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THE INTIMATE LIFE OF DISSENT

ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

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Edited by
Harini Amarasuriya, Tobias Kelly, Sidharthan Maunaguru, Galina Oustinova-Stjepanovic and Jonathan Spencer

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Chapter 1
Introduction: the intimate life of dissent

Harini Amarasuriya, Tobias Kelly, Sidharthan Maunaguru, Galina Oustinova-Stjepanovic and Jonathan Spencer

Natalya Gorbanevskaya, one of the participants in a Red Square protest against the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, did something surprising: she brought her baby son to the demonstration even though she anticipated arrest. She pushed a pram with her child to the demonstration in the centre of the Square and unfurled a home-made banner. She then left the baby in the lobby of the KGB headquarters while she underwent an extensive interrogation. When asked by a KGB officer to name the father of her child, Gorbanevskaya refused, declaring that family issues were irrelevant. Yet in many ways her act of political opposition had been forged and sustained by relations with lovers, friends, family and with other dissidents. Gorbanevskaya's mother, for example, both supported and fretted over her daughter's political engagements. When Gorbanevskaya was charged with anti-Soviet agitation, her actions were said by the prosecutor to amount not only to a betrayal of the Soviet state, but also to a betrayal of her own children. She was cast as both a bad Soviet citizen and a bad mother. The jury then punished Gorbanevskaya with a lengthy confinement in a psychiatric ward, resulting in separation from her family and friends (many of whom shared her hostility towards the Soviet state). In one fell swoop, Gorbanevskaya seemed to have both transgressed and reinstated the boundary between the intimate life of sex and family and the public life of political protest. Her story shows what is at stake, both politically and personally, in acts of dissent.

The chapters in this edited collection examine those moments when people take a stand, acting in ways that go against the grain of social and political life, often at great personal risk. For Soviet dissidents, Kurdish activists, Sri Lankan leftists, Orthodox Jewish Israelis,

Indonesian students and prisoners, Tibetan exiles and British pacifists, acts of dissent are attempts to take a position of principle, to set oneself up against the status quo. We might view such acts of dissent within a range of possible interpretive frames, such as 'resistance', 'refusal' or 'protest' (McGranahan 2016; Simpson 2014; Weiss 2016), but we are particularly interested here in those acts where people declare or act on their commitments.

Dissidence implies not just strong dissatisfaction, but also determined and open opposition. Such acts of dissent are found not so much in forms of hidden and subtle resistance, but in the processes that Leela Gandhi has described as 'actively renouncing, refusing and rejecting' (2006, 5). In this collection we are trying to understand the conditions of possibility for such acts, and the culturally thick meanings and significance with which they are inscribed. We do not wish to romanticise dissent – conservatism and xenophobic nationalism can be dissenting principles, after all – but rather to put acts of protest and refusal back into the thick social and cultural relations out of which they emerge and take effect.

The term 'dissent' has a very particular and freighted history – linked most obviously with the Protestant Reformation and, more recently, anti-authoritarian politics and Cold War human rights (Arendt 1972; Havel 1989; Shelby 2018, 264). Underpinned by a specific view of personal freedom, dissent in this tradition is presumed to emanate from within the individual and has been strongly linked to ideas of 'conscience', 'interiority' and 'authenticity' (Boym 2010; Laidlaw 2002). Dissent here is a form of political disruption born in the moral individual. To dissent is both to protest in the face of injustice *and* to be true to oneself: a combination that Václav Havel called 'living in truth' (1989). Indeed, acts of dissent are seen to represent a residual and radical humanity that cannot be crushed by authoritarianism, totalitarianism or political horror.

Dissidents can be awkward in their commitment to freedom, even iconoclastic in the way they hold fast to their principles – but for them *not* to dissent would be somehow ethically corrupting. 'Silence', as Nadezdha Mandelstam put it, 'would be the real crime against humanity'. The dissenting heroes of the liberal imagination are therefore people such as Mandelstam, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Václav Havel and Ken Saro-Wiwa. They may seem idiosyncratic and awkward, but their dissent is often seen as a positive virtue – one that not only allows the dissenter to be 'true to oneself', but also serves as a powerful social and political corrective to the injustice around them.

Although the term 'dissent' may resonate within the histories of liberal politics and Protestant Christianity, its meanings and implications are not constrained by those traditions. Ethnographic and historical evidence points instead to multiplicity: dissent – as an act of renouncing, refusing and rejecting – can assume many forms and is not limited to individual acts of moral protest. As Oustinova-Stjepanovic shows in chapter 2, for example, dissent in the late Soviet period was manifest not only in public demonstrations, but also sometimes in seemingly absurd forms of conceptual exile and artistic estrangement. Similarly, Erica Weiss has suggested in chapter 3 that the peace activism of liberal and ultra-Orthodox Jews may be defined by a common goal, but builds on radically different, even incompatible moral premises. If dissent is often associated with particular forms of freedom, individualism and aesthetics, these links are therefore not as self-evident as they might appear. Dissent, for example, can be thought of as a form of obligation or a duty as much as an expression of freedom. There often seems to be a sense (in Geertz's (1968) formulation) that we are *held by* the convictions that ground our dissent, rather than that we *hold* them. Furthermore, even within the liberal tradition, not all forms of dissent are seen as equal. Individuals do not stand free and unencumbered, but are always marked by histories of inequality. Some people find it easier to enter the space of dissent than others. The sense that dissent somehow has its origins deep inside the individual can also cause unease, as a valorisation of sincerity produces anxieties about authenticity and dissenters can be viewed as degenerate trouble makers as much as moral saints. In short, there are many cultures of dissent.

The central argument of this volume is that foregrounding intimacy can help us to parochialise liberal notions of dissent, and their associated forms of agency, personhood and change. Dissidents are not simply lone individuals with abstract ideals; they are also caught up in other, sometimes contradictory aspirations and relationships and forms of responsibility. Dissent does not just reverberate through public acts, but also in the most intimate of relations, and the social world of dissidents and activists is often a place of especially intense sociality. For liberal theorists such as John Rawls (1993), dissent is carried out by abstract individuals, seemingly devoid of personal ties. When Rawls writes of anti-war activists and their acts of civil disobedience during the Vietnam war, it is as if they have no social relations and act solely as moral individuals alone against the world, weighing up what is good and right to do in the face of violence, coercion and domination. Yet the memoirs of dissidents are full of descriptions both of how they gained support

and succour from loved ones and of the tragic consequences of their action for their own families (Yakir 1972). Acts of dissent can therefore involve the making and breaking of specific intimate attachments of kinship, friendship and solidarity, just as much as commitments to high principles.

We understand intimacy here as being linked to the experience of familiarity within friendship, family and love, but as also going beyond that – opening up what Lauren Berlant has described as a 'range of attachments' that 'links the instability of individual lives to the trajectories of the collective' (1998, 283; see also Herzfeld 2005). Ties of family, friendship and sex are therefore not the only sources of intimacy, although they can be a very important part. Or, to put this another way, the intimate is exhausted neither by kinship ties nor the private realm. As Michael Herzfeld (2005) has argued, for example, the idea of the nation can be invoked through the register of intimacy too, creating shared frustrations, embarrassments and aspirations. Intimacy works across different scales, implying closeness but not necessarily proximity, gesturing to forms of broader mutual identification, at the levels of the family, but also of the nation, the religious community or other publics. In this process, and importantly for our argument, the very distinction between private ideas and public action begins to break down. Intimacy is also not an inherently positive experience or virtue: it can be fraught, claustrophobic and coercive, as well as caring and supportive.

Thinking of dissent as intimate helps us to move beyond the narrow notions of the individual by putting dissidence back in the histories of the dense social relations from which it emerges (Berlant 1998, 282; Berlant and Warner 1998, 553; see also Laurie and Stark 2017, 73). We might say that dissent is both enabled and contained by our intimate relations, and we can only understand the intensity of acts of dissent, and the risks they entail, if we also understand the intimate ties, tensions and contradictions within which they are enmeshed. Intimate ties can exist in tragic tension with forms of political dissent, or they can provide the energy upon which dissent thrives. Either way, we cannot understand dissent unless we understand its often fraught relationship with intimacy.

At one level, putting intimacy and dissent into the same frame might seem an awkward move. In the popular imagination, dissidents are moved by a commitment to what is right or wrong that transcends their own narrow self-interest and personal ties. Bonhoeffer, Havel and Saro-Wiwa went to jail and Bonhoeffer and Saro-Wiwa were executed for standing firm by their ideals; they left behind lovers, children, family and friends, who could only watch in a tragic mixture of admiration and

despair. As the anthropology of ethics has tried to show, many people act out of a deep commitment to ideals of what is right, good and just, rather than the partiality of specific ties and interests (Laidlaw 2002; Schielke 2015). These are ideals that, as Samuli Schielke argues, can appear distant, 'external and superior to everyday experience' (2015, 13). And as Alberto Toscano (2010) has similarly argued, people are often moved by abstract ideals in a way that makes political action both possible and imaginable. Ideas of class, nation and religion evoke much more than the here and now. That is precisely why they are such a powerful force in people's lives, one that can compel them to act under the most difficult of circumstances.

We should not though overplay the distinction between abstract commitments and intimate relations. If intimacy is not simply about known personal relations, but also about wider ties of familiarity (Herzfeld 2005), the lines between intimate relations and abstract principles blur. At one level, convictions are shaped and given meaning through the dense flux and flow of relations with friends, children, parents, siblings, lovers, comrades and others. Commitments are rarely just commitments to ideas, but also, as Michael Walzer (1970) has pointed out, obligations to people who we might know, love and respect. People tend to die, for example, not simply for country, God or class, but also for friends, comrades and lovers. As Veena Das (2007) has argued, ideals do not transcend the world of everyday relations and experiences: they rather emerge through and as part of them. Furthermore, as Mathijs Pelkmans has also argued, abstract commitments can have a deeply affective dimension; as he puts it, 'we can be moved by our principles' (2017). The commitments for which we might take a stand can be deeply personal in a profound sense. Foregrounding intimacy therefore helps us to move away from a stark contrast between abstract principles and dense social relationships. It is not that the ties that bind are simply put at risk by grand schemes and ideals, but rather that all schemes and ideas gain meaning and possibility through those ties in the first place.

We might be tempted to understand dissent as an issue of 'politics' or 'ethics' – a play of power and resistance, or a product of a commitment to ethical virtue and normative principles. The last 30 years of anthropology have produced numerous important insights into ways in which people resist multiple forms of domination (Abu-Lughod 1990; Simpson 2014). In partial contrast, some of the recent work in the anthropology of ethics has pushed back against an understanding of political action as linked to instrumental forms of action, in favour of an emphasis on the

cultivation of ethical selves and judgements (Laidlaw 2002; Mattingly 2014). But using the frame of intimacy helps to show that both an 'ethical virtue' and 'power and resistance' approach to dissent can be too reductionist, failing to grasp the dense and often contradictory bonds within which people live alongside one another, the grounds upon which they protest and the implications of doing so.

It is not that 'ethics' and 'politics', or even 'kinship', do not matter – they matter intensely – but rather that our hopes, fears and relationships cannot be neatly constrained within these frames. Our intimate ties cut across these domains, even as they might sometimes push them apart. The forms of dissent explored in this volume are not simply stories of great lives lived alone or family melodramas, nor are they simply lives of high principle or intense calculation, but all and neither at the same time. Commitments are lived and struggled with in a way that is not reducible to something called politics, ethics or kinship, but through a shifting, fraught and sometimes inspiring combination of multiple forms of always intimate obligation and attachment.

Domains of dissent

In his monumental account of the early years of the Soviet Union, Yuri Slezkine (2017, 334–5) cites at some length an architectural vision of the proposed social relations of the new society that was coming into existence. The new men and women of the Soviet era would be housed in vast collective blocks. On entering the block, they would first pass through an area dedicated to personal hygiene and cleanliness before entering the zone of sociality and the collective 'American-style' cafeteria, where all were to eat. Finally, past all this, residents would have access to their strictly individual sleeping rooms. Sex, reproduction and the responsibilities of parenthood were all epiphenomenal to the vision of a new order. This would be a regime in which intimacy would to a great extent be rendered architecturally unthinkable.

The story of Slezkine's book, though, is of the Soviet failure to remake intimate relations on rational, socialist lines, as orthodox Marxist expectations about the imminent end of the bourgeois family came up against what we might, in retrospect, see as the intransigence of the intimate. 'The Bolsheviks' early attempts to reform the family,' Slezkine concludes, 'were soon abandoned in favour of an acceptance that remained untheorized and apparently irrelevant to the building of Communism' (2017, 953).

But intimacy can present an opportunity as well as a challenge for would-be revolutionaries. Alpa Shah (2013), for example, argues against attempts to explain local support for Indian Naxalites in terms of purely material factors (so-called 'greed or grievance'), in favour of an explanation which attends more closely to the idioms of intimacy that draw in, and hold onto, the loyalties of the rural poor. Young recruits to the Maoists are at once attracted by the familiarity of the cadres they join – brothers, sisters, cousins – while also seeking to escape the impossibility of their own domestic circumstances, the overbearing father, the threat of an unwanted marriage. Intimacy, this case reminds us, cuts two ways, promising warmth and solidarity, but as often delivering conflict and division. And the blurring of the boundary between the intimate and the political is, of course, one source of the peculiarly bitter dynamics of local-level civil wars. In such conflicts accusations of treachery and betrayal are most often hurled at those who would otherwise appear to be close, sometimes resulting in the most intense forms of violence (Kalyvas 2006; Thiranagama and Kelly 2010).

These two examples, read together, show that the politics of intimacy are unlikely to be simple or straightforward. For would-be revolutionaries, captivated by top-down, totalising visions of social and political change, the intimate, as a bounded enclave in social life, threatens to undermine the integrity of the big vision. But, at the same time, the sentimental intimate, the promised warmth of comradeship, of brotherhood and sisterhood, offers the possibility of scaling up into bigger forms of solidarity. They also show that the intimate has been a source of potential dissonance for radical political projects well before the 1960s reminder that 'the personal is political'. As Hanisch put it, in a classic second-wave feminist intervention, 'Personal problems are political problems. There are no personal solutions at this time. There is only collective action for a collective solution' (1970). There is a subtle difference in intent here, though, between second-wave feminism and the socialist revolutionary projects described above. The 'political' here is less a totalising project, but rather more a pervasive reality, an inescapable dimension of all social relations. This argument finds a familiar academic echo in Foucault's 1960s and 1970s writings on power. But, as Heberle (2016) shows in a useful recent survey, it was much more widespread as a point of departure across a range of 1960s social movements – anti-war, anti-racist, anti-patriarchy.

What follows from this, as the history of the last 50 years amply attests, is really not at all simple. The invocation of the 'personal as political' raises questions of scale, of strategy, of consistency and of

potential compromises and trade-offs. These have become as much practical questions for those who would act politically as they are theoretical questions for those who would simply analyse. In part this is because the intimate plays tricks on us all: intimacy is the zone in which individual lives should take their proper shape, yet intimacy is precisely the area where we seem to have least control over the shape our lives take (Berlant 1998). The expectation of stability in intimate relations is inseparable from the experience of instability. The desire to bound off the intimate from the unruliness of the wider world is at odds with the weakness of the boundary itself.

But boundaries matter, even – or especially – blurred boundaries. We should be careful lest we collapse intimacy, kinship and politics, or the public and the private for that matter, into one another too quickly. Rather we need to pay attention to their productive points of tension. At one level, intimacy within a family, even if chosen (Weston 1997), can be very different from intimacy within an orchestra or within a political demonstration. Not all intimacy is the same. At another level, intimacy does not exhaust all social relations, and there is more to life than feeling intimate. Intimacy has its own qualities too; it cannot be reduced simply to politics or the social. In the recent anthropology of activism, questions of class, sexuality and gender have been given important analytical weight (Dave 2012; Howe 2013), but activists have also sometimes been analysed as if they are political, and only political, all the way down.

There is a lesson to be learned here from the anthropology of Islam and Christianity, which has also occasionally treated people as if a description of their self-consciously religious life projects can meaningfully ignore their other cross-cutting and sometimes contradictory aspirations, obligations and commitments, as well as the inevitable tensions and failures involved in this process. As Schielke (2015; cf. Mahmood 2004) has reminded us, people are always caught between conflicting and contradictory political, ethical and social projects. In a similar vein, in the anthropology of politics, everything has sometimes been treated as political. As a result the idea of the political easily becomes conceptually, culturally and sociologically flat, with nothing to push off against (Candea 2011; Curtis and Spencer 2012).

The intimate dimensions of dissent therefore do not necessarily crowd out all others, but can exist in parallel, or in tension, with the possibility of changing both, folding and unfolding into one another (Das 2007). Unbounded intimacy, like the relentless politicisation of everything, can sound attractive as an abstract project, even if it is

impossible to achieve in practice. Indeed, it is often the very relationship between the intimate and the political that is at stake in acts of dissent.

Rather than simply doing away with the distinction between kinship and politics, the public and the private or intimacy and its others, we need to understand how these distinctions are produced and contested, valorised and denigrated in particular contexts, and how these processes in turn give shape and meanings to both intimacy and dissent. *The Intimate Life of Dissent* therefore pays particular attention to the ways in which the meanings and implications of dissent are formed specifically through the contingent relationship between the 'political' and its counters.

Many of the political projects described in this volume involve an attempt to collapse the distinctions between the intimate and the political, in the face of sometimes considerable resistance, in order to create the grounds of dissent. These are projects which try to produce a unitary life world, where the personal is the political, sometimes from the top down and sometimes from the bottom up. And it is here that many of the key tensions described in the volume can be found, as the ties that bind pull in different directions. The allure of consistency, from top to toe, rubs up against multiple responsibilities and relationships, both intimate and otherwise, within which people live their lives. The result is friction. Some forms of dissent are about expanding the intimate and some are about bounding it, but either way there is a sense of concomitant danger.

In chapter 4 Serra Hakyemez describes how Kurdish activists, imprisoned and tortured by the Turkish state, develop forms of intimacy, caught as they are between class and kin and grounded in their shared experiences of suffering. The Turkish prison regime imposes a programme of violence, and the Kurdish movement's prison organisation seeks to produce its own revolutionary subjects through a counter-programme of education and bodily discipline. The moment a person steps inside a prison, the Kurdish prison committee introduces him or her to the communal life of political prisoners designed to turn newcomers into a loyal *heval* (comrade), thereby eradicating any private sense of self. But the Kurdish term *heval* implies both comrade *and* friend. It is therefore a source of possible tension, at once speaking to the possibility of revolutionary politics while also implicitly acknowledging its limits.

Hakyemez describes the unease caused when one prisoner asked the court not to disclose the tapped private conversations he had with his 'social friend' in the presence of his 'political friends' – the implication being that he has an intimate relationship with the former that extends beyond the comradeship among the latter. In this seemingly small

gesture, the very relationship between the political and the social is at stake.

The new men and women of revolutionary socialist politics, for whom private life is supposedly eradicated in the name of class solidarity, provide numerous examples of the attempt to collapse the intimate and the political. The early Soviet state's attempted eradication of the nuclear family represents one of the greatest failures of the Soviet political project (Slezkine 2017). In chapter 2 Galina Oustinova-Stjepanovic describes the Soviet regime's persistent attempts to impose a regime of top-down intimacy: the singular intimacy of 'we', the Soviet people. The people and the state of the USSR were said to exist in a seamless, singular and unified whole, an inescapable oneness.

Importantly, the language of totality was evoked both by the regime and its opponents. For critics, the totality of the Soviet state was the brutality of the totalitarian. But, as Oustinova-Stjepanovic explains, this created a conundrum for dissidents. If the Soviet state was a totality, there was no exterior space the dissidents could claim from which to resist and oppose. Their response was instead a form of estrangement from the state, an attempt to create a moral 'outside' that was most obviously found in non-instrumental forms of artistic expression and dense social relationships. In this case the meanings and possibilities of dissent are produced through struggles over the meanings of the intimate.

