency groups – chief among them being the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA), the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), and the Karenni Army (KA) – have grown progressively violent in the past decades. In 2011, an ethnic armed alliance called the United Nationalities Federation Council (UNFC) was founded. Since the 2021 military coup that overthrew Aung San Suu Kyi's government, a new alliance of People's Defence Force has been formed, made up of the multiple insurgent groups fighting the junta. The growing tensions between the military junta, insurgency groups, and external actors in Burma have lent inspiration to political thrillers such as Geoffrey Archer's *The Burma Legacy* (2002) and Alex O'Brien's *Midnight in Burma* (2001). Prem Sharma's *Escape from Burma* (2007) reveals the excessive violence used by the military junta to contain opposition to the regime. By contrast, Jerome Nugent-Smith's *The Burma Conspiracy* (1995)[30] deals with the burgeoning public dissatisfaction with the military regime as the protagonists, with the help of local insurgency groups, plot a series of conspiracies to overthrow the dictatorship regime.

The rise and fall of military regimes from the heyday of the colonial mandate in Egypt to the Iran-Iraq War have been a perennial theme of Arab literature between 1950 and 1990, which responds to the insurgent

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cultures shaped by four major events in the region: the Egyptian revolution (1952), the Algerian war of independence (1954–1962), the Six-Day War (1967), and the Iran-Iraq War (1980–1988). A salient feature of all these historical events is the mobilization of violence through enchanted solidarity for mythic ideologies such as pan-Arabism and Ba'athism. According to George Sfier, "the Egyptian revolution of 1952, the Algerian war of independence, and the ferment in Syria and Iraq helped to make the 1950's a decade of radicalism in the Arab world and set the stage for the contemporary political novel."[31] In Egypt, an insurgent momentum against the imperially instituted constitutional monarchy and its cultural ramifications is best captured in Naguib Mahfouz's *Autumn Quail* (1962), *Miramar* (1967), and *The Beggar* (1965), and Tawfiq al Hakim's *The Return of Consciousness* (1974).[32] These works are noted for weaving insurgent symbolism not only by rejecting the foreign influences in Egyptian bourgeois society but by cultivating a sense of existential crisis in post-imperial Arab society at large. Subsequently, the pan-Arab nationalism that drew inspiration from the Egyptian revolution had a lasting impact on the Algerian war of independence, one of the most violent yet successful anticolonial insurgencies to date.

While both Egyptian and Algerian resistance movements began as revolts – the former led by Gamal Abdel Nasser, the latter by pro-Ba'athist, socialist, and anti-imperialist leaders such as Larbi Ben M'hidi of the National Liberation Front (FLN) – the novels of Tlahar Wattar and Assia Djebar[33] predominantly featured insurgent plots through myriad means, methods, and mythologies of violence such as suicide (bombing), acts of vengeance, or redemptive justice befitting the parlance of Fanonian catharsis. The same could be said of the novels emanating from the Iran-Iraq War, such as Abd al-Sattar Nasir's collection of short stories *al-Shahid 1777* (Martyr 1777) or Janan Jasim Halawi's *Layl al-bilad* (The Night of the Country),[34] both of which consist of protagonists taking an insurgent path beyond national liberation. In *al-Shahid 1777*, the Moroccan protagonist who joins Saddam Hussein's forces offers his life for a pan-Arabic cause.[35] In other cases, armed and unarmed insurgency (mass protests, civic noncooperation, general strikes) become unlikely bedfellows; the post-Nakba literature is replete with accounts of an entire society of displaced Palestinians turning insurgent – with or without weapons.[36] Novels and short fiction such as Ghassan Kanafani's *Men in the Sun* (1962) and Emile Habiby's *The Secret Life of Saeed: The Ill-Fated Pessoptimist* (1974)[37] are prime examples of the early wave that combined pan-Arab solidarity, anti-imperialism, and a renaissance of anticolonialism infused with socialist ideals.

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The anticipation of the historical trajectories of Sunni-Shia sectarianism, the failures of pan-Arabism, and the (anti)colonial geneses of the ideological schisms between Ba'athism and the Muslim Brotherhood in the first wave of Middle Eastern novels are clearly inflected in the second wave of literature in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks and the Arab Spring (2010), specifically from countries and regions most adversely affected by the "war on terror" campaign: Iraq, Syria, Kurdistan, and Palestine. Unlike the foundationalist discourses or the pan-culturalist ideologies of violence in the preceding generation, as detailed below, the second wave of novels harbor an array of splintered ideologies of insurgency, resistance, resilience, and politics of defeatism that capture the spirit of besieged, paralyzed, and terrorized societies seeking radical uprooting and overhaul of the reigning systems.

Splintered Violence and Disenchanted Solidarity

In India, barely two weeks after the 9/11 attacks, the then Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh declared the Naxalite insurgency a terrorist organization.[38] The succeeding governments by the Indian National Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party invoked the antiterrorism and sedition laws of the colonial era, with strategic amendments in 2004, 2008, and again 2019 to the India's Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act of 1967. The Naxalite insurgency did not surface as a terrorist problem until the spring of 2006 when an estimated forty-five tribal movements across various districts of Orissa, Chhattisgarh, and West Bengal halted development projects and posed a serious threat to some forty new agreements signed between the state and industrial developers (namely, Vedanta, Tata, and Essar) for the extraction of forest and mineral resources such as timber, iron ore, coal, copper, mica, and bauxite in the insurgency-affected areas. In the process, as I have argued elsewhere, the Adivasis and Maoists have emerged as the "new Muslims" of the Indian nation.[39]

In Burma, despite the fact that the international community has ostracized the military junta for over five decades, often labeling Burma a terrorist and rogue state, the United States PATRIOT Act listed its own allies against the regime, such as the Karen National Liberation Army, in the category of terrorist organizations (only to be corrected seven years later). Elsewhere, after September 2002, the militarization of the West African oil region became a top priority of the American Empire under the aegis of "rooting out 'terrorism.'"[40] The Nigerian National Assembly seized the momentum built by the "war on terror" campaign and labeled the Nigerian Delta militancy as a terrorist threat. [41] Today, an intricate

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network of area studies, counter-terrorism studies, and state-sponsored think tanks on India, Nigeria, Burma, and the Middle East has unpacked a subsidiary discourse of "energy security" that is designed to provide military strategies for protecting natural resources such as oil, gas, uranium, and forestry products from terrorist threats in the interests of the safety and stability of world economy.[42]

The pressures created by these complex discourses have led to a major overhaul of the organizing strategies of the insurgencies in the four regions. First, as a number of sociologists and political scientists have noted, the organizational unity forged by vanguard organizations does not necessarily conform to earlier approaches that conceive of the conflicts as a product of competing sovereignties.[43] Instead, it points toward a wide range of political ambitions and grievances of sub-insurgency actors who are brought together by a consolidated ideology of antistatism, wherein the existing state is presented as the common enemy or the detractor of their respective nationalist ambitions, an idea strategically and rhetorically cultivated by vanguard organizations. This view is endorsed by John Mackinlay in his landmark study *Insurgent Archipelago*: "In the post-Maoist era the reasons why men rebel and the long-term goals they espouse have become opaque and less easy to explain. Insurgency has spread into several different categories, and this means that there can be different groups with different causes operating in the same place."[44] By implication, second, such diffused political orientation is no longer premised on a uniform ideological axis of mythic violence – such as ethnic secession or regional or tribal liberation – but is determined by a series of economic, cultural, and resource pressures created by post-9/11 discourses. Consider, for instance, William Ivey's sociological assessment that the Indian Maoists had to constantly reassess their revolutionary goals: in order to keep the Adivasis on their side of the struggle, they needed to "tax" the forest contractors and develop a para-economy within the Indian state.[45] Similarly, in the post-9/11 Burmese context, the struggle for control over resources has led many insurgent groups to shelve their political agendas and use arms instead to protect the forests and procure the basic needs of the community.[46] The Niger Delta conflict is a hotbed of such internal pressures, which, as the Nigerian geographer Elias Courson affirms, has evolved into "a complex mixture of grievance, greed, marginalization, deprivation, political repression and the quest for social equity and justice [which are] are mixed up with historical factors, external actors and local political dynamics."[47] Kimiebi Ebienfa offers a bewildering typology of the insurgent groups at work in the Niger Delta today, which include peaceful/resource agitator

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militancy, political thug militancy, cult group militancy, and, finally, ethnic warlord militancy.[48]

If there is any region that could outperform the Niger Delta in the production of sheer variety of insurgencies, it would be the Middle East. Since the invasion of Iraq, the Middle East has become a hub of transnational insurgency networks and sectarian and factionalist groups within and among Sunni, Shia, Alawites, Kurds, and Hamas. These include al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, the Mujahideen Shura Council, the Islamic Army in Iraq, al-Qaeda in Iraq, the United Jihad Factions Council, and Jaish al-Rashideen.

