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**BETRAYAL, SACRED LANDSCAPES, AND
STORIES OF JUSTICE AMONG TAMILS IN
MALAYSIA**

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BETRAYAL, SACRED LANDSCAPES, AND STORIES OF JUSTICE AMONG TAMILS IN MALAYSIA

ABSTRACT Malaysia's multiethnic ideology is premised upon an ideal of hospitality that simultaneously announces its own impossibility through the marking of legal ethno-nationalist rights and privileges. The performativity of the Law has been increasingly revealed to Malaysian Tamils through a series of recent events that have left them questioning the civility of their country. Specifically, the demolitions of temples and the acquisitions of land by the State, forced conversions, and the dispossession of Tamil plantation workers have precipitated doubts. I argue that the force of law within the ethno-nationalist state is haunted by a fragmentation of memory and experience among Tamils. This is wrought by a sense of 'betrayal' by the State upon an increasingly sacralized landscape. Among Tamil Hindus, notions of divine justice have become fused with possessive and sometimes violent imaginaries. Tamil notions of divine justice are revealed to be a form of compensation, albeit one grounded in a growing victim's narrative. Through my interlocutors and collaborators, I have come to critique the Law, as mutually understood through the ethnographic encounter. At the same time, I have strategically utilized empathy in the face of great hospitality, whilst recoiling, at times, from the implications that accompany calls of justice. I conclude with a meditation upon the ethics of critique by suggesting the ethnographic betrayal is both painful and necessary.

Malaysia's multiethnic ideology is premised upon an ideal of hospitality that simultaneously announces its own impossibility through the marking of legal ethno-nationalist rights and privileges. The performativity of the Law, and, hence, impossibility of multiethnic hospitality, has been increasingly revealed to Malaysian Tamils through a series of recent events that have left them sometimes questioning the civility of their country. Specifically, the demolitions of temples and the acquisitions of land by the state, forced conversions, and the dispossession of Tamil plantation workers, have been precipitating factors behind these doubts.

In this paper I argue that the capricious force of law within the ethno-nationalist state is haunted by the fragmentation of memory and experience wrought by this very 'betrayal' of the State upon an increasingly sacralized landscape. This sublime horror has, paradoxically, a culturally recognizable logic in Tamil Hinduism, as notions of divine justice become fused with possessive and sometimes vio-

lent imaginaries. In some cases, where a sense of injustice is perceived to be extreme, Tamil notions of divine justice are revealed to be a form of compensation, albeit one grounded in a growing victim's narrative. Compensation grounded in victim's narratives, in turn, produce counter-patrimonial narratives of the nation, defined against majoritarian discourses of ethnic hospitality. These narratives, however, do not call into question their provenance in the violence of serial forms of identification, against more permeable and protean possibilities that exist in Malaysia (Mandal 2004; Noor 2010).

As many scholars have noted, the 'Malay' ethnic category is both defined and buttressed through the Malay language and Islam. That there was no unified of homogenous Malay culture or polity throughout the peninsula in the 19th century (or prior) is now common knowledge to students of history who recognize the plurality of groups and the *peranakan* or mixed origins of those who became self-identified as 'Malay' (Kahn 2006). What is, perhaps, more sur-

prising is the extent to which the census in the late 19th century and early 20th century reveals just who was living in today's heartland of Malaysia. For example, in Selangor, the industrial heartland of Malaysia today, and a former plantation landscape, the census figures in 1911 numbered Indians at 74,067 and Malays and Chinese at 65,062 and 150,908 respectively. By 1931, Indians outnumbered Malays 155,924 to 122,868 in the state. All the more dramatic is the fact that in 1884, only 17,856 Malays were counted as living in Selangor (Gullick 2004; Iyer 1938).

The state, in other words, was settled and populated at the turn of the century as the cities of Kuala Lumpur and Klang were developed by Chinese tin mining and business, and through the growth of the plantation industries, which, in turn, was dependent upon Indian labor (Gullick 2004; Sandhu 1969). This is significant, I suggest, because plantation communities, developed and populated by Tamils, date from this period (Gullick 2004; Nagarajan 2004), and are literally inscribed into the landscape in such a way that their descendants today, living within these same plantations (or 'estates'), now facing retrenchment and eviction under the pressures of 'development' and ethnic politics, have a growing sense of historicity, and with this, a growing sense of anger (Nagarajan 2004). At the same time, however, this historicity increasingly takes the shape as a victim's narrative among the Tamil poor and working class. Moreover, a compensatory narrative is generative of ethnic myths about a lacking and inauthentic Other, the 'new Malay' (*Melayu baru*) that is the subject of state-sponsored nationalism. This Other, the ethnic subject of the law (i.e., the so-called *bumiputra*) is increasingly seen as lacking by Tamils as its claims are revealed as arbitrary, violent, and built upon disavowals of difference within itself. The big question that remains, and to which I turn here, is whether this recognition produces a deconstructive critique of the ethnic subject as constructed by the state, or whether Tamils, in identifying this lack, in turn, identify with it, becoming subjects of victimhood (Lacan 1993).

The development politics have, in short, brought about a dramatic demographic shift in the ethnic composition of Malaysia's industrial heartland. This was the intended goal all along. To develop the nation's core identity, politically constructed around Malay ethnicity and Islam, the two being increasingly synonymous, Malays, it was argued, had to be united and strong—particularly at the center. In addition to reforming, and thereby policing Malay identity (Peletz 2002; Hoffstaedter 2011), incentives and privileges created a culture of privilege and, concomitantly, increasing self-rationalization of these purported entitlements. The racializing of urban development, and its troubling potential, is summed up by Joel Kahn in this way:

"[A]lmost exclusively Malay housing estates...are sprouting up... In many cases this racial exclusivity is part of the design. One of the first new towns to be built was Shah Alam ...built on plantation land. Its resident population of mainly Tamil estate workers was rehoused elsewhere, or simply evicted to make way for new, mainly middle-class Malay residents. Probably the supreme example of this is the new Federal Capital in Putrajaya." (Kahn 2006, 156-7)

However it would be overly simplistic to state that this process is uniform in intent or circumstance. Indeed, the historical demographics of Malay vis-à-vis Tamil or Chinese communities vary tremendously within the Klang Valley alone. Still, the resentments felt by non-Malays have been tangible and growing, as have the over zealous rationalizations by so-called 'Malays' (many of whom, being of recent immigrant status,¹ are seen as undeserving by non-Malays) who guard their bureaucratically derived entitlements in the knowledge, albeit, probably unconsciously, of their shallow historicity, as is often the case with true believers.

