Dead Certainty: Ethnic Violence in the Era of Globalization

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the links between globalization and ethnic violence in comparative perspective. By looking at ethnographic material from Central Africa, Europe, India and China, the paper suggests that bodily violence between social intimates may be viewed as a form of vivisection, and as an effort to resolve unacceptable levels of uncertainty through bodily deconstruction. This approach may cast light on the surplus of rage displayed in many recent episodes of inter-group violence. At the same time, the study suggests that the conditions for such extreme and intimate violence may partly lie in the deformation of national and local spaces of everyday life by the physical and moral pressures of globalization.

Under what conditions is group violence between previous social intimates associated with certain forms of uncertainty regarding ethnic identity?[1] In one widely shared perspective, ethnic violence, as a form of collective violence, is partly a product of propaganda, rumour, prejudice, and memory — all forms of knowledge and all usually associated with heightened conviction, conviction capable of producing inhumane degrees of violence. However, there is an alternative approach to ethnic violence, with roots traceable to Durkheim's (1951) work on anomie and Simmel's (1950) ideas about the stranger. This tradition of thinking — which focuses on doubt, uncertainty, and indeterminacy — has surfaced recently in many different ways. It animates the ongoing work of Zygmunt Bauman (1997) on the roles of the stranger, the consumer, the parvenu, and the vagabond as social archetypes of the postmodern world. It appears, too, in the work of Piotr Hoffman (1986, 1989) on doubt, time, and violence. Julia Kristeva's (1991) work on strangers, a philosophical reflection clearly prompted by the renewed fear of xenophobia in France, belongs to this tradition. This line of thought has also been invoked, at least implicitly, in several recent anthropological works on

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1. In sketching an approach to this question, I build on an argument against primordialism developed in previous work (Appadurai, 1996) and lay the foundations for a larger study of ethnic violence currently in progress.

ethnic violence. These works have in common the sound intuition that, given the growing multiplicity, contingency, and apparent fungibility of the identities available to persons in the contemporary world, there is a growing sense of radical social uncertainty about people, situations, events, norms, and even cosmologies.

Some of these works discuss the politics of the body in such a world of uncertainty. In others, there is a recognition that what is new about these uncertainties has something to do with the forces of globalization — weakened states, refugees, economic deregulation, and systematic new forms of pauperization and criminalization. This latter connection is especially suggestively made in Bauman (1997). Yet, to my knowledge, no single work has sought to explore the precise ways in which the ethnic body can be a theatre for the engagement of uncertainty under the special circumstances of globalization. This link is an important preoccupation of the essay that follows.

Significant steps to engage these challenges are found in a growing body of work on ethnic violence by anthropologists (Daniel, 1996; Das, 1990, 1995; Desjarlais and Kleinman, 1994; Devisch, 1995; Hayden, 1996; Herzfeld, 1997; Jeganathan, 1997; Malkki, 1995; Nordstrom, 1997; Tambiah, 1996). Part of what emerges from this work is a consensus that the ethnic labels and categories involved in contemporary ethnic violence are frequently products of recent state policies and techniques, such as censuses, partitions, and constitutions. Labels such as 'Yugoslav', 'Sikh', 'Kurd', and 'Muslim', which appear to be the same as long-standing ethnic names and terms, are frequently transformations of existing names and terms to serve substantially new frameworks of identity, entitlement, and spatial sovereignty.

Given the high-level mobilization of such names and terms, three consequences follow. First, given the increasingly porous borders between nation-states in matters of arms, refugees, trade, and mass media,[2] these ethnic names and terms become highly susceptible to transnational perturbation. Second, where local identities and identifications often were far more important than higher-order names and terms, modern state-level forces tend to generate large-scale identities (such as Latino, Scheduled Caste, and Serb), which become significant imagined affiliations for large numbers of persons, many of whom reside across large social, spatial, and political divides. Third, and by extension, the angers, frustrations, and

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2. Virtually all borders, however rigidly policed, are porous to some extent. I am not suggesting that all borders are equally porous or that all groups can cross particular borders at will. The image of a borderless world is far from what I wish to evoke. Rather, I wish to suggest that borders are increasingly sites of contestation between states and various kinds of non-state actors and interests and that it is only in respect to some populations, commodities, and ideologies that states succeed in maintaining tight borders. Further, the movement of ethnic populations across national borders, whether in flight or not, is frequently a factor in intranational ethnic conflict.

quarrels of small (face-to-face) communities and larger megaethnic group-ings tend to affect each other directly and explosively, so that certain communities, in Robert Hayden's provocative phrase, become unimaginable (1996: 783).

Since the subject of ethnic violence is large and horrifying in its range and variety, this article confines itself to violence involving neighbours, friends, and kinsmen — persons and groups who have some degree of prior social familiarity. Thus the organized violence of police, armed hoodlums, profes-sional torturers and investigators, and paid ethnic militias is not discussed here, except as it directly informs the problem of violence between socially proximate persons.[3] Also, rather than focus on all forms of violent confronta-tion, the discussion will concentrate on those associated with appalling physical brutality and indignity — involving mutilation, cannibalism, rape, sexual abuse, and violence against civilian spaces and populations. Put simply, the focus here is on bodily brutality perpetrated by ordinary persons against other persons with whom they may have — or could have — previously lived in relative amity.

This focus allows an examination of limiting conditions and extreme cases for testing the idea of uncertainty as a key factor in severe ethnic violence. Focusing on bodily violence between actors with routine — and generally benign — prior knowledge of one another is also a way to illuminate 'threshold' or trigger conditions, where managed or endemic social conflict gives way to runaway violence.