It is thus not by chance that vanguard organizations such as MEND of Nigeria, Jabhat al-Nusra of Syria, the Islamic Front for the Iraqi Resistance, the UNFC of Burma, and the CPI (Maoist) of India have all emerged during the post-9/11 era as a response to the pressures created by the "war on terror" and its ancillary discourses. The rhetorical unity forged by these vanguard organizations, despite their splintered pathways, as Ranjit Guha reminds us, has been a decisive aspect of insurgent bonding under colonialism:

> When a rural society is polarized so sharply . . . it often leads to generalization of violence making the individuality of other local conflicts merge in the overall confrontation between the subaltern classes and their enemies. No pre-existing tension or dispute remains outside the scope of the insurrection under such circumstances and all antagonisms start functioning as if in an altogether new context.[49]

In Guha's conception of insurgency, it is not that the differences among horizontal communities are erased in the face of an insurgent momentum, but that they are temporarily suspended against a common enemy. While these social science perspectives are primed to explicate the paradoxical phenomena of splintered unity, their empirical overdetermination suffers from both an insufficient attention to cultural phenomena and an inadequate access to reliable sources from the conflict areas.[50] It is here, at this very disjuncture between critique and conjecture, theory and practice that the imaginative powers of fiction, films, autobiography, life-writing, and other narrative forms come to play a decisive role in articulating the current dynamics of these insurgencies.

Unlike mythic violence, splintered violence refers to the infiltration of violence among sub-insurgency actors who use violent resistance as a necessary means for negotiating their respective claims with, and to defend themselves against, the violence of the state. In the Indian case, for instance, Vineet Agarwal's *Romance of a Naxalite* (2006) and Diptendra

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Raychaudhuri's *Seeing through the Stones* (2007)[51] provide compelling fictional accounts of the diffusion of violence among various insurgent groups based on caste and tribal and communal causes, despite their ideological compliance with antistate nationalism and the construction of the state forces and multinational corporations as their common enemy.

Not unlike the Indian experience, the second wave of works on Burma such as Keith Dahlberg's *Flame Tree: A Novel of Modern Burma* (2004) and Pascal Kho Thwe's *From the Land of Green Ghosts* (2002)[52] sheds light on the changing alliances among Karen, Kachin, Shan, and Padaung rebels, while popular fiction such as Randolph O'Hara's *The Homecoming* (2005) delves into the external interventions in the conflict(s) by intelligence and counter-terrorism agencies in India and Thailand as well as the CIA.[53] In Mitali Perkins's *Bamboo People* (2012), two young soldiers, one belonging to the Burmese military regime, and the other to the Karenni insurgency, find unlikely compassion and common ground in the face of economic hardship and depletion of forest resources.[54]

In the Niger Delta, similar literary responses in the form of novels, docufictions, and reportage accounts such as Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow* (2006), Christie Watson's *Tiny Sunbirds Far Away* (2011), Michael Peel's *A Swamp Full of Dollars* (2009), Helon Habila's *Oil on Water* (2010), and Andrew Berends's *Delta Boys* (2012)[55] have selectively emphasized the role of foreign oil companies and their host countries in the growing militarization against oil piracy in the Delta region. These works provide a fictional voyage into the organized violence under the auspices of antistate oil-nationalism, and the formation of various splinter groups in response to ecological pollution, precarity, and poverty among the so-called oil communities of Ogoni, Efik, Ijaw, Urhobo, and Ogoja peoples. While the very juxtaposition of the terms "oil" and "communities" alludes to the inextricable ("epistemic") relationship between ecology, resources, and insurgency, as Kathryn Nwajiaku-Dahou notes, such relationship in the Niger Delta does not necessarily constitute a linear political trajectory with sovereign ambitions:

> Today the resurgence of militant forms of Ijaw ethnic nationalism, against the backdrop of oil community protests which have been taking place since the early 1990s, has given rise to new interpretations of the war, and the creation of new political linkages between Ijaw nationalists, other Niger Delta minorities, and Igbo pro-Biafra movements.[56]

In *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), Chimamanda Adichie's frequent allusion to Ijaw minorities as the weakest links or the "saboteurs" of the Biafran war

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constructs a revisionist discourse among the Delta minorities whose historical grievances have been "complicated by contemporary political struggles over oil."[57]

Generically distinct from the first wave, post-9/11 literature from the Middle East moves beyond naturalistic and realistic portrayals of death and destruction. Instead, in a Bataillean sense,[58] they register death as an excess, a poetic and *symbolic* expenditure, while generically experimenting with irrealism or magical realism as well as the Gothic. Iraqi writers such as Sinan Antoon, Hassan Blasim, and Ahmad Saadawi are prime examples of this genre. In Antoon's novels, particularly *I'jaam* (2007) and *The Corpse Washer* (2013),[59] art, heritage, tradition, and national culture are staged as the insurgent weapons that would reconnect the broken syntax of Iraqi culture in the face of imperialist necropolitics. In contrast to Antoon's silent insurgency, Hassan Blasim's stories feature artistic competitions of embellishing corpses, and tales of perpetrators and victims whose insurgent alterity is made possible by the accidental exchange of flesh from one another.[60] The splintered nature of such insurgent violence, that is, organized violence in the absence of a mythic ideology, is a signature theme of Arab Spring novels such as Yasmine El Rashidi's *Chronicle of a Last Summer* (2016) and Saleem Haddad's *Guapa* (2016). Palestinian resistance novels such as Yasmina Khadra's *The Attack* (2007)[61] or the Kurdish novelist Kae Bahar's *Letters from a Kurd* (2014)[62] offer equally compelling examples of disenchanted solidarity as expressed through veritable suicide plots, misguided revolutionaries, and betrayed insurgencies and revolutions.

Given the complex constellations of resource-based, nationalist, and liberationist tendencies of the insurgencies outlined above, it comes as no surprise that this second wave of literature refrains from extending an enchanted solidarity to the oppressed or marginalized, thereby disavowing the pervasive culture of violence that insurgencies have come to embrace. As Helon Habila's cynical protagonist puts it, surrounded by soldiers, kidnapping gangs, and oil pirates, the Delta has more need for "gravediggers than for a doctor."[63] It is thus no surprise that instead of revolutionaries, ideologues, or nationalist liberators, this new wave of writers features the victims of violence as their protagonists: refugees, sex slaves, political prisoners (Wendy Law-Yone), disenchanted Marxists (Ojaide), disheartened Maoists, and vigilante groups (Chakravarti).[64]

These literary trajectories of splintered violence, and their political implications to disenchanted solidarity against the "destructive hurricane"[65] of excessive violence, pose a formidable challenge to the

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dichotomous configurations of mythic violence that led to the (mis)recognition of conflicts as the products of competing and incommensurable ideologies fueled by sovereign ambitions. By virtue of its enchanted solidarity for the oppressed, the ideological framing in the first wave of insurgency literature has inadvertently contributed to the canonization of mythic violence, one that fed into the post-9/11 discourses of energy security and the war on terror. In an attempt to reformulate this uneasy conflation of terrorism with postcolonial insurgencies, this book draws from a selection of examples in the second wave of literature outlined above – fourteen novels, three works of literary journalism, and two autobiographies/life fictions, representing India, Nigeria, Burma, Iraq, Kurdistan, Israel, and Palestine. The generic as well as the geographical diversity of this literary corpus is aimed at developing a body of literary criticism and an adequate theoretical language that captures the emergent insurgent cultures in the Global South beyond the normative discourses on terrorism, or the nostalgic parlance of revolution.

Unframing the Insurgent: Violence at the Limits of Literary Criticism

At the onset of the anticolonial insurgency in Malaysia, the colonial office in London issued a directive to the Defence Department: "It has been decided that the criminal elements engaged in acts of violence in Malaya should be referred to as 'bandits.' On no account should the term 'insurgents,' which might suggest a genuine popular uprising, be used."[66] As the insurgency unfolded, this strategy proved to be a public relations disaster not just for the colonial office but for the entire British government; questions arose from their Cold War allies as to why 50,000 British soldiers were deployed against such a dismissible enemy and why they had managed to kill only 500 of the bandits after combing through the Malayan jungle, and, worse still, why an equal number of British soldiers had died in 1951 alone.[67] After flirting with every other term in the catalogue of colonial criminology – ruffians, rebels, guerrillas, thugs – that would make a dismissible enemy out of the Malayan insurgents, the British finally settled on a label that oozed originality: "communist terrorist."[68] If the objective of British rule was to discredit the political legitimacy of the Malayan insurgency, as Phillip Deery concedes, the label "terrorism" was indeed a better choice than the other available alternatives, given its draconian character.

Such were the sweeping powers of the label that "even before Palestinian plane hijackings, Irish Republican bombings or Italian Red Brigade

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assassinations . . . 'terrorist' was one of the most misleading words in the English language."[69] The adjective "misleading" here is perhaps a misnomer; it was the most potent term to have been employed by the colonizing powers against a whole host of anticolonial insurgencies since the 1857 Sepoy Revolt, the Mau Mau uprising (1952–1960), the Morant Bay Rebellion (1865), the Algerian War of Independence (1954–1962), uMkhonto we Sizwe (1961–1994), the armed wing of the African National Congress, and the Azad Hind Fauj (1945).