The intimate politics of dissent

How does intimacy shape the forms of dissent? In much political theory there has been a distinct analytical severing of the intimate from the political. Most obviously, Hannah Arendt sought to draw a sharp distinction between the personal and intimate ties of the household and the public life of politics (1958). Indeed, her definition of politics was expressly based on the very distinction between the intimate and the public. This is a distinction that also runs through much liberal politics, where intimate ties are often seen as somehow polluting political commitments and attempts are sometimes made to protect the private lives of politicians from public glare.

More recent work has sought to examine the ways in which disruptive forms of politics might emerge out of intimate life. Giorgio Agamben, for example, has argued that intimate practices help to bring 'the political out of concealment' (Bordeleau 2017, 482). For Agamben, acts of dissent bring an otherwise inchoate politics into view by putting

the self and its relations with others at stake (Bordeleau 2017, 490). Intimacy here provides the grounds and affective labour necessary for political action. As Saidiya Hartman argues, intimacy can be the 'insurgent ground that enables new possibilities', rooted in the affective labour central to political action (2019, 227). Indeed, one of the greatest predictors of whether someone will participate in an act of dissent is whether they know someone closely who is already involved (McAdam 1988). It is not simply that private and intimate convictions are taken out into the public realm, but that intimacy itself is generative of political positions and relationships.

What is needed is a more nuanced sense of both intimacy and the possibilities of political disruption. As Serra Hakyemez describes in chapter 4, it is the intimacy created by the shared experience of torture by the Turkish state that creates the possibility of political solidarity within the prison. Hakyemez draws on another part of the work of Hannah Arendt in arguing that relationships formed through witnessing mutual suffering create the grounds for 'being together' and therefore acting politically. She develops Arendt's analogy of oases, 'those fields of life which exist independently, or largely so, from political conditions' (Arendt 2005, 202). In this analogy the 'political conditions' are the desert of the totalitarian; the oasis represents a space that escapes such a totalising project, or escapes it just sufficiently to allow a flicker of passion and creativity to kindle and burn. As Arendt argues, we may act together 'in the inherently worldless relationship between human beings as it exists in love and sometimes in friendship – when one heart reaches out directly to the others, as in friendship, or when the in-between, the world, goes up on flames, as in love' (Arendt 2005, 202). These spaces, and the intimacy that animates them, are not the spaces of compulsory comradeship imposed by the movement's programme of prison discipline. To tease out what they are, Hakyemez makes a detour into the etymology of local idioms of the intimate and the significance of the 'private space' and the 'forbidden' in creating the grounds for other possibilities – which in turn challenge the iron logic of the totalitarian version of the political.

Not only can dissent grow out of intimate ties, but it can also produce its own new ties of intimacy. Elsewhere Dave, for example, has shown how queer activism in India forges new relationships (2012, 64). These ties are seldom simple, however. In chapter 5 Amarasuriya and Spencer's account of the life of one Sri Lankan radical, Joe Seneviratne, starts with a father dramatically giving away his errant son's dinner to the dog, with dramatic results: 'I said, my house is not here, but the whole

world, and I left home'. First the party, then particular comrades pick Joe up and find him work, food and shelter. Intimacy is a constant theme in the account of his life that Joe composes in his conversations with Amarasuriya. In this he describes turning his back on home and family, placing his trust in comrades (and the bitter lessons of betrayal) and experiencing the impossible tug between obligations to wife and children and the demands of the party.

Clearly, some forms of dissent can exist in tension with intimate ties. For Michel Foucault, for example, what he calls *parrhesia* (fearless speech) is not simply controversial speech for the sake of speech, but also involves the speaker knowing that it might put their relationships at risk (2001). Dissent *is* dissent here, precisely because it puts our most precious ties at stake. Not only do acts of dissent put intimate ties under strain, however. On the one hand, the burdens and implications of dissent are often borne most intensely by those to whom the dissenter is personally close. On the other hand, the very rupturing and severing of personal relations is the enabling condition of dissent; for those involved in forms of dissent, family and friends become neglected and barely visible. There is considerable evidence to suggest that people with fewer family ties (however those may be measured) are more likely to participate in more radical actions, and limiting obligation to people outside a movement is a key indicator of longevity within it (Whittier 1995). But as Amarasuriya and Spencer point out, breaking ties is not confined to intimate relations: splits, ruptures and breaks are part of the long history of oppositional politics in all parts of the world. There is scope for thinking about the move from personal splits to bigger political splits and back again, and for considering what might happen to the affective consequences of breaks and ruptures with the shift in scale.

Dissent can also be straightforwardly socially corrosive, working against intimate relations. In chapter 6 Tobias Kelly describes how, in mid-twentieth century Britain, conscience was both valorised as an authentic ground of moral autonomy and at the same time suspected as a form of vanity and delusion. His chapter focuses on conscientious objectors to military service in the Second World War. He describes the resolute convictions of the tens of thousands of peace activists who refused conscription and the fight against fascism. As long as they were willing to do alternative forms of service, such as humanitarian work patching up the wounded, they were widely tolerated, often even respected, by the British public for sticking to their principles. A small minority refused to take any direction from the state, however, and many of these ended up in jail.

Although many conscientious objectors came to the decision not to fight as part of intense conversations and experiences with friends, comrades and lovers, the eventual decision to refuse to fight could also be very lonely and full of doubt. Certainly some conscientious objectors were accused of being anti-social, self-obsessed and self-indulgent. As Susan Sontag has argued elsewhere, the moral heroes of our 'liberal civilization' are often regarded with a 'mixture of revulsion, pity and reverence' (1963). The occlusion of kinship ties and disregard of intimate backgrounds is sometimes seen as a mythical source of 'Western' creativity in the sense of the capacity to move, explore, conquer and think freely (Bashkow 2006). But such freedom comes at a cost. Dissent, particularly in its most liberal forms, walks a tight line between moral virtue and arrogant pride.

Intimacy can also work across political lines: you are not only intimate with your political allies. An understanding of politics as rooted in the distinction between friends and enemies (Schmitt 2007) is upended by an examination of the dense relationships that can exist across political lines, where a combination of proximity and difference can transform social relations. As Leela Gandhi argues, friendships can produce dissident solidarities that cut through the exclusionary logics of many forms of politics (2006). There are numerous examples of how, for example, returnees from Soviet prison camps, rejected by families, then became friends and drinking buddies with the guards whom they had despised in their confinement. As Sidharthan Maunaguru describes in chapter 7, political intimacy can traverse the institutional distinction between friends and foes (see also Klumbytė 2011). Maunaguru asks whether it is possible to be a friend and a political rival, and explores the struggle to maintain friendship in the face of political violence.

Chapter 7 focuses on the example of Ranjan, a Sri Lankan Tamil refugee and exile now living in the UK. Ranjan was an early member of PLOTE, a radical leftist Tamil group that emerged in the 1970s. However, he soon fell out with the leadership, which he denounced for its promotion of what he saw as an undemocratic cult of personality. The result was an assassination attempt and threats on Ranjan's life, as he moved from a position of political affinity to one marked by accusations of treachery and eventually enmity. Ranjan finally made his way to the UK, where he worked as a street sweeper and cleaner and tried to support his fellow Sri Lankan exiles in whatever way he could. At one point he helped another former member of PLOTE, who had once followed the orders of the leadership and tried to kill him. Ranjan remained deeply critical of his friend's political views, but believed that

an ethical commitment to democratic politics meant that, in the midst of the splintering violence of Sri Lankan and Tamil politics, he was obliged to maintain friendships across political lines. We are a world away here from the Schmittian definition of politics. If for Schmitt (2007) it is the distinction between friend and enemy that forms the basis of politics, for people such as Ranjan an ethical politics must work to erode that very distinction.

We should not inevitably associate either dissent or intimacy with positive virtues. As Berlant (1998, 286) drily observes, intimacy 'only rarely makes sense of things'. For its part, intimacy may be disruptive or dissonant, but it can be coercive too (Sa'ar 2001; Strange 2018). The inequalities and forms of violence that mark intimate relations can also run through public acts of dissent, as the act of taking a stand can be inflected by the same hierarchies of gender, class and race that shape intimate ties. Intimacy can also be stifling or claustrophobic. It is not just a resource for dissent, but can also be the very thing people wish to dissent against, particularly in the context of gendered forms of inequality. Intimacy certainly has its 'dark sides' (Geschiere 1997; Jamieson 1998; Klein 1967), creating vulnerability, coercion and anxiety as much as care and support. Or, to put this another way, intimacy can be marked by fear and suspicion as much as trust and comfort.

Dissent itself can also be very conventional. As dissent draws people into particular and perhaps new forms of intimacy, it also creates its own norms and ties. Dissent is therefore not a simple synonym for subversion; it creates attachments of its own and can morph into loyalty and conformity to its own principles. Dissent can be deeply orthodox and conformist, a privilege even. At some point dissent stops being itself, giving way to other solidarities and alliances. Furthermore, importantly, dissent from one perspective can look like compliance from another. But if intimacy is associated with affinity and closeness, dissent might imply disagreement and discord. There is therefore a potential paradox at the heart of dissent, in that it both brings people together and pushes them apart.

We are left with a set of questions about the ways in which acts of dissent might be disruptive of, or simply a way to reproduce, existing social relations. Is dissent a social anomaly, and a break from the ordinary flux and flow of life? Or is it rather something to be understood as itself forming social and political relations? How do intimate relations both work against and produce the conditions of dissent? Do particular types of intimacy encourage people to take a stand? Do they indeed shape such acts, and when do they act as a break or an impediment?

In chapter 8 Carole McGranahan shows how dissent both works within and against normative frames, subtly and not so subtly working along and against the grain of convention. Chapter 8 describes how over the course of the twentieth century the Pangdatsang family from eastern Tibet rose from being traders far away from the centres of power to intimates of the Dalai Lama. They achieved this through strategic acts of both subversion and loyalty, both playing by the rules and breaking them, in a situation where power was supposed to be reserved for the central Tibetan aristocracy. This is a family who included anti-colonial politicians, Buddhist loyalists and Communist Party officials. But the family's very presence in Lhasa was itself a form of dissent from aristocratic hierarchy, enabled by submission and acquiescence. For McGranahan, the dissent of this family was always entangled within wider webs of obligation, and it is these entanglements that make dissent so dangerous. An act of opposition is also an act of loyalty and, perhaps most importantly, an act of loyalty can also be seen as an act of opposition.

Socialities of dissent

How do we know dissent when we see it? Dissent is always embedded in dense webs of cultural meaning and social relationships. Different types of sociality therefore produce different forms of both intimacy and dissent. Dissent does not always have to involve taking to the streets, but it always involves some attempt at communication, however small or unclear the intended audience. Dissent must therefore be located in relationships, rather than in individual moments of intentionality. It can be aimed at getting things done, to bring about change, or it can be understood as an end in itself. Even if it is only aimed at the self, however, it also involves making otherwise intangible commitments somehow more concrete. There are therefore important questions about the types of claim – and the types of action – that are seen as dissenting, both by dissenters themselves and by others, and about which claims and which actions are seen as legitimate and significant. Most significantly, how is dissent made tangible or visible?

In chapter 3 Erica Weiss compares what she calls the liberal and secular dissent of conscientious objectors to military service as she explores the dissent of ultra-Orthodox Jewish women peace activists. For liberal peace activists, dissent is grounded in an individual will that stands above narrow calculation, and there is a wider public celebration

of such forms of disruption. As the saying goes, 'We might not agree with what you are saying, but we respect your right to say it'. In contrast, for ultra-Orthodox Jewish peace activists, there are plenty of differences of opinion, but iconoclasm has little aesthetic or moral appeal and there is an emphasis on finding internal consensus, especially before speaking beyond the ultra-Orthodox community. Compromise here is not seen as morally corrosive but as morally virtuous; moral authority is not thought to lie in the individual, but is instead collective and hierarchically organised.

There are very different moral grammars and aesthetic judgements at work in this comparison. As Weiss argues, we need to be careful not to fall into the trap where we analytically identify dissent with particular 'rhetorics, aesthetics and structures' that reflect narrow 'assumptions about moral decision-making' and the 'ethics of self-presentation'. For Weiss, the media and public discourse tend to celebrate liberal, secular forms of dissent, but often miss the subtler, backstage, community-focused forms of dissent found among ultra-Orthodox Jews. One of the key points to take from chapter 3 is that we need to pay attention to modes of dissent that are differentially recognised as appropriate in different contexts. Perhaps counter-intuitively, dissent has its own conventions.

The mediums through which dissent is communicated and given meaning are central to the ways in which it is understood and given meaning. For Foucault (2001), for example, speech, in the form of *parrhesia*, is central to dissent: dissent is a linguistic activity that involves *speaking* truth. But texts can also have a particularly significant role to play here: the very acts of reading and writing can play a specific role in mediating dissent (Cody 2013). Dissidents are famous as much for what they write as for what they say, and writers have a particularly prominent role in the public imagination of dissent. If texts hold a privileged place in the communication of dissent, reading and writing are also about more than communication. They can also be central to the intimate grounds of dissent. At one level both reading and writing, in their different ways, are deeply personal experiences, potentially reproducing particular forms of interiority. Yet at another level reading and writing are also deeply shared experiences. Not only is writing, in most of its forms, about communicating with others, but reading and writing can play an important role in the imagination of collective forms of life. As Sidharthan Maunaguru and Tobias Kelly both describe, in chapters 7 and 6 respectively, the acts of reading and writing play a central role in the sociality of political activists, be this in contemporary Sri Lanka or Britain

during the Second World War. Far from being a solitary act, reading and writing are intensely social, drawing people into dense political relationships.

In chapter 9 Doreen Lee describes how political prisoners and student dissidents in 1990s Indonesia engaged in the writing and circulation of texts, often with the help of their family, friends and strangers. She describes the joy of two former activists on meeting one another after many years, their memories focused less on shared ideals and commitments and more on the shared sensuous work of grappling with photocopies and duplicators to produce political leaflets and posters. While the production of such texts gave ideas a tangible material form in ink and paper, and the evidence of dissent was often to be found in such papers, the processes of production were as important for dissident students as the actual words on the page.

As Lee argues, an analytical focus on the intimate world of paper can help us to understand those ties that bind political activists, away from 'ideological propulsion' or the 'overwhelming force of protest'. For Lee, the apparently ordinary but intimate and shared labour of running the printing machine helped to conscript people into political activities that stretched across space and time. This production of the paper artefacts of dissent was a craft that revealed new political forms (Lee 2016, 30). Often read in secrecy, dissident texts changed hands, entering and transforming social, political and interpersonal relations. New publics and new political relationships were called into being through the production of words on the page.

Questions of recognition and misrecognition are central to the process of dissent. And recognition can itself be a form of privilege. In hierarchical settings the right to be heard is if anything more important than the right to speak (Burghart 1996). Not all forms of dissent are recognised as such, and not all forms of dissent are deemed politically legitimate. As McGranahan shows in chapter 8, the everyday details of a life can be read by the state as mundane or subversive, depending on the frame within which they are placed. If dissent is an issue of interpretation, rather than being an innate quality of an act, it is often therefore deeply ambiguous, containing both forms of protest and loyalty that can be read in different ways by different audiences.

In what might be called the liberal imagination, dissent is foundational for both a particular type of citizenship and for moral personhood (Kelly 2015). To dissent is to show the capacity for ethical reflection and autonomy: dissent is therefore both a moral and political virtue. As Erica Weiss reveals, for example, Israeli conscientious objectors work

with a moral vocabulary that valorises the capacity for ethical freedom. Yet at the same time firm boundaries are placed around how people can dissent and in what ways, and around what is said to 'count' as an authorised form of dissent. Not all issues are dealt with equally as issues of conscience, and not all people can equally persuade others that their conscience is genuine. As Kelly has described elsewhere, for example (2015), not all forms of opposition to war are given the same weight within liberal democracies. To be persuasive, conscience often has to be tempered and individual, and claims of conscience are often most persuasively made by those deemed to be loyal citizens.

We might see the recognition of dissent as diagnostic of particular social formations, in the sense that what is understood as an act of dissent can help us understand what aspects of social relations are understood as significant and important for social reproduction (Abu-Lughod 1990). Audiences for dissent can take many forms and, rather than being unified, should be understood as varied and hierarchical (Warner 2002). We might also ask who is watching, who is noticing and who cares? What happens when no one takes any notice? And what happens when an audience attributes meanings that were not intended by their authors? Seemingly innocent acts can be labelled as radical, and acts designed to be disruptive might be ignored.

In chapter 2 Galina Oustinova-Stjepanovic describes how acts of seeming political dissidence were reframed by the Soviet state as evidence of mental health problems, as delusions and mental pathology that could be treated therapeutically. However, she also questions why the Soviet state seemed to care so much. Why did it go out of its way to respond to criticisms of the state that were commonplace, and even aired by people at the centre of the regime? Her answer is that it was not so much *what* was said that was at stake, but *how* it was said, and where. Dissidents tried to create an artistic and moral space that was somehow 'outside' the Soviet state. Through their estrangement they challenged the state's very claim to totality. Dissent matters here, precisely because it was so seemingly inconsequential.

Taken together, the chapters in *The Intimate Life of Dissent* – ranging across Israel, Turkey, Indonesia, Tibet, Britain, Sri Lanka and Russia – examine the conditions under which people take a stand on issues of principle, at great potential risk to themselves. British conscientious objectors refuse to take up arms, Indonesian students print political pamphlets, Kurdish prisoners maintain tight bonds of loyalty in the face of a deracinating prison environment, ultra-Orthodox Jewish Israelis meet with Palestinian Muslim women, Soviet dissidents struggle

to maintain a social and moral space outside the suffocating embrace of the Soviet state, Tibetan politicians work against aristocratic forms of hierarchy and Sri Lankan activists push against ethnic and political divisions. These acts are both small-scale and grand, but they involve a commitment to principles, however ambiguous, in the face of intense pressure and at great risk. And these are forms of dissent that reverberate through the most intimate aspects of their lives, running up against and through the ties that bind them to others. It is not simply that the ties are put at risk by a commitment to high ideals. Rather these ideals gain meaning and possibility through these most intimate relationships. Intimacy marks both the possibility and the limit of dissent.

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Chapter 2
One is the biggest number: estrangement, intimacy and totalitarianism in late Soviet Russia

Galina Oustinova-Stjepanovic

25 August 1968

At midday on 25 August 1968, eight people gathered in Moscow's Red Square to protest against the military invasion of Czechoslovakia by Soviet and Warsaw Pact troops.[1] According to a written account of one of the participants, Natalya Gorbanevskaya (2017 [1970]),[2] the eight protesters barely had the time to unfurl home-made banners that read – among other things – 'For your freedom and ours!' when they were roughly apprehended. They were beaten, bundled into KGB vehicles and taken to the notorious Lubyanka prison, a scene of many politically motivated arrests. A predetermined closed trial ensued. Most protestors were sentenced to several years in labour camps, but two dissidents, Natalya Gorbanevskaya and Victor Faynberg, were taken to psychiatric hospitals and later exiled to France.

During the trial of the Red Square protestors, Victor Faynberg was not put in the dock. Instead he was remanded in a hospital. During his interview with Dr Lunts and others, Faynberg allegedly displayed fascination with reformist ideas and came across as an arrogant person, convinced that he was right (Artemova, Rar and Slavinski 1971, 201). He was diagnosed with 'psycho-other-thinking' (*shizoinakomysliye*). Natalya Gorbanevskaya (who brought a newborn baby to the Red Square protest) was diagnosed with insanity, acquitted and placed under her mother's care. Granted this reprieve, Gorbanevskaya compiled a collection of documents about the protest and the trial. She was re-arrested in December 1968 and, following an analysis of her poems for traces of mental health 'pathologies', was diagnosed with 'sluggish schizophrenia' by Dr Lunts. He claimed that Gorbanevskaya's schizophrenia

was so amorphous that it did not hinder her work and intellectual habits (Artemova, Rar and Slavinski 1971, 54–6). Nevertheless, during the trial Dr Lunts insisted that Gorbanevskaya was dangerous to the public because she was not fully aware of her mental condition (63).

