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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Beyond production: Following nomadic space in IR

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Abstract

The burgeoning critical scholarship on space in International Relations (IR) overwhelmingly recognises space as a socially produced set of performances, practices, and discourses, converging into meaningful organisations of located experience. Drawing on the writings of Deleuze and Guattari on the related concepts of nomadism and the war machine, I argue that this productive emphasis betrays a continued statist methodology that proceeds by binding, or partitioning, space into finished outcomes. I present a conceptual challenge to the normative emphasis on socially produced space by following nomadism, the immanent tendency to variation in the process of spatial becoming. Working with nomadic potentials brings to the fore smooth space, which includes the continuous possibilities and intensities existing unencumbered beneath concretised productions of organised space. I follow the spatial movement of violence in Punjab during the Indian Partition of 1947 as the emergence of a war machine which deployed the nomadism of smooth space to decompose and upend striations. My objectives are first, to argue for spatial possibilities beyond the normative positivity of produced space, and secondly, to register the fundamental methodological and analytical shifts that these possibilities demand. These shifts can in turn deepen ongoing disciplinary inquiries into indeterminacy.

Keywords: Deleuze and Guattari; Indian Partition; nomadism; space; war machine

Introduction

In this paper, drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's writings in *A Thousand Plateaus*, I explore the two spatial relations of striations and nomadism and their respective methodological emergence in the state and the war machine.[1] I argue that in spite of the turn to space and spatiality in International Relations (IR), spatial imagination largely continues to adhere to, and reproduce, statist understanding of phenomena, at the expense of the indeterminacy at the heart of spatial becoming. To challenge this productive bias, I advance an exploration of the erosive spatial becoming of the war machine in the movement of violence in the Indian Partition of 1947. Following Deleuze and Guattari, state here does not refer to identified institutional entities that wield authority but 'one of the ways life expresses itself – as is the war machine as its immanent Other'.[2] While the former inscribes productive unities in space, the latter marshals the subtractive force of space and disassembles unities. Thus, while the state is a principle of seeing and forging the world, in actualised, materialised outcomes, the war machine is the force that works with immaterial potential to variation, or virtuality, that informs the process of becoming.

[1]Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

[2]Doerthe Rosenow, 'Nomadic life's counter-attack: Moving beyond the subaltern's voice', *Review of International Studies*, 39:2 (2013), pp. 415–433 (p. 429).

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While disciplinary beginnings of IR, shrouded as they were in pessimistic abstractions, engaged with space primarily in its container function of yielding universal insides opposed to an anarchical outside,[3] much of this earlier theoretical containment is now being challenged by the turn to productive space and spatiality. There is a committed turn within the discipline towards addressing its core abstractions through a spatial lens. Borders,[4] order,[5] territory,[6] and violence[7] are some such concepts which have been deployed as scaffolding for legitimating space as a theoretical tool. Additionally, and perhaps more importantly, space itself is emerging as a core theoretical concern in IR, prompting a number of studies that explore the analytical purchase that space can hold in the discipline.[8] Relatedly, there is also growing interest in the different kinds of spaces that proliferate within the international, and the political, social, cultural phenomena that produce these spaces. Some such spaces include everyday space,[9] security space,[10] liminal space,[11] and climate space,[12] to name a few.

Notwithstanding the analytical depth that space is being afforded, the imagination of the concept remains largely limited to the socially produced space. This is space continuously constituted and (re)produced by the practices, discourses, and interactions that make it meaningful to the actors and agents circulating within it. While the urgency for such a socially produced space comes from the need to challenge the originary disciplinary binary of inside/outside, I contend that arguments for productive space ground the ontological primacy of striated space. The normative positivity afforded to meaningful production within spatial analyses reaffirms the value of partitioned space.

Further, challenging this normative insistence on (re)production, I want to demonstrate how space exceeds the grasp of social production and striation and scatters, obtrudes, protrudes, and distends becoming in ways that often cannot be distilled into meaningful narratives of human social production. To do this, I foreground nomadism, which is the potential of bodies[13] –

[3]R. B. J. Walker, 'State sovereignty and the articulation of political space/time', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 20:3 (1991), pp. 445–61; John Agnew, 'The territorial trap: The geographical assumptions of International Relations theory', *Review of International Political Economy*, 1:1 (1994), pp. 53–80.

[4]Dina Krichker, 'Making sense of borderscapes: Space, imagination and experience', *Geopolitics*, 26:4 (2019), pp. 1224–42; Sergio Peña, 'From territoriality to borderscapes: The conceptualisation of space in Border Studies', *Geopolitics*, 28:2 (2021), pp. 766–94.

[5]Sanjay Chaturvedi and Joe Painter, 'Whose world, whose order? Spatiality, geopolitics and the limits of the world order concept', *Cooperation and Conflict*, 42:4 (2007), pp. 375–95.

[6]Jordan Branch, 'Territory as an institution: Spatial ideas, practices and technologies', *Territory, Politics, Governance*, 5:2 (2016), pp. 131–44.

[7]Elias Juanita and Shirin M. Rai, 'Feminist everyday political economy: Space, time, and violence', *Review of International Studies*, 45:2 (2019), pp. 201–20.

[8]See Harvey Starr, 'On geopolitics: Spaces and places', *International Studies Quarterly*, 57:3 (2013), pp. 433–9; Duncan Weaver, 'Spatiality and world politics', *Oxford Research Encyclopaedia of International Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020) https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190846626.013.562; Orit Gazit, 'A Simmelian approach to space in world politics', *International Theory*, 10:2 (2018), pp. 219–52; Jack L. Amoureux, 'Is faster better? Political and ethical framings of pace and space', *International Theory*, 12:2 (2020), pp. 163–88; David Lambach, 'Space, scale, and global politics: Towards a critical approach to space in International Relations', *Review of International Studies*, 48:2 (2022), pp. 282–300.

[9]Matt Davies and Michael Niemann, 'The everyday spaces of global politics: Work, leisure, family', *New Political Science*, 24:4 (2002), pp. 557–77.

[10]Zoltán Glück, 'Piracy and the production of security space', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 33:4 (2015), pp. 642–59.

[11]Victoria Mason, 'The "question of Palestine": From liminality to emancipation', *Review of International Studies*, 47:1 (2021), pp. 107–27.

[12]Eva Lövbrand and Johannes Stripple, 'The climate as political space: On the territorialisation of the global carbon cycle', *Review of International Studies*, 32:2 (2006), pp. 217–35.

[13]By 'body', I mean 'what is capable of acting and being acted upon'. See Elizabeth Adams St Pierre, 'Deleuze and Guattari's language for new empirical inquiry', *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 49:11 (2016), pp. 1080–89 (p. 1083). Bodies here are not finished forms of human and non-human matter but processual entities whose capacity to intra-act with other bodies in the environments they move in keeps the process of becoming ongoing. See also Erin Manning, *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2009), p. 7.

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elemental, physical, affective, immaterial – to come into indeterminate relations and materialise unanticipated encounters in space. Conceptual recognition of nomadism is necessary to dispel the persistent methodological myth of making all phenomena fit into ontologically striated formations.

I choose the historical moment of the Indian Partition of 1947, particularly the all-engulfing violence in the frontier region of Punjab, to follow the nomadic emergence and movement of the war machine because it presents a particularly stark moment of competition between the imposed striated meanings on space and the decompositional effects of nomadism. The Partition of India and Pakistan, orchestrated alongside and in tandem with the departure of the British Empire from the Indian subcontinent, opened a categorically 'empty' space where striations had been located but were yet to take concrete shape.[14] In the weeks and months before and after the moment of Partition, a seismic violence erupted in Punjab, which was 'decentralized and diffused across the body politic',[15] and which was compelled by the singular aim of 'the wholesale destruction of communities'.[16] Thus, alongside one of the largest mass migrations in human history was unfolding a terrible and enduring force of violence that saw previously coexisting communities of Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs engage in brutal acts of violence and grotesquery against one another.

While the violence has been variously rationalised,[17] I want to eschew focus on its causes and paradoxes, to instead 'analyze tendencies and poles, the nature of the movements' in its becoming.[18] Honing insights from the field of Partition Studies,[19] I argue that the violence articulated a nomadic

[14]Gazit, 'A Simmelian approach to space in world politics', pp. 240–1.

[15]Sunil Purushottam, *From Raj to Republic: Sovereignty, Violence, and Democracy in India* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2021), p. 131.

[16]Ian Talbot, 'The 1947 Partition violence: Characteristics and interpretations', in Radhika Mohanram and Anindya Raychaudhari (eds), *Partitions and Their Afterlives* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019), pp. 1–22 (p. 3).