From its origins in the French revolution to its outsourcing to the colonies, particularly French Algeria and the British Raj, the discourse has shifted in emphasis from the ideology of terrorism to the figure of the terrorist. As Margaret Scanlan reminds us, "to call people terrorists is to condemn them; those of whom we approve are, of course, soldiers, liberators, partisans, freedom fighters, or revolutionaries; even *guerilla* remains more neutral."[70] In an age of post-panoptical biopolitics, Joseph Pugliese pushes this abject figuration of the terrorist from bare life to bare carcass.[71] Once you label a group of people as terrorists, you can do anything to them outside the legal limits: strip them of their rights, their clothes, their skin, and treat their bodies as though they were pieces of meat, as we have witnessed in the case of Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq. The body of the terrorist becomes so carcerally encoded that it is neither sacrificial nor ungrievable life, but an expendable life, to use the words of Georges Bataille.[72] A terrorist, by definition, is excess of both life and terror, an excess that has *no* use value, an excess that has been systemically othered and outsourced to the colonies in the aftermath of the French revolution. If the French revolution signaled a shift in the use of terror as deterrent violence by the state to "non-state violence aimed at the state or the citizens which the state is obliged to protect,"[73] then French imperialism "came to shape the conditions of possibility of the twentieth-century dispositif of terrorism during the Algerian revolution."[74] Posed this way, the violence used by the French forces against the Algerian revolutionaries is nothing more than a "reenactment of a historical precedent":[75] the Reign of Terror. In effect, the colonial framing of the Algerian revolution as terrorist had less to do with imperialist anxieties and ambitions than, say, the French Empire's cathartic drive to justify the colonizer's own terror as counter-terrorism.[76]

After the fall of *le Directoire* in 1799, the need to keep a safe distance from violence[77] has resulted not only in the aestheticization of terror as a sublime object, to be reserved and preserved for such extraordinary events as the French revolution where a complete overhaul of society could be

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envisioned, but also in the relocation of this object of terror in the colonial subject. It thus comes as no surprise that Edmund Burke, who is often credited with the coinage of the term "terrorism" with reference to the Reign of Terror,[78] took such keen interest in the Warren Hastings trial in India in which the Indian natives were depicted as both the embodiments and the victims of colonial terror.[79]

By the mid-nineteenth century, this latent Orientalism in locating the objects of terror has gradually been pressed into militant action, as manifest Orientalism. As Stephen Morton observes, the colonial framing of terrorism may have been implicit to the post-1857 security laws in India:

> In 1867, the British Indian government passed a law proscribing the publication of seditious writing, or literature that was deemed to promote disaffection with the British colonial government. In the eyes of the British government, the literature of sedition served to establish a connection between literature and "terrorism." The proscription of books, pamphlets and newspapers in British India on the grounds that they were seditious has a history that can be traced back to the Press and Registration of Books Act in 1867.[80]

This was followed by a series of colonial policies and legal enactments in the guise of emergency and sedition laws, including the Martial Law of Morant Bay (Jamaica, 1865), the Peace Preservation Act of 1870 (Ireland) and the Criminal Law and Procedure Act of 1887 (Ireland), the 1914 Defence of the Realm Act (India), the Defence of India Act (1915), the publication of the Sedition Committee Report in 1918 and the Rowlatt Act of 1919 (India), the Anarchical and Revolutionary Crimes Act of 1919, the British Defence (Emergency) Regulations of 1936–1939 and 1945 (Israel/Palestine), the British Emergency Powers (Defence) Act of 1939 (Kenya), the Malayan Emergency Regulations ordinance of 1948, and the state of emergency decree of 1955 in French Algeria ("Article 12 of the law").[81]

Notwithstanding such deep colonial immersion (and investment) in the figure of the terrorist in Euro-American discourses, early literary responses[82] to terrorism became chiefly preoccupied with the dynamite plots, and the Fenian bombing campaign (1881–1885) by Irish republicans. Barbara Melchiori's *Terrorism in the Late Victorian Novel* (1985),[83] one of the first literary critiques to appear on the subject, focuses on the methods and means used for terrorism and the sense of spectrality, awe, and sublime that dynamite explosions evoked among Londoners. Subsequently, Deaglán Ó Donghaile's *Blasted Literature* (2011)[84] complicates the reception of the dynamite novels by reading the explosive nature of blasted plots alongside the radical impulses of modernism:

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> [T]he act of dynamiting became translated into modernism's militant blasts against the inert weight of the literary establishment. The symbolic political destructiveness of the Fenian and anarchist bomb had a literary analogue in modernism's desire to blow up the norms of literary tradition and reconstitute writing as a revolutionary and intensely personal form of expression (in this way modernist shock reacts against its origins in the popular mass reading of the 1880s and 1890s).[85]

In a previous study on the intersections of terrorism and modernism, Alex Houen focuses on the figurative affinity between terrorism and the modernist form, arguing that if the very discourse of post-9/11 terrorism is hyperbolic, then it "is an index of the way that performative aspects of discourse generally, and figurative language in particular, can affect the nature of material events, just as material events can modulate discursive practices."[86] While this interlinking of the material discourse (which is in excess of rhetoric) with the figurative discourse of language goes a long way in deconstructing the institutionalist biases inherent to the very conception of terrorism, a good deal of early literary criticism on terrorism does not venture beyond the European shores. The usual suspects that repeatedly surface in the pages of late Victorian and early modernist literature on terrorism include Tom Greer's A *Modern Daedalus* (1885), Marie Corelli's *The Sorrows of Satan* (1895), Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent* (1907), Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Dynamiter* (1885), Richard Henry Savage's *The Anarchist: A Story of To-Day* (1894), Henry James's *The Princess Casamassima* (1886), and H. G. Wells's *The War of the Worlds* (1898). With the exception of Wells's classic, almost all of the other novels are set in Europe, and treat the subject of terrorism with a sense of trepidation and aesthetic endearment – including Wells's oblique reference to the British genocide of the Tasmanians in the same breath as the Martian invasion of the Earth – befitting the Burkean sublime: terror is best consumed from a safe distance. As Ó Donghaile puts it:

> Certainly, it [the Dynamite terrorism] frightened the public, but many late Victorian readers found having their "nerves," or political conceptual faculties, shattered a very thrilling experience, as proven by their eager consumption of popular narratives of revolutionary violence, and especially of those that showcased the kind of destructive workmanship featured in the Strand. Fenian bombs entertained as much as they terrified and appealed to sensation-hungry readers of penny dreadfuls and popular magazines.[87]

From the standpoint of those at the receiving end of violence, however, "terror was not merely an aesthetic experience or feeling, but a brutal material and corporeal experience of sovereign power in the raw."[88] Given

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both the political and aesthetic foundations of terrorism in colonialism that I have sketched above, to one's surprise, the novels featuring criminal plots that portrayed native figures as the objects of terror, especially works that emerged in the wake of the anxieties surrounding the 1857 Indian national mutiny, such as Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* (1901), Sir Conan Doyle's *The Sign of Four* (1890), and Edmund Candler's *Siri Ram Revolutionist* (1912), did not receive the same critical attention as the dynamite plots. Even a century later, terrorism did not fare any better on the other side of the Atlantic: American literary criticism, too, fell prey to its usual inward-gazing, narcissistic modus in times of crisis, turning to the national trauma resulting from the 9/11 attacks, with an excessive focus on domesticity, mourning, and the spectrality of the falling of the Twin Towers.[89] It is thus no exaggeration to say that, on both sides of the Atlantic, the figure of the terrorist has been overdetermined by aesthetic concerns and formulations at the expense of its political subjectivity.

Margaret Scanlan's *Plotting Terror* (2001), incidentally published in the same year as the 9/11 attacks, makes a significant contribution to this body of literature by bridging the gap between dynamite plotters, modernists, American literary critics, and the postcolonial counter-critics. Challenging the "imputation of violence or underhandedness" of the label "terrorist," Scanlan sees writers – including postcolonial writers, as she demonstrates in her later work[90] – act as both rivals and doubles of terrorist figures.[91] Other postcolonial critics, however, seem less concerned about this paradoxical association between the writer and the terrorist. If the "war on terror" sprang to life from "the spectacular horror of 9/11"[92] for some, then such "horror" is no more, and no less, than a ghostly interlude in the annals of long-twentieth-century imperialism. Neil Lazarus has famously argued that America's war against terrorism is an attempt at refashioning imperialism for the twenty-first century.[93] In a similar vein, Elleke Boehmer and Stephen Morton trace the colonial geneses of terrorism to theories of the sublime that removed terror from the European domain and deposited it in the "non-European as a figure of fear and terror."[94] Since a repetition of this construction has characterized both the aestheticization and spectralization of 9/11 in media, theory, and texts, they set out to "re-interrogate the histories of violent colonial occupation, and also resistances to such forms of occupation, and the terroristic or subterroristic shapes and rhetoric these histories and forms have taken."[95] This approach marks a decisive shift in focus from the victims of terrorism (as in the bulk of 9/11 fiction) to the figure of the terrorist himself: "He who inflicts terror himself, having once been its victim, is the quintessential contested subject of the postcolony."[96]

