

**ANNIHILATION AND ACCUMULATION: POSTCOLONIAL LITERATURES  
OF GENOCIDE AND CAPITAL**

by

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## **DEDICATION**

*For my wife, who saw in me a different narrative*

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## Introduction

Recent debates about the continued relevance of postcolonial studies stake three broad positions. In the first, Robert Young argues that postcolonial studies are born of and continually engaged with anticolonial political struggle. Simon During represents the second argument, which holds that Young's version of postcolonialism caricatures the fragmented and contradictory reality of colonialism, which "moved forward fitfully" and varied from violent expropriation to "acts of exchange and mutual benefit," rarely evincing the kind of "clear decisionism" anticolonial movements necessarily attribute to them (335-36). Moreover, During argues, the age of formal empires has passed, so a paradigm built on those moorings must necessarily be swept away. Dipesh Chakrabarty articulates a third set of arguments, less in defense of postcolonial studies than as a broad outline of their current tasks in the context of anthropogenic climate change.

The author of *Provincializing Europe* writes that thinking human agency in the current moment requires analysis across "multiple and incommensurable scales at once," a strength of postcolonial studies generally and its literary branch specifically (1). The first level is the universal human subject bequeathed to us by the Enlightenment, the human that is potentially the same across spaces and times, the subject of human rights. The second level of human agency sits adjacent to the first but acknowledges the contingencies of history, race, class and gender that overdetermine the rights-bearing subject. The third level analyzes humans as a parasitic collective who have created a geological age, the Anthropocene, which has altered the climate in ways that endanger their planetary habitat. Chakrabarty is careful to say that no one of these views "is rendered invalid by the presence of others. They are simply disjunctive" (2). In fact,

any effort to conceptualize the world today "encounters the necessity of thinking disjunctively about the human, through moves that in their simultaneity appear contradictory" (2).

Postcolonial literature works across several of these disjunctures. The archive I assemble in this dissertation take seriously the universal rights-bearing human as well as the historical circumstances such as genocides and systemic discrimination that obviate such universality. In so doing, these texts bring together Chakrabarty's discontinuous modes of agency into rich palimpsests that never quite cohere. Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981) and Boubecar Boris Diop's *Murambi, The Book of Bones* (2000), the subject of my first two chapters, concern genocides in Bangladesh and Rwanda respectively. In chapters 3 and 4 I take up M.G. Vassanji's *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* and Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* to analyze the weird arguments offered by protagonists who claim that capitalist entrepreneurship and its attendant accumulation constitute a mode of self-defense against the contingencies of racist states.

While Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and Diop's *Murambi* concern genocides that differ across time and place, both novels share a concern with the overdetermination of Southern conflicts by Northern weapons and geopolitical strategies. Written during the Cold War, Rushdie's novel examines the consequences of that Great Power showdown for the subcontinent. Specifically, the novel locates in this larger global arena the 1971 war of independence waged in Bangladesh (then East Pakistan) and the genocidal repression meted out by (West) Pakistan. America and Europe supply weapons and political support to Pakistan while the Soviet Union sides with Bangladesh and India's intervention into that crisis. The 1994 Rwandan genocide, the subject of Diop's novel, similarly attends to the international forces abetting the genocidaires and aiding their victims. France, which supplied Pakistan with fighter jets in 1971, provides weapons and diplomatic support for the murderous Hutu Power militias while also taking the lead in the

ostensibly humanitarian Operation Turquoise. Rushdie's novel, I argue, asks what it means to indict individual perpetrators given the international weapons and geopolitics that enabled their crimes. In contrast, Diop's novel critiques the narrative of global "indifference"—no one cared about Rwanda—repeated across analyses of the genocide. *Murambi*, in my reading, foregrounds the over investment of European powers, France and Belgium specifically, which belies their ostensible apathy.

M.G. Vassanji's *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* and Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* continues the focus on the influence of global machinations on local conflicts. These novels, however, allow me to turn away from Northern powers to emergent Southern powers and their dominations of other Southern spaces. Although these novels focus on East Africa and India respectively, they concern Southern businessmen negotiating structural discrimination in their countries by leveraging the influx of international capital enabled partly by a neoliberal shift in economic policy. Vikram Lall, the namesake of Vassanji's novel, belongs to the South Asian diaspora in East Africa, which is demonized in the novel as "Asian Shylocks," a class of imperial collaborators and self-interested merchants. In response, Lall weaponizes capital accumulation to guard against a racist state. Adiga's *The White Tiger* offers a parallel to this strange logic so that its protagonist, Balram Halwai, argues that neoliberal entrepreneurship allows him to escape India's caste system.

Collectively these texts negotiate particular "distribution[s] of the sensible" that, for Jacques Rancière, constitute the basis of community. He argues, "The distribution of the sensible reveals who can have a share in what is common to the community based on what they do and on the time and space in which this activity is performed" (12). Communities abstractly, and nation states particularly, begin with a shared commonsense, a field of intelligibility that delineates what



is visible and what is not, which people may participate in this society and how they may do so. Both politics and aesthetics earn their name with the interruption of this given distribution and the disruption of its commonality. *Midnight's Children* and *Murambi* both demonstrate how genocidal violence aims to create the commonsense of ethnic or cultural homogeneity through annihilation; however, these novels also foreground the ways such violence helps sustain international alliances. In contrast, *Vikram Lall and White Tiger* posit capital accumulation as the means by which marginal groups can protect themselves within regimes that can only see them as pariahs. If the first two novels bespeak the violence founding a given “distribution of the sensible,” the latter two illustrate the violence enforcing this dominant commonsense within their communities. Taken together, the postcolonial literary fictions in this dissertation intervene in their historical moment by rupturing the given distribution of perceptibility. Specifically, these texts use literary strategies—hyperbole and counterfocalization—to stretch out the dominant commonsense to a breaking point. In this way, I argue, these works advance the need for alternate narratives that require neither annihilation nor accumulation.

In chapter 1, I examine the 1971 genocide in Bangladesh when Pakistan tried to violently suppress the independence movement of then East Pakistan at the cost of nearly three million lives. Placing this event at the center of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, I argue, turns the focalizer's the narrative in to the elaborate self-defense of a genocidaire, who claims to be innocent of these crimes by indicting himself for the entire twentieth-century history of the subcontinent. This hyperbolic self-indictment produces a crisis of history by blurring the boundaries of an event and individual agency until one is forced into an infinite regress to explain the historical origins of a war crime. This crisis of historical accountability also plagues the International Criminal Tribunal currently being held in Bangladesh as it seeks justice for the

victims of the genocide; as I show in chapter 2, a similar problem afflicts the United Nations during the Rwandan Genocide. Such a crisis also works spatially to indict the flow of arms from America, China, and the Soviet Union, along with their diplomatic support. Examining such international networks both broadens our understanding of genocides and obfuscates the agency of individuals as war criminals by recognizing their entrapment within overdetermining forces. The dead, rights-bearing humans and their killers suffer from "too much history" (Rushdie 36).

In view of such international forces and their specific role in the Rwandan Genocide, I argue in chapter 2 that we should no longer speak of "indifference." Reading across a variety of texts in different genres, including Philip Gourevitch's *We Wish to Inform You that Tomorrow We Will be Killed with Our Families* (journalism), Roméo Dallaire's *Shake Hands With the Devil: The Failure of Humanity in Rwanda* (military memoir), and Boubacar Boris Diop's *Murambi, The Book of Bones* (literary fiction), I examine "indifference" as a trope that repeats across most commentary on the Rwandan Genocide, in which 900,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus were massacred. The accusation of international apathy makes little sense when we consider, at minimum, French support of the ruling Hutu Habyarimana regime, Belgian supply of arms, as well as the humanitarian aid these nations proffered. To grasp these contradictions I use Michael Herzfeld's argument on the *production* of indifference but broaden its implications to demonstrate that the clash of conflicting forces, weapons and humanitarianism specifically, yields this affect. The UN's stasis during the genocide, I argue, was not the result of an uncaring malaise but the product of an overidentification with its own bureaucracy, which clashed with its member nations' strategic investments of as well as the needs of Rwandans. Such bureaucratic self-preservation also allowed the UN to "distribute accountability to the point that it becomes irretrievable," allowing one to "point fingers in all directions" (Bennett 575). In this way, I return

to the concerns with the difficulty of justice in view of international forces supplying arms to genocidaires and humanitarian aid to their victims. I build on this argument in chapter 2 by locating the key narrative term—indifference—that obfuscates these transnational forces by distributing the blame to global apathy rather than geopolitical economy, where it belongs.

In the third and fourth chapters I develop a nascent theme in the first two chapters, namely a shift away from North-South relations to South-South relations. In doing so, I contend that the relevance of postcolonial studies in the twenty-first century lies in its attention to the rise of Southern powers and their emergent informal empires. Specifically, I focus on India's relation to East Africa and the correspondence between India and China, both of which must necessarily travel the routes of global capitalism. I demonstrate the allure of neoliberal capitalism and capital accumulation within the marginalized populations of Kenya and India who use these international financescapes to battle against or overcome local racism and the caste system respectively.<sup>1</sup> In chapter 3, I analyze the argument for capital accumulation put forward by M.G. Vassanji's focalizer in *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall*. The novel's namesake belongs to the East African Asian diaspora, whose presence as traders and shopkeepers predates the arrival of European powers. Drawing on the rich historical work of Thomas Metcalf and Robert Gregory, I contextualize this early history as well as the impact of the British Empire, which added to this diaspora with the indentured servants it brought in to build the Uganda Railway and, more troublingly, as an active settler colonial population. These historical tensions propelled Idi Amin's 1969 expulsion of Asians from Uganda who, in the novel, are slandered as "Asian Shylocks." Lall locates in this slur both the reason and means to accumulate capital, which protects against the contingencies of a racist state and its perpetual threats. I take this argument seriously to understand the allure of capital accumulation within this diaspora while also pushing

against it by attending to the radical history of solidarity between Asians and their Black compatriots both during the independence struggle and the labor organizing efforts in the new nation.

Balram Halwai, the focalizer of Aravind Adiga's Booker Prize winning novel *The White Tiger*, posits a similar argument by claiming that an embrace of neoliberal entrepreneurship and its impersonal calculus represents an advance for the victims of the caste system's intimate violence. In chapter 4, I draw on the primary theorist and hero of lower-caste struggle, Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, author of *The Annihilation of Caste* and *The Buddha or Karl Marx*. In these works Ambedkar critiques Mohandas Gandhi's conservative reformism. This allows me to foreground the primacy of caste as an organizing principle and structure of violence, the battle against which cannot be subsumed necessarily within anticapitalism, a position Gopal Guru argues for. The sparse scholarly attention to this novel does not pay sufficient attention to caste or its relation to the text's brutal satire of both individual entrepreneurship and the atomizing freedom this neoliberal ethos promises as well as India's Socialist parties and their leaders. I argue that these tensions help us understand the context of subaltern accumulation and its suspicion of the anticapitalism voiced by parties who often shore up the caste system rather than annihilate it.

In these close readings I unpack the peculiar arguments offered by Vassanji's and Adiga's focalizers: that capital accumulation is a mode of self-defense against the hostilities of a racist state; that adopting neoliberal entrepreneurship's profane accumulative spirit helps escape from the caste system's sacred predestination that denies Dalits (the downtrodden) any escape from poverty. Although these arguments reflect a concern with the neoliberal turn in their nations' economic policy—privatization of national industries, decentralization of national authority for

increased local autonomy, deregulation of financial markets, and concerted efforts to weaken trade unions—these novels do not present national allegories as Fredric Jameson once theorized.<sup>2</sup> Allegories aim to represent a totality even while necessarily failing at that task; these novels and their focalizers, on the other hand, articulate the perspectives of a marginalized community engaged in a civil war with other more dominant groups. They do not allegorize the nation but fight against it.

These arguments for the virtue of international capital, moreover, help us understand the emergent primacy of South-South exchanges. Vassanji's novel, for instance, focuses on the descendants of a South Asian diaspora brought to East Africa to build the Ugandan Railway for the British Empire. This diaspora, however, also dominates the financial and mercantile sectors of Kenya's economy, enriching themselves through Indian Ocean trade. More troublingly, this diaspora's correspondence with the subcontinent now involves the massive influx of capital from India to East Africa, which includes the purchase of millions of hectares of farmland in Uganda, Tanzania, and Ethiopia, as well as multibillion-dollar "resource-seeking deals in exchange for infrastructure investments" (WTO 52). India's bilateral trade with Africa (\$63 billion) now surpasses its trade with the US (\$56 billion), and the difference continues to grow exponentially (WTO 15). India imports African minerals and fuels to support its booming manufacturing and energy needs, which if unabated, will nearly triple the value of their current trade (\$176 billion) by 2015 (WTO 15). All of this places India in direct conflict with China, Africa's second largest trading partner (\$166 billion), and its own strategic investments to access the resources that will insure it remains the world's factory.

Adiga's novel takes up this rivalry through its epistolary form, in which the narrator writes to the Chinese premier on the eve of his visit to India to tell him the real way Indian

entrepreneurs are made, rather than the sanitized version the premier will hear from his guides. The contest between India and China in Africa undoubtedly influences the premier's interest in Indian business culture. In chapter 4, we see the rise of one such businessman in India. Balram Halwai does not address East Africa nor does it seem that Africa generally registers on his map of the world. However, he does describe the Indian Ocean as a force that brings "light to my country. Every place on the map of India near the ocean is well-off" (Tiger 14). When combined with the epistolary form of the novel and its explicit address to the Chinese premier, this laudatory attention to the ocean discloses an interest in the complex networks of exchange across the contested waters of the Indian Ocean. Specifically, India and China, who have already fought a month long war in 1962 across their Northeast border, now vie for shipping routes as well as the goods traversing those routes. This is, in part, the reason why India has remained the world's largest weapons importer since 2010. One analyst at the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) argues that "China's naval modernization is starting to infringe on the Indian Ocean, which India considers its backyard," which is "why you see both countries expanding naval forces slowly and carefully toward Southeast Asia" (cited in Pizzi).

These twenty-first century tensions depend on colonial histories, of course, but postcolonial studies has more to offer than the back story to the current moment. Instead, they may help us recognize the emergence of informal empires within exchanges that must be seen as collaborative and domineering at once, and which may advance some racial minorities at the expense of others. The lack of official colonial structures or government does not make postcolonial studies irrelevant, as Simon During suggests, but necessary precisely because of their absence. In this, I veer closer to Robert Young's argument that postcolonial studies must be

anticolonial because it emerged from and continually engaged with a decolonizing political project. For Young,

the only criterion that could determine whether “postcolonial theory” has ended is whether, economic booms of the so-called “emerging markets” notwithstanding, imperialism and colonialism in all their different forms have ceased to exist in the world, whether there is no longer domination by nondemocratic forces (often exercised on others by Western democracies, as in the past), or economic and resource exploitation enforced by military power, or a refusal to acknowledge the sovereignty of non-Western countries, and whether peoples or cultures still suffer from the long-lingering aftereffects of imperial, colonial, and neocolonial rule, albeit in contemporary forms such as economic globalization. (20)

I agree with much of this argument insofar as it aligns postcolonialism generally and Postcolonial studies specifically with an ongoing anticolonial project. However, I want to amplify Young’s concerns by attending to emergent South-South patterns of domination, which draw on recent “economic booms” to drive “economic and resource exploitations enforced by military power” (20).

For During, much of this is “posturing” since it ignores “colonialism’s limits and disjunctions” (336). These “disjunctions” continue into a present in which a paradigm born of resistance against formal colonial power cannot make sense of the “postcolonized today,” who “find a comfortable berth in democratic state capitalism.” For instance,

the political party that represents New Zealand's indigenous peoples—the Maori Party—is currently in power in coalition with a fiercely neoliberal party. Why has it joined the coalition? Partly best to protect the considerable capital sums that have accrued to *iwi* (tribes) by virtue of their successful appeal to the 1840 Waitangi treaty by which Maori seceded sovereignty to the British. How does anticolonialist postcolonialism apply here? (333)

One answer to the first question—why has the Maori Party joined a coalition with a neoliberal party?—may be found in the novels examined in chapter's 3 and 4, both of which posit the use of capital accumulation as a mode of self-defense against a racist state. The relevance of “anti-colonial postcolonialism,” then, lies in its ability to contextualize and evaluate the emancipatory strategies now pursued by dominated populations. The Maori Party, if it is anything like the focalizers I examine in chapters 3 and 4, fails to be anticapitalist in the way *we* want our indigent populations to be, which is not the same as saying that they lack a radical anticolonialist politics. This is not to argue, of course, that aligning with neoliberal capitalism now constitutes radical politics but to recognize this strategy for what it is. Furthermore, the anticolonial version of postcolonialism also helps point to the limits of these strategies—just as it acknowledges the limits of an emancipatory project founded on sovereign nation states—in part by drawing on historical examples of broader solidarities such as the Non-Alignment Movement to inspire the creation of new projects, which like their predecessors, must bring new kinds of South-South relation into being. If the economic “partnerships” brokered between India and Africa constitute a new form of South-South exchanges—perhaps as part of a defensive strategy



against reliance on, and domination by, the North—the task will be to interrogate the material and cultural flow between these spaces as well as their impact on the 900 million people living in extreme poverty within their borders.

Again this does not necessitate a narrow focus on formal colonial institutions, which are less viable in part due to the success of anticolonial struggles. Rather, we must attend to the informal. The literary wing of Postcolonial studies teaches us how to listen to the silences, the unremarked, the unofficial, which on examination, disclose the grounding premises of the whole narrative.

Two literary strategies characterize the otherwise disparate range of texts examined in this dissertation. The first is counterfocalization, which doubles as a reading and writing strategy. To counterfocalize, according to Gayatri Spivak, is to “shuttle between focalization and the making of an alternate narrative as the reader’s running commentary” (22). This “effortful and active” practice grounds the “‘political’ in political fiction” because it activates the “readerly imagination”; “Literature advocates in this special way,” and such literary reading “has to be learned” (22). In other words, literary texts do not merely offer expository prose to marshal a particular argument and supporting evidence. Rather, literature activates readers through strategic failures, which beg for an alternate narrative that draws from the given text to arrive at different conclusions. This mode of advocating must remain “singular and unverifiable,” insofar as the text cannot entirely frame the reader’s alternate narrative nor can readers be sure of their own productions (23). While Spivak argues that such modes of championing are particular to literature, she does not explicitly say that the prods to counterfocalize constitute a particular aesthetic practice. I want to make this claim clearer. The literary texts analyzed in this

dissertation push readers to counterfocalize as a part of their aesthetic strategy. This is not a statement about authorial intention but an argument about the formal practices employed.

This brings us to the second literary strategy shared by the novels analyzed in this dissertation: hyperbole. There seems little need to argue that *Midnight's Children*, for instance, uses hyperbole, but the specific term remains undertheorized. *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, for instance, quotes Quintilian, who defines hyperbole as “an elegant straining of truth” (546). The truth here can be found either in the ostensive situation—“the pragmatic context of the utterance”—so that the hyperbole is relative to the local conditions or in more conventional hyperbole—“I’ve told you a million times”—that “evades the necessity of reference to the ostensive situation” (547). Within the scope of this dissertation, the ostensive situations concern postcolonial nations experiencing various upheavals. The strategic use of hyperbole breaks the narrative, spurs readers to counterfocalize, and produces an alternative narrative that speculates on the divergent possibilities that were not explored or rejected. More concretely, Rushdie employs hyperbole—produced by making allegories literal—to explore and parody the causality between individual agency (a war crime) and the event (war), between the actor (the nation state) and the stage (global weapon flows), during the violent suppression of the Bangladesh independence movement. Vassanji, by contrast, uses hyperbole—caricaturing a racist caricature—to critique the class politics of the East African Asian community relative to their Black compatriots as well as the racist epithet “Asian Shylock,” which functions by belying the histories of solidarity between these two communities. Such hyperbole not only relies on the immediate ostensive situation of an annunciation but the larger political context that makes and unmakes a given focalizer’s narrative. Moreover, the texts intervene in these contexts through

their hyperbole, often articulated by focalizers that exaggerate or understate their relation to those contexts, and thereby fail to realize other more desirable trajectories.

Claudia Claridge's *Hyperbole in English: A Corpus-Based Study of Exaggeration* argues that hyperbole is not a "primary means to create new lexical material or new senses" (176). Hyperbole "is never a 'necessity' in that sense but always an option," unlike metaphor or metonymy, which may fill an "expressive 'gap'" (176). The texts studied in this dissertation counter these claims. Hyperbole does seem necessary to fill an expressive gap in these texts partly to drive the production of new lexical material, which may not be found in the text itself but in the reader's alternate narrative. That is to say, my primary material finds hyperbole necessary as an aesthetic strategy to produce the kind of counterfocalization necessary to engage readers and advocate for alternate political possibilities. All of this, however, does not help us understand *why* these texts use hyperbole and the resultant counterfocalization or *how* precisely the contexts of their annunciations drive these aesthetic choices. Some speculative answers emerge in this dissertation.

First, these writers may choose hyperbole as their representational strategy in part to index the way their global English audiences must perceive them, as caricatures of Western referents: the savage militants, the unscrupulous businessmen. The latter especially appear rapacious and corrupt, feral entrepreneurs who do not merely emulate the behavior of the North but make it grotesque. It is as if the adoption of neoliberalism elsewhere and the ferocity of its agents suddenly reveals the global threat of these political economic methods; they are called "Tiger" and "Dragon" economies because they have become apex predators.

There is little doubt that Vikram Lall and Balram Halwai—the focalizers of chapters 3 and 4 respectively—are caricatures of neoliberalism's promise of a first-world life for all if only free

market forces are unleashed from the tethers of these formerly socialist states. However, and here is where the trouble begins, these texts also take seriously the violent and racist underpinnings of existing structures within their societies. These hyperbolic narratives must "balance between similarity to the target" and critique, deforming the referent even while taking care to ensure it remains recognizable (Claridge 257). That these focalizers look to capital for rescue, therefore, parallels not only their state's shift in economic policy but also the ostensible lack of alternatives available today; remember, these are states that began with centrally planned economies. In lieu of other political and economic models, then, capital accumulation seems desirable to protect against local exigencies in the short term. In the long term, depending on neoliberalism for freedom is as misguided as imagining that austerity measures will solve economic crises. However, the local and immediate advances capitalism presents for certain indigents as they battle entrenched hierarchies should be taken seriously lest we misunderstand the lure of accumulation in emerging economies.

In a strange way, these arguments in defense of capital accumulation parallel the presentism humanitarianism sometimes suffers from. David Rieff articulates this position elegantly by outlining the problems of humanitarian aid and its exacerbation of the very circumstances it aims to alleviate, sometimes by collaborating with the perpetrators to triage victims. While Rieff points out the limits of such humanitarianism, he does not concede that we simply abandon the cause due to the messy politics involved, because doing so causes more harm than good. He holds that supplying a bed for a night still matters. Unlike Rieff, however, neither Lall nor Halwai seem to acknowledge the unsustainability of their positions in the long term and focus instead on the alleviation of present trouble.

Hyperbole may also be understood as the “resource of lost causes used by speakers in the view of formidable opposition” (cited in Claridge 219). This is evident in chapter 1 through Saleem Sinai's use of hyperbole to absolve himself of war crimes during the Bangladeshi Genocide by straining the borders of agency, events, history, and international networks. Saleem's attempted exoneration demonstrates the pragmatic difficulty faced by tribunal courts attempting to serve justice for victims when Jameson's dictum to always historicize turns hyperbolic. This struggle echoes in chapter 2 when the UN's deputy of Peacekeeping Operations, Iqbal Riza, argues that he ignored the faxes from the field general warning of an imminent genocide because, “We get hyperbole in many reports” (Gourevitch 106). Roméo Dallaire, the issuer of these faxes, suffered from the representational impossibility of announcing an emergency without urgent language—panic without an exclamation mark—because such a communiqué will be read as a hyperbole meant to draw scarce attention. Riza's cynicism seems to evince the kind of “indifference” exhibited by much of the world, an argument that repeats across writings about the Rwandan Genocide. To undermine this commonsense I demonstrate that the very powers supplying the peacekeeping mission—France and Belgium specifically—also sold weapons to the genocidaires and supported that murderous regime. The international community was anything but indifferent; indeed, the claim to indifference is hyperbolic because it is the last resource of powers that continually intervened in these nations.

Another way of understanding hyperbole as a resource of lost causes comes through the neoliberal businessmen of chapters 3 and 4. This mode of hyperbole is superficially contradictory because it seems to imply weakness rather than the vigor of emergent powers. However, these caricatures also articulate the “lost causes”—alternate modes, trajectories unexplored, solidarities lost—overwhelmed by global capitalist relations. In this view, Vassanji

and Adiga do not draw on hyperbole to defend lost causes, at least not overtly, but produce readerly counterfocalization through the given narrative's deformations. In these alternate and simultaneous narratives lie not only the lost causes of the past but also the future possibilities to be shaped within and against formidable opposition.

Finally, I would like to note that these strategic uses of hyperbole follow some principles outlined by the great Japanese martial artist and founder of Aikido, Morihei Ueshiba. In *The Art of Peace*, Ueshiba Sensei meditates on the responses one may have to the hostile energies an attacker brings. Tensing, becoming rigid, or anchoring in your position to stop the partner's force is inefficient, Ueshiba demonstrates, and merely results in a contest of strength. This position can be roughly equated to the historical Luddites or the current ostensibly "autonomous" communities whose local chickens do not affect the machinations of Goldman Sachs. The preferred response, both pragmatically and spiritually, merges with that energy, directs it, even amplifies it toward a more peaceful end, one that takes the partner under control without hurting them or minimally so. I imagine this method as a physical allegory of Marxism, insofar as the aim is to take control of the massive productive forces capitalism develops toward more just ends. Hyperbole too merges with the given material of the world, critiquing not by way of polemic (rigidity) but by amplification (fluidity), guiding narratives to absurd ends that reveal the faults of their violent premises.

## Chapter 1: The Midnight's Children of Bangladesh

...morality, judgment, character...it all starts with memory...and I am  
keeping carbons. (Rushdie 241)

Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* investigates the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971 through its narrator, Saleem Sinai, who commits war crimes as a member of the invading West Pakistan Army.<sup>3</sup> Saleem claims he suffered amnesia in 1965 just before the West Pakistani army conscripted him into military service. However, he confesses to his role in perpetrating massacres but folds this confession into a megalomaniac self-indictment for the subcontinent's twentieth-century history, claiming to be its literal embodied allegory. Saleem's hyperbolic memory underpins this allegory by remembering unintended and extended repercussions, and rewriting them in causal chains that bind him in infinite guilt. But the novel succeeds because Saleem fails to exonerate himself, pushing us toward a critique of professional armies and global weapons flows without absolving war criminals. Placing the novel's account of the Bangladesh Liberation War at the center sheds new light on recent literary criticism of Rushdie's work.

Critics read Rushdie's oeuvre generally and *Midnight's Children* specifically with attention to the liminal, migrant, hybrid and religious, without sustained attention to the novel's indictment of military service. Saleem's role in West Pakistan's invasion and genocide of then East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) couples soldiering and amnesia, two tropes unattended to by the novel's critics either individually or in their peculiar entwinements.<sup>4</sup> The novel challenges a common sense understanding that military service epitomizes citizens' allegiance to fellow compatriots; it argues instead that the soldier must forget the nation and his responsibility to fellow citizens precisely when these resources ostensibly energize fighters. Saleem's role in the

1971 war, then, requires attention to the relationship between memory, military service, and nationalism, three issues woven together in the novel's allegory of history.<sup>5</sup>

Saleem asks emphatically, "*Why alone of all the more-than-five-hundred-million, should I have to bear the burden of history?*" (440, emphasis in original). His fictional autobiography answers this question through a narrative that entwines his personal and family's story with that of the subcontinent. Saleem claims to bear the "burden of history" because he and India were born simultaneously on August 15, 1947. But Saleem asks the question while fleeing Bangladesh after serving in West Pakistan's army as it tried to violently suppress the independence movement. Another question precedes the burden of history. "Why should I," Saleem asks, "accept the blame for what-was-not-done by Pakistani troops in Dacca?" (440). This is the primary question at hand, and the "burden of history," indeed the whole of Saleem's narration, may be read as an elaborate obfuscation of his self-admitted guilt.

To demystify Saleem's account, this essay reads the literary logics of his defense—metaphor, allegory and hyperbole—as well as their mnemonic foundations against the historical background of the Bangladesh Liberation War. I begin with Saleem's conscription into and service with the West Pakistani army during a bout of amnesia to demonstrate the novel's decoupling of nationalism and soldiering. Saleem participates in the violent suppression of the Bangladesh independence struggle but tries to exonerate himself, strangely, by pleading guilty for causing the whole war. His claim depends on a hyperbolic memory that remembers strange and disconnected consequences, rewriting them in causal chains that render him guilty for the 1971 war, thereby obfuscating the particularities of his crimes. These weird mnemonic relations also underpin Saleem's claim to allegorize the nation and admit infinite guilt for all that befalls it.



This absurdity prompts a turn to his midnight twin, Shiva, and a brief material account of Cold War weapons flows.

In these militant shadows, Saleem's defense rings true by lampooning atomized indictments as caricatures of justice, blaming individuals instead of, say, arms dealing Security Council powers. Saleem's allegory is already entrenched in the geostrategic flow of Cold War weapons supplied by the United States, France, the Soviet Union and China. These machinations render individual indictments absurd without also letting perpetrators off the hook as overdetermined victims of history. Moreover, the novel's account of weapons trafficking troubles the ostensible antiimperialism of national sovereignty and critiques standing armies as the open wounds of capital unsheathed. The essay's final section attends to this tension by returning to Kashmir, a contested space host to the ongoing conflict between India and Pakistan, a battle for which both nations seek weapons. Saleem begins his story in Kashmir to both foreshadow and obfuscate the real beginning in Pakistan.

### **War Crimes**

A few years after Saleem's family emigrates to Pakistan, the Indo-Pakistan war of 1965 begins. During Indian air raids a bomb strikes his family home in Lahore, killing everyone, and throwing a family heirloom high in the air and down onto Saleem's head. This item from the past becomes "what-purifies-and-sets-me-free"; Saleem attains amnesiac purity in Pakistan, the Land of the Pure. Conscripted into the West Pakistani army, "emptied of history" and having learned the "arts of submission" he does what he is told to do. "To sum up: I became a citizen of Pakistan" (403).