[17]With any systematic explanation of the brutality remaining impossible, the violence has been variously rationalised as a motivating force for populations to leave their homes and seek security elsewhere; see Ritu Menon and Kamala Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1998), p. 38; as a symbolic manifestation of the pathologised discordance between communities in South Asia, see Sudhir Kakar, *The Colours of Violence* (New Delhi: Penguin Books 1995); as nationalist fratricide that tears asunder communities of common cultural heritage with competing national visions, see Jason Francisco, 'In the heat of fratricide: The literature of India's Partition burning freshly', *Annual of Urdu Studies*, 11 (1996), pp. 227–50; as the violence of the processes of modern nation-state formation wherein sexualised bodies form the central political axis of the project, see Rani Neutill, 'Bending bodies, borders and desires in Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India* and Deepa Mehta's *Earth*', *South Asian Popular Culture*, 8:1 (2010), pp. 73–87 (p. 74).

[18]Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 367.

[19]Recognising partition as an 'organising principle' of modern social and political consolidations, Partition Studies has emerged as a vast cross-disciplinary field of studies. See Smita T. Jassal and Eyal Ben-Ari, 'Listening for echoes: Partition in three contexts', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 41:22 (2006), pp. 2213–20 (p. 2213). The field has attended to a host of questions including but not limited to identity and community construction; see Gyanendra Pandey, 'Notions of community: Popular and subaltern', *Postcolonial Studies*, 8:4 (2005), pp. 409–19; Veena Das, 'Trauma and testimony: Implications for political community', *Anthropological Theory*, 3:3 (2003), pp. 293–307; citizenship, migration, and displacement, see Neeti Nair, 'Introduction to Special Issue: Citizenship, belonging, and the Partition of India', *Asian Affairs*, 53:2 (2022), pp. 293–7; Uditi Sen, 'The myths refugees live by: Memory and history in the making of Bengali refugee identity', *Modern Asian Studies*, 48:1 (2013), pp. 37–76; Joya Chatterji, 'South Asian histories of citizenship, 1946–1970', *Historical Journal*, 55:4 (2012), pp. 1049–71; Ilyas Chattha, *Partition and Locality: Violence, Migration and Development in Gujranwala and Sialkot 1947–1961* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Vazira F. Y. Zamindar, *The Long Partition and the Making of Modern South Asia: Refugees, Boundaries, Histories* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); Papiya Ghosh, *Partition and the South Asian Diaspora: Extending the Subcontinent* (London: Routledge, 2007); political violence, see Shruti Kapila, *Violent Fraternity: Indian Political Thought in the Global Age* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2021), William Gould, 'Hindu militarism and partition in 1940s United Provinces: Rethinking the politics of violence and scale', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 42:1 (2019), pp. 134–51; Veena Das, *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); Gyanendra Pandey, *Routine Violence* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2006); trauma, memory, and ordinary everyday experience, see Anjali Roy, *Memories and Postmemories of the Partition of India* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020); Anna Castaing, 'Poetics of pain: Writing the memory of Partition', in Churnjeet Mahn and Anne Murphy (eds), *Partition and the Practice of Memory* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018), pp. 155–71; Urvashi Bhutalia, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India* (New Delhi: Penguin Random House, 1998); Menon and Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries*. Transversally intersecting these lines of inquiry is the problem of the question of history and fact, and the impossibility of accuracy, which places indeterminacy at the heart of the event, its experience, and most importantly, in the processes of knowledge production

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response in the emergence of the war machine to the spatial foreclosure of the state. This response is neither peculiar to the subcontinent, nor to the Partition, but infinitesimally thrives beneath the visible, congealed surfaces of relations in all space. It is important to clarify at the outset that I do not offer a historical analysis of the violence in Punjab, nor do I claim to produce an alternative explanation for the violence. In this sense, I also refrain from suggesting that there is an empirical argument here about partitions per se, i.e. about the histories and political causes and eventualities of determinate acts of demarcating territory. My intention is to demonstrate tendencies in space that remain largely overshadowed due to the continued theoretical valuation of productive partitions in space, even within critical literatures. Thus, I want to follow the becoming of a spatial event without adding it up within a complete framework of explanation.

As such, this paper contributes to the growing acknowledgement within IR of the need for working with 'disruptive',[20] even 'destructive' potentials.[21] A substantial body of work in IR thinks these potentials by working with the philosophical directions of Deleuze, and Deleuze and Guattari.[22] However, a number of works taking recourse to Deleuze and Guattati's writings in IR often perform a bounded reading of their concepts, at the expense of the overspilling ongoingness of process that this framing demands.[23] Strikingly, this larger analytical valuation of boundedness has been highlighted in vocabularies of spatial closure. For instance, Eun diagnoses this as the problem of 'closed territoriality' in IR, such that 'its territories and codes remain narrowly confined within a few lines of strata' which can only articulate explanations and analysis within bounded frames of reference.[24] Similarly, Rajaram recognises this in the 'abiding importance of the territorial imagination in the epistemic categories of international relations'.[25] Space and analysis thus inhibit each other, suggesting that space is not just a conceptual construct but an analytical scaffolding that informs core epistemological choices in the discipline. Following Eun's call for 'IR as becoming-rhizomatic',[26] I eschew theoretical preoccupation with constructed space to take up the method of nomadism. This entails following the infinite possibility of movement and change underwriting space, instead of identifying how meaning comes to rest within locations. As such, the premise of this argument is analytical, suggesting that engaging nomadic space allows lived indeterminacy to seep into analyses and methodologies, making predetermined outcomes and prescriptions unfeasible.

I perform my argument through four moves: in the next section, I demonstrate how dominant critical approaches to space remain partial to the logic of bounded space through an enduring emphasis on production of meaning. In the following section, I expand on Deleuze and Guattari's logic of striated and smooth space to point out what socially produced space in IR misses – the possibility of nomadic movement that underwrites, and holds the potential to override, bounded space. Next, I turn to the demonstration of such an instance of overriding in the movement of violence in Punjab in 1947, where nomadic space came to the fore in the emergence of the war

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that have emerged in its wake. See Gyanendra Pandey, 'Long life of rumour', *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, 27: 2 (2002), pp. 165–91.

[20]Prem Kumar Rajaram, 'Disruptive writing and a critique of territoriality', *Review of International Studies*, 30:2 (2004), pp. 201–228.

[21]Laura Sjoberg, 'Knock it down? Unmaking, deconstruction, and destruction as/in politics research', *Global Studies Quaterly*, 3:1 (2024), pp. 1–12.

[22]See, for instance, Julian Reid, 'Deleuze's war machine: Nomadism against the state', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 32:1 (2003), pp. 57–85; Julian Reid, 'Of nomadic unities: Gilles Deleuze on the nature of sovereignty', *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 13:4 (2010), pp. 405–28; Julian Reid and Brad Evans, *Deleuze & Fascism: Security: War: Aesthetics* (London: Routledge, 2013), Paul Lenco, *Deleuze and World Politics: Alter-globalizations and Nomad Science* (London: Routledge, 2011), Paul Lenco, (Re-)introducing Deleuze: New readings of Deleuze in International Studies', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 43:1 (2014), pp. 124–44, Rosenow, 'Nomadic life's counter-attack'.

[23]This tendency is particularly rife in works that situate Deleuze and Guattari's concepts within otherwise normative and constructionist analyses. For examples and critique of this tendency, see Lenco (2014), pp. 3-4; Rosenow, 'Nomadic life's counter-attack', p. 428.

[24]Yong-Soo Eun, 'Calling for "IR as Becoming-Rhizomatic"', *Global Studies Quarterly*, 1:2 (2021), pp. 1–12 (p. 7).

[25]Rajaram, 'Disruptive writing and a critique of territoriality', p. 204.

[26]Eun, 'Calling for "IR as Becoming-Rhizomatic"'.

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machine, which upturned space and its recognisable contents and relations. I then tie up the concepts together in following the paradigmatic movement of Partition violence – the carnage on trains carrying refugees to each side – to consider how the war machine disassembles the illusion of productive meaning in space. In the concluding section, I revisit the argument and briefly return to the analytical implications of thinking with nomadic space in IR.