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Such victimization under colonialism does not necessarily lead to a political passivity of the postcolonial subject, but rather produces a paradoxical association between death and agency.[97] In his reading of the figure of the suicide bomber, Achille Mbembe draws a subtle theoretical trajectory from the Hegelian notion of death as an object of the aesthetic sublime to death as a form of escape, or even a "release," from a permanent state of being in pain.[98] Buoyed by these theoretical cues, literary criticism after 9/11 became solely preoccupied with counterdiscourses to Orientalist and imperialist representations of migrants, Muslims, and religious nationalists in postcolonial novels.[99] This counterdiscursive approach, however, fulfills a self-serving purpose: far from accounting for the modalities of violence in literary texts from the postcolony, it concerns itself with the crisis *in* Western representations of terrorism itself. This aporia is symptomatic of the very literary corpus used by some postcolonial critics to reject the Orientalist framing of terrorism, which features straightforward terrorist plots: Sahar Khalifeh's *The End of Spring* (2008), Slimane Benaïssa's *The Last Night of a Damned Soul* (2004), John Updike's *The Terrorist* (2006), and Ian McEwan's *Saturday* (2005), to name a few.[100] In their eagerness to humanize the terrorist figure in post-9/11 fiction and film, the critics' lack of attention to the literary and cultural production of *other* forms of violence in the postcolonial world fails to do justice to the spirit of their own argument. Put differently, if we are to demonstrate that what is portrayed as terrorism in the so-called 9/11 novel is actually *not* terrorism, but some other form of violence (often excluded or "displaced" by the writers, as Scanlan puts it),[101] then the onus is upon the critic to identify, name, and conceptualize what those forms of violence are – be they insurgencies, rebellions, paranationalist movements, or secessionist insurrections.

Current postcolonial scholarship on terrorism falls short of this critical task, and it is only recently that works in comparative and world literature studies have begun to decisively move away from the terrorist novels set in the Euro-American hemisphere to peripheral violence, nonstate violence, and "binding violence" in the Global South, from French Martinique to Mexico, Vietnam, Brazil, India, and the Dominican Republic, among others.[102] Slavoj Žižek's attempt to revive Walter Benjamin's notion of "divine violence"' as the law-founding violence – as opposed to the law-preserving violence as well as "softened" and "decaffeinated" versions of Frantz Fanon's retributive violence – may be added to this list.[103] Although, for critics, the postcolonial nation-building process is fraught with contested narratives about belonging, which are made possible by the construction of communal unbelonging, the violent responses triggered by

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such politics of inclusion by exclusion have not been treated as equal partners in such contested narratives. In the polarized world of post-9/11 security, violence, it is deemed, has no narrative, although there is a set, if not celebrated, precedent for reading insurgency in the colonizer's "prose of counter-insurgency" in the Subaltern Studies project.[104]

Even before the advent of Subaltern Studies, Frantz Fanon famously epitomized insurgent agency: "the starving peasant, outside the class system, is the first among the exploited to discover that only violence pays."[105] As colonization itself is a violent process, harnessed to the Manichean logic of protecting good from evil and worth from waste, counter-violence serves as "a cleansing force" or even the "oxygen" of national resistance for the colonized subject who, in Fanon's view, fears life "more than death."[106] However, as Hannah Arendt has cautioned, a major limitation of Fanon's work is his objectification of an otherwise unpredictable nature of all violence; his advocacy for insurgent nationalism suffers from a hyperbolic formulation of the colonizer as the ultimate evil and the colonized as the penultimate victim.[107] In other words, Fanon fails to anticipate how, once liberated, postcolonial nation-states themselves could replicate the colonizer's model of violence in suppressing dissent, difference, or marginalized minority groups within the nation. As if capitalizing on this theoretical aporia, Achille Mbembe's coinage of necropolitics as "subjugation of life to the power of death"[108] extends Fanon's subversive formulation on the fears of "life over death" to the postcolonial context.

Taking her cue from Mbembe, Moira Fradinger reads the Trujillo massacre of Haitians in the Dominican Republic, via Mario Vargas Llosa's novella *The Feast of the Goat* (2010), as violence that binds "the most powerless and most powerful as part of a structure of enmity whose two polar opposites alternatively embody figures inimical to the fantasized unity of the nation."[109] "Leaping out of" the dichotomous impasse between the "violence of institutionalized power versus the violence of insurgency" in the "modern excrescences of violence," Fradinger argues, through a comparative reading of Marquis de Sade's *The 120 Days* of *Sodom* (1785), Sophocles's *Antigone* (442 BCE), and Vargas Llosa's *The Feast of the Goat*, that "the politicization of the dead figures a specific communal form of binding violence, an exceptional machinery that, powered by human blood, solves membership in the guise of protecting communal life."[110]

While these literary incursions into the communal dimension of violence require an alternative vocabulary to the discourses of terrorism, critical responses have often veered toward a statist or sovereign-centrist tradition of theorizing political power, with undue emphasis on the

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techniques and tactics used by the sovereign entities to amass, organize, govern, and execute power. In Mbembe's thesis on necropolitics, for instance, it is the founding violence of colonialism that forms the basis for what he calls the "colonial commandment" through which African elites self-authorize violence, often reengineering and reenacting the terrors visited upon the native populations. Similarly, in the postcolonial context, Mbembe holds the imperialist war machinery as the prime executioner of necropolitics. In particular, Mbembe draws attention to its vertical sovereignty – both figuratively and literally – of dominating the perceived enemy through a top-down chain of command, from the skies to underground tunnels. The same critique holds true for Fradinger, whose reading of "necropolitical links"[111] or bonds created through violence is confined to the perpetrators of violence, not its victims. It is among the Dominicans that the bonds of blood are created at the expense of the Haitians, and similarly it is the "libertines," not "the victims" in Marquis de Sade's *The 120 Days* of *Sodom* who are bound by violence.

Nonetheless, Fradinger hesitantly guides her reader toward the formation of violent bonds among victims – on a horizontal axis – in her reading of Sophocles's epic. Creon's edict to deny the funeral rites to Antigone's brother Polynices kills two birds with one stone; it creates an inside of the community, against which the vertical bonds between Creon's friends and loyalists are forged. Although Fradinger does not elaborate it as explicitly as she does the latter's hold on Thebes, she leaves enough intuitive cues on the horizontal bonds of violence among "the traitors":

> We see signs of disobedience from the beginning: the men who object to Creon's edict before Creon becomes a king; the elders who refuse to guard the unburied body; the guard who brings the news that there has been either disobedience or negligence in guarding the body; the elders again who hint at their dislike when they suggest that the dusting of the body might have been the work of the gods; the guard who finally brings Antigone. Only after these hints of disobedience do we witness Antigone's rebellion, Ismene's momentary alliance with her, Haemon's fight with his father, the city's rumor of Antigone's glory, the priest's omen, and finally, Eurydice's condemnation of Creon and her subsequent suicide.[112]

Fradinger's allusion to the phenomenon of rebellious bonds between a horizontal community of peers, equals, exiles, and the persecuted, which includes elders, guards, priests, commoners, and estranged noblemen, opens space for what I would call a "necropolitics from below." In the cramped space of intimate enemies and familial feuds, the necropolitics of the sovereign and the necropolitics of the subaltern feed off each other,

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giving rise to insurgent cultures in a shared domain of sovereignty between the oppressor and the oppressed. A similar move can be observed in Mbembe's "Necropolitics," from which Fradinger draws her reading of binding violence. Toward the end of his essay, Mbembe makes a swift move from traditional power to technological occupation, and to the African elite, the use of private armies, extrajudicial killings, and purchase of military power in the open market outside the sovereign ambit, which create space for insurgent cultures, or necropolitics from below:

> Many African states can no longer claim a monopoly on violence and on the means of coercion within their territory. . . . Neighboring states or rebel movements lease armies to poor states. Nonstate deployers of violence supply two critical coercive resources: labor and minerals. Increasingly, the vast majority of armies are composed of citizen soldiers, child soldiers, mercenaries, and privateers.[113]

Mbembe's view that necropolitics requires absolute sovereign control to render targeted populations lifeless while they are alive does not rule out the possibility that the same techniques – private armies and the trading of militant power in the open market – could be used by non-sovereign entities vying for power. Although this subtraction of necropolitics from the vertical axis of sovereign power and its depositing in the non-sovereign domain of rebels, rogues, and warlords make no references to colonialism, and appear fairly late in Mbembe's essay, this move emulated Ranjit Guha's thesis on the formation of the horizontal bonds among peasant insurgents in colonial India. In his preface to Guha's *Elementary Aspects of Insurgency in Colonial India*, anthropologist James Scott captures the spirit of Guha's argument:

> In place of formal organization of the office-bearers, manifestos, and table of organization Guha finds informal networks of kinship, coresidence, ethnicity, ritual links, or a common subordination; in place of formal messages and public conflict, Guha finds the world of rumour, anonymous threat, arson, and supernatural attacks; in place of radical public movements, he finds banditry, low level-resistance, and symbolic attacks on elite property and status.[114]