Although transregional contacts and transnational processes have ante-cedents and anticipations over centuries (Abu-Lughod, 1993; Wallerstein, 1974) in the form of what we refer to as world-systems, there is a widely shared sense that there is something new about these processes and systems in the last few decades. The word globalization (both as a socioeconomic formation and as a term of folk ideology in journalism and in the corporate world) marks a set of transitions in the global political economy since the 1970s, in which multinational forms of capitalist organization began to be replaced by trans-national (Rouse, 1995), flexible (Harvey, 1989), and irregular (Lash and Urry, 1987, 1994) forms of organization, as labour, finance, technology, and technological capital began to be assembled in ways that treated national boundaries as mere constraints or fictions. In contrast with the multinational corporations of the middle of the century which sought to transcend national boundaries while working within existing national frameworks of law, commerce, and sovereignty, the transnational corporations of the last three

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3. However, I do not wish to imply that these different forms and registers of violence are analytically or empirically insulated from one another. Indeed, Claudio Lomnitz (personal communication) has suggested various ways in which the vivisectionist violence between intimates and the banalized violence of professional torturers (especially in Latin America) may be linked through the politics of identity and the state, and thus of globalization. I hope to pursue these suggestions in future work on this subject.

decades have increasingly begun to produce recombinant arrangements of labour, capital, and technical expertise which produce new forms of law, management, and distribution. In both phases global capital and national states have sought to exploit each other, but in the most recent decades it is possible to see a secular decline in the sovereignty of national states in respect to the workings of global capital. These changes — with accompanying changes in law, accounting, patenting, and other administrative technologies — have created 'new markets for loyalty' (Price, 1994) and called existing models of territorial sovereignty into question (Sassen, 1996).

It is not difficult to see that the speed and intensity with which both material and ideological elements now circulate across national boundaries have created a new order of uncertainty in social life. Whatever may characterize this new kind of uncertainty, it does not easily fit the dominant, Weberian prophecy about modernity in which earlier, intimate social forms would dissolve, to be replaced by highly regimented bureaucratic-legal orders, governed by the growth of procedure and predictability. The links between these forms of uncertainty — one diacritic of the era of globalization — and the world-wide intensification in ethnocidal violence inform this essay and are explicitly addressed in its conclusion.[4]

The forms of such uncertainty are certainly various. One kind of uncertainty is a direct reflection of census concerns: how many persons of this or that sort really exist in a given territory? Or, in the context of rapid migration or refugee movement, how many of 'them' are there now among 'us'?[5] Another kind of uncertainty is about what some of these megaidentities really mean: what are the normative characteristics of what the Constitution defines as a member of an OBC (Other Backward Caste) in India? A further uncertainty is about whether a particular person really is what they claim or appear to be or have historically been. Finally, these various forms of uncertainty create intolerable anxiety about the relationship of many individuals to state-provided goods — ranging from housing and health to

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4. It is difficult to make plausible quantitative claims about changes in the incidence of ethnic violence over long periods of time. There is some evidence that intrastate conflict (including ethnic violence) is more frequent today than interstate conflict. It appears that there is a secular increase in extreme forms of bodily violence between ethnic groups, even though many societies are remarkable for their striking degree of ethnic harmony and social order generally. There is no doubt that the amplification of our impressions of ethnic violence through the mass media creates the inherent risk of exaggerating the global occurrence of extreme violence.

5. For a suggestive discussion of the widespread uncertainty concerning the identities of persons, social categories, villages, and even about the link between religion and nationhood during the process of partition in 1947, I am indebted to a draft paper by Gyanendra Pandey, 'Can a Muslim Be an Indian?' delivered at the University of Chicago in April 1997. A similar kind of uncertainty, produced by late colonial and postcolonial politics, is remarked by Quadri Ismail (1995) with respect to Sri Lankan Muslim self-understandings of identity.

safety and sanitation — since these entitlements are frequently directly tied to who 'you' are, and thus to who 'they' are. Each kind of uncertainty gains increasing force whenever there are large-scale movements of persons (for whatever reason), when new rewards or risks attach to large-scale ethnic identities, or when existing networks of social knowledge are eroded by rumour, terror, or social movement. Where one or more of these forms of social uncertainty come into play, violence can create a macabre form of certainty and can become a brutal technique (or folk discovery-procedure) about 'them' and, therefore, about 'us'. This conjecture might make special sense in the era of globalization.

The first step toward such an understanding must be the most obvious and striking feature of such violence, which is its site and target — the body. Even a quick scan of the extensive literature suggests that the human body is the site of the most horrifying acts of ethnic violence. It might seem banal to say that the body is the site of the worst possible infliction of pain, terror, indignity, and suffering, in comparison with property or other resources. Yet it is clear that the violence inflicted on the human body in ethnic contexts is never entirely random or lacking in cultural form. Wherever the testimony is sufficiently graphic (Das, 1990; Feldman, 1991; Malkki, 1995; Sutton, 1995), it becomes clear that even the worst acts of degradation — involving faeces, urine, body parts; beheading, impaling, gutting, sawing; raping, burning, hanging, and suffocating — have macabre forms of cultural design and violent predictability.

The single most forceful anthropological account of such design is Liisa Malkki's 1995 description of the memories of Hutu refugees in Tanzania in the 1980s of the genocidal violence perpetrated against them principally in the early 1970s in Burundi. This study, which brings together themes of exile, morality, memory, space, and nationalism in its effort to interpret genocidal violence, has many points of convergence with the principal arguments made here, but just two issues raised by Malkki directly concern me: the forms of bodily violence and the relationship of purity to identity.

Built around partially standardized accounts (mythico-histories) by Hutu refugees in Tanzania of the ethnocidal violence they experienced in Burundi since the 1960s, but especially in the bloodbath of 1972 directed against the Hutu majority, Malkki shows how questions of identification and knowledge of the ethnic body lay at the heart of the atrocious violence of this moment. Discussing a detailed response to her question of 'how it could be possible to know a person's identity with certainty enough to kill', Malkki shows how earlier colonial efforts to reduce the complex social differences among local ethnic groups to a simple taxonomy of racial-physical signs had come to be elaborated in the 1970s and 1980s. These 'necrographic' maps were the basis for detailed, technical recollections of the ways in which death was administered to victims in specific, humiliating, and drawn-out ways. Malkki (following Feldman, 1991) suggests that these maps of bodily difference are themselves delicately poised between acquired knowledge and techniques of

detection. These maps 'help construct and imagine ethnic difference', and 'through violence, bodies of individual persons become metamorphosed into specimens of the ethnic category for which they are supposed to stand' (Malkki, 1995: 88). A slightly different approach to the relationship between 'bodies', 'persons', and 'identities' appears in this essay.