Space and IR

Traditionally, IR has viewed space as a stable and divisible repository of territorial ambitions and claims, treating it as a conceptual and metaphorical chronicle of territorial histories and politics of nation-states. This 'culture of spatial chasms' in IR determined the location of coherent politics within the 'inside' space of the nation, assigning disorder and disequilibrium to the 'outside' space of the international.[27] The purchase of this theoretical culture continues undiminished within realist IR in the so-called partition debate, for instance, which contends on the value of partition as a policy 'solution' for 'policymakers in states such as the United States' in resolving 'ethnic' conflicts in troubled states.[28] In the larger context of such colonial legacies, Ranabir Samaddar has argued that the 'postcolonial times' are better described as 'partitioned times'.[29] The continued relevance of this description is visible not only in the recurrent 'ethnic' and 'communal' wars in those parts of the world where partitions forcibly circumscribed communities within marked territories, but also in the continued legacy of advancing partition as a colonial, racialised 'solution' to 'resolve, or at least stabilise, ethno-national conflicts'.[30]

Rejecting the container categorisation of space which sustains notions of territorial partitions as solution, a distinct body of critical work has emerged in IR that has been provisionally recognised as constituting a 'spatial turn' and makes way 'for understanding space as constituted socially, politically and discursively, as well as consideration of how space and place shape, and are shaped by, human agency'.[31] This turn counters the Cartesian construction of 'empty' space by situating space as a constructed set of practices, performances, and discourses that is 'pregnant with meaning'.[32] This literature, largely mobilising the works of Lefebvre, Foucault, and Soja, rather uniformly approaches space through 'a social lens' and attends to '*interpretations* and *understandings*' that constitute space.[33]

This 'spatial turn' can be observed to be concretising into an emergent, normative thrust on making space intelligible in and through meaningful outcomes of social processes. My contention here is not that the meanings produced out of this excessive focus on 'the process of *space making*' are normative,[34] but more fundamentally, that this singular methodological emphasis on constructed meaning normatively favours outcomes over process, thus reproducing a bounded orientation towards phenomena. The underlying assumption of lack regarding the Cartesian model of empty space, which socially produced space seeks to recuperate, comes from the idea that 'space was robbed of *substantive meaningfulness* to become an ordered, uniform system of abstract linear coordinates'.[35] The pivot on which critical space turns is the need to overcome this emptiness, which, by

[27] Walker, 'State sovereignty and the articulation of political space/time', p. 457.

[28] Alexander B. Downes, 'The Holy Land divided: Defending partition as a solution to ethnic wars', *Security Studies*, 10:4 (2002), pp. 58–116 (p. 61).

[29] Ranabir Samaddar, 'The last hurrah that continues', in Ghislaine Glasson Deschaumes and Rada Ivekovic (eds), *Divided Countries, Separated Cities: The Modern Legacy of Partition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 21–35 (p. 21).

[30] Yair Wallach, 'The racial logic of Palestine's partition', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 46:8 (2022), pp. 1576–98 (p. 1577).

[31] Moran Brigg and Nicole George, 'Emplacing the spatial turn in Peace and Conflict Studies', *Cooperation and Conflict*, 55: 4 (2022), pp. 409–20 (p. 409).

[32] Mark B. Salter, 'Theory of the /: The suture and Critical Border Studies', *Geopolitics*, 17:4 (2012), pp. 734–55 (p. 740).

[33] Amoureux, 'Is faster better?', p. 3, emphasis in original.

[34] Lambach, 'Space, scale, and global politics', p. 290, emphasis in original.

[35] Barney Warf, 'From surfaces to networks', in Barney Warf and Santa Arias (eds), *The Spatial Turn: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), pp. 59–76 (p. 61), emphasis added.

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virtue of being pitched against, and criticised through, an insistence on the concrete production and organisation of meaning,[36] signifies a lack of (human) meaning and hence 'space without politics'.[37] Interestingly, this is not a theoretically unified literature, but critical orientations to space from varying angles, including Critical Border Studies, Mobility Studies, and Critical Security Studies, which converge on the centrality of social construction and (re)production. Thus, whether it is the micropolitics of defensive architecture,[38] or the macropolitics of regional integration,[39] or the affective geographies of securitised spaces,[40] space is analysed as a product of practices and discourses of organisation; actions and flows within it are productively employed into the 'transformation of matter into meaning, content into expression, the social process into a signifying system'.[41]

While the scholarship ostensibly distances itself from the territorial model of space by privileging open-ended processes and practices of spatial construction, it nonetheless makes space meaningful or coherent through what Lövbrand and Stripple have recognised as the 'activity' of territorialisation, which deploys the 'bounding of space' to engender, or in this case reveal and analyse, social consequences.[42] The spatial turn, despite its insistence on the processual nature of space, reproduces the 'territorial imagination' or methodology of space which proceeds by binding.[43] To be sure, there is no claim of assigning a fixed meaning to space, and the scholarship brings into focus the varied and variable ways in which space becomes intelligible. Yet meaning is recognised by binding it within a concretised moment. The necessity of meaningful production of space, and the need to meaningfully narrativise space, evokes Doreen Massey's recognition that much of Western spatial analysis and its 'accustomed ways of imagining space have been attempts to tame it'.[44]

Nisha Shah's reckoning of 'the territorial trap of the territorial trap' is instructive here.[45] Shah argues that the recurrent metaphor in globalisation theories of 'overcoming' the territorial state through the more circulatory, mobile, and interconnected spaces of the globalised world betrays the implicit assumption of the state being a territorially grounded entity in the first place.[46] Extending the image of the double territorial trap to the theorisation of space in IR, it is possible to see how the territorialising activity of bounding continues to inform critical approaches to space.

For instance, Solomon and Steele's micropolitical space as a '*grounding*' for macropolitics is demonstrative of this proclivity towards territorialising assumptions and moves within critical

[36]See, for instance, Ty Solomon and Brent J. Steele, 'Micromoves in International Relations theory', *European Journal of International Relations*, 3:2 (2017), pp. 000–000 (p. 209); Glück, 'Piracy and the production of security space', p. 645; Salter, 'Theory of the /', p. 740.

[37]Louise Amoore, *The Politics of Possibility: Risk and Security Beyond Probability* (Durham: Durham University Press, 2013), p. 3.

[38]Derek Denman, 'On fortification: Military architecture, geometric power, and defensive design', *Security Dialogue*, 51:2–3 (2020), pp. 231–47.

[39]James Wesely Scott, 'A networked space of meaning? Spatial politics as geostrategies of European integration', *Space and Polity*, 6:2 (2002), pp. 147–67.

[40]Esther Marijnen, 'Eco-war tourism: Affective geographies, colonial durabilities and the militarization of conservation', *Security Dialogue*, 53:6 (2022), pp. 550–66.

[41]Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 90.

[42]Lövbrand and Stripple, 'The climate as political space', p. 233.

[43]Rajaram, 'Disruptive writing and a critique of territoriality', p. 202.

[44]Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: Sage, 2005), p. 152. There is a growing literature based on non-Western approaches to space that is similarly critiquing or seeking to displace the deep lodgings of Western metaphysics in the study of space. For instance, see Morgan Brigg, Nicole George, and Kate Higgins, 'Making space for Indigenous approaches in the Southwest Pacific? The spatial politics of peace scholarship and practice', *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, 16:5 (2022), pp. 545–62; Morgan Brigg, 'The spatial-relational challenge: Emplacing the spatial turn in Peace and Conflict Studies', *Cooperation and Conflict*, 55:4 (2020), pp. 535–52; Chris Hesketh, 'Indigenous resistance at the frontiers of accumulation: Challenging the coloniality of space in International Relations', *Review of International Studies*, 51:1 (2025), pp. 64–83.

[45]Nisha Shah, 'The territorial trap of the territorial trap: Global transformation and the problem of the state's two territories', *International Political Sociology*, 6:1 (2012), pp. 57–76.

[46]Shah, 'The territorial trap of the territorial trap', p. 58.

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IR.[47] Micropolitical space is described here as the possibility of 'evaluating and appraising smaller *enclosures* where politics is practised as demonstrating both macro-/molar-politics but also their reversibility (the possibility of something different than the broader cultural, social or spatial competition that defines that relationship)'.[48] Thus, while the argument seeks to attune political analyses to the 'sensations, resonance, movement, flow' that outrun and overspill macropolitical structures,[49] the disruptions of micro-tendencies are still enclosed within partitioned blocks of meaning where co-presences are aggregated into new collective identities positioned against power. Indeed, Solomon and Steele emphasise the importance of the analytical exercise of 'ontologiz(ing) the micropolitical formation, demarcating the scope (affective, spatial, and temporal) of the entity being examined'.[50] The binding activity of demarcation reads here as being necessary in validating a spatial event's scope as 'socially meaningful'.[51] In examining the performative reclaiming of space as sites of protest in the Occupy movement, for instance, Solomon and Steele's focus is on underlining how 'new symbolic meanings' of dissenting spaces are produced.[52] This results in the enlarging of micropolitical tendencies of affect, rhythm, and space into 'outlinable objects whose contextual variants can be explored in controlled, that is, repeatable circumstances',[53] and eventually typified into the binary choice of power or resistance to power.