Saleem seems to agree that military duty—"the arts of submission"—epitomizes citizenship but eliminates any honor or romance such service usually confers. For Benedict

Anderson, an imagined “fraternity” makes it possible “for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly die” for their nation (7). Saleem, however, is “unable to remember grief, numb as ice [and] wiped clean as a slate” (402). The fraternity produced by imagined communities vanishes at the precise moment when it ostensibly drives soldiering. He does not volunteer for army service but rather is betrayed into it by his (not biological) sister after professing to love her. Rejecting his impure love, Jamila hands the hospitalized Saleem over to the army and continues her career singing patriotic songs that serenade troops to their death. Saleem’s army duty begins with the failed fraternity of family betrayal and requires numbness, not the overwhelming passion for another that rejuvenates the hero to risk his life again.<sup>6</sup> Instead, “wiped clean,” Saleem does not even remember his own name. He takes the nickname buddha, “old man” (402).<sup>7</sup>

When the fellow soldiers of his small unit ask, “you don’t feel *bad*? Somewhere you’ve maybe got mother father sister”; the buddha replies, “Don’t try and fill my head with all that history. I am who I am, that’s all there is” (403, italics in text). Only the numb present exists during Saleem’s stint in the army. The three sixteen-year-old soldiers he trains with are amnesiacs of a different sort. Too young to have those memories of “love or famine” that enable a firm grasp of reality, they fall prey to “legends and gossip,” imagining themselves as action heroes and secret agents (401). Unmoored from history, they, like Saleem, “obey unquestioningly,” “seek unflaggingly,” “arrest remorselessly” (400). Together, they form Unit 22 of CUTIA—Canine Units for Tracking and Intelligence Activities.

Tasked with rooting out “undesirable elements” the CUTIA units, joining ninety thousand West Pakistani troops, fly into the East Wing dressed as civilians. After landing they change back into military uniforms and on March 25, 1971, begin the violent suppression of the

East Wing's independence movement. As the designated canine of his unit, the buddha leads his fellow soldiers to arrest Sheik Mujib Rahman, the opposition Awami League's political leader who declared independence earlier that day. They watch the massacre of intellectuals at the University of Dacca, witness soldiers raping women, burning newspaper offices and city slums. West Pakistani soldiers seize poets and professors, shoot Awami Leaguers along with Communists. The soldiers of Unit 22 vomit from the stench of burning flesh and turn away from the "weren't-couldn't-have-been true" events unfolding around them to continue their work (410). The buddha merely sniffs out the undesirables and leaves "the rest to the soldier boys" (411).

The soldiers assassinate "Father Time" in a rice paddy before fleeing into the Sundarbans, "the jungle which is so thick that history has hardly ever found the way in" (413). They emerge months later after the monsoon season in a "drowned rice-paddy" (423).<sup>8</sup> This journey of zero distance draws them into "a darker heart of madness," a hallucinatory voyage that, echoing Joseph Conrad, figures the perpetration of genocide, not an escape from it. Freezing time, hallucinations, the soldiers' awakenings to guilt—these experiences are not incompatible with continuing military service but the novel's representation of its psychic process. Indeed, Saleem hopes this chapter of his autobiography articulates the "condition of spirit" in which the real world of their genocidal mission takes on the "altered light" of "absurd fantasy" (417). This altered condition suffers from an "overdose of reality," which gives birth "to a miasmatic longing for flight into the safety of dreams" (414). However, the "historyless" rainforest provides no safety but instead assaults them with the "accusing eyes of the wives of men they had tracked down and seized, the screaming and monkeygibbering of children left fatherless by their work" (418). His fellow soldiers deafen their ears with jungle mud to mute the "lamentations of

families”; the buddha, however, continues to listen “as though he were bowing his head before the inevitability of his guilt” (421).

### **Hyperbolically (Not) Guilty**

Saleem does not distance himself from his role in war atrocities although, strictly speaking, he never pulls the trigger. Saleem, however, cannot entirely identify himself with “the buddha” who remains a strange doppelganger that must be addressed simultaneously as “he (or I)” or “I, he” (403). Saleem does not finally take recourse in estrangement or amnesia. Instead, he makes the double move of distancing himself from his amnesiac double, “not I, He. He, the buddha,” and conversely arguing that, “even in those depths of withdrawal from responsibility, I remained responsible, through the working of the metaphorical modes of connection, for the belligerent events of 1971” (405).

Saleem encases his admission in the literary logics of metaphor and hyperbole; his amnesiac secession from history serves as a metaphor for the East Wing’s secession from West Pakistan. But Saleem’s narration inverts this relationship so that East Pakistan’s drive for regional autonomy and Sheik Mujib Rahman’s declaration of an independent state take as their guiding metaphor Saleem’s break with the consciousness of being a “homogeneous entity in time” (404). To these “metaphorical modes of connection,” Saleem pleads guilty. He confesses to tracking and arresting Rahman but enfolds this admission in the larger claim to be guilty for the very reason the opposition leader’s arrest was sought—breaking from (West Pakistan’s) consciousness. He is guilty of the crime, its context, and the victim’s provocations. Saleem uses memory not merely as the guiding metaphor—amnesia secedes from history—but the apparatus of prosecution; his hyperbolic memory remembers his intimate connections to the subcontinent, which ground his hyperbolic guilt. Such hyperbole undercuts his self-indictment by exaggerating

guilt to the point of absurdity. Saleem actually pleads innocence by indicting himself for the whole war, hyperbolizing the *respondent superior* plea until he remembers only an inverted—because innocent—caricature of his role in war atrocities.

### **Remembering in Hinglish**

For Saleem, memory centers self-identity and judgments of previous actions as their secondary and tertiary consequences come to light. He defines consciousness as “the awareness of oneself as a homogenous entity in time,” which depends on “a blend of past and present” and holds together “our then and our now.” The homogeneity of our being depends on our memory, which acts as “the glue of personality” because we need not repeat the same behaviors to identify as the same person (404). Secondly, if we lose the “powers of retention,” we “become incapable of judgment, having forgotten everything to which [we can] compare anything that happened” (512). Indeed, “morality, judgment, character...it all starts with memory...and I am keeping carbons” (241, ellipses in original).<sup>9</sup>

These Lockean notions recall Francis Ferguson’s argument that “romantic memory” marks an inward turn invested in recognizing the connection between my self and my actions in the world. Since an act’s secondary or tertiary consequences only register in the past tense, memory obliges one to reexamine and “redescribe” the link between action and results (523). Such redescriptions, however, risk producing infinite guilt by joining an act and all its unintended consequences in causal chains. The resulting guilt paralyzes actors by denying them the ability to endorse any action, fearful of all that may follow. Saleem seems to indict himself in precisely this way, retrospectively redescribing strange and unintended consequences until he assumes guilt for the subcontinent’s twentieth-century history. This hyperbole of self-indictment

requires a frantic narrative form that remembers ever more events and sequences them into causal chains.

In his preface, Rushdie argues that the novel's narrative style attempts to create a "literary idiolect to blend with the idiosyncrasies of 'Hinglish' and 'Bambaiyya,' the polyglot street slang of Bombay" (xi). A part of this idiolect is repetition, of clauses—"there will be knees and a nose, a nose and knees"—of Saleem's self-consciousness—"And already I can see the repetitions beginning"—and the repetition of his autobiography; he recounted his story three times already and recites it to his lover Padma while writing, doubling the moment of composition (96, 7).<sup>10</sup> His first recitation comes in the Sundarbans jungle where, "incapable of continuing in the submissive performance of his duty," he leads his fellow soldiers in a bid to desert the army (414). Haunted by the memories and guilt of their war crimes, Saleem ascends from amnesia's false Eden when a snake bites him. Saleem's story pours out, beginning with his midnight birth to the unholy war the buddha and his unit currently wage. His fellow soldier replies, "so many bad things, no wonder he kept his mouth shut" (420). Rather than silence and amnesia, Saleem defends himself by speaking prolifically, repeating his story repeatedly and blaming himself for the subcontinent's twentieth-century history to obfuscate his role in war atrocities.

At the moment of his birth, for instance, Saleem's father Ahmed clumsily drops a chair and shatters his toe. Saleem duly indicts himself for the accident:

Yes, it was my fault (despite everything)...it was the power of my face, mine and nobody else's, which caused Ahmed Sinai's hands to release the chair; which caused the chair to drop...the falling chair shattered his toe. (130)

That Saleem would blame his infant self for another's awkward handling of a chair is strange enough, but utterly bizarre when one considers that he is not the infant. Rather, it is Shiva, his midnight twin with whom he is switched at birth. The drive to create this illogical causal link pauses with the parenthetical "(despite everything)," which both insists on the causal chain and breaks it apart by acknowledging that these events (birth and broken toe) do not cohere. Ferguson terms "circumstantial memory" such events that cannot link together but must stand alone and retain their vividness. Saleem drives to overwrite these moments through a hyperbolic memory that trumps its own disintegration by insisting "it must be true; because what followed, followed" (474). These circular arguments recur when he cuts out the newspaper headline, "After Nehru, Who?" for the question mark (298). The answer indicts Saleem:

And my grandfather was the founder of my family, and my fate was  
linked by my birthday to that of the nation, and the father of the nation  
was Nehru. Nehru's death: can I avoid the conclusion that that, too, was  
all my fault? (319)

Despite the absurdity of Saleem's final claim to responsibility for Nehru's death, the moment offers an insight into the way he produces guilt. Saleem's grandfather, Nehru, and his own fate, are brought together in a narrative arc, the keystone of which conflates "father" and "founder." Adam Aziz, Saleem's grandfather, *founds* his family and Nehru *fathers* the nation and both social units have their center in Saleem who is fathered-founded by *fate*, the grandest patriarch of all. More than mere alliteration but less than rational—certainly below the threshold of legal prosecution—Saleem's self-centered muddling of nation and family evinces another literary logic of his defense; he allegorizes the nation and therefore is guilty of all that befalls it.

### **National Allegory**

If the novel's allegory is a "literalization of metaphor," Saleem gives literal life to the dead metaphor of a nation's 'birth,' and channels his hyperbolic memory and guilt by narrating himself as an allegory of India (Kortenaar 43). By making dead metaphors literal the novel's allegory also makes events hyperbolic. Although the *OED* dictates that one should not understand hyperbole "literally," Saleem creates hyperbole precisely by making metaphors literal. For instance, India's rapid and uneven industrialization registers literally on Saleem's bandied toddler legs, a base allegorically bent under the weight of his responsibility for the nation. As Kortenaar remarks, "if India were a person, it would be a grotesque such as Saleem, its paternity would be in dispute, and its ability to tell its story would be in question" (46). Nationalizing himself through allegory, Saleem disburses the blame of his war crimes by literalizing the "imagined communion" Benedict Anderson argues helps establish the nation as an imagined community.

Saleem's strongest communion with India comes through his telepathic communications with the other magical children born in the first hour of India's independence. He becomes a radio and acts "as a sort of national network." By transforming his mind he could "turn it into a kind of forum in which they could talk to one another, through me" (259). Beyond the sudden shock of discovering this power and the onrush of voices, Saleem hears the subcontinent's multilingualism as "the voices babbled in everything from Malayalam to Naga dialects, from the purity of Lucknow Urdu to the southern slurrings of Tamil" (192). Deeper probing, "below the surface transmissions" reveals "universally intelligible thought-forms which far transcended words" (192).

In Rushdie's novelistic vocabulary, universal "thought-forms" become the magical-realist equivalent to Anderson's print-language, a shared field of intelligibility that transcends local



particularities and grounds national consciousness. Such universal comprehensibility allegorizes the imposition of Hindi as India's national language by making literal its elision of intra-national linguistic battles. It is no mistake that Saleem juxtaposes his discovery of "universal thought-forms" with "the partition of [his home] state of Bombay along linguistic boundaries—the dream of Maharashtra was at the head of some processions, the mirage of Gujarat led the others forward" (191). These language marches succeed and Bombay is divided into two states. In this context, the desire for unity is an understandable, if not endorsable, response to the state's fragmentation. Moreover, Saleem's ruminations on linguistic sectarianism allude to the first confrontations between East Pakistan and its rulers in Rawalpindi.

Without the sutures of universal thought forms, the question of official language remains an open wound. In 1948, Pakistan's Prime Minister Liqat Ali Khan rejected the Bengali speaking East Wing's demand for dual official languages, Bengali and Urdu. He claimed that Urdu was both a lingua franca and the "language of the Muslim nation" (cited in Ayoob and Subrahmanyam, 31). M.A. Jinnah, the 'father' of Pakistan, argued the same line at Dacca University in the East Wing, and the students—Mujibur Rahman among them—jeered him off the stage (Ayoob and Subrahmanyam, 31).<sup>11</sup> When Saleem and his fellow Pakistani soldiers arrive in the Eastern wing to set the stage for military repression they tap their feet to the tune of "Amar Sonar Bangla" (Our Golden Bengal), although "none of [them] could understand Bengali" (408). Unable to comprehend the verses of Rabindranath Tagore's song turned into a hymn for independence, the Pakistani soldiers are "protected from the insidious subversion of the lyric" (408). Saleem's sardonic comment and translations of select verses—"they *madden* my heart with delight"—foreground the linguistic discordance between Pakistan's two wings (408, my emphasis). In this context, language divides and cannot make compatriots legible. Saleem's unit

shuffles past “fluttering newspapers in curious curlicued script, through [the] empty fields and abandoned settlements” left in the wake of genocide (425). Universal thought forms ultimately allow Saleem to elide, if not entirely ignore, the dire consequences of the subcontinent’s numerous languages; but even telepathic communion with magical children cannot create the imagined ground for Saleem to practice a democratic union with his fellow citizens, a solidarity worth fighting for.

The Midnight’s Children’s Conference communes daily from midnight to one a.m. “in [a telepathic] lok sabha or parliament” (259). Differences between their (magical) powers and material lives rive the MCC just as they do the nation’s governing institutions. Unable to decide whose power is greatest, the children defer to Saleem, their medium of communication. He rejects the title “chief” and insists that they form a “family, of a kind,” of which he is “just the oldest,” a “big brother” (260-1). Available here are all the ingredients for a national imagined community but rather than solidarity a “many-headed monster, speak[s] in the myriad tongue of Babel” (262). Nationalism fails at the point of emergence. The MCC literalizes the voices of democratic constituencies clamoring to be heard and lead the way forward. Shiva offers that he and Saleem should be “joint bosses of this gang” because, the future army major argues tautologically, “gangs need gang bosses” (252).

### **Shiva**

If Saleem is India born disfigured, then his midnight twin Shiva is the nation’s militant, impoverished other half. When “the memory of his actuality” grows dull, Saleem’s rival comes to represent “all the vengefulness and violence and simultaneous-love-and-hate-of-Things in the world” (342). The ambiguity of simultaneous love and hate tempers Shiva’s brutality. It is Shiva, after all, who fights in the Indian army and becomes a war hero in the military intervention

against West Pakistan's genocide. He represents a complicated indictment of militarism and its "world of startling uniformity" (250). Shiva murders easily but also kills killers. After that saving moment, however, Shiva aids tyranny, helping sterilize the poor, crack down on Communists and round up other *Midnight's Children* under Indira Gandhi's Emergency rule. The military forms a powerful conjunction of interests, a bulbous joint literalized in Shiva's enormous knees (rather than bandy legs), an ongoing articulation of nationalism, capital and the international flow of weapons.

Far from disinterested solidarity, Shiva's nationalism emphasizes material relations over imagined communion:

money-and-poverty, and have-and-lack, and right-and-left, there is only  
me-against-the-world! The world is not ideas, rich boy; the world is no  
place for dreamers and their dreams; the world, little Snotnose, is things.  
Things and their makers rule the world...For things, the country is run.  
Not for people. For things, America and Russia send aid; but five  
hundred million stay hungry...Today, what people are is just another  
kind of thing. (293)

Shiva highlights India's entrenchment in the Cold War geo-politics between America, China and the Soviet Union. Moreover, his attention to class differences and nationalism's material base is both necessary and accurate. "For what reason you're rich and I'm poor? Where's the reason in starving, man?" (252). Shiva offers a crude materialist analysis but does not take the Marxist reprieve of class solidarity as a solution or even a starting point to counter Saleem. Instead, atomistic individualism, "me-against-the-world," is the first principle in a world that offers no larger narrative, no larger structure of meaning. This vision of the world reduces people to "just

another kind of thing” to be made, exchanged or destroyed as the strongest power dictates. For Saleem, humans reduced to mere materiality are dust particles, “anonymous, and necessarily oblivious”; they cannot make a nation (34). For Shiva, however, nationalism is unnecessary for military service.

To serve in West Pakistan’s army, Saleem required amnesia and the attendant inability to feel responsible for his actions granted him innocence and numb service; Shiva, on the other hand, already rejects larger narratives that may make him responsible to others; he fights for himself, to make himself a more powerful thing than the lesser things around him. Insofar as Shiva does not care to remember those strangers, his fellow citizens and East Bengalis, who benefit from his military service, he too is an amnesiac. That is, Shiva’s narrative begins and ends with himself as the atomistic individual whose material circumstances improve regardless of the cost to others. Shiva willingly takes credit for his murderous actions but unlike Saleem, he is on the right side of history in the 1971 war. The novel avoids easy solutions here because both Saleem’s amnesia and Shiva’s ruthless individualism disconnect soldiering from the fraternity of imagined communities; both forget the nation they serve, or worse, persecute their compatriots. Despite their antagonisms, the two actors overlap in their critiques of Cold War geopolitics.

### **Warring Systems**

Saleem contextualizes his amnesia and the atrocities that follow in the struggles of Cold War machinations and the subsequent trade in weapons. Such arms trafficking, Saleem hints, exonerates the individual soldier’s role in war crimes; after all, it is an air raid’s fire and bombs that “purifies” Saleem and begins his amnesiac stint in the army. He only survived the 1965 war “because nobody sold our would-be assassins the bombs bullets aircraft necessary for the completion of our destruction” (393). In Bangladesh, Saleem’s unit fights with “American guns,

American tanks and aircraft,” shielded by President Nixon who infamously tilted toward West Pakistan in a bid to bridge the diplomatic gap with China (431). Like Shiva, Saleem too is a thing, bought, sold and used as the greatest power sees fit.

The battle of superpowers creates for Shiva a world of basic binaries, “have-and-lack, left-and-right,” in which people as things are subordinate to thing makers. Shiva inadvertently voices the important critique that focusing on explosions of genocidal violence may obscure our attention to the systemic violence endemic to capitalism and statecraft. Saleem counters by attending to the dialectical entwinement of capitalism’s systemic injustices and eruptions of sweeping murder. While Shiva rejects “dreamers and their dreams,” Saleem argues that dreams too circulate like things, materializing as Mirages and Mystères, the French fighter jets and bombers deployed against India’s Soviet MiG jets.

After Independence, the Soviet Union, China, France and United States all sold weapons to the partitioned neighbors, who in turn vied for superpower support. Indocentric perspectives on the 1971 war lambast America as an imperial hegemon, China as a militant hypocrite for their support of West Pakistan during the conflict, and praise the Soviet Union as India’s lone ally in the Security Council.<sup>12</sup> This simplified version gets the basic coordinates right but neglects the nuances of geopolitical maneuvers. While the Soviet Union publicly sided with India during the war, it sold \$30 million in military equipment to Pakistan in 1968, “including medium tanks, rocket launchers, artillery, and helicopters,” some of which West Pakistan used in Dacca so as to avoid using U.S equipment, thus frustrating its relationship with Washington (Sisson and Rose 237, 258). Meanwhile, both the U.S. and China cut off new arms supplies to West Pakistan when the repression began in March, but continued to ship replacement parts and materials sold under contracts approved before their embargoes; the Soviets did the same. Sadly, India’s pioneering

non-alignment policy only meant keeping out of the “quarrel between the two power blocs. It was not neutrality or equidistance from the two super powers.” Most importantly, the policy never excluded “accepting defense equipment from one of the major powers” (Ayoob and Subrahmanyam, 194).

The novel both mocks such militarism and acknowledges its necessity in an independence struggle. When the West Pakistan General Tiger Niazi surrenders to the Indian General Sam Manekshaw, Saleem imagines the two friends converse in Britishisms—“I say, bloody fine to see you Tiger, you old devil!”—and sing “Auld Lang Syne” together; like Ayub Kahn, general cum premier, they are “not MADE AS ENGLAND” but “certainly Sandhurst trained” (437, 330). However, these students of the Royal Military Academy also train the *Mukti Bahini*—East Pakistani soldiers, police and other volunteers. These independence fighters sought temporary refuge in West Bengal, where the Indian military helps organize and supply them (Ayoob and Subrahmanyam, 156). The novel empathizes with the Bangladeshi independence fighters by pushing them offstage as they successfully escape capture by the invading army; “Soldiers came looking for Bahini and killed many many, also my son” (428). These sympathies stand in tension with the novel’s indictment of military service but align with a larger critique of individual guilt amidst global bellicosity.

Saleem’s evasion of personal guilt through a hyperbolic national allegory seems understandable given his entrenchment in the flow of weapons and geostrategic concerns; he combines Fredric Jameson’s infamous claim that “third-world literature” should be read as “national allegories” with the dictum “always historicize!”<sup>13</sup> Any proper historical account deconstructs the always already international situation of national allegories, especially of the post-colonial South. However, the novel builds on Saleem’s failed account by pointing to the

limits of Jameson's dictum and taking it too literally. Rather than enabling the prosecution of war crimes, Saleem's allegory defends his soldiering by historicizing it as one episode in a larger narrative of belligerent nationalisms. Moreover, Saleem caricatures history through a self-centered, strangely causal narrative to lampoon individual indictments in the international state system. Prosecutions of those who hold and use weapons never question the weapons suppliers—all permanent members of the UN Security Council in this case—or the global political dynamics that arm perpetrators. Saleem's allegory troubles the dictum 'always historicize'—how far back?—by making difficult what might be a sloganized version of David Harvey's work, 'always spatialize!'—how far abroad?

The war crimes Saleem commits require thinking space and time not merely as absolute (fixed) or relative (redefinable), but as relational. Harvey theorizes that a "relational view of space holds that there is no such thing as space or time outside of the processes that define them"; "Processes do not occur *in* space," Harvey goes on, "but define their own spatial frame" (123). Saleem's narrative defense of his war crimes takes the process of genocide seriously and acknowledges its ability to bend space-time, pulling global matter into its orbit: his amnesia, the Sundarbans episode, American guns and diplomatic support for Pakistan, its use of French fighter jets and close alliances with China, Soviet military equipment on both sides and diplomatic support for India. Entrenched in the global flow of weapons, capital and political pressure, the novel uses Saleem's allegory to critique the atomized indictments of ICC tribunals as allegories of justice, hyperbolic prosecutions that make absurdly literal the metaphor of soldiering; to give one's life for the nation. But this argument goes too far if it absolves ground level actors like Saleem and reduces regional players to puppets or client states without

acknowledging their own goals. Since Independence and Partition, India and West Pakistan have fought bitterly over Kashmir and sought weapons for the conflict.

### **Kashmir**

Even amidst superpower intrigues, the Kashmir conflict focuses regional anxieties between the partitioned neighbors whose concerns, paranoid or real, lead to the 1965 war in which Saleem achieves amnesia. This war affirmed East Pakistan's suspicion that their "economic and political (and now defense) interests" mattered less to Rawalpindi than the struggle for Kashmir (Ayoob and Subrahmanyam, 65). Saleem's uncle General Zulfikar orders mines placed along the border between West Pakistan and India leaving "those damn blackies" in East Pakistan to "look after themselves" (327). Indeed, Rahman's popular six-point program asked explicitly for a regional military force, an ordinance factory and military academy. Given these ongoing tensions, Saleem makes the case for the historical overdetermination of his actions by beginning his narrative in Kashmir with Tai the boatman, who fights to exile the foreign influence of Aadam Aziz's German medical training.

Aadam's childhood mentor Tai rejects him and his "foreign" training, materialized in a "big bag full of foreign machines," "that thing made of a pig's skin that makes one unclean just by looking at it" (15). For Tai, "the bag represents Abroad; it is the alien thing, the invader, progress," which, like Aadam, he wants exiled from the Kashmiri valley. Tai reads "Abroad" as those elsewheres with Great Wars and pigskin bags that invade Srinagar, provoking his combative language. Many things happen Abroad during the Kashmir chapters, but these events are peripheral no matter their significance elsewhere. As Doctor Aadam Aziz meets his future wife Naseem, "far away the Great War moved from crisis to crisis" (22). "On the day the World



War end[s],” Aadam finally sees Naseem’s face and finishes falling in love (23). In Saleem’s narration, World War I happens Abroad.

Such distancing glosses what Dipesh Chakrabarty terms “provincializing Europe” so that Europe is the Abroad, the periphery from which Aadam returns to the Kashmiri center. This spatial reorientation meshes with Chakrabarty’s, and the narrative’s, critique of enlightenment historiography and undoes what Johannes Fabian calls “the denial of coevalness”; the love story unfolding in Kashmir exists at the same temporal moment as those world-historical events; they belong to the same modernity.<sup>14</sup> Tai, however, understands the globe’s simultaneity and campaigns to exile Abroad’s influence on Kashmir.

He wants Aadam, “our foreign-returned doctor...that nakkoo, that German Aziz,” to leave lest a world war erupt in his home valley (24). Despite Aadam’s departure, however, Kashmir soon becomes a battleground for warring nations.<sup>15</sup> When Tai demands “Kashmir for the Kashmiris,” he is shot by either Indian or Pakistani troops (35). Tai misunderstands the problem insofar as he locates Abroad only in Europe, forgetting the proximity of British colonialism and the partitions left in its wake. He succeeds in banishing the German trained Aadam Aziz but fails to survive Kashmir’s occupation by Indian and Pakistani armies. “In those days,” Saleem reminisces of his grandfather’s home, “there was no [Indian] army camp at the lakeside, no endless snakes of camouflaged trucks and jeeps” and “no soldiers” (5). These first mentions of military power in the Kashmir chapters foreshadow Saleem’s own soldiering. He begins his autobiography in this prelapsarian space because Kashmir hosts the subcontinent’s perpetual war between rival nations, for which Saleem claims responsibility.

Inheriting his grandfather’s hope of returning to Kashmir, Saleem circulates it to belligerent politicians by “dream[ing] Kashmir into the fantasies of our rulers,” and instigating

the 1965 Indo-Pakistan war (387). His dreams merge with the fantasies of Pakistan's leadership in a perverse imagined communion, which—like print capitalism and telepathy—produces both national solidarity and military excursions abroad. Beyond amnesia and military conscription, Saleem claims that the “hidden purpose” of the 1965 war was “nothing more or less than the elimination of my benighted family from the face of the earth” (386). Saleem's absurd claim to catalyze a war aimed at the systematic destruction of his family eerily displaces his role in the systematic destruction of dissenting Bangladeshis.

This parallel again evinces the hyperbolic logic of his appeal; Saleem is guilty of war crimes, for instigating the war (amnesiac secession from history), the previous war that successfully destroyed his family and the Kashmir conflict that burns steady in the post-colonial subcontinent. That is, Saleem's entwinement with the subcontinent's belligerent twentieth-century history makes his guilt both inevitable and excusable. To prosecute him is to indict the whole historical situation because he allegorizes—literally embodies—his nation. Such allegory writes national history hyperbolically to make legible the global determinations warring in the subcontinent and, conversely, to explicate the international stakes of regional conflicts.<sup>16</sup> Where Saleem's defense by allegory fails, the novel succeeds in indicting both local war criminals and the Cold War weapons distributors who comprise the UN Security Council. The manufacture and export of weapons to regions of “strategic concern” subverts the ostensible antiimperialism claimed in nation state sovereignty and their professional armies. *Midnight's Children* critiques the need for national standing armies even while empathizing with the militant struggle independence often requires.

Postcolonial studies, which focuses on imperial brutality and subaltern resistance, must frame these within a critical material account that rejects the necessity of professional armies

under the false name of antiimperialism. An ongoing decolonization project must question the belligerence of armed sovereign borders. This difficult conclusion sympathizes with the necessity of armed antiimperial struggle but begs for a conversation about military service without upholding it as the apex of citizenship, national or otherwise, by attending to systemic injustices, eruptions of violence and the revolutionary struggle against both.

## **Chapter 2: Against Indifference: International Weapons and Narratives in Rwanda**

[At the] root of it all, however, is the fundamental indifference of the world community to the plight of seven to eight million black Africans in a tiny country that had no strategic or resource value to any world power.

(Dallaire 6)

When discussing the 1994 Rwandan genocide, writers frequently blame international “indifference” without elaborating on what that might mean. At first glance, indifference seems to indicate that the international community did not care about the execution of approximately 900,000 Rwandan Tutsis and moderate Hutus, and therefore provided no material aid to the country during the crisis.<sup>17</sup> This banal version of indifference—nobody cared about Rwanda—implies humanitarianism as its opposite. Indeed, the international community responded to the massive refugee exodus following the genocide with a massive humanitarian aid mission that attempted to appease both global conscience and Rwandan suffering. Unfortunately, the resulting refugee and aid camps helped genocidaires hide, reorganize, and refuel before launching more attacks.<sup>18</sup> While most accounts of the Rwandan genocide critique the poor political analysis supporting the humanitarian response and its dire consequences, the story of global “indifference” and its relation to humanitarianism remains unexplored. I argue that the common accusation of global “indifference” helped animate the humanitarian response while also obscuring the deep investments in Rwanda of major global powers. That is, the problem was not that no one cared about Rwanda but that some Security Council powers, especially France, were overinvested—politically and militarily—in Rwanda and Central Africa. At stake here is a

reevaluation of a dominant narrative trope surrounding the Rwandan genocide as well as an immunization against the ruse of “indifference” for future “humanitarian” emergencies.

In this chapter I advance a material critique of the narrative of indifference in Rwanda by demonstrating that the international community supplied weapons and peacekeeping missions both, simultaneously affecting a disinterested solidarity and promoting militant profiteering. These tensions complicate the story of indifference, which appears in texts from a variety of genres, including journalism, military memoir, and literary fiction.