It is in this political context that increasing ethnic consciousness is creating fantasies about the Other that are potentially volatile (Willford 2006; 2008; 2014). Tamils are increasingly resentful of the fact that lands that were developed and populated by their ancestors are now claimed by Malays as their own; and moreover that the land use patterns in these new townships, such as in Shah Alam, are increasingly hostile to the most symbolic vestiges of the Tamil and Hindu presence, the temples. Hindu temples are not only anathema to all that is Islamic and modern within the state sponsored discourses of reform and orthopraxy, they are a reminder of both a pre-Islamic past that is always present within certain aspects of Malay culture and identity (but one that is always under siege by reformers), and they also serve as reminders of a more recent non-Malay presence on the landscapes that are purported to be vaunted Malay-oriented townships. The compulsive erasure of these sites, as perceived by Tamils, is, in other words, not only a land grab, but also, fueled by a moralizing conscience. It is in the combination of demographic transformations, and the political and economic marginalization of Tamils that accompanied this, coupled with the apparently amnesiac hostility with which Malays in the newly created townships show to (older) Hindu presences there, that draws the ire of the Tamil community. This, in turn, led to the dramatic events

¹ As I write this in 2011, there is much controversy leading up to the next general election that UMNO has awarded citizenship to thousands of immigrant workers from Indonesia in exchange for their loyalty as voters. For example, see www.malaysiakini.com/news/178439, "MyKad Scam: PAS Corners Bus Load of Foreigners." 10/12/11. Accessed on 10/12/11.

of 2007, the so-called ‘Hindraf’ rally in Kuala Lumpur that drew thousands of protesters to the streets. The Hindraf-led rally marked the most significant public demonstration by Malaysian Indians. In addition to issues pertaining to land, however, legal cases surrounding religious conversion have exacerbated a sense of insecurity among Tamil Hindus.

As Nagarajan (2008) argues, there were several important court cases that brought alarm to non-Muslims in Malaysia, as a ‘silent rewriting’ of the constitution was being done in the name of Islam; but at the same time, the judgment of prominent federal judges was increasingly revealed to be shaped by religious beliefs. I cite Nagarajan at length on this point, providing but two examples of judicial partiality with regards to conversion law:

“the religious bureaucracy continued to intrude into the lives of the minorities. Islamic authorities forcibly separated V. Suresh from his wife, Revathi Masoosai, and their 16-month-old baby. Revathi was born to Muslim convert parents but was brought up as a Hindu by her Hindu grandmother. She was detained at the Muslim rehabilitation centre against her will while her child was handed to Revathi’s Muslim mother. In another case, P. Marimuth’s five young Hindu children were taken from their home by Islamic religious officials who said his wife was technically still a Muslim and therefore their marriage of twenty-one years was invalid....This worrying trend of Muslim officialdom to ignore the religious sentiments and the rights of non-Muslims only served to fuel more fear and unhappiness among non-Muslims. But they had an even more troubling impact on the Indian Malaysian psyche because most of the affected people are from the community. They not only lost their spouses, but their children were taken away from them and they have no recourse to justice.” (Nagarajan 2008, 390-391)

In another well-publicized case, Malaysian Mt. Everest climbing hero, M. Moorthy, was given a Muslim burial in December of 2005, despite protests from his widow that he was a practicing Hindu at the time of his death. Indeed, nobody in his family was aware that he had purportedly converted to Islam in secret. But what outraged the Indian community most was that the civil court surrendered jurisdiction to the *syariah* court in this case. As his widow, Kaliammal, was not a Muslim, she could not appear in *syariah* court to contest its ruling on Moorthy’s conversion (Nagarajan 2008).

It is in this context that the actions of about fifty Malay protesters who were protesting a plan to relocate a 150 year old temple in Shah Alam to Section 23, a ‘predominantly Malay area’, can, perhaps, be understood. In August of 2009, the protesters marched to the Selangor State Government Secretariat in Shah Alam to protest the proposed relo-

cation of the old temple (which had to be shifted when the plantation had been converted to housing). The protesters, however, carried with them a severed cow head and several banners insulting the Chief Minister of the state as well as his executive councilor (*New Straits Times* 2009). (The cow head was spat upon and kicked, which, in turn, outraged the country’s Hindu population and drew angry rebukes from several political leaders, including the Prime Minister himself. The plot thickened when the Home Minister and UMNO Vice President, Datuk Seri Hishamuddin Hussein later appeared in public with the protesters and issued a statement that the protesters ‘felt victimized’ and had only wanted their voices to be heard (Asrul Hadi Abdullah Sani 2010). Hishamuddin implicitly and apparently sided with the protesters. This, in turn, caused much controversy, as opposition politicians called for his resignation. UMNO leaders kept silent, worried that a rebuke of Hishamuddin would alienate Malay voters.

This incident, however, sheds light upon the processes of urban change outlined briefly above. The offensive presence of the old Hindu temple in a new Shah Alam neighborhood is instructive. Shah Alam is a new city. It is built entirely upon former plantation lands, predominantly populated by Tamils. As such, there are dozens of old temples that have and are slowly being destroyed as this development proceeds. The long and drawn out struggle by the temple devotees to have their temple relocated is a story for another day, but it demonstrates the enduring significance these structures hold for communities that have since been relocated and dispersed after their plantation villages have been developed into other land uses. The emotional attachment to the temple runs deep within these communities, and the loss of potentially hundreds of these structures has produced great anxiety for Tamil Hindus in Malaysia.

In a very real sense, the landscape where plantations existed is imbued with a sacrality that is now being defiled by the processes of development. On the side of the new residents within Malay-dominated townships, such as Shah Alam, the presence of the older Hindu temple arouses anxiety as well. The temple is a constant reminder of the ‘immigrant status’ of recently arrived Malays to these former plantation areas, their purported claims to *bumiputera* rights and privileges, notwithstanding. The demographic evidence suggests that a large percentage of ‘Malays’ are, in fact, recent immigrants from Indonesia (Kahn 2006), or have married into the community (*masuk Melayu*). The fact that Indians, and in some cases, Orang Asli communities were displaced in order to create the symbolic Malay heartland for the nation is, one could imagine, troubling. Coupled with the need to erase, rationalize privilege, and silence a troubled sense of one’s identity’s recent historicity, the very vestiges of

a so-called Indic or Hindu layer of Malay culture that is constantly and relentlessly being invigilated and purged by state religious apparatuses (Peletz 2002; Hoffstaedter 2011) must also affect how the contemporary Hindu presence becomes an object of avoidance, an *objet petit a*, in Lacan's sense,² or that which blocks one's enjoyment or desire. But to qualify, it must be stated that my perspective comes from interactions with and observations of Malaysian Tamils, not Malays, for the most part. The following three vignettes attempt to capture the cascade of anger that culminated in the massive Hindraf protests of 2007.