Legendary among dissidents, their historians and some Russian intellectuals, the protest had no transformative effect on Soviet politics (Komaromi 2012, 71).[3] Nevertheless, for some human rights activists, constitutional rights defenders and civic activists, the event encapsulated a sustained effort to generate 'a political otherwise' through multiple conventional and experimental modes of dissent, including public truth speaking, embodied protest and 'an exercise of oneself in the activity of thought' (Povinelli 2012, 456). Nevertheless, the real significance of the protest was not its outcomes nor its critical content; the invasion of Czechoslovakia was and remained an ambivalent and troubling decision for many Soviet citizens and Party members. Rather the protest was subversive for its ability to materialise the repressive state as a felt, intimate presence (c.f. Ahmann 2018). Chloe Ahmann (2018) describes how protests can punctuate 'sluggish temporalities of suffering' (144), experienced as slow violence and attrition of political control in order to crystalise habitual, toxic environments into an event. Her argument strikes a chord with the post-Stalinist history of unspectacular state repression.

Analytically, the event exposed a tension between the Soviet ideological imperative for unity and a value of outsideness, or *vnye*[4] (Yurchak 2005), as a space of intellectual, artistic and moral autonomy and critique. Outsideness was a common principle of living within the Soviet system (128). However, dissidents reified the alleged cohesion (*splochennost*) of the Soviet people to claim repeatedly an exclusive capacity to think differently, speak the truth and act in accord with their conscience (Boobbyer 2005), understood as a universal ethical beginning unsullied by party politics. Gorbanevskaya's memoirs of the Red Square protest (2017) mention her friends' intent to split away and stand apart (*otmezhevatsa*) from the dominant univocal opinion (10) and unanimous support of the Party's decisions (23).

Gorbanevskaya and others denied that sedition or even political motives had inspired their protest.[5] Instead they reiterated a commitment to *inakomysliye*, or 'other-thinking' (thinking differently). In their defence speech, the protestors spoke about the right to express critical views that diverge from commonly acceptable opinions (221–4), while the prosecution accused them of trampling on the 'norms' of existence (240) and literally 'sound thought' (*zdravii smysl*) of the Soviet people (256).

Although the Soviet repressive apparatuses were probably more irked by public displays of dissent rather than criticism per se (Field 1995, 277), 'other-thinking' was a proud self-attribute of dissidents then and now.

In contrast, for Soviet prosecution and psychiatrists, other-thinking was an instantiation of 'oppositionism' (Halfin 2001). Predictable within the Soviet conceptual premises of scientism, dissent and oppositionism were liable to be explained as 'a mental predicament' (Halfin 2001, 319), a temporary eclipse of reason and delusion that could be treated therapeutically. With Khrushchev's formal notion that dissent was a mental illness (Brintlinger 2007, 4), the aetiology of madness was disengaged from social conditions; dissent was not a response to the state politics, but rather an anomaly that the state had a responsibility to eliminate. Thus there appeared a shift from politicising mental illness and dissent during the early days of the revolutionary state (Sirotkina 2007) to pathologising both.

A notion of dissent as pathology does not fully explain why some dissidents were sent to prison and others hospitalised. The criteria for differentiating between political and intellectual dissidents and 'mad' Soviet citizens remain obscure without documentary evidence of psychiatric deliberation, which might not have a written trace. For instance, both Gorbanevskaya and Faynberg had a prior history of referrals to psychiatrists which would feature on their files. These, taken into consideration with linear, deterministic theories of personality, served to prompt an interpretation of Gorbanevskaya's participation in the 25 August protest as a medical condition rather than as a conscious political gesture. However, a possibility of casting political dissent as madness, even if hospitalisation was not the inevitable punishment, suggests that the Soviet state was interested both in diminishing the value of political dissent (and the status of its individual members) and in controlling the innermost recesses of human subjectivities. To do so it employed a variety of methods described by Halfin as 'the hermeneutics of the soul' (Halfin 2001, 316). At the same time, the treatment of dissent as madness implied a possibility of cure and rehabilitation, further complicating a narrative of ideological misuse of punitive psychiatry and imprisonment (c.f. Thomas 2014). Put simply, to pathologise dissent as madness was to deny its efficacy as a political gesture.

In addition to understanding the logic of representation of political dissent as madness, my current research in Moscow seeks to comprehend the paradoxical ontology (as the fact of existence) of totalitarianism as intimacy with the many and dissent as a claim to 'other-thinking'

(*inakomysliye*) and estrangement from an abstract collectivity in late Soviet Russia – and, to some extent, today.[6]

First, how did dissidents succeed in producing a political value other than the status quo (Gratton 2014, 117), given the conditions of totalitarianism that presume all-encompassing control and total identification with the party state? The paradox lies within dissidents' claims to 'other-thinking' as a political statement rather than a mental predicament, together with their simultaneous affirmation of the existence of totalitarianism as actual and experiential workings of the state's power. Claims of totalitarianism would have signalled defeat of oppositional activities because dissent and other-thinking (*inakomysliye*) were considered logical impossibilities under the conditions of 'actually existing totalitarianism' (Bergman 1998, 251). If the Soviet state had been 'really' totalitarian, and so had exerted control over all aspects of Soviet life, how could dissidents have ever distanced themselves from the dominance of a regime that had such crippling effects as loss of moral judgement and political apathy (Bergman 1998, 257)? How could dissidents justify their own exception? How did they cultivate political, intellectual and artistic spaces of personal autonomy (Komaromi 2012) within the state or following their flight abroad?

Second, why was a small-scale protest such as this so troubling for the Soviet authorities? One explanation is that dissent as estrangement from the reified Soviet peoplehood contravened an ideological imperative of intimacy with the many. It posited the possibility of an alternative circle of intimacy with politically 'like-minded' (*edinomyshleniki*) persons who frequently disseminated their views through networks of family, friends and colleagues. Dissident circles cultivated a sense of togetherness and detachment from others through shared commitment to ideas, engagement in samizdat activities and the collection and distribution of money and food for political prisoners and their families, as well as everyday socialising. Numerous memoirs and interviews point to a pervasive 'fellow feeling' (Hankins 2019, 170), defined by Joseph Hankins as a historical 'connection through similar placements' (185). I would like to argue that, in Soviet Russia, those placements of dissent were marked by two political modes of intimacy, namely closeness to other dissidents and detachment from the abstract 'we' of the Soviet state.

The rhetorical 'circle of the We' (Hollinger 1993) extended to all Soviet people, despite countervailing tendencies toward differentiation and ethnic particularism, among other things (Slezkine 1994). As an overarching objective, the Soviet peoplehood was a communitarian

project premised on the notion of unity of all. Such a communitarian project presupposes a normative and psychological affinity or solidarity akin to claims of a prepolitical, affective 'society' or 'nation' (Levy 2017). Against the grain of the primacy of totality, dissent as estrangement openly challenged the premises of political unity of the workers, with its improbable commonality of ideas, values and practice. Thus the embodied intimacy of engagement with dissident activities and ideas posited a challenge to an abstract mode of intimacy with the Soviet 'we'. In sum, the broadening and closing of intimate political circles allows us to reimagine dissent and totalitarianism as alternative forms of unity that shared a vocabulary of intimacy and estrangement but implied a difference in degree and scale.

Totalitarian intimacy

In extant scholarship, an effort to resolve the paradox of dissent under the conditions of totalitarianism is situated within a *realist paradigm*: either the Soviet party state was not totalitarian or dissidents were not free agents of other-thinking, as they saw themselves. For instance, Hannah Arendt defines 'totalitarianism' as absolute political control, including rectification of thought and effacement of socio-political antagonisms and contradictions (Arendt 1976 [1958], xxiii–xxiv). Totalitarianism signals the 'enormity of the [state] power' (Bergman 1998, 248) that subjugates any oppositional thought and activity.

In addition, Hannah Arendt's classic definition of Soviet and Nazi totalitarianism underscores loyalty to a leader and concrete historical conditions of mass mobilisation of atomised individuals (1976 [1958], 324). For her, totalitarianism as a practical political action is successful in shaping an ideal-type character and concrete empirical product of totalitarian mechanisms of violent control of subjectivities: the 'mass-man' (Sigwart 2016). The mass, the mob, the crowd, the undifferentiated multitude constitute the subject of a totalitarian society and 'the rebus of collective politics' (Mazzarella 2015, 105–6). It vividly conjures an image of collective frenzy and fanaticism of 'a swarm' (Toscano 2010, xv). The pathos is menacing: totalitarianism and fanaticism are essentially the same because they cultivate a blind commitment to an abstract idea among the multitude of people (Toscano 2010, xix). The monotony of multitude is reiterated in spatial, architectural and design metaphors of flatness as invariance (Higman 2017), also conceptually associated with totalitarianism.

Guided by the above definitions, some historians look for historical evidence for or against the empirical reality of totalitarianism. A great deal of literature on totalitarianism enumerates traits and characteristics of a totalitarian society to ascertain what authoritarian orders fit such description (for example, Mirskii 2003). Conventionally fascist Italy, Nazi Germany, Stalin's Soviet Union and Mao's China meet the criteria although, of necessity, the argument is circular: the key attributes of totalitarianism are deduced from a study of a totalitarian society which is re-affirmed as totalitarian *ipso facto*.

Soviet scholarship denied that the term had any relevance to the politics of the Soviet Union. It used totalitarianism as a synonym of fascism (Bergman 1998, 252), although the subtle parallels were drawn by a few Soviet historians from the 1960s onwards. Slavoj Žižek (2001) finds the term 'totalitarianism' unhelpful because, for him, it defeats the Left (4) and 'relieves us of a duty to think' (138) about socialism as anything other than a Gulag ideology. For him, the term has been misused as a denunciation mechanism of any radical emancipatory project and its utopian or universal credentials.

Žižek was not the only one to question the meanings, origins and implications of theories of totalitarianism in Soviet Russia, although others had their own, and different, purposes. Some dissidents, including a Russian writer with nationalist leanings, Solzhenitsin, believed 'totalitarianism' to be a Western imposition on authentic Russian culture. Others racialised totalitarianism as Russia's 'intrinsic' inclinations towards barbarism, submissiveness, tyranny and denial of personal freedom (Bergman 1998, 255).

Notwithstanding the term's problematic theoretical character, many Soviet dissidents of the post-Stalinist period applied it to their own historical experiences to contextualise disturbing encounters with the party state. Instead of theorising 'totalitarianism', the notion was thus adopted specifically to identify a felt experience of the repressive mechanisms of the Soviet party state. As many Soviet people questioned the nature of Soviet totalitarianism, for Soviet dissidents it had appeared as an undeniable materiality of court rooms, prisons, psychiatric hospitals, KGB officers and so on.

A comparable line of reasoning, this time about the reality of dissent, informs Benjamin Nathans' argument: that contrary to dissidents' self-understanding, their protest did not occasion a dramatic confrontation between 'official' and 'nonconformist' positions in the Soviet Union (Nathans 2012, 177). Serguei Oushakine (2001) suggests that political dissidents voiced objections to totalitarianism and unlawfulness of the

state practices that were identical to the critical discourses about *glasnost* among reformers within the Soviet government from the 1950s onwards. The same stock of questions worried Gorbachev-era politicians who had to explain their own capacity for critical thinking and prospects of socio-political restructuring. Some reformers doubted the empirical validity and scope of totalitarianism, seeking rather to qualify Soviet totalitarianism as partial and consensual (Bergman 1998, 265). Thus 'totalitarianism' was redefined as an aspiration rather than actuality. Nevertheless, it remained closely linked to nefarious socio-political and psychological effects of unlimited power, including the erosion of human autonomy and a lack of ethical judgement.

It follows that 'absolute ideological uniformity' (Oushakine 2001, 212) and the intimacy with the party state were an ideological projection, as political realities were inevitably diverse within and outside the Communist Party ranks. As a consequence, Oushakine contends, there was no 'external' position available to dissidents. What made dissident rhetoric an act of resistance was its 'locus of enunciation' rather than the message per se (204), as well as an intensification of the existing critical discourse and an appeal to universal truth and sincerity. In fact, the main demand among dissidents was a public acknowledgement of a simple fact of disagreement (212) and discrepancies between a designate and actuality. Dissidents thus demanded the recognition of the Soviet state as partocracy rather than democracy (211); this also resonated with a paradoxical call for greater realism and sincerity in literature and art dominated by heroic, embellished forms of so-called social realism (Kozlov 2013, 44).

Building on my own archival and ethnographic encounters, I agree with the above arguments: totalitarianism was not all inclusive, nor were dissidents unique in their critical capacities. Nevertheless, the stylistic ploy of 'things are not what they seem' is stifling. This means that the controversy over the empirical evidence for or against Soviet 'totalitarianism' turns a blind eye to the ideational significance of a deeper political principle of the primacy of whole and the intimacy with the many that dominated the Soviet conceptual universe. I suggest that, despite being exploited during and after Cold War enmities (Geyer and Fitzpatrick 2009, 8), the notion of 'totalitarianism' points to the creation of an ethico-political value of totality and 'wholeness' that reverberated across pre-revolutionary and Soviet Russian utopian and folk theories, philosophy and ethics, as well as the administrative and economic practices of joint responsibility and collective ownerships (Stites 1989). Dissidents laboured not only against the state institutions,

but also against the ethico-political value of totality, to which they had juxtaposed *estrangement* as a way of life (Boym 1996).

For instance, the idea of the primacy of the whole underpins a constellation of notions of 'freedom' in Russian. The words *svoboda, mir* and *volya* all convey a sense of membership among one's own people, but with subtle differences (Humphrey 2007). *Svoboda*, for example, is not centred on an individual. It is rather predicated on 'an entry into a privileged political state of liberty, rather than a move out from captivity into an indefinite state called freedom' (Humphrey 2007, 2). In contrast, *mir* is an expansive concept that refers to a particular life world and limitless universe. If *svoboda* demarcates a bounded world, *mir* presupposes outward existence. Last but not least, *volya* merges boundless freedom with an individual will and despotic power, both unstable as they ebb or intensify (Humphrey 2007, 6–7).

In sum, contrary to Žižek, I would like to take the term *totalitarianism* seriously, but to shy away from the polemical controversy about whether the Soviet state was or was not totalitarian. Instead, I approach 'totalitarianism' as an imaginary or a conceptual topology of totalitarianism that mattered in the discursive fields of dissent regardless of its correspondence to reality or lack thereof.[7] In addition, I aim to illuminate this conceptual topology as a philosophical problem of relating and prioritising parts and whole. Thus I suggest that the idea of the primacy of the whole and implicated notions of freedom through a privileged political membership permeated everyday thought, professional scholarship and political programmes of many participants in Soviet Russia. Wholeness and interconnected collectivity featured in post-Stalinist dissident writings (Komaromi 2015, 4), but as an alternative aggregate of friends and like-minded people (*edinomyshlenniki*), brought together by political and research activities and interests, as well as drinking, sexual relations, sleepovers, shared childcare and family holidays, underlaid with an exhilarating sense of conspiracy. Freedom was found in estrangement from the Soviet peoplehood and in intimate interactions within dissident circles, yet was imagined as a link with the rest of humanity and its alleged universal values.

In sum, a shift from totalitarianism to totality as a value allows me to elicit a deeper relational order of dissent as a transgression of the idea of the primacy of the whole. To flesh out the value of totality empirically, I draw on archival materials and studies of the political abuse of psychiatry in Soviet Russia that exemplify a much broader intellectual and socio-political history of fascination with totality in Soviet and European thought and practices. As we have seen, some dissidents in

post-Stalinist Russia were 'punished with madness' (Artemova, Rar and Slavinski 1971) – that is, sent to the psychiatric hospitals that flourished in the post-Stalinist period.

From a pragmatic point of view, psychiatric hospitals embodied an excessive form of exclusion and isolation from the social. However, it is not entirely clear to me why and how the link between dissent and schizophrenia was justified in Soviet psychiatry and political settings. I would like tentatively to suggest that in Soviet psychiatry schizophrenia was broadly defined as withdrawal from reality and dissociation from a social collective, which in turn was a foundational concept of Soviet Marxist ethics. The diagnosis of schizophrenia was applied to dissidents who, according to their forensic psychiatry reports, failed to grasp the primacy of the whole. What we see is a reiteration of the logic of intimacy and estrangement from the many.

Unity of thought

In August 1968 the Soviet newspapers described the Red Square protestors as '*otschepentsi*', with a pejorative meaning of splintering away from the whole. In Soviet newspapers the protest was constructed as a violation of the unity of the Soviet people and a betrayal of intimacy (or complicity, in the dissidents' terms) with the party state in the face of ideological enemies. Gorbanevskaya's memoirs contain numerous newspaper clippings proclaiming unwavering support for the invasion among Soviet citizens. On behalf of the vast and heterogeneous Soviet population, the newspapers spoke of unity, shared understanding (*obschaya positsiya*), socialist commonwealth, unshakable solidarity and unanimous approval of the Soviet actions (Gorbanevskaya 2017, 22–4, 30). In mainstream Soviet media the military intervention was construed as a moment of renewed ideological requirements for conformity with the state and with the Communist Party. Brezhnev's doctrine of 'developed socialism' (Nathans 2011, 180) announced the arrival of the era of 'genuine collectivism' (183) and, crucially, its conditionality on the state's control. In sharp contrast informal accounts, diaries and memoirs of political and other dissidents and ordinary Soviet people referred to the invasion as the endpoint of a liberal period that had proffered hope for an alternative, perhaps more liberal pathway for Warsaw Pact socialism.

Fully aware of the consequences, the eight protestors in Red Square saw no political utility in their actions (Gorbanevskaya 2017, 10).

They did not expect to achieve anything concrete and some continue to describe their actions as an 'apolitical gesture' (interview with Pavel Litvinov, December 2017). Even eyewitnesses were unaffected because they found the flashpoint protest puzzling: some thought the participants were Czechs (Gorbanevskaya 2017, 40) or Jews (45) disrupting public order. For the participants, the protest was not a means to any specific political end, but a compulsory action, a moral dictate of universal human conscience.[8] Somewhat akin to the relentless but inconsequential letter writing of many Soviet citizens to the Party leaders, the 1968 protest was a well-considered gesture of dissociation (*otmezhevatsa*) from the presumed consensus (Boobbyer 2008, 134).

The consensus was an ideological construct and a somewhat exaggerated (some say self-serving) claim to exception among some dissidents. Many more Soviet citizens, including reformists within the Communist Party leadership, disapproved of the military intervention. For example, a sociological survey of attitudes to the invasion carried out clandestinely in a small Russian town from September 1968 to March 1969 revealed a profound ambivalence and intergenerational divide about the Soviet invasion (Zaslavsky and Z* 1981). The majority of younger people (between 18 and 30 years old) offered weak support, while about 47 per cent of the over 50s (who comprised ten people out of a sample of 352 respondents) approved of the Soviet-led invasion.

Even among the highest-ranking Soviet leadership, presided over by Brezhnev, the use of power did not seem inevitable or wise (Bischof, Karner and Ruggenthaler 2010). The Soviet government was deeply divided. Some members of the Soviet leadership feared that a military intervention would undermine the conciliatory rhetoric of Nikita Khrushchev and Aleksei Kosygin, both of whom felt that the antagonism between the West and the Soviet Union had shifted from military to economic competition (Bischof, Karner and Ruggenthaler 2010) that opened the door for socialist reforms and liberalisation. However, Leonid Brezhnev fanned public anxieties by emphasising the ideological differences between the West and the Soviet sphere. In Brezhnev's rhetoric, Soviet socialism was perpetually threatened from outside and from within – by spies, dissenters, reformers and so on. Thus, despite initial equivocations about its goals and outcomes, the invasion became the crunch moment to silence the reformers within the Soviet Communist Party and dissidents among Soviet citizens.