American reporter and *New Yorker* correspondent Philip Gourevitch’s *We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed with Our Families* lists “the indifference of the outside world” as one ingredient in “an excellent recipe for a culture of genocide” (180).<sup>19</sup> In *Shake Hands With the Devil: The Failure of Humanity in Rwanda*, Canadian Lt. Gen. Roméo Dallaire, the Force Commander of the UN Assistance Mission For Rwanda (UNAMIR) argues that the country’s story is one of “betrayal, failure, naïveté, indifference, hatred, genocide, war, inhumanity and evil,” in which “the developed world, impassive and apparently unperturbed, sat back and watched the unfolding apocalypse or simply changed channels” (xxiv). I read these texts against my primary text *Murambi, The Book of Bones*, a rare fictional account by Senegalese author Boubacar Boris Diop. The novel opens the day the murders begin when Tutsi shopkeeper Michel Serumundo laments that the Football World Cup would occupy the planet uninterested in “the same old story of blacks beating up on each other” (9). In her forward to the novel, Eileen Julien hopes that Diop’s work will help readers overcome “the numbed indifference or silent acquiescence of which we are all a part” (x). While these texts belong to different genres, they overlap as travel accounts responding to a relatively brief stay in Rwanda. This broad categorization does not intend to skate over their formal differences but construct an

archive of texts to explore “indifference” as a trope. Reading these varied texts as kinds of travel literature, moreover, helps explain their concern with and use of “indifference”; these authors and texts initially know nothing about Rwanda and come to care deeply about the country. In other words, they journey on the narrative arc from ignorance—the ostensible root of indifference—to humanitarianism and want their readers to do the same. Diop and Gourevitch visit Rwanda in the aftermath of the genocide, while Dallaire participates intimately in the failed peacekeeping mission and its attached political processes before returning to Canada stricken with PTSD. Even so, Dallaire remains hopeful; “After all I have witnessed, I too believe we can prevail” (548). Diop’s novel seems to endorse this progressive narrative from distance to intimacy and activism.

In this chapter's first section I takes up one major narrative in *Murambi*—the novel deploys no less than nine focalizers—that appears to offer this affirmative lesson in the story of Cornelius Uvimana’s return to Rwanda after the genocide. Uvimana progresses from an exiled acquaintance with the genocide to a deep immersion in its machinations and concludes by affirming literature’s power to awaken readers. The novel’s disjunctive form interrupts this banal, if powerful, conclusion by framing it with alternate narratives and other more nefarious focalizers. An analysis of these formal ruptures provokes my turn to Dallaire’s memoir and an analysis of global overinvestments in Rwanda.

Lt. Gen. Roméo Dallaire’s presence in the middle section of my analysis reflects his unfortunate placement as the fulcrum between the international communities of the global North and South. As the Force Commander for UNAMIR, Dallaire enacted the Security Council’s orders while negotiating—and quite literally translating—between the anglophone RPF (Rwandese Patriot Front) and the francophone RGF (Rwandese Government Forces).

Consequently, his formulation—“betrayal, failure, naïveté, indifference, hatred, genocide, war, inhumanity and evil”—places “indifference” between naïveté and hatred, failure and genocide, betrayal and war. This syntactic location suggests that “indifference” is not merely a non-space between naïve caring and brutal hatred, but the battleground between these contradictory and seemingly disconnected phenomena. Torn between failure and genocide, betrayal and war, the trope of “international indifference” only makes sense if we take it to mean the clash of such contradictory vectors. In other words, Dallaire's formulation suggests that indifference is *produced*.

In the second section I attempt to displace the commonplace understanding of indifference as a synonym for apathy and argue for the *production of indifference* in bureaucracies (the UN) and, more largely, in situations of contradictory investments. In the last section I trace these material investments, specifically weapons shipments, which prompt a return to *Murambi* and attention to the text's indictment of France's neocolonial African policy while also gesturing towards the antiimperial potential of indifference.

### **Writing Development**

Two major sections of Diop's novel chronicle Cornelius Uvimana's return to Rwanda after a twenty-five year exile in Djibouti. He fled Rwanda as a boy after a period of violence against Tutsis, in which he and his mother were targeted. Uvimana returns to Rwanda believing that his whole family perished in the genocide, only to learn something worse. Uvimana's father, Dr. Joseph Karekezi, orchestrated the mass murder of fifty thousand people at Murambi Polytechnic Institute. Branded the “Butcher of Murambi,” Dr. Karekezi ordered the execution of his Tutsi wife and young children as well. When Uvimana learns that “he was the son of a monster,” his life and return from exile “could no longer have the same meaning” (78). “He had

suddenly discovered that he had become the perfect Rwandan: Both guilty and a victim” (78). This realization concludes the first section of Uvimana’s development as he enters the polity by coming to know what everyone else already knows (Slaughter 3). The second stage passes through open grave memorials.

Uvimana must visit the Murambi memorial to confront the slaughter organized by his own father, who destroyed his mother and siblings. His response to the genocide uses words, even words as weapons of war. While the form these words will take changes over the course of Uvimana’s development, the basic affirmation of literature’s power remains intact. He abandons the idea of a play but does not give up on writing.

He would tirelessly recount the horror. With machete words, club words, words studded with nails, naked words and... words covered with blood and shit. That he could do, because he saw in the genocide of Rwandan Tutsis a great lesson in simplicity. Every chronicler could at least learn—something essential to his art—to call a monster by its name. (179)

Uvimana sees in the genocide and its aftermath “a great lesson in simplicity,” which prods him into the “modest role” of “tirelessly recount[ing] the horror.” If the “essential” lesson seems clear—“to call a monster by its name”—the proper name of that monster remains unclear. At first glance, this Rumpelstiltskin theory of writing names the monster of genocide and critiques the international community, especially Western nations, for obfuscating the situation lest they fulfill their obligations under the UN Genocide Convention. But recounting the horror, as Dallaire did in his daily reports, failed to move the international community. Even worse, these dispatches convinced the Security Council that an intervention force could do “little good”



(Barnett 560). Dallaire and Uvimana assume that such accounts fight against the monster of indifference whose defeat will allow their readers to confront tragedies.

Learning to write the proper name of genocide and its executioners certainly seems an important lesson. Uvimana believes in a “duty to get as close as he could to all suffering” (181). By recording and sharing the horror and suffering of survivors, he will become a medium for Murambi’s dead whose “most ardent desire was for the resurrection of the living” (181).<sup>20</sup> If Uvimana’s narrative affirms literature’s power to breathe life into half-dead affects, the novel’s formal disjunctures bespeak a more cautious lesson: the living need no resurrection because they are not dead, nor indifferent. Worse, some are too alive and invested in the horror of genocide. Uvimana should realize this when his survivor-guide takes him away to larger room and asks him to “touch a flagpole put up on top of a little pile of brown pebbles: This is where [the French] hoisted their flag” (149). The guide tells Uvimana that the French military built the garrisons for their humanitarian invasion, Operation Turquoise, atop the Murambi massacre grounds. To excavate the memorial and preserve the violation required digging beneath a military playground; the novel preserves these layers in its sedimented form.<sup>21</sup>

Those cruel days were like nothing that had ever been seen. Woven from flashes, there were threaded with all manner of frenzy...he would never be able to tame this whirlwind, its bright colors, its howls and its furious twisting.

Diop’s novel weaves together flashes of experience from nine different focalizers—victims, perpetrators and a French Colonel—whose frenzy both precedes and breaks up Uvimana’s narrative. This formal strategy subverts an easy focus on Uvimana or an affirmative narrative of development. Although the novel does not employ the Bildungsroman’s formal

tautology—beginning at the end and narrating how one got there—Uvimana does develop into an ideal human rights subject affirming the basic right to life of both the victims and his own future vocation as a chronicler employing human rights literacy.<sup>22</sup> But he is not the novel's hero.

The story of Uvimana's return to Rwanda does not even begin until we have met a victim, a perpetrator, and a RPF-allied informant. These narratives precede and exceed Uvimana's story, setting a stage that formally demonstrates the need for a polyvocality the novel bravely attempts. After Uvimana's first section, the novel breaks again into many other voices that speak while living through the horror of genocide. This section's focalizers include perpetrators, victims, and most importantly a French Colonel tasked with evacuating Dr. Karekezi. While it is true that this formal strategy "encourage[s] the reader to view the genocide from a variety of different angles and to resist a reductive interpretation of the events," the novel does not simply advocate the recognition of genocide as such—rather than tribal or ethnic warfare—by those who paid "little attention" during the 1994 massacres (Hitchcott 53, 55).<sup>23</sup> Rather, these formal disruptions encode David Keen's lesson that conflicts do not simply disrupt economies and interrupt benevolent progress but continue economics by other means and create "an alternative system of profit, power and even protection" (10-11). These alternate systems link local extortions with "international trading networks," allowing Rwandan genocidaires access to South African arms and French military protection. That is, the human rights NGO's desire for "a speedy transition from wartime relief to development" ignores the ways development processes both promote conflict and continue during these perilous times (10).

The survivor-guide at Murambi Polytechnic Institute tells Uvimana, "the World Bank had given a grant" for the school's construction, "but work had been interrupted by the events" (145). The genocide ostensibly interrupts a "Banking bildungsroman" meant to evince the "[World]

Bank's extensive commitment to education" (Benjamin 162).<sup>24</sup> Such funding inundated Rwanda and increased by "nearly 100 percent from 1989 to 1993"; this last year's total foreign assistance of \$334 million received an additional \$130 million in "emergency aid" (Des Forges 94). Despite the spending regulations on aid money, "Rwandan officials diverted resources intended for civilian purposes to use by military or militia," including purchasing arms (ibid. 94). This militarization depends on the Banking bildungsroman and siphons monies into the arms trade shot through with a parallel tautology of development—citizens begin as what they must become, armed soldiers. The UN peacekeeping mission led by Dallaire tried to interrupt the flow of arms in Rwanda.

### **UNAMIR and the Bureaucratic Infrastructure of Indifference**

In early January 1994, a high-ranking member of the Hutu Power extremists turns informer and warns UNAMIR of arms caches in Kigali and militias training to systematically kill Tutsis. The informer, codenamed Jean-Pierre, discloses a mission to target Belgian soldiers—UNAMIR's military backbone—hoping that a few casualties will lead to the contingent's withdrawal. Dallaire reads this buildup as a direct threat to UNAMIR and a violation of the Kigali Weapons Secure Area (KWSA) agreement; he sends a fax to UN's Department of Peace Keeping Operations announcing his plans to raid the arms caches believing that his mandate allows this action. The reply from the head of Peacekeeping Operations, Kofi Annan, and his deputy, Iqbal Riza, scolds Dallaire for even thinking of such action and reminds him of the severe limitations of UNAMIR's mandate. When Gourevitch later interviews Riza, the latter devalues the fax as one among many correspondences with Dallaire and the UN mission. Riza tells Gourevitch, "We get hyperbole in many reports" (106).

Riza invokes the literary figure of hyperbole to imply that Dallaire's fax exaggerated reality and effectively canceled its own persuasive power. Riza's comment on UN member state unwillingness to contribute troops in the wake of Somalia suggests that the hyperbole was not in the details of Dallaire's fax but his assumption that the world community cared enough to enable action. Riza deploys the *Realpolitik* commonsense that no one would have offered "our boys for an offensive action in Rwanda" (Gourevitch 106). But Dallaire already had his "boys"—Ghanaian and Tunisian troops lauded for their courage during the mission—and thought he was merely informing his superiors, not asking for permission of what he read as entirely within his mission's mandate. Gourevitch cites a television interview Dallaire gives in which the latter mourns the "absolute detachment of the international community and particularly of the Western world." "To be very candid and soldierly," Dallaire continues, "who the hell cared about Rwanda?" (cited in Gourevitch, 168). Dallaire's hyperbolic fax received a hyperbolic reply, a rejection sanctioned by an "absolute detachment" both from the situation in the Rwanda and UN's genocide convention. The rhetorical question, "who the hell cared about Rwanda?" repeats across writing on the genocide because the answer—no one—is damningly commonsensical. However, Michael Barnett's essay "The UN Security Council, Indifference, and Genocide in Rwanda" offers a more troubling reply to Dallaire's question.<sup>25</sup> Barnett served as an expert on Rwanda for US State Department staff at the UN. To answer Dallaire, he turns to the production of indifference in bureaucratized peacekeeping; everyone cared about Rwanda but they cared more about the bureaucracy that regulated and authorized that caring.

Barnett works as a political science professor at the University of Wisconsin and uses Midwestern self-deprecation to mock his status as "a seasoned veteran of Rwanda for nearly four months," when the genocide begins. Barnett argues that his standing as an expert derived not

from extensive knowledge of Rwanda “but rather the culture of the policy-making process in the U.S government and the UN” (554). Barnett expertise derives from bureaucratic tautology: “As a political officer I was, by definition, an expert. Rwanda was my account; I was its owner and hence a Rwanda expert” (554). The language of commerce subsidizes this bureaucratic position, underwriting Barnett’s claim to Rwanda as “my account,” “its owner,” which confers formal, if not entirely empty, expertise. And language is a currency indeed. Barnett’s earns expertise and fluency with a strong purchase on UN departments, acronyms and, most importantly, “the precise language of past mandates” (554-55). This bureaucratic insularity inhibits any substantial knowledge of Rwanda, while doubling one’s investments in sustaining and reproducing the bureaucracy. Following Jean Herzfeld, Barnett locates the production of indifference in this bureaucratic self-interest that undercuts investments in populations these organization ostensibly serve.

This suggests that one function of the UN was to distribute accountability to the point that it becomes irretrievable. Who was to blame for the lack of response to Rwanda? Everyone. The mere presence of the UN allowed states (and the Secretariat) to shield themselves from responsibility, to point fingers in all directions, and to avoid responsibility or culpability. (575)

Barnett seems to perform the argument of bureaucratic indifference by spreading the blame across principal actors such as the UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali as well as the culture of bureaucracies. The former suffers “indecision to the point of paralysis, if not complacency” and fails to provide guidance to the Security Council or transmit Dallaire’s recommendations (559). After President Habyarimana’s plane was shot down on April 6, 1994

Barnett argued for withdrawing UNAMIR's "5,000 lightly-armed peacekeepers scattered throughout Rwanda" (558). That number is greatly exaggerated, and is corrected in his book. But it evinces the distance, or delusions, separating Security Council debates from the reality Dallaire describes; there were "2,538 UNAMIR personnel on the ground on April 7" (231). This distance and lack of recommendations combines with bureaucratic self-preservation—coded as a moral obligation to preserve the UN's reputation—so that daily reports of genocide convinced the Security Council that a "modest-sized" intervention would do "little good and much harm both to [the peacekeepers] and the UN's reputation and future" (560).<sup>26</sup> Indifference to Rwanda is produced passively out of an over-identification with both the UN bureaucracy and national self-interest. In a "brutal" formulation, Barnett argues, "the UN had more to lose by taking action and being associated with another failure than it did by not taking action and allowing the genocide in Rwanda" (561). Identifying with the bureaucracy produces "an emotional and cognitive mechanism for producing exclusion and apathy": indifference (561).

Similarly, active anti-intervention arguments appealed to the safety of UN peacekeepers as well as the organization's reputation and ability to secure future resources if soldiers died.<sup>27</sup> As Barnett summarizes, "Moral oratory draped self-interested actions. Indifference was presentable through the appeal to the transcendental" (572). But there are problems with Barnett's account.

As already noted above, Barnett writes initially of over 5,000 peacekeeping troops already deployed in Rwanda when the genocide began; as we have seen, this is simply not true. Second, and more problematically, Barnett claims that "few, if any, member states had independent sources of information, and they therefore relied heavily on the Secretariat for

intelligence and policy recommendations regarding UNAMIR's future" (559).<sup>28</sup> Dallaire disagrees.

Disallowed from raiding the arms caches, Dallaire must instead brief ambassadors from France, Belgium, and the United States in Rwanda. "None them appeared to be surprised, which led me to conclude that our informant was merely confirming what they already knew" (148). The lack of surprise registers powerfully on Dallaire, who fears that everyone around him knows more about the situation than he does. Before Dallaire departs for Rwanda, the DPKO tells him repeatedly that no one has any "interest" in Rwanda besides its former colonial rulers, Belgium and France. However, Dallaire notes that the five permanent members of the Security Council—France, England, China, Russia and the United States—"all had fully equipped and manned embassies in Rwanda, including both military and intelligence attachés" (90).<sup>29</sup> None of these great powers, however, provide Dallaire and his staff with any intelligence. The grotesqueness of this situation worsens when Dallaire reveals that "the French, the Belgians and the Germans had military advisers numbering in the dozens at all levels of the military and gendarmerie command and training structures in Rwanda" (90).

The French and Belgians permeate the military wings of the Rwandan government, advising both the RGF and the Gendarmerie "from their headquarters to their training institutions to their units in the field" (70). This network of advisers extends further and reaches deeper than "their ambassadors or military attachés let on" (70). Dallaire prods the embassies for more information, but they reveal nothing and leave him to wonder, "What was their actual mission in Rwanda?" France, meanwhile, stations an elite paratrooper battalion, which remains "close-mouthed about its strength and true mission in Rwanda" (71). French military aid to Rwanda peaked twice, in October 1990 and February 1993, in the form of outright interventions to stop

the RPF. These military investments and extensive embassy networks challenge the common accusation of Western indifference. The situation was better and worse than that. The Security Council powers were *already* in Rwanda, especially France, Germany and Belgium; but they advised the wrong side of history and trained those government forces behind whose lines the genocidaires worked.

French military investments in Francophone Rwanda extended to “military advisers, both in and out of uniform, to major units of the RGF.” “France was the only member on the UN Security Council,” Dallaire continues, “that had demonstrated a clear interest in Rwanda” (62). While France’s “clear interest” seems an advance on supposed Western indifference, Dallaire means to indict the ostensible neutrality of peacekeeping mandates as well as French backing and military training of a repressive regime. However, he notes a rift within French foreign policy and its multiple authors. When Dallaire visits the French embassy to debrief them on his preliminary recommendations for 2,500 UNAMIR troops, the military attaché leaps “into the fray.” Arguing against the need for so many troops, the attaché claims, “France had a battalion of only 325 personnel stationed in the country and the situation seemed to be well in hand.” Dallaire reads the “deliberately obstructive” attaché as evidence of an “outright split” that fractures the French foreign affairs department and ministry of defense (76). Rather than correct these failures, the French help rescue members of the Habyarimana regime, even those complicit in organizing and executing the genocide. Unfortunately, the French were anything but indifferent to Rwanda and they were not alone.

Less than a week after the DPKO rejects Dallaire’s raid on arms caches, an unscheduled military cargo plane lands in Kigali airport. UNAMIR’s military observers



found the aircraft to be loaded with tons of artillery and mortar ammunition. The paperwork on the plane—registrations, ownership, insurance, manifest—mentioned companies in France, the United Kingdom, Belgium, Egypt and Ghana. Most of the nations on the list had troops in UNAMIR. [Major] Brent [Beardsley] asked a Belgian officer what it felt like to be risking his life in Rwanda while his nation dealt arms that could be used to kill him. The officer replied that peacekeeping was peacekeeping, and business was business, and the business of Belgium was arms. I cursed the double standard of the supposedly ex-colonial powers. (156)

Dallaire indicts the simultaneous arms trafficking of those nations that also contributed to a peacekeeping mission. Such militarism is not the remnant of colonialism but an active profiteering that jeopardizes his men and mission. The unnamed Belgian officer's blasé response matches Dallaire's incredulity, as if the General naïvely forgets that both peacekeeping and arms trafficking are just "business." These multiple, contradictory businesses produce international indifference, tearing apart Dallaire and UNAMIR, reducing them to witnesses of a slaughter that the "international community" was overinvested in. Amidst these secret plots Dallaire suspects "that these powerful nations did not want to get involved because they had a firmer grasp on the threats to the success of the Arusha accords than the rest of us" (90). These threats undercut the peacekeeping mission but bolster economic investments as capital flowed into Rwanda in the shape of weapons.

### **French Militarism**

These formal, thematic and military concerns coalesce in Diop's novel when a French Colonel arrives to help Dr. Karekezi escape. Colonel Étienne Perrin's narrative of evacuating Dr. Karekezi precedes Uvimana's final section and undercuts his affirmation of literature. Perrin's chapter demonstrates that foreign powers were not indifferent, but all too invested by acknowledging the presence of French troops and their complicity with perpetrators. Secondly, Dr. Karekezi showcases the profits available to weapons smugglers.

The heavy-handed dialogue between Colonel Étienne Perrin and Dr. Karekezi ("the Butcher of Murambi") rehearses French complicity in genocide as the consequence of entrenched racism. Colonel Perrin laments those "crazy" men in charge of foreign affairs who operate with "one-track minds: 'Africa is ours, we're not going to let it go'." These Parisian strategists "create African heads of state there in their offices" (121). Dr. Karekezi was merely a pawn amidst these strategy games, serving as a useful backup to President Habyarimana, whose concessions to the RPF during the Arusha peace accords loomed darkly over his fate. These African strategists knew of Dr. Karekezi's "dubious trafficking" flowing through his "tea factory" (120). If Perrin's indictment of French complicity and racist geo-strategies overdetermine Dr. Karekezi, this brief allusion to weapons trafficking through a tea plantation both bolsters and undercuts his claims.

The French foreign affairs officers know of Dr. Karekezi's weapons smuggling because the French national bank, Credit Lyonnais, provided a \$6 million bank guarantee for Rwandan arms purchases from Egypt in 1992. The Rwandan government paid \$1 million in cash and another \$1 million in the form of 615 tons of tea; future tea harvests were pledged as collateral to Credit Lyonnais for the balance.<sup>30</sup> Diop's novel condenses this history into a brief allusion of Dr. Karekezi's "dubious trafficking," which his French patrons endorse because it allowed "the man

[to] advance concealed for a long time” (120). Dr. Karekezi’s “sensational return to politics” at Murambi exceeds French strategists who find his “planned liquidation” “rather embarrassing” (120-21). Still, they wonder if Dr. Karekezi can be forced into a leadership position to broker power with the victorious RPF.

In Perrin’s account, the French foreign affairs officers still believe in Dr. Karekezi despite his brutality because “in Africa political questions get resolved everywhere with extreme cruelty”; and besides, “the survivors of this alleged genocide were soon going to forget the entire episode” (121). Perrin attributes the French nonplussed response to racist ideologies that see in Africa a continent devoid of political process save those of “extreme cruelty”; even the victims will surely soon forget these predictable practices. Dr. Karekezi argues that this braggadocios racism hated the anglophone RPF, the first “Blacks who don’t kowtow to you” (126).<sup>31</sup>

Dr. Karekezi retorts that the French hated the RPF as much as his fellow Hutu Power comrades. The anglophone RPF register as “shady characters from other places,” who “look down on” the French and militantly refuse to play their docile parts.<sup>32</sup> Dr. Karekezi summarizes, “Hatred, you can handle that, but this indifference, no. That’s worth killing several hundred thousand Tutsis” (126). French military investments, interventions and evacuations fight against Black anglophone usurpers indifferent to the colonial power. This indifference is worse than hatred because it rejects the other as worthy of hate; the RPF simply cease to “kowtow” before French military power. The RPF’s indifference to France’s “Great Power act” allows them to successfully immobilize a French convoy on the contested road to Butare (128-29). This military victory doubles as a racial performance that defeats French colonial expectations. Perrin concedes the incident was a “kind of humiliation” that would “weigh heavily on our politicians’ decisions” (119).

Two RPF companies ambushed a French convoy exceeding the bounds of the French controlled Zone Turquoise and making their way to Butare. They order the French forces to submit to an inspection. As RPF military leader Paul Kagame recounts to Gourevitch,

Our interest was to make sure none of these people they were taking were FAR [RGF] or militias. The French refused. Their jeeps were mounted with machine guns, so they turned them on our troops as a sign of hostility. When the soldiers in the ambush realized there was going to be a confrontation, they came out, and a few fellows who had rocket-propelled grenade launchers targeted the jeeps. When the French soldiers saw that, they were all instructed to point their guns upward. And they did (159).

The RPF find two Rwandan government soldiers in this convoy and execute them. After this incident “the French softened their tone” and began speaking of the RPF with “grudging respect” (158). This militant arrogance forgets the RPF’s previous successes, in which, to Dallaire’s mind, they “proved capable of engaging and defeating the French-backed Rwandese Government forces” (47). Dallaire senses colonial angst in the Butare ambush and another defeat. No French troops are killed, “but French pride suffered a blow,” because both “patrols had been outwitted by the RPF and shamed in the process” (444-45). Unfortunately, Dallaire notes that these victories “did nothing to dissuade the French from wanting to support their former colleagues and put the RPF in their place” (445). Dr. Karekezi argues that the RPF’s victory marks “the beginning of the end” because France will “leave Africa by the back door” (129).<sup>33</sup>

This fictional dialogue labors to balance French colonial racism and the agency of Rwandan genocidaires. Diop’s account of racism entrenched in French foreign policy rhymes

with those offered by philosophers Alain Badiou and Giorgio Agamben, both vociferous critics of European right-wing jingoism that hates North African immigration, francophone or otherwise. However, Colonel Perrin reflects that French complicity does not absolve the “enormous bloodstain” on Rwandan hands; “To say otherwise would be to think of them as irresponsible children.” The rejection of paternal responsibility conflicts with Perrin’s acknowledgement that “we did nothing to prevent the massacres. We were the only ones in the world who could have done it” (124). This self-indictment rings hyperbolic given the international scope of weapons shipments, the presence of Security Council power embassies and intelligence capabilities, as well as the neutered UNAMIR mission. Only decrying French indifference would sound more absurd.

Although the novel's disjunctive form "challenges any reading to be the final version of events," Perrin's chapter eagerly indicts the French and helps that nation's reading public, as well as those of England and the US, to recognize their governments' part in “aiding and abetting genocide” (Hitchcott 54, 57). But this analysis stops short insofar as it assigns Diop's novel, or aesthetic responses to the genocide, a merely revelatory function, awakening readers out of their ignorance. I believe Diop's novel begs readers to investigate the genocide and their place in a gruesome world. This requires, first, rejecting the narrative indifference and attending carefully to the pervasive linkages already in place. As I have tried to demonstrate, finally, one crucial linkage that requires special attention is the international arms trade enabling both neocolonial suppression and humanitarian relief of the global South as well as its humanitarian armature.

Let us return to the mass graves and the rage they produce.

### **Angry Lessons**

Uvimana prepares himself for the worst but when he sees the first skeletons, he “immediately want[s] to turn around and go back” (144). He has already visited several mass graves but encountered a different type of remains. In the cities of Nyamata and Ntarama, “the skulls, arms, and legs had become detached from their torsos”; in Murambi, however, the bodies are almost all intact (144). Uvimana “took fright...started pacing up and down the hallway, glancing indecisively in every direction, as if looking for a place to flee. Saliva was collecting in his throat and he swallowed it to conceal his disgust. Even from the outside the stench of the cadavers was intolerable” (144). Seeing whole bodies affects his whole body. Taste, smell, sight and movement explode into each other, proving to him that “genocide had taken place only four years ago and not in ancient times” (147). Despite the “nauseating stench of decomposing bodies,” Uvimana tells his companion that he wants to “see everything.” His companion replies that there are sixty-four more rooms like the one they are in and that Uvimana will “see the same bodies everywhere” (146-47). “No,” Uvimana snaps, amazed at the “sudden bout of rage” he experiences.

The cacophony of sensations harmonizes into rage. Uvimana’s grows “furious” with the guide who apologizes for the crass remark, which ignores the particularity of victims and lumps them into “the same bodies everywhere” (146-7). Violating this particularity produces rage and reveals to Uvimana “his own suffering, much more profound than he had thought” (147). This fury born of suffering is the real lesson of the Murambi memorial. And the education justifies the open graves because they challenge “every Rwandan” to “look reality in the eye” (147). In this reality, “the victims had shouted out” but “no one wanted to hear them.” The memorial preserves the “echo of those cries,” whose continued reverberations scold global indifference to Rwandan screams (147). Uvimana’s rage and endorsement of the open grave memorials constitute the final

stages of his development. He becomes “the perfect Rwandan: Both guilty and a victim” (78). Uvimana is also the perfect visitor by learning from the memorials, which drive him to write about the genocide. The horror of the memorials meshes with an outrage at the world’s indifference—“No one wanted to hear them”—and makes the affirmative power of literature an inevitable and powerful, if banal, conclusion. Philip Gourevitch also visits a mass grave turned memorial and, like Uvimana, experiences an educative rage.

In his opening chapter, Gourevitch visits a mass open grave at a church in Kibungo province and reflects on the desire to look more closely, to know by walking among the dead. He arrives on the scene aboard a UN helicopter accompanied by two Canadian military officers with the proper paperwork. A Kalashnikov-wielding guard accepts the paperwork and grants them entrance to the memorial.

“The dead looked like pictures of the dead” (15). Open, decomposing and strewn about in agonizing chaos, the bodies “did not smell” nor did they “buzz with flies” (15). The remaining tissues, clothes and bones clearly evince violence—“Macheted skulls had rolled here and there”—but do not provoke a visceral reaction from Gourevitch. He finds the genocide “still strangely unimaginable,” meaning “one still had to imagine it” (16). Looking does not provoke a meaningful response despite the range of affects he experiences: “revulsion, alarm, sorrow, grief, shame, incomprehension, sure but nothing truly meaningful” (19). After touring more rooms, Gourevitch walks outside and hears “a crunch.”