BUKIT TINGGI

This case of Bukit Tinggi Estate, near Klang, involved resistance in the face of intimidation and coercive force. In the end, after many years of constant struggle, the developer settled with the retrenched plantation workers of Bukit Tinggi Estate and provided low-cost housing, saved the Tamil school, and offered land for a temple. Those who were still technically 'squatting' were rearing cattle upon the land as they had done for generations. At one point in their post-retrenchment struggle, there were three hundred cattle housed in a shed, which provided for a good income in daily milk deliveries to local housing estates.

We³ met with two of the cattlemen. They were rough and tumble, not having shaved recently, and having weathered a few fights against so-called 'gangsters' hired by the developers to drive them out. The police had repeatedly arrested these men for trespassing. Upon demolition of their former homes, and retrenchment of their plantation employment, these lands, which were originally given as unused land at the fringes of the plantations, were claimed by the developer as private property, and thus, this, too, had to be vacated. The cattlemen, on the other hand, maintained that this land lay outside of estate boundaries, and was 'fringe land' that went unused, and therefore, could continue to be used by the simple right of continued use for generations. Indeed, they maintained, "*if we were Malays,*

we would have been given land." Their perception of an ethnic dimension to land allocation was acute. Still, after being threatened with one year of jail time, fines of up to ten thousand ringgit, and threats of violence from 'gangsters', they still fought on, hoping that their cattle shed would be relocated, as this was their only source of livelihood.

As alluded to above, twenty-nine families, plus eight individuals, were given housing in a rare compensation settlement. They had marched, blocked access points for tractors and bulldozers, and even withstood police pressure in a non-violent manner. The developer, in turn, hired 'gangsters', they claimed, to chase them out with threats of violence. Those who persevered were finally given housing in a nearby low-cost flat. The lesson, while not setting any legal precedent, suggested that effective strategies that stall projects primed to make large profits, particularly when large investments have already been made, are more likely to meet success in bringing the reluctant developers to the negotiating table. In this case, the compensation they knew they should be getting far exceeded what was legally entitled by the letter of the law. They knew this through the speculative worth of the land after development, which all but promised to reap huge profits for the developers. Indeed, the very fact that compensation was calculated upon the real estate value of the land,⁴ and not upon the speculative value of the land, whereas the very impetus to sale and development of lands was premised upon the speculative value of said lands was increasingly not lost upon the dislocated and disenfranchised plantation workers.

In this case, they recognized the value of the land—that which they imbued with the value of their labor—and refused to yield to the demands of legal compensation. Here compensation had to be paid based upon another principle: that of the speculative worth of the land, as well as the emotive and singular bond to the land that exists between the workers and it. This was nowhere better epitomized than in the milk-yielding properties of its cattle, who grazed and nourished themselves upon the land that produced their milk for years. Refusing to yield this ground, that which most potently connects the cattle-rearers to the mother that has nourished and fed them for generations, they were willing to risk and sacrifice everything, including their own freedom and safety. Nagarajan cites one individual as saying, "We would be insulting the memories of our ancestors if we didn't fight back" (2004, 172). This is a powerful statement, and one that animates an attachment to the land that exceeds instrumentality. But the ancestors were also a living memory through the means of livelihood that was carried on, and the rich symbolic resonance of

² Lacan spoke of the *object a* in several registers at different periods of his career. In my usage here, I refer to that which remains or is leftover after the introduction of a symbolic order. *Object a* causes anxiety and sets desire in motion in relation to this anxiety. This anxiety, however, is as a surplus or excess of the symbolic order, itself. In this context, the intractable hold of Malay identity, as a symbolic demand, generates its others through its very impossibility, and also supplements or sutures this lack within the symbolic through avoidance of *object a*. This avoidance takes ethnographic form through the logic of the supplement: laws, boundaries, and phobic racialisations (Willford 2006).

³ My research collaborator was Dr. S. Nagarajan, then a PhD student at the University of Malaya.

⁴ Luxury housing was planned for the former estate lands, which, presumably, would produce large profits.

the cow and milk in Hindu and Tamil society. One could say that to these cattlemen the hardships faced by the cows (death, loss of foliage, loss of grazing ground, etc.) had only reanimated the necessity of protecting their ancestral home at all costs. It imbued the struggle with the charge of a sacred task. For this, a powerful and divine agent stood as protector and ally.

A small shrine was nestled near the cattle shed. It looked like a termite and/or tree trunk mound forming a natural *lingam*.⁵ I was told it was a cobra's nest around a tree trunk. Despite the imminent eviction and demolition of this shrine, a somewhat more than temporary shrine was constructed with a paved floor leading up to the trunk of a tree. Daily offerings of milk and eggs were offered at this shrine to the *nagas* (snake spirits), who, in turn, guarded the cattle from harm. There was great fear that the cattle would be harmed by gangsters or by 'drug addicts' who frequented the area.

Regarding the powers of the shrine, the cattlemen said that the developers had tried to remove the shrine already, but had, upon trying, witnessed their trucks and bulldozers breaking down. Now, we were told, the developers also believed that the *nagas* were also protecting them. In respect and fear, the Chinese developer—which, of course, was significant, as Malays were thought to be less likely to respect the gods—was working around the shrine, careful not to offend its powerful and supernatural host. In this sense, the continued flow of milk had been aided by the recognition of powers immanent in this shrine; but at the same time, the powers of flowing milk, had, arguably, made possible the elaboration and evolution of the immanence of this shrine. The symbiosis between shrine and the continued practice of cattle rearing upon the ancestral lands re-enacted a desire to see a particular historicity recognized by the Other. The sense of justice and stewardship, if not ownership, was not solved by the mere acquisition of property, the letter of the law notwithstanding. In this sense, the memories of the plantation exceeded those of a 'workplace'. There was an excess of identification that could not be resolved or theorized through our normal categories of 'compensation'. As in the identification with the tragic hero (Shulman 1985), which I will touch on later, the ancestral, indeed, genealogical connection to the landscape is imbued with sacred power at the moment of injustice—that is, when violence is rendered visible (Ram 2013). The death of the sacred cow, this very dispossession, tore asunder the law from its everyday normalcy, rendering violence visible. In turn, the land, cattle, and the sacred guardians, the *nagas*, became awesomely powerful in the act of transgression. This was the very reason why developers and union leaders were meeting earnest, if not, risky refusals from retrenched

laborers. Still, as one political leader is purported to have said to Bukit Tinggi resident, "The land has been sold. You have been paid for your labour. You have no right to be on this land anymore" (2004, 169). The mentality among politicians, developers, and bureaucrats was structured through the law to silence those webs of associative meaning that existed among plantation workers.