In the account that Malkki presents of the mythico-historical presentation of how Tutsi killers used shared maps of physical differences to identify Hutu, it is clear that the process is racked with instability and uncertainty (even in survivors' views of the uncertainty faced by their killers), so that multiple physical tests have to be applied. Malkki offers a bold interpretation of the specific ways in which Hutu men and women were killed (often with sharp bamboo sticks, using the grid of vagina, anus, and head; often removing fetuses from pregnant women intact and forcing the mother to eat the fetus, and so on). She concludes that these recollected practices, played out on the necrographic maps of the Hutu ethnic body 'seem to have operated through certain routinized symbolic schemes of nightmarish cruelty' (ibid: 92).

It remains to draw out the link between the mapped body of the ethnic other and the peculiar and specific brutalities associated with ethnic murder. While much of Malkki's analysis strikes me as deeply persuasive, what is vital for the present argument is the link between indeterminacy and brutality in the negotiations over the ethnic body.[6] Although it is difficult to be sure (especially for an analyst who is one step away from Malkki's firsthand exposure to these narratives), there is enough evidence to suggest that we are looking here at a complex variation of Mary Douglas's classic arguments about 'purity and danger' (1966) and about the body as a symbolic map of the cosmos (1973). In her classic argument about 'matter out of place' (which Malkki also discusses), Mary Douglas made a symbolic-structural link between categorical mixture, the cognitive anxiety it provokes, and the resultant abhorrence of taxonomic hybridity in all sorts of social and moral worlds. In subsequent work on body symbolism, Douglas showed how and why the body works to compress and perform wider cosmological under-standings about social categories and classifications. Several recent analysts

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6. This is the appropriate point at which to acknowledge the pathbreaking contribution of Allen Feldman's study of ethnoreligious violence in Ireland (1991). Most subsequent anthropological studies of violence, including several that I cite here, are in his debt. His brilliant examination of the logic of space, torture, fear and narrative in Northern Ireland brings a radical Foucauldian perspective to bear on a series of searing ethnographic observations of militarized ethnic terror. The ways in which Feldman's arguments set the stage for my own are many: they include his observations about interrogation as a ceremony of verification (Feldman, 1991: 115), torture as a technique for the production of power out of the body of the victim (ibid), the medicalization involved in interrogation (ibid: 122–3), and the role of the corpse, or 'stiff', to mark the transfer of larger spatial maps onto the map of the enemy body (ibid: 73). My effort is to shift the focus away from state-sponsored violence to its 'ordinary' forms and agents and to elaborate the links between clarification and purification.

of ethnic violence have made useful recourse to Mary Douglas's ideas about purity and category-mixture (Hayden, 1996; Herzfeld, 1992, 1997) in addressing issues of ethnic cleansing in Europe.

The argument here owes a direct debt to Douglas, but some distinctions are worth making. While Douglas takes a cosmology (a system of categorical distinctions) as culturally given, thus leading to taboos against 'matter out of place', ethnic violence introduces contingency into this logic, for the situations discussed here are explicitly about cosmologies in flux, categories under stress, and ideas striving for the logic of self-evidence. What is more, the sort of evidence presented by Malkki (and supported by similar accounts from Ireland, India, and Eastern Europe) suggests an inversion of the logic of indeterminacy, category-mixture, and danger identified by Douglas. In Malkki's evidence, for example, the body is both a source and a target of violence. The categorical uncertainty about Hutu and Tutsi is played out not in the security of the 'body maps' shared by both sides but by the instability of the signs of bodily difference: not all Tutsis are tall; not all Hutu have red gums; not all noses help identify Tutsi, nor do all modes of walking help identify Hutu.

In a word, real bodies in history betray the very cosmologies they are meant to encode. So the ethnic body, both of victim and of killer, is itself potentially deceptive. Far from providing the map for a secure cosmology, a compass from which mixture, indeterminacy, and danger may be discovered, the ethnic body turns out to be itself unstable and deceptive. It is this reversal of Douglas's cosmologic that might best explain macabre patterns of violence directed against the body of the ethnic other. The peculiar formality — the specific preoccupation with particular body parts — is an effort to stabilize the body of the ethnic other; to eliminate the flux introduced by somatic variation, by mixture and intermarriage; and to evict the possibility of further somatic change or slippage. It is difficult to be sure whether such a shift in the role of the body in ethnic violence is a qualitatively new feature either of modernity or of the most recent decades of globalization or simply an intensification of earlier tendencies. I shall return to this interpretive challenge later.

This sort of brutality belongs to the theatre of divination, sorcery, and witchcraft. It literally turns a body inside out and finds the proof of its betrayal, its deceptions, its definitive otherness, in a sort of premortem autopsy (see also Feldman, 1991: 110–15), which, rather than achieving death because of prior uncertainty, achieves categorical certainty through death and dismemberment. In Peter Geschiere's recent and magisterial analysis of witchcraft in West Africa (1997), with special reference to regional variation in Cameroon, we are presented with a powerful reminder that witchcraft and sorcery, far from being static cultural forms, are elastic and highly flexible moral discourses for bringing to 'account' new forms of wealth, inequality, and power. They both feed and are fed by news of national politics, global flows of commodities, and rumours of illegitimate flows of people and goods. Flourishing in an atmosphere of rumour,