The old Canadian colonel stumbled in front of me, and I saw, though he did not notice, that his foot had rolled on a skull and broken it. For the first time at Nyarubuye my feelings focused, and what I felt was a small

but keen anger at this man. Then I hear another crunch, and felt a vibration underfoot. I had stepped on one too. (19-20)

Gourevitch's range of meaningless emotions narrow to a "small keen anger" focused on the Canadian colonel. This anger is the real moment of insight. Gourevitch describes his anger as "keen" not merely to emphasize the sharpness of his emotional focus, but because the adjective suggests a clarity otherwise absent during his visit to the memorial. The moment's visceral lucidity instantly clouds when Gourevitch also missteps on a skull; he does not elaborate on his anger or follow its insight when discussing the lessons of such memorials specifically, and the Rwandan genocide more generally. The scene contrasts sharply with Uvimana's experience, in which the stench of decomposing flesh overwhelms the narrator.<sup>34</sup> Gourevitch smells nothing and the graphic sights incite an apparently meaningless confusion of emotions. The dead remain pictures that represent nothing but their own death, their powerlessness rendered mere visual datum. Only when the colonel missteps does Gourevitch glimpse the affective foundations of mass violence.

His "small but keen anger" fixates on the colonel and a trespass that, in the larger context, seems to matter little. Regardless, for the first time Gourevitch feels clearly in a momentary burst of emotion and its ready target. He glimpses the keen anger necessary for mass violence, and understands how a murderous drive for a "new order" feels both "compelling" and "absolute" (17). In this light, Gourevitch's accidental trespass—stepping on a skull—reads as a self-indictment that acknowledges his and our own potential as an agent of violence. This is not to conflate small angers with the systematic murder but to caution against the misuse of such righteous anger to energize the will to intervene.



### Chapter 3: Accumulating Safety: Asian Shylocks and *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall*

Total corruption, I've been told, occurs in inches and proceeds through veils of ambiguity. (Vassanji 271)

Critics such as Nalini Iyer have read M.G. Vassanji's *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* as demonstrating that "the diasporic Indian community in East Africa manages to stay influential through corruption and by pandering to the needs of the ruling elite" (Iyer 211). At its best, studying the Asians of East Africa complicates a simpler story of empire—colonizers and colonized—by attending to the "sites of colonial contest" themselves "marked many times over by various forms of "subjects" and power brokers (Desai 159). The value of these arguments lies in their attention to empire's unevenness, its creation of and reliance on local racial tensions to advance the larger project of subjugation. Vassanji's novel, however, further complicates this story by teasing out a strange logic of capital accumulation. The title character of *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* weaponizes capital accumulation as a form of self-defense ostensibly justified by the marginality of the Asians in East Africa who live in constant fear after Kenya's political independence.

Idi Amin's expulsion of Asians from Uganda in 1972 merely took the logic of marginality to one conclusion. The foreign, imperial collaborators were asked to leave a country to which they never belonged; the Asians are not merely a comprador class but a people under threat from all sides; they are not hybrid but stranded. These charges are not entirely untrue, which mutes polemics against racism and marginality, and begs for a more sophisticated strategy. The complicated history of the South Asian diaspora in East Africa requires nothing less than an acknowledgement of its historical role and a simultaneous refutation of racist

caricatures that forget their place in Kenya's radical political history.

Vassanji's novel builds precisely this nuanced critique, I argue, by caricaturing the caricature of the "Asian Shylock," offering as the principal focalizer a Kenyan Asian man who embezzles a huge fortune for himself and his partners among the new political elite. Vassanji's critique of capital accumulation and the Asian Shylock inheres in Lall's strategic self-defense, especially when it veers hyperbolic at crucial moments. Despite the hyperbole, however, the novel's argument is not an obvious one. Vassanji's literary strategy pushes readers to "counterfocalize" against Lall and produce a parallel alternative narrative to the one he offers. This strategy both avoids the polemical while also strengthening our critical reading muscles.

For Gayatri Spivak to counterfocalize is to "shuttle between focalization and the making of an alternate narrative as the reader's running commentary" (22). This "effortful and active" practice grounds the "'political' in political fiction" because it activates the "readerly imagination"; "Literature advocates in this special way" and such literary reading "has to be learned" (22). Counterfocalization may offer a one-word summary of postcolonial literary criticism; one generates the parallel alternative text precisely by reading a given text closely (22). The reward of this labor is ultimately an understanding of both the structures of domination and possibilities of resistance. *Vikram Lall* offers a bit of both by critiquing a particular logic of postcolonial capital accumulation. Vassanji's text, I argue, produces structural critiques through tiny fissures in a single focalizer's narration. Lall's financial schemes, for instance, demonstrate the fusion of the formal and informal economies whose transnational circuit siphons wealth to the corrupt elite. His claim to be an overdetermined participant of such schemes—the Asian Shylock has no other position—seems to reveal another intersection of race and capital. A counterfocalized reading, however, reveals as well the radical political opposition always

countering such overdeterminations; Asians actively aligned with the Mau Mau rebels, launched trade unions, and engaged in other decolonizing efforts. Vassanji's literary strategy cannot list these possibilities out in great detail but prods readers to explore alternatives that found historical realization or remain energetically speculative. Lall avoids the struggles for independence and the delicate postcolonial period by claiming to be apolitical, but his search for moneyed safety at the intersection of finance and transport puts the lie to his ostensible apoliticism.

### **Gilded Communalism**

Lall first discovers the link between wealth and safety purely by chance. He and his sister Deepa are rescued by a wealthy businessman in Dar es Salaam from communal attackers who want to punish them for deviating from their sexual communities. At that time, the Hindu Lall has a platonic affair with a Shamsi Muslim girl; they share an emotional intimacy but nothing more, which Lall blames on his cowardice to invest fully in a woman. Meanwhile, Deepa visits Lall in Dar to escape her mother's watchful eye and spend time with Njoroge, their childhood friend and her current African lover; they dance together at nightclubs and openly demonstrate their love. They broach "the most sensitive topic in East African sexual politics: relationships between Asian women and African men" (Jones 172).<sup>35</sup> In this way, Deepa and Lall earn the wrath of self-appointed communal warriors who attack them in a dark street.

"Out leapt before us six youths, howling like wild dogs, gesturing like demons, mouthing all manner of obscenities; they surrounded us" (208). They block all escape routes and ready for an attack when a white Mercedes appears and turns towards them. The attackers disperse "like cockroaches" (208). Out of the car steps a local millionaire, Mr. Bapu, whose nondescript name (Mr. Father) only adds to his benevolent ghostliness. He saves their lives, insists they spend the night at his mansion, shows them his beautiful garden, plucks a rose for Deepa and drops them

off the next morning at the university where Lall studies; he never appears or is mentioned again. Lall remembers this episode in Manichean terms as the fortunate rescue from provincialism by a wealthy benefactor. He remembers not the contingency of the rescue but the gleaming white Mercedes and its saving headlights. A closer look at this scene yields worthwhile results.

First, the attack takes place in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, rather than Kenya, the novel's principal setting. This parallel location, where Lall studies and Deepa comes to visit and openly be with Njoroge, suggests that such communal policing is a regional issue in East Africa and not simply isolated to Kenya. Vassanji's oeuvre negotiates these issues across East Africa and offers novelistic depth to the abstracted historical record. Secondly, Lall admits that he remembers these attackers with a great deal of contempt and has "called them names" (209). One of those names, however, is particularly telling. Lall describes one of their attackers as a "half-caste chotara," deployed here as a pejorative name for the child of mixed parentage. Vassanji places this insult in the context of breaking communal (sexual) borders to undercut the attacker's authority to purity, contemptuously belittling these communal policemen. Taken together, the scene suggests that the communalism plaguing East Africa inherits a miscegenated history rather than the ills of postcolonial independence.<sup>36</sup>

This all seems fairly positive until we address again the saving "white Mercedes" and its anonymous millionaire owner. The car's color and manufacturer reads as a kitschy metaphor that repeats twice on the page in a short span; a white luxury chariot arrives just in time to extricate them from militant provincialism. Lall barely acknowledges the contingency of its arrival at that moment, on that street, but instead focuses on the attackers' lowness and the white Benz. Wealth saves. That it is the German Mercedes, rather than a British Rolls Royce, for example, foreshadows something of the transnationalism required by capital accumulation, and the supra-

communal position one may occupy given enough capital to buy the protection of an estate behind security gates. Such wealth ensures safety even in hostile East Africa's self-policing sexual communities. Although he does not explicitly say so, Lall remembers this episode as the first instance when wealth saved him and his family. The lesson sticks. He describes the efforts of his career merely as an extension of this lesson; wealth in the form of accumulated capital—reified in a commodity or not—protects people in precarious circumstances. As an Asian in East Africa, Lall contends, he is born into a vilified community, stranded in-between colonizer and colonized. This position began, in Lall's narration, when his ancestors worked as laborers on constructing the Ugandan Railway.

### **Iron Lines: Family, Railroads, and Colonial Infrastructure**

The Lall family feels connected to Kenya through the railroad their grandfather worked on. The rail just before the station box, Anand Lal tells his son and grandson, bears his name inscribed on the metal line with acid and a steel wire. Lal's fellow laborers had done the same on previous lines. These signatures in Punjabi letters are "our claim to the land" (16). The "our" of this claim refers to "our people," Asian laborers who "had sweated on it, had died on it: they had been carried away in their weary sleep or even wide awake by man-eating lions." Lall's claim to belong by dint of historical labors mirrors that made by prominent East African Asian businessman Nanji Kalidas Mehta in his memoir *Dream Half-Expressed*. Asian labor on the Ugandan Railway, Mehta argues, was an "enormous human sacrifice at the alter of civilization [that] bears testimony to the fact that no nation can stay alone and flourish in isolation...*It also teaches us that the debts of the past must be recognized and should bear a just relation to the future*" (cited in Desai, 154 with emphasis). Mehta attempts to universalize Asian labor on the railway as a contribution to all, or at least to East Africa, by restraining its political contexts:

indenture and settlement strategy. Simultaneously, Mehta deposits Asian "sacrifice" in a historical bank—"debts of the past"—so that its value appreciates over time. Vassanji's Lall furthers this argument by using these historical "debts" to stake a "claim to the land."

Vassanji drives Lall's claim too far because it aligns railroad laborers with the desires of their colonial masters who pushed the Asian laborers to settle the land. This reading does not require an untenable equivalence between the British and their subjects, but acknowledges the strong sense of Imperial subjectivity developed by the South Asian diaspora who sought to take advantage of the Empire's offerings. The Asian presence in East Africa predates the arrival of Europeans and comprised primarily of merchants and traders. At the height of empire, however, these merchants, as well as the laborers and bureaucrats who arrived with the British, sought to bring East Africa under Indian control as a province of its imperial hub (Metcalf, 182). Mehta figures Asian commercial history as a romance and savors its intimate exchange of "mutual gain" (as practiced by the Asian traders) rather than the "unequal power" used by the British (cited in Desai, 153). Lall, meanwhile, advances the settler strategy by using Asian work on the railway as a payment for their share of East Africa. Vassanji critiques Lall's settler claims by aligning his focalizer's family history with the British Empire and its epistemologies.

Narrating the story of his grandfather's decision to stay "in the new colony after his indenture-ship," Vikram Lall imagines his Dadaji (Grandfather), Anand Lal, and a few others at an almost complete railroad station. During a peak period for the Empire, 1897, Anand Lal completes his second contract with the British helping finish the Ugandan railways. Lall imagines his grandfather

contemplating the vast flat grassy plains of the Rift Valley, the pointed  
Mount Longonot, its sides grey with volcanic ash, rising up like the

nipple on the breast of some reclining African god, two escarpments in the distance, along whose steep slopes they had lain the railway in the direst of wet muddy conditions....(17)

Filled with tropes from imperial travel writing, Lall connects his grandfather's contemplations too closely with British Imperial epistemology. Lall's surveying eye sexualizes the Rift Valley, transforming it into a bare-chested, reposing African deity. The deity's breasts, distant escarpments with a dormant nipple, are conquered by the railway lines, "lain" there in "wet muddy conditions" (17). The trope of a sexualized landscape impregnated by European modernity has a long, well-studied history.<sup>37</sup> Vassanji critiques such imperial visions by embedding them within Lall's imagination of his grandfather's conquest. At first glance, there does not seem to be anything critical in Lall's fantasies. Indeed, they might be read as Vassanji's acknowledgement that British Indian subjects, indentured colonials or not, sought to bring East Africa under British Indian control (Metcalf, 188). Vassanji goes beyond mere acknowledgement and toward critique by ventriloquizing Lall's reading strategy.

Anand Lal does not speak for himself; rather, his grandson, Vikram, imagines these contemplations and weaves them into a claim to belonging in Kenya. If Vikram Lall aims to prove that he and his family belong in Kenya on the merit of their history with the land, he also imagines his grandfather as an imperial warrior. Lall recognizes the tense position his grandfather and fellow indentured laborers were caught in when he asserts that the Asian workers were "speared and macheted as proxies of the whites by angry Kamba, Kikuyu, and Nandi warriors" (17). These historical conflicts form a part of the historical background for understanding why Asians are vilified in East Africa; they were and continue to be understood as proxies for imperial powers, or as a self-interested and enclosed community that sails the

prevailing wind. Vassanji resists such caricatures, however, through Lall's juxtaposition of his grandfather's story with the completion of the railroad; Lall takes us from the indentured laborer's too imperial thoughts to Lake Victoria where "the last key had been driven home" by an "English lady" (17). The railway's completion and Anand Lal's survey appear sequentially in one paragraph, highlighting the drastic power asymmetry between the two. By grading these two perspectives against each other, Vassanji acknowledges that the Asian laborers worked as "proxies of the whites" but underlines the fact that they were the proxy labor to an imperial command that still retained the "last key" (17). This juxtaposition points to the asymmetry of power between imperialists and their laboring subjects, who faced an indigenous resistance they should have aided. In this way, Vassanji hints at the broad Afro-Asian solidarity required to confront imperial power. Such hints leak through the cracks of Lall's focalization, prodding readers to counterfocalize against Lall and investigate further.

We see immediately that Lall's version of the family history fails to produce the kind of belonging that would defeat anti-Asian racism. While Anand Lal may not have participated in the imperial pageantry at Lake Victoria, he helped build the empire's infrastructure. After working on the railway, he sets up a small shop and joins the scores of merchants that help penetrate and establish trade in the East African interior. Although Asian traders historically precede the British, new crops arrive with the imperialists. Lall narrative frames the decision to stay in Kenya and operate a business within a family story rather than the broad settler strategy to which it belongs. By remaining in Kenya, however, Anand Lal takes part in the colonizing mission Colonial Administrator Frederick Lugard advocated for Indians in East Africa and the Indians advocated for themselves. Indeed, the Indian community's "self-perception [was] founded on the notion that they had as much *right* to the lands as British colonists—rights based



on community contributions that were tangible and appeared self evident in addition to less overt yet profound notion of “civilizational worth” (Nair, 90, her emphasis).<sup>38</sup> Vassanji critiques such notions—of land rights and civilizational superiority—within Lall's narrative.

If his grandfather and father worked on empire's material infrastructure, Lall practices the epistemology sponsoring these colonial projects. Reading the African landscape as a naked goddess poised for penetration exemplifies such imperial epistemology. This mode of seeing strategically blinds itself to those already inhabiting the land or renders them impediments to be overcome as modernity progresses rail by rail.<sup>39</sup> Such imperial epistemology forms the infrastructure for Lall's own writing, moreover, as he omits the settler mission given to Indian laborers and merchants. Lall's participation in and practice of such imperial infrastructures leaves readers unsympathetic to his claim to belonging in Kenya. He sounds too much like a well-established settler defending bloodied inheritances. I am arguing, however, that Vassanji sets up his narrator to fail, for Lall's narration to contradict its own intentions; in so doing, Vassanji challenges readers to suspend Lall's narration, disbelieve its historical framing and counterfocalize.

When Lall narrates the atomized story of his grandfather as a young man who merely seizes an opportunity for himself in Kenya, Vassanji leaves clues that readers ought not to agree with Lall's story. Continuing the trope of sexual conquest, Lall wonders if his grandfather had not slept with a Masai woman during his youth and borne “cousins in some of the manyattas of the plains” (59). If laying lines began as a literal description of building railways and doubled as an imperial metaphor for subjugating space, it returns now as a fantasy of impregnation. Lall admits that this “fantasy has partly to do with [the] desperate need to belong to the land I was born in” (59). The fantasy is “not impossible,” moreover, because the railway workers were

promiscuous according to “reports of their British overseers, quoted in histories of the railway” (59). Lall’s fantasies of his grandfather are overseen by an imperial archive that takes bureaucratic reports for histories. These reports represent their laborers without giving voice to those licentious coolies who lay the foundations of Lall's Kenyan citizenship. In sum, Lall's fantasies repeat three imperial tropes: first, the masterful survey of virgin landscapes awaiting modernity's penetration; second, sexually conquering the natives; third, use the former two as grounds on which to claim a home as a settler.

Dan Odhiambo Ojwang critiques these tropes of exoticism and sexual conquest in Vassanji and other East African Asian writers as "window[s] into the historical context about which the writers reflect" (Ojwang 44). Wherever Vassanji's writes about African independence, his Asians experience only "menacing darkness mitigated by little islands of safety" (Ojwang 51). *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* seems to repeat this trope and confirm Ojwang's analysis, but the text ventures toward a different end. In *Vikram Lall* Vassanji does not only reflect on the continuities, tensions and contradictions of the South Asian diaspora in East Africa but actively critiques colonial alignments. This argument does not aim to recruit Vassanji's text toward an antiimperial politics but to open up the critical reading strategy advanced by the novel.

Vassanji redeploys these imperialist tropes through the corrupt Lall precisely to make readers suspicious both of the narrator and his claims. That is, Lall's early admissions render the imperial tropes pieces of a worldview that supports embezzlement. Meanwhile, those who recognize the colonial epistemology underwriting these tropes can map Lall's imperial inheritances riding on colonial railways. Vassanji then links these tropes of imperial travel writing with Lall's rise in newly independent Kenya's government bureaucracy. In so doing, Vassanji pushes readers to critique Lall's careerist vision, which sees his arrival in the Ministry

of Transport as the continuation of an upward mobility begun by his grandfather. If his family once labored under the burning sun, they have advanced to shady middle management now. Vassanji uses this continuity to critique the liberation promised by political independence from colonial powers.

Vassanji's critique inheres precisely in what Lall sees an enabling continuity between empire and independence. Where Peter Simatei argues that Vassanji's fiction mourns the loss of African nationalism's "reterritorialization of the British Empire," Lall aligns too closely with the latter project (Simatei 59). Simatei argues that East African Asians see "African nationalism as an assault on the Asian spaces of freedom guaranteed under colonialism," which is why they might be lured by "a more hegemonic form of nationalism, I.e. British imperialism" rather than the emergent African nationalism (Simatei, 59).<sup>40</sup> Lall's too imperial allegiance to the railroad does suggest a longing for the good old days of the formal Empire; however, he also aligns with the new African nationalism and tries to carve out a protected space within its reterritorializing project.

With help from his childhood friend Njoroge, Lall becomes an "assistant auditor and inspector" for the railways in the Ministry of Transport. Lall's family believes the job completes his destiny—from manual laborer to middle management—as well as his childhood dream of riding the lines "to appraise the world flying before me" (239). When Lall begins his career he takes his grandfather along on the final voyage of a Manchester built engine. The retirement of the "5607 'Sir George'" steam locomotive occasions Lall's invitation to Anand Lal. A new diesel engine will replace the colonial machinery even while it travels on imperial infrastructure. Lall is tasked with taking inventory of this infrastructure so that the new government can field contractors for new engines. During this voyage, however, he also takes stock of his

grandfather's labor and thought, folding them into the larger project of bringing colonial material under the control of an ostensibly independent regime.

When the engine carrying the two generations of Lall reaches a crest and the Great Rift Valley appears, "stretching vastly before us in the mist down below, virgin as God created it, endless and endless until the Red Sea" (233). The masterful survey returns to look upon a (still) "virgin" and "endless" land. This time, however, Lall attributes this description to his father, who used it to entertain Vikram's "childhood wonderment" (233). Meanwhile, Lall's grandfather, "Dadaji," stands "shaky on his feet, clutching my arm" and looks down at the valley, "his eyes glazed with grim nostalgia" (233). This account differs greatly from the one Lall projected on his grandfather or the mythical descriptions inherited from his father. Lall thinks that his Dadaji remembers hard labor, losing the tip of his pinky finger, and witnessing his close friend's marriage to a Masai woman. Although these elements do not disagree with earlier imaginings, they are recollected "with grim nostalgia"; grim befits indentureship and loss (the tip of a pinky finger) while nostalgia fondly remembers new and unexpected connections (marriage).

In sharp contrast, Lall feels a "true sense of pride and accomplishment" for treating his grandfather to this trip using his new government position (234). The parallel sentences allow Lall's pride to usurp his grandfather's grimness and his accomplishment to supplant nostalgia. Through this juxtaposition Vassanji attempts to make clear that Lall's narrative coopts his grandfather's experiences as the groundwork for his own career. Dadaji's "shaky" foundations as an indentured laborer for the imperial project become the iron rails for Lall's upward mobility as a bureaucrat in Kenya's newly independent government. By repeating the trope of a masterful survey, moreover, Vassanji suggests the troubling continuity of colonial exploitation in postcolonial governance, a continuity embodied in Lall's position as an auditor asked to

“appraise the world flying before me” (239). Such appraisal takes inventory of imperial infrastructure without necessarily redistributing its fruits.

Independence had brought an abundance of opportunities, the British and Europeans vacating lucrative farms and businesses and well-paying jobs, foreign aid and loans promising contracts and kickbacks; this was a time to make it, once and for all, as a family, as a clan, as a tribe—the stakes were mountain-high. And this in the tinderbox Cold War climate of the period, foreign governments peddling influence, bribes, arms. (235)

This cynical summary contextualizes Lall’s strategic cooptation of his grandfather’s labor and the railway itself. Neither are properly owned any longer, finally abandoned by their former colonial overseers and therefore up for grabs. Both coexist as different orders of vacancies. Lall sees in political independence the local ownership of exploitative structures and not necessarily social justice and economic equality. This vision remains blind to other hopes of independence because it myopically focuses on the narrow allegiance to “family, clan and tribe” (235). For Lall, this sense of community seems to encompass, at most, the marginalized but economically powerful Asians in East Africa. Such communalism both produces, and responds to, the very marginalization it seeks to protect against, safe within a gilded fortress.

Nairobi’s Asian communities, Lall argues, suffered “devastation” after Kenyan independence. When Britain passes its infamous immigration law in 1968 “to curb the flow of British Asians from Kenya,” an “Asian Exodus” follows as people flee to England before they no longer can. Many friends and family depart and “property values in Asian Eastleigh” collapse (236). This neighborhood and others like it were planned specifically to use the Asian community as “a buffer zone between the very few whites and the densely populated indigenous

Africans” (Siundu 263). Against the metonymy of the city as "the cosmopolitan ideal of the nation," Nairobi's segregationist policies tried to minimize African migration into the city (Siundu 265). This migration "constituted a risk to [the] wealth, health and power" of both Whites and Asians who fought to retain their homogenous spaces (Siundu 264).<sup>41</sup> Recounting this troubled history seems to push against Vassanji's tendency "to portray Asians as victims of malice and envy at their business astuteness" (Siundu 269).

Such a reading, however, conflates Vassanji's argument with that of his focalizers. One does not need to swallow whole Lall's bathetic account of the Indian diaspora's uprooting in this historical moment just as one should not endorse racist British immigration policy. Shaping critiques from "the vantage point of global immigrancy and Asian diasporic communities the world over" ignores the relative privilege of the Asians in Nairobi and removes "from sight [the] particular pasts and futures that would impact on social interactions with Non-Asians” (Siundu 267). Such myopia inheres in Lall's perspective—not Vassanji's—precisely because Lall fixates on the racism facing Asians in communal isolation.

Lall offers this communal context just after describing the trip with his grandfather and the “abundance of opportunities” brought by political independence in order to demonstrate the unevenness of such abundance and justify the communalism of his own response (235). In other words, Lall’s hope that his family, clan and tribe will “make it, once and for all” announces the desire to accumulate enough capital, and through it political power, to protect and sustain themselves. This is accumulation under duress rather than for its own sake.

If we do not dismiss Lall’s claim as merely a Machiavellian ruse for a total alignment with global capital, then we might see evidence of a particular order of postcolonial capital accumulation driven by the need for personal and communal security. This strategy seems

relatively unthinkable given Marxist analyses of race and capitalism that understand the former as a tool with which to divide laborers, suppress wages and drive capitalist accumulation forward. This framework allows us to see how racial constructions enabled the British Empire to use Indian merchants as settlers to buffer their rule in East Africa and facilitate unencumbered exploitation and extraction of wealth. If we dismiss Lall's drive as merely parroting imperial capitalist ideology, little remains to be said. To consider Lall's context in the relatively marginal Asian diaspora might inspire capital accumulation as a defensive measure, however, remains more difficult and interesting. Taking Lall's claim seriously does not require endorsing Lall's drive to accumulation for self-defense as a strategy or a twisted mode of resistance. Rather, the point is to understand the political contexts that reinforce the centrality of capital accumulation.

Perhaps most riskily, I also suggest that we see a parallel between Lall's strategy and the economic policy of former Non-Aligned Movement nations, which seek to shore up their independence on the strength of economic power. This policy too is a self-defense strategy against global capital and holds together a contradictory symmetry: one only defeats capital by becoming a better capitalist, which is of course how capital conquers you. Obviously, such a strategy deliberately omits (Kenya), or grandly defers (China), alternative economic and social possibilities that might do more than accumulate better or faster than the imperialists.

When Lall imagines trains "traveling west from Nairobi to Lagos and Accra, south to Cape Town, north to Khartoum and Cairo, *uniting all Africa*," he hints at the lost opportunity during decolonization (240, emphasis mine). For a moment, Lall breaks through communalism or the relatively narrow claims to Kenyan belonging and advocates a pan-African solidarity. This lost project would reclaim colonial infrastructure (railroads) to advance postcolonial independence and transnational allegiances ("uniting all Africa"). Such a utopic horizon appears

in a paragraph where Lall's family declares his new career to be "pure destiny" and the "just reward" of his grandfather's work. At its best, Lall's juxtaposition of an unrealized African unity and his own upward mobility posits the Asians in Africa as fellow Africans who would both belong to and participate in a larger antiimperial solidarity. Such a gesture would reject the political and racial antagonisms that culminated in the post-Independence "Asian exodus" he described earlier (237).

Vassanji forecloses these alternate possibilities, however, by reintroducing the possessive, commodifying mode of Lall's focalization. "The country was mine to explore, on this mysterious metal highway stretching from the coast into the interior, its iron rails reaching to diverse, far-flung and strange places" (240). Exoticism spices Lall's enthusiasm—"mysterious," "far-flung," "strange"—even while he attends to the railroad's primary function as an instrument of trade that penetrated from "the coast into the interior" (240). These tropes of exoticism and trade collude in a kind of orientalist hermeneutics through which Lall reads the railroad as the "Thousand and More Miles of Fantastic Lives and Ghost Stories" (240). The possibility of advancing the Non-Alignment project or even an abstract postcolonial solidarity no longer holds. Rather, Lall reads the railway as a storybook filled with adventure and treasure, benevolently haunted by his grandfather's indentured labor.<sup>42</sup> This fantastic reading, in part, allows him to later found the "Aladdin Financial Company" and invent schemes to create money out of thin air. Vassanji discloses the possibility of a postcolonial transnational solidarity, at least a pan-African unity, within Lall's careerism and exoticizing tropes in order to disclose the political projects Lall must remain blind to. In this way, Vassanji pushes readers to suspend Lall's version of postcolonial independence and investigate other modes of political life attempted in that period.



As other scholars have noted, Njoroge, Deepa and Uncle Mahesh give voice to such alternate modes of party, sexual, and radical politics respectively. I am arguing, however, that Vassanji advances his main argument by weavings suspicion and critique into the fabric of Lall's narration. Rather than merely choosing one among the possibilities each of these characters represent, Vassanji's formal strategy pushes readers to more critical responses to *every* given narrative. Such counterfocalization develops the critical capacities necessary for political practice.

One historical realization of such radical political practice is Mankhan Singh, whose absence haunts Lall's narration. The openly communist Singh formed the first trade union, the Labour Trade Union of Kenya, and demanded immediate independence for the East African territories. Other examples include lawyers who defended the Mau Mau in court, doctors who treated the fighters, pro-African journalists and printers, as well as a lumberman who provided the Mau Mau with food (Gregory 267). Vassanji takes special note of the lumberman, Yacood Deen, and incorporates him into the novel; Lall's uncle Mahesh lives shortly as a lumberman who supplies the forest fighters.

Lall, however, associates such practice with the murder of his childhood friends, the wealthy European Bruce family. They are killed by the gun Mahesh supplies the Mau Mau. The Bruce children's murder traumatizes Lall and ostensibly turns him away from politics. In truth, Lall shuns only radical left politics in favor of rampant capital accumulation.

### **Asian Shylock: Corruption and/or Banking**

Lall's entry into the new government's bureaucracy comes on the strength of his friend Njoroge's recommendation letter. Without that, Lall argues, he would have floundered.

with neither the prestige of whiteness or Europeanness behind me, nor the influence and numbers of a local tribe to back me, but carrying instead the stigma from a generalized recent memory of an exclusive race of brown “Shylocks” who had collaborated with the colonizers...Black chauvinism and reverse racism were the order of the day against Asians. (238-39)

While Mankahn Singh and other radicals put the lie to the "generalized recent memory," exclusivity and collaboration remain dominant accusations. Historian Robert Gregory's work pushes against such a reductive view by detailing the political activity of "Asians," an awkward term for a fractured constituency. Hindus, Muslims, Parsees, Sikhs—such as Singh and Lall—and Goans broke their united front in the years after World War II and the subcontinent's partition (Gregory 262). Agitation for separate electorates in government by the many new communal organizations led to different degrees of "collaboration" with the colonizers (Gregory 259, 1981). Divide and rule succeeded in some moments and anticolonial antagonism in others. This complicated history has no place in Lall's narration because it subverts his principal argument; as an Asian, he had little choice to become something other than a shadow banking financier; he merely took advantage of these racist assumptions and the opportunities they brought.

Lall's rise actually begins with a moment of naive honesty. Charged with evaluating offers for new rail coaches, Lall fails to recognize an Italian woman named Sofia for the bribe she is and rejects the Italian firm's offering of luxury rail coaches; he judges them to be financially unsound and not designed with East Africa's uneven landscape in mind. When the

Ministry of Transport rejects the firm's bid, Sofia disappears. Despite Lall's heartbreak his integrity in the matter earns him praise and a promotion to be Paul Nderi's personal assistant.