Considering Bukit Tinggi at a macro-level, where profits were won and lost, the housing estate itself was very up-market. It was to possess large lake in its center, a jogging track, and large bungalow-style houses. Most units were initially advertised for around 500,000 ringgit, and advertisements featured pictures of mainly Chinese buyers.

Because of the huge investment that this developer had made, and the large anticipated or speculative worth of future property, the urgency to settle with the former laborers was great. Though their legal standing was not necessarily greater than in similar other cases, their collective and aggressive stance towards the developer slowed down the work schedule significantly enough to delay, and thus, threaten profits. Moreover, utilizing paralegal measures, such as the use of strong-arm tactics, as in the aforementioned 'gangsters' was risky and could potentially backfire in the court of public opinion, and harden the resolve of residents. Perhaps the developer also became frightened that were details to become aired publicly, the sales of units could be affected. In any event, the logic of profit, not the sudden recognition of the worker's investment in the land and its history—and hence, of the worker's sense of historicity—prompted the change of heart. But, for those who risked and won, it was something, though certainly not everything.

EBOR ESTATE TEMPLE

I approached the remnants of the Ebor Estate temple by passing a mostly deforested area of land, apparently soon to be developed into housing. The ruins of a recently demolished temple could be seen. The Kaliyamman (goddess) temple was situated in a green clearing, near a highway and final grove of palm oil trees. It was a somewhat idyllic setting, that belied its stormy future. After being warmly received by five or six men, three or four women, and a couple of children, I was told about the event that changed their lives. Without any notice, on June 14th, 2003, the temple had been suspiciously razed by fire. I was shown a scrapbook of media coverage surrounding the event. A police report had been filed, though no arrests were made. I was told that the police had actually covered up the fact that some members of their force might be involved in the arson, having been hired by a property developer to either do the deed, or to turn a blind eye to

⁵ Siva's aniconic form.

those who did. I was told by one man, a middle-aged retired worker who had grown up with this estate and its temple, that the MIC (Malaysian Indian Congress) 'had done nothing'; and, in fact, Samy Vellu, the then head of the party, had suggested that the residents pray at a temple 'several kilometers away'. Emotions were still raw and a suppressed rage on this man's face was palpable as he spoke about the betrayals of the police acting in collusion with the developer—who, in turn, never met with them personally, or offered any notice of temple eviction or relocation—and the MIC, who, after promising an inquiry, had merely suggested that they 'move on' and forget that site, despite its emotional and historical significance for the community of former estate residents. The same man told me that several former residents traveled quite far to pray at this temple, having forged deep attachments to it. Even the priest, who still worked regularly within the temple, was employed from outside the area, and thus came by car to the temple from a distance. I was also shown the Shah Alam master plan, obtained from the Shah Alam town council, which showed the future housing estate that was to be built in this area. I was shown how schools, *dewan* (community halls) and *masjids* (mosques), together with parks had been planned for. Conspicuously absent, however, was any mention of plans for a Hindu temple. I was told that a certain percentage of Indians was needed for the allotment of land for a temple, and that the planners clearly hoped to develop the township for Malays, thereby obviating a need for a Hindu temple. That is, the Indians who were attached to this place, would not be given much priority in buying into the future housing estates or *taman*, being built, ironically, upon plantation lands once mainly populated by Tamils. That is why, I was told, there was no provision for a temple.

At a second meeting, we discussed further the destruction of the Ebor Estate temple. The temple committee head believed that the local police acted as accomplices for the developer (Sime Darby), though they "were dressed in plain clothes", he claimed. On the previous visit, I surveyed the destroyed temple, and took pictures of a toppled *vimana*, and the continued prayers on the base of the shrine that was now destroyed. The main temple itself was now rebuilt out of corrugated tin, and was again being used by the former estate community of worshippers. It was a temple for Mariamman (a Tamil form of the supreme goddess, Sakti). The temple community was fighting now for a piece of land to relocate their temple. Originally, they fought to save the original structure on the land that it stood. But they seemed to have accepted the fact that they had to relocate. This was the sad irony wrought by vandalism. The very act of sacred transgression had, on the one hand, outraged the worshippers, emboldening them in their legal struggle against Sime Darby, the police, and by extension, the state, which they

increasingly saw as unjust. On the other hand, the destruction of their old and historically significant building had made it easier for them to contemplate the relocation of their temple. Indeed, the Sime Darby negotiators considered the makeshift temple that was rebuilt as being only 'one year old' (!), now that it had been built out of necessity. In fact, the razed temple was 117 years old, according to the temple committee's documentation.

The head of the temple committee explained that devotees of the one hundred year old temple were considered to be 'trespassers' upon the land and temple they had been devoted to for decades. He expressed clear outrage as he explained this to me. He also produced a document to certify his justification of outrage. That is, an archival moment that clarified the moral claim to possess the temple came in the form of a letter from the State Government of Selangor requesting Sime Darby to provide land for the temple. This letter had been delivered to Sime Darby two days before the demolition of the smaller Muniandy shrine. This demolition, I was told, was carried out illegally. The document only underscored the illegal and immoral nature of the act, showing blatant disregard for the state government's appeal.

Preparations were under way for a large festival in the temple on May 30th, 2004, that expected to draw one thousand people. This, the annual festival, would bring lots of former residents home to their temple, and would also attract the media, who would be invited to cover it for the local papers. The hope would be that with the plight of the temple, and the large festival turnout being covered in the papers, the MIC would be forced to lobby harder and win concessions from Sime Darby. As drumming groups practiced in the temple grounds, the temple committee sat in the temple and ate *mee goreng* (fried noodles) and drank sweetened rose water. We all examined, at some length again, the newspaper scrapbook coverage of the temple demolition and vandalism, including Samy Vellu's official visit in the aftermath of it. His picture of concern belied the lack of action following up his visit, according to the now disillusioned committee members. At first, they had held out the hope that his visit and response would yield both an investigation and ultimately, assistance in rebuilding the temple; or at the very least, securing an alternative land site elsewhere. Since this time, however, the MIC had been largely silent, to the Ebor devotees' dismay. But the scrapbook served as an archive of injustice, allowing the community to contemplate together the injustice of their predicament. This, in turn, was the catalyst for spiritual conviction.