Emerging out of this normative affirmation of meaningful space is the posturing of socially produced space as 'sites of political significance'.[54] This normative recognition of the political quite aptly represents what Chris Hesketh identifies as the 'coloniality of space in IR'.[55] Hesketh argues that the epistemological foundation of space in IR excludes and negates 'other imaginaries of the world that are contrary to the hegemonic order' and thus is lodged in colonial practices of material and epistemological dispossession.[56] The equivalence of political significance with meaning marshals implicit assumptions about what constitutes meaning and hence what gets counted as political.

Indeed, Hesketh's analysis of the appropriation of factions of Indigenous liberation and resistance into the support of resource-based nationalism in Bolivia is precisely demonstrative of the susceptibility of meaning to the erasures, appropriations, and imbrications of narrativisation.[57] The pointed recovery of space within a (re)productive logic of meaningful agential actions and interactions risks entrenching the coloniality of space in IR by privileging only such ontologised formations and values as analyses can meaningfully recognise, name, and organise in space. The positivity associated with the value of meaning and production in spatial analyses is the problem of a particular ontology that favours the specificity of space by grounding even its disruptive potentials into sites, locations, and wholes. I now turn to showing how such a representation only presents half the picture of space, the one which can be visualised and easily recognised. Echoing Amoore, what this fails to recognise is that 'amid the life that is attached to given subjects and objects, there is already present a *life* in potentiality, a surprising and unanticipated life that has capacity to interrupt' reproductive orders of meaning-making.[58]

[47] Solomon and Steele, 'Micromoves in International Relations theory', p. 271, emphasis in original. See also Weinert, who similarly 'grounds' spatiality as a 'horizon of intelligibility' through which practices in a purely physical space become meaningful. Matthew S. Weinert, 'Grounding world society: Spatiality, cultural heritage, and our world as shared geographies', *Review of International Studies*, 43:3 (2017), pp. 409–29.

[48] Solomon and Steele, 'Micromoves in International Relations theory', p. 272, emphasis added.

[49] Solomon and Steele, 'Micromoves in International Relations theory', p. 270.

[50] Solomon and Steele, 'Micromoves in International Relations theory', p. 280.

[51] Solomon and Steele, 'Micromoves in International Relations theory', p. 269.

[52] Solomon and Steele, 'Micromoves in International Relations theory', p. 281.

[53] Elizabeth Grosz, 'Deleuze, theory, and space', *Log*, Fall:1 (2003), pp. 77–86 (p. 82).

[54] Solomon and Steele, 'Micromoves in International Relations theory', p. 277.

[55] Hesketh, 'Indigenous resistance at the frontiers of accumulation'.

[56] Hesketh, 'Indigenous resistance at the frontiers of accumulation', p. 2.

[57] Hesketh, 'Indigenous resistance at the frontiers of accumulation', pp. 15–19.

[58] Corey Johnson, Reece Jones, Anssi Paasi, et al., 'Interventions on rethinking "the border" in Border Studies', *Political Geography*, 30:2 (2011), pp. 61–9 (p. 64).

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The tendencies of space: Striated and smooth

While Deleuze and Guattari do not necessarily offer a theory of space, their expansive project in *A Thousand Plateaus* not only 'abounds in references to spatiality'[59] but also spatially articulates the flux of becoming. Concepts in the text are immaterially spatial, advancing in spatial terms while giving space to the intangible, the infinitesimally continuous, and the virtual. In the plateau 'Treatise on Nomadology: The War Machine', Deleuze and Guattari siphon the functions of actual/virtual, arboreal/rhizomatic, state/nomadism into two relations or tendencies – striated or statist space and smooth or nomadic space.[60] Striated space, as the name suggests, is space marked out by lines, borders, plots, tracings. It is a measured and bounded space for identified and identifiable things, bodies, and claims, occupied by the statist imperative to classify and identify. Smooth space, on the other hand, names the possibility in space to supersede, circumvent, pass through, and invent connections across, beyond, and most significantly, in spite of striations. Space is smooth in the sense that it is open to endless possibility of indeterminate composition and decomposition.

Striated space and smooth space do not exist as different physical planes that possess different actualised properties. They are coexisting relations in space that shape the total movement of life. Deleuze and Guattari describe the two relations as follows: in the case of the striated space, 'space is counted in order to be occupied', whereas in the case of smooth space, 'space is counted without being occupied'.[61] The former assigns decipherable value in space, seeking to close space off to its own indeterminate extensions by imposing conditioned orders of meaning on it. These partitions or striations depend on space to cede that 'which is extractable' in it,[62] to generate the possibility of meaningful action in it, action that can be readily narrativised and reproduced. Concrete driveways slice up a usable patch of space and mark off public space from private property; the specific arrangements of furniture in our dwelling spaces impart meaning and pattern to our everyday habitation practices; the roof above my head separates me from the vagaries of the environment. Striations thus engender occupation of space through the productive facilitation of repeatability and narrativisation of that which can be directly perceived – a steady replication of outcomes and actions made possible through the extraction of the most clear-cut outlines of phenomena and their stabilisation into actualised knowledge. Thus, in striated space objects, bodies, and locations can be meaningfully perceived and simplified, and importantly, this is the statist approach to life. Statist here does not refer to state agencies and structures but the method of ontologising phenomena to make habits and patterns possible and recognisable within it.

On the other hand, smooth space is the virtual space in-between concrete outlines, containing limitless possibilities of encounters, materialisations, and chance that can neither be fully perceived nor predicted. It effects consequences in phenomena without materialising itself as an occupiable surface. Smoothness is the quality of all space to infect the unfolding of phenomena indeterminately, *in spite* of the organised separations and contours that produce unified experiences in space. Smooth space inheres in the roots of a tree erupting out of concrete driveways; it makes itself felt in the all-too-universal and unhappy experience of stubbing one's toes against a piece of furniture in the intimately known structure of one's inhabited space; it is at work in a roof caving in from the accumulated pressure of continuously percolating rainfall. Albeit imperceptible, smooth space makes itself *felt* in unpredictable shifts and unanticipated encounters that erupt out of the continuous flow of phenomena in the passage of time on space.[63] It registers itself as the propensity

[59] Grosz, 'Deleuze, theory, and space', p. 81.

[60] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 351–423.

[61] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 362.

[62] Grosz, 'Deleuze, theory, and space', p. 81.

[63] Time in this framing is not a separable and measurable construct. The ongoingness of becoming takes shape in the passage of time through space. In the propelling forward of phenomena is the convergence of time and space, such that they are both created in the process of becoming, while making further becoming possible. Thus, in the experience of becoming space and time remain creatively, thickly entangled: 'We move time relationally as we create space: we move space as we create time.' Manning, *Relationscapes*, p. 17.

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of phenomena to take shape by repurposing or even degenerating striations in space, connecting discontinuities while disrupting stabilisations.

Of particular interest to my argument here is how movement moves differently within striated and smooth space. Striated space is 'sedentary' because its purpose is to '*parcel out a closed space to people*, assigning each person a share and regulating the communication between shares', and is hence marked out by walls, enclosures, boundaries, whereas nomadic or smooth space only carries 'traits' that appear and disappear in the passage of movement.[64] Movement in smooth space contains the nomadic potential to 'diverge from the present, to function differently' in space, and thus cannot be made to repeat itself or be transmitted fully into organised knowledge.[65] Thus, while an urban road may be well marked with defining partitions for the functional separation and flow of traffic, bodies flowing in it can bring to the fore the smoothness of space simply by suddenly swaying sideways in it, jumping over barricades, disappearing behind bushes, re-emerging out of nowhere in the middle of a busy street, and dispersing other bodies around themselves in more, ever-opening directions that the striations cannot foresee.[66] The distinction between smooth and striated is then, as Grosz puts it, 'a distinction between a necessarily unpredictable materiality and the imposition of our needs for regularity and predictability on this materiality'.[67] The smooth and striated constantly jostle and chafe against each other, interlocked in an interminable conversation.