Njoroge warns Lall not to take the position among the "top brass" because "it's dangerous and murky up there." Lall replies that he is "the least political person" Njoroge knows. They laugh and Njoroge tells him to "stick to railways. And finance. Stay away from politics" (251). Lall notes the irony of that advice because his future career as a shadow financier places him in contact with the highest echelons of political power. Despite Njoroge's admirable politics—he backs the Mau Mau struggle and their abandoned veterans, turns away from Kenyatta after the failed promises of independence and joins the "people's hero" J.M Kariuki — he remains stunningly blind to political economy, not recognizing railroads and finance as the battlegrounds they are. Indeed, Lall only comes to understand the connection between railroads and finance when he is introduced to informal economy.

Lall's shadow banking career begins with a briefcase full of American dollars. His new boss, Paul Nderi assures him that the briefcase consists merely of donations from well-wishers who want to help safeguard Kenya against the communists lurking in Tanzania. Nderi tells Lall that "arms have been discovered now and then in the hands of" the communist opposition and "money flows constantly into their coffers, from Moscow and Peking" (256). He uses Tanzania's socialist government to scare Lall, arguing, "they have nationalised the banks and the private properties of your Asian brothers" (256). Nderi privatizes geopolitical battles by tugging on Lall's transnational ethnic solidarity—"your Asian brothers" of East Africa—to capture his attention and motivate him to become a bank, or at least facilitate informal banking services. Lall initially responds to these regional battles and Cold War alignments by claiming ignorance, doubling down on his ostensible apoliticism. Lall argues, "This was totally beyond me. Like any

ordinary citizen I had read the news reports he mentioned and assumed that, if correct, they would be acted upon by the government” (256). That a government bureaucrat with hopes of becoming a “PS” (permanent secretary) would regard ‘the government’ with such studied distance seems suspicious (251). More understandable is his inability to understand how these geopolitical issues “concerned him, specifically” (256). Nderi demonstrates to Lall the precise links between these different scales of political action, ranging from the Cold War to regional communalism. Specifically, Nderi narrates a fantastic link between the fight to stave off communism and Asian capitalist prowess.

As Lall sits awestruck before “the open briefcase of stacked US dollars,” which appears as “a foreign and very potent object with their dull green colour,” Paul Nderi offers a two-part map to help situate Lall (257). Nderi acknowledges that his party's political opposition would read the cash stuffed briefcases as “bribes,” “foreign interference,” and “American imperialism” (257). He assures Lall, however, that no larger forces are at play; this money is simply the sum donations of “private individuals” who want to see Kenya remain capitalist and the ruling party to stay in power. (257). In this way, Nderi acknowledges the geopolitical forces shaping capital; however, he atomizes them as the voluntary relation between private individuals and electoral parties. This is the first part of Nderi’s mapping. The second part zooms into Kenya’s particular racial politics and the assumptions behind them.

Nderi asks Lall to “find your Indian contacts and have them change this money [into local currency] and stash it; like in a bank” (257). Then some flattery: “You with your brilliant mind will keep track of the account,” so that when “our different constituencies need money for their operations, they will be paid by those Indians” (257). “Those Indians” become money-laundering banks. Nderi assumes the Asian Shylock will handle the large sum of money and

Lall, despite his initial shock, delivers. Nderi's strategy bets on the Indian community at large rather than Lall particularly, as evinced in Nderi's initial request that Lall seek out his "Indian contacts" to make the magic possible. Lall turns to his father who in turn calls another acquaintance who "immediately understood what was required," and guides them to Narandas Hansraj, a local "dealer in curios" (257). Through his shop, Hansraj "came into frequent contact with tourists" and becomes the laundering banker. Lall characterizes him as a caricature—"a typical banyani of modest habits, shrewd mind, and accumulating wealth" for whom laundering dollars is "only a shade out of the ordinary" (258). Hansraj specifically, and Asians generally, bridge the formal and informal economies, which here need the racial Other as an intermediary to grease their coupling. For Lall, Kenya can only imagine the racially marginal Asians in an absolute relation to capital, no matter its legal status.

Although Lall enables this transaction he denigrates Hansraj as a "typical banyani" (258). This is not internalized racism or self-hatred but Lall's twisted attempt to ground Nderi's racist assumptions by summoning a figure who embodies the caricatures of Asians. This gesture absolves Lall of having to push back against such racism, prove its caricatures wrong or draw on the radical political history of Asians in East Africa; instead, he rides instead the tide of racism's enablements. That is, rather than rejecting this introduction to the informal economy, Lall comes to embrace these profitable enterprises even if they require him to be an "Asian Shylock." Here, the difference between Lall's narrative strategy and Vassanji's becomes even more apparent.

Lall consistently foregrounds the racist stereotypes he faces as an Asian in independent Kenya. However, Lall's career and narrative capitalizes on the enablements of racism. For example, Lall wants to distance himself from the "typical" Hansraj but nevertheless works with him. Even more, he springboards from this success to a deeper immersion in the grey zone

between informal and formal capital transfers; he becomes an expert money launderer. He capitalizes on the racism facing the Asian community by justifying his accumulation as a mode of self-defense. Meanwhile, Vassanji undercuts Lall's narrative by making explicit the larger consequences of its worldview. These consequences include a reiteration of colonial narratives and blindness to the other possibilities of postcolonial life.

Following that thread of suspicion, readers can see Lall's acceptance of Asian stereotypes for the strategic excuses they are. For instance, Lall clearly admires Hansraj's "shrewd mind," and admits to being slightly amazed that the "dealer in tourist gewgaws could so easily muster the equivalent sum [of two hundred thousand US dollars] in shillings" (261). He remains critical, however, of Hansraj's typically "modest habits," which contrast sharply with the tailored suits, vacation homes and imported English teas Lall comes to enjoy. In other words, Lall merely rejects Hansraj's *style* of accumulation but endorses its necessity and informal methods. In this way, Vassanji produces a hyperbole of the Asian Shylock bent on rampant accumulation.

If Lall builds on a career by following the enablements of racist caricatures, then Vassanji constructs him as the caricature of caricatures, a parody on steroids, "the King of Shylocks" (346). Vassanji's critical strategy, however, does not allow readers to simply reject Lall's narrative and ignore the very real problems Asians face. Indeed, Lall continually juxtaposes his hyperbolic accumulation with its strategic value as a tool of self-defense.

Lall ascends the ladder of government bureaucracy and befriends the politically powerful principally on the strength of his ability to launder American dollars. He is even summoned to a direct meeting with President Jomo Kenyatta, who remarks that Lall's work serves the nation. The meeting ordains Lall as a "higher initiate," conditionally "admitted into the abode of power"

(274). The “power latent in my new status,” Lall writes, “was brought home to me in the most amazing fashion”; he defends his father’s business from being taken over by a petty local politician (280). In contrast to later episodes of triumph, which he announces with the swagger of one opening his palatial gates, Lall here tries to capture something of the genuine surprise and newness of political power. It is worth reiterating that these political connections are attached to his usefulness in the informal banking sector. For these temporary connections legality is beside the point.

An unnamed local politician threatens to take over Lall’s father’s business. Lall telephones the politician to say that his father’s business is legal, that they are “citizens of this country,” and their businesses cannot simply be taken over (281). “By what authority?” Lall asks. The politician screams, “You cannot talk to me like this, you Indian! I will have you deported tomorrow!” (281). Lall’s interlocutor deploys “Indian” as a pejorative reminder of abject powerlessness, underlined in the threat of deportation; even crossing a petty politician is an offense worthy of expulsion. Lall reads this threat as “simple blackmail” and, seemingly unfazed, replies that he has “recourse to the courts of law and the constitution, to defend my father’s business and his rights” (281). These apparatuses rely on Lall’s claim to be lawful citizens of a country that, in this scene, seems to acknowledge neither the rule of law nor their citizenship in any meaningful way. The man replies “brashly” that Lall and his family will not come within “a hundred feet” of the court (281). Once the unnamed politician acknowledges the takeover is extralegal, and unapologetically so, Lall takes recourse to the highest authority in Kenya. “In that case I will speak to Mzee himself” (281). Lall’s claim to a personal connection with President Kenyatta defeats his interlocutor and shocks his own father. Neither know the circumstances of this powerful connection, which, precisely because it is built on informal

economic dealings, is strong enough to protect his father's work in the formal economy. A stunned silence follows, then the man hangs up. This successful self-defense leaves Lall "profoundly affected" and pushes him to ask, rhetorically, if such connections were "the only way to get justice for a minority?" (282).

The answer precedes Lall's rhetorical question. No, there is no other avenue of justice for the Asian minority, Lall argues, by carefully demonstrating that they have no recourse to the legal system. Lall and his father could theoretically take the hostile politician to court but would either be killed or deported beforehand. Either way, they will remain "a hundred feet" from the courts, merely glimpsing the edifices (281). Instead, Lall must invoke his connection to President Kenyatta. "Can such power reside in one man?" Lall asks, again rhetorically, after the invocation defeats his interlocutor (282). The question, however, allows Lall to underline the oligarchic structure of political power in newly independent Kenya. In so doing, his second question—"Was this the only way to get justice for a minority?"—answers itself because it forecloses all other possibilities of justice (282).

A preview of Lall's final conclusion that minorities had no chance in Kenya's turbulent post-independence political climate comes when he encounters Njoroge's failing idealism. Between meeting with Kenyatta and defending his father's business, Lall joins Njoroge in a cafe. A short distance away from them, university student protestors face "tear-gas" and "a zing or two of rifle bullets" from the General Service Unit (GSU), the police's paramilitary wing (278). Watching the violent repression outside, Njoroge mourns that he does not "know what to believe any longer" (279). "The world's too much beyond our control; we thought we could make a difference to it, we could make Kenya great, make Africa great—and it's all slipped away, the ideals and the hope" (279). Violent state repression destroys Njoroge's pan-African ambitions.



Njoroge flounders because he has turned away from Kenyatta and the failed promises of independence. He cautions Lall on building a relationship with the President, “you need a long spoon if you sup with the devil” (279). Although surprised that Kenyatta has transformed from Moses to the devil for Njoroge, Lall says nothing further. While Njoroge flounders because of his political hopes, Lall seems to thrive on an ostensibly apolitical acceptance of the given order. This scene combines Njoroge’s despondency with the violent repression of student protests to offer a bleak glimpse of the political climate. Rather than acknowledging the various modes of resistance on display, Lall focuses on their bloody defeats. In sum, the scene contextualizes his money-laundering career within a violent oligarchic state that suppresses its most hopeful and dynamic citizens. The same paragraph announces the jailing of Ngugi wa Thiong’o. When Lall asks his questions about the possibility of justice in the next scene, they serve as rhetorical exercises meant to solidify the answers bluntly suggested here. Vassanji, however, pushes against such an overdetermined logic by foregrounding its blind spots and hyperbolic structure. Such hyperbole need not be obvious. It does not necessarily rely on the absurd but can simply strip some nuance away. The line between satire and hyperbole seems thin here because satire often requires taking existing logic to hyperbolic ends. In Vassanji’s strategic use of counterfocalization, however, hyperbole is a literary strategy.

Despite having provided ample answers in his narrative, Lall cannot help but reply to his own rhetorical questions. Through these answers, Vassanji critiques Lall’s worldview. Minorities could only get justice, Lall argues, if they were among the “well-positioned”; his own access to the politically powerful demonstrates this to be true (282). However, Lall continues “even penniless” Africans were “protected and favoured” by their access to “family or communal allegiances” (282). Lall seems to have forgotten about the tear-gassed students he witnessed only

a few pages earlier. He also forgets the collection of former Mau Mau fighters Njoroge had introduced him to. These rebels were abandoned by the newly independent regime despite, or precisely because of, their “communal allegiances.”<sup>43</sup> Lall admits, “suspicion and intimidation could make a victim of anyone,” like a “costal man” in Nakuru or a Luo seeking a job in Nyeri. (282). These communal antagonisms, however, paled in comparison to the “few and frightened and caricatured” Asians who “could be threatened with deportation as aliens even if we had been in the country since the time of Vasco de Gama and before some of the African people had arrived in the land” (282). Just as Lall overlooks the class hierarchies in African communities, he omits the multiple migrations that brought Asians to East Africa and their troubling political and economic history. Instead, they are made passive victims, “frightened and caricatured” (282). That his own economic rise depends on these caricatures slips to the background because Lall wants to follow the logic of marginalization to its ultimate conclusion.

This abhorring of a people, holding them in utter contempt, blaming them for your misfortunes—trying to get rid of them en masse—could and did have other manifestations on our continent. Idi Amin cleansed Uganda of its entire Asian population by deporting them, and many African leaders applauded him. Little did they know what a slippery slope it was from that move toward genocide in Rwanda, and then elsewhere. (282)

Lall invokes the Rwandan genocide as the ultimate end of all such communal antagonisms, using Idi Amin’s expulsion of Asians to ground his argument in regional political history. This argument is hyperbolic, the East African equivalent of breaking Godwin’s law by raising the specter of genocide to win an argument. Parsing this critique requires some care. Lall

is not wrong to note the continuum between discriminatory policies, marginalization, and the search for genocidal solutions to communal problems. Mahmood Mamdani also articulates a link between the Rwandan genocide and East African Asians, framing them both as part of his larger analysis of how the construction of “natives” and “settlers” helps produce such (genocidal) antagonisms (Mamdani 28). However, Lall builds a “slippery slope” across Uganda, Kenya, and Rwanda that slides over too many historical and political differences. Simply, Kenyan Asians were never in the position the Tutsi of Rwanda commanded. The former never ruled, massacred their enemies, were in turn periodically massacred, or engaged in a protracted rebellion from exile. Although both the Asians and Tutsi were used to advance English and French imperial ambitions respectively, the comparisons must remain very broad and generally ignore historical specificities.<sup>44</sup>

But such generalizing comparisons are precisely what Lall relies on and Vassanji critiques. When Lall ignores the inequalities among African communities and the economic power of Asians, he pushes those blind spots to their hyperbolic end, sliding too smoothly from social marginalization to genocides. In these strategic omissions and hyperboles, Vassanji imbeds his critique in the very form and logic of his focalizer’s narration. In doing so, Vassanji pushes his readers to suspend Lall's logic even while attending closely to the text. This writing strategy has two consequences. First, it asks readers to do more than choose among the various characters' world-views and challenges them to produce another one entirely. Secondly, it disallows readers the comfort of reading the text as the voice of a native informant speaking from the margins. If readers had not caught on to these clues, the remainder of Lall's narrative builds on these hyperboles in order to become a premier money launderer and earn his name as the "King of Shylocks" (346).

In a simpler version of this novel, Lall might have experienced a moral and political transformation after defending his father's business. After all, he drew a connection between the "abhorring" of Asians in Africa and the Rwandan genocide (282). In that more banal, didactic novel Lall would begin engaging progressive politics and perhaps join his friend Njoroge in the fight with "the radical politician J.M. Kariuki, champion of the poor and a critic of the government" (284). Instead, Vassanji's Lall learns the opposite lesson; "To me the world was what it was, a far from perfect and tangled manifold" (285). Attempting to "change this world" yields only unintended harm, as he learned from Uncle Mahesh's solidarity with the Mau Mau and the radical Oginga Odinga (named Okello Okello in the novel). As an Asian, Lall prefers rather to stay in his "natural place," the middle, and "watch events run their course" (285). "The secret to my success," he argues, was the lack of "moral judgments" (285). This superficially apolitical position barely conceals Lall's allegiance to the dominant political powers and their ravenous economic exploitation. In other words, Lall's stake in "the middle" veils his extreme turn toward the informal economy in order to become a "neutral facilitator" for transnational capital flows (318).

### **The Neutral Facilitator**

The Kenyan government severs formal ties with Lall when news of his meeting with Rhodesian representatives gets out. Although Nderi set up the meeting in London, Lall serves as the scapegoat because he remains "the disposable outsider" (301). Jomo Kenyatta confirms the dismissal but offers Lall continued protection. Once these formal ties are severed, the informal connections multiply.

Lall partners with his in-laws to become their "facilitator" in business by using his political connections (309). When the National Bank calls Lall for help to transfer foreign aid

money into local shillings, Lall and his in-laws found the Aladdin Financial Company. They accomplish this sudden request by "scouring the shops of Nairobi, Mombasa, Nakuru, and Kisumu"; they turn, in other words, to the Asian business community (313). Later, the bank needs to buy some of the dollars back and the company facilitates this transaction as well, charging exorbitant prices for both transactions. Despite the fact that they deal with aid money for drought victims, Lall argues that their fees simply represent "the morality of the marketplace" (313). He previously argued that his *lack* of moral judgments catalyzed his success; that ruse falls away here and Lall's alignment with the exploitative logic of the "marketplace" lays bare. The company name, Aladdin, also signals such an alignment, even while playing with the trope of Oriental wealth. Fittingly, Lall does not see himself as Aladdin but rather as the "genie of the fabled lamp" (318). He enables wishes, but slavishly, without judgment. He may be able to grant any wish but is enslaved by every new wisher. These strained allusions attempt to represent the larger constraints of his position and allow Lall to arrive, tangentially, at a structural critique of capitalism.

[W]ould it have made a difference if I had declined the fortuitous role that happened my way? Surely there would have been another to fill my place. The game of money requires the presence of someone such as me, the neutral facilitator. (318)

Lall argues that although he lucked into his position, there is nothing contingent about the position itself or about the "game of money" (318). Capitalism, especially transnational capital flows, requires "the neutral facilitator," the one who knows how to rig the game (318). The "neutral facilitator" serves a structural function in capital circulation, one that disguises its absolute allegiance as neutrality. "Does a bank need to be moral? Or a croupier?" (318). Lall

uses these rhetorical questions to absolve his corrupt dealings because he facilitated these transactions in the same way a bank does. These analogies are useful in so far as Lall avoids ethics for the sake of discussing capital's systems and structures. Lall's language, however, bears cracks through which Vassanji reveals just how deeply Lall aligns with capitalism and its (informal) institutions.

Banks and croupiers, after all, never merely facilitate the game of money; they play it, rig it and always want to keep the game going. There is nothing "neutral" about these roles or their interests. Lall admits that he made hundreds of millions—the currency changes of course—amidst war, famine, and drought. Readers cannot accept that Lall's serves merely a structural role as the "genie" of embezzling aid money. Rejecting Lall's version of a structural explanation, however, does not mean a return to individualism and discourses of morality. Rather, Vassanji pushes reader to examine carefully the connection between Lall's two arguments.

On the one hand, Lall claims that he merely fumbled into this role as the "neutral facilitator" for capital flows. On the other, he also claims that he was particularly suited to this position as an Asian in East Africa. Lall defends himself, in other words, by claiming that he merely capitalized on the racist assumptions of his boss and others who reintroduced the Asian Lall to the world of money laundering. This argument traces an awkward circle to conclude that the Asian Shylocks of East Africa are uniquely placed to play the "neutral" role in financial circuits because they are outcasts banned from finally belonging to Africa nor willing to return to India; they are a tribe set apart, the "Wahindi," the Asian Shylocks, whose allegiance is to capital itself (267).

The derogative "Asian Shylock" obviously picks up on the anti-Semitic notions of a people uniquely fixated on law and money but not attached to a nation state. Shakespeare's

Shylock, however, offers a more sophisticated lesson. As Ken Jackson suggests, Shylock aligns imperfectly as a Kierkegaardian Knight of Faith, who must heed the call of an absolute Other without believing that he will receive anything in return. Like Abraham, Shylock is called to kill whether he wants to or not, to offer "the gift of death." This reading of Shylock's predicament aligns, again imperfectly, with Lall's argument; as an Asian Shylock, Lall claims that he participates in the informal economy whether he wants to or not. For Kierkegaard, the Knight of Faith acts on faith, the "strength of the absurd," to form an uneconomic relation and transgress his obligation to the universal—Hegel's nation state—for an "absolute relation with the Absolute" (Kierkegaard 71). In a strange way, the Asian Shylock is accused of performing this movement away from the nation state toward an absolute relation with something incomprehensible, something outside and above the nation.

Lall argues that he too must seek an absolute relation to an absolute, global capital, and he must do so despite his own interests. Ostensibly, his chief aim is to belong in Kenya and be acknowledged as a fellow citizen. Lall must act against this desire by becoming the very caricature that pushes Asians to the margins of Kenyan society. Being the Asian Shylock means being exiled from the national community; Lall seeks instead an absolute relation to global capital, which demands him to act against both his best interests and Kenya's.

There is nothing uneconomic in Lall's actions, however, because unlike the Knight of Faith Lall believes that this absolute relation will grant him security within the nation. Where the Knight of Faith's act gains nothing for his position within the nation—it rather aligns him with the Absolute—and therefore requires "the strength of the absurd," Lall acquires wealth, influence and a measure of security. Lall gains quite a bit within Kenya despite embezzling public money.

I have taken this detour to Kierkegaard through Shylock in order to better conceptualize the slander of the "Asian Shylock" and its relation to global capital, the circuits of which entangle but exceed any given nation state. More than a low-minded insult, the Asian Shylock is both called to and accused of seeking an anchor outside of the nation state, a relation. Lall claims that such racism precedes and exceeds his career, determines it despite his own desires to the contrary. In other words, Lall, like the Knight of Faith and Shylock, acts against his obligations to Kenya and his best interests. Instead he goes in "fear and trembling" toward an absolute relation to an absolute beyond the nation. Lall departs from those Kierkegaardian heroes, however, by engaging in an economic relationship with that absolute, capital. He receives a great deal in return. Moreover, he acquires an imperfect safety within the structure of the nation state. Lall aligns with Shylock, insofar as both the universal—Venice and Kenya respectively—and the absolute Other—the Law and capital—demands that he trespass his obligation. Denied full citizenship, he must seek his salvation elsewhere.

While classic Marxist critique understands deformed creatures such as Lall as a product of capitalism's regime of subjectivization, one also needs to understand the particular postcolonial conditions that produce such subjects. Although it is broadly true that capital's financial flows rely on middlemen such as the Asians merchants of East Africa, it leaves open the question why particular populations, especially minority peoples, come to embrace this role. Lall argues that the Asians take on this function as a self-defense strategy. This argument tries to coopt Spivak's notion of strategic essentialism—retooling the very epistemic categories used to oppress you—in the service of capital accumulation. Lall does not care to work against such essentialism but merely launder it, turn white markets brown.



He reframes the racist trope of the Asian Shylock as an “enabling violation,” but not in the way Spivak intends (Spivak 524, 2004). Lall argues that the prejudices enforcing the social marginalization of Asians also enable their capital accumulation for self-defense. Such accumulation both guarantees their marginality—‘proving’ that Asians are interested only in money and without allegiance—and allows them some protection from the consequences of such economic power relative to their small population. The argument reads less like strategic essentialism than a convenient tautology. To bolster these arguments, however, Lall juxtaposes them with episodes in which his ill-gotten access to political power helps defend his family’s businesses.

Another informal economic giant, Mother Dottie, threatens his sister's husband, Dillip. Mother Dottie deals primarily in the illegal ivory trade, among other things, while Dillip owns a burgeoning chemical business. Her henchmen lay before him a contract to sell his enterprise for ten percent of its value. They threaten Dillip with "information regarding his family, who had bribed officials on several occasions, and one of whom (Mahesh Uncle) had collaborated with communist enemies of the state” (310). These weak and common premises barely conceal the extortionists’ threat. Dillip immediately refuses but grows “extremely frightened by the chill that [meets] his answer,” and offers to consider the offer (310). The “chill” he feels is the threat of death. Dillip and Dottie’s lawyers sit a large library with “two ceiling-high elephant tusks on either side of the antique desk, and bookends and numerous other knick-knacks of carved ivory” (310). There is nothing subtle about this setting, which discloses an artful ability to bring immense violence to bear outside of the law. As “the principal dealer in the country’s illegal ivory trade,” Mother Dottie and her henchmen are well practiced in these arts. These threats advance on the previous episode of hostile takeover insofar as Mother Dottie formally recognizes

Dillip's legal powers. Such recognition remains merely formal, however, because between their equal rights within the legal structure (a sale contract), "force decides" (cited in Miéville 120). Dillip calls Lall who turns once again to Kenyatta.

The President likely benefits from some of Dottie's businesses but offers to help Lall. Kenyatta calls Dottie's lawyer and tells him, "You have no shame" (311). "They," Asians, "are an asset to our country; they export to Uganda, to Tanzania, to Ethiopia" (311). "They" refers here to Dillip's company Mermaid Chemicals, which is a synecdoche for all Asians. Like the representative company, the Asians too export to other East African nations and consolidate economic power for Kenyatta and his regime. For the help, Dillip offers Kenyatta a ten percent share in the company; "Just like the British manufacturers say, By appointment of Her Majesty the Queen, et cetera" (312). This pageantry amuses Kenyatta and slyly reminds readers of the failed promise of independence, which exchanged ruling oligarchies rather than abolished them. Only those ensconced within this exploitative elite may enjoy safety from extortion, deportation and death. Lall remains in this elite precisely because of his ability to shore up their position. Kenyatta tells Lall that his informal financial work is "an important service to the nation" (276). His national service consists in abstracting value and making it available for global financial flows.

Lall is 'in-between' in this sense too, not merely of identity but in-between labor and finance. Both modes of in-betweenness coalesce in the slander of the Asian Shylock, which signifies placelessness (neither Africa nor India) and "wily" financiers whose absolute relationship to capital denies their allegiance to any given country (267). To reiterate, Lall argues that such racist tropes enabled his entry into the informal economy and, more broadly, that the Asian community's self-preservation lay in excellent capital accumulation. Meanwhile, Lall also

claims that his position—and that of fellow Asian Shylocks—is a structural one within the game of money; it just happens to be brown in Kenya’s racial political history. In sum, economic structure and racial political history overdetermine Kenya’s elite Asians. These arguments present a self-enclosed logic by which Lall and his colleagues cannot escape their fate as money launderers.

While his uncle Mahesh and sister Deepa represent obvious counterpoints to these claims of overdetermination, I am arguing that Vassanji encloses his critique within Lall’s narrative logic and its tendency toward hyperbole. Rather than merely choosing one among the few perspectives on offer, Vassanji’s critical strategy develops our ability to counterfocalize against any given narrative and produce an alternate narrative. For instance, when Lall attempts to retrieve a little elbowroom from his own arguments by demonstrating his power to accumulate capital, the demonstration also contains Vassanji’s critique.

My prestige round about town was large though somewhat shadowy. I was the famous facilitator, with access to the powerful and the immeasurably wealthy. I was not in any business for myself, yet I gained a stake in many enterprises that I had helped to make a success. (312)

While Lall’s swaggering self-description attempts to stake out his ostensible power, Vassanji uses it to return to a structural critique of financial capitalism. Lall claims prestige from his “access” to political and economic power. That is, he does not actually have such power but merely enjoys a shadowy contact with it. This claim meshes well with his supplemental argument that he was not “*in* any business” but gains “stakes” in those enterprises he helps (312, emphasis added). Lall’s arguments try to elide the very political and economic power he demonstrated a paragraph earlier by defending his brother-in-law’s business. In other words, Lall

does not need to be *in* a business because he *is* a business: the neutral facilitator. And on the page following, Lall provides the proper name for his business, the Aladdin Finance Company. The separation between Lall's self-description and the proper name marks the critical distance readers must cross. This space barely spans a page but allows Vassanji to categorize Lall's financial work in the broader economy. That is, Lall's self-description cannot take on its proper name because it doubles as Vassanji's critique of informal banking, or even banking in capitalism more generally.

Like Lall, banks too enjoy a shadowy prestige and immense power as facilitators with stakes in many enterprises without ownership or productive expertise in any, save capital itself. Vassanji's critique requires taking Lall's braggadocio seriously but unpacking it as the personification of a structural position. Lall's arguments on the shadowy prestige of neutral facilitators in the game of money provide the framework and vocabulary for this reading. Vassanji, however, does not engage in polemic but rather challenges readers to produce a critique with the given tools. Vassanji's critique, it should be noted, centers on capitalist banking specifically, which supplants the state as the primary sponsor and coordinator of productive activities. He makes this clear by mapping the privatization of financial networks and dramatizing their excesses.

Lall founds the Aladdin Finance Company when Kenya's National Bank needs help transferring aid dollars into local schillings. Once the national financial infrastructure leans on private companies such as Aladdin hyperbolic exploitation follows. Lall extends his identification with the fable's genie and fancies himself a powerful agent who "could make monies vanish and produce gold out of thin air" (335). He remains the "banker of choice," for the country's "perpetually upwardly mobile businessmen and politicians" (335). Lall extends the

fairly pedestrian function of bankers into the realm of fable (the genie) and megalomaniacal fantasy, describing himself as the “alchemist who could transmute currencies” (335). These strained metaphors, however, capture something of the singular interest in capital Lall and his business partners’ share, an interest that certainly exceeds the self-defense arguments he makes throughout. Like alchemists, they want to create capital out of rocks. As bankers they invest in generating capital out of capital, no matter how fantastic the process. The “Gemstone Scandal,” which earns Lall the title “King of Shylocks,” perfectly dramatizes the financial sorcery necessary to generate capital merely by circulating capital, without investing in any productive ventures (346).

Lall and his partners buy a Tanzanite mine they know to be fake and start a company called Solomon Mines (345). The name refers less to the Biblical King than to H.R. Haggard’s famous imperial adventure novel *King Solomon’s Mines*; this intertextual reference echoes backward to demonstrate the genealogy of Lall’s imperial fantasies on the railroad; the reference also echoes forward to sound out Lall’s financial schemes as treasure raids. Lall and his partners engage in self-referential financial deconstruction, with the added proviso that the remainders are deposited in “British and Swiss banks” (345). Said less cryptically, Lall and his partners take advantage of the government’s offer of “handsome commissions to exporters or exporters selling local commodities abroad and bringing into the country precious foreign exchange” (345). They ship out “nonexistent or worthless gems” at inflated values to their own subsidiary in London and deposit the Kenyan government’s commissions in British and Swiss banks “on behalf of some of our elites, into their secret accounts” (345). These deposits are financial transactions on which Aladdin Finance earns commissions in local currency, which is sold back to the National Bank at premium prices during “cash-flow crises” (345). To complete the financial tautology,

their own Aladdin Finance handles all of these transactions as well; money circulates from and to the National Bank, flowing through various subsidiaries of the same financial institution, Aladdin Finance Company.