At one point, the head of the temple committee said, "they just don't want a temple in this *taman*", referring to the housing area that was being built upon the immediate estate surroundings. He added, "*there are masjids everywhere.*" Naga, my collabora-

tor added, “If it is a one hundred year old *masjid*, then the government will scream about heritage.” This was an oft-repeated sentiment among Tamils in Malaysia. That is, the notion that in new townships, particularly where there is likely to be a Malay majority—which is certainly true in Shah Alam, designed to be an Islamic city (Kahn 2006; Bunnell 2004; Nagarajan 2004; Willford 2014)—there is a deliberate and sustained effort to actively discriminate against the presence of Hinduism and Hindu temples. One might think this a paranoid fantasy, but one that inverts the unwanted presence into a space of intrusive power. That is, the temple is unwanted, in the Tamil Hindu eyes, because its offending presence asserts itself so powerfully in the life of Malays if left unsuppressed. I have examined this notion, calling it, following a psychoanalytic insight of Freud’s, the countertransference of Malay desire, in another context (2006).

A few hundred devotees were on hand to celebrate the annual festival at Ebor estate. It may have been less than the one thousand that were predicted, but still, not a bad turnout for a temple that had already been demolished, and which existed through the memories of estate workers that had long since moved out their estate housing. Prayers and *pal kuddam* (milk pots) were being offered to the goddess all morning. *Puja* (worship) and *arch-enei* (praise) went on until a lunch of *prasadam* (sanctified food) was served to all present. Food was served in orderly shifts under a tent that had been rented for the occasion. Food stalls selling drinks and *murukku* (savory snacks), *laddoo* (milk sweet), and *jelebi* (fried sweet) lined the paths around the temple, which now stood in a hard to access place, situated off all main roads, and lying close to construction sites. Still, upon reaching the temple, the remnants of oil palm trees fringed the backdrop of the immediate vicinity, allowing one to forget the construction nearby.

It was an annual reunion, of sorts, for the former residents. But in 2004 it was more. Given the recent vandalism and demolition, it was also a chance to come together and celebrate, as well as assert their sense of community. A petition was passed around for signatures that asked that the Menteri Besar (Chief Minister of Selangor) require that Sime Darby heed the ‘state government’s advice’, referring to the earlier document that had been ignored before the demolition had taken place. In effect, the petition asked the state to enforce its advice. While this was an unlikely outcome, documenting the discrepancy between state policy and legal obligation was a critical strategy. If state policy was grounded in notions of fairness and justness, and by extension, if the aggrieved could document their victimhood, the shear amorality or violence of the law was being pressed to its limits through such actions. At the very least, this allowed for a consolidation of sentiment within the community of believers in the shadow of

the recent catastrophe. That which was rather inexplicable was given narrative shape through these acts of documentation (e.g., the scrapbook and the petition).

A cultural performance occurred in the temple, and *bharata natyam* (classical dance) was featured. Some also spoke about the fight for the temple. Two activists explained to me that ‘this kind of problem’ was “basically racism in Malaysia...the color of our skin.” One added that the Special Branch (secret police) was present in the audience taking notes on everything.

The 117 year old temple, if nothing else, was clearly still vibrant as a community icon, despite its apparent demise. Indeed, its destruction had actually galvanized a sense of community—a rebirth, in a sense, out of destruction (Ram 2013). Fresh offerings were made, as well, at the site of the damaged smaller shrine for a guardian deity, adjacent to the main temple. While the temple committee was full of rage, they were not without hope. As I discovered in many other cases, the theme of rebirth, or the denial of destruction, is a ubiquitous and potent motif. In this process, we witness a notion of justice that exceeds juridical calculability. For at the heart of the law, be it colonial, brahminical, or postcolonial, there is an inherent violence. Paradoxically, divinity exceeds destruction and the law, yet, in terms of its witness or containment, a form of documentation is utilized to make its claim, or to reveal the transgression against it. Hence, the history of a shrine is critical, despite its apparent capacity to withstand destruction. In this sense, one might say that the divine is supplemented by its archive. Yet, the undetermined (by the reason of humans) powers of divinity always exceed and overwhelms any attempt at a consolidation of meaning (or historicity). The divine must be infinite and total, having no history. The paradox, as we see, animates community struggles, but also agitates reason, pointing towards what we might call a rupture in the political. At this, an aporia between the civil, legal, and divine, and/or justice, points to the intractable limits of hospitality within a civil, juridical order.

RAMAJI, SPIRITUAL ADVISOR TO HINDRAF

On November 25th, 2007, 30-40,000 Indians demonstrated against the Malaysian government in the heart of Kuala Lumpur, only to face tear gas, batons, and water cannons. This event, captured by the global media, and spearheaded by Hindraf, surprised many Malaysians, if not other Indians, both in the diaspora and India, in its boldness. But for those familiar with sentiments within the working-class Indian community, the event, while surprising in its scope and audacity, was not entirely shocking.

I met leaders from Hindraf at Berkeley Corner Restaurant in Klang, a quiet place to have a discussion. Present was Regu, co-founder of Hindraf, an assistant, and Ramaji, the so-called ‘spiritual advisor’ to Hindraf, as well as two other assistants. These individuals were all from the Hindu Seva Sangam, which, from their account, formed the nucleus of Hindraf from the start. In their words, the legal counsel, which included the lawyers who were currently being detained under ISA, P. Uthayakumar, M. Manoharan, R. Genghadharan, V. Ganabathirau, and T. Vasanthkumar, were hired as spokespersons for the movement, as the ‘actual’ leaders were less adept at public speaking. Regu, for instance, who was present at the table, said he was ‘very shy’ at public speaking, and would only speak boldly when he was very upset about something. Moreover, the lawyers really were necessary as they understood the ‘law’ and what ‘our rights’ really were. Now that the ‘spokespersons’ were, in fact, under arrest, the role of speaking at rallies had, in fact, fallen upon Regu and Rama, or ‘Reguji and Ramaji’. They were leading the ‘roadshows’, traveling to prayer meetings in Penang, Kedah, and Johore. Ramaji told me that he had just returned that day before from large gatherings in temples across Johore.

Regu presented evidence to me of the modern Indian presence in Malaya dating back to the 1820-30s, taking from research the lawyer Uthayakumar had collected in London. This was being compiled as evidence of a “two hundred year history in Malaya”, and the claim that some temples were older than previously thought. Documenting the antiquity of the community in Malaya seemed to be an important strategy in the Hindraf legal case. Finding evidence of the earliest presence would bring greater legitimacy to their claims of deep-rootedness in Malaya, it was believed. If it could be shown that plantations were there for over 150 years, with their attendant temples, then the demolition of these temples appeared all the more capricious and cruel, in the world’s eyes, they would argue. In this sense, Hindraf was formally archiving that which we heard several evicted plantation communities doing in their struggles for compensation, and indeed, survival of their temples, schools, homes. The archive rendered visible the refused gift or reciprocity by the modern Malaysian government (Grosz 2005) and created the narratological parameters of victimhood, demonstrating the violence at the heart of the law. This archive is, of course, also built on the desire and/or hope for future recognition. In that sense, while Hindraf exceeded legalistic arguments in its search for justice, outside and above the law (or in a higher, divine Law), it also pursued legal strategies grounded in the archiving of a kind of historical precedent.