Importantly, Deleuze and Guattari clarify that smooth space effects itself through 'small tactile or manual actions of contact' – as opposed to the visually organised striated space.[68] Consider the movement of a parkour athlete in a dense concrete jungle.[69] The athlete moves between destinations by deploying points such as buildings, fences, railings, abandoned structures, and so on as tactile encounters to launch themselves into the next movement. These points of contact act as 'relays' and not barriers,[70] prioritising continuous passage of movement over regulation. Points in smooth space generate highly localised physical encounters that enable movement to pass through them without assigning meaning or position to the movement. Thinking with the movement of the nomad, Deleuze and Guattari explain that it is not that the nomad moves in ignorance or defiance of points, they move through and across these points of contact ('water points, dwelling points, assembly points, etc.') – where every 'point is reached only in order to be left behind'.[71] Nomadic space thus does not yield destinations for movement to come to rest in, but connecting links forged spontaneously in the flow of movement, for the continuous facilitation of movement.

Striated space becomes a method of regulating this movement, a method of intervening into the 'absolute state of a moving body occupying a smooth space' and decomposing it into 'relative characteristic of a "moved body" going from one point to another in a striated space'.[72] The consequence of giving ontological primacy to such stratifying partitions is that 'in doing so, they obscure what is most "true" of nature, and what is most "true" of peoples and subjectivities in general, which is their tendency toward multiplicity'.[73] With the 'variability … of directions' between the indefinite 'sets of relations' that compose and recompose space,[74] nomadism highlights the multiplicity that is inherent to space.

[64]Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 380–1, emphasis in original.

[65]Grosz, 'Deleuze, theory, and space', p. 82.

[66]See Srishti Malaviya, 'Digitising the virtual: Movement and relations in drone warfare', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 49:1 (2020), pp. 80–104 (p. 86).

[67]Grosz, 'Deleuze, theory, and space', p. 83.

[68]Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 371.

[69]I would like to thank my colleague, artist Prashant Nawani, for highlighting this example.

[70]Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 380.

[71]Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 380.

[72]Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 386.

[73]Reid, 'Of nomadic unities', p. 406.

[74]Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 382.

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Massey identifies within this nomadic multiplicity the 'chance of space'.[75] It is the chance of contingency that nomadic space injects into the making of phenomena, the chance of 'singularities, unpredictable eruptions, transmutations, or evolutions' that imbricates the movement of becoming.[76] The chance of space blooms indeterminately, in uncertain, unpredictable ways, into ongoing events that compose the world as process. Here, events are not the same as the inscriptions – or 'intelligence' – that are made in their wake, retrospectively, to give them historical meaning and territorial position.[77] However, this also underscores the difficulty of accessing nomadic space. It cannot be touched or seen directly. To reach into the immateriality of nomadic space one must move in the vanishing trail of a nomad while feeling for the moments of chance that propel movement in indeterminate directions. I now turn to such a movement through space in my reading of the movement of violence during the Partition. I deploy the war machine as an analytical bridge to get access to nomadic propensities in space. As I argue in the next section, in the case of the Partition, the violence can be read as an expression of the war machine that channelled nomadic potentialities and variabilities of space to attack nascent striations. Thus, in following the movement of violence it becomes possible to feel the potential of nomadism.

However, I hasten to add a brief note of caution here. This framework does not entail a romantic celebration of nomadism as an extrapolatable resource for emancipatory resistance. Nor does it identify with the 'nomadic subject' of Rosi Bradoitti's design that is exhorted to remain 'grounded … in the radical immanence of a sense of belonging to and being accountable for a community, a people, and a territory'.[78] Nomadism ungrounds, and its porosity and fluidity cannot be applied as a solution to the exclusions and perforations of partitions. Indeed, as Deleuze and Guattari remind us, 'there are just as many relations of force, and just as much violence, on one side as on the other'.[79] Thus, the point here is not to establish normative ascendancy of nomadism over partitions, or even to dispute or deny the material presence and significance of partitions. Instead, it is to make space for the nomadic and indeterminate in the writing of space in IR.

The Indian Partition: The nomadic space of the war machine

'On whose behalf were they acting…?'[80]

Urvashi Bhutalia poses this question in the context of the mass suicides and honour killings of women in Punjab amid the raging atrocities of Partition violence in the newly formed India and Pakistan in 1947. This question, however, can be equally extended to every agent and act of brutality that the Partition inaugurated in the Indian subcontinent, especially in Punjab where the violence was so total and all-encompassing that blame, ownership, responsibility still remain impossible to assign. As the British Empire made its exit from the subcontinent, affording 'competing nationalist imaginations' of India and Pakistan to explode into each other, victims, aggressors, death, and grotesquery all merged into the seismic, rolling explosion of violence that lasted for weeks and months before and after the Partition/Independence.[81] As far as estimated numbers go, over 14

[75]Massey, *For Space*, p. 151.

[76]Grosz, 'Deleuze, theory, and space', p. 82.

[77]Grosz, 'Deleuze, theory, and space', p. 83.

[78]Rosi Bradoitti, 'Posthuman, all too human towards a new process ontology', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 23:7–8 (2006), pp. 197–208 (p. 205).

[79]Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 221.

[80]Urvashi Bhutalia, 'Community, state and gender: On women's agency during Partition', *Economic and Political Review*, 28:17 (1993), pp. 12–24 (p. 15).

[81]Menon and Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries*, p. 40. It is important to highlight here that meaningless is quite a common descriptor of the violence across all accounts of it, including witness testimonies, literary tellings, and scholarly investigations. Meaningless does not, however, mean devoid of causes, which itself is an extremely chequered, overlapping, and irresolvable category that partitions the event. Meaningless here indicates both the suspension of production of meaningful value and, more

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million people were 'exchanged' between the new nation-states, 2 million people killed, 100,000 women raped and brutalised, countless horrors witnessed, and innumerable sorrows afflicted.

The Partition was championed based on naturalised notions of community and homelands, and specifically on the notion of Pakistan as a homeland for South Asian Muslims. As such, the logic of Partition stood at the apogee of a statist politics of spatialised meaning which locates, attaches, and bounds definite subject positions in enclosed space. However, in the decimating force of unprecedented violence, the striating logic came undone, precisely in the impossibility of 'fully comprehend(ing) its meaning'.[82] While the effects and nature of the violence were not homogeneous to all communities and spaces in the subcontinent,[83] violence itself was 'universal to the experience of the event'.[84]

An important observation that finds common ground across the terrain of partition studies is that violence spatialised key *tendencies* of Indian social and political realities. While early scholarship on Partition treated the violence as an exception or aberration – a 'temporary madness' – the later development of the field has sought to emphasise that the violence was an expression of a 'much more general and continuous aspect of modern life',[85] spatially expressing the competing intersection of the multiple relations, interests, and affinities that composed routine life.[86] In this vein, Shruti Kapila has recently argued that violence, or more importantly, the 'potential for violence' among kinsmen who lived in close intimacy, was a crucial axis along which Indian political thought developed in the early 20th century.[87] This recognition of the *potential* for violence in intimacy disturbs normative notions of organised order by infusing landscapes of shared becoming with the tendency to 'potent irregularity and interruption'.[88]

Channelling this potential for violence of the 'anti-statist subject',[89] Partition violence followed patterns of spatial change and continuity.[90] At the same time, violence effected displacements in the spatial distributions of people and communities.[91] Finally, the violence was integrally significant to the resultant shapes that space was stratified into in the newly formed nation-states. Indeed, as Purushottam points out, 'violence cleared space, quite literally, for the growth of a new regime of state sovereignty',[92] effecting a transition of the colonial state into a developmental national state. Considering the significance of spatial relations and concretisations to the emergence, execution, and distribution of violence in Partition, the latter can be treated as a significant device in mapping and following the nomadic elasticity of space.

importantly, the wholesale investment of the social space into an ongoing decimation of established lines of meaning-making, by no one (identity, community, place, unit) in particular but the total movement of violence in general.

[82]Menon and Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries*, p. 38.

[83]While I focus on the movement of violence in Punjab, this is not to suggest that the experience of Partition in other parts of the subcontinent was less than, or secondary to, the Punjab experience.

[84]Purushottam, *From Raj to Republic*, p. 157.

[85]Pandey, *Routine Violence*, p. 5.