This closed circuit requires false (or non-existent) gems merely to catalyze the process. The purpose of this circulation lies in “earning immense sums in commissions in foreign currency,” whose transfer also earns commissions and, after circulating as local Kenyan currency, siphons more wealth from the National Bank, the institution from which the initial commissions first flowed out. This is capital generated from the circulation of capital, yielding enormous wealth for well-placed elites. Since this circulation is not connected to material production, schools or electrical grids say, it leaves the great majority of people untouched and their country poorer. Lall argues that these financial circuits and their hyper-accumulation were driven by self-defense.

When Patrick Iba Madola (I.e. Daniel arap Moi) comes to office after Kenyatta’s death, Lall fears for his life. “Without my *almighty protector*,” Lall realizes, “I was naked” (332, emphasis mine). The religious language captures something of the existential terror Lall feels when returning to the world of absolute capital, which offers a “price” of his life and regards him as “an easily disposable commodity” (332). Devoid of Kenyatta’s protection, Lall must again face the threat of death by any number of enemies he made along the way. He collects important documents and stores them in an abandoned railway station; in his absence, his house is broken into and some jewelry and cash stolen. Lall is not surprised by the bullet holes in the walls and actually left the valuables open on purpose. “This was as I expected” (333). Lall responds to this threat by leveraging his relationship to capital circuits and letting his clients know that his death would mean the release of incriminating documents. That is, he reasserts his place in the

informal economy as an important node, connected enough to bring down other nodes in the network. The threat on Lall's life and his response bolsters his argument that he merely occupies a structural position in the game of money and is all too replaceable. For the moment, however, he uses his position to remind the hunters that killing him would not be very profitable to anyone.

His network assures him that Lall was merely “imagining [his] terrors,” because he is a “fearful Asian” (333). The response confirms the circuitous racial logic that enabled his accumulation in the first place. They dismiss his fear as imaginary and a consequence of his being Asian. That such fear has a basis in bullet holes and expulsion policies matters less than Lall’s place as an “important and valued member of the business community” (333). Lall’s ability to enable accumulation buys his safety, because the “the wheels grind on as before” and “business is business is still paramount” (333). In order to alleviate some of the tension, Lall is invited to join a delegation to meet with the new President.

“So many prominent yet nervous Asian businessmen desired to contribute to my briefcase...that to accommodate all it had to be filled with notes of twenty-pounds sterling instead of the local currency” (334). By this point, Lall deems it unnecessary to explain how he acquired such a vast amount of money in British currency; no one is surprised. The president’s representative accepts the large “donation” briskly and puts it in “a golf trolley that collected all the briefcases” received that day; rather than Kenyatta’s patronage, Lall realizes that the new president “would simply tolerate me” (335). The briefcase full of pounds sterling is not much different from the cash and jewelry Lall leaves for the would-be assassins to steal; both donations are simply the price of avoiding bullets. The transition to Moi’s presidency does not

signal the shift to a new precarity for Lall but rather the return to open violence from which Kenyatta's patronage shielded him.

Despite the new president's lack of patronage, Lall remains safe because of his structural placement in the informal economy. For the "perpetually upwardly mobile businessmen" aligned with the new regime Lall remains the "banker of choice," reveling in his status as the "alchemist who could transmute currencies, the genie who could make monies vanish and produce gold out of thin air" (335). Lall mutes his braggadocio when discussing his crimes with Seema—his lover during his exile in Canada—and instead thinks of himself as a "simpleton" whose "crimes of circumstance" were the results of "simply going along with the way of the world" (344). Seema replies, "That's what many of the killers in Rwanda would also say." Lall cannot identify himself as a potential murderer but receives an appropriate reply. "There are different ways of killing, Mr. Lall" (344).

Lall's earlier comparison between the marginalization of Asians in Kenya and the massacred Tutsi of Rwanda returns to haunt him. This time, however, Lall plays the perpetrator, killing at a distance through financial systems. Confirming Seema's response, he discloses the machinations of the Gemstone Scandal, which siphoned the country's wealth to an elite class. Lall goes on, moreover, to describe his involvement in more direct modes of killing. He never picks up a gun but makes sure they too circulate to the appropriate places. These "varied" financial projects "offered me comfort, prestige, and the friendship of the powerful," while also making his name "legend outside of the country" (346). For instance, Lall accepts cheap gold and diamonds from a "company in Uganda that is obviously a front." In exchange he arranges

to facilitate the arrival of certain metal goods in Mombasa port and their transportation in covered trucks back to Uganda, from where presumably



they will go on farther north and west, where the civil wars are fought.

Nothing could be easier to arrange. (344)

North of Uganda lies Sudan and West is the Democratic Republic of Congo, formerly Zaire at the time of the civil war. Lall provides weapons—"certain metal goods"—to these conflict zones knowing full well the murderous political import of his services.<sup>45</sup> Nevertheless, he frames these transactions as "financial involvements," abstracting their deathly powers into a question of logistics and capital flows. A scarier link between Lall's gun running and claim to apolitical "going along" lurks in Rwanda, which abuts Uganda's southern border.

The word "presumably" sneaks into Lall's story of transmuting cheap diamonds into weapons shipments; "presumably they will go on farther north and west." He uses the qualifier to rupture the link between his facilitation of weapons and their use; he can only assume where and how they move on from Uganda. Although Lall's familiarity with Central African political wars gives the lie to his ostensible apoliticism, he maintains a strategic distance to any particular position within these wars. However, "presumably" also forwards Vassanji's critique of Lall's worldview by indicting the icy indifference that reduces bloody conflicts to logistics without context. That is, Vassanji's critique inheres in Lall use of "presumably" to distance himself from the consequences of arms transfers. If Lall remains uncertain about the final locations of those weapons, then the possibility of their use in Rwanda remains. Since these weapons flowed out of Uganda, however, they would have aided the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) whose invasion into Rwanda finally stopped the genocide. Lall's gun running takes place a few years before the Rwandan genocide during a time when the RPF launched unsuccessful invasions.

Despite the possibility that Lall unintentionally aided the RPF, Vassanji critiques the broader structural overlaps between weapons and capital—indeed, weapons as capital. That Lall

might have found himself on the right side of history is an ambiguous, perhaps dubious, prospect, which retrieves gun-running from the brink. Vassanji acknowledges such a possibility—that arms can help 'good' rebellions—but only within a frame that equates arms, capital and "unwanted flotsam" such as "generals, prime ministers, politicians, widow, orphans" awash with illegal monies (346). Such residue includes diamonds, guns and people as a part of the "financial involvements" Lall sets out to describe. Gems are exchanged for guns, which are used to dispose of or exile people who may also have gems to exchange for the "assistance of a finance company such as Aladdin to see them safely to their new homes" (346). Vassanji sets his critique within this chain of equivalences made possible by Lall's worldview. The paragraph opens and closes with the all encompassing "financial involvements" conducted by a "finance company," which frames those equivalences as the exchange of capital. Through this framing, Vassanji critiques Lall and provides his readers with a strong clue with which to produce their own critical narrative. That is, readers ought not only to disagree with Lall's finance based worldview but in doing so must produce a different relation between guns, gems and people. Although Vassanji does not offer any direct guidance on a new relationship, he does explore two popular options.

The "chummy bazaar of discreet telephone class and the party circuit" ends with the Cold War when the West begins calling into account loans ostensibly supplied to fight off international communism. This broad historical context does not allow for simple indictments because it calls attention to entrenched circuits of power and capital. When the reinvigorated press learns about Lall's gemstone charade, they make him a "symbol of corruption" and christen him the "King of Shylocks" (346). Such individual indictments evince a strategic myopia that disables a broader focus on the geopolitical forces entwined with capital flows. Isolating Lall

does little to halt corruption and, as a symbol, misrepresents the scale of the problem. Rather than thinking historically and systemically about a wide range of actors ranging from nation states to mine laborers, Lall becomes the racial surrogate whose essential corruption reveals the dark underbelly of human greed. Such banalities obscure far more than they reveal.

I am arguing that Vassanji advocates for the systemic, historical view rather than the banal individualism that seeks out "a bad guy" even while allowing Lall to hide in the shadows of those systems. That is, Vassanji's attention to the impact of Cold War geopolitical economy seems to mitigate Lall's guilt in gun running and shadow capital accumulation.

Indeed, Lall's individual life becomes "cheap" and its value only recovers when he reestablishes himself as one actor in a network that will be disrupted if anything happens to him. A few days after the press names Lall the "King of Shylocks" assassins arrive at his home and, unable to find him, angrily fire their machine guns. A few bullets hit the undiscovered safe in which Lall hides with his wife, deep in their bedroom closet. He invites the press to "look at the unlawful attack and destruction of [his] property," then baldly states that his lawyer will publish his business documents if he dies. That is, he threatens to disclose the identity of his business partners, many of whom rank among the post-Independence Kenyan elite (348). "I possessed information that could help indict a platoon of politicians and a hive of senior bureaucrats" (349). Soon afterwards, Kenya's new president Daniel Arap Moi delivers a speech reminding everyone that "attacks on private individuals would not be tolerated" (348). Given the briefcase full of pounds sterling donated to the president by Lall and his fellow Asian businessmen, Arap Moi's speech seems intended not to defend Lall's safety but rather his own, or even warn against the futility of attacking "private individuals" given the entanglements of business and state in the embezzling racket. The president uses the futility of individual indictments in an attempt to

placate both the public as well as Western donors; the government sets up an independent "Anti-Corruption Commission," which in turn publishes the "List of Shame"; "Vikram Lall's name was first" and he is "invited to testify about my questionable business dealings" (349). "But if Vikram Lall spoke, as everybody knew, a lot of prominent people would get skewered" (349). His place in the network protected him briefly but sufficient pressure turns those connections hostile and he, a lone node, comes under threat. Lall flees to Canada and writes the confessional autobiography we read.

The "List of Shame" and its sponsor, the Anti-Corruption Commission represent Vassanji's most generous articulation of the disinfecting power of sunshine. Challenging both world-weary cynicism as well as the overly optimistic hopes of "transparency," Vassanji demonstrates that public pressure on a few nodes within a network puts that network on the defensive without necessarily disrupting it. Lall is publically ostracized for his corruption even while "everybody knew" that those shadowy dealings involved other major players. To prevent him from disclosing other players, hired hitmen prowl. When he returns to Nairobi intending to testify to the Anti-Corruption Commission, Lall fears for his life and hides but is ultimately found and killed; Lall tosses his autobiography to a friend before flames engulf him.

While Vassanji acknowledges the efficacy of public pressure he does not allow it more worth than the self-preservation tools of informal capital networks. Lall's shadowy allegiances, in other words, will not tolerate any threat and readily sacrifice a person they dare disrupt the great "game" of accumulation. Sunshine, "transparency," does not disinfect but rather reveals people like Lall, the racial other who serves as a "perfect scapegoat" because he is "an Indian without a constituency," "the crafty alien corruptor of our country" (365). Removing him by trial

or execution will not hinder the continuing function of those shadowy networks. This is the dark reality of capital's claimed self-regulatory powers.

Lall tells his lawyer to feel out the Commission and gauge their interest in his plea bargain. Lall admits only to engaging in "unethical but not illegal" activities "done with the approval of public servants" (364). He offers "as a goodwill gesture" to liquidate *most* of his wealth and answer questions about the Gemstone Scandal. The Commission will "declare publicly that it has no case against" Lall, who can live on with a clean slate (364, emphasis added). Even offering these limited admissions endangers Lall's life. Consequently, he asks his lawyer to also reach out to Nairobi's businessmen such as Paul Nderi, Lall's first boss, who are afraid of becoming scapegoats "for a condition that's rampant"; the lawyer assures these businessmen that Lall will only focus on the Gemstone Scandal. In a disquieting if unsurprising move, the Commission accepts Lall's offer; he must admit to the Gemstone Scandal but "need not name names," nor speak about other dealings. "The Donors and the World Bank will be pleased," his lawyer summarizes, "all they want is some admission, after all, some accountability" (367). The Commission hopes others will follow Lall's example and perhaps usher in a genuine truth and reconciliation movement.

Vassanji's cynicism shapes Lall's hopes. The stunted form of "accountability" Lall offers and the Commission accepts reduces complex long running systems to a banal individual moralism, pardoning sinners if they properly repent. Lall's book length defense, which doubles as Vassanji's indictment, culminates in the Commission's myopia. What better deal could Lall hope for than limited personal guilt for one scheme of many, some monetary compensation and a blind eye to the informal economic structures that dictate the country's present and future. To Lall's surprise, however, even this meager admittance threatens too much.

After accepting Lall's offer the Commission is declared illegal and promptly disbanded. Open and vulnerable, Lall admits that he was "naïve in my expectations" (368). Vassanji's cynicism runs beyond his focalizer. Lall's lawyer is arrested, possibly tortured, leaving behind a "dangling" client. "It's clear that powerful people close to the government prefer to keep my mouth shut" (368). Neither Lall nor Vassanji remain quiet.

I have been arguing that Vassanji speaks through and against Lall. When Vassanji's focalizer first attempts to articulate the infrastructure upholding his claim to belong to Kenya—the Lal family's labor on the East African railroad—Vassanji critiques this history through Lall's imperial tropes—the conquest of empty and sexualized landscapes—to acknowledge the imperial projects emanating from India into East Africa. Asians were not merely coolies but settlers. Lall also claims to be overdetermined by the racism against Asians in East Africa, who are a frightened minority are prevented from any other positions in society than Shylockian middlemen. Lall argues that his career could not have been otherwise due to these factors and that he, like other Asian Shylocks with their superlative power to accumulate capital, find safety in these moneyed shadows. Vassanji's most obvious critiques to these claims are Lall's sister Deepa and radical Uncle Mahesh. Less obvious, and perhaps more important, is the critique embedded in Lall's narrative and its use of hyperbole.

I have been arguing that Vassanji builds Lall as the caricature of a caricature, an overblown Asian Shylock. To understand this hyperbole, however, readers must also take seriously the marginality of Asians in East Africa, acknowledge both their role in settler colonialism as well as the racism of expulsion policies. Lall focuses on the latter in order to justify what he claims to be capital accumulation for safety's sake. Lall's strategic myopia misuses Spivak's strategic essentialism. Vassanji, however, urges readers to take a more global

view and read against Lall, to counterfocalize and produce alternate narratives. Doing so does not merely yield a more complex understanding of East African history but also a structural critique of capitalism and its use of racial others to facilitate capital circuits. Like Lall, these racial others are condemned to seek an absolute relation to global capital against some their own interests and the interests of the universal they marginally belong to. Despite Lall's hyperbolic accumulation, however, Vassanji proffers a subtle argument about the racial and political circumstances that might energize capital accumulation.

My most speculative argument links Lall's claims to the quest for economic power among postcolonial nations. I have in mind India and China particularly. While the latter may be developing a "proto-post-capitalist" society, the former now happily embraces neoliberal economic policy. Both have prioritized economic development over human rights because it is only economic power that can protect against neocolonial advances. Neither, however, offer a narrative one can entirely agree with.

## Chapter 4: 'The door was always open': Caste and Neoliberalism in *The White Tiger*

When Aravind Adiga's novel *The White Tiger* won the Booker Prize in 2008, some were embarrassed and frustrated that they again had to discuss poverty in India. Expressed in a *Telegraph* article, these critics argued that the "book took us back three decades" to a time when "the BBC showed nothing but cows on the roads"; Adiga focuses on "everything that is bad and disgusting" (Dhillon). For them, the novel's critiques of uneven and combined development and the 'India Shinning' slogan promoted by the government returns the discussion to an impoverished India denied coevalness with Britain or other Western powers. Literary critics on the other hand largely celebrated the novel's focus on injustice, with the simultaneity of booming technology centers and the rural poverty seemingly unaffected by this new wealth. Neither the embarrassed nor the ebullient, however, discuss the novel's representation of caste and its complex relationship to the growing wealth divide. I redress this gap by foregrounding caste, its relation to occupation and wealth as well as its potential annihilation within neoliberalism. This last point will be the most contentious and joins an ongoing debate between anticapitalist and anticaste Dalit activists.

I build my reading of the novel primarily in conversation with two critics: Betty Joseph, whose article "Neoliberalism and Allegory" offers the most astute reading of the novel available to date, and Gopal Guru's article "Rise of the Dalit Millionaire," which attempts to critique subaltern accumulation and, I argue, subsume anticaste work within anticapitalism. Along the way, I also turn to Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (Babasaheb), the primary theorist of and for the lower castes, author of *The Annihilation of Caste* and the Indian Constitution, as well a fierce critic of Mohandas Gandhi and his fight to retain and reform the caste system.



Betty Joseph's "Neoliberalism and Allegory" reads *The White Tiger* as a satire of neoliberal rhetoric and an allegory of India as an "individual emerging finally from long-term postcolonial economic woes and ready to take its rightful place on the international stage" (69). Adiga's novel satirizes this figure by focalizing through an "an illegitimate spokesman" of neoliberalism, Balram Halwai, an "uneducated rural migrant and murderer who self-identifies as a successful "entrepreneur"" (72). However, it is unclear why Joseph considers Halwai an illegitimate spokesperson for neoliberalism; his rise from poverty to wealth ostensibly proves the power of individual initiative—personal and political entrepreneurship—to transform the rural and uneducated subject into an urban businessman in the global information technology sector. Indeed, India's new Prime Minister Narendra Modi, a neoliberal to the core, touts his rise from being a tea server. Joseph rightly critiques neoliberalism's mythology that erases social and historical contexts, an erasure that helps drive the evisceration of the social welfare state. However, the strong social ties binding the welfare state in India also manifest as strict caste hierarchies that imprison people in degradation. And the escape from the latter constitutes an important part of Halwai's narrative, if not Adiga's critique.

Halwai is born into a poor family of the sweetmaker's caste. His father does not work in this prescribed occupation but rather slaves as a rickshaw driver to support his family. When he dies amid the bloody spasms of tuberculosis, Halwai must help his brother earn money for the family. He eventually becomes the driver for a wealthy, upper-caste family that bribes politicians to secure an export deal to China for their coal business. The local extraction of coal is, of course, built on labor held subservient in part by caste, which disallows social mobility of any sort. Halwai kills his employer and takes a bag of bribe money—which he considers back pay for years of exploitative wages—as the starting capital for a new business.

His opens a taxi business in Bangalore, India's Silicon Valley, operating a fleet of cars that drive technology workers to and from their offices in the middle of the night. This work allows global companies to operate 24/7 and live up to the "customer care" slogans promised by otherwise anonymous corporations. These workers make up the "off-shore resources" that continue the working day so that the global North may ostensibly go home for an evening of leisure after eight hours. In this way, Halwai's labor continues to support international capital, but as an owner sunning himself beneath his prized chandelier rather than the blotted trenches of a coal mine. That is, Halwai's escape does not necessarily position him differently relative to global capital but does transform his relation to caste and its hegemonic space, the village.

This transformation, however, requires violence. First, and most obviously, Balram Halwai must murder his employer to reappropriate the wealth extracted from his labor. Second, Halwai's entire family will be murdered for this transgression. Both murders speak to the violence—physical, not discursive—structuring the caste system.<sup>46</sup> This violence answers two questions Joseph believes Adiga is asking: "What if this last bastion of imagined collectivity also falls to neoliberalism? What if even the poor villager is now in the pores of global capitalism?" (87). The answer may be "let it fall" because it—neoliberalism—may aid the annihilation of caste. If this imagined collectivity also includes the nation state then its exploitative presence in rural areas can be done away with too; such evisceration of the state, however, also means the destruction of the welfare state or, at best, recasting it as the infrastructure-building agent it is meant to be. If the neoliberalisation of the rural should be resisted, it cannot be on the grounds of preserving the current order and its violent relations. I agree that one should not look nostalgically "onto the rural as a site of essential values" but as a hostile space, the essential caste values of which must be fought.

I agree with Joseph's contention that Adiga encodes these questions within a literary strategy that privileges satire. This strategy undoes the usual allegorical method of establishing metonymic relations so that Balram Halwai stands in for a collectivity. Instead, he is ventriloquized by Adiga to voice the "appropriation of the neoliberal virtue of entrepreneurship as primitive accumulation, extortion, bribery, and criminality" (Joseph 91). Halwai does not speak for or represent a collective; he boasts his own exceptionality too often for that. For Joseph, moreover, ventriloquization only aides Adiga's satire, the thrust of which comes from the principal focalizer, who is an "illegitimate interceptor" of the neoliberal dream (Joseph 89).

Interception and appropriation accurately describe Halwai's strategies. He absconds with a mythology never intended to include him despite its claims otherwise. Moreover, such interception seeks not to end a clash but to open a new battlefield, expose new wounds to the astonishment of the established combatants, village caste violence and international neoliberalism. Interceptors must always be illegitimate. This is different from saying that Halwai is an "illegitimate *spokesman*" for neoliberalism because he does not parody its ethos, as Joseph argues, but rather embodies its grandest myth—advancement through individual initiative.

Balram's initiative may indeed be a part of Adiga's "fiction of agency" but it comes at a price, "namely that the poor, *once they stand out as individuals*, may be quite different from what most audiences know or imagine about them" (Korte 298, emphasis mine). Such individualism goes to the heart of neoliberalism and its socially bankrupt ethos that sees in collective struggle a hindrance to the kind of "indigent agency" necessary to create a "tiger economy" (Korte 296). Indeed, Balram idly dreams of establishing a school that would produce classes "full of White Tigers unleashed" on the world (Adiga 319). Tigers are, of course, solitary animals that do not form collectives. If such individualized agency "disturb[s] preconceptions which their [cultural

elite] readers might have about poor people," it does so by proselytizing an atomic relation to the world and reaffirming the possibility of upward mobility for "determined individuals" (Korte 297, 296).

Such platitudes ignore the collective efforts raging simultaneously as the novel is being read. Benedict Anderson long ago identified "meanwhile" as the novelistic vocabulary for articulating the simultaneity of plots, of pressing readers to imagine the multiple lives lived in parallel without necessarily intersecting; such an awareness constitutes "imagined communities" (8). Formal or informal collectives that push against the limitations within such communities constitute an important part of thinking simultaneity. Such collectives are, however, absent from Adiga's novel; they do not show as absent presences, hinted at through hyperbole and satire. If the novel "endows the indigent with conspicuous agency and powers of enunciation," it does so by ignoring all the enunciations already in flight, choirs of resistance that do not seek permission or endowment from others. Adiga's indigent agency must remain trapped between the lines, ignorant of the struggles it does not even care to parrot.

Even in this otherwise bankrupt reading that fixates on individual agency, however, a utopic potential lingers. The height of Balram's agency is not his becoming a business owner but rather in his "audacity to address" the Chinese premier directly (Korte 303). Such individual audacity is less interesting than the form it takes.

Built on his claim that "the future of the world lies with the yellow man and the brown man," Balram addresses the Chinese premier, Wen Jiabao, though letters. As Elizabeth Hewitt has argued, the epistolary form both assumes and engages complex systems and networks of exchange.<sup>47</sup> Although Balram knows about email, owns a computer and works in an information technology hub—the web is no longer a metaphor or description but an emerging sentience—he

continues to write paper letters. Balram's attempt to engage the premier recalls the all but forgotten project of Non-Alignment, a postcolonial solidarity built on transnational communication networks and their postal transmissions. This is not to say that Balram, or Adiga, want to harken back to a pre-electronic age; rather this epistolary mode points to the long history of such engagements between China and India even while pausing to note the wars that have punctuated that history.

Halwai wants to tell Premier Wen the true story of India through his life story, but fixating on individualism or even critiquing its atomized logics misses a key feature of his narrative, namely caste. Not discussing caste, indeed not foregrounding it as a driving force in the novel and Indian society at large, succumbs to the ideology of "castelessness" whose American counterpart may be "postracial." That is, Balram's caste—Halwai, sweetmakers—is marked in the novel, while the caste of others, especially his masters, is not. Critics have paid insufficient attention to this point and Balram's caste gets mentioned often only in passing or conflated with his class position. In doing so, we may fail to understand how the novel represents the relationship between caste and class as well as the limitations of this representational strategy.

In contemporary Indian society, caste is a marked term imperfectly analogous to woman or black. Castelessness, like male and white, assumes the natural, universal reference point, invisibly commanding subalterns to identify themselves as deviant relations. Caste now means *lower caste* (Deshpande 37). The upper castes generally, and Brahmins specifically, are the "unmarked universal citizen" for whom no articulation of caste is necessary; indeed, they may claim castelessness, which paradoxically proves their high caste (37). The higher castes could disrobe in this way because their caste remained invisible and unrecognized as a "source of

privilege or advantage" (37). In contrast, lower castes acquire a "hypervisibility," marked legally and socially as the subject of reservations—quotas ostensibly aimed to alleviate social injustices (37). The newest legal category—after "Scheduled Castes" (SC) and "Scheduled Tribes" (ST)—"Other Backward Classes" (OBC) recalls a colonial insult and strategy of subjugation; subalterns as backward people always need to be brought forward into modernity, willingly or not. More importantly, through the addition of OBCs to the reservation system, "the general category had now become a euphemism for the upper castes" (38).

Within this social matrix, Balram's caste matters a great deal. That he alone announces his caste in the novel is as significant as the fact that he does not need to enunciate the (high) castes of all those whom he serves. However, Balram need not announce precisely to which legal category he belongs because "everyone in the Darkness who hears *that name* knows all about me at once" (Adiga 63, emphasis mine). In the Darkness, Halwai's counter-figure to the ubiquitous cliché "India Shining"—the Indian government's marketing campaign—one's surname indicates their caste and through it their destinies. Halwai actually complicates this version of caste by offering this reduction: "These days, there are just two castes: Men with Big Bellies, and Men with Small Bellies. And only two destinies: eat - or get eaten up" (64).

Caste and class thus intersect without subsuming each other: high-caste wealth (Big Bellies) and low-caste poverty (Small Bellies) align all too well. Balram contends, however, that the lower castes too can have wealth as long as they are willing to eat and not get eaten up any longer: "anyone with a belly could rise up" (64). His own murderous rise attests to that. Moreover, Balram's binary demystifies the relation between caste and "destiny" by disjoining the latter from occupation or vocation. As a Halwai, Balram belongs to the caste of sweetmakers, but his father became a rickshaw puller because, he speculates, "a member of some other caste must

have stolen [the sweets shop] from him with the help of the police" (64). Balram disarticulates the relationship between caste and occupation because another illegally appropriated that relationship. He does not seek to return to this 'true' caste vocation but rather uses this "enabling violation" to break away from caste limits (Spivak 524, 2004).

An important debate between Ambedkar and Gandhi concerned precisely this split between caste and vocation. In 1937, Ambedkar published the second edition of *The Annihilation of Caste* and rebutted Gandhi's conservative critique of his work in an article entitled "A Vindication of Caste" (1944).<sup>48</sup> Ambedkar cares little for the sacrosanct Mahatma who is "so great that when he opens his lips it is expected that the argument must close and no dog must bark" (1944). Specifically, Ambedkar refutes Gandhi's claim that

the law of Varna teaches us that we have each one of us to earn our bread by following the ancestral calling. It defines not our rights but our duties. It necessarily has reference to callings that are conducive to the welfare of humanity and to no other. It also follows that there is no calling too low and none too high. All are good, lawful and absolutely equal in status. (1944).

Ambedkar's rejects Gandhi's arguments as reducible to the "the dogma of predestination."<sup>49</sup> Such a societal principal would forbid one from changing occupations even if it "would be impossible for him to gain his livelihood through the ancestral calling" (1944). Moreover, Ambedkar notes, the Mahatma and his family have long ignored their calling as traders—they are Banias by caste—and have chosen instead to become ministers (the lot of Brahmins), lawyers, politicians, and newspaper magnates (1944). The second critique listed here speaks to a central injustice within Gandhi's claims. Specifically, the higher castes may ignore their "ancestral calling" and

move freely into another occupation and its place in society even while they prohibit lower castes from doing the same.

For Balram, Gandhi's prescription would mean a life as a sweetmaker even if the family shop were stolen a generation ago. This ancestral calling has little to do with his family's lived reality or the clear hierarchies within which it takes place. Before Balram learns how to drive he works at the local teashop, "the one with the big photo of Gandhi in it" (Adiga 61). Even if the novel does not mention Gandhi's fiercest critic, pieces of Ambedkar's arguments certainly creep in as the former's visage overlooks a scene he helped create. The shop's workers are

crushed humans in crushed uniforms, sluggish, unshaven, in their thirties or forties of fifties but still 'boys'. But that is your fate if you do your job well — with honesty, dedication, and sincerity, the way Gandhi would have done it, no doubt. (51)

Predestined to be "human spiders," these workers, and Balram with them, are consigned to life-long servitude no matter their aptitude. While neoliberalism proffers false hopes of social mobility based on industriousness, the caste system vanquishes such hopes. If this rigidity seems perversely more honest, it does not allow for the possibility that capital will profane this sacred system.

When Balram first tries to learn how to drive a car and change his vocation, his future teacher dismisses him because he is a sweetmaker and driving is "like taming a wild stallion - only a boy from the warrior castes can manage that" (56). Like Gandhi, Balram's teacher conflates Varna and caste, which Ambedkar differentiates: "Varna is based on the principle of each according to his worth, while Caste is based on the principle of each according to his birth" (1944). Balram's birth, however, determines his worth, his abilities to tame cars or advance his



occupation. The old driver capitulates because "three hundred rupees, plus a bonus, will do that," as will working as a free mechanic for the local taxis (Adiga 56).