Clearly the unity of thought was a projection of homogeneity that did not correspond to historical reality. However, the trope had felt consequences. Specifically, following a brief but optimistic (as it

is remembered today) decade of de-Stalinisation, the late 1960s and 1970s revived the persecution of 'other-thinking' (*inakomysliye*) in a multiplicity of its forms. The term was applied to activists for human rights, religious liberties, Jewish migration, nationalist and ethnic self-determination, civic rights, socialist Leninist reformists and defenders of constitutional rights (Nathans 2007), as well as Jewish, German and Chinese '*otkazniki*', or refuseniks.[9] It also encompassed writers, artists, actors, singers, philosophers, sociologists and others who did not necessarily oppose the socialist order, or even its partocratic structures, but simply engaged with experimental artistic genres, schools of thought and research methods. In the Soviet legal jargon, *inakomysliye* signalled anti-Soviet agitation and perfidious representations of Soviet reality. In a targeted campaign against *inakomysliye*, state institutions and agents would threaten, detain, interrogate, demote or dismiss from a job, exile internally or abroad and sentence people to labour camps, prisons and psychiatric hospitals that represented *inakomysliye* as a mental illness.

Dissent and madness

After the Red Square protest, Natalya Gorbanevskaya and Victor Faynberg were sent to the psychiatric wards in Serbsky Psychiatric Hospital in Moscow (Faynberg was later transferred to Leningrad). Other protestors were sent to labour camps that remained a more likely destination for a political dissident. An avalanche of letters from dissidents, their families and friends brought to the attention of the Soviet government and international organisations that incarceration of *healthy*[10] people in psychiatric wards constituted a blatant abuse of power and a betrayal of medical ethics. However, it has been argued that some Soviet psychiatrists may have genuinely believed that dissidents suffered from 'a mental anomaly' (Wilkinson 1986, 642). This later claim should not be misread as a justification of political abuse of psychiatry nor as a plea of innocence on behalf of Soviet psychiatrists. My question is rather what presuppositions and arguments made it possible to represent involvement in a seditious political activity as a mental problem?

Gorbanevskaya and Faynberg were examined in one of the most notorious organs and locations of forensic or criminal psychiatry (*sudebnaya psihiatriya*), the Serbsky Institute of Forensic Psychiatry in Moscow. The referral to a hospital did not need justification (*neobosnovan*), which in itself was seen by dissidents as an illegal, unconstitutional practice. Dissidents did not know why some 'healthy persons'

(*zdoroviye lyudi*) were referred for psychiatric assessment as potentially 'schizophrenic' or 'insane'.[11] Objections to the hospitalisation of mentally healthy people in psychiatric wards is recurrent in the handwritten and typewritten letters frequently sent to the Soviet Ministry of Health or the Government, with copies passed to dissidents and samizdat activists in the late Soviet period. Many letters are preserved in the Memorial Society in present-day Moscow and other archives. Such letters describe a moment of detention that could start with a casual knock on the door and a request to follow the police (*militsiya*) or a security officer (*KGB*) to a hospital. A superficial physical examination, including a temperature and blood pressure check-up, could prompt a medical worker to prescribe a course of psychotropic injections (*psihotropiki*); these, according to many patients, induced sleepiness, sickness, headaches and immobility. The whole process was condemned by dissidents and their supporters as an unlawful violation of the Soviet Constitution. Furthermore, most letters presumed that the reasons for being sectioned were accusations and fabricated charges of anti-Soviet activities of prisoners and/or their family members. One could be rapidly discharged only to face disability and socio-economic consequences such as unemployment.

However, the Serbsky Institute where Gorbanevskaya and Faynberg were assessed was already a prison-like institution. A former tsarist police detention unit, it became a centre for research and a psychiatric prison in 1923. Its founder, Vladimir Serbsky, had championed the understanding of social conditions in mental illness (Bloch and Reddaway 1977, 36). By the 1970s the Institute was directed by Dr Lunts, a major authority in Soviet psychiatry. He is remembered as an 'utter bastard' by Moscow dissidents and their families and friends.

Dr Daniil Lunts defined mental illness as a failure to represent reality and act upon it (1970, 8). Symptoms included hallucinations and false convictions, accompanied by disengagement from reality or its inappropriate/wrong perception (*nepravilnoe ponimaniye*) (14) and their manifestations in anti-social behaviour (19). According to Lunts, Soviet forensic science was entrusted with a job of determining culpability, effective treatment and the reintegration of psychiatric patients into society, as well as safeguarding the public from dangerous people with mental health problems (19–20).

Some wards in the Serbsky Institute were classified as state secret 'specialised hospitals' ('*spetsbolnitsi*'), administered by the Ministry of Internal Affairs rather than the Soviet Ministry of Health. Dissidents wrote about doctors in white overalls with KGB shoulder marks underneath: the 'psycho-fascists' of Soviet medicine, according to some samizdat

letters. The image speaks volumes about a recurrent assumption about a dual reality that was genuine and deceptive. However, on a more immediate level of analysis, it also highlights the horror of psychiatric abuse with political aims and points to a fact that psychiatrists in Soviet Russia required political as well as medical qualifications (Bloch and Reddaway 1977, 44).

It is important to keep in mind that, as an alternative to Stalin's methods of mass repressions and executions, criminal psychiatric wards multiplied in the post-Stalin period. In 1978 Kosygin, by then Chairman of the Council of Ministers, ordered the construction of more than 80 new hospitals (some of which were never completed). In a postscript to his study on punitive medicine,[12] Alexander Podrabinek explained that not only political dissidents but any inconvenient person could be sectioned – including ordinary people who dared to criticise their management, exposed a violation of constitutional rights or administrative irregularities or attempted 'a flight abroad' by making inquiries at a foreign embassy. Forcible psychiatric treatment of dissidents, refuseniks (*otkazniki*), public figures, musicians, poets and ordinary people continued until 1988, when Article 70 on 'Anti-Soviet propaganda and agitation' and defamation laws of the Soviet Russian (RSFSR) Criminal Code were repealed.

Most dissidents were held together with the criminally insane, drug addicts and other people suffering from 'genuine' mental health illness. In letters passed to samizdat, some dissidents conveyed their distress at sharing a room with convicted killers. Other dissidents were shocked to witness people collecting their own faeces, screaming obscenities and being restrained and beaten by nurses, many recruited from former convicts. Thus psychiatric wards were not a more 'humane' form of political control – a view voiced at a public lecture in May 2018 in lieu of an explanation of why Gorbanevskaya, a single mother of two, was not sentenced to prison.

In fact a stint in a psychiatric hospital was often a preliminary stage (*etapirovaniye*) on the way to a prison camp. Some people were moved from prisons into psychiatric wards after suicide attempts, for example swallowing nails in a political prison. In a samizdat letter Semyon Gluzman, a Soviet psychiatrist who systematically studied abuse and was sentenced for his research, explained that, within the punitive system of Soviet prisons, suicide was a sign of despair rather than of mental illness. But material conditions in labour camps and psychiatric hospitals were often comparable. Food lacked nutrition and diversity, and food parcels from friends and relatives were frequently stolen. Patients were

treated with cold shower therapies while they practically suffocated in hot wards with bolted windows and no ventilation or fresh air. Isolation was commonly mentioned in letters republished in samizdat literature. Access to the toilets was often denied. In short, even though straightjackets were not used, the general aim was to immobilise – that is, to restrict and slow down physical movement and intellectual activity.

As a result, for some dissidents, psychiatric hospitals were a harsher punishment than forced labour camps. Patients were medicalised into a vegetative-like state accompanied by headaches and nightmares. Neuroleptic drugs caused severe side-effects such as stomach ulcers, insomnia and depression. Most importantly, they halted dissidents' intellectual labour. Arguably, even Stalin's Gulag camps allowed some prisoners to be creative intellectually: some prisoners wrote poetry, studied literary texts and managed to draw in the most squalid conditions (Etkind 2013). In contrast, intellectual prisoners in psychiatric hospitals lived in a drug-induced stupor. They were frequently prevented from writing and reading, to the point that reading science fiction, for example, could be interpreted as a symptom of madness.

For some, psychiatric hospitals were seen as an acceptable alternative to prison. Many Soviet hippies performed and celebrated madness to dodge army conscription and mock social norms, but they also feared an onset of real madness triggered by prescribed drugs (Fürst 2018). For the poet Joseph Brodsky, psychiatric detention was a balancing act between intellectual freedom and a total loss of creative consciousness, including incapacity to work (Reich 2013). Nevertheless many dissidents feared psychiatric hospitals more than labour camps because they stripped them of their individuality – a process described as loss of 'distinctiveness' of the self[13] and of one's political identity. For instance individuality, as a sense of one's juridical and political 'I', was an important theoretical question that preoccupied defenders of human rights (Komaromi 2015, 76) and Orthodox religious dissidents (Ganson 2013). The former situated an individual within a legal framework of democratic rights distribution that could strengthen a position of an individual as a citizen in possession of individual rights. The latter pondered the problem of atomisation as a breakdown of community links that could be healed through renewal of religious solidarity (Ganson 97). For dissident priests, godless society resulted in an experience of isolation within a crowd (98) – a simultaneous loss of individuality and loneliness of isolation that haunted political dissidents in psychiatric prisons. Thus an alternative to the 'totalitarian' unity of thought was, in the dissident Petro Grigorenko's words, 'a community of persons – rational, proud, independent in everything

and tolerant of each other, voluntarily cooperating in the course of interaction' (Reich 2014, 582) and/or a community of believers within the Russian Orthodox Church (Ganson 2013).

Similarly, in a letter to samizdat (dated 1971), one political prisoner agonised that the loss of all his rights entailed a concomitant loss of political subjecthood. Textbooks on criminal psychiatry distinguished between *pravosposobnost* and *deesposobnost* – a capacity to have rights and a capacity to acquire and exercise rights, and so to assume responsibilities and duties as a citizen, respectively (Morozova 1977). *Pravosposobnost* was ascribed at birth while *deesposobnost* was predicated on purposeful intelligent activity (*planomernaya rassuditelnaya deyatelnost)* (72). A diagnosis of madness thus not only made ordinary Soviet people squeamish (*brezgliv*) about dissidents. It also deprived a dissident of his or her rights and, crucially, of a legitimate voice in domestic political affairs by depoliticising their protest as psychotic behaviour (Field 1995, 278).

Sluggish schizophrenia

Sluggish schizophrenia was a medical term coined by Soviet psychiatrists in 1920–39 to describe mild borderline cases and the tempo of schizophrenia (Zajicek 2018). Because it was seen as an early stage of a progressive mental disorder, sluggish schizophrenia lacked a precise list of symptoms. This indeterminacy was a handy politicised tool of criminal psychiatry and the Soviet prosecution, as almost any behaviour, especially the strength of dissidents' conviction and their self-righteousness,[14] could be assessed as sluggish schizophrenia – a potentiality of a mental illness rather than its full-blown version. In other words, forensic psychiatry in the Soviet Union claimed to spot psychological 'anomalies' without any manifest symptoms, even if a patient contradicted medical experts and claimed that he or she was psychologically robust (Morozova 1977, 5). In many ways Soviet psychiatric manuals contained a self-authorisation.

Nevertheless, Soviet psychiatric manuals did publish various definitions of schizophrenia and sluggish schizophrenia. Schizophrenia was described as an (anti-)social illness because the Marxist framework highlighted the role of social conditions in determining mental health. Consequently, it was said that schizophrenia entailed a withdrawal from social contract (Zajicek 2018, 3). For example, Dr Sukhareva, who was among the first to engage with sluggish schizophrenia, described it as a propensity for solitude and emotional flatness in the late 1930s. In the

Brezhnev era Dr Snezhnevski expanded the list (Field 1995, 287) of fuzzy symptoms to include perseverance, struggle for truth, manifestation of reformism and litigiousness (Reich 2014, 566). Occasionally sluggish schizophrenia was identified with 'philosophical intoxication', unconventional and experimental thought, interest in abstract ideas and a tendency to offer 'bizarre' interpretations and theories.

A case study of a murder suspect profiled the defendant as somebody who, despite his emotional aloofness, entertained paranoid ideas about making an invention or discovery in biology and physics and claimed to have written 'award-worthy' manuscripts titled 'Gnoseology' and 'Theoretical Mechanics' (Morozova 1977, 65). The defendant, accused of beheading his manager, gave an impression of looking down on the investigators. For the Soviet experts, it was a textbook case of schizophrenia. Soviet forensic psychiatry pledged to carry out prophylactic measures against such socially harmful tendencies (7–8). Vehemently opposed to trendy philosophical teachings (*modniye filosofskiye ucheniya*), Morozova appeared scornful of Western psychiatry for treating psychological maladies (*rasstroystva*) as acts of personal rebellion against existing public order (8). For Morozova, any 'odd' behaviour, including 'incorrect and inappropriate' (*nepravilnoye i neadikvatnoye*) (11) conduct during an investigation, could be a justification for psychiatric evaluation.

According to a KGB report on Zhores Medvedev,[15] a prominent Leninist Marxist, his 'mental illness' comprised the following symptoms:

- A persistent mania for truth-seeking
- Having a beard
- Meticulous habits of thought
- A belief that the invasion of Czechoslovakia was an act of transgression of sovereign borders
- A conviction that he should devote his life to the ideals of communism
- Attempts to prove his point
- Inclinations to philosophising
- Scriptomania, or writing excessively
- Shouting out about his fight for democracy and truth

In his letter in defence of Zhores Medvedev,[16] Solzhenitsyn noted that Medvedev was told that he was 'abnormal' because 'normal people' thought alike.

Another dissident, Petro Grigorenko – admired as a Soviet general who joined dissidents to defend ethnic minorities in Crimea and speak

against the abuse of psychiatry – was given a similar diagnosis during one of his internments in the Serbsky Institute. He was described as a well-adjusted individual with excellent memory and concentration skills. However, his 'pathology' consisted of a conviction that he was within his right to seek reforms. In fact, it was said his ideas had an obstinate character and were so intense that they determined his conduct. His first psychiatric assessment mentioned Grigorenko's tendency to argue, construct repetitive arguments, dominate in a conversation, interrupt and insist on the correctness of his views, but concluded that he was a mentally healthy, principled and politically active person (Artemova, Rar and Slavinski 1971, 99–103).

Another subject, Ivan Yakhimovich, was a Latvian dissident and a member of the Initiative Group for the Defence of Human Rights. He demonstrated no signs of hallucinations, but was diagnosed with a paranoid psychopathic personality for his conviction that he fulfilled an important mission on behalf of the Soviet people. In fact, psychiatrists and lawyers speculated whether conviction in the rightness of their position and in speaking the only available truth was a common or anomalous trait among politically active people – with a crucial difference that prosecution saw the dissidents' critical statements about the Soviet Union as being slanderous of Soviet reality.

Taking into consideration the fact that sincere speech, stubbornness, irony, strategies to derail interrogation and many cultivated eccentricities (van Voren 2009) were assiduously cultivated among dissidents, Semyon Gluzman published a manual for dissidents or 'agents of other-thinking' in 1975. A Soviet psychiatrist, Gluzman disagreed with a description of 'other-thinking' as a psychiatric anomaly, a belief for which he was later convicted. Gluzman argued that Soviet psychiatry operated with two sets of concepts and definitions of mental illnesses. One was 'truly' scientific, backed by research. The other set was pseudo-concrete, rooted in fuzzy and abstract assumptions, frequently with a philosophical or political cast, about what counted as a 'normal' person. The norm, he explained, presumed a person of average intelligence, unwilling to take risk and mainly guided by an instinct of self-preservation and a desire for stable employment (Gluzman 2012, 33). During psychiatric evaluations, Gluzman recommended dissidents to project the image of an average, normal person, somebody with a normal childhood, well-integrated, keen on sports and comfortable in mass social settings such as festivals (44). It was important to demonstrate lack of interest in modern art, theoretical mathematics and philosophy (unless it was a professional occupation); failure to do so risked a diagnosis of 'metaphysical

intoxication' (44). A single person had to cite objective circumstances (unemployment, illness, etc.) rather than lack of interest in marital relations.

Gluzman suggested that 'sluggish schizophrenia' was applied to dissidents because it was consistent with psychiatric theory and political imperatives of the totalitarian state that defined 'other-thinking' as an outcome of mental pathology. His engagement with psychiatric theory was an attempt to redefine the very idea of 'pathology' that other dissidents sought to invert and apply to the Soviet system of 'behavioural bilingualism' (Reich 2014, 567) – a system that, for dissidents, engendered a schizophrenic break between truth and lies, reality and political illusion.

'Other-thinking' and totality as the primacy of the whole

Sidney Bloch and Peter Reddaway explain that psychiatry and political ideology of Soviet Marxism were intertwined (1977, 43). In fact, the Soviet Marxist concept of the collective guided Soviet psychiatry: a group, a collective always had priority over an individual (42). As a result, the task of a psychiatrist was to reintegrate a person into the collective through a mediating power of labour and to eradicate nonconformist values. The above examples show how dissidents were cast as 'madmen', incapable of understanding the principles of unity of thought. This brings me back to my initial question about the possibility of dissent as 'other-thinking' (*inakomysliye*) under the conditions of totalitarianism.[17] I have indicated that this contradiction tends to be framed within a realist paradigm. If the unity of thought had had empirical basis, then a dissident activity was not what it seemed.

Alternatively, to acknowledge the radical possibility of other-thinking undermines a claim to the existence of a monolithic totalitarian society, but somewhat tarnishes the dissidents' claim to exception. In this chapter I have adopted a different tack by showing that the notion of 'totalitarianism' is valuable not as a label of an actually-existing reality, but as an ideation that reveals certain philosophical foundations of the Soviet world. I have picked examples from case studies of political abuse of Soviet psychiatry because they crystallise the tension between the official Soviet premise of the primacy of the whole and the dissidents' efforts to delineate a critical space outside 'the whole'. At the same time loyal (for want of a better word) Soviet citizens and dissidents shared a cosmological perspective of the world divided into 'inside' and 'outside'.

The idea of the primacy of the whole has a long genealogy in European philosophy and has found traction in anthropology as a mereological problem of relating (and separating) parts and wholes. In philosophy the argument goes like this: are parts derived from their whole or is the whole an abstraction from its parts (Schaffer 2010, 31)? The question applies to 'gunky' worlds where things (including social worlds) are composite objects that can be subdivided or reassembled into infinitely complex worlds (Brzozowski 2016, 58–9). The tricky bit is not simply to ascertain that parts and wholes are relational, but to establish what is fundamental: parts or their entanglements. A pluralist solution is numerical; it quantifies and adds parts to create an essentially atomistic assembly marked by boundaries and ontological categories (Schaffer 2010, 44). A monistic perspective sees the world as an integrated system where components supervene (or build) on the whole, rather than the other way around (56–7). This produces a world where heterogeneity does not presume a summation of isolated entities.

If philosophical arguments seem too abstract, anthropological research tends to flesh out this basic philosophical problem by looking at many concrete ways to carve the world. For example, Marilyn Strathern's seminal essay on the reconfiguration of social relations by constructing and dissolving wholes into parts resists a conventional understanding of personhood through a membership of an individual in a group (1994). I suggest that, in the realm of political agglomerations, the relation between parts and wholes is predicated on a kind of intimacy that does not correspond to kinship ties.

To press the point, the value of the primacy of the whole specifies both intimacy and dissent – political, intellectual, artistic and so on – as an imperative to remain or an attempt to explore a potentiality of 'outsideness'. It instantiates a tension between intimacy and estrangement and harbours a conceptual contradiction: there could be no 'outside' under the conditions of totalitarianism. Nevertheless, the state agents and dissidents (and many other people, overlooked by grand historical narratives) engaged in an infinite movement between inside and outside of the perimeters of the Soviet cosmos. Dissidents, refuseniks, intellectuals, artists, religious people, hippies, creative Marxists and others looked for routes outside – literally abroad or retreating into the obscurity of basements, private flats, low-profile jobs, where autonomy could be affirmed. It was not a choice but a prerequisite for a compromised freedom of exile and loss (Boym 1996). Nevertheless, a plausible 'outside' location engendered a possibility of the political otherwise. State agents also explored the potentialities of 'outside' by deporting and exiling

people abroad or locking them in isolated, sometimes remote spaces outside the official domains of legitimate personhood.