Ramaji outlined his version of the Hindraf story. He repeated what others had told me, namely, that the Moorthy ‘body-snatching’ case had galvanized

Hindus in protest, leading to the formation of the Hindu Rights Action Committee, first, with Datuk Vaithilingam as its advisor. The Hindu Seva Sangam, and the Hindu Mamandaram, as well as other Hindu bodies, were also involved in this coalition of groups that filed a case in High Court on behalf of the widow on December 28th, 2005. But as that turned out to be unsuccessful, and frightened the Hindu community, the more forceful Hindu Rights Action Force came into being.

Ramaji explained that “Islamization was very strong”, and had influenced how the police dealt with local communities, as well. In “2006, alone, 29 temples were destroyed in a space of three weeks.” After demolitions in Setapak and Pantai Dalam, memorandums were presented, through their legal counsel (by this time, they had already procured the legal aid of P.Uthayakumar and P.Wayamurthy) to the Sultan of Selangor, the Prime Minister, and even to the King, but with no response, “We finally said, we had better go to the foreign.” Ramaji explained that the decision to file a suite against Her Majesty’s Government came only after six letters to the Prime Minister were left unanswered, in addition to the memorandum which had been submitted to the Prime Minister on behalf of Hindraf.

I asked if he thought the movement was headed in the right direction, now that the ISA had detained the spokespersons, and the government had branded Hindraf a terrorist-linked organization. Ramaji said:

“We are uniting for the whole of society, not for the self, but for a cause. But we are branded as ‘gangsters’. The youth are motivated. There were no criminal cases at Thaipusam last year. In years past there would always be criminal or gangster elements at Thaipusam.”

Hindraf, he maintained, had given them something to believe in.

Though Hindraf had called upon the government to help Indians economically, Ramaji’s philosophy for the Indian community was self-reliance:

“We want a self-sustaining society, no longer dependent upon the government or MIC. Fundamental works can be identified. They (the people) can do things on their own.”

By fundamental works, I believe he meant occupations and skills. Basically, he was arguing that if given the opportunities, and educated about those opportunities, Indians would take advantage of these and become a self-sufficient community. But, due to the obstructions in employment and education as a result of ethnic quotas, the Indian community had faced difficulties.

Ramaji then spoke about the harsh chemicals that were added to the water cannons on the “day

of the roses” demonstration. “We wanted to present roses to the Prime Minister, but chemicals were added to the water to hurt us, instead.” This, he added, was a ‘very cruel’ way to treat people who want to demonstrate peacefully. Moreover, we “carried the Agung’s (King’s) picture at the rose demonstration to show our loyalty.”

I then asked whether the Prime Minister’s promise to the Indian community, which came out in a meeting with twenty NGOs to look into specific problem areas faced by the community would produce tangible results. Ramaji said, this was just a “bluff to stop our movement.” “He has not even acknowledged our memorandum in his promises.” That is, his promises were empty, he surmised, because they did not respond directly to Hindraf. Of course, had he responded directly to Hindraf, the political cost among Malay voters might have been terribly consequential for UMNO. But Ramaji did not consider this. Indeed, he saw a dark horizon in interethnic relations brewing in Malaysia which was somewhat ominous, echoing what others had said to me, “it will *happen like Sri Lanka...* We’ve been tolerant enough for the last fifty years.” But while Hindraf did not appear, nor admit to any LTTE links, Ramaji did admit to have learned from the RSS, and even to have some loose affiliation with the VHP and RSS.⁶ His orientation was therefore conservative and Hindu, not radical Tamil nationalism, which has been historically anti-brahminical in both Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka. But Hindraf was a many headed Hydra.

Ramaji and Reguji then took me to a rally at Padang Jawa, “where it all started.” They explained the significance of this sight. “This was a divine event”, the awakening of Hindraf. And this awakening happened because of the breaking of a specific temple a few days before Deepavali in Padang Jawa, in Shah Alam. In this very working-class area, the ‘ground zero’ of the *Makkal Sakthi* (People’s Power) movement, which was their clarion call, Hindraf turned the breaking of the temple, what was once a tragic event in the Tamil community, into a rallying point, and even a pilgrimage spot. To underscore its spiritual significance, the temple was reconstituted within the compound of someone’s home, or between two homes, safe from further demolition, for now. Regu said to a crowd of assembled devotees at this site, “We tried every avenue to save this temple, but perhaps, because of this, and how the authorities handled it, something bigger or divine was planned.” Ramaji led the group of about one hundred people in chanting, and then spoke to the

crowd about the ‘spirit of sacrifice’ that was in one woman who had tried to save the temple, and who had helped rebuild it. That spirit of sacrifice, he said, was now needed within the whole community. Opposition politicians were also called upon to speak.

In this focal point, we can understand Hindraf’s power vis-à-vis the force of the law. Though I do not wish to detail the struggle against developers, and, ultimately, the state, that led to the traumatizing eventual demolition of the Padang Jawa temple on the eve of Deepavali, an important Hindu festival, I would suggest that this had a profound psychic impact upon the Tamil community. It revealed the state and its laws to be transgressive in a manner more forcefully, if not outrageously arbitrary, than before, in their eyes. This betrayal, in turn, led to a precipitous decline in Indian support for the government. But also, the simultaneously incomprehensible, yet symbolic violence of demolition, as played out in the Tamil and independent media, awakened an unease, a restless insecurity of faith, too, that sought reconstitution in a higher power or reason, in a transcendent source.

There was a denial of a temple’s destructibility, on the one hand, expressed in the face of potential demolition. Stories of the miraculous were in abundance whereby the immanence of spirit deterred bulldozers or would-be transgressors. Thus, a crisis of faith could ensue with demolitions. These, in turn would be supplemented by rationalizations of future rebirth, deferred vengeance, and punishment, all being symptomatic of a shattered faith. Indeed, I also witnessed talks of retribution for transgression, whereby the logic of deferral was manifest. That is, the spirit was only apparently defeated with physical desecration of sacred space, whereas divine justice was ultimately forthcoming. One might add in this the logic of self-sacrifice in Tamil Hindu ritualism and folklore. The apotheosis of the Tamil anti-hero in folklore (Shulman 1985) is tragic, but also spiritually empowering to both the hero and his downtrodden followers, both of whom find redemption through his demise and rebirth. Exposing the Other’s wrong (the capricious king or brahmin, or in this case, the Malay-led government), or lack, in these instances, is a critical component of this redemption. Even Gandhian non-violence is, arguable, embedded within a similar logic. However, in the Gandhian exemplar, redemption, and one might say, recognition by the Other *as one’s Self*, is possible. The notion of reciprocal violence, operating by a similar force of law, albeit divine, is more haunting. The possessive force of violence, its overwhelming sway, is more destabilizing and uncontainable, re-inscribing the principle of law over that which it destroys. Thus, ‘like Sri Lanka’ remains a very real threat.