The interruption of caste by capital here does not hail a new development in their relations or the overturning of the former by the latter. Rather, this moment presents an already ongoing and dynamic relationship between these overdetermining forces. The landlords of Laxmangarh, Balram's village, own large coalmines they hope to contract to Chinese firms. The wealth produced from these mines, moreover, allows their son Ashok to live and study abroad before returning to India. Joseph contends that these landlords "use the rural as a sort of interdiction of the global and the local" so that the movement of their son and his tuition partly tell "the story of multinational capital" (79).<sup>50</sup> She uses interdiction here in Spivak's Derridian sense: "a practice that does not take sides, but uses what is strategically important" (77). These "old residual power structures" depend on the local caste hierarchies, which may be residual but are no less powerful for that (79). If the novel does indeed ask, "What if this last bastion of imagined collectivity also falls to neoliberalism?" it is less concerned about villages than caste communities (87). The question, then, is not "*What if* even the poor villager is now in the pores of global capitalism?," but rather, *how does* this caste indigent live in these spaces? The novel's representation of rural life in India cannot be "an authentic description of the hardships endured by the rural populations of many India villages" because the aesthetic strategy centers on satire and caricature (Suneetha 168).

The buffalo Balram's family owns, for instance, serves as "a parodic allusion to microcredit: a fattened animal remains the hope of all members of the family, yet the entire family seems to be working for it rather than the other way around" (Joseph 87). This reading shifts the time and place of neoliberalism; it is no longer arriving here soon (*What if?*) but

already living with you and masticating your labor (*how does?*). Given this micro-penetration of neoliberal capital it is unclear how Balram must be a "monstrous gangster-like" figure (87). Two strands of argument join here. One, as I argued earlier, Balram does not represent an illegitimate spokesman for neoliberalism but rather an instance of its greatest myth. This means that, secondly, Balram cannot be anymore monstrous or gangsterish than his surroundings. This is not to say that his behavior merely "mirrors" that of the landlord class, nor do we hear in his speech only "entrepreneurial shibboleths *as criminality*" (Joseph 87, 72, emphasis in original). I am arguing instead that Balram *appropriates* and *intercepts* the logics around him—discursive, entrepreneurial, and violent.

The shift away from mirroring to appropriation matters a great deal. Returning to the scene of microcredit, Balram's family must do everything to sustain the buffalo because "if she gave enough milk, the women could sell some of it and there might be a little more money at the end of the day" (Adiga 20). They pull Balram out of school to help produce more income and remove their husbands' earnings when they return from their migrant city work. He only ensnares himself more deeply into these bonds when he tries to break free. For instance, Balram's grandmother sponsors his driving lessons with the caveat that he must send his entire pay back to the family; secondly, he becomes the driver for one the village landlords. Such desperation does not evince a "cannibalistic urge" that "mirrors the landlord class's predatory brutality toward the villagers" (88). Rather, Balram and his family live and die within the confines of the latter.

Caste relations frame these brutal confines more rigidly than critics have acknowledged. While Balram may appropriate the language of entrepreneurship—as a driver he is already an independent contractor of sorts—he cannot appropriate anything of caste. Even after Balram

learns how to drive, the fortuitously lands an audition to be a driver and impresses the Stork (the villagers' name for this landlord), he must answer a final, all determining question:

What's your last name again?

'Halwai'

'Halwai...!' He turned to the small dark man. 'What caste is that, top or bottom?'

And I knew that my future depended on the answer to this question. (63)

No matter his education or proficiency a final blockade remains. This scene occasions Balram's digression into the dynamics of caste and his argument that only two castes remain: "Men with Big Bellies, and Men with Small Bellies" (64). That analysis strangely ignores caste's overdetermining power in the scene it interrupts and perhaps contributes to the critical silence on this issue. The "small dark man," one of the landowner's sons, does not know the answer, so Balram must answer himself. He replies "Bottom, sir," arguing that he could "have made a good case either way" (65). In the landowner's reply, the novel parodies the affirmative action of the reservation system and its patronizing benevolence: "All our employees are top caste. It won't hurt to have one or two bottom castes working for us" (65). One is granted the permission to serve and only earns that magnanimity after proving one's proficiency at the task. Balram cannot appropriate such caste logic or power. He can, however, learn its violence.

They hire Balram only after ensuring that his family does not support the Naxalites (Maoist revolutionaries) and remain in that village; "We know *exactly* where they are" (66, emphasis in original). Balram explains that the Stork killed a previous servant who failed to guard his infant son from a Naxalite kidnapping. Although the servant claimed innocence and was executed, the Stork has the servant's entire family killed and their family house burned

down. Balram assumes that the same has happened to his family after he kills the Stork's son, Mr. Ashok, and absconds with the bribe money. One critic finds fault with Balram's actions, arguing that "if the injustice of the master class was immoral, Halwai's methods of redressing the injustice seems equally so" (Khor 44). Debating the morality of Balram's violence obfuscates its context, a battlefield strewn with the victims of caste and poverty. His is a retaliatory violence that, to my mind, cannot be unjustified.<sup>51</sup>

In a surprising argument, Ambedkar argues that the Buddha was "in favor of justice and where justice required he permitted the use of force" (Buddha). More provocatively:

If a soldier can be killed in war because he belongs to a hostile nation  
why cannot a property owner be killed if his ownership leads to misery  
for the rest of humanity? There is no reason to make an exception in  
favour of the property owner, why one should regard private property as  
sacrosanct. (Buddha)

Theological accuracy matters less for my purposes than Ambedkar's tactical reading of Buddhism, and the Buddha's teachings more specifically, to bolster an argument for the use of retaliatory force. (Ambedkar argues that the Buddha and Marx agree on this point.) Although force does not necessarily mean violence, Ambedkar's phrasing suggests that they become synonymous under the right conditions. The parallelism between a soldier at war and property owners intimates that the latter too operate on a battlefield and should be treated as belonging to a "hostile nation" bent on producing "misery for the rest of humanity" (Buddha). In this reading nothing about property or the property owner remains "sacrosanct" (Buddha). Balram must be understood in this context, guided by the invisible hand of these lessons even as he intercepts neoliberal ideology.

Ambedkar appears nowhere in the novel. Balram does not mention him, nor does he come across the statues of him in Delhi even though he drives around the Gandhi statue a few times. This omission is purposeful if not entirely desirable. The novel's literary strategies—allegory, satire, counterfocalization—disallow a sincere treatment of Ambedkar. That is the generous reading. A less generous reading may accuse the novel, and "the Brahmin Adiga" specifically, of failing "to mention the term Dalit in the whole of the novel" (Dalit Nation). As even that hostile reviewer notes, however, "there is [a] mention of Gandhi in a disparaging way" (Dalit Nation). Given Balram's irreverence for such political gods, however, Dr. Ambedkar must remain outside the novel lest he suffer the same fate. He can only appear in the guise of the Buddha.

The Buddha first appears in the novel only to demonstrate how desolate Balram's home village is. Laxmangarh is located in the Gaya district, home to Bodh Gaya where the Buddha achieves (or re-achieves) enlightenment. Did the Buddha walk through Laxmangarh? "My own feeling is that he ran through it — as fast as he could—and got to the other side —and never looked back!" (18). The moment indicts Laxmangarh more than it does the Buddha, whose enlightenment it seems would drown in the village's Darkness. The next paragraph destroys the idols of Hinduism worshiped there: the Ganga river for its filth and Hanuman ("half man half monkey") for being "a shining example of how to serve your masters with absolute fidelity, love, and devotion" (19). Such exemplary servitude only helps Balram underscore "how hard it is for a man to win his freedom in India" (19). In this flow of indictments his earlier commentary on the Buddha's foot speed then cannot be a critique but an admiring glance at an ideal of freedom to which he aspires.

At the novel's conclusion, Balram again returns to the Buddha to explain why he should not be considered a "cold-blooded monster" (315). In reply to a "cunning Brahmin" who was "trying to trick the Buddha" into claiming that he was a god, the Buddha says that he is neither man nor god: "I am just one who has woken up while the rest of you are sleeping" (315). Balram argues that he too is neither man nor "demon" but only one who has woken up, "and that is the only difference between us" (315). This claim seems blasphemous on its own but it approximates Ambedkar's reading of the Buddha discussed earlier. Balram has awoken to injustice and uses force to rectify the situation; according to Ambedkar, with whom I concur, Balram has the Buddha's blessing. Balram's second claim, that his awakening alone differentiates him from the rest of us, suggests the possibility of an enlightened collective that fights back.

One night, will they all join together — will they destroy the Rooster

Coop?

Ha!

Maybe once in a hundred years there is a revolution that frees the poor.

(303)

Balram follows his mocking "Ha!" with a more concrete analysis.

People in this country are waiting for the war of their freedom to come

from somewhere else — from the jungles, from the mountains, from

China, from Pakistan. That will never happen. Every man must make his

own Benares. (304)

Balram's relative optimism of individual "revolution," however, matches his pessimism about collective struggles that are either deferred or dislocated (304). Instead, he admonishes, "The book of your revolution sits in the pit of your belly, young Indian. Crap it out, and read" (304).

Although the scatological remark alludes to the work of "Untouchables" with feces, it also marks the passage between internal and external as an effort, a verb ("crap") that must be followed by another ("read"). If a driver only reads fantasy stories about servants killing their masters, Balram argues, the master has nothing to worry about because these stories begin with a deranged servant and end with a dead one; these penny novels reinforce the inescapability, even sanity, of servitude. "It's when your driver starts to read about Gandhi and the Buddha that it's time to wet your pants, Mr. Jiabao" (126). Reading these luminaries reverses the verb order for the masters so that seeing produces liquefied fear; like the young Indian who must excrete his wisdom to make it legible, the masters will see the terror inherent in their position soiling their underwear.

The Buddha helps both actors—servant and master—understand what is inside them. I am arguing that he must be the surrogate for Dr. Ambedkar. If that's true, then coupling Gandhi alongside Ambedkar as enlightening thinkers seems incongruous. Given his earlier critiques of Gandhi, however, Ambedkar (the Buddha) foils the former; the driver does not read Gandhi for inspiration to revolt but as the paragon of a conservatism that must be fought. Reading Gandhi alone does not suffice. Reading about him "*and the Buddha*" (Ambedkar), their debates against each other, endangers the masters (126, emphasis mine). Indeed, his final escape consolidates a few lines of Ambedkar's thought: the annihilation of caste (Balram works above and outside his, then takes a high caste name), property owners are enemy combatants (Balram kills Ashok), private property is not sacrosanct (he steals—expropriates—a huge sum of money).

Critiques of Balram's arguments note their individualism and therefore alignment with a neoliberal ethos. Indeed, as I argued earlier, Balram's claims and life trajectory does not make him an illegitimate spokesman for neoliberalism but offers the best kind of rags to riches story it

promises will be available to all if only we unleash free market forces. I have also argued that Balram does not merely mirror the landowner's logic but appropriates it and that such appropriation should not be understood *only* as a caricature, a hyperbolic representation that reveals the grotesqueness of its referent. Rather, Balram's interception of neoliberal entrepreneurship exploits the utopic potential within this system. The criteria that ostensibly make him illegitimate—"an uneducated rural migrant and murderer" —demonstrate their irrelevance to neoliberalism's final analysis; does it generate profit? (Joseph 72).

I am not arguing that the novel demonstrates the efficacy of neoliberalism nor am I personally endorsing the latter. Rather, I am following Fredric Jameson's method of locating the utopian horizon within the otherwise repellent. He notes, for instance, that Walmart's production, transportation, and distribution systems provide the "anticipatory prototype of some new form of socialism for which the reproach of centralization now proves historically misplaced and irrelevant" (Jameson 153). If Walmart provides an "anticipatory prototype" of a future to be won, then the call centers and Balram's shuttle business glimpses an India where caste relations succumb to capital's indifference.

Both Walmart and the technology companies in Bangalore (and the multinationals that contract them) rely on global circuits of communication and trade that, while exploiting local hierarchies to lower labor costs and prevent organization, otherwise care little of the local prejudices and supremacies. Lower cost trumps concerns over the laborer's lower caste. Ignoring this feature of capital blinds one to its enticements and makes the popularity of neoliberal reforms, if not their success, incomprehensible. In such a failed analysis, one might mistakenly charge the lower castes with the task of anticapitalist revolution without understanding why they do not occupy that role.



Gopal Guru, editor of *Humiliation: Claims and Context*, a volume that focuses in large part on caste generally and untouchability specifically, falls into the traps I have just described. Guru's punching bag is the "Dalit millionaire" who receives applause and a condescending handshake from established (high-caste) industrialists. This scene "uniformly designate[s]" the "triumphalism" of neoliberal ideology because it affirms, and answers in the affirmative, the question: "Can the subaltern accumulate?" (Guru 41). The Dalit millionaire constitutes a "spectacle," in Guy Debord's sense, "which, as false consciousness, necessarily forges a fake association between a person or a social collectivity, and the spectacle" (41). He qualifies that the Dalit millionaire is a "low intensity spectacle," a kind of sub-spectacle that promotes the corporate class's ideology (42). This spectacle "induce[s] in common Dalits a feeling of pacification, which in effect will neutralize their anti-corporate stance" (42). He goes on to argue that corporations promote various cash transfers to the "toiling Dalit in rural India" in order to neutralize any burgeoning radical consciousness and, to recall his earlier argument, promote "false consciousness" (42).

Guru's analysis limits radical consciousness to anticapitalism. This is a strangely provincial version of radical politics. While anticapitalism and anticaste politics would ideally intersect and aid each other, Guru fails to mention the latter at all, let alone as a revolutionary consciousness. He understands the Dalit millionaire's relation to caste in two ways: first, they require the "ragpickers and scavengers in the withered down jhuggis [shanty slums]" to mark them as a spectacle, economically and socially forward relative to their backward brethren. These millionaires must "remain in touch with the wretched, howsoever "embarrassing" the latter may be" (43). Guru seems to suggest that Dalits cannot escape their relation to the "wretched" among them despite their desire to. However, he goes on to chide them because "they prefer to

remain chained to their identity" (43). That caste identity is not a preference one can simply disavow does not occur to Guru here. This means that Dalit millionaires, as Guru's nomenclature indicates, must remain *Dalit* millionaires. More importantly, nowhere in these contradictory relationships can one locate an anticaste politics that might use imposed caste markings—that they "prefer" to retain—to upset its brutal hierarchies.

Balram both abandons his caste identity and describes its decisive role in his life. After arriving in Bangalore, Balram renames himself Ashok Sharma, a high-caste name that does not impose limits on upward mobility; we might call it caste-passing. As described earlier, the high caste no longer carry a marker, acquiring the more universal category of citizen. However, in recounting his story to the Chinese premier, Balram emphasizes how being a Halwai affects his destiny by limiting the occupations he may take up. For Balram, a low caste identity is not a voluntary choice but a shackle to be broken, never discarded. A high caste or unmarked identity must be stolen, absconded with like a bag full of money, with which he must live in apprehension, as a thief must.

Secondly, Guru understands the Dalit millionaire's relation to caste in terms of their use of "state and political patronage" (43). Such patronage, rather than the "free and competitive" market, combined with affirmative action measures, allowed the "political freedom that seems to have helped Dalits gain economic freedom" (44). While it is true that the reservation and quota systems are in place (ostensibly) to provide aid to the "Backward Classes," Balram's narrative discloses a darker secret. Such state-sponsored balms are unnecessary if we move directly to the guillotine. In cutting his master's throat, walking away with an attaché case of cash and even taking his master's first name, Balram circumvents the kind of state and political patronage Guru describes. That is, Balram provides an example, if an atomized one, of a revolutionary politics

Guru cannot envision for Dalits or their millionaires: a direct attack that may not seek solidarity with anticapitalists or the socialist parties that house them.

Indeed, the novel satirizes the socialist leaders in India. While it is generally true that the novel represents "both the crisis of the nationalist-socialist state of the 1950s and the emergence of the neoliberal globalizing state in the 1990s," the specific critiques of the former need elaboration (Joseph 82). Specifically, the novel's allegorical structure marks the derangement of Nehruvian socialism's ideals in the figure of the Great Socialist. This state leader displays all the features of a corrupt autocrat conspiring with the landowners, whom he occasionally humiliates, to siphon "one billion rupees form the Darkness and [transfer] that money into a bank account in a small, beautiful country in Europe of white people and black money" (Adiga 98). Accused of "murder, rape, grand larceny, gun-smuggling, pimping and many other such minor offences," the Great Socialist nevertheless continues to remain in power through election rigging and false promises to the poor. Balram reveals that the local unconstructed hospital ranks chief among these broken pledges, leaving only "three different foundation stones for a hospital, laid there by three different politicians before three different elections" (47). Balram's father dies in a hospital too far away, without a doctor in attendance, and of a disease for which a vaccine is available, tuberculosis. This triple tragedy underscores the Great Socialist's already capitalized name, marking him as the abstract ideal of a gap between name and deed, a historic project deformed to become unrecognizable.

The novel certainly critiques the narratives of

national progress and economic development, where infrastructure  
development is now in the service of electronic capitalism and high-end  
consumer goods, rather than the older socialist-welfare agendas of

poverty alleviation, rural literacy, women's welfare, and healthcare.

(Joseph 76)

In the figure of the Great Socialist, however, the novel argues that the difference between these agendas has eroded. Joseph's "*rather than*" separates two projects that have now aligned so that the "older socialist agendas" disguise servitude to "electronic capitalism" (Joseph 76, emphasis mine). Laxmangarh's landlords push against the Great Socialist's power by forming a party of their own, the All India Social Progressive Front (Leninist Faction). If the name parodies the divisions between the various Communist parties in India—CPI, CPI (Marxist), CPI (Marxist-Leninist), CPI (Maoist) to name a few—its foundation by the masters as a challenge to power offers a stronger critique. "Social Progressive" and "Leninist" no longer refer to leftist politics, let alone left radical politics, but rather serve the landlords' interests under slogans that champion the poor. To be clear, the novel does not seem to critique communism, socialism, or Marxism per se, but parodies the Indian political parties that ostensibly fight under those flags. Even if these critiques cannot be endorsed they cannot be ignored as they have been by otherwise astute critics.

More troublingly, I want to suggest a link between the novel's critiques and Guru. I suggested earlier that Guru seems unable to understand a radical emancipatory politics outside of an anticapitalist frame. That is, Guru wants Dalits to either join the Marxist (party?) struggle or, in the vein of Subaltern Studies, take up the mantle of revolutionary subjectivity. The term Dalit itself, Guru argues, "symbolizes struggle as it is produced by the struggling masses in opposition to both the state and state-driven capitalism, and the free market" (48). Taking something true—that Dalit names and enables a collective struggle—Guru arrives at something false—the brown washing of the term to represent abstract "masses" whose anticaste struggle is subsumed into

Marxist terms. Worse, the term takes on an "autonomous ontological status" as an agential term that rejects "the idea of victimhood" (48). Ontology is precisely the framework Dalit avoids because its basic premise rejects the givenness of caste and the hierarchy of being it structures; the term aims to marshal SCs, STs, and OBCs under one flag. Moreover, articulating an agential term does not ignore victimhood—which is different than refusing to be victims *only*—nor the explicitly caste-based violence under which it suffers.

Dalit as a struggle concept has been sociologically constituted, historically arrived at and politically articulated. This, by definition, would avoid any association with capitalism and the coercive state, and other patronizing vocabulary produced by Gandhi or by the welfare state.

*Dalit is not a caste term at all.* (48, my emphasis)

If Guru only hinted at subsuming Dalit as a "struggle concept" earlier, the closing line of this paragraph swallows it whole. Abstracting Dalit from its roots in anticaste struggle in order to "avoid any association with capitalism" reads like a landowner claiming that the toil of his coal miners benefits all equally without noting that he and his ilk are more equal than others. If this comparison seems ungenerous or the muddling of entirely different agendas, then it captures something of exasperation felt when reading Guru's perverse annihilation of caste. Again, this is not to say that anticaste activism cannot and should not intersect with anticapitalism; rather, it is to note that subsuming the former in the name of latter does little to cultivate such alliances.

The novel's Great Socialist inspires this ungenerous comparison because he operates under the party symbol, "a pair of hands breaking through handcuffs — symbolizing the poor shaking off the rich," which is "imprinted in black stencils on the walls of every government office in the Darkness" (Adiga 97). Although these once powerful stencils on government offices

mean to advertise the state as the saving force, they become caricatures in the novel, hyperbolic parodies of a state that shackles the poor to the landlords and through them to capitalist exploitation. After coming to a detente with the landowners, the Great Socialist visits them to collect his extortion fee of one and a half million rupees. He knows they have the money, "You've got a good scam going here — taking coal for free from the government mines. You're got it going because I let it happen" (104). He did not merely enable the landowners but produced them: "I brought you here — I made you what you are today" (105). This caricature of a corrupt politician and the long scams they create nevertheless ruptures Joseph's critique of current development narratives' fixation on electronic capitalism "*rather than*" the old socialist agendas (Joseph 76, my emphasis). In the novel's logic those old socialist agendas now devour the poor with the rhetoric of liberation and the exploitation of capitalism.

One more frightening symmetry: Guru writes that the emergence of the Dalit millionaire forces the latter to "treat the ideology of neo-liberalism with liberatory potential" (49). Worse still, they must "collaborate with the Indian corporate class with the purpose to create a unified ideological impact on socially discreet groups" (49). Certainly, a crucial part of this ideological assault directed at the poor holds that anyone can become a millionaire given, as the American version might say, enough pluck and bootstraps. Indeed, I argued earlier that Balram embodies this myth, making him the ideal representative for neoliberalism. However, the novel pushes back, arguing that neoliberalism alone does not offer false promises to the poor; the Great Socialist and his ilk do the same. For instance, a government agent visits Balram's school and asks him to identify a photo:

Who is this man, who is the most important man in all our lives?

"He's the Great Socialist"

What is his message for children?

"Any boy in any village can grow up to become the prime minister of

India. That is his message to little children all over this land." (35)

In the next moment, however, the agent names Balram the white tiger, "the creature that comes along only once in a generation" (35). The equality promised earlier quickly proves an abnormality, a rare genetic trait that has little to do with the vegetation around it. The agent promises to send over a scholarship and transfer Balram to a new school. Those plans quickly fall away, however, when he must go to work in order to pay off his family's debt to the landlord. If Guru rightly critiques the structural limits of neoliberal capitalism—its promised upward mobility depends on the indentured stasis of many—the novel critiques the Great Socialist's version of a similar promise that cannot overcome generational poverty, or worse, perpetuates it in collusion with the landlords.

Unpacking the novel's critique of the symmetry between neoliberalism's promise of wealth for all and the Great Socialist's promise of upward mobility does not require agreement or endorsement. Most critics find Balram repulsive for various reasons and clearly the state minister is not a likable character either. If the novel suggests a fearful symmetry between the two, it also rejects both even while, as I argued earlier, noting the utopian potential within them.

The novel also gives both neoliberal capitalism and Great Socialism—I am retaining the novel's caricature to avoid conflating it with existing or future instantiations—a figure of upward mobility. While Balram represents an ideal of the neoliberal promise, Vijay represents the obverse, Great Socialism's embodiment of a rise from poverty to party official. Balram encounters Vijay throughout his life, including in Delhi when the latter slides into the car next to another politician.

The man on the right was my childhood hero - Vijay, the pigherd's son turned bus conductor turned politician from Laxmangarh. He had changed uniforms again: now he was wearing the polished suit and tie of a modern Indian businessman. (270)

This trajectory corresponds to Balram's own — the rickshaw puller's son turned driver turned entrepreneur from Laxmangarh. If the novel's parallel between socialist politician and entrepreneur becomes even more evident here, Vijay's new business suit melds the two occupations together. He works with the other politician in the car to extort Ashok: "I told him if he didn't pay, we'd screw him and his father and his brother and the whole coal-pilfering and tax-evading racket they have" (271). Vijay and his Comrade—note the caricature—belong to the national branch of the state-level Great Socialist. That is, they do not hope to end the corrupt extraction of natural resources, labor, and wealth from Laxmangarh but exploit their awareness and enablement of this "tax-evading racket" to benefit themselves. What was once a cold war between two opposed world building methods—socialism and capitalism—collapses into the banal collusion of corrupt politicians and landlords.

In another version of this novel, Balram might have killed a politician and landowners in order to expropriate the money necessary to begin his new life. This would be a bloody justice but not an entirely unwarranted one and one, as I argued above, that neither Ambedkar nor his reading of the Buddha disallow. Instead, Balram kills the landowner. This plot trajectory may keep the novel's world intact—Balram cannot become an anticorruption hero—but it also advances the utopic horizon of neoliberal capital I discussed earlier, a horizon apparently unavailable to the state. Specifically, Balram vanishes into the anonymity of global capital where his past and caste matter less than the wealth he circulates; Vijay demonstrates that a similar



upward mobility, but not anonymity, may be available within the party and state bureaucracy but only if it is treated as a capitalist enterprise.

As with the novel itself there are crucial limits to these developmental trajectories. Gender constitutes the most important of these outcast elements. The novel concerns a male's rise from poverty, in servitude to predominantly male employers, and the transmission of this story to the male Chinese premier. The other upwardly mobile figure identified above, Vijay, is also male as are his Comrades, including the Great Socialist, whose agent once conveyed an inspirational message to Balram at his school: "Any *boy* in any village can grow up to become the prime minister of India. That is his message to little children all over this land" (Adiga 35, emphasis mine). Even as this message presents a mirage, it genders access to that false oasis of upward mobility for all. Indira Gandhi's time as prime minister never happened in this India, and not because she imposed draconian measures against the poor, but because she does not exist as a woman. After naming him the White Tiger, the government agent gives Balram a book, "*Lessons for Young Boys from the Life of Mahatma Gandhi*" (25). The erasure of Ambedkar and the gendering of education converge here in the form of the parting gift the government agent has on hand. Gandhi had no lessons for young girls apparently and Ambedkar offers nothing for children of either gender despite the centrality of education to his activism. Moreover, there seem to be no girls in Balram's school, or at least none that he speaks of. The only correspondence between women and education in Balram's narrative involves his sister's marriage, the celebration and dowry of which required Balram to work to pay off the family debt rather than attend school. No mention is made of his sisters' schooling.

Balram's decrepit school offered no books or other supplies but an indifferent teacher who steals supplies and food to compensate a half a year's lack of pay. The novel mockingly

describes the teacher as practicing a "Gandhian protest to retrieve his missing wages — he was going to do nothing in class until his pay cheque arrived in the mail" (33). In this context, emancipation through education rings as hollow as its attendant promise of upward mobility for all. Even the educators suffer under the misallocation of resources, including the lack of training or a training that emphasizes "rote learning" such that "the technique of emphasizing meaning is not what s/he would understand by teaching" (Spivak 26). This constitutes the "real disgrace of rural primary education," which defeats "even the *good* teacher with the best will in the world" (26, emphasis in original). In the novel's terms, the subjects produced from this sort of education are "half-baked" (Adiga 10). "He can read and write," laments Ashok, "but he doesn't get what he's read. He's half-baked" (10). Balram concurs:

All these ideas, half formed and half digested and half correct, mix up with the other half-cooked ideas in your head, and I guess these half-formed ideas bugger into one another, and make more half-formed ideas, and this what you act on and live with. The story of my upbringing is the story of how a half-baked fellow is produced. (11)

It is generally true that this passage tells the story of "Indian illiteracy and infrastructural development" through Balram's "flawed and fragmentary perspective" (Joseph 89). And this is not a bad thing. Indeed, Balram promises that any school that he starts would not "corrupt anyone's head with prayers and stories about God or Gandhi," the fully formed but ossified shibboleths of conservatism (Adiga 319). While being half-baked in this way does not lend itself to achievements on standardized exams, it does encourage invention and deviation, processes far more amenable to revolt. I would describe these processes as an aesthetic practice, the making of something entirely new. In Balram's case such aesthetics breaks from given modes of

instrumentality—his own servitude—for the sake of a neoliberal form—entrepreneurship. Balram's education comes through poetry; he knows "by heart the works of the four greatest poets of all time — Rumi, Iqbal, Mirza Ghalib, and a fourth fellow," Kabir perhaps, who remains unnamed but whose ideas of equality have been memorized.

*"They remain slaves because they can't see what is beautiful in this world.'* That is the truest thing anyone ever said" (Adiga 40). Balram quotes Iqbal as the foundation of his explanation of why masses remain impoverished even while they constitute the majority. In a Marxian vein, Balram argues that the "history of the world is the history of a ten-thousand-year war of brains between the rich and the poor," and "Poetry...when understood correctly spills out secrets that allow the poorest man on earth to conclude the ten-thousand-year-old-war on terms favourable to himself" (254). He goes to a street-side bookseller who reads a bit of poetry to him: *"You were looking for the key for years/ But the door was always open!"* Balram repeats the couplet feverishly, changing the poem's "You were" to "I was," as he comes to see the bag of money and his master's death as the open door through which he must walk out. This fragment of Iqbal's poetry, learned without its ecstatic context or historical explication, may be "half-formed" but Balram makes it an affirmation of freedom. While some definitions of aesthetics claim it to be in excess of instrumentality, Balram's understands aesthetics as that which ruptures the existing instrumentality of caste and class hierarchies. For him, seeing what is beautiful in the world means glimpsing freedom, the door to which is always open even if it leads to neoliberal capitalism.

The equation of freedom and neoliberalism makes little sense without understanding the local bondages from which one may seek escape. The allure of this trajectory into the anonymity of capital—"[Bangalore] was full of outsiders. No one would notice me here"—comes in its

liberty from caste (296). The novel, I have argued, both satirizes neoliberal entrepreneurship and explores its utopian potential to profane sacred hierarchies. Attending to this tension allows us to understand why anticaste and anticapital activism does not necessarily coincide despite our desires; and subsuming the former within the latter does not help forge alliances. Through the Great Socialist and his agents, the novel satirizes the liberation ostensibly promised by ruling leftist parties, which either do not provide adequate infrastructures (hospitals) or use existing systems (schools) to reproduce caste subservience (Gandhi). Only by intercepting bits of skill, neoliberal ideology, and violence, the novel argues, does one break away from servitude, if not achieve anything like freedom. For Balram "it was all worthwhile to know, just for a day, just for an hour, just for a *minute*, what it means not to be a servant" (321).

## Conclusion

The twenty-first century's proliferation of South-South relations requires the critical capacities, historical knowledge, and ability to read across disjunctive scales, offered by Postcolonial studies. These South-South relations are both collaborative and domineering, reflecting external the solidarities of national liberation movements as well as witnesses to the eruption of internal antagonisms that destroy these hopes. This focus on the global South, however, does not require denying the continued dominance of the North or fixing its place as the fount of all power. In the course of this dissertation, I explore a range of issues that, taken together, demonstrate the ways postcolonial literary studies enrich our understanding of contemporary politics and aesthetics.