If formal messages, desk clerks, and bureaucratic insignia represent the vertical hierarchy of sovereign discourses, then rumor, symbolic disobedience, sabotage, ritual, and religious symbols used to mobilize peasants across a community of peers, who may not always be equals, are the lifeblood of colonial insurgency. The formation of horizontal alliances through solidarities, an inherited and shared sense of victimhood, affective

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injustices, and routinized and naturalized violence among non-sovereign actors form the basis for the reading of the insurgent cultures in the chapters to follow. Guha's views on vertical power and horizontal resistance find their echoes in other postcolonial contexts. The Senegalese philosopher Souleymane Bachir Diagne holds that if horizontal universalism is one in which all communities contribute toward a collective vision of humanity, verticality, on the other hand, is of a piece with the logics of imperialism and its hierarchical ordering of the world.[115] For Arjun Appadurai, in a clash of the "vertebral" (the old nationalist and ideological formations) and "cellular" social structures (local-level, diversified, heterogenous networks), the globalization of violence unfolds at both ends of the spectrum, the state and the nonstate, the oppressor and oppressed, the military and the militants. The production of environmentally precarious subjects, insurgents, and jihadists in this sense is nothing more than "a metastasis of war,"[116] in which the terrorists, insurgents, or all other nonstate violent actors become soldiers detached from the nation. In his recent study, Joel Nickels rightly cautions *against* reading the resistance of such nonstate actors through statist historiographies or the binaries of nationalism and cosmopolitanism that literary studies have constructed. There exists, Nickels argues, "an entire world of territorially based struggles aimed at constructing forms of self-government outside of the state, maintaining power bases in sustained conflict with the state, or assembling organs of struggle that are state-dystonic."[117]

This book takes insurgent cultures to be an assemblage of state-dystonic organs such as rebels, rogues, private militias, picaros, precarious subjects, revolutionary ideologues, intimate enemies, corpse washers, and digital guerrillas. Yet the book is concerned not merely with the alliances and bonds cultivated by nonstate actors themselves but also with the solidarities extended by state actors, writers, journalists, and the revolutionized middle classes who relinquish their privileges to join ranks with the former, often with surprising or at times tragic results.

Narrating Insurgency: World, Periphery, and the Vernacular

The "world" of territorially based struggles that Nickels alludes to is one that stretches from the shores of the Antilles to the backwaters of Kerala, across the terrain of time, history, and space that cuts through competing European empires, their linguistic heritages, and the multiple vernacular traditions that comply, cohabit, and collide with such histories of domination. Any attempt at capturing these worlds in the literal sense of the term

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needs to grapple with the affordances of the world literature debate despite the fact that its early proponents have paid little attention to the significance of insurgent resistance by nonstate actors and their contributions to the forging of worldly bonds. Consider, for instance, Edward Said's brilliant juxtaposition of the tropes of violence and world-making in *Culture and Imperialism*:

> One of imperialism's achievements was to bring the world closer together, and although in the process the separation between Europeans and natives was an insidious and fundamentally unjust one, most of us should now regard the historical experience of empire as a common one. The task then is to describe it as pertaining to Indians and Britishers, Algerians and French, Westerners and Africans, Asians, Latin Americans, and Australians despite the horrors, the bloodshed, and the vengeful bitterness.[118]

The caveat here – "despite the horrors, the bloodshed, and the vengeful bitterness" – is indeed a glaring testament to Said's recognition of the insurrectional figures in the postcolonial tradition, from Fanon to C. L. R. James to Conrad. While recording colonial violence, these figures also promulgated the view, in their own contorted ways, that if the world as we know it is brought together by the violence of nineteenth-century colonialism, then the ensuing responsive violence,[119] in the name of new national cultures, is the defining feature of the decolonial world vis-à-vis postcolonial world-making. In the imperialist mapping of the world into the proverbial three worlds, which Gayatri Spivak calls the "worlding of the world," "the violence of the rift" manifests itself as "the multifarious thingliness of a represented world on a map."[120] If imperialist worlding conflates space with "multifarious thingliness" or the "historical experience of empire" common to colonized subjects, to use Said's words again, then any renewed conception of the world must venture beyond a spatial mapping of the planet – as conglomeration of nations and former colonies – and embrace the temporalities that inhabit that space. These temporalities, if understood here as a shorthand for intersubjective, affective, ethicomoral and even spiritual yet cognizable abstractions, are constitutive of shared experiences (through imperialism), modernities, and inner histories – a struggle-based, subject-centered, and resistance-laden conception of the world. The shared experiences of responsive violence in such worlds, despite the vast chasm of colonial cultures that shaped them, bear the traces of what Auritro Majumder defines as "peripheral aesthetics," which arise out of not only the "disjunctive and discontinuous experience" of colonialism but also a "resisting impulse" common to that experience "which seeks to abolish its conditions of emergence."[121]

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In the current debates on world literature, however, the resisting impulses that underpin the temporalities of a struggle-based conception of world have not received as much attention as the spatial coordinates and configurations of the field: aesthetic merit, tastes, literary market, competition of national letters, readership, variations in consumption habits, among others. A good deal of the world literature debate today is preoccupied with the idea of the coming together and competing of national letters on a world stage, subject to the aesthetic protocols imparted by the literary traditions of the metropolis.[122] For some, such competition has comparative advantage, by which national letters can reach out to the readers beyond their cultures of origin and stake a claim in the global literary market.[123] For others, this literary market is the product of an unequal world system of dependency, in which national letters from the periphery simply cater to the literary demands from the center, which includes specific literary form(s) manufactured by the market.[124] Neil Lazarus in particular cautions us that the structural inequalities that shape and sustain such systems should not be conflated with cultural difference. Apropos Franco Moretti, this conflation for Lazarus could be overcome by a "distant reading" that, unlike close reading's penchant for meaning and difference, shifts emphasis to the structural inequalities of the world: "a common reference provided by global capital and its requirements."[125] If the post-9/11 discourses of terrorism, too, are tributaries of such common reference, then it is entirely possible to read the spatial and temporal configurations of insurgent cultures across diverse cultural geographies as convergent rather than divergent, commensurable rather than contradictory. Aamir Mufti issues a similar corrective by suggesting that distant reading is no panacea for the perils of "close reading": "what is needed is *better* close reading, attentive to the worldliness of language and text at various levels of social reality, from the highly localized to the planetary as such."[126] Structural inequalities, in other words, are invariably constituted as aesthetic difference (such as Orientalism) at the level of their vernacular iterations and local configurations.[127]

Taking its cue from these various conceptual moves drawing away from the spatial and planetary centrality toward "historical experiences of empire" (Said), "the multifarious thingliness of a represented world on a map" (Spivak), the "highly localized social realities" (Mufti), and peripheral aesthetics and inequalities (Lazarus and Majumder), this book draws attention to the contributions made to world literature by texts emanating from vernacular contexts. However, my use of "vernacular" here is by no means associated with the periphery of a singular core, nor is it a shorthand

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for the "domestic," the "authentic," or all things non-Anglophone. Instead, it is a "categor[y] located within the specificity of place, simultaneously metaphoric with respect to multiple mediations of the imagination through spatial unfolding of territories. We cannot rely on a vernacular as a 'natural state' from which we extrapolate its pristine meanings."[128]

Modes of vernacular expressions, in this sense, can also exist in the same "vehicular" and "major" language such as English. For instance, the strength of some of the Anglophone texts discussed in this book – Tony Nwaka's *Lords of the Creek*, Diptendra Raychaudhuri's *Seeing through the Stones*, or Diti Sen's *Red Skies & Falling Stars* (2012)[129] – lies in the vernacular worlds they paint, not in their vernacular use of English. A conservative critic would dub these Anglophone texts, despite their vernacular riches, as "lowbrow" or "trash" literature. This, as my readings show, is far from being the case. These novels, which are produced outside the mainstream literary market, driven by the need to tell a story in which the authors themselves are deeply entangled, are prime examples of vernacular aesthetics from the periphery. Such vernacularism is characterized by a demotic appropriation of the *langue* of the law and order by the *parole* of the people.[130]

Yet it would be erroneous to assume that a "better closer reading," *pace* Mufti, may be achieved through vernacular texts than in those "born-translated"[131] Anglophone texts that cater to metropolitan tastes, for the same market forces that shape world literature also shape the process of selection, translation, and marketing of such texts outside their domestic circuits of readership. This holds true for the translation of English into vernacular languages as well. It would therefore be equally erroneous to assume that texts written in vernacular languages are better representatives of the postcolonial worlds than their Anglophone counterparts. In a translation of Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy*, for instance, the scene in which Chamar castes (untouchables) are skinning an animal was deleted, or rather "vegetarianized," so as to not offend the upper-caste elite, especially the Brahmins, who might be incensed by the act.[132] Thus, the implied association of Anglophone texts and English translations with literary fraternity and cultural capital holds equally well for vernacular hierarchies. In Arab Anglophone contexts, as Geoffrey Nash observes, while a number of women novelists writing in English tend to Orientalize their homelands (Ahdaf Soueif's *In the Eye of the Sun* [1992]), English translations from Arabic (e.g., Rajaa Alsanea's novel *The Girls of Riyadh* [2007]) do the reverse: they sacrifice certain vernacular formulations (of lexis, landscapes, or objects) and stylize their female characters so as to cater to a global readership.[133] At the same time, writers operating from their home

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countries either are subjected to censorship regimes or self-censor their work in a climate of fear and persecution.