Contrary to the scholarship that gives the notion of 'totalitarianism' little empirical basis or conceptual traction, my objective has been to show that Soviet totalitarianism remains a productive category of analysis in Soviet studies because it embodies a distinct vision of a social order where primacy is given to the whole rather than its parts. My intention has been to rework this philosophical problem as an anthropological inquiry into a mode of value creation (Munn 1986, 3). For reasons of genealogical continuity and parallelism with the Soviet thought that I cannot elaborate here, 'totalitarianism' as a value of the primacy of the whole postulates an extreme intimacy of a thing to itself (Sider 2007, 54), of *one to its parts*, a crucial problem for Soviet experiment and its deeper conceptual lineaments.

To rephrase, even if 'totalitarianism' was empirically hyperbolic, the priority of the whole carried a high conceptual, ethical and political premium in the Soviet Marxist thought and praxis. To go beyond 'mere facticity' (Munn 1986, 4) of totalitarianism, I have described a topology of totalitarianism that confers equivalence to the whole and its parts, the way clay subsumes its fluid pieces (Martino 2010, 147). The topology of totalitarianism, with a propensity to subtend everything into one, conveys an idea that a systemic world of totalitarianism can be found not in fact, but in the effects of its fantasy (Meltzer 2013, 86).

Estrangement and intimacy

In interviews and memoirs, many dissidents recollect a sense of isolation from friends and family during their incarceration and a dependence on dissident networks upon their release. The intimate relations with other dissidents proved to be a lifeline for many. It was not unconditional, as one could be expelled for suspected cooperation with the Soviet security agents, but it was vital for many, especially as many dissidents managed to create unofficial systems of financial and psychological support. On the other hand dissidents were persecuted for their infidelity to the Soviet people; yet upon return from prisons and psychiatric hospitals, many dissidents encountered ostracism and unemployment. The letters they addressed to the Soviet functionaries suggest that, even if they wanted to, former dissidents could not fully reintegrate into the Soviet whole. Hence physical expulsion and immigration became the way out of this internal isolation.

To conclude, I have argued that Soviet totalitarianism was predicated on the value of one, as the primacy of the unity of the many. In this historical scheme of things dissent enacted *estrangement* and thereby subtracted from the whole, while the repressive mechanism reinstated the *intimacy* with the many as the primacy of the abstract whole. As a political coordinate, dissent demarcated an exclusive circle of friendships, kinship and political activists. At the same time the intimate connections among dissidents severed the links with the presumed Soviet peoplehood and concrete people who embraced the value of unity. As dissent engendered estrangement from the ideology and institutions of the Soviet government, it was punished with another kind of estrangement, including a diagnosis of madness, imprisonment and exile.

In the Soviet context, dissent engendered estrangement and intimacy, while political membership also necessitated estrangement and intimacy to a different abstract collectivity, to a different degree. The concurrence of estrangement and intimacy is not specific to Soviet history either; it represents just one way – a lamentably repressive and self-negating one – of reworking the problem of encompassing the diverse many within a totality of one. Thus the above historical narratives point not so much to a tension between estrangement and intimacy, but rather to their forms, scale and intercalations. We are left with a perpetually awkward question of how 'radical estrangement is compatible with a shared duty' (Levy 2017, 113) in its intimate political forms.

Notes

1 In writing this essay, I have used the archival materials kept in the Archive of Other-Thinking (*inakomysliye*) of the International Memorial in Moscow (f.163, op.1, d.3,6.9,10,22). It consists of letters of political prisoners and their family members that were passed into different collections of samizdat archives. All personal names have been omitted with the exception of well-known dissident figures such as Gorbanevskaya, Faynberg, Medvedev and Gluzman, among others. I would like to thank Boris Belenkin and Alexei Makarov in the International Memorial in Moscow for their support.

2 Originally published and circulated through samizdat in 1970.

3 This argument reflects dissidents' own perceptions of their work as accumulation and dissemination of objective facts and historical information. Some recoiled at any suggestions of theorising their materials. However, many dissidents, especially those of a far-right and nationalist ilk, have transitioned well into contemporary politics and occupy prominent positions in the Russian Duma (c.f. Laruelle 2015). Some dissident strategies and 'repertoires of contention' have been recently adopted in street protests and critical analysis of current socio-political events in Russia (Horvath 2015, 582).

4 Yurchak appropriately links his concept of *vnye* to M.M. Bakhtin's formulation of outsideness, or *vnyenakhodimost*, in the latter's *Toward the Philosophy of the Act*, written between 1919 and 1921 and first published in the USSR in 1986, after the author's death. The concept seems to have gained currency among Moscow intellectuals in their discussions of dissidents and today's protest politics.

5 Elsewhere I have discussed a complex genealogy of official and creative Soviet Marxism that was explicitly built on Baruch Spinoza's ideas of the physicality of thought and evolved in parallel with Gilles Deleuze.
6 To give the past an anthropological reading, I engage with archival materials, collections of Soviet diaries, texts such as memoirs and compilations of archival documents, Russian and English-language secondary sources and conversations with ageing dissidents, as well as intellectuals and civic activists in Moscow who find dissident history interesting.
7 For example, housing, clothing and other practices of centralisation and standardisation that had practical and ideational value.
8 Similarly understood as a transcendental humanist principle above and outside the concreteness of a political action.
9 People who were denied (*otkaz*) exit visas to migrate from the Soviet Union.
10 The impression is that multiple human rights organisations in Soviet Russia and then among Soviet expats protested against the use of psychiatry for political purposes rather than against its systematic abuse of all patients.
11 It turned out that this is a sensitive question to raise with surviving dissidents. When I asked a wife of one of the members of a committee against psychiatric abuse in Moscow if she knew how and why KGB differentiated between political dissidents and psychiatric patients, she responded with a scornful 'just because'. By contrast, at a public lecture on dissidents in Moscow in 2018 I joined a group of young professionals (translators, historians and administrative staff at an international organisation) who speculated that Gorbanevskaya was not imprisoned because she was a single mother and Faynberg was tucked away into a psychiatric hospital because he lost his front teeth during the scuffle with the KGB in Red Square.
12 The complete study was disseminated through samizdat and sent to Amnesty International in 1977.
13 Some dissidents were petrified to meet violently insane inmates. Rooms were shared with other patients. There was no attempt to protect them from each other.
14 Most dissidents claimed that their perspective was the only correct way of interpreting the world.
15 GARF (State Archive, Moscow), f.10055, op.3, d.421.
16 For a personal account of Zhores Medvedev's incarcerations and the efforts to release him, see Medvedev and Medvedev (1974).
17 The Soviet example is not unique and it would be unwise to indigenise 'totalitarianism' as a culture-specific perspective and to racialise it as a 'Russian' propensity. In fact the primacy of whole, and its political entailments, had precedents in Russian intellectual and folk theories and history has been an enduring philosophical theme in European, including Soviet, thought, discussed with reference to monism or to non-dualistic, one-world theories of complexity. My intention is to give the well-known empirical events of August 1968 and their broader political and ideational context an anthropological reading.

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Chapter 3
Dissent with/out resistance? Secular and ultra-Orthodox Israeli approaches to ethical and political disagreement

Erica Weiss

The Palestinian members of the Israeli Parliament were, as more often than not, hard up and desperate for allies. With the backing of his right-wing coalition, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had pushed forward a controversial bill that would limit the time of day and volume that mosques could use for the Muslim call to prayer. The law's proponents argued that the bill was intended to curb noise pollution and prevent disturbance at quiet hours of the day. Although laws restricting the Muslim call to prayer exist in many countries, including Canada, Germany, and the UK, the topic is of particular sensitivity in Israel. The proposed law is widely opposed by Palestinian–Israelis and the political left, who see it as a blatant attempt to discriminate against Palestinian Arab citizens and curb their religious freedom. Representative Jamal Zahalka claimed 'What disturbs the supporters of this legislation is not the noise, but rather that the sound of the muezzin reminds them of the true identity of this land' (Wootliff and Fulbright 2017). This reflects a widespread belief among Palestinian–Israelis that the law's purpose is further to erase the Palestinian presence from the Israeli public sphere.[1]

In January 2018 the bill had just cleared another hurdle towards its implementation in law. Seeing that Netanyahu had the votes to pass this bill into law, Palestinian representative Ahmed Tibi sought support from political parties in the ruling coalition. Two political parties answered his call and announced their defection. The dissenters were not fluctuating centrists nor ideological outliers, but Shas and United Torah Judaism – two ultra-Orthodox political parties considered solidly within the right wing. For emphasis, ultra-Orthodox representative Yitzhak Vaknin promised Tibi that he would rather have his hands cut off than vote for

the bill (Azulay 2018). Though their dissent from the coalition took some by surprise, it was by no means a sudden decision.

A year and a half earlier, when the Muezzin Bill was little more than a rumour, I sat in a hotel conference room in Dayton, Ohio with ultra-Orthodox community leaders and leaders from the Islamic Movement in Israel. These groups, often stigmatised as the enemies of peace, were there under the auspices of the Citizens' Accord Forum and the Kettering Institute to talk peace. The Islamic leaders requested that the ultra-Orthodox support them should there be any political moves against the Muslim call to prayer. The ultra-Orthodox conferred among themselves, discussing the requirements of Jewish law in relation to this issue. At the time they did not offer personal opinions and they made no commitments, merely assuring the Islamic leaders that they would raise the issue among the political representatives of their communities.

Here we have the seeds and fruit of ultra-Orthodox dissent. The issue was debated behind the scenes and, in the end, the ultra-Orthodox parties defied their own coalition. In this chapter I would like to take up the case of dissent among Jewish ultra-Orthodox Israelis as a window into a version of dissent that I argue we often do not see – and sometimes fail to recognise when we do. Jewish Israeli society, both secular and religious, has moved to the far right in recent years. When we do hear about dissent in the media, it is often from the liberal, secular peace camp. When you speak with dissidents from the liberal left, they are often unaware of dissenters from other demographics – or are sometimes convinced that they do not exist.

In this chapter I draw attention to the varieties of political and ethical dissent. I argue that the mainstream media, and academia, often celebrate secular liberal dissent while failing to recognise other forms. This is because such non-liberal forms of dissent look different. They are articulated in different ethical grammars to liberal dissent, have different aesthetic ideals and employ different techniques and rhetorics of persuasion. For this chapter I will draw on fieldwork I have conducted with secular liberal Jewish Israeli peace activists and ultra-Orthodox Jewish Israeli peace activists. I will demonstrate that dissent within each community looks and functions very differently, and attempt to explain some of the cultural roots of these differences.

The comparison between secular liberal and ultra-Orthodox societies in Israel serves to bring attention to the cultural nuances of dissent. One of these differences regards the tendency of liberal society to respect and even applaud the aesthetics of disruption. In this cultural context, expressions of dissent are made publicly and often in the

glamorised aesthetics of rebelliousness. Here the maverick and the revolutionary are viewed as cultural heroes. This valorisation of resistance, based in liberal culture, has been shown to be a bias in anthropological research as well (Abu-Lughod 1990; Ortner 1995), a bias that also prevents anthropology from highlighting other modes of agency (Mahmood 2004; Rouse 2004). By contrast, ultra-Orthodox society does not idealise dissent. Though it does take differences of opinion seriously, it tends to deliberate on such matters more quietly, while adhering in public to the cultural ideals of consensus and continuity and the aesthetic of solidarity.

This distinction does two things. The first is that following critiques of 'resistance' as an anthropological paradigm, my approach considers resistance not as an analytic lens, but rather as an empirical phenomenon. In other words, some interlocutors hold resistance as a romantic cultural trope and others do not. The second thing it accomplishes is to separate the existence of dissent from its cultural interpretation. In this case I resist a quantitative distinction that would suggest that secular and ultra-Orthodox Israeli society have different amounts of dissent, or that one society has more capacity for social change. Rather I argue that they interpret dissent differently and bring different cultural and social resources to bear in their performance of dissent.

'Successful' dissent

I seek to show that ultra-Orthodox Jewish dissent differs from its secular liberal counterpart in terms of 'the cultural and social resources on which people draw to explain and understand – to themselves and others – the grounds and purpose of their dissent' (see chapter 7, p.133). This case demonstrates that the performance of dissent is evaluated by the cultural standards of the community. For the purposes of this chapter only, I am using the term 'successful dissent' to refer to an expression of dissent that the cultural community recognises as appropriate, proper and conventional. One could reasonably read 'successful dissent' as implying that the act had indeed convinced people and had made an impact on society or public policy. In a comparative situation this is ultimately a quantitative question. Which is more effective: secular liberal or ultra-Orthodox dissent? In this chapter, however, I am more interested in whether an act or articulation of dissent is accepted by the community as proper or not.

In this particular understanding of success, I employ Webb Keane's writing in the anthropology of ethics on the topics of recognition and

justifications (Keane 1997; 2010). Keane emphasises that while the individual may make ethical acts, it is the community that organises ethical life and defines any ethical situation as such. When individuals act, they are often called upon to explain themselves and their decision (Keane 2010, 78). Whether or not this explanation is accepted often depends on the cultural competence of the individual and whether he or she offers appropriate justifications (drawing on recognised sources of moral authority) in the proper semiotic modality (genre, aesthetics, disposition, etc.). In stating this, I am building on the assumption that dissidents share an ethical grammar with the community they are trying to persuade; my previous work demonstrates that even in their dissent we can see the values and ethical norms of the community writ large (Weiss 2017). While dissent diverges from mainstream opinion, therefore, it does not in the process also jettison the ethical standards and beliefs of the community. On the contrary: dissent will present in different forms across cultural contexts, and dissidents often rely on commonly held ethical norms and semiotic modalities to make their case to the larger society.

The result of this approach is to focus the research on the community from which dissidents emerge rather than on the dissidents themselves. In other words, we do not ask, as perhaps a moral philosopher might, 'What is it about these dissidents that caused them to break from society?' Instead we ask the question, 'What is it about this society that produces dissidents of this sort?' As Keane writes:

> Empirical observation bears out a classic theory: one does not develop morality all by oneself. Studies of children's language socialization (Ochs 1988; Schieffelin 1990; see also Ochs and Kremer-Sadlik 2007) have shown that the habits and emotions that we can identify with moral virtues are shaped and given coherence in ongoing social interactions over the course of a lifetime. This process occurs across a range of interactions with distinct kinds of persons, giving it a socially distributed character. (2010, 74)

I am primarily examining how dissidents interact with their own cultural communities. I consider how secular liberal dissent is received by the secular liberal consensus and how ultra-Orthodox dissent is received by the ultra-Orthodox consensus. The grammar and performance of dissent uses the moral language and norms of the broader society. Thus, even as I describe the liberal approach as more 'individualistic', this refers to the semiotic ideology of the individual's apologia and does not imply that

liberals are less dependent on the acceptance of their communities. This approach is in contrast to the liberal genealogy which would describe liberal social life as characterised by freedom and non-liberal life by constraint (Povinelli 2006).

Dissent as resistance: conscientious objection

In the Israeli context conscientious objection is a classic example of dissent as resistance (Weiss 2014). While military service is mandatory in Israel for Jewish citizens, conscientious objectors refuse to perform their military service due to their ethical opposition to the Israeli occupation and Israel's treatment of Palestinians. They do so in violation of Israeli law, often serving time in military prison as a result, and in opposition to widespread public opinion regarding the necessity of performing military service even when one has political objections (Weiss 2014). And yet this is a case of 'successful dissent'. How can this be so?

I argue that it is successful dissent first and foremost because it is recognised as dissent by the objectors' cultural community. Conscientious objectors are drawn almost exclusively from a fairly narrow demographic: what Baruch Kimmerling referred to as *Ahusalim*, which stands for Ashkenazi (of European descent), secular, socialist and nationalist, culturally a variation on the American White Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP). In describing them here as liberal, I am referring less to their political orientation (be it left, right or other) and more to their basic, often unreflective beliefs about the nature of the public sphere, citizenship and their individual oriented subjectivities and values. Though many *Ahusalim* disagree with conscientious objection politically, they nevertheless recognise and often respect individual conscience as a legitimate reason for dissent.

Although I often did not recognise the cultural specificity at the time, in retrospect – after subsequently working with ultra-Orthodox dissenters – I now realise that conscientious objectors' understanding of dissent resonated with many of my own implicit assumptions about community, citizenship and the public sphere that should not in fact be assumed. Many of the tropes of liberal dissent were evident from the very beginning. In our very first introductory interview, Yotam told me:

> For a long time, I tried to work within the system. I tried to change the system from the inside. Really, all the refusers I know tried this for some time. I thought I was a good influence on the other

> soldiers in my unit and on my commanders, that they would behave themselves if I was there to make sure there wasn't any abuse. But eventually I realized something that I had always known, that this doesn't work. This is why we refused. We had to shock the system. We had to blow it up. And we did. This was the only way for us to really change things.

When Yotam talks about blowing things up, he is referring to the shock that reverberated through Israeli society and media at the news that its most revered combat soldiers had become conscientious objectors, as well as the swift and harsh punishment that was brought down on these refusers by the military. However, this harsh reaction does not imply that the act of dissent was unsuccessful. On the contrary, it had the desired effect; even those who did not agree with the refusals often respected the act itself (Weiss 2014). When I spoke with Amir, a senior figure in the military legal division responsible for punishing a number of these refusers, he told me:

> Look, they've broken the law, so we punish them, that is how it works. They knew this in advance. But personally I do respect them for their willingness to stand up for their beliefs, their conscience and accept the punishment. The truth is that if I felt the way they do about something, I like to think that I would do the same. Of course, I think they are completely crazy and naïve, and if we listen to them we'll all be dead.

Above we see a rejection of the arguments of conscientious objectors combined with a respect for their willingness to act, and also for their moral autonomy. Such a reaction was very widespread among the mainstream secular population, even among members of the military that I interviewed. This is directly related to the ways in which conscientious objectors directly appealed to the fact that both their supporters and detractors in the liberal community hold dissent as a cultural value, regardless of content. At their public presentations, conscientious objectors would recount their personal journeys, describing how they moved from true believers to dissenters. These included their experiences in the occupied Palestinian territories, where they were soldier-witnesses to the abuses and injustices carried out by Israeli policy. At the end they invariably called upon their conscience, explicitly or implicitly, to authorise their acts. Here are some examples from personal testimonies.

Alex: I finally decided to listen to my conscience and to do the right thing.

Hanan: I realized that I had the obligation to refuse. Once I was willing to be honest with myself and let my conscience dictate what to do, everything became clear to me. That was my truth. I refused and I was sent to jail. But now it doesn't matter what the price is. Even if they send me to jail for a hundred years, I cannot go against my conscience.

Ben: I knew what I had to do. I knew on the inside what the right thing was and that I didn't really have a choice. Rather I had a choice, but only one was legitimate and only one I could be proud of. I realized that all around me was complacency, and that I needed to shake things up, to disturb people in a profound way.

The reliance on conscience is key to the recognition of refusal as an act of dissent and to give it legitimacy in the eyes of the broader community. Conscientious objectors would frequently give presentations in front of small and large groups in order to justify their controversial acts. In these presentations they would describe intense moments of moral epiphany, when their conscience was revealed to them – often after long periods of denial. On many occasions the decision to obey one's conscience rather than a commander's orders is presented as a gut-wrenching process. Nevertheless, it is clear from the testimonies that obeying one's conscience was the right thing to do and the authentic decision.

Hegel claims that conscience tries to establish for itself, and for others, that the deeds it requires are bound by duty in an unmediated fashion (Feldman 2006, 50). When I spoke with members of the audience at these presentations, conscience was clearly the most persuasive element. Often the audience was left relatively unswayed regarding their support for the Israeli military and the necessity of service, while many arrived already holding critical attitudes towards the occupation and Israel's policies towards the Palestinians. In short, not many audience members had been newly convinced that conscientious objection was the right thing to do. However, people frequently expressed their approval of conscientious objectors' refusal as an act of dissent and an authentic obedience to conscience.