[86]Partition studies is indented by an intense debate on the characterisation of the violence. While the aberration model stands long discarded, there has been careful and extensive discussion on where the violence can be 'placed along a continuum of overlapping categories that range from riots to pogroms, massacres to genocides.' See Paul Brass, 'The Partition of India and Retributive Genocide in Punjab, 1946-47: Means, Methods, and Purposes', Journal of Genocide Research, 51:7 (2003), pp. 71-101 (p. 72). The debate on qualifying the nature of violence has been complicated by the involvement of competing factions and limbs of state and society along blurred lines of fire yielding to the now established understanding that the 'violence… possessed both private and political purposes…was both spontaneous and politically purposeful.' Talbot (2019), p. 15. Engaging with the vast literature on the typification of the violence and corresponding reasoning is beyond the scope of this paper.

[87]Kapila, *Violent Fraternity*, p. 7.

[88]Kapila, *Violent Fraternity*, p. 7.

[89]Kapila, *Violent Fraternity*, p. 7.

[90]Gould, 'Hindu militarism and partition in 1940s United Provinces', p. 148.

[91]Brass, 'The Partition of India and retributive genocide in Punjab, 1946–47', p. 82.

[92]Purushottam, *From Raj to Republic*, p. 131.

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To reiterate, this is not a historical analysis or an attempt to piece together the 'principal historical issue' of 'why … the atrocious violence [happened] … and who was responsible for it',[93] eschewing the typical historical model of reducing the violence to the history of its context.[94] Instead, I use the nature of the violence that erupted in response to, and in advance of, imminent stratifications in space, to demonstrate the nomadic variations that are always possible in space. Violence became the moving force that smoothened space, at the precise moment when modern stratifications, overburdened with competing, intersecting meanings, were coming into effect. As such, I see Partition violence as 'nomadic life's counter-attack' to the striated foreclosure of stratified meanings in space.[95]

I use the war machine here as an analytical lens to explore how Partition violence revealed the immanent nomadic tendencies in space. In the interest of analytical conciseness, I use three specific methodological aspects of the war machine that highlight tendencies of nomadic space outlined in the previous section. These include the war machine's irreducibility to the state;[96] how it gives form to the chance of space by existing 'only in its own metamorphoses';[97] and, relatedly, how it does so in the movement of 'following' or relaying, as opposed to reproducing.[98] The next section then maps the spatial unfolding of this emergence in the exemplar becoming of Partition violence in Punjab in the massacre of refugee trains.

War machine

In his survey of violence affected areas in Punjab in March 1947 as the vice-president of the Interim Government, Jawaharlal Nehru lamented that 'if politics are to be conducted in this way, then they cease to be politics and become some kind of jungle warfare which reduces human inhabitations to the state of a desert'.[99] This is a particularly striking analogy that projects the decompositional force of smooth space. In distancing the violence of 'this way' from the conduct of politics, Nehru situates a certain kind of warfare beyond the grasp of the state, whose conduct has the potential to entirely flatten space – obliterating and rasing structured human inhabitations to the unstructured potential of the desert. In exacting this difference Nehru's statement anticipates the coming of what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as the 'war machine' – an immaterial force of virtuality that takes shape by pulling in and stretching out in space the tendency within it to continuous and indeterminate change.

Irreducibility

The war machine is not an organ or function of the state. It emerges in the wake of a 'social state',[100] a loose shape-shifting gathering of multiplicity, of multiple desires, affects, and chances, bursting at the seams and raging to ward off the striations and concrete wholes. Unlike the striated functioning of the State, the war machine does not adhere to a reproductive model of 'remaining identical to itself, across its variations'.[101] While the war machine may be appropriated from time to time by the state and channelled into its military apparatus, the latter does not own or possess the force and functioning of its violence. Indeed, when 'it fails in this exercise, it is in trouble',[102] for it opens

[93] Brass, 'The Partition of India and retributive genocide in Punjab, 1946–47', p. 74.
[94] Pandey, *Routine Violence*, p. 17.
[95] Rosenow, 'Nomadic life's counter-attack'.
[96] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 352.
[97] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus, p. 360*.
[98] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*.
[99] Jawaharlal Nehru, 'Punjab: "Situation under control", says Pandit Nehru', March 18, 1947 available at: {https://eresources.nlb.gov.sg/newspapers/digitised/page/indiandailymail19470318-1.1.1}.
[100] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 357.
[101] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 360.
[102] Rosenow, 'Nomadic life's counter-attack', p. 429.

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itself to the war machine's escape from its interiority as well as the war machine's erosive violence against its partitioned securities.

The war machine emerged not despite the Partition, but precisely in response to the colonial striations that had 'hardened' the fluid affinities of the subcontinent into concretised identities and religious affiliations.[103] These striations had not only entrenched divisions but had also, for so long, engendered such deplorable conditions of existence, economic, social, and political, that 'a condition of extraordinary explosiveness' was ripe.[104] This was intensified by 'the fragmented and distributed forms of local authority' that always already paralleled and challenged the sovereign authority of the state on the ground in colonial India.[105] These intensifications together contributed to the emergence of a 'social vacuum uniquely habitable to thugs and goons'.[106] Thus, despite the imminent closures, space was opened up 'in a way that provid(ed) the nomad with a territory'.[107] And the war of the nomad always already implicates space in it, for it necessarily proceeds 'by a manner of being in space as though it were smooth'.[108]

The Partition violence remains impossible to attribute to any singular source – community, state, or individual motives.[109] The violence expressed itself as rhizomatic fruition of a 'multiplicity of sources, uses, motives, and purposes' which were irreducible to a centralised collection of causes and rationales.[110] The violence was thus a movement of incoherent, inconsistent multiplicities that converged onto specific points of breakdown in space before moving further, passing along 'as a function of singularities impossible to universalize, of circumstances impossible to interiorize'.[111] As such, a straightforward relationship between particular instances and agents and general causes and reasons ceases to exist. As Brass points out, often in cases of violent antagonisms '*peoples display local and personal motives that have little or nothing to do with categorical explanations applied to them*'.[112] These motives were highly varied, including but not limited to revenge, community honour, loot, and competition for resources. Thus, the Partition war machine was comprised of the movement of ex-military men, mushrooming paramilitary organisations, volunteer movements, and so on, each loose grouping composed of raiders 'making use of the war' to effectuate their own disparate or coinciding interests.[113] While factions of the state were definitely involved in the execution and continuance of violence, for instance, in the emergence of 'heavily armed and organized war parties that were on occasion aided by policemen and soldiers',[114] yet the violence 'emanated from the society rather than the modern state'.[115] As Deleuze and Guattari point out, it is not uncommon to hear the cry 'The police are with us!' when the war machine surges.[116]

Metamorphoses

Largely, partition scholars have pointed out how the militarised tendency in Punjabi society, honed for long by the British Empire's policy of extensively recruiting men from the region for its own army, 'turned in on itself'.[117] The empire had developed a systematic policy of recruiting military personnel from particular ethnic groups it deemed 'martial', and this was designated based

[103] Ajay Verghese, *The Colonial Origins of Ethnic Violence in India* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016), p. 9.
[104] Francisco, 'In the heat of fratricide', p. 231.
[105] Gould, 'Hindu militarism and partition in 1940s United Provinces', p. 149.
[106] Francisco, 'In the heat of fratricide', p. 231.
[107] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 381.
[108] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 386.
[109] See Talbot, 'The 1947 Partition violence', pp. 9–14.
[110] Brass, 'The Partition of India and retributive genocide in Punjab, 1946–47', p. 91.
[111] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 378.
[112] Brass, 'The Partition of India and retributive genocide in Punjab, 1946–47', p. 83, emphasis in original.
[113] Brass, 'The Partition of India and retributive genocide in Punjab, 1946–47', p. 86.
[114] Talbot, 'The 1947 Partition violence', p. 15.
[115] Purushottam, *From Raj to Republic*, p. 130.
[116] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 367.
[117] Swarna Aiyar, 'August anarchy: The Partition massacres in Punjab, 1947', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 18:s1 (1995), pp. 13–36 (p. 34).

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on whether 'members of the group had been defeated by the sepoys of the Bengal Army in the 1840s and had not joined that force in rebelling against the British in 1857'.[118] While the state thus honed fidelity to its determinations as key to the recruitment of its causes, the martial tendencies exceeded statist capture and were channelled by the war machine into the propagation of violence, which served as the one connecting link between the disparate multiplicity of interests.