Given these entangled politics of representation in Anglophone, vernacular, and translated texts, my readings here are guided by the view that the resistance mounted by vernacular heterogeneity against the perceived hegemony of world literary texts does not automatically amount to diversity or a critique of inequality. Instead, the tension between the vernacularized Englishes and Anglicized vernaculars is suggestive of a globalized modernity in which the so-called West as a departure point of modernity is dethroned, and multiple peripheral sites shaped by capitalism emerge as the former's contenders.[134] Thus, rather than "forgetting English" in the name of the vernacular resurgence,[135] a productive engagement with the vernacular elements within Anglophone literary cultures may best serve the sort of world literature debate the texts analyzed in this book endorse. As Arundhati Roy has eloquently argued, the very idea of mother tongue today is appropriated by communalists, ethnonationalists, and separatist ideologues alike to create "alien-mother's other tongues" within a seemingly homogenous vernacular tradition.[136] If conflict is integral to the construction of vernacular worlds and traditions, then the founding violence of worlding and world-making becomes all the more normative. This is best captured in Pheng Cheah's conception of struggle-based, nonutilitarian, affective, and temporally conceived worlds that is anchored by the "play of social forces" as opposed to the conglomeration of nations or spatially contained cultures.[137] In the debates of the Anthropocene, such play of social forces is rendered as the play of human humans and nonhuman humans. If nonhuman humans are a non-ontological geophysical force on par with asteroids that could physically transform the world, then human humans are an ontological category, endowed with a sense of inner history through "differently scaled" experiences and struggles in this history: "Humans have a sense of ontic belonging. That is undeniable. We used that knowledge in developing both anticolonial (Fanon) and postcolonial criticism."[138] This struggle-based conception of human ontology is of a piece with the temporality of its inner world, shaped by the violence internal to the ontology of human humans. Consider, for instance, the very emergence of *Homo sapiens* on this planet some 300,000 years ago, which is believed to have been made possible by the extinction of our fellow human race, the Neanderthals in Europe. By extension, apropos Said, if the world as we know it was brought together by violence, a parallel world of anticolonial and postcolonial violence sprang to life in its wake.

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These discursive resuscitations of violence as the founding principle of the world and "world order" and the ensuing responsive violence that contests the containing borders of the world give way to another resuscitation: the vernacular (cont)texts as equal participants in the process of "world-making" as well as the debates on world literature. This double resuscitation – of violence and the vernacular – has significant implications for the understanding of insurgency literatures and cultures not only as political artifacts but, more importantly, as a series of aesthetic and formal interventions with the potential to redraw the coordinates of the world from the vantage point of a peripheral imagination. As Michael Niblett's notion of "aesthetics of the commodity frontiers" exemplifies, in the face of the peripheral resistance to resource extraction, "[t]he particular historical and cultural contexts in which individual works originate, as well as the distinct political ecologies of these commodities, will impart an irreducible specificity to their fictional or poetic mediation."[139] In the context of the Caribbean sugar commodity frontier, Niblett offers the example of Grace Nichols' poem "Sugar Cane": while formally crafted to mimic the upright structure of the cane, the undulating knots in the stem unravel the truths of the crimes and the violence committed in its name. Much the same way, Joel Nickels reads the formal devices in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* such as the symbolic symbiosis of the seemingly disconnected social groups – the factory laborers, untouchables, and "failed developmental bourgeoisie" – as "an attempt to imagine a nonstate development project that could somehow borrow elements from rural insurgency programs, proletarian internationalism, and decentralized development initiatives such as those undertaken in Kerala in the late 1960s."[140]

Against the prevailing tradition of employing world and globe as heuristic categories, the vernacular positioning of world literature, as in the above examples, lays bare the disruptive, at times disjunctive, nature of peripheral resistance internal to their poetics and fictional form. The usual tendency in postcolonial studies is to read literature on resistance and violent insurgencies through the lens of realism ("life as it is," in a Lukácsian sense), and to translate the repressive conditions on the ground into some form of actualized, factualized, or narrativized truths about voiceless subalterns.[141] *Insurgent Cultures* complicates such naturalistic iterations of realism by unveiling the disruptive conditions produced by violent insurgencies and the formal aesthetic devices employed to represent such splintered realities. Although postcolonial critics tend to be suspicious of realism for its perceived association with authenticity, falsehood, and homogenization, as Eli Sorensen points out, postcolonial novelists

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themselves seem to have no qualms in employing realist aesthetics "prompted by disturbing political circumstances, gesturing performatively in an attempt to persuade, seduce, or lure its readers toward the idea of a commonly imagined world."[142]

Contextualizing such disruptions in the world literary system debate, the Warwick Research Collective defines "peripheral realism"[143] as a "fractured and unstable narrative" expression of literature from the global periphery in which the narrating subjects move from being "active" and "organic" to "unstable, disoriented and disorienting" participants of the narrative structure.[144] This mode of realism is conditioned by the rupturing of the novel's form as a device "for recording its own impossibility."[145] Here, Lazarus's invocation of Said on the dissolution of the novel's form into "reportage, pastiche," autobiography, or even an "authorless discourse"[146] holds a special methodological relevance to the splintered violence represented in, and espoused by, the disruptive form of the literary texts analyzed in this book. Such disruptive form and its splintered politics chart an alternative literary history to the statist archive that subaltern historians have rejected, one that reduces insurgent concerns to mythical violences of premeditated revolutionary ideologies. Instead, inflecting splintered violence and formal disruptions, the new wave of insurgency narratives featured in this book represents a wide spectrum of genres: social realism, irrealism, narrative journalism, epistolary narration, autobiographical fictions, and fictional autobiography.

The fourteen fictional works discussed in this book fall under a wide array of realisms and postcolonial modernisms. While framing their narratives around real-life events that led up to political violence, a sense of gritty (resilient drive), grim (hardship and survival), and social realist (the role of structures, place, and social values in shaping the agent) elements remain critical even to irrealist plots such *as Frankenstein in Baghdad* or *The Corpse Washer*. Michael Niblett cautions that genres such as realism and irrealism should be seen not as diametric opposites but as "dialectical counterparts."[147] The same could be said of realism and modernism, and the genre of irrealist fiction that, as Michael Löwy puts it, much like Saadawi's protagonist, "takes the form of protest, outrage, disgust, anxiety, or *angst*."[148]

The splintered subjectivities in autobiographical works such as *From the Land of Green Ghosts* operate "by insisting, within the writing itself, on a gap between the I that writes and the I . . . that is written about"[149] and tend to closely align with the fragmentation of selfhood in the peripheral realist novel. As the desire for representational truth largely remains in open conflict with a silent or skewed official response by the state, it is

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within the literary impulse of autobiographical storytelling that a process of bearing testimony to violence takes place. These observations also hold true for the works of literary journalism discussed in this book. Together with common journalistic practices such as on-site reporting, literary journalists have a penchant for filtering social reality through authorial implication, personal or personalized interventions, and moral judgments.[150] In conflict zones, these filters of storytelling lay bare the affective trajectories of individual lives as opposed to "structures of feeling," with the use of literary devices such as emplotting, diegesis, physiognomic descriptions, anecdotes, and even ironical commentary. The move away from prescriptive norms (and forms) of traditional journalism and toward a more "subjective experience" acknowledges "a greater range of uncertainty about what the writer knows"[151] and, in so doing, allows for a disruptive sense of social realism to come to the fore.

If such a range of uncertainty were a spectrum, then the readings in this book would fall closer to the unmediated space between fact and fiction than to truth and lies, for "the truth or falsity of a story cannot be decided by measuring it against some outside reality, for what matters is how stories enable us to regain some purchase over the events that confound us, humble us, and leave us helpless."[152] This approach is instrumental to reading and writing literature against the status quo of repressive governments and despotic leaders, including revolutionary ideologues or the insurgent vanguard, for it "provides us not with a means of changing that which we cannot change but with a way of reimagining it" within and across the generic spectrum.[153] Such sense of opacity – to use the words of Édouard Glissant[154] – and disenchanted solidarity for the victims of violence cuts across all three formal genres featured in this book.