deception, and uncertainty, these discourses place large-scale political and economic uncertainties onto maps of kinship and its local discourses of equity and morality. Among the Maka of Cameroon, witchcraft is focused on the frightening figure of the *djambe*, a small creature that occupies the body of the victim and drives him or her to sacrifice their kin, to participate in nocturnal anthropophagic banquets, and thus to 'introduce treason into the most reliable space in Maka society' (Geschiere, 1997: 40), the space of kinship and the household. We shall return to the themes of treason, cannibalism, and morality shortly. For the moment, though this is not Geschiere's principal concern, let us note that the many variations on witchcraft and sorcery studied by anthropologists in sub-Saharan Africa, going back to Evans-Pritchard's classic study (1937) of these matters among the Azande, the sources of witchcraft and sorcery often involve forces and creatures embedded inside the body of the victim/perpetrator, and the establishment of guilt and accountability often involve techniques of bodily investigation, whether of other animals or of humans. Finally, Geschiere is able to show that witchcraft links the world of kinship to the world of ethnicity and politics in Cameroon and is held responsible for the new found wealth and potential power of large ethnic groups. This extension of an idiom of intimacy gone awry to large-scale suspicion of adversarial ethnic groups is a matter that will be re-engaged shortly.

For now, it is sufficient to note that the macabre regularities and predictabilities of ethnocidal violence cannot be taken as simple evidence of 'calculation' or as blind reflexes of 'culture'.[7] Rather, they are brutal forms of bodily discovery — forms of vivisection; emergent techniques for exploring, marking, classifying, and storing the bodies of those who may be the 'ethnic' enemy. Naturally, these brutal actions do not create any real or sustainable sense of secure knowledge. Rather, they exacerbate the frustration of the perpetrators. Worse, they create the conditions for pre-emptive violence among those who fear being victims. This cycle of actual violence and the expectation of violence finds its fuel in certain spatial conditions of information flow, human traffic, and state intervention.

Anthropology has long known about the ways in which the body is a theatre for social performances and productions (Bourdieu, 1977; Comaroff,

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7. This may be the place to note the peculiar relationship between spontaneity and calculation in collective ethnic violence. The emphasis in this essay on uncertainty and vivisection may cast new light on this difficult problem. Existing approaches tend to encounter a missing link between the planned (generally politically motivated) forces behind ethnic violence and the undeniable element of spontaneity. The approach taken here suggests that, at least under certain conditions, the vivisectionist response to uncertainty may mimic modern scientific modes of verification just as the planned aspects of ethnic violence may mimic other legitimate modes of politics that stress procedure, technique, and form. There may thus be an inner affinity between spontaneity and calculation in modern ethnic violence which requires further explanation (cf. Tambiah, 1996).

1985; Douglas, 1966; van Gennep, 1965; Martin, 1992; Mauss, 1973). Combining Malkki's material on ethnic violence in Burundi with Geschiere's study of witchcraft in Cameroon, against the backdrop of Douglas's path-breaking work on category confusion, power, and taboo, allows us to see that the killing, torture, and rape associated with ethnocidal violence is not simply a matter of eliminating the ethnic other. It involves the use of the body to establish the parameters of this otherness, taking the body apart, so to speak, to divine the enemy within. In this sense, the fruitful studies of witchcraft logics in Africa might have much wider interpretive salience.

The role of the body as a site of violent closure in situations of categorical uncertainty is closely allied with a theme that has already been touched upon, the theme of deception. The literature on ethnocidal violence is shot through with the related tropes of deception, treachery, betrayal, imposture, and secrecy. Considerable sustenance for this view of the suspicion, uncertainty, and cognitive paranoia about the identity of the ethnic enemy comes from a variety of sources. Benedict Anderson has shown the salience of the Nazi fear about the 'secret agency' of Jews in Germany, and the desperate deployment of all sorts of means to smoke out the 'real' Jews, many of whom seemed 'Aryan' and 'German' in every regard (Anderson, 1991). The murder of Jews under Hitler constitutes a large area of research and of ongoing debate that exceeds the scope of this essay, but the importance of Nazi ideas of racial purity (Aryan-Germanness) for the extraordinary genocidal violence directed against Jews seems beyond debate.

The idea of Jews as 'pretenders' — as ethnic quislings, as a cancer within the German social body — draws our attention to a crucial way in which the Nazi handling of the Jewish body far exceeds the logic of scapegoating, stereotyping, and the like. What it shows is how those needs, under certain conditions, evolve into policies for mass extermination of the ethnic other. This brutally modern fact, which is the peculiarly horrifying feature of the Holocaust (associated with its totality, its bureaucratization, its 'banality', its goal of complete ethnonational purification) is certainly complicated by the special history of European anti-Semitism.[8] However, in its drive for

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8. There is a vast literature about the relationship between German nationalism, Jewish identity, and the dynamics of the Holocaust. Some of this literature, including some work produced by the Frankfurt School, recognizes the relationship between modernity, irrationality, and the fear of international cosmopolitanism represented by Nazi anti-Semitism. It is also apparent that the banalization and mechanization of death in Nazi Germany had much to do with the Jewish body as a site of fear about abstract forms of capital and identity. The recent debates surrounding Daniel Goldhagen's study (1996) of the involvement of ordinary Germans in the extermination of Jews in Nazi Germany have reopened many of these questions. The scope of this literature makes it impossible to take it up intensively here. Suffice it to say that Nazi policies toward Jews raise issues about both purity and clarity in ethnonational projects, which are closely connected to the argument of this essay.

purity through ethnocide and its 'medicalization of anti-semitism' (Proctor, 1995: 172) it sets the stage for the ethnic cleansing of, at least, Eastern Europe, Rwanda-Burundi, and Cambodia in the last two decades, the era of globalization. In the case of Nazi racial ideology, the idea of the Jew as secret agent brings together the ambivalence of German Nazis about race, religion, and economy. Jews were the perfect sites for the exploration of Nazi uncertainty about both Christianity and capitalism. Like the Hutu for the Tutsi, the Jews were 'the enemies within', always potential threats to German national-racial purity, secret agents of racial corruption, of international capital (and, paradoxically, of communism).