This multiplicity was transformed into an interlinked continuity of violence, wherein each emergent link's force effected its own variation into the ongoing movement of the violence. For instance, Swarna Aiyar has documented how the military nature of the society in Punjab was hugely influential in yielding the organised bands and packs of travelling violence during the riots. Punjab has always demonstrated strong tendencies towards military-style socialisation of its men and a general proclivity for organised military training which imparts 'an extraordinary group solidarity and willingness to die for a cause',[119] denoting an intrinsic harnessing of warring and warrior tendencies that does not find its end in the state. Aiyar argues that the presence of these trained men of war, along with access to sophisticated ammunition and methods of war, severely compounded the violence in Punjab.[120] Further, it was not just military training that enabled the exacerbation of the violence, but also importantly the combat experience gained by recruits in the Second World War.[121] Jha and Wilkinson have demonstrated that the greater the presence of units with combat experience among the paramilitary bands of war in a region, the more intense the violence of ethnic cleansing. The advantage of combat experience, they argue, is that it offers insights into 'the actual experience of engaging in violence, and the need to improvise in rapidly changing circumstances'.[122]

This sharpened experience of responding to variation in space was in turn further siphoned into the training of the many 'mushrooming' paramilitary units that were emerging in the region.[123] Many of these units were populated by volunteer organisations for community defence, such as the Muslim National Guard, the Ram Sena, and the Akali Fauj, among others, cultivated out of 'tentative and always emergent [forms of] authority grounded in violence'.[124] These volunteer groupings were assemblages of 'mushroom organizations, created to meet the exigencies of the moment and then forgotten … owing allegiance to nobody, or what is worse to a local faction or a faction's busybody'.[125] Thus, exceeding the state on the one hand, the war machine in Punjab became a force of metamorphosis on the other. The militarised tendencies of Punjabi society that were first appropriated into the colonial military apparatus were unleashed back into space on 'an altogether new and different plane' through a continuous series of metamorphoses of the war machine.[126]

Following

Further, the emergent channels of communication between these mushrooming assemblages set up contingent lines of flight along which 'potential violence was networked'.[127] These lines of flight were the pathways that violence followed. This sense of 'following' can be distinctly seen in the ways in which the violence exerted itself, through a very specific 'directional' logic of relaying in

[118] Saumitra Jha and Steven Wilkinson, 'Does combat experience foster organizational skill? Evidence from ethnic cleansing during the Partition of South Asia', *The American Political Science Review*, 106:4 (2012), pp. 883–907 (p. 891).

[119] Aiyar, 'August anarchy', p. 28.

[120] Aiyar, 'August anarchy', p. 28.

[121] Aiyar, 'August anarchy'; Jha and Wilkinson, 'Does combat experience foster organizational skill?'.

[122] Jha and Wilkinson, 'Does combat experience foster organizational skill?', p. 884.

[123] Talbot, 'The 1947 Partition violence', p. 4.

[124] Thomas Blom Hansen and Finn Stepputat, 'Sovereignty revisited', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 35 (2006), pp. 295–315, quoted in Gould, 'Hindu militarism and partition in 1940s United Provinces', p. 149.

[125] 'Report Covering the First Half of 1939', L/PJ/8/678, IOR, quoted in Gould, 'Hindu militarism and partition in 1940s United Provinces', p. 145.

[126] Aiyar, 'August anarchy', p. 28.

[127] Gould, 'Hindu militarism and partition in 1940s United Provinces', p. 150.

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space.[128] Consider the following exhibit of a particular pattern that violence reportedly followed in certain regions of Punjab:

> A false alarm that a Sikh band headed by horsemen had attacked a locality would be sent to the military. The local police would impose a curfew. The National Muslim Guard would set fire to Hindu and Sikh houses. The people running for life from burning houses would be shot for breaking the curfew. Those trying to escape the town would be butchered by the troops (of the Guard).[129]

The methods of the war machine thus relied on a 'continuous variation of variables, instead of extracting constants from them'.[130] It recruited a series of spatial effects to engender its violence, using variable points of contact to advance itself further in space, without occupying any single point as a constant container of its violence. Significantly, this 'ambulant' model of exertion gathered violence into fleeting compositions that, 'lacking any central command', took form as connecting effectuations in space.[131] The composition of the gangs could be organised at very short notice, and the organisation of their constituent formations also followed a directional, and not a territorial, logic in space. That is, the units emerged in relation to dispersed points in space. Thus, the Sikh *jathas* (gangs), for instance, would take form in assembling in the vicinity of the village *gurudwara* (Sikh place of worship), where they would be apprised of their immediate mission by the leaders.[132] The size of the composition would vary with the size of the mission. For larger missions, like the massacre of a refugee train, the gangs would absorb local Sikh villagers, who would 'disperse to their homes' following the mission, while the *jathas* would find shelter in a village local to the operation.[133] The assembly, deployment, and dispersal of the gangs took form in response to the emergent directions that the violence was to follow, and the movement of these units and its compositional parts was not uniform and homogeneous, but ambulant in an open space. The composition thus remained indeterminate and variable, gathering and releasing bodies in the ebb and flow of the violence.

Community here provided the vectorial direction for the moving squads of the war machine, creating the moving targets that the violence followed. Indeed, in the instances of honour killings of women 'a whole new order of violence came into play, by men against their own kinswomen; and by women against their daughters or sisters and their own selves'.[134] Thus, as Bhutalia has pointed out, the impossible separation between subjects and agents of violence makes it also impossible to be explained as communal.[135] The violence cannot be reduced to 'feelings' of community and nationhood: 'feelings become uprooted from the interiority of a "subject", to be projected violently outward into a milieu of pure exteriority that lends them an incredible velocity, a catapulting force'.[136]

Dispersed assemblages gathered into varying speeds of violence which wandered in space, extending into the directions that the violence followed. A total metamorphosis of space drove a continual relay of relations into the movement of violence. Francisco has stressed that there may have been instances where retaliatory violence was spurred purely by the affective diffusion of fear, 'by people who surrendered to a frenzy of anger'.[137] The war machine's emergence was thus

[128] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*.

[129] 'Origins of the riots', *Hindustan Times*, September 7, 1947 available at: {https://dn790009.ca.archive.org/0/items/NewspapersPartitionofIndia1947/PDF.pdf}. Accessed July 30, 2024.

[130] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 372.

[131] Brass, 'The Partition of India and retributive genocide in Punjab, 1946–47', p. 86.

[132] Aiyar, 'August anarchy', p. 29.

[133] Aiyar, 'August anarchy', p. 30.

[134] Menon and Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries*, p. 45.

[135] Bhutalia, 'Community, state and gender', p.15.

[136] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 356.

[137] Francisco, 'In the heat of fratricide', p. 232.

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this relaying movement of violence that transformed space into an infinite and localised set of manoeuvres and missions which could not be reduced to a uniformly coded structure and cause.

Ghost trains

One of the most enduring images of the rapacious violence of Partition in Punjab is the carnage of migrant bodies aboard the trains that ran between India and Pakistan between August and September in 1947, which came to be known as ghost trains. The ghost trains became 'the virtual hallmark of Partition violence'.[138] While incidents of train wrecking, derailment, and other acts of sabotage and killing on board had already begun weeks before the Partition, post-Independence and Partition, trains became moving weapons of mass carnage in both directions. By September, the two governments had organised Refugee Special Trains to facilitate population exchange, while ordinary services had been completely suspended owing to the increasing instances of sabotage and killings after Independence.[139] However, with the Refugee Special trains the war machine found clearly directional lines of flight to follow – 'these trains generally carried members of one community only, who were headed in the opposite direction and provided ideal targets'.[140] The attacks on the special trains, thus, emerged in response to the direction in which the train was headed, as that determined the community whose members would number the train, and hence simultaneously the attackers whose vector that particular community was. The nomadic violence assembled and disassembled in following directional lines of flight in space. Following these lines, the war machine engendered its own metamorphosis into a self-generating and self-perpetuating movement of total violence:

> Sending train loads of dead passengers across the borders became a mad competition on both sides of the border so that each exhorted its community to kill ever greater number of people to be sent across to the other community.[141]

Once again, seizing and occupying territory or power was not the abstract force reproducing this violence. Instead, the 'competition' was over the count, how many more other bodies, how much space, can be counted in the passage of violence, and left behind decomposed.