These interactions reveal a number of assumptions about dissent that do not necessarily hold true outside the secular liberal community. Specifically, I want to focus on three tropes that we hear repeated throughout the ethnographic details presented: the trope of 'I', which

suggests the individual nature of moral decision-making, the trope of 'conscience', which shows the internal nature of moral decision-making, and the trope of 'disruption', which reveals the belief that change will occur through a dramatic intervention in the public sphere.

The moral authority of dissent as resistance

One constituent element of liberal dissent is that the natural vessel of proper moral decision-making is the individual. Conscientious objectors constitute a group only in the coincidence of their dissent – that is, after the fact. It is not due to their belonging in a group that they refuse: rather they become a group *because* they are all refusers. Judgement takes place on an individual level. Dissent in this case is not done out of any kind of group solidarity, but out of loyalty only to one's own conscience. The bind of conscience only applies to the owner of that conscience. Even when conscientious objectors speak as a group, they are careful not to speak for each other without consultation, and they do not demand ideological or moral conformity from each other. As a union of like-minded individuals, the basis of their association is instantly dissolvable the moment an individual moral stance falls out of alignment with that of the others in the group.

This is, of course, related to the liberal assumption of moral autonomy, derived from Kant (2017). This is the idea that the individual is capable of moral deliberation and contains within him or herself the capacity for moral discernment. This idea has become essential to liberal ethics, and to modern ideas of conscience more specifically. For our purposes, the most important characteristic of this assumption of moral autonomy is that the source of moral authority is internal to the individual.

Webb Keane has demonstrated the ways in which the inward moral focus, which found full expression in Protestant Christianity, has become essential to Western ideas of modernity and beliefs about proper ethical discernment (2007). Here, too, dissent such as conscientious objection acquires legitimacy if it can be shown to be based on internal reflection and moral sentiment, rather than political expediency or group-based solidarity. Because of this, conscientious objectors go to great lengths to demonstrate how their dissent is actually contrary to their rational interests, often describing how much more easily they could have simply avoided punishment and public attention.

The final assumption of liberal dissent as resistance that I would like to address is that of disruption. Conscientious objectors often described

their desire to deliver a shock to the system through their dissent. In fact a recent documentary on this group was entitled *Disturbing the Peace* in order to capture just exactly that sentiment (Apkon and Young 2016). The promotional materials for this film explain:

> They (the members of the conscientious objector organisation Combatants for Peace) stand in a long line of people, from Gandhi to MLK Jr., Rosa Parks and many others, who have been arrested and those today who continue to be willing to 'disturb the peace' in an effort to help all of us move toward a more just and peaceful world.

Disruption and radical transformation are major themes of this documentary, and lie at the heart of conscientious objection as an act of dissent. As one of the participants in the film is quoted saying, 'Each time we are creating this alternative to the reality, which is an Israeli and Palestinian communicating, taking an action together, it is a revolution, not less than that'. Their activities have been represented as 'rehearsing the revolution' (*Disturbing the Peace*, 2016). This documentary and other media representations of conscientious objectors play into the romantic idea of resistance and dissent. In liberal popular culture, dissent is 'cool'; being a rebel, a maverick or standing against the mainstream has strong cultural appeal.

This trope of disruption is foundational to the liberal world-view. The goal is to liberate the individual from the constraint of culture and society (Brown 2006). Thus social change is imagined as a breach with the present; the role of cultural heroes is to shatter the existing order and create a new world, free of any commitment to what happened before it (Mizrachi 2017, 98–9). This idea reflects a strong commitment to moral progressivism, the idea that society must always be in transformation or ideally revolution, moving away from an oppressive past and towards a more just future (Mizrachi 2017, 29). In this model, dissent is intended to undermine the past and the status quo. Such a model recalls the ideal of revolution and transformation in Christian theology. 'You have heard it said… but I say unto you…' (Matthew 5:17–48). Here dissent seeks to criticise and delegitimise the traditional hierarchies and to encourage a break with the past.

Dissent without resistance: ultra-Orthodox Israelis

As part of my ongoing research with religious peace initiatives, I participated in a women's group of ultra-Orthodox Jewish and Muslim social

workers that met under the auspices of the Citizens' Accord Forum. The goal of this group was to explore areas of commonality between these two groups of women, both coming from highly religious, traditionalist, non-liberal societies. The idea was that, as two politically marginalised groups, they may have issues of overlapping concern that could be addressed through their joint efforts. It was left to the women to decide which issues they would like to take up.

In contrast to the previous group, I describe these women as non-liberal because they come from a non-liberal community and enthusiastically share norms and values that emphasise the community, gender/age/status based social hierarchies and religious authority over the individual. They cover their hair with wigs, headscarves and hats, and follow strict rules of modesty and gender segregation outside the immediate family. By and large these women tend not to consume television or the internet. They also privilege the consensus of the religious community and the Torah above the individual will in their approach to ethical dilemmas. While these divisions are not meant to be understood as hermetic, I believe they are useful to describe some deep cultural differences that exist between the groups. Furthermore, I reject liberal stereotypes about these groups that would claim that these women are oppressed, unreflective, uncritical or otherwise limited in their agency or thoughts.

The women discussed their experiences as social workers in their own communities, where much of their training and education seemed inapplicable. Many of the 'developmentally normative behaviours' they had learned about, such as teenage rebellion and dating, simply did not occur in their communities. But it was the issue of domestic abuse on which they decided to focus as a group. In particular Tsippy, a social worker in Jerusalem, introduced the concept of 'spiritual violence', which was greeted with instant recognition by the other participants. This idea refers to harassment and abuse on the part of a husband, specifically in a way that prevents a wife from fulfilling her religious obligations and damages her relationship with God (Siegel-Itzkovich 2009). Examples included interrupting a woman's prayers or trying to force or trick her to violate religious prohibitions such as religious dietary rules.

Israeli law as well as state social workers currently recognise several forms of violence against women beyond the physical – for example, emotional, verbal and financial violence. These ultra-Orthodox social workers felt that women in their communities were being exposed to a further form of abuse, spiritual violence, for which they received no protection in law. There was significant doubt that the criminal court

system, with their secular norms, would be interested in recognising this religiously informed concept, but the Orthodox Jewish women thought they might be able to influence the religious courts.

In the Israeli context, this would be a significant intervention. Family law, including marriage and divorce, is under the jurisdiction of the religious courts, Jewish, Muslim and Christian. If the religious courts decided to recognise spiritual violence as a form of abuse, this could be legal grounds for women who were treated in this way to receive justice. One of the members of the group is a well-known figure in the ultra-Orthodox world, the daughter of a very important rabbi. She is married to a dayan, one of the religious judges in the Jewish courts. She told the other social workers that she would raise this issue of spiritual violence with her husband for consideration.

At their next meeting, about a month later, the social workers were anxious to hear the response.

Margalit: I raised the issue with my husband and he said absolutely not. His response was that it is absolute silliness and it has no standing in *halacha* (Jewish law).

Tsippy: But did you explain him what it means?

Margalit: Yes, I told him and gave him all of the examples, but he said that none of them actually do spiritual damage to her.

Tsippy: What about when he interrupts her prayers?

Margalit: He said women can pray at any time, the times are not set as they are for men.

Karen: And when he whispers only to her that his blessing on the wine [Kiddush] doesn't include her?

[Here she is referring to the Kiddush, a ritual blessing on the Sabbath. If this blessing is not performed, the woman cannot eat without violating religious law.]

Margalit: He said she is capable of saying all the blessings for herself.

Karen: With children and guests gathered around the table in her house?! Everyone will see her, she will be humiliated! She wouldn't say the blessing for herself, she would say she has a stomach ache and not eat.

Chavi: And when he forces her to violate the Sabbath?

Margalit: He said if he tricks her into eating something then that does not count against her, but against him.

You could see the disappointment on many of the faces.

Tsippy: So that is it?

Margalit: That means that it is not going to be recognised in the courts at this time. But that doesn't mean that in your work you cannot use the concept and help women who are dealing with this type of abuse. There are also other ways that we can start to educate people about this idea. I know that you are all very disappointed, but I remind you that things in our community happen slowly. But they do happen. I am older than most of you and I have seen many significant changes in the status of women and their possibilities in life, under my father and since I was young.

The women nodded sombrely.

Dissent in the ultra-Orthodox society functions very differently than in secular liberal society. This dissent took place very quietly, and it did so on purpose, making use of back channels and avoiding publicity. Even when these efforts failed, the issue was dealt with quietly. Despite their frustration, no one at the meeting considered making a statement to the media or drawing public attention to the matter. They were certainly disappointed, but they accepted the verdict of the judge's authority on the matter and decided to keep working on the issue in other social spheres. Moral authority is not found equally in each individual, but is distributed hierarchically – in this case with the religious judge whose decision people are duty bound to obey, just as refusers obey conscience. The consensus of the community is not seen as a target for iconoclastic rebellion, but as a social fact.

I asked a few of the women why they were being so cautious not to upset the leadership.

One woman explained:

> I don't care if they are 'upset' or not, that is not the reason. But I do not want chaos in the community. Maybe we see something that the leadership doesn't see yet, but maybe we are wrong. We rely on their guidance for a reason, and our solidarity is more important than any one issue.

Another woman emphasised the potential impact on personal relationships of taking dissent beyond the accepted norms.

> In our community, we don't do things without permission. You know my sister became secular, so I am somewhat familiar with all

that. Where she lives, no one knows her, if she goes to a non-kosher café no one cares. When I leave the house, everyone knows me. If I did something everyone would know, and it would be hard for me, and that would make it hard for my husband, and hard for my kids. Other parents wouldn't want their kids to be around mine, I could never do something like that to them.

She understood my question to be emerging from the anonymous interactions of modern secular society. In order to correct my understanding, she wanted to impress on me the ways in which ultra-Orthodox women are embedded in thick relationships of kinship and community. As a result, their choices and public behaviours impact not only their own social wellbeing but also those of their families. This makes the stakes of 'disturbing the peace' extremely high, to the point where such action may unethically cause harm to one's loved ones.

Dissent and moral authority in ultra-Orthodox Israeli society

In this world-view the individual is not intrinsically qualified to discern the moral good entirely on his or her own. The capacity for moral discernment is not inherent to the human condition, but is found in education, tradition and intersubjective deliberation. Thomas Hobbes said that what modern society calls conscience is in fact no more than private opinion, and should not be credited as bearing any more moral weight than that. The ultra-Orthodox dissidents with whom I have worked expressed similar suspicions, often referring to liberal dissidents as only operating on the basis of opinion.

The following interaction demonstrates some of these issues. Yitzchak Vaknin, the ultra-Orthodox member of the Knesset who claimed to prefer to cut off his hands than vote for the Muezzin Bill, attended a J-Street conference in Washington DC. J-Street is a liberal American nonprofitable organisation working to solve the Arab–Israeli and Israeli–Palestinian conflicts. Vaknin sat down for an interview with a sceptical interviewer who was surprised to see an ultra-Orthodox politician at a left-wing event. The following excerpt illustrates the difference in approach to questions of dissent (Magid 2013).

Aaron Magid: You said that your party is supportive of peace, but why are you the only member of Shas here and the only

Shas MK to attend the Israeli–Palestinian joint initiative in Jerusalem?

Yitzchak Vaknin: I am not the only one. At the end of the day, the Rabbis decide and the Council tells us how to act. The moment the Council says something in opposition to what I say, then I follow them. Many people believe in what I do that the Israeli–Palestinian conflict must end.

Vaknin does not just answer the question, but also corrects its false premise. The question asks why more individuals from Vaknin's political party do not take a public stand in support of Palestinians and the peace process. Vaknin corrects the interviewer, explaining that he is not the only one involved in such activities. However, he also corrects the implication that he himself is taking a stand against the consensus of his party. He wants to take an initiative to end the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, declaring that he is not the only one. However, he does not act alone; ultimately he will follow the consensus.

Consensus is central to the ultra-Orthodox world-view. The text from Exodus 23:2, which says 'You shall neither side with the majority to do wrong – you shall not give perverse testimony in a dispute, incline after the many', is interpreted as instructing Jews to follow the majority opinion. This is a general rule in deciding matters of Torah Law as elaborated by the Massekhet Sanhedrin in the Talmud (majority of legal judges; this does not imply universal democracy). Yet the rule to set aside one's own opinion and defer to Jewish law as determined by the majority applies to both men and women in all contexts.

However, this does not imply a radically different conception of personhood nor a dividuated subject, as found in other ethnographic contexts. As with liberal subjects, persons in Judaism are generally considered unique actors who are individually responsible for their actions. Yet in this case, because moral authority is removed from the individual and invested in the rabbinical judges, in the case of error the onus is on the judges rather than on the individual.[2] This consensus is not unitary; there are several streams of ultra-Orthodox Judaism, many of which differ on issues of both politics and religion. Nevertheless, individuals are generally not left to figure out ethical issues on their own, as liberal subjects are. Instead they do so within the framework of their community and under the guidance of the rabbinical authorities.

Like consensus, continuity has additional cultural significance here in contrast to liberal dissidents who revere disruption. While the

aesthetics of liberal dissent romanticise the individual standing alone against society to confront the oppressive past, no such romantic ideal exists here. Instead continuity with the past and harmony with society are idealised. Likewise, iconoclasm is generally not part of the aesthetic appeal of this type of dissent. The reverence for continuity is, in fact, quite a bit broader than the ultra-Orthodox community. Meir Buzaglo, in reference to traditionalist (*masorti*) Judaism, writes that demonstrable loyalty to the past and to tradition is the necessary condition for revolution in the Jewish world. His work demonstrates that traditional populations do not want to see themselves as renegades, but rather as the latest link in the chain of their forebears (Buzaglo 2011). This by no means implies that such an approach is not open to change. Rather, it means that change and dissent take place within a framework of loyalty to tradition and a respect for continuity.

The liberal orientation towards disruption and the non-liberal orientation towards continuity and consensus should not be perceived as an absolute binary. Elizabeth Povinelli writes that the liberal imagination defines itself by freedom and imagines the other as a genealogical society defined by constraint. Thus the liberal subject is legitimised through creativity and its other through continuity (2002). Here we see a situation in which notions of continuity are highly valued by a non-liberal society, yet we do not want to reify these positions or expect reality to conform fully to this binary opposition. In fact, I want to illustrate that in practice conscientious objectors often bend towards continuity, and sometimes the ultra-Orthodox have maverick moments.

While the focus of conscientious objectors' testimony is on their own moral process of rejecting military service and breaking away from mainstream society, at the same time we can find gestures to continuity. Often conscientious objectors describe their genealogical links to mainstream Jewish Israeli society at length, as well as describing their loyalty to civic values known to be within the Jewish consensus (Weiss 2011). Here, even to a liberal audience that explicitly values individual ideas of conscience, dissenters must still guard against the suspicions of nihilism that their non-liberal counterparts accuse them of. In addition, sometimes even secular liberals found military refusal to cross the line of acceptable dissent. Often the true price was found not in rhetorical condemnation of conscience as a value, but in the consequence to personal relationships. Some conscientious objectors were rejected by certain family members, while many lost friends who supported their freedom of conscience and respected their dissent from the mainstream only up until the point of refusal.

By contrast, the ultra-Orthodox sometimes take actions that could be seen as disruptive, despite the social taboos. Margalit, the social activist who delivered the bad news to the ultra-Orthodox social workers, recalled at one meeting a time when she evaded the hierarchical moral authority of her community. In 2015, at the Gay Pride Parade in Jerusalem, 16-year old Shira Banki was stabbed to death by an ultra-Orthodox protestor. Margalit, despite the broad consensus against homosexuality in the ultra-Orthodox community, and believing that her husband would disapprove, went to console Banki's family without discussing the matter with him first. (She did not, however, advertise this incident publicly until he told her that he did in fact approve and would have joined her had he known of her plans.)

The analytic framework I draw regarding the ideals of dissent, contrasting disruption and consensus between the communities, should not therefore be seen as overly rigid – nor imply that values of continuity are never present in liberalism, or that disruption is never present in the non-liberal, ultra-Orthodox tradition. In a diverse society, these aesthetic ideals can also influence each other.

In this chapter I am trying to correct for a bias that allows researchers from liberal contexts more easily to recognise the rhetoric, aesthetics and structure of dissent as resistance. And in the wake of critiques of resistance as an analytic lens, I seek to provincialise resistance as a specific cultural approach to dissent. I believe it would be a mistake diametrically to oppose dissent and consensus, which reflect liberal assumptions about moral decision-making as well as the ethics of self-presentation. Through the lens of dissent as resistance, one must choose between dissent and consent.

As we see above, this is not the only option. One can hold dissenting opinions until such point at which a consensus is reached, and then consent to the majority stance. The lens of resistance has a hard time processing this shift in positive ethical terms. Through this lens, one cannot change from a dissenter to someone who 'genuinely' consents to the popular consensus without undergoing a personal transformation. Obeying a demand for consent that does not originate with the individual would be seen as a compromise of one's principles, if not as hypocrisy. This idea is reinforced by the Western assumption that associates secularism with critical thinking and religion with conformity (Asad et al. 2013). However, the ultra-Orthodox see this shift as being in line with their positively framed ethical principles, not a compromised act. For them, one has a duty to dissent, and then one has a duty to give consent to majority rule. These principles are not contradictory for them.

To a significant extent this opposition of dissent and consent is related to the liberal expectation for authenticity. Charles Taylor writes that modernity demands self-fulfilment, that individuals will create or discover their true selves and that this demand amounts to a moral calling (1991; 1992). In addition Andrew Weigert argues that authenticity is demonstrated in moments of moral dilemma, when the individual is called to feel and to act in accordance with their personal values (2009). Ori Schwartz defines the authenticity ethos in the following way:

> This emphatically modern ethic … demands that individuals find out their true nature, emotions and beliefs and stick to them; act spontaneously and uncalculatedly; and remain true to themselves despite external pressures to conform to social norms and temptations to 'sell out'… Finally, authenticity turned into an axiological principle used to evaluate other people's moral and social worth. (2016, 3)

On the one hand, we see that the discourse of self-discovery is central to conscientious objectors' testimonies of moral discernment, and that self-fulfilment is key to their justifications of refusal. On the other hand, we see how the ultra-Orthodox fail the test of authenticity by their subordination of their individual opinions to the consensus. The 'failure' of this non-liberal population to demonstrate authenticity leads to their negative evaluation by liberal peers. It is common to hear the negative trope that the ultra-Orthodox do not engage in critical thought, but only obey the instructions of their rabbis. Such statements accuse the ultra-Orthodox community of improper ethical practice according to the liberal code of resistance.

Interestingly, both groups see their acts as being taken for the good of the community, casting this issue as one of ethical, and not solely political, life. Conscientious objectors understand themselves to be giving up their freedom in order to save Israeli society from its own destructive policies and political decisions. Ultra-Orthodox dissenters meanwhile sacrifice their personal stances for the unity and solidarity of the community. Here we see quite clearly the difference in emphasis between an individual versus a community-oriented social context.

Thus I suggest that we can describe such ultra-Orthodox – and potentially other non-liberal forms of dissent – as dissent without resistance. By dissent without resistance, I mean to pry apart the universal social phenomenon of dissent from the specific cultural manifestation that privileges the aesthetics of disruption and romanticises

rebellion. This echoes James Laidlaw's move to detach the concept of freedom from the fetishised idea of 'Freedom' that is central to the Western ethical and political project and which invokes an 'atomistic social ontology' (2002, 311). He does this in order to free the concept from its cultural baggage because he sees in the concept great potential for service in the anthropological toolkit, specifically as a foundational concept in the anthropology of ethics. Here I seek similarly to recover the concept of dissent as a foundational universal. Doing this will allow us not only to consider cases of dissent exercised outside the liberal framework, but also to identify cases when dissent is in fact manifested in the liberal grammar of resistance, such as in the case of conscientious objectors.

Because ultra-Orthodox dissent is generally not brought to the mainstream media or articulated in the discourse of disruption, it often slides beneath the radar; such communities acquire stereotypes of being 'closed' and 'repressive'. This pattern is recognisable in other cases of non-liberal societies. For example, Hurst and McConnell found a substantial amount of internal divisions among the Amish regarding church doctrine, family life and educational choices, despite their outward and highly cultivated appearance of unity and homogeneity (2010). In a somewhat different vein, Saba Mahmood found that the women's Islamic piety movement in Egypt was largely illegible to Western feminist discourse, in part because of its failure to conform to tropes of political liberation or what I refer to here as the politics of disruption (2004).