Plan of the Book

Taking their cue from the genealogies of violence in literary criticism outlined above, the chapters in this book fortify the conceptual vocabulary on insurgency by drawing from a wide range of theorists, from frontiers to the fringes: Immanuel Levinas, Frantz Fanon, Sule Egya, Walter Benjamin, Slavoj Žižek, Amia Srinivasan, Shruti Kapila, Pheng Cheah, Frank Schulze-Engler, Ashis Nandy, Gyanendra Pandey, and Santiago Zabala. The chapters presented here are arranged in such a way that they guide readers – in the order of their significance – through the structural and concealed (Nigeria), intimate and sovereign (Burma), ideological and asymmetrical (India), and religious as well as vernacular determinants

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(the Middle East) of insurgent violence. Chapter 1, "Precarious Riches: Oil, Insurgency, and Violence in Nigerian Literature," argues that the violence that enters the lives of precarious subjects exists through them in the form of insurgency, rebellion, and even as roguery. The first section reads two texts together, given their thematic resonance: whereas Michael Peel's *A Swamp Full of Dollars* features a real-life journalist with a penchant for literary devices, Helon Habila's *Oil on Water* features a fictional journalist with social realist and picaresque proclivities. By employing literary devices that are charged with concealed violence, both texts reveal that precarity breeds insurgent violence. In doing so, each text treats Delta militancy as a metaphor – a symptom of the larger yet absent inequalities crystallized into insurgency – and sets out to trace other absent metaphors, including naturalized violence, that are laden with militancy: area boys, urban gangs, and precarious ecologies. This is followed by a reading of the "subterranean violence" in Tony Nwaka's *Lords of the Creek* (2015):[155] rather than addressing the root cause of the insurgency, Nwaka's novel reveals how the oil fraternity and power elites manufacture a false sense of emergency to crush the militants. As a result, the real emergency concealed under the second order of diegesis implodes itself into insurgent violence. The play of the militant tropes in the three texts is complemented by a reading of the "routine violence" in *Tiny Sunbirds Far Away*, in which militancy becomes a mere response to the violent disruption of the daily routines of the Delta populations: procuring food, access to employment, water, or transportation.

Chapter 2, "Intimate Violence: Rebels, Heroes, and Insurgent Sovereignties in Burmese Anglophone Literature," examines three novels: Wendy Law-Yone's *Irrawaddy Tango* (1993),[156] Lucy Cruickshanks's *The Road to Rangoon* (2016), and Charmaine Craig's *Miss Burma* (2017), as well as two works of life writing, Pascal Khoo Thwe's *From the Land of Green Ghosts* and Aung San Suu Kyi's *Freedom from Fear*.[157] Each of the fictional works unravels a world of insurgent figures that undergo a constant mitosis, from lovers to rebels, from fathers to national fathers, and from husbands to dictators. The chapter mediates the porousness associated with insurgent figures and cultures through a subset of concepts, namely, intimate violence, affective (in)justice, inherited violence, and intimate sovereignties. Unlike the soft or slow violence of poverty and precarity, intimate violence occurs in familiar sites and spaces, against a familiar enemy: friend-turned-foe. The readings unveil how the intimate violence in the life trajectories of a tribesman from a Padaung village, a tango dancer from the backwaters of Irrawaddy, two orphaned ruby smugglers from the Shan state, and a beauty queen from Rangoon are

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invariably bound by their sovereign desires of armed secession. The second section pairs two readings, Suu Kyi's *Freedom from Fear* and Thwe's *From the Land of Green Ghosts*, offering a contrasting perspective on the interplay of intimacy, affects, violence, and sovereign desires. If Suu Kyi's narrative of defending the nation through militaristic means can be read as an extension of national autobiography, then Thwe's defense of tribal autonomy through affective insurgency can be read as the formative aspect of what I call subalter-nation.

Chapter 3, "Violent Solidarities? Narrating the Maoist Insurgency in India," turns to the Indian context to demonstrate how insurgent activity is shaped, if not enacted, by forms of solidarity extended to the victims of violence. The first section focuses on three novels, Diti Sen's *Red Skies & Falling Stars* (2012), Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland* (2013),[158] and Diptendra Raychaudhuri's *Seeing through the Stones*, which demonstrate the pitfalls of cultivating bonds of violence across caste, class, and gender divisions. Whereas Sen's and Lahiri's novels build on an enchanted solidarity that fails to foresee the ideological pitfalls of the Maoist movement, Raychaudhuri's novel extends a disenchanted solidarity for the militants, one that is geared toward exposing the fractures, fault lines, and inherent disunity of the insurgency. In the second section, two works of literary journalism, namely, Arundhati Roy's *Walking with the Comrades* and Sudeep Chakravarti's *Red Sun*,[159] steer the discussion on "deep" and "liberal" solidarities that fortify such fractured cultures of insurgency. While Roy's narrative, given its penchant for fictional devices, is orientated toward a deep, affective solidarity, Chakravarti's work, which is more attuned to factualization of narrative, is a champion of liberal solidarity.

Chapter 4, "Violent Worlds: Vernacular Agency in Middle Eastern Literature," proposes that certain forms of violence and the literary avenues for expressing them – typically provincialized as ethnocentric, sectarian, or vernacularly coded – constitute their own allegorical worlds that place them on the fringes of global and world literatures. Such vernacular worlds submerged under the normative world rise up to assert their existence through violent bonds and alliances. Against the predominantly secular and centrist underpinnings of world in the world literature debate, the chapter heeds Pheng Cheah's plea for construing worlds through temporal coordinates that are malleable, multiple, and contra-normative. The process of world-making through violence, as the reading of Yasmina Khadra's *The Attack*, Kae Bahar's *Letters from a Kurd*, and Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* show, unfolds deep within such temporalities where vernacular renditions of divine and organized vengeance take on

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an insurgent mode. Contesting the secular notions of the sublime as something *to be revealed* to the subject at the end of reason, the readings illustrate that the insurgent sublime manifests itself as an intrasecular force that could be invoked or called upon on a whim at the limit of reason. Such an intrasecular sublime becomes a salient feature of Sinan Antoon's *The Corpse Washer* and Omar Robert Hamilton's *The City Always Wins* (2017)[160] wherein death and dead bodies become breeding sites of violent alliances. The haunting presence of death in the two novels enables a thanatopolitical resistance in which acts of naming, washing, resurrecting, and ennobling the dead lend themselves to a critique of global necropolitical technologies that manufacture death as though it were a factory commodity.

Within the predominantly Anglophone corpus, the inclusion of a handful of non-Anglophone texts strengthens the vernacular context necessary for a transregional understanding of the conflicts examined in this book. *Frankenstein in Baghdad,* for instance, is a non-Anglophone text to begin with, but the fact that it is a rewrite of an English canonical text makes it a curious candidate for a "born-translated" text in the global literary market. Yasmina Khadra's *The Attack* makes a compelling case for a twice-born translated text: a novel about Anglophone postcolonial legacies written in French by a French-Algerian author, which was turned into a popular film with an Arabic screenplay. Given such entangled journeys of vernacular texts beyond the cultures of their origin, it would be a mistake to treat them as any more or any less mimetic or authentic representations of Global South cultures than their Anglophone counterparts. Instead, this book turns to the vernacular worlds that inhabit Anglophone texts, and globalized modernities that cohabit the vernacular traditions of the Global South in a conciliatory move that lays bare the entangled histories of violence, and the insurgent cultures imparted therein.

Notes

1 Italo Calvino, *Numbers in the Dark and Other Stories*, trans. Tim Parks (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014), 11–12; the narration of the story has been altered to suit the context of this book.
2 Albert Camus, *The Rebel* (Bombay: Times of India Press, 1959), 84.
3 The protagonist of Ahmed Saadawi's novel *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, trans. Jonathan Wright (London: Penguin, 2018).
4 Although *Satya* is typically regarded as a noir film, it is possible to read the Mafia addressed in the film (the Dawood Ibrahim gang) in relation to the Mumbai terrorist attacks of 1994.

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5 Ram Gopal Verma, *Guns and Thighs* (New Delhi: Rupa Publications, 2016), 66.
6 Charles L. Ruby, "The Definition of Terrorism," *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy* 2, no. 1 (2002): 9–14, 10.
7 Saadawi, *Frankenstein in Baghdad*, 177–178.
8 Calvino, *Numbers in the Dark*, 23–25.
9 Walter Enders and Todd Sandler, "After 9/11: Is It All Different Now?," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 49, no. 2 (2005): 259–277; Moritz Feichtinger, Stephan Malinowski, and Chase Richards, "Transformative Invasions: Western Post-9/11 Counterinsurgency and the Lessons of Colonialism," *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development* 3, no. 1 (2012): 35–63; Michael Toomey and Benedict E. Singleton, "The Post-9/11 'Terrorism' Discourse and Its Impact on Nonstate Actors: A Comparative Study of the LTTE and Hamas," *Asian Politics & Policy* 6, no. 2 (2014): 183–198.
10 The gap is all the more jarring in Anglophone literary studies; in comparative literature, however, Auritro Majumder's recent work *Insurgent Imaginations: World Literature and the Periphery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021) shows the way forward.
11 Alex Tickell, *Terrorism, Insurgency and Indian-English Literature, 1830–1947* (London: Routledge, 2012); Stephen Morton, *States of Emergency: Colonialism, Literature and Law* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013); Nicole Rizzuto, *Insurgent Testimonies* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2016); Rebecca Ruth Gould, *Writers and Rebels: The Literature of Insurgency in the Caucasus* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016). Priyamvada Gopal's *Insurgent Empire: Anticolonial Resistance and British Dissent* (London: Verso, 2019) is an equally significant contribution to the field that focuses on the three major anticolonial insurgencies: the Sepoy rebellion of 1857, the Morant Bay uprising in Jamaica in 1865, and the Mau Mau peasant rebellion in Kenya (1952–1960).
12 Moira Fradinger, *Binding Violence: Literary Visions of Political Violence* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2020); Jean Franco, *Cruel Modernity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013); Immanuel Ness, *Southern Insurgency: The Coming of the Global Working Class* (London: Pluto Press, 2016); John Mackinlay, *The Insurgent Archipelago: From Mao to Bin Laden* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).
13 Joel Nickels, *World Literature and the Geographies of Resistance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Majumder, *Insurgent Imaginations.*
14 For a provisional typology of these terms used in the twentieth-century literature on violence, see Eric Wolf, *Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), and Eric Hobsbawm's *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1959).
15 Ruby, "The Definition of Terrorism," 10.
16 Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999 [1983]), 39.