In its rebirth, now, the temple itself had been sacrificed for the spirit of community awakening—a ‘divine event’ disseminating the temple’s power (or

⁶ The Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and Rashtriya Swamys-evak Sangh (RSS) are two leading militant right-wing Hindu organizations in India. They, together with the political party, the BJP, comprise the core of the Sangh Parivar, or brotherhood of saffron. For an insightful analysis of Hindu right-wing politics in recent decades, see Thomas Hansen, *The Saffron Wave* (2001).

transforming its apparent failure) into the people, now reborn with ‘people power’ (*makkal sakti*). In this instance, the shards of destruction and creative energy (*sakti*) seemed comprehensible, at least in part, in the emergent narrative of the apocryphal birth of Hindraf out of the temple’s sacrifice. Still, a violent unease about the future gripped the imagination. The specter of the state, the ghost of ‘like Sri Lanka’, and the fear of future demolitions lurked as an unfathomable horizon.

In Tamil Hindu terms, a violent unleashing of the transgressed goddess (Kinsley 1986; Nabokov 2000) will overwhelm and possess her subjects in response to the arbitrary violence of the law. At the edge of reason, *katavul* (the sacred, God, or, more specifically, ‘crossing’ from the known to the unknown (Nabokov 2000, 8)), reconstitutes the subject with a sense of power and mastery, but an uncanny residue remains. As Nabokov⁷ (2000) has argued for possession and counter-sorcery, more generally, in the Tamil context, a violence inheres in both the attack against the subject that announces itself as possession, as well as in the destruction of the anthropomorphized demonic presence. Nabokov’s insightful analysis of several counter-sorcery rituals underscores their unresolved nature. She demonstrates that the destruction of a possessing demonic agent, as achieved through counter-sorcery ritual, is never absolute or complete, as it involves a splitting of the psyche of the Tamil subject. The offending deity, as representative of the subject’s forbidden desire, and as translated through the cultural work of symbolization,⁸ is subject to external objectification through the work of effigies, which, in turn, are destroyed by decapitation. The literal destruction of one’s (alter) self, and the renunciation of desire that accompanies this process, Nabokov argues, produces not only a recapitulation of the law and its violence (in this case, the patriarchal structure of Tamil life), but also, the ever-present feeling of suppressed selfhood haunting the conscious subject.

The subject is forced to renounce his/her desire, the etiology of his/her possession, and to submit unto the law, despite the spirited protest by the alien presence, which made itself known at the edge of reason, or in a ‘crossing’ (*katavul*) into the unknown. In the Tamil context, the notion of divine justice is also always already haunted by the force of the law with its arbitrary violence (Shulman 1985). That is, even the heroic figure of folklore, while transgressing and thus revealing the violence within hierarchy, more generally, through their own violence and tragic ends, re-inscribe a principle of power dependent upon self-sacrifice. This Tamil theodicy produces its own version of the sublime,

outside, though not entirely dissimilar from its Kantian variant. As Rodolphe Gasche has eloquently argued:

“What is judged sublime is the mind’s capacity to form an apprehension of something that thwarts even the possibility of minimal objectification, and that like the ‘wide ocean, disturbed by the storm...is just horrible.’” (Kant 1951, 84; cited in Gasche 2003, 127)

But, arguably, the sublime object, born of a divided and violently suppressed self, is ‘minimally’ objectifiable; however, this objectification, as Freud’s notion of the uncanny would have it, possesses the subject, bringing on a restlessness and agitated psychic movement. That is, beyond reason, the force of judgment produces both a futural angst and desirous fantasy about violent outcomes, imagined and figured as justice.

Tamils increasingly feel that a *new and insecure Malay identity* is increasingly brash and assertive, manifesting itself in monocultural policies and Islamist insensitivities to the history of Malaysia, and especially to the sentiments of other communities. This new identity and mindset has been cultivated through exclusive educational institutions, entitlement regimes, and the cognitive dissonance that comes with the partial knowledge that *bumiputrahism* (pro-Malay policies and ideologies) is built upon historically shallow notions of ethnic purity that belie recent immigrations from Indonesia, India, etc. That is, Malay identity has always been more fluid (Mandal 2004) and cosmopolitan (Kahn 2006), indeed, Malaysian, than the new brand of ethnic purists want to admit. Hence the new kind of racialism that permeates the landscape of ethnic politics in Malaysia finds its displaced scapegoat in ethnic Others, be they Indians, Chinese, or foreign workers. Indians, in perceiving this lack in the Other, attempt to surmount or supplement it. But in the supplementary acts, the excessive and possessive force of identification also simultaneously alienates the subject from itself (Siegel 2006; Appadurai 2006). The evidentiary base of the archive grows in direct proportion to the sense of self that is forged in the parameters of victimization. The nurturing of spirit (Derrida 1989), or justice, in these terms, carries within it the risk of (temporarily) silencing the haunting double that drives the imaginings of the subject (or, perhaps, of the imaginary subject). As manifested in Hindraf, the call for justice evokes an assertion of higher or divine law, which might even be called a reverse patrimony, as defined against Malay-Islamic nationalism. But achieving this awakening, in turn, required an extensive and feverish archiving of transgressions by the Other against the authenticity of the Tamil Hindu presence. Elsewhere, I demonstrate how this takes place, in particular, within the realm of a meaningful plantation

⁷ Nabokov is now known as Isabelle Clark-Deces.

⁸ As Gananath Obeyesekere and Sudhir Kakar have also argued in other South Asian contexts.

landscape geography that, under the threats of demolition and dispersal, has produced a lore of the miraculous (Willford 2014; 2006; Bunnell, Nagara-jan, and Willford 2010).

The ‘powers’ and memories associated with temples and shrines within the plantations are, indeed, the animus behind the emergence of Hindraf as a collective force. The benign or protecting powers, associated with the memories of the estate, can turn malevolent, too, and that is of concern to devotees, who at some risk to themselves, stage festivals which involve the offerings of meat and beer to potentially violent ‘guardian’ deities (Shulman 1989; Mines 2005; Nabokov 2000). The question that remains is whether ritualized memorializations, protests, or archivization, can affect control over the incomprehensible wound caused by the destruction of the sacred space. And more broadly, the question is also whether a particularly dangerous and justice-seeking deity’s violence can be contained.