Dissent in the public sphere

Liberal dissent as resistance assumes a deliberative public sphere, a central principle of liberal political philosophy (Rawls 2005; Habermas 1991). Under this model, discernment and reflection about the just and the good takes place on an individual level. Once an individual understands their position, it is his or her right and duty to engage their fellow citizens in the public sphere, arguing for their position while simultaneously being open to persuasion by others (Rawls 2009 [1971]).

For conscientious objectors, refusal is an intervention in the public sphere – not only because they do not want to continue performing military service on a personal level, but also because they think their actions will influence public opinion towards their position. This is the reason that they testify before audiences, accept invitations to be interviewed on television, on radio and in newspapers, speak in schools

and other venues. They see their act of dissent as contributing an argument to the ongoing conversation among the Jewish Israeli public regarding the occupation and the policies of the Israeli military.

By contrast, the ultra-Orthodox process of handling dissent is quite different. Contrary to stereotypes, many hot button issues, religious and political, are debated among the ultra-Orthodox. However, often these debates do not primarily take place in the media nor in front of the broader public, but rather through back channels, as we saw in the cases presented here. On sensitive issues, the ultra-Orthodox often enter the broader Israeli public sphere only once consensus is reached. In this they differ from the liberal model of the deliberative public sphere, conforming more instead to the agonistic model of the public sphere.

Individuals and groups following this agonistic model do not try to persuade each other under the assumption that the public sphere is a neutral space or that difference can be resolved through rational debate. Rather it recognises deep difference, often incommensurable difference, between perspectives. In an agonistic public sphere, opposing hegemonic projects struggle for power in an adversarial system (Mouffe 2000; 2005). As such, we see that not only do the ultra-Orthodox differ from liberals in terms of their ethical subjectivities, but also in terms of their political models.

Conclusion

Israeli conscientious objection takes place on a very public stage, both domestically and internationally. By contrast, dissent within the ultra-Orthodox Jewish community often garners far less attention. In this chapter I take a comparative perspective to try to explain this difference. I show that the conscientious objection bears a number of liberal assumptions and specific cultural expressions. This type of dissent lodges its moral authority in individual conscience, considered to be an inherent part of the human condition. Dissent in this context is also often romanticised and aestheticised through resistance, in line with a cultural value privileging disruption in ethical life. By contrast, the ultra-Orthodox dissidents value the aesthetics of continuity and solidarity even as they see dissent as necessary and inevitable.

The comparison presented here reveals another important distinction related to the internal politics of legitimation. Often academic accounts focus on strategy and struggles of dissidents against the hegemonic political forces (Herzfeld 2016). While these dynamics are

of essential importance, they tend to sidestep the ways in which dissent movements are *ethical* in addition to being political. As ethical interventions, it is not only a question of effective political manoeuvering, but also one that involves essential cultural issues, for example sources of moral authority and the relationship between the individual and the community.

Attention to this level of legitimation allows us to discern between the cultural politics of dissent of individuals in secular liberal societies from those social movements that emerge from non-liberal, traditionalist social contexts. Typically these include dense networks of kinship and high expectations of fealty, and in them the ethical is invested communally. One can expect that the type of ethical legitimisation will also have implications for the relationships between the dissidents of any given movement. A movement based on individual conscience will likely be the voluntary association of strangers who come together because of their common dedication to a cause, such as the Black Lives Matter Movement or the Women's March in the US. By contrast, a movement that is legitimised by communal and hierarchical moral authority will likely be based on close forms of association and an expectation of solidarity based on group belonging. One could expect to see this in different indigenous land movements among non-liberal communities around the world.

Notes

1 From their home in Caesarea, Netanyahu and his family can hear the muezzin's call to prayer from Jisr az-Zarqa and they do not like it. Netanyahu found time to complain about hearing the call to prayer during his cabinet meetings on several occasions (*Times of Israel* Staff 2016).

2 One of my interlocutors explained to me that the reason for this rule was to standardise Judaism. If the laws were left to personal interpretation, everyone would follow their own opinion on every matter; in surrendering to their own individuality, there would be nothing holding people together in a shared religion. Deferring to majority opinion, it is claimed, allows Judaism to survive as a coherent religion throughout the world and to maintain continuity through time.

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Chapter 4
Friendship behind bars: Kurdish dissident politics in Turkey's prisons

Serra Hakyemez

In December 2017 I paid a visit to Devrim, a Kurdish man in his early 30s, finally to congratulate the newly-wed bridegroom who had been detained immediately after his wedding ceremony and kept in prison for six months. His wife was watching the film *Arabesque* on television, a cult work of the Turkish cinema produced in the aftermath of the 1980 military junta. In the genre of melodrama, the film parodies the liberalisation of public space from the grip of the Turkish military. Here Şener the violinist and Müjde the singer face an endless series of unfortunate events that hinder their merry union.

One of these events culminates in Şener's imprisonment on the false charge of murder. As a newcomer to prison, he looks around the room, furnished by two dozen double-decker bunks and a large plastic table. A group of inmates smokes cigarettes and drinks tea around the table. Into this almost clichéd scene of killing time another group of inmates abruptly emerges from an underground tunnel, wearing yellow raincoats and carrying shovels. Not knowing who these men are, Şener asks a fellow inmate 'Are these men miners?' The fellow inmate corrects him. 'No, they are *political*. They will never receive amnesty. Therefore they are digging a tunnel.' At that moment Devrim, his memories from prison still fresh, confirmed what had just been stated: a 'political prisoner is the prisoner whom the state would never pardon'. A former political prisoner himself, Devrim repeated these words with the anticipation that his time released from prison would be shorter than the time he had already spent in it.

This chapter examines the dissident politics of Kurdish prisoners in the face of the misfortune that befalls their relationships with intimate others outside prison. It focuses on the intimacies they form

through prison friendship. I use 'friendship' (in Kurdish *hevaltî*) as a general category, referring to two interconnected forms of relatedness entertained by prisoners: comradeship/political friendship and social/non-political friendship. Rather than employ an *a priori* distinction between political and non-political, I study ethnographically what makes a friendship and what kind of labour is invested in relating to one another as a political or non-political friend. In the context of prison friendship the non-political is an outcome of continuous collective action, rather than a backdrop against which the political operates (see Candea 2011). Intimate publics and collectivised privacies are two sides of friendship among prisoners that exist in constant but productive tension.

The Kurdish movement lays out a set of rules about how prisoners should form relationships and how they should conduct themselves. The ultimate goal of this form of governmentality is to produce revolutionary subjects, prepared to commit their lives to the Kurdish movement through the institution of comradeship.[1] This institution requires that prisoners comply with the Kurdish movement's strict organisational hierarchies and regimentation of everyday life in order to refract the repressive rule of prison administration and to achieve formal equality. At the outset the institution of comradeship may appear as another oppressive institution within the already oppressive regime of prison administration, unless due attention is paid to the multiple socialities to which it gives birth. Based upon an overview of how comradeship is structured in prisons, this chapter examines what my interlocutors call 'social friendship' – a relationship originating in, yet exceeding, political friendship. I argue that prisons remain the hub of dissident politics – not simply because the Kurdish movement commands this to be so, but also because the prisoners' commitment to their friendship, which is irreducible to comradeship, becomes inseparable from their commitment to the Kurdish cause.

In *The Promise of Politics* Hannah Arendt (2005) criticises the confusion of politics with domination and use of force. Drawing on its deployment in antiquity, Arendt defines politics in spatial terms as that which 'arises *between* men and *outside* of man' (2005, 95). Identifying politics with the 'in-between space' generated by the plural existence of human beings, she considers interdependency, rather than sovereignty, as a condition of possibility for political action (see Butler, Gambetti and Sabsay 2016; Çubukçu 2018). Political action imbued with world-making power does not occur in isolation; according to Arendt, it is an action in concert and requires one to act with friends and comrades as equals. The 'in-between space' of politics grants its participants freedom,

albeit temporarily, but it is neither atemporal nor bereft of structure, as Arendt argues.

> Each such space has its own structure that changes over time and reveals itself in a private context as custom, in a social context as convention and in a public context as laws, constitutions, statutes and the like. (2005, 106)

In Arendt's reading of politics, it is only through passion and action that the withering away of such 'in-between spaces' can be resisted. If totalitarian movements are like storms in a desert world, in which everything between human beings is hollowed out, human beings need *oases* that exist somewhat independently from political conditions, but are nevertheless essential for the endurance of human faculties of passion and action. Creativity unfolds in this desert world in the singular:

> in the inherently wordless relationship between human beings as it exists in love and sometimes in friendship – when one heart reaches out directly to the other, as in friendship, or when the in-between, the world, goes up in flames, as in love. (Arendt 2005, 202)

Carrying this analogy further, I consider friendship behind bars to be a form of relatedness – one that is both structured by the rules of the institution of comradeship yet is also formative of *oases*, enabling prisoners to find creative ways to form non-political socialities. By taking friendship as the analytic to understand the endurance of dissident politics in prisons, this chapter shows the ethical, corporal and affective ties that friendship weaves between prisoners, thus sustaining their collective will for life and dissent.

Ethnographies of political prisoners in places as diverse as Northern Ireland, Turkey and Palestine illustrate how the collectivities formed by dissent move beyond the question of survival as they utilise their bodies as weapons against the biopolitical order of prison administrations (Aretxaga 1995; Bargu 2016; Feldman 1991; Nashif 2008). Departing from these ethnographies, which omit the role of the non-political in the formation of dissent, this chapter focuses on the spaces carved out by prisoners to form political as well as non-political friendships. I argue that friendship behind bars, constantly made and unmade by the prison administration and the Kurdish movement, creates an 'in-between space' between the self and the others. In this space not only daily life but also pain and fun are collectivised. The commitment to politics is a

commitment to the friendship that protects the self from giving in to the state's coercive power, together with the help of *oases* they collectively create within prison walls.

I have developed long-term friendships with former prisoners during the 30 months of ethnographic research that I conducted in Diyarbakır, Turkey between 2008 and 2014. In addition to more than 100 interviews, I collected two dozen prison memoirs and engaged in less formal conversations with former prisoners. Friendship was not necessarily what the former prisoners preferred to talk about during these interviews, given the abundance of contentious issues to discuss – including the Kurdish struggle for national liberation, Turkish colonialism and the like. Nor did I initially think of or pay attention to friendship as an analytic to read prison stories interwoven with torture, resistance and death (Hakyemez 2017). Communicated to me with the sparest of signs and gestures, it was only when I stopped the tape recorder and put my notebook aside that our conversations turned to the relations that the former prisoners established with each other in prison. These were the moments when they claimed their prison experience in intimate terms, shared together with close friends.

Antagonist politics

Unlike in the film *Arabesque*, Turkish prison administrations usually segregate Kurdish prisoners accused of terrorism from common criminals. This enables them to subject the former to a different regime of discipline and punishment and to prevent the latter from being influenced by potentially subversive ideas. The former group of Kurdish prisoners is further divided between those who align with the Kurdish movement spearheaded by the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) and others who either express repentance and side with the Turkish state or remain unaffiliated with either side. The political (*siyasi*) prisoners, on the one hand, and those who are repentant (*itirafçı*) and the unaffiliated (*bağımsız*) on the other: each stay in separate prison blocks and use disconnected recreation yards.[2]

Notwithstanding the relative ease with which newcomers may identify themselves with one of these groups, the prison administration utilises violent and non-violent means to convert the prisoners in political wards into repentant or unaffiliated ones. Among the techniques employed is the promise that they will receive reduced prison sentences and live in less arduous prison conditions. Turning away from the

political community is one of the ways in which prisoners remake their normative world which has been crushed by their torturers (Cover 1986; Talebi 2011; Thiranagama and Kelly 2010). Since the 1980 military junta prison administrations have succeeded in recruiting political prisoners into the repentant and unaffiliated groups. Nonetheless political wards continue to outnumber the wards of repentant and unaffiliated prisoners.

Political wards are distinguished from others on two registers: the prisoners' external relation with the administration and their inner relation with each other. Devrim's definition of the political prisoner as the one whom the state would never pardon speaks to the political prisoners' feeling of enmity toward the state, embodied inside by the prison administration. Anthropologists have asserted that the state is neither a clearly bounded institution nor a unitary and autonomous actor; it rather consists of a multilayered, contradictory, trans-local ensemble of institutions, practices and people in a globalised context (Sharma and Gupta 2006). As Abrams (1988) famously argued, the state as an *a priori* conceptual and empirical object obscures the ordinary and often uncoordinated contestations of power between these actors. However, the intellectual work of deconstructing the state does not necessarily mean that our interlocutors do not reconstruct it, whether to assure sovereign protection or to contest sovereign oppression (Blom Hansen and Stepputat 2005; Navaro-Yashin 2002; Wedeen 1999). As recent anthropological studies argue, we need to suspend our own definitions of the state and politics in order to shed a light on what these notions come to mean for our interlocutors (Candea 2011; Curtis and Spencer 2012).[3]

As much as it obstructs the daily operation of power relations, the state as an ethnographic category is indispensable in the formation of dissident politics. Kurdish political prisoners operate with the Schmittian concept of politics when drawing the boundaries of enmity and friendship with prison administrations. Within this framework, the conflict that Kurdish guerrillas wage in the mountains is carried forward by the fight of Kurdish prisoners against prison administrations.[4] Kurdish prisoners map the mutually constitutive antagonism between the Turkish state and the PKK onto what Carl Schmitt calls the 'friend–enemy antithesis'. This

> provides a definition in the sense of a criterion and not as an exhaustive definition or one indicative of substantial content. […] The distinction of friend and enemy denotes the utmost degree of intensity of a union or separation, of an association or disassociation. (2007, 26)

Such an antithesis takes new forms when prison administrations impose new rules that prisoners do not accept (for example, all inmates must wear a uniform) or when prisoners push prison administrations to change the existing rules (for example, strip-search). Hunger strikes, in particular, escalate antagonism to the extent that the survival of prisoners becomes contingent upon the demise of prison administrations (Bargu 2016). Alternatively, in the words of a former prisoner, either prisoners defeat prison administrations and get out of prisons on foot or they are defeated and carried out in coffins. In Turkey the latter scenario is often the one with which prison uprisings have concluded.

In his articulation of the friend–enemy antithesis, Schmitt (2007) concedes that the antagonism between two groups does not necessarily prevent them from entertaining any transaction. Nor does it mean that individual members of each group necessarily hate each other. The enemy in us–them distinction refers to public enmity rather than private animosity. Former prisoners affirmed this distinction between public enmity and private animosity on the grounds that their problem was with prison administrations, not with individual prison guards. Instead, they saw the cruelty of their torturers as a sign of their abnormality. The prisoners speculated that most prison guards were addicted to drugs, consummated by abundant alcohol consumption and brainwashed by special training. Some prison guards were considered exceptional for bringing food to prisoners when the administrations banned all services, informing them ahead of time about the administrations' incursion plans and refraining from torturing them. Although such instances of care extended by a few prison guards to Kurdish prisoners attest to the permeability between two groupings at a personal level, it does not change the inherent public enmity between prisoners and prison administrations.

If refusal to collaborate with the state initiates Kurdish prisoners into the political prison wards, it is their friendships that keep them there. Antagonism between the Turkish state and the PKK, which makes the political wards effectively another front of war, does not explain the texture of the relationship among prisoners. The ties that bind the members of a group in the friend–enemy antithesis might be as imaginative as those of a nation or as intimate as those of kin. The institution of comradeship is irreducible to neither the sociality of strangers, with which the public is associated in liberal democracies, nor to the intimate sociality of kin associated with the domestic. It is rather the homo-sociality of male prisoners who negotiate the boundaries between insiders and outsiders as they are inculcated into the ethics of comradeship.

The ethics of comradeship

> Common criminals were respectful and measured toward us [political prisoners]. Among themselves, however, they were very manipulative. Their relations were built on self-interest. If their personal life was at stake, they could sell their best friends. Rather than a *friendship* [my emphasis], they seemed to have a forced union. I met some good people who remained tight-lipped and rejected to inform the administration on their friends no matter what. Yet their inner relations were fraught with contradictions. They did not have a collective life. They were divided into groups of three or four, each meeting their own ends. (Sezgin 2014, 125)

The excerpt is from *Sinop'ta İdam Geceleri* (*The Nights of Execution in Sinop*) by Yılmaz Sezgin, who at the age of 18 was accused of secessionism and sentenced to death, later commuted to 30 years' imprisonment. Yılmaz entered prison in 1980 with little knowledge of the Kurdish movement, let alone its ideology. He was an illiterate shepherd who had befriended a few guerrilla fighters in the mountains while grazing his flock. When he left prison in 2010, however, he had not only learned how to read and write but had also become the author of a well-known prison memoir.

In the aftermath of a prison uprising in Sinop, Yılmaz and his cellmates were placed in the ward of common criminals. In his prison memoir he noted a stark contrast between the relatedness of common criminals and that of political prisoners. If common criminals had a forced union, the political prisoners' was a voluntary one. If the members of this forced union were manipulative and self-centered, Yılmaz believed political prisoners to be sincere and collective-minded. The moralising language Yılmaz deployed to describe common criminals does not presume that political prisoners are inherently better human beings – rather that they become so as they participate in the institution of comradeship. The excerpt attests to the felicitous subjectification of Yılmaz to the comradeship ideology even though, as will be evident in the last section, one should never assume this subjectification process to be complete.

Prisons, in the words of Erving Goffman (1968), are total institutions which break down the spatial barriers between labour, work, leisure and action. Goffman argues that inmates subjected to the coercive authority of total institutions experience mortification and loss of selfhood. The reasons are varied and complex.

> First, all aspects of life are conducted in the same place and under the same single authority. Second, each phase of the member's daily activity is carried on in the immediate company of a large batch of others, all of whom are treated alike and required to do the same thing together. Third, all phases of the day's activities are tightly scheduled with one activity leading at a prearranged time into the next, the whole sequence of activities being imposed from above by a system of explicit formal rulings and a body of officials. Finally, the various enforced activities are brought together into a single rational plan purportedly designed to fulfill the official aims of the institution. (1968, 6)

The corporal imprints that the material structure of prisons leave on prisoners should be added to Goffman's list of coercive practices that threaten one's sense of self. Prison as a punitive institution produces bodily vulnerabilities even in the absence of torture; it deprives prisoners from contact with human and non-human beings except prison guards and fellow inmates. Prisoners are locked up in dimly lighted rooms; small barred windows restrain their field of vision. Their sense of touch with the outside world is reduced to their bodily contact with fully cemented floors of recreation yards, in which Kurdish prisoners are not even allowed to grow plants or feed pigeons. The bland diet of prison life deprives prisoners of necessary nutrients, to the extent that most of them develop digestive problems. Finally, prisoners' bodily dispositions resemble each other over the years as they stay in the same enclosed space. It is therefore not uncommon for released prisoners to spot another former inmate from afar simply by recognising the particular way in which they carry their bodies on the street.

Notwithstanding these similarities, the political wards of Kurdish prisoners are different from other total institutions. This is because of the informal and somewhat discrete organisation they instituted to evade the administration's authority over their lives. The prison writings of former prisoners provide insights into the organisational model they developed over time called 'internal coordination'. Cafer Solgun (2018), another Kurdish writer who stayed in seven different prisons in the 1990s, describes the internal coordination as a highly hierarchical structure, similar to that established in camps by Kurdish guerrilla fighters.[5] At the top of the hierarchy comes the coordination team, consisting of three members and three alternates who held senior positions within the Kurdish movement prior to their imprisonment. Its members act like a governing body, shaping how political prisoners

conduct themselves in the wards. Strategies developed by the coordination team are implemented by the central committees formed in every prison and again composed of three members and three alternates. Each central committee establishes an education and a commune committee to coordinate prisoners' daily activities. Finally, each ward has a separate unit consisting of five members responsible for social, practical and administrative activities. However, as Solgun notes, this organisational model does not always work as designed: prisons differ from each other with regard to their population profile, ward size and level of oppression.