As Malkki shows, the theme of secrecy and trickery pervaded Hutu ideas about the Tutsi élite that governed Rwanda. Here seen from the vantage point of the victims, their oppressors appear as 'thieves who stole the country from the indigenous Hutu', as innately skilled in the arts of deception (Malkki, 1995: 68). The Hutu were seen as foreigners who hid their origins, as malign tricksters who were 'hiding their true identity' (ibid: 72).

The trope of deception, fake identity, and betrayal finds further support in the context of the violence perpetrated in North India since the 1980s in struggles between Hindus and Sikhs, articulated eventually in powerful demands for an autonomous Sikh state (Khalistan). In the discourse of Sikh militants in India, Veena Das (1995) has shown the importance of concern with 'counterfeit' claims to Sikh identity, even where such claims pertained to identities that were not the most legitimate forms of Sikhness. In a chapter on Sikh militant discourse, Das shows how, in the key years of the early 1980s, a Sikh militant discourse emerged in the Punjab which identified the state with Hinduism and Hindus with a dangerous effeminacy that threatened the community of Sikhs conceived as male. This discourse selectively identified key events in the Sikh past and present so as to play down the crucial tensions between Sikhs and Muslims in favour of the current opposition between Sikhs and Hindus. Das has much to say about history and memory, speech and violence, gender and the state, but her crucial concern is with the ways in which militant discourse both represents and induces the possibility of violence through its graphic mobilization of sexual, personal, and political images and narratives and exhortations. In many ways, Das shows how the public speeches of Sikh militants, such as Sant Bhindranwale, transform the experience of individuals into the shame of the community, and thus all violence committed in the name of the Sikhs is justified as individual action against collective injustice, as a step toward martyrdom. The many rich details of this analysis of Sikh militant discourse cannot be engaged here, but two phenomena concerning identity addressed by Das are highly relevant.

Especially in the speeches of Bhindranwale, as cited by Das, a recurring theme is the question of who the Sikhs really are. One vital issue in mobilizing the uncertainty surrounding what it means to be Sikh concerns a breakaway group among the Sikhs, called the Nirankaris. Here is what Das

has to say about Sikh militant violence against the Nirankaris in the 1970s and 1980s:

> There is a huge mistrust of alternative definitions of the Sikh community. This comes to the fore in the relationship between Sikh militants and communities on the peripheries of Sikhism. One such community is the Nirankaris, who may be considered a sectarian development within Sikhism. Since the followers of this sect worship a living guru, this being contrary to orthodox Sikh teaching, they were declared enemies of the panth in 1973 by the priests of the Golden Temple. In April 1978 some of Bhindranwale's followers clashed violently with the Nirankaris on both sides ... Though it acknowledges that they were a sect with close connections with the Sikhs, their present forms of worship are considered unacceptable; they are declared 'counterfeit Nirankaris' ... The Nirankaris are declared to be agents of the Hindu government, whose only mission is to destroy Sikhs. (Das, 1995: 133–4)

So here is a vivid example of having to bring the killing close to home to clarify who real Sikhs are and what the label Sikh really means. Note the ideas of 'counterfeit Nirankaris' and of 'agents' of the hostile group (Hindus), along with the terrible fury against the 'pure' Sikh. We are back here with the theme of purity, first remarked by Douglas (1966), then elaborated by Malkki (1995), Robert Hayden (1996), and Michael Herzfeld (1997) in various directions. In Malkki's account, this ideology of the pure and the counterfeit explains the paradoxical sense among Hutu living in refugee camps in Tanzania that their very exile was the sign of their purity as 'Hutu' (and anticipates Bauman's [1997] reflections on purity, strangers and otherness). While the Nazi case shows the power of the discourse of purity for the powerful majority (often using the idiom of the minority as a 'cancer' within the social body), the Sikh case shows the domino effect of violent efforts to cleanse, as they ripple through the victim group, creating further efforts to cleanse grey areas and achieve complete clarity and purity. Of course, clarity and purity are not identical concerns, nor do they call forth similar forms of motive and commitment. While clarity is a matter of cognition, purity is a matter of moral coherence. These dimensions seem to converge in the collective heat of ethnocide, where the logic of cleansing seems both dialectical and self-perpetuating, as one act of 'purification' calls forth its counterpart both from and within the ethnic 'other'. Likewise, purification and clarification appear to be in a dialectical and productive relationship.

The terror of purification and the vivisectionist tendencies that emerge in situations of mass violence also blur the lines between ethnicity and politics. Indeed, just as ethnocide is the limiting form of political violence, so certain forms of political hysteria lead to a quasi-ethnic preoccupation with somatic strategies. This somatic rendition of political identities offers another angle on the issue of masks, counterfeits and treachery. A powerful example of this dynamic comes from China, where Donald Sutton (1995) interprets the significance of widespread reports of cannibalism in Guangxi Province in China in 1968, toward the tail end of the violent phase of the Cultural Revolution. Again, this complex essay takes up a large range of fascinating issues involving cannibalism in the cultural history of this region, its reactivation

under the violent conditions of the Cultural Revolution, the complex rela-
tions between regional politics and the politics of Beijing, and so on.

What is striking for our purposes in Sutton's analysis is the issue of violence
among persons who live in considerable social proximity to one another.
Consider this chilling description of the general forms of events of what
Sutton calls 'political cannibalism'. The forces of law and order, not the
revolutionary rebels, were the killers and eaters. Moreover, the forms of
cannibalistic consumption varied within a narrow range. People agreed on the
best body parts and insisted on them being cooked; and the selection, killing,
and consuming of victims were relatively systematized (Sutton, 1995: 142).

By closely examining what were referred to in Wuxuan as 'human flesh
banquets' and what were known during this period as 'struggles' (ritualized
events involving accusation, confession, and physical abuse of suspected
class enemies), Sutton is able to show convincingly that, while these episodes
involved ostensible political categories of persons, their logic appears fully
compatible with the sorts of violence we would usually call ethnic. In
analysing a related case from Mengshan, Sutton shows how the designation
of a man as a 'landlord' made him such a convincing villain that a neighbour
did not warn him of his impending murder by a local group of militia.