Read as an extension of the community, the village gods are explicitly bound to their subjects in an eternal contract of reciprocity. They can equally create or protect against calamity, according to Tamil folklore (Kinsley 1986; Whitehead 1921; Shulman 1989). But against the horrific and sublime reconstitution through ritual control, memories of a landscape that was once theirs are manifest in the focal attention paid to these shrines and temples. Yet even in this repossession of the land, figural or literal, as is often the case in the ‘social’ ritualisation of the sacred landscape in Tamil Hinduism, the possession of the devotee that accompanies this process by an unseen and dangerous power that lies outside of oneself becomes partially inexplicable or exceeds the symbolic order (Nabokov 2000). From here, aspiration, divine justice, the miraculous, and the limits of reason co-exist. As in Derrida’s contrast between the ‘calculating apparatus’ that is the law, and which is subject to the rules of the archive, justice is “infinite, incalculable, rebellious to rule and foreign to symmetry...” (Derrida 2002, 250). The sublime sacred in Tamil Hinduism haunts the (human) order of the law, and exceeds historical reason. Its de(con)structive power to unmask the contingencies of human law proves politically potent, as witnessed in the collective force of Hindraf, in the wake of the state’s transgression upon sacred spaces.

Finally, what does this portend for the possibility of civility and hospitality in Malaysia? Elsewhere I chronicle the productive violence of the ethnic signifier, supplemented by the ethnographic state in Malaysia (2008; 2014). The general problematic or aporia, obviously, concerns the bureaucratic fixing of serial identifications. The originary lack inherent in the violence of the law is supplemented through the archive of an ethnographic state (Dirks 2002; Hirschman 1986). Grounding itself in conventions provides an aura retroactive historicity to the vio-

lence of the Law and state. The postcolonial state, in short, requires a continuous source of exteriority through which to ground its authority, and its decisions. The ethnographic archive—an archive of difference—supplements and grounds an impossible ideology. That this archive is necessarily ‘thin’ and based upon the measurement and replication of categories through the magic of the census is not completely lost upon Tamil or Malay subjects. This is the larger problem of ‘bound’ serialization that Benedict Anderson and others have called attention to. In a civil-legal, and bureaucratic order established to sustain, indeed, supplement the impossible arche-violence of types, any proclamation towards multiethnic tolerance, hospitality, and civility is always already founded on an act of violence (and a reciprocal expectation of violence). The disposition, therefore, of the victim, as in the case of the perception of the aggrieved minority Tamils in this case, becomes one of justice outside and beyond the juridical/civil order.

True hospitality would, like the true gift, be impossible, as it would involve a forgetting—a non-recognition, or non-calculation. It is in allowing oneself to be overtaken and overwhelmed, destroying the boundaries of self and other. Derrida argues:

“If I welcome only what I welcome, what I am ready to welcome, and that I recognize in advance because I expect the coming of the hôte (guest) as invited, there is no hospitality.” (2002, 362)

That this mystical and infinite hospitality is impossible is not hard to see. But the lack, paradoxically, induced by this demand, is supplemented by the calculable demands of difference and recognition, and herein lies the paradox of religious and ethnic nationalism coupled with juridical rights and privileges. That is, one comes to define hospitality and civility through the matrix of difference, and an expectation of the Other’s failure to match one’s own. Again, as Derrida reminds us with a Jewish joke:

“Two Jews, longtime enemies, meet at the Synagogue, on the Day of Atonement. One says to the other: ‘I wish for you what you wish for me.’ The other immediately retorts: ‘Already you’re starting again.’” (2002, 381)

As he explains in his analysis of the joke, the two old enemies apparently make a gesture of ‘forgiving each other’. But it is ‘fake’ and for ‘laughs’ as

“they reopen, or internally persist with, the conflict. They avow to each other this inexpiable war; they symmetrically accuse each other of it. The avowal goes through a symptom rather than through a declaration, but this changes nothing of the truth: they have not disarmed; they continue to wish each other ill.” (2002, 381)

Herein lies the problem of achieving what might be called civility under the legal premise of ethnic accommodation. The demarcation of types, as wedded to legal rights and privileges, brings with it a symmetrical expectation of hospitality's failure. And with that, gestures of legal right bring with them a kind of laughter, coupled with an inexplicable underlying symptom, and calls for a justice that are oftentimes far from civil.

This brings me to my dilemma as anthropologist. My own alignment and complicity within the discourse of the 'victim' exceeds my written analysis. Indeed, my perspective within the 'field' was enabled by a collaboration with an activist scholar, who, in turn, through his various collaborations, had established contact with radicalized (or at the very least, politically 'awakened') members of various squatter and plantation communities. This, of course, as is often the case with our work, proved immensely critical in terms of access and vantage. But a betrayal is inevitable. In obvious and simple terms, I betray a very situated perspective (whom I did and, significantly, chose not, to interview and/or represent). The victim's narrative of betrayal that I underline mutes those more mundane, but, perhaps, more 'successful' individual outcomes. Even if these are deemed exceptional, they are not without significance. Thus the betrayal of bias for both parsimony and analytic majoritarianism (i.e., highlighting the perceived majority sentiment) moves us beyond the normal bias of perspective, and suggests something uncannily similar to the failure of hospitality I described above. That is, the expectation of the other's failure occurs within a discourse of majority and minority rights. Here, in my actions, I expect the 'failure' of the differing account to tell the story that I believe the majority experience. Thus, the minority report is sequestered, silenced, and deferred. Is this failure of analytic hospitality a necessary one, given one's political convictions? This, in turn, leads me to consider a second and third betrayal: that of my interlocutors and, ultimately, of my conscience.

As I have argued, the containment of calls for justice is never certain. Indeed, my argument, in part, has been that a possessive force often accompanies calls to justice, and that these take a 'divine' turn in a Tamil theodicy. My own discomfort with or recoil from with the potential violence of divine justice allows me to archive difference, to give analytic objectivity. But this so-called, and perhaps, necessary, objectivity is really constructed out of the fear of 'contagion'⁹ that true hospitality would entail. My reserve is my betrayal of those I seek to understand and know. Conscience, in turn, cannot escape this double bind. For if I pay heed to my recoiling conscience, my betrayal of intimacy with those 'victims' is certain. On the other hand, my identification with

the victim produces its own form of betrayal, suspended in the transference, and potentially counter-transference space of recognition. Still, effacing these traces of being in the service of a so-called objectivity or moral absolute, is, I believe, the greatest betrayal of all, and one that mirrors the arche-violence of the law.

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⁹ I take this term from Allen Young (1997).

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