In chapters 1 and 2, I demonstrate that local violence—genocides in Bangladesh and Rwanda—depends on Northern political support, weapons supplies as well as the humanitarian aid that follows. Understanding such violence requires attention both to the historical colonial relationships that ground these North-South relationships—the French in Rwanda for example—as well as to the local actors who turn from victims to killers. In these chapters, I aim to demonstrate that the supply of arms remains a key mode through which the North still shapes the South. In chapter 1, for example, the protagonist of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* uses these Northern weapons as one set of material evidence to absolve himself of war crimes committed in Bangladesh. This hyperbolic strategy—look at all these overdetermining forces!—caricatures one version of postcolonialism in which all crimes can be traced back to the global North. The insufficiencies of this narrative challenge us to create the alternate narrative strategies necessary for justice in the present.

I carry these concerns into chapter 2 by locating in the trope of “indifference” an obfuscation

of the international community's many investments in Rwanda. The banal narrative that no one cared about the genocide in Rwanda mystifies the involvement of old colonial powers France and Belgium, as well as Uganda and South Africa, all of who supply weapons to the warring parties. This arms supply is not equal, of course, as the Francophone powers equipped the genocidaires while also providing peacekeepers to the UN and humanitarian aid in the genocide's aftermath. Boubacar Boris Diop's *Murambi, The Book of Bones* underlines these grotesque connections that evince the continued influence of Northern powers without, however, absolving the Rwandan genocidaires of their crimes. The critique of "indifference" aims to inoculate us against its mystifying force and turn our attention instead to the existing networks of political influence, arms, and capital that riddle South-South relations.

While I move in the first two chapters from India to East Africa, I zoom into the traffic between these spaces across the Indian Ocean in chapter 3. These South-South relations, I argue, represent emergent modes of collaboration and dominance even while drawing on historical connections. In chapter 3 I focus on the Asian diaspora in East Africa, which may predate the arrival of European powers but they remain "Asian Shylocks," a community of imperial collaborators who currently represent the vanguard of India's expansion in that region. M.G. Vassanji's novel *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* offers a literary analysis of these complexities by taking seriously the racism facing the Asian diaspora as well as its historically troubling class politics. Vassanji uses what Gayatri Spivak calls counterfocalization as an aesthetic strategy to articulate a given text as well as mark ruptures that push readers to produce an alternative narrative in parallel. By demonstrating that Vassanji's focalizer represents the caricature of a caricature, a hyper-Asian Shylock, I trace out the ignored histories of Black and Asian solidarity and the alternate futures they can help energize. Such futures are urgently

needed as India's investments in, and exports from, Africa boom, rivaling only China in their exponential growth. I examine this dialogue with China further in Aravind Adiga's novel *The White Tiger*, whose protagonist addresses the Chinese premier on entrepreneurship. The novel's epistolary form as well as its concerns with the Indian Ocean and transnational technology showcase some of the concordant interests these two powers share.

Chapters 3 and 4 also figure protagonists who emphasize capital accumulation as a mode of self-preservation. Vikram Lall, the namesake of Vassanji's novel, argues that such accumulation both protects against, and is enabled by, the racism that sees the East African Asian diaspora as "Shylocks." Meanwhile, Balram Halwai, Adiga's focalizer, argues that capitalist entrepreneurship helps him escape the shackles of the caste system. Balram represents a caricature of neoliberalism's success story—"development as bildungsroman"—while also appropriating the utopic potential within capitalism's ability to profane the caste system's sacred violence (Benjamin 147). Both Lall and Halwai, I argue, demonstrate the allure of capital accumulation within disenfranchised or discriminated populations and help us understand why their version of radical emancipation may not align with that advanced by anticapitalists. This troubling insight raises the broader question of how to negotiate the turn to neoliberal economic policy and the primacy of commercial development as well as the uneven spread of these forces.

The exponential industrialization of India and China, as well as their rivalry in Africa and the Indian Ocean, amplifies other significant questions that must remain outside the scope of this dissertation. The first among these questions concerns the fate of women and sexual minorities in India and East Africa. While Uganda has recently repealed its draconian anti-LGBT legislation, for instance, India reinstated its archaic colonial policy of imprisoning queer people. Would capital accumulation prove a similar defensive strategy for this half of the world's population or

is that reserved for the heterosexual males that dominate this dissertation? Another set of questions concerns the massive increase in resource consumption required by these economic development policies and its meaning for global climate change. While neoliberal capitalism promises a first world life for all, materializing even a fraction of such commercial and resource development may turn the Anthropocene into the next mass extinction event. How then do we address the 900 million living in extreme poverty across Africa and India at the moment when these trading partners invest heavily in extraction industries? Responding to these questions and others yet unknown to us requires thinking across disjunctive scales of human agency, emergent South-South relations, and the narrative modes that must engage these registers. This is the task of Postcolonial Literary Studies in the twenty-first century.



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## Appendix A: Endnotes

### Introduction

<sup>1</sup> The notion of "scapes" of various sorts comes from Arjun Appadurai's *Modernity at Large*.

<sup>2</sup> In chapter 1, I take up Jameson's argument on national allegory as articulated in his infamous essay "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism."

### Chapter 1

<sup>3</sup> For an excellent discussion of the tribunal with special attention to gender violence, see the special issue of *Criminal Law Forum* edited by Suzannah Linton.

<sup>4</sup> Shalija Sharma's "Salman Rushdie: The Ambivalence of Migrancy," offers a subtle reading of memory in relation to migrancy. Sharma maps Rushdie's versions of cultural translation, which range from "an excess of memory," those characters who refuse to be tainted by anything foreign, to a complete "refusal of memory," such as those post-diaspora generations who would call Bangladesh "Bungleditch."

<sup>5</sup> Fredric Jameson argues, in "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," that "third-world" texts should be read as "national allegories." This holds true "particularly when their forms develop out of predominantly western machineries of representation, such as the novel" (69). Thinking through a Marxist framework, Jameson contends that a central feature of capitalist culture "is a radical split between the private and the public, between the poetic and the political" (69). This split is not yet present in the third-world and consequently, "the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the third-world public culture and society" (69). Aijaz Ahmad offers the most searing critique of Jameson's

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argument in his *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*. Mark Mossman, on the other hand, grants Jameson's theory a range of validity but argues it is insufficient for accounting the complex interiority presented in *Midnight's Children*. Jameson originally articulates his claim as "a sweeping hypothesis," which is to say he is well aware of its limitations (69).

<sup>6</sup> I had the great privilege of having a decorated veteran of the current US-led Iraq and Afghanistan wars in my classroom. This 25-year-old Marine served four tours in Iraq's most hostile regions, including Baghdad and Fallujah. The war veteran told us that, during missions, nothing matters beyond the safety of their small four-person unit. All the training up to deployment, he said, places the highest importance on the cohesion and relationships of these units; no one is left behind. He returned for subsequent tours because he felt responsible for the new recruits who were going to be put on the front lines. As a sergeant at age 23, he wanted to make sure that "these 18-year-old kids" would get home safely. The initial patriotism driving his enlistment was forgotten, removed through training, in order to handle the circumstances. When we discussed the Rwandan genocide in class, another student cried that he would have "gone in," and served in a US military mission to Rwanda had there been one to stop the genocide. The Marine student commended the comment but confided to me after class, "That kid doesn't know what he's talking about. You have to be trained to give your life." Such training, however, would begin by channeling one's nationalist energy into an absolute caring for the small unit, indivisible even by death.

<sup>7</sup> For an excellent discussion of Rushdie's religious tropes see Roger Clark's *Stranger Gods: Salman Rushdie's Other Worlds*. "Saleem's paradoxical Buddhahood helps Rushdie to express his view that Pakistani leaders crush the liberating, mystical aspects of religion." While the

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Buddha's sought transcendence through a "detached awareness," Saleem achieves "forgetful ignorance" (82).

<sup>8</sup> A cyclone devastated East Pakistan in 1970, leaving a million dead. The central government in Islamabad (West Pakistan) responded slowly and ineffectively to the crisis. Rahman commented, "While we have a substantial army stationed in West Pakistan, it is left to British Marines to bury our dead in Patuakhali. While we have army helicopters sitting in West Pakistan, we have to wait for helicopters to come for relief operation from across the earth" (cited in Ayoob and Subrahmanyam 90). Rahman's Awami League won an absolute victory in the subsequent elections and shifted political power to the East, to which the West Pakistani leadership responded with violent repressions in 1971.

<sup>9</sup> Rushdie may be drawing on John Locke's work. For Locke, memory allows an individual to retain self-identity without the need to repeat the same behaviors. Given this, one is able to contradict or drastically alter behavior without necessarily identifying as a different person. Secondly, memory functions as a theater in which one views previous actions, their attendant consequences and compares them to the choices available in the immediate moment. Thus, an internal mnemonic landscape is crucial to establish both identity and responsibility.

<sup>10</sup> Sara Upstone offers a spatial critique of the novel's domestic politics without damning Rushdie as a misogynist or glorifying him as a feminist. Drawing on Anne McClintock's work, Upstone argues the novel centers on domestic spaces, which both prompt other remembrances and resist the smooth incorporation into a national allegory advocated by colonialism. Consequently, Upstone argues that postcolonial representations turn away from the metaphorical toward a (magical-realist) literalization.

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<sup>11</sup> “It was also an economic proposition which would put young Bengali leaving the portals of a school or college at serious disadvantage in comparison with his counterpart in West Pakistan” (Ayooob and Subrahmanyam 31).

<sup>12</sup> Sukhbir Choudhar’s *Indo-Pak War and Big Powers* reads as a screed rather than history but evinces the strong anti-US and China sentiment among Indian diplomats. Choudhar characterizes West Pakistan’s leadership as a military *junta*, China’s cultural revolution as Han chauvinism using the same repressive measures as their Pakistani allies, and comically, cites an editorial that derides Henry Kissinger as Dr. Strangelove. He also praises Indira Gandhi’s decisiveness and unflinching Soviet support. Choudhar’s work caricatures history without intending to.

<sup>13</sup> Jameson articulates his thesis on "third-world literature" in “Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism.” The dictum "Always historicize!" opens *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*.

<sup>14</sup> Paul Fussell’s *The Great War and Modern Memory* offers a brilliant account of the First World War’s cultural affects on Britain. He says nothing of the colonies or colonial soldiers.

<sup>15</sup> Patrick Colm Hogan’s “Midnight’s Children: Kashmir and the Politics of Identity” offers a rare account of these early chapters in Kashmir, reading Tai the boatman as a representative of Kashmiri traditions and customs while Aadam figures the transition to new modes of identity that both bind and rend the new nation. So far, Salman Rushdie’s best aesthetic negotiation of the Kashmir conflict is *Shalimar the Clown* (2002).

<sup>16</sup> Subramanian Shankar places two poles of postcolonialism, vernacular and transnational, along a continuum. The key entailment of this model reorients a theoretical practice in which “the point of departure for analysis is the global, in whose context the local and the traditional, if present, must be understood.” Consequently, “any idea of the local and traditional as a point of departure

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for understanding the global” is “unthinkable” (84). Shankar’s model, on the other hand, insists that the vernacular can explicate the transnational.

## Chapter 2

<sup>17</sup> “International community” here signifies more than NATO or Security Council powers, which are the usual referent of this term. This essay investigates those Western powers—US, France, Belgium—as well as the role of Egypt and South Africa in weapons trafficking.

<sup>18</sup> Philip Gourevitch takes it up in part three of his book. David Reiff argues that the humanitarian response obfuscated the conflict’s politics and the especially the United States’ deliberate stall strategies.

Fiona Terry’s *Condemned to Repeat?* puts this disaster in the context of a history of militarized refugee camps. Terry also offers a detailed analysis of the weapons purchased, shipped, and circulated through the refugee camps in Zaire.

<sup>19</sup> Gourevitch’s formulation recalls Thomas L. Haskell’s canonical two-part essay “Capitalism and the Origins of Humanitarianism,” in which Haskell argues that humanitarianism depends on recipes, understood as a series of routine steps one can take to alleviate the pain of the starving stranger. These recipes are functional actions that lead causally from A to E. For Haskell, the spread and increasing ordinariness of global market transactions—buying tea from the colonies, for example—provides the ground for perceiving the causation necessary for humanitarianism, as well as the concrete mechanisms by which my simple action (e.g., a donation) will help the one suffering far away.

Although I do not use Haskell’s language in this chapter, I both endorse and apply his insight by following the material transactions already in place between the international community and Rwanda.

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<sup>20</sup> Uvimana's final affirmations mesh well with his profession as a history teacher. His pupils in Djibouti never believed Rwanda's beauty because "the word Rwanda evokes only blood and endless killings for everyone" (141). Even his girlfriend "had the same old stereotypes in her head: two ethnic groups who've hated each other since time immemorial" (65). Both Uvimana and the novel seek to redress these misconceptions held by the international community, from Djibouti to Paris to Washington. Michel Serumundo, the novel's opening focalizer, laments, "Even Africans would say, during half-time of [the World Cup] match[es], 'They're embarrassing us, they should stop killing each other like that.' Then they'll go on to something else" (9-10). The novel's critique of African nations advances beyond the Eurocentrism of other perspectives. This essay augments this critique by noting that Egypt, Uganda, and South Africa also overinvested in Rwanda by supplying arms.

<sup>21</sup> The French military built a volleyball court atop a mass grave.

<sup>22</sup> Joseph Slaughter argues that the "figurative act of human rights incorporation"—"how contemporary human rights law images and produces the human rights person"—"fulfills itself when the incorporated person acquires human rights literacy: the capacity to read itself and others as human rights persons, as creatures of dignity and bearers of international rights and responsibilities" (24-25). I would only add that such literacy and the resulting writing often doubles as a pedagogical practice that reminds others of violence that interrupts incorporation.

<sup>23</sup> In her article, "Writing on Bones: Commemorating Genocide in Boubacar Boris Diop's *Murambi*," Nicki Hitchcott pays sensitive attention to the problem of representing genocide. However, Hitchcott repeats the narrative of global indifference only to review French military and political backing of Hutu Power a paragraph later.

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<sup>24</sup> Bret Benjamin offers a rich account of the World Bank's role in subsidizing development narratives. On its turn to literary representational strategies, Benjamin summarizes: "The Banking bildungsroman announces itself as consistent with, in fact constitutive of, the development of the ethically refined, socially conscious, liberal, global citizen—a citizen who is figured by a character from the Global South but who is more likely embodied by the consenting, consuming subject in the overdeveloped North" (163).

<sup>25</sup> Barnett writes a more comprehensive history in his book *Eyewitness to a Genocide: The United Nations and Rwanda*. However, his article offers a potent summary of the main argument and a deeper insight into his own role and thinking during those debates at the Security Council. Barnett's article appears in 1997, only a few years after the genocide and a solid five years before his book. The article reads as a rawer response, complete with some accounting errors.

<sup>26</sup> Such indifference relies on a "secular theodicy" that invokes the transcendental good of a given organization—the nation state or the UN. This bureaucratic faith believes in the "principle of the elect as an exclusive community, whose member individuals' sins cannot undermine the perfection of the ideal they all share" (Herzfeld 10). Barnett believes the Security Council debates evinced such secular theodicy when member states argued for the best interests of the UN as an ethical demand that, however unfortunately trumped Rwandan lives.

<sup>27</sup> Barnett refers to New Zealand and Czechoslovakia as "'the conscience of the council' in both derision and admiration" for their support of military intervention to stop the genocide but failure to offer any troops for the mission. A tragic joke circulates: "the international community seemed willing to fight down to the last US citizen" (572).

<sup>28</sup> In the final chapter of his book, Barnett both extends and qualifies this argument. While he continues to scold the Secretariat and the DPKO for failing to pass on relevant information,

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Barnett also argues that the UN narrated Rwanda as a civil war and read all incoming data in that framework. Dallaire's cables never reached the Security Council partly because they were taken as evidence of an ongoing civil war, complete with arms caches and violence. Moreover, Barnett argues that the US "could not have predicted the genocide" while conceding that both Belgium and France "knew more than they revealed at the time" (161).

<sup>29</sup> Alison Des Forges's definitive history verifies Dallaire's claims. "Belgium, the U.S., France, and Germany all had good sources of information within the Rwandan community and frequently consulted with each other, even though there was little formal interchange among their military intelligence services" or UNAMIR, which was not mandated to gather its own intelligence (113).

<sup>30</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Arming Rwanda - The Arms Trade and Human Rights Abuses in the Rwandan War*, 1 January 1994, A601, available at:

<http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/3ae6a7fc8.html> [accessed 19 June 2012].

This report also accounts for weapons shipments directly from France in response to the 1990 RPF invasion. Rwanda imported arms from South Africa including "a wide range of light arms, machine guns and ammunition." Although some of these weapons spread to the RPF from captured government forces, the former were supplied through Uganda.

<sup>31</sup> Dallaire also negotiates the colonial attitudes of the Belgian troops whose racism belongs neither to a historical past nor to fictive imaginings of novels; rather, these attitudes belong to a militant present that sees in Africans a chance for target practice. As the former colonial power in Rwanda, the UN does not want to deploy Belgium troops, but they must because no other nations step forward. The Belgian soldiers come to Rwanda after completing a tour in Somalia, a chapter-seven mission that allowed them to make peace rather than simply keep it.



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Consequently, these troops are “very aggressive,” bragging that they “killed over two hundred Somalis” and “knew how to kick ‘nigger’ ass in Africa” (113). An infuriated Dallaire tells the Belgian commander that he will tolerate no “racist sentiments, colonial attitudes, [and] unnecessary aggression” (113). But these attitudes persist and infiltrate the mission’s already bare logistical capabilities.

Dallaire assigns the Belgian troops to secure the airport—a key link in a landlocked country—and needs them to “live out of camp garrisons” (120). Although he already provided guidelines that troops come prepared with basic camp stores, the Belgians refuse to live under canvas “as per national policy” (120). Dallaire learns of a “national Belgian army policy directive” stipulates that Belgian soldiers would never camp under canvas “in Africa.” They must be housed in hard buildings, “not necessarily for the sake of comfort or hygiene but because it was imperative that they maintain a correct presence in front of the Africans” (120-21). The Belgian troops’ colonial baggage leaves no room for camp stores.

<sup>32</sup> Mahmood Mamdani’s brilliant analysis in *When Victims Become Killers* hinges on the construction of alterity. He contends that the genocide’s roots lay in colonial logics that produced various constructions of Hutu and Tutsi. Mamdani understands these as political identities that transformed under Belgian colonialism, which billed “Hutu as *indigenous* Bantu and Tutsi as *alien* Hamities” (16). The Tutsi were no longer ethnic minorities but racial outsiders that helped buffer and enforce colonial rule. Decolonization not only failed to overcome this understanding but rather empowered these identities. Consequently, the genocide pitted native Hutu against settler Tutsi whose armed return to Rwanda, in the form of the RPF, represented the return of foreign domination. This model allows Mamdani to explain, partly, the popular character of the genocide.

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In her essay “Global Humanitarianism, Race, and the Spectacle of the African Corpse in Current Representations of the Rwandan Genocide,” Heike Härting extends Mamdani’s account of racialized power dynamics by acknowledging that such political identities depend on the “management of the colonial subject’s body, gender, and sexuality” (69). Härting reads Guy Courtemanche’s novel *A Sunday at the Pool in Kigali* as a “necropoetic and pornographic narrative” that instrumentalizes brutal scenes of rape to “project a particularly violent but apparently truthful reality of Africa as a place of rampant sexual depravity” (69, 71). In Courtemanche’s dark continent, the rape victim Gentille serves “as both an allegory of the Rwandan nation and the ultimate victim of international indifference and patriarchal opportunism” (70).

<sup>33</sup> Recent French interventions in Libya and Mali have proven Dr. Karekezi wrong, unfortunately. For an excellent analysis of the militant humanitarianism in Libya, see Vijay Prashad’s *Arab Spring, Libyan Winter*.

<sup>34</sup> Sara Guyer’s “Rwanda’s Bones” offers an insightful account of the role smell plays in the narration of memorial visits. She cites *New York Times* reporter Andrew Blum’s experience of an intense odor that “exempted us from the need for imagination. It relieved us of the need for understanding” (cited in Guyer 166). By contrast, Gourevitch does not smell anything and consequently, Guyer argues, “is arrested, rather than informed” by the memorial (169). Guyer elaborates that the contradictions inherent in Rwanda’s memorials produce such seizure, leading to “confusion, despondency and even senselessness” (169). She concedes that such memorials “provide a permanently visible ground for the victims’ claim to power” and can be used to enable political violence; Guyer has in mind the ruling RPF’s misuse of the genocide to exonerate their own crimes and shield themselves from voices critical of their political policies.

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However, by reducing Gourevitch's account of stepping on a skull to "an allegory for the impossibility of good conscience," she misses his anger and the international violence that such memorials may enable (170).

### Chapter 3

<sup>35</sup> Stephanie Jones's "The Politics of Love and History: Asian Women and African Men in East African Literature" applauds Vassanji's text for taking on the "deepest taboo" of sexual relationships between Asian women and African men. Jones reminds us of central place diasporic women play in the reproduction of community, which in turn polices their bodies and relationships so that they remain ideal representatives and transmitters of homogenous (pure) traditions. Such policing, however, cannot be dismissed as internalized colonial logics but as part of conservative "Indian" culture in its diasporic iteration. This is not to dismiss the importance of colonial ideology or its use of the Asian diasporas as a settler class, but to map more vectors of (conservative) determinations and the (racist) agency they produce. Jones goes a step further in her analysis of Vassanji's fiction—among the rare works to address this taboo directly—to indict the diasporic mother as the ultimate policemen. The most sophisticated iteration of this character occurs in *Vikram Lall*, in which the mother both loves Njoroge as her own son and absolutely prohibits her daughter Deepa's relationship with him. Lall's mother deploys a series of contradictory arguments, at once evoking the lovers' childhood friendship—"he's like a brother to you"—ostensible tolerance—"I have nothing against Africans"—and absolute difference—"But we are different" (247-48). Jones is right in all this but strangely omits another piece that would bolster her argument; Lall's mother decries that she too has dreams, having Asian grandchildren she can raise to understand their culture. Vassanji allows her to voice both individual and communal desires, as if no slippage exists, so that she protects the community's

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unity and ensures the transmission of a culture that values community unity, racist or otherwise.

All of this serves as a reminder that the diasporic community's conservatism does not merely ape imperial ideology but represents a dark agency, policing the boundaries of fair skin and its communal homogeneity.

<sup>36</sup> Jones rightly notes that Lall's father's coupling with an African woman points to a more tolerant future even while being entirely "traditional," insofar as the Malaboux—an Asian man and African woman—are already a representative part of the Asian East African genealogy.

<sup>37</sup> Marie Louise Pratt's *Imperial Eyes* remains the canonical text on this subject.

<sup>38</sup> Through her historical research, Savita Nair argues that the East African Indian community claimed belonging *on equal terms* with the British and even saw themselves as rival colonists by dint of their history in the area and their work building its infrastructure. Lall's claims, in contrast, route through a presentism that his forefathers would not have recognized; he belongs in Kenya as a national-citizen while East African Indians in the 1920s, according to Nair, claimed more. They saw themselves on equal footing with the British and drew on their long history of trading in the region as obvious evidence to support their claim. Even Winston Churchill agreed that the Indians were right in these claims. Unfortunately, so did Idi Amin. Amin readily acknowledged the long history of Indian traders, laborers and merchants in East Africa and, like 1924 British district commissioner Campbell, blamed the Indians for ruining the African and stunting native development.

<sup>39</sup> The British described their civilizing mission as a policy of "native paramountcy," which placed the improvement of the natives above all else. The Indian (Asians) were called on to be role models for the Africans and were especially hated for this patronizing role.

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<sup>40</sup> Simatei's essay offers a broad overview of various East African Asian writers and their relation to postcolonial nationalism. He argues convincingly that diaspora and nation state are not oppositional but synthetic terms that coalesce uneasily for those generations of East African Asians born in Africa. Scanning all of Vassanji's novels, Simatei has little time to focus on the particular tensions of *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall*, and offers nothing in the way of a material analysis. Railways, shops and bazaars, for him, symbolize modernity and nation building that, if accepted by new Kenya, have Asians as their chief architects. While this is useful for decentering dominant narratives of the nation, it does little to explain the chief conceit of Lall's narrative; his facilitation of il/legal development by financial alchemy while claiming to be aiding the national project.

<sup>41</sup> Siundu, Godwin. "Locating Cultural Ambivalence and Afropolitanism: Nairobi and Dar-es-Salaam as Heterotopia in the Fiction of Dawood and Vassanji," 259-80.

<sup>42</sup> For Ojwang the *Thousand and One Nights* represents the ur-text of encountering exotic Africans. Ojwang discuss the text in relation to the Indian Ocean trade in African slaves.

<sup>43</sup> For more on the conflation between the Mau Mau resistance and Kikuyu nationalism, see Bethwell Ogot's article "Mau Mau and Nationhood: The Untold Story," in *Mau Mau & Nationhood: Arms, Authority and Narration*.

<sup>44</sup> When Seema, Lall's Canadian lover, accuses him of using the same complacent logic as the Rwanda genocidaires, Lall admits to trafficking weapons. He argues that he also sent money to a girl from a massacred village so that she may attend school. Lall recognizes the absurdity of equating those two actions: gun running and meager education aid. As I argued in chapter 2, however, these two actions—war mongering and humanitarianism—continually clash to produce

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indifference. But the weapons are merely capital in the form of “certain metal goods,” abstracted from their functions as agents of death.

<sup>45</sup> David A. Perocx's "Mau Mau & the Arming of the State" offers a detailed history of British efforts to arm and re-arm Kenya. These efforts include supplying Kenyatta's early independence regime "in the hope that Kenya would remain in the Western sphere of influence, in line with Britain's vital interests."

#### **Chapter 4**

<sup>46</sup> Glancing at an Indian newspaper will provide daily testimonies to caste-based violence.

<sup>47</sup> Elizabeth Hewitt offered this analysis during a lecture at the Frei Universität in Berlin on June 20th, 2013. I have included the full essay from which her talk drew in the works cited page.

<sup>48</sup> I have chosen to cite the open access version of *The Annihilation of Caste* in solidarity with the boycott against Navayana/ Verso India who republished this work with an introduction by Arundathi Roy, a non-Dalit writer. Like the choice of Roy for the author of the introduction, the book cover features a silhouette of Ambedkar *inside* a much larger silhouette of Gandhi. Some are using the former to "revaluate" the latter, which only repeats the very subservience Ambedkar fought. One does not need to rethink caste as Gandhi attempted but to annihilate it entirely.

<sup>49</sup> I cannot recap the full breadth of the debate between Ambedkar and Gandhi nor the thorough annihilation of the latter by the former.

<sup>50</sup> Such transnational flows also remind the reader of "the conditions of production and distribution of the novel, a Booker Prize-winning work in Indian English, to a worldwide audience" (Joseph 81). To my mind, this reading of the novel's attention to multinational capital contradicts the more banal critiques of "Adiga's staging of a Dark India as a new-fangled object

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of exoticist discourses" (Mendes 276). The latter can only frame caste as the subject of an orientalist fantasy rather than a living problem. Moreover, the attention to international flows refutes one critic's argument that the novel "cuts India off from the larger international world and its values, placing it in a kind of moral quarantine" (Goh 337).

<sup>51</sup> For a reading of Halwai's violence as Fanonian, see Sara D. Schotland's "Breaking Out of the Rooster Coop: Violent Crime in Aravind Adiga's *White Tiger* and Richard Wright's *Native Son*."

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**ABSTRACT****ANNIHILATION AND ACCUMULATION: POSTCOLONIAL NARRATIVES ON  
GENOCIDE AND CAPITAL**

by

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The emergence of South-South relations in politics and economics refracts strangely through the literature produced in these postcolonial regions. Two primary worldviews emerge in these texts. The first focuses on the continued presence of imperial powers in the South and their culpability in eruptions of violence. The second shifts to modes of domination emerging within South-South interactions. Salman Rushdie's canonical *Midnight's Children* examines the Bangladeshi genocide through a variety of literary strategies, especially hyperbole, to produce a crisis of history that indicts the Cold War arms trade on equal terms with a war criminal. Similarly, Boubacar Boris Diop's novel *Murambi, The Book of Bones* helps contextualize the Rwandan genocide within the circuits of international attention—weapons supplies, political support and humanitarian aid—that put the lie to the world's supposed "indifference." On the contrary, *Murambi's* fragmented and polyvocal form evinces the multiple and contradictory investments Rwandans suffered through. East Africa is also home to a South Asian diaspora that arrived before the European powers and now advance India's exponential trade relations with

Africa. M.G Vassanji's *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* caricatures one of these "Asian Shylocks" to critique the diaspora's class politics and, simultaneously, the racism and xenophobia that led to their 1969 mass deportation from Uganda by Idi Amin. Vassanji's focalizer weaponizes capital accumulation to claim that it protects against such racism, even if it confirms racist caricatures. This argument is not unlike that made by emergent economies from the postcolonial South, which have turned to neoliberal developmental policies to guarantee their independence. Despite the unsustainability of such policies, both Vassanji's novel and Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* take seriously capitalism's ability to nullify old hierarchies even while building new ones. Adiga's focalizer breaks free of his place in the caste system on the strength of capitalism's ability to profane this sacred hierarchy. Such anticaste politics challenge the category of 'radical politics' as espoused by anticapitalists and adherents of Gandhi, who fought feverishly for the preservation of caste. Taken together, these two novels represent emergent Southern businessmen who fight local antagonisms through international capital, producing a complicated situation that helps us understand the allure of accumulation in emergent economies and its impact on South-South relationships.

**AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT**

“I am the sum total of everything that went before me, of all I have been seen done, of everything done-to-me. I am everyone everything whose being-in-the-world affected was affected by mine. I am anything that happens after I'm gone which would not have happened if I had not come.” — Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*

Shashi Thandra practices martial arts and hopes to teach a new generation of peaceful warriors.