Sutton also shows how political labels took on immense somatic force: an
urban youth cited in one of his sources says of the former landlords, 'I felt
that deep in their hearts they still wanted to overthrow everything and kill all
of us. In movies, they had awful faces. And in the village when I saw them I
feared them and thought they were repulsive to look at. I guess ugliness is a
psychological thing'. This remarkable quotation offers a brief glimpse of how
political labels (such as 'landlord', 'class enemy', and 'counterrevolutionary')
become powerful bearers of affect, and of how, in at least some cases, verbal
propaganda and mass-mediated images can literally turn ordinary faces into
abominations that must be destroyed.[9] In a final, crucial piece of data from
Sutton's essay, a former party leader, when expelled from the party in the

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9. The entire issue of dual identities and split subjectivities has been approached in a highly
   suggestive manner by Slavoj Zizek (1989) in his creative Lacanian revision of Hegel. As
   part of this reading, Zizek observes the sense in which anxiety about the resemblance
   between Jews and German is a key part of anti-Semitism. He also notes the peculiar ways
   in which Stalinist terror demanded that its victims, in political trials, for example, confess
   their 'treason' precisely because they are, in some sense, also 'good' communists who
   recognize the needs of the party for purges and exposures. In both cases, the victims
   endure the suffering of being both 'us' and 'them' in reference to a totalizing ideology.
       Sheila Fitzpatrick first pointed out to me the salience of the Stalinist trials of 'class
   traitors' to the general logic of my argument. In her own brief essay on autobiographical
   narratives and political trials in Stalin's Russia, Fitzpatrick shows that the fear of
   uncertainty about their class histories affected many Soviet citizens at this time, since
   everyone had some sort of vulnerability: 'Then their Soviet masks would be torn off; they
   would be exposed as double dealers and hypocrites, enemies who must be cast out of
   Soviet society. In the blink of an eye, as in a fairy tale, Gaffner the kolkhoz pioneer would
   become Haffner the Mennonite kulak. A clap of thunder and the face looking back from

early 1980s on the grounds of his earlier cannibalism, says with contempt: 'Cannibalism . . .! It was the flesh of a landlord that was eaten, the flesh of a secret agent' (Sutton, 1995: 162).

With this example, we are back again with the problem of identification and uncertainty, the transformation of neighbours and friends into monsters, and the idea that social appearances are literally masks (Fitzpatrick, 1991, 1995), beneath which truer, deeper, more horrible forms of identity may subsist. 'Secret agency' is found in a wide range of sources that deal with ethnic violence, and it is an indicator of the crucial trigger of the sense of betrayal, treachery, and deception that seems to underwrite its most dramatic expressions. This essay about political cannibalism from China casts an eerie light on descriptions from Bosnian concentration camps in which men were made to bite the severed genitals of friends or fellow prisoners and similar hints of forced cannibalism in other contexts.

Ethnocidal violence evidently mobilizes some sort of ambient rage about the body as a theatre of deception, of betrayal, and of false solidarity. Whenever the charge of categorical treachery is made to appear plausible, secret agents are unmasked, impure ethnicities are exposed, and horribly cancerous identities are imputed to what we may call the inner body, numerous collective forms of vivisection seem possible, with the most ordinary of people as their perpetrators.

In many of these forms of violence, we can see a horrible range of intimacies. It is of course true that the most extreme forms of ethnic violence involve major dramas of power, of degradation, of violation, and of emotional and physical pain. It is also true that some of this is explicable as part of a cycle of memory and countermemory, where one remembered atrocity becomes the basis for another. However, something else is present in at least some of these situations: that is, this violence is a horrible effort to expose, penetrate, and occupy the material form — the body — of the ethnic other. This may well be the key to the many ways in which sexuality is implicated in recent global forms of ethnic violence. Eating the liver or heart of the exposed 'class enemy' is surely a horrible form of intimacy, and one does not have to make recourse to deeper structural theories about 'friendly' cannibalism to see that eating the enemy is one way of securing a macabre intimacy with the enemy who was so recently a friend.[10] Making one

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Ulianova's mirror would be that of Buber the wicked witch, enemy of the Soviet people' (Fitzpatrick, 1995: 232; see also 1991).

10. This sort of brutal intimacy could be viewed as a fatal deformation of the sort of 'cultural intimacy' which Herzfeld (1997) defines as that sense of familiarity, proximity, trust, and inside knowledge that is preserved by local communities in the face of state taxonomies, policies, and stereotypes. Given the delicate line between popular essentialisms and state essentialisms that Herzfeld notes in his larger analysis, it may not be far-fetched to suggest that some sort of intimacy — gone terrifyingly awry, to be sure — is a feature of the vivisectionist quality of much ethnic violence today.

prisoner bite off the genitals of another is an even more grotesque way of simultaneously inflicting deep pain, injury, and insult while imposing a brutal sort of intimacy between enemy bodies.

This may be the place to briefly note that rape in such circumstances is not only tied up with special understandings of honour and shame, and a possible effort to abuse the actual organs of sexual (and thus ethnic) reproduction, but is additionally the most violent form of penetration, investigation, and exploration of the body of the enemy. These factors may account for the renewed salience of rape in ethnic violence. Rape, from this point of view, is the counterpart to the examination of males suspected to be Muslim (in places like Bombay) to check whether they are circumcised. Like the wooden stakes driven through the anus of the ethnic enemy and up into his skull (in the case of Hutu–Tutsi ethnocide reported by Malkki) the penis in ethnocidal rape is simultaneously an instrument of degradation, of purification, and of a grotesque form of intimacy with the ethnic other. This is not of course to suggest that the sexual violence directed against men and women — for example, in recent events in Eastern Europe — is the same either in quantity or quality. It is clear that, in the history of warfare generally and of ethnic violence more recently, women bear the largest burden as victims of sexual violence.[11] Still, it may be worth considering that there is something that links the violence of ethnocidal rape with other forms of bodily violation and disposal.