In his novel *Train to Pakistan*, Khushwant Singh offers a vivid description of how the refugee trains moved: 'From the roof legs dangled down the sides onto doors and windows. The doors and windows were jammed with heads and arms. There were people on buffers between the bogies.'[142] The irruption of the war machine decomposed territorially rationalised distinctions and forms in space. With the 'intolerable overcrowding' on the refugee trains, the organised space of the train and its compartments and coaches and other striations was rendered a smooth space where any point could be entered into contact with.[143]

As a moving body that traverses through points to continue its onward trajectory, the train is always already a nomadic body. Arrival and departure are not so much the ends of its spatial encounters as relaying points that re-turn it to ongoing movement. The space of locomotion came now to be doubly infused with the dense heterogeneity of uprooted, groundless bodies. This smothering, piling, and choking mass of moving bodies – of the train, of the passengers, of their salvaged possessions, and eventually the shredded, decomposed remains of these bodies – became a rolling multiplicity composed of undifferentiable unity. The trains turned into a force of metamorphosis, and bodies coming into undistinguishable relations with it became a pure exteriority –

[138] Brass, 'The Partition of India and retributive genocide in Punjab, 1946–47', p. 84.
[139] Aiyar, 'August anarchy', p.21.
[140] Aiyar, 'August anarchy', p. 21.
[141] Navdip Kaur, 'Violence and migration: A study of killing in the trains during the Partition of Punjab in 1947', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 72:1 (2011), pp. 947-54 (p. 949).
[142] Khushwant Singh, *Train to Pakistan* (Delhi: Lotus Roli, 2006) quoted in Kaur, 'Violence and migration', p. 949.
[143] Aiyar, 'August anarchy', p. 25.

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a space completely on the outside of, and even inhospitable to, discrete forms of organisation and reproduction.

Indeed, the ghost trains cannibalised their own organised tendencies in the suicidal mania of the war machine. The trains had fixed directions, and times of arrival and departure were known.[144] These organised tendencies of the trains' movement were what allowed for the marauding gangs to time their violent irruption into the trains' durational becoming. This irruption transmuted all bodies in space into possible and actual relations of violence.

> Trains would usually be attacked when passing through the countryside, which provided ideal cover for the mobs stopping the trains as they could lie in wait in the nearby fields of standing crops or sugarcane or maize, and vanish with equal ease once the looting and killing was completed. For the same reasons attacks were generally carried out in the nights or in the early hours of the morning.[145]

The above exhibit demonstrates how the movement of violence advanced in relation to the space, converting all spaces into 'a milieu of pure exteriority'.[146] The rampant forms the war machine took gathered unto itself the very spaces of sustenance that feeds the primarily agrarian geography of Punjab and turned them into conniving checkpoints or relays for the passage of violence. Further, these spatial emergences enabled the aggressors to remain anonymous. The aggressors appeared and 'vanished' as indeterminate, undefined movers of violence that worked through the dimming of visual understanding of space, producing instead smooth space of fluid, tactile contacts. The attackers were also helped by the particularly aggressive monsoonal flooding that year, which, enacting the chance of space, had destroyed railway bridges and tracks in rural areas.[147] Thus, all tendencies in space are always already available to be repurposed in the nomadic movement of becoming. Subverting the logic of organised population transfer across two territories, the trains instead turned into moving conglomerations of violence, folding into this movement a dense jumble of bodies that formed and deformed as an inseparable, multiple force of uncontained response.

Finally, it was not only en route that the trains engendered the passage of violence. The stations and platforms were particularly affected by the multidirectional movement of bodies. Serving as 'the entry point for one set of refugees and the exit for another', stations and platforms were appropriated into the nomadic overrunning of space in Punjab.[148] Not only did the stations turn into dense sites of filth and disease as the number of bodies driven to the platforms increased, but also the multiple directionalities of bodies either entering or exiting the newly formed territory enabled a continuous metamorphosis of space into sites for 'wholesale carnage'.[149]

The Partition violence in Punjab was thus an intensely spatial becoming that populated in space a response to the partitioned territorialities of emergent nation-states. Yet, in closing this section, it is important to point out that emergence of the war machine did not concretise into permanently nomadic spaces post-Partition.[150] There is no coherent end to the variability of nomadic space. As state- and nation-building processes gained momentum in both India and Pakistan, striations hardened into an enduring nationalist conflict which saw the reabsorption of the war machine into the statist machinery. An example of such post-Partition reabsorption can be seen in the space of Kashmir, which has been produced as an ongoing location for the enunciation of competing state identities and militarised conflict, restraining and reducing the complex local multiplicities and

[144] Kaur, 'Violence and migration', p. 950.
[145] Aiyar, 'August anarchy', p. 25.
[146] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 356.
[147] Aiyar, 'August anarchy', p. 26.
[148] Aiyar, 'August anarchy', p. 20.
[149] Aiyar, 'August anarchy', p. 19.
[150] I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for highlighting this point.

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voices of Kashmiri peoples to the 'binary choice of either supporting India's or Pakistan's claims'.[151] The chasm of nomadic space that had opened with the emergence of the war machine underwent a 'passage and transition from one formula to another', such that spatial excess and fluidity were reconstituted into a unifying framework for national identity.[152]

Conclusion

Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's formulation of nomadism and the war machine, I have argued here that spatial assessments in IR remain tied to striated understanding of space. Striated space privileges the methodological acts of bounding and (re)production, which are seen as yielding meaningful consequences in space. I have argued that this singular emphasis on meaningful production limits itself to recognising concretised outcomes in space, at the expense of the nomadic potential to variation immanent to the process of becoming in space. Nomadism renders space open to the indeterminate potential that always already exists and flows in space. I have sought to demonstrate this nomadic movement in space through the violence that moved in the immediate aftermath of the Indian Partition of 1947 through the frontier region of Punjab. Resisting the representation of this violence as a spatial outbreak of entrenched social antagonisms, I follow the movement of the violence as the emergence of the war machine – the cascading irruption of nomadic potential against the closures of statist partitions.

This paper has sought to reflect on spatial tendencies that elude meaningful narrativisation. Spatial indeterminacy infuses into phenomena and bodies an uncanny potential to become other in ways that cannot be predicted in advance. I have made a provisional attempt at mobilising nomadic concepts to read this indeterminacy in the unfolding of phenomena. An important theoretical consequence here is that indeterminacy is not merely a matter of recognition. It is not enough to identify and name locations and discourses in space as being open-ended and processual while keeping the ontological primacy of boundedness intact. Accepting the essential kernel of indeterminacy in nomadic space in turn necessitates a methodological openness to accounts that do not always add up to a coherent, or meaningful, framework of experience. This means encountering possibilities and potentials which do not make sense within established regimes of meaning-making, without rushing to ontologise them as organised configurations. A methodological sensitivity to smooth space is an openness to following the currents of phenomena rather than reproducing predetermined objectives or conditions of movement. Yet precisely because it follows immediate stimulus rather than pregiven constraints, nomadic methodology cannot be defined in advance as a set of structured solutions or steps.

Nonetheless, while it may be difficult to offer ready-made scripts for proceeding with the potentials of nomadism, it is still possible to highlight the analytical shifts that it makes possible. Nomadic space throws up possibilities and parts of experience that are undisciplined and emergent and indeed beyond the grasp of organised production. These are parts concurrent with the experience of organised phenomena yet underscore its radical openness to divergence and surprise. Channelling this analytical openness into study of phenomena enacts immediate shifts in the 'how' of doing. Like the parkour athlete's movement, it demands a way of moving through space as a series of possibilities in motion that are *experienced* as passing encounters rather than occupied as positions. Experience is open to intensities, affects, and ways that run unseen and unrecognisable to existing knowledge, leaving us always exposed to a very wide margin of chance. This margin

[151]Matthew Hill and Nishank Motwani, 'Language, identity and (in)security in India–Pakistan relations: The case of Kashmir', *South Asia*, 40:1 (2017), pp. 123–45 (p. 128).

[152]Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 419. Other examples of interest here include the history of abducted women's 'retrieval' and reabsorption into state-owned subjects in post-Partition India and Pakistan, and the conjoined histories of post-Partition urban space, nation-building, and reterritorialisation of migrants and refugees, particularly in the case of Delhi. See, for instance, Deepra Dandekar, 'Women's "retrieval" from Pakistan: "India's Daughters" and the emotional history of Partition', *South Asia*, 44:4 (2021), pp. 703–20; Anjali Bhardwaj Datta, 'Genealogy of a Partition city: War, migration and urban space in Delhi', *South Asia*, 42:1 (2019), pp. 152–69.

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necessitates a shift away from reproducible mandates of moving in particular ways to guarantee certain outcomes. It also calls for a shift away from requiring all phenomena to be explainable within predominant models and methods of understanding. Inexplicability follows close on the heels of indeterminacy, and if the latter is allowed space in analyses, then erasing the former cannot be a sustainable ontological assumption or methodological ambition. Openness thus calls for attention to flow outside of pathways of research that repeated ontological manoeuvres have striated into habitual patterns.

Video Abstract. To view the online video abstract, please visit: https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210525101186.

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