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18 Ibid.
19 Walter Benjamin, "Critique of Violence," in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, ed. Peter Demetz, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Schocken Books, 1986), 277–300, 290–291.
20 Ken Saro-Wiwa, *Sozaboy: A Novel in Rotten English* (Port Harcourt: Saros International Publishers, 1985).
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22 Mahasweta Devi, *Mother of 1084*, trans. Samik Bandyopadhyay (Calcutta: Seagull Books 2001 [1974]); K. Ajitha, *Kerala's Naxalbari – Memoirs of a Young Revolutionary*, trans. Sanju Ramachandran (New Delhi: Srishti, 2008 [1979]).
23 Devi, *Mother of 1084*, 20.
24 The military responded to the killing of twelve policemen by the Ijaw youth known as the "Asawana boys." See Kenneth Omeje, "The State, Conflict & Evolving Politics in the Niger Delta, Nigeria," *Review of African Political Economy* 31, no. 101 (2004): 425–440.
25 Edward Hunt, "Dispatches from Nigeria: The Actions of Royal Dutch Shell and ChevronTexaco in the Warri Crisis, 2003–2004," *Canadian Journal of African Studies/Revue canadienne des études africaines* (2022): 297–317, 298.
26 Kathryn Nwajiaku-Dahou, "Heroes and Villains: Ijaw Nationalist Narratives of the Nigerian Civil War," *African Development* 34, no. 1 (2009): 47–67.
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28 Nnimmo Bassey, *We Thought It Was Oil but It Was Blood* (Ibadan: Kraft Books, 2002), 14–15.
29 Ibiwari Ikiriko, *Oily Tears of the Delta: Poems* (Ibadan: Kraftgriots, 2000).
30 Geoffrey Archer, *The Burma Legacy* (London: Random House, 2002); Alex O'Brien, *Midnight in Burma* (Bangkok: Asia Books, 2001); Prem Sharma, *Escape from Burma* (Woods Mill, VA: Bookwrights Press, 2007); Jerome Nugent-Smith, *The Burma Conspiracy* (Brighton: Burmah Publishing, 1995).
31 George Sfeir, "The Contemporary Arabic Novel," *Daedalus* (Fall 1966): 941–960, 953.
32 Naguib Mahfouz, *Autumn Quail*, trans. Roger Allen (New York: Anchor, 2016 [1962]); Naguib Mahfouz, *Miramar*, trans. Fatma Moussa Mahmoud (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2002 [1967]); Naguib Mahfouz, *The Beggar*, trans. Kristin Walker Henry and Nariman Khales Naili al-Warraki (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1989 [1965]); Tawfiq al Haki, *The Return of Consciousness* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1974).
33 Assia Djebar, *Children of the New World: A Novel of the Algerian War* (New York: Feminist Press at CUNY, 2009 [1962]).

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37 Ghassan Kanafani, *Men in the Sun and Other Palestinian Stories*, trans. Hilary Kilpatrick (Boulder, CO: Rienner, 1999 [1962]); Emile Habiby, *The Secret Life of Saeed: The Ill-Fated Pessoptimist*, trans. Salma Khedra Jayyusi and Trevor LeGassick (Northampton, MA: Interlink, 2003 [1974]).
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44 Mackinlay, *Insurgent Archipelago*, 105.
45 William Noel Ivey, "Robin Hood or Al Capone? Natural Resources and Conflict India's Naxalite Insurgency," in *Resources, Governance and Civil Conflict*, ed. Magnus Öberg and Kaare Strøm (London: Routledge, 2008), 77–100, 91.
46 See Global Witness, *A Conflict of Interest: The Uncertain Future of Burma's Forests* (London: Global Witness Trust, 2013), 10.
47 Elias Courson, "MEND: Political Marginalization, Repression, and Petro-Insurgency in the Niger Delta," *African Security* 4, no. 1 (2011): 20–43, 37.
48 See Kimiebi Imomotimi Ebienfa, "Militancy in the Niger Delta and the Emergent Categories," *Review of African Political Economy* 38, no. 130 (2011): 637–643.
49 Guha, *Elementary Aspects*, 223.
50 See Paul Staniland, *Ordering Violence: Explaining Armed Group-State Relations from Conflict to Cooperation* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2021). In what he calls "armed orders," insurgency groups, states, and militants use

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arms to negotiate their respective grievances, but suspend the use of violence for an agreed amount of time.

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57 Ibid., 62; Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *Half of a Yellow Sun* (London: Harper Collins, 2007).

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61 Yasmina Khadra, *The Attack*, trans. John T. Cullen (New York: Random House, 2007).

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63 Habila, *Oil on Water*, 154.

64 Wendy Law-Yone, *The Road to Wanting* (London: Vintage, 2010); Tanure Ojaide, *The Activist* (Lagos: Farafina, 2006), 45; Sudeep Chakravarti, *Red Sun: Travels in the Naxalite Country* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2008).

65 Ojaide, *The Activist*, 45.

66 Qtd. in Phillip Deery, "The Terminology of Terrorism: Malaya, 1948–52," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 34, no. 2 (2003): 231–247, 236.

67 Ibid., 238

68 Ibid., 240.

69 Ibid., 246.

70 Margaret Scanlan, *Plotting Terror: Novelists and Terrorists in Contemporary Fiction* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001), 6; original emphasis.

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71 Joseph Pugliese, *State Violence and the Execution of Law: Biopolitical Caesurae of Torture, Black Sites, Drones* (London: Routledge, 2013), 168.
72 Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, 128–129.
73 Verena Erlenbusch-Anderson, *Genealogies of Terrorism: Revolution, State Violence, Empire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 23.
74 Ibid., 17.
75 Marnia Lazreg, *Torture and the Twilight of Empire: From Algiers to Baghdad* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 7; Ibid., 93.
76 Erlenbusch-Anderson, *Genealogies of Terrorism*, 93.
77 Stephen Morton, "Terrorism, Orientalism and Imperialism," *Wasafiri* 22, no. 2 (2007): 36–42, 37.
78 Erlenbusch-Anderson, *Genealogies of Terrorism*, 67. Inspired by Sergey Nechayev's revolutionary ideology, the Russian organization Narodnaya Volya, founded in 1789, used the term to refer to their own acts of violence against the Tsarist regime. I thank Michael C. Frank for bringing this to my attention.
79 In conjunction with his theory of the sublime, Burke opposed Hastings's corrupt methods not only because they exceeded the aesthetic distance necessary for observing the native's terror from a safe distance, but also because terrorizing the native, who is already an embodiment of terror, could have adverse consequences to the Empire.
80 Morton, *States of Emergency*, 66.
81 Ibid., 2, 26, 62, 125, 149, 175.
82 Whereas the historical conceptions of terrorism (Jewish Zealots, the century Sicarii of the first to fourth century, and the Ismaili sect of assassins between the tenth and eleventh centuries) were associated with the use of traditional weapons such as knives and daggers in acts of regicide and other anti-establishment violence, modern conceptions of terrorism, and the literary criticism that ensued, are heavily invested in the aesthetic significance placed on the spectrality of the explosive act and its ability to influence a larger audience – thanks to Alfred Nobel's patenting of dynamite in 1867.
83 Barbara Arnett Melchiori, *Terrorism in the Late Victorian Novel* (London: Routledge, 1985).
84 Deaglán Ó Donghaile, *Blasted Literature: Victorian Political Fiction and the Shock of Modernism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011).
85 Ibid., 10.
86 Alex Houen, *Terrorism and Modern Literature: From Joseph Conrad to Ciaran Carson* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 6.
87 Ó Donghaile, *Blasted Literature*, 3.
88 Morton, "Terrorism, Orientalism," 38.
89 Some discussion on this point is included here with kind permission from Taylor & Francis, from my earlier essay: Michael C. Frank and Pavan Kumar Malreddy, "Global Responses to the 'War on Terror,'" *European Journal of English Studies* 22, no. 2 (2018): 92–102.
90 Margaret Scanlan, *Plotting Terror*, 6.
91 Ibid., 7.

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95 Ibid., 8.
96 Ibid., 15.
97 Morton, "Terrorism, Orientalism," 39.
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