In the end, when all the horrible descriptions are read and all the large-scale political, social and economic factors are taken into account, the body remains the site of intimacy, and in the many different forms that bodily violence takes in different contexts, there is a common thread of intimacy gone berserk.[12] Looking at the question of uncertainty and vivisection in the context of intimacy returns one to the question of number and abstraction — and thus of globalization — discussed earlier in this essay.

To repeat, one of the key features of the new ethnic categories is their large-scale, officialized quality. In no case of ethnocide of which we have knowledge can it be shown that these categories are innocent of state practices

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11. Several colleagues have suggested to me that in the United States and in the advanced industrial societies of Western Europe many of the features that I see in global ethnic violence are strikingly present in domestic abuse directed against women. This comparative insight opens up the wider question of the links between ethnic and sexual violence and of the structural relation between these forms of violence in more and less wealthy societies. In the current context, this link is a reminder that large-scale violence in the context of intimacy is not restricted to the non-European or less-developed countries of the world.

12. This point resonates with the provocative analysis of power and obscenity in the post-colony by Achille Mbembe, where he discusses the dynamics of 'the intimacy of tyranny' (1992: 22). Here the body appears as the site of greed, excess, and phallocentric power among the ruling élites and thus as the object of scatological intimacy in popular discourse. The relation between this sort of political obscenity and the logic of vivisection which I explore here must await another occasion (see also Mbembe and Roitman, 1995).

(usually through the census and often involving crucial forms of welfare or potential punishment). The question is, how can forms of identity and identification of such scope — ethnic labels that are abstract containers for the identities of thousands, often millions, of persons — become transformed into instruments of the most brutally intimate forms of violence? One clue to the way in which these large numerical abstractions inspire grotesque forms of bodily violence is that these forms of violence — forms that I have called vivisectionist — offer temporary ways to render these abstractions graspable, to make these large numbers sensuous, to make labels that are potentially overwhelming, for a moment, personal.[13]

To put it in a sanitized manner, the most horrible forms of ethnocidal violence are mechanisms for producing persons out of what are otherwise diffuse, large-scale labels that have effects but no locations.[14] This is why the worst kinds of ethnic violence appear to call for the word 'ritual' or 'ritualized' from their analysts. What is involved here is not just the properties of symbolic specificity, sequence, convention, and even tradition in particular forms of violence but something even more deep about rituals of the body: they are always about the production, growth, and maintenance of persons. This 'life-cycle' aspect of bodily rituals (remarked upon by Arnold van Gennep and many distinguished successors in anthropology) finds its most monstrous inversion in what we may call the 'death-cycle' rituals of mass ethnocide. These horrible counterperformances retain one deep element in common with their life-enhancing counterparts: they are instruments for making persons out of bodies.[15] It may seem odd to speak of the production of persons out of bodies in an argument that rests on the

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13. Of course, not all forms of abstraction in social life conduce to violence, nor have such potentially violent forms of abstraction as the map, the census, and models of economic development always led to coercion or conflict. Here, as elsewhere, one needs to examine the multiple vectors of modernity and the particular ways in which they converge and diverge in the era of globalization. In this most recent epoch of globalization, these instruments of abstraction combine with other forces, such as migration, mediation, and secession to create conditions of heightened uncertainty, but that is not an inherent quantitative or structural property of these abstractions.

14. Here and elsewhere in the paper I have preferred the use of person over subject, although the Hegelian idea of subjectivity, as well as its Foucauldian version in respect to violence and agency, is deeply relevant to my analysis. While the idea of the subject is more immediately and explicitly tied to the dialectics of modernity, there is no easy bridge between it and the category of the person that continues to be central to the anthropology of the body and ritual. I hope to engage more fully with the discursive implications of these key terms in future work on this topic. For now, I can only suggest that my use of the term person is not intended to foreclose the sorts of readings that for some may more comfortably flow from the substitution in such contexts of the idea of the subject.

15. This part of the analysis resonates with many aspects of Feldman's interpretation (1991) of the ceremonial — indeed, sacrificial — overtones of the interrogation and incarceration of political prisoners by state functionaries in Northern Ireland, as well as his account of the transformations of these eschatological procedures by the victims.

presumption of prior social intimacy (or its possibility) between agents and victims. However, it is precisely in situations where endemic doubts and pressures become intolerable that ordinary people begin to see masks instead of faces. In this perspective, extreme bodily violence may be seen as a degenerate technology for the reproduction of intimacy where it is seen to have been violated by secrecy and treachery.

Through this ritualized mode of concretization we can see how the bodily violence of ethnocide is an instrument for the production of persons in the context of large-scale ethnic identities that have, for whatever reason, turned mutually hostile. It may seem frivolous to suggest that such violence produces persons, in the face of the fact that so much of it is not only degrading and deadly but also literally appears to deconstruct bodies (through various forms of mutilation and butchery). This macabre technique for the production of persons is, of course, special. Nevertheless, in the intimacy and intricacy of preoccupation with body parts and wholes, with penetration and with consumption, with exit and with access, these forms of violence are methods of assuring that some bodies are — without doubt — real persons. The horrible negativity of this technology is that the production of 'real' persons out of the bodies of traitors, secret agents, and despised group enemies seems to require their vivisection. Here, too, is the link between intimacy and uncertainty. Where fear about ethnic body snatching and secret agency becomes plausible, then producing 'real' ethnic enemies out of the uncertainty posed by thousands of possible secret agents seems to call forth a special order of rage, brutality, and systematicity, all at once. The problem of fake identities seems to demand the brutal creation of real persons through violence. This is the modification I propose to the suggestion of Allen Feldman (1991), echoed by Malkki (1995), that ethnic violence produces abstract tokens of ethnicity out of the bodies of real persons.

Such examples can be multiplied. They testify to one important fact: as large populations occupy complex social spaces and as primary cultural features (clothing, speech styles, residential patterns) are recognized to be poor indicators of ethnicity, there tends to be a steady growth in the search for 'inner' or 'concealed' signs of a person's 'real' identity. The maiming and mutilation of ethnicized bodies is a desperate effort to restore the validity of somatic markers of 'otherness' in the face of the uncertainties posed by census labels, demographic shifts, and linguistic changes, all of which make ethnic affiliations less somatic and bodily, more social and elective. Mixed marriages, of the sort that have long taken place in many cosmopolitan regions and cities, are the biggest obstacles to simple tests of ethnic 'otherness' (Hayden, 1996). It is such facts that set the stage for the body as a site for resolving uncertainty through brutal forms of violation, investigation, deconstruction, and disposal.

This proposal — linking categorical uncertainty to the bodily brutalities of ethnocide — builds on other components of a general theory of ethnic violence, many of which are already in place: the classificatory policies of

many colonial states; the large involuntary migrations created by such powerful states as Stalin's USSR; the confusions created by policies of affirmative action applied by democratic constitutions to quasi-ethnic classifications, such as the 'Scheduled' Castes created by the Indian Constitution; the stimuli of arms, money, and political support involved in diasporic populations, creating what Benedict Anderson (1994) has called 'long-distance' nationalism; the velocity of image circulation created by Cable News Network, the World Wide Web, faxes, phones, and other media in exposing populations in one place to the goriest details of violence in another; the major social upheavals since 1989 in Eastern Europe and elsewhere that have created dramatic fears about winners and losers in the new open market, thus creating new forms of scapegoating, as with Jews and Gypsies in Romania (Verdery, 1990).

These larger forces — global mass mediation, increased migration, both forced and voluntary, sharp transformations in national economies, severed links between territory, citizenship, and ethnic affiliation — return us to the theme of globalization, within which the argument was earlier framed. It is not hard to see the general ways in which transnational forces impinge on local ethnic instabilities. Hayden's (1996) discussion of national populations, censuses, and constitutions in the former Yugoslavia, and the resultant drive to eliminate the 'unimaginable' in new national formations, is one clear demonstration of the steps that lead from global and European politics (and history) to imperial breakup and ethnic meltdown, especially in those zones characterized by the greatest degree of ethnic mixture through intermarriage. However, the road from constitutional mandates to bodily brutality cannot wholly be handled at the level of categorical contradiction. The peculiar and ghastly forms of vivisection that have characterized recent ethnocidal violence (both in Eastern Europe and elsewhere) carry a surplus of rage that calls for an additional interpretive frame, in which uncertainty, purity, treachery, and bodily violence can be linked. This surplus or excess makes sense of the hyperrationalities — noted throughout this essay — that accompany what seems to be the hysteria of these events: the quasi-ritual order, the attention to detail, the specificity of bodily violation, the systematicity of the forms of degradation.

Yet globalization does not produce just one road to uncertainty, terror, or violence. In this essay I have identified a logic for the production of 'real persons' which links uncertainty, purity, treachery, and vivisection. There are surely other 'ethnocidal imaginaries'[16] in which the forces of global capital, the relative power of states, varying histories of race and class and differences in the status of mass mediation, produce different kinds of uncertainty and different scenarios for ethnocide. The examples I have relied on here — the

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16. I am grateful to Dipesh Chakrabarty (personal communication) for this striking phrase and for alerting me to the dangers of moving from global questions to globalizing answers.

People's Republic of China in the late 1960s, Central Africa in the 1970s, North India in the early 1980s, and Central Europe in the late 1980s and early 1990s — do not have either the same spatial or temporal relationship to the process of globalization. In each case, the degree of openness to global capital, the legitimacy of the state, the internal and external flow of ethnic populations, and the variety of political struggles over group entitlement were clearly not the same. Though the vivisectionist hypothesis put forward here may not thus apply uniformly in these cases, its critical elements — purity, clarity, treachery, and agency — may well provide key ingredients that might be recombined fruitfully to cast some degree of light on them.

In an earlier effort to analyse the link between large-scale identities, the abstraction of large numbers, and the theatre of the body, I suggested that global forces are best seen as 'imploding' into localities, deforming their normative climate, recasting their politics, and representing their contingent characters and plots as instances of larger narratives of betrayal and loyalty (Appadurai, 1996: 149–57). In the present context, the idea of implosion might account for actions at the most local of globalized sites — the ethnicized body, which, in already confused and contradictory circumstances, can become the most natural, the most intimate, and thus the most horrifying site for tracking the somatic signs of the enemy within. In ethnocidal violence, what is sought is just that somatic stabilization that globalization — in a variety of ways — inherently makes impossible. In a twisted version of Popperian norms for verification in science, paranoid conjectures produce dismembered refutations.[17]

The view advanced here of ethnocidal violence between social intimates is not only about uncertainty about the 'other'. Obviously, these actions indicate a deep and dramatic uncertainty about the ethnic self. They arise in circumstances where the lived experience of large labels becomes unstable, indeterminate, and socially volatile, so that violent action can become one means of satisfying one's sense of one's categorical self. Of course the violent epistemology of bodily violence, the 'theatre of the body' on which this violence is performed, is never truly cathartic, satisfying, or terminal. It only leads to a deepening of social wounds, an epidemic of shame, a collusion of silence, and a violent need for forgetting. All these effects add fresh underground fuel for new episodes of violence. This is also partly a matter of the pre-emptive quality of such violence: let me kill you before you kill me. Uncertainty about identification and violence can lead to actions, reactions, complicities, and anticipations that multiply the pre-existing uncertainty

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17. The issues alluded to in these concluding remarks will be pursued more fully in the larger work of which this essay is a preview. Close attention will be paid to the question of what distinguishes situations that share a large number of features with other situations of globalized stress but do not produce ethnocidal violence. Likewise, the complex epidemiology that relates various forms of knowledge (including propaganda, rumour, and memory) to various forms of uncertainty will be explored more fully.

about labels. Together, these forms of uncertainty call for the worst kind of certainty: dead certainty.

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