In contrast to the administration's written rules and sovereign decisions implemented through force, the Kurdish movement's prison organisation is concerned with conducting the conduct of political prisoners within the institution of comradeship to produce revolutionary subjects. When a detained person enters prison, the central committee collects intelligence about the newcomer. Such intelligence includes where he comes from, what positions he held prior to his imprisonment and what information he disclosed when interrogated by the police, the public prosecutor and the judge. If there is any suspicion of his having collaborated with state officers, the newcomer is approached with caution and placed under close surveillance by his comrades to detect whether he leaks information to prison guards or not.

The central committee pays special attention to the distribution of newcomers, ensuring that they share cells with senior prisoners responsible for initiating them into the institution of comradeship.[6] Since the organisational ties take precedence over familial ones in such revolutionary movements, even when two brothers are sent to the same prison it is up to the central committee to decide whether they would occupy the same ward or separate ones (see Thiranagama 2011).

One of the main components of daily life in political wards are regular discussion sessions organised by the education committee. Committee members determine the list of books and newspapers that are admitted to political wards, avoiding those associated with a degenerate, bourgeois lifestyle. In the 1990s the education committee censored ostensibly apolitical materials by removing the magazine pages from daily newspapers and redacting the images they deemed obscene. Like many Marxist organisations, the education committee draws on Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in connecting the written word to the goal of producing a rational and self-determining human subject (Cody 2013). In accord with the modernist idea of enlightenment, the education committee approaches reading and writing as a means toward the objectification of the world and the abstraction of the self. From this

emerges their strong emphasis on literacy in prisons where illiterate Kurds such as Yılmaz can learn how to read and write, while literate comrades learn how to see the world through an 'objective' lens and reflect on their 'abstracted' selves.

Such reading and discussion sessions are held three times a day, proceeding from general to group-based to individual education. Political prisoners start the day at 6 a.m. with breakfast, followed by general education in which newspapers and journals are read by everyone in the ward for discussion. During the break prisoners are allowed out to the recreational yard to take a walk or play volleyball. After the break prisoners are divided into four groups, with upper levels being for those who have taken the oath to work as professional revolutionaries and lower levels for sympathisers. The main material for group discussion includes the writings of Abdullah Öcalan, ranging from his party congress speeches to prison notebooks. Depending on the level of discussion, other texts by Marx, Lenin, Fanon, Wallerstein, Foucault, Bookchin and the like might be assigned. While everybody is invited to participate in group discussions, senior prisoners can intervene to steer the topic of discussion in what they consider the desired direction. Upon the completion of group sessions, prisoners come together for dinner and to watch the news on television. Finally evenings are reserved for individual education, with prisoners able to undertake the readings of their choice until the call for sleep at 10 p.m.

Such prison activities regimenting the daily life of political prisoners produce cultural intimacies of which they themselves are sometimes unaware (Herzfeld 2005). Prison guards as the outside observers of the institution of comradeship may discern the manifestations of this cultural intimacy better than those within it. A former captive who stayed in prison for 20 years recounted to me a conversation he had with a prison guard whose observations compelled him to realise that the Kurdish political prisoners had inadvertently cultivated the same taste for leisure activities. The particular guard did a headcount to confirm the attendance of prisoners in the same block twice a day. One evening when on duty, the guard asked him with bafflement how it was that all political prisoners watched the same quiz show at the same time of day. The guard's question caught him off guard: the central committee did not require that the political prisoners must watch the same television programmes. Yet there was perhaps no need for a requirement as such. The institution of comradeship had already garnered the prisoners' preferences not only toward particular texts, but also toward particular leisure activities.

Beside the production of knowledge and practice, discussion sessions run by senior prisoners exemplify how to address one another, share a space together and forge an egalitarian community of comrades. As a way of cultivating the ethics of comradeship, the central committee holds monthly meetings called 'platform'. In these each prisoner is asked to make reflections on himself – more commonly known as self-criticism – by disclosing his limitations and weaknesses in living up to the standards of ethical life. The platform is then opened for other prisoners to assess whether their comrade is able to put in practice the theory he endorses, abandoning any 'backward' or 'superstitious' beliefs, avoiding degenerate bourgeois behaviour and committing himself fully to the Kurdish movement. As is noted in the writings of former prisoners, these platform meetings are both a source of humour for the misunderstandings that the notion of self-criticism generates and a source of stress for the punitive action that follows should the prisoner be found guilty by his comrades of breaking tacit rules of the political ward (Masdar 2007).[7]

Political prisoners set up communes to redistribute equally whatever resources they have in prison. The commune committee assigns a representative to each ward for the purchase, storage and usage of their needs. Some of these needs would be met by the prisoners' family members who send clothes, cigarettes, food and money; others receive help from comrades outside prison. Not all families can afford to make a contribution to the commune budget given the wide range of income groups they come from: some are large landowners, businesspeople or civil servants, while others are peasants, manual workers or unemployed. A representative of the commune oversees the allocation of resources to ensure that the needs of those without any familial support be met.

Pedagogical training and communal practices facilitate the cultivation of revolutionary subjectivity within the institution of comradeship as a regulatory mechanism that governs the space between the self and the others. Not everyone in the political wards would be as susceptible to subjectification as Yılmaz, however. If Yılmaz's story bears witness to the institution's success, the accounts of other political prisoners more resistant to the modernist ideals of the Kurdish movement illustrate its limits.

Let me recount one of these stories, told to me by a former commune representative. Despite the efforts that he and other members of the education and the commune committee made, Mehemmed, an elderly Kurd, refused to share his belongings with the commune in the ward. On a family visit day Mehemmed returned to the ward once again with a large package of new items. Having been fed up by Mehemmed's

uncompromising attitude, the commune representative approached the older man directly to clarify that commune rules were binding for everyone. The commune had expropriated personal belongings of everyone except his. Mehemmed finally gave up in exasperation and handed over his package with some reservation. If his then personal belongings now belonged to the commune, he wanted to have a say on how they would be redistributed. To the commune representative's surprise, he then made a proposition. 'I have two wives. If the commune is willing, you can take my older wife, but I am keeping the younger one to myself.'

During the interviews with former prisoners, I recorded several stories similar to that of Mehemmed, revolving around the figure of an elderly man depicted as the symbol of tribal and patriarchal culture. Narrated in a humorous tone, the former prisoners explained that they were responsible for dismantling this 'counter-revolutionary' culture to make sure that political prisoners would become the right subjects of revolutionary action; they should leave behind their 'previous' selves to be born into the egalitarian life of comrades. While the education committee teaches the why of this self-transformation, the commune committee shows the how. Such egalitarian life is possible only if political prisoners comply with the rules of comradeship; otherwise, they would either be the object of jokes such as Mehemmed or, worse, the subject of exclusion. It is through the lens of this institution that Yılmaz and his comrades can perceive the relationship among common criminals to be a forced union of self-centered and manipulative individuals, while defining theirs as egalitarian comradeship.

Social friendship

At a court hearing held in 2012, the public prosecutor presented the Kurdish political prisoner Tolhildan with a tapped phone conversation as evidence of his membership in the armed branch of the Kurdish movement. Not only did the content of his conversation support this charge, the public prosecutor argued, but so did the form of address he used when talking to other people on the phone. '*Heval* (friend) is a term commonly used among the PKK members to address each other,' he observed. The judge leaned toward Tolhildan's file and began to read the transcript of that conversation. Shortly afterwards Tolhildan interrupted the judge on the grounds that including that conversation in his file violated his right to privacy. 'That was a conversation between

me and my social friend.'[8] The judge glanced over the conversation and agreed to skip it. Yet the awkward term 'social friend' raised eyebrows among other prisoners in the room. Who did he count as a social friend if not his comrades with whom he shared the same ward? How private is one's privacy in a revolutionary movement where each member's life is immersed in that of the other?

The friendship developed by Kurdish political prisoners resembles the comradeship in other revolutionary organisations that disavow the private in order to form a public in which solidarity is established across urban–rural, peasant–worker and elite–subaltern populations (Gürbilek 2016). This utopian ideal of dismantling the public–private divide can easily become a dystopia in the hands of totalitarian regimes controlling not only how one participates in public but also how one relates to another in private (Arendt 1968; Yurchak 2008). Although the prison life of Kurdish political prisoners where the personal is denounced in the name of the political does carry this dystopic potential, I propose to consider the distinction between public and private not in absolute terms, but rather in terms of degrees of privacy that prisoners may share. I do so by paying attention to the regions of intimacy that they develop from within the institution of comradeship.

In their oft-cited article 'Sex in Public', Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner argue that intimacy is mediated publicly as it constitutes the 'endlessly cited *elsewhere* of political public discourse' (1998, 553). Reflecting on the Habermasian account of public sphere, Berlant (1998) notes that intimacy belongs to neither the public nor the private realm; it rather migrates between the two by generating collective intimacies in rationalised and institutionalised publics and intersubjective intimacies in affectively-constituted worlds. Intimacy, thus, has the potential both to stabilise and to disrupt particular forms of knowledge and practice. The institution of comradeship produces cultural intimacy among prisoners who participate in the same daily activities, hold regular reading and discussion sessions and form affectively-charged platforms to criticise oneself in the presence of others. Departing from this kind of intimacy shared in public, the 'social friendship' referred to in Tolhildan's account takes us to another sphere of intimacy – one whose disclosure in public may produce shame.

The Kurdish movement's incorporation of *heval*, the Kurmanji word for friend, into its revolutionary vocabulary leaves some ambivalence with regard to the level of intimacy folded into the prisoners' friendship. *Heval*, depending on the context in which it is used, denotes comrade, lover or confidant. When two prisoners call each other *heval*, instead of

using proper names, kinship terms or honorific titles, it incites the kind of formality and solidarity that is generally associated with 'comrade' and that creates both intimate equality and formal distance at the same time. As a form of address it enables prisoners to maintain verbal egalitarianism, establishing equality and solidarity between an addressee and addresser who might otherwise be in a superior–subordinate position (Keane 2016). With the erasure of all identifiers from conversation, *heval* also enables prisoners to establish formal enough interaction to give and receive commands. Despite this semiotic resemblance of *heval* to comrade, it still retains less formal aspects of friendship (love and intimacy) which may be evoked when talking about rather than talking to a friend, as was done by Tolhildan in the court.

In a highly structured space such as political wards, I argue that *heval* hides within itself different modalities of *mahremiyet* (intimacy); this is achieved both despite and because of the rules of prison administration and the institution of comradeship. Derived from the Arabic root *h-r-m*, *mahrem* (intimate), it is semiotically tied to other terms with the same root: *harem* (private space) and *haram* (forbidden). The degree of intimacy denoted by *mahrem* is contingent upon the demarcation of a private space which strangers are forbidden to enter. *Mahremiyet* is a regulatory mechanism that creates boundaries between spaces and individuals and within the body of the individual (Sehlikoğlu 2016, 146).[9] Neither the boundaries of this private space nor those forbidden from it are fixed; they depend on the ways in which the self is made to relate to an individual's body and to the others.

In contrast to my one-to-one interviews with former prisoners who narrated their prison experiences either in the melancholic genre of good old days or in the genre of tragedy, the stories that unfolded during my casual conversations with groups of two or more former prisoners revolved around the question of how they endured the everyday difficulties of prison life. It was neither the spectacular prison uprisings nor the infamous prison operations that coloured such conversations. One particular conversation I had with Tolhildan, whose court trial I have been observing since 2009, and his former prison friend Kasım was striking in showing how the mundane practices of torture at once violated the prisoners' sense of intimacy and yet facilitated intimate connections between the self and the others. If some of these violent events ended up breaking down prisoners and producing 'traitors', in opposition to which Kurdish prisoners draw the boundaries of their friendship, others resulted in the formation of a 'we' – part of but irreducible to the prisoner population called the political.

Tolhildan and Kasım had been apprehended around the same time and stayed in the same prison throughout the 1990s. Upon their release in the early 2000s, Tolhildan decided to continue working as a professional revolutionary while Kasım decided to complete his interrupted higher education in literature; he then found a job as a translator. In the winter of 2018 Tolhildan invited me and Kasım to his apartment for a lunch. While Tolhildan was preparing the meal, Kasım and I chatted about how they had first met. Kasım recalled that when Tolhildan was brought to prison in 1992 he still had open wounds and a few bullets in his body – yet was nonetheless taken directly to a torture chamber. With evident discomfort, Tolhildan corrected Kasım: he had not been the only one tortured and the entire prison had served as a torture chamber, especially from 1993 to 1994. 'We saw the worst kind of torture,' he added, emphasising that the pronoun of the tortured subject was not the first person singular 'I' but the first person plural 'we', and thus indexing himself and many others whose bodies were maimed in that prison.[10]

As the conversation took these two men back to the prison days, they confirmed with each other the names of other prisoners who had stayed in their ward, exchanging brief notes about their current whereabouts. The list was so long that I could not help but ask how they could still remember those who were no longer their 'comrades' in the literal sense – meaning that they no longer worked for the Kurdish movement. Kasım admitted that it was impossible for him *not* remember them – his memories of those friends were stuck to his *skin*. Tolhildan agreed with Kasım's comment, then went on to explain in more detail.

> The friends with whom you were strip-searched and tortured have a qualitatively different place in your life. We had seen each other in a condition that no one else, neither our parents nor our wives, ever could. We saw each other's utmost intimate selves (*Birbirimizin en mahremini gördük*).

What is it that is seen when one sees one's friend stripped naked before the torturers? On the one hand, the tortured body attests to one's existential vulnerability in the face of physical violence. Before and beyond the infliction of pain, torture puts the body at the risk of betrayal as the tortured subject loses sovereignty over his own body (Al-Mohammad 2007; Talebi 2011). This loss of sovereignty manifests itself in various ways, one of them being forced sexual intercourse between male prisoners in political wards. On the other hand, the one who is forced to be present at the torture of the other experiences the

act of seeing the other in pain as being in pain himself. Reflecting on this experience, Tolhildan recalled that once the prison guards burned the pubic hair of a prisoner in his ward. As he and other captives were watching that friend in pain, his hand inadvertently moved to his own pubic hair as if his was also on fire. What Tolhildan counts in this instance as torture is his body's simultaneous susceptibility to pain and inability to act when the torturer acts on the other's body.

Ethnographic accounts of prisons from Northern Ireland to Turkey to Palestine show how the culmination of such instances of oppression incites large-scale prison uprisings (Aretxaga 1995; Bargu 2016; Feldman 1991; Nashif 2008). However, what they have not highlighted so well is that the comradeship between these prisoners may turn into social/non-political friendship (*heval* in its sense as confidant) when prisoners are made to witness their mutually constitutive bodily vulnerabilities. Collective torture entails the forced inclusion of the others in the *mahrem* of the self. This entrance would constitute a grave violation, as it did regarding the perpetrators, if the other has not become a part of the self who could see and feel the vulnerability of his own body through that of the other. Instead of closing in on itself, pain under these circumstances extends by moving beyond the limits of one's body (cf. Daniel 1996; Scarry 1985). It produces new forms of intimacy.

The act of seeing and being tortured can be considered 'a source of external embarrassment but that nevertheless provide insiders with their assurance of common sociality' (Herzfeld 2005, 3).[11] The grammar of this sociality is the first person plural, but not because torture annihilates the self or renders personal experience generalisable. It is rather because the boundaries of the body are extended to embrace the other's presence within the intimacy of the self. If formality is a constitutive aspect of solidarity among comrades in revolutionary movements, intimacy is its counterpart. Without this it would be hard to understand how these prisoners come to stand together against the violence of prison administrations.

The forced violation of *mahremiyet* is not the only way of creating private spaces in which new layers of intimacy emerge from within the institution of comradeship. The space in between bodies of the self and of others is invested with the potential for intimate relations unconstrained by the ethics of comradeship. Political prisoners actively work on that space through collusion in order to experience the plurality of their existence as a source of mutual enjoyment (Kreil 2016).

The collusion practised for fun is not the same as collusion with prison administrations for reducing prison sentences or for living in

better prison conditions. Far from serving as a means to an end, it is an end in itself: a temporary enjoyment of social friendship; an oasis in the desert which disappears as quickly as it appears. Equally importantly, it is not an individual act against the commune, like that of Mehemmed, but rather a collective act of the commune against itself. Former prisoners explained, with discernible excitement in their voices, that the yard, the cell and the breakfast table could all transfigure into a private space of social friendship when they loosened the formal ties of comradeship. Let me elaborate on this point with the help of an account by a former prisoner, Farqin. It describes his collusion with his cellmates during a leisure activity.

Prison guards open the wards' doors for recreational activity on a daily basis. Prisoners spend this time in a square-shaped yard enclosed by prison walls 5 metres in length, preventing them from seeing other yards and the outside world. Except for weekly volleyball tournaments, the common activity undertaken at this time is '*volta*' [Latin: *voluta*], which literally means 'to revolve'. It involves walking on a straight line from one side to the other with high tempo and turning around approximately every ten steps. During this walk, prisoners take part in groups of two or three, pacing back and forth across the yard.

As someone who has spent half of his life in prison, Farqin explained that he felt annoyed by revolving and repeating the same activity over and over again. One day he proposed to his comrades in the ward that they should change this routine. Instead of walking as if they were in military training, he wanted for once to walk with the others leisurely, while eating sunflower seeds that they had stored in the cabinets. His comrades agreed, with the proviso that no one would mention this break from the norm to anyone outside their ward. Farqin recalled that moment of change. 'As we spit the shells of sunflower seeds on the yard floor, we felt like we were no longer in prison.'

Other examples of playful collusion include fermenting pomegranate juice with bread yeast to make wine, making soil out of used tea leaves to grow plants and skipping reading sessions to sing songs across prison wards. One may wonder if these temporary acts of collusion have any political significance at all. Notwithstanding its ephemerality, the pleasure of cracking sunflower seeds in the yard opened a space for Farqin and other prisoners playfully to release their bodies from the constraints and regulations of prison life and to feel momentarily 'free'. The disclosure of this collusion to the central committee or to the internal coordination could have created trouble, based on the grounds that Farqin had pushed against the ethics of comradeship by carving

out a space for the non-political. In order to avoid criticism, he and his comrades had therefore collected all the seeds dispersed around the yards by the end of their break. With the removal of the seeds from the ground, the oasis was removed from the desert world of prison. Experienced in the intimacy of confidants, this freedom is not necessarily world-making in the Arendtian sense, but is rather conducive to sustaining the existent world in prison.

The multiple boundaries drawn by different levels of intimacy entailed in comradeship and social friendship enable prisoners to share with confidants their differently distributed vulnerabilities without being purged from the institution of comradeship. Some endure separation from their loved ones, others suffer from severe health problems, yet others feel intimidated by the revolutionary hierarchy. The acknowledgement of vulnerability does not necessarily conflict with the masculine image of revolutionary subject standing against the prison administration – and by extension against the state. It rather enables the prisoners to keep that image intact on the stage of law by healing the wounds of each other in 'private' spaces where life is embraced in its messiness. Put differently, social friendship is interwoven with collective experiences of pain, collusion and fun whose disclosure to strangers would be a grave violation of *mahrem*.

The wounds of the body may not always be healed by the creation of intimate social spaces. Upon his release from prison, Kasım could not continue to work as a professional revolutionary. The revolution has lasted too long, he said, for his body to sustain the passion for action. When I met Kasım, he was visiting Tolhildan *merely* as a social friend to discuss how to find a proper prosthetic limb to take the place of his lower leg; the amputation had been carried out in the mountains. If the amputated limb was a reminder of what he had sacrificed to the revolutionary struggle, Tolhildan served for Kasım as the reminder of why he had engaged in that struggle in the first place.

Conclusion: death of dissent?

At the very end of *The Nights of Execution in Sinop*, Yılmaz Sezgin's memoir takes an unexpected turn. He attempts to commit suicide by hanging himself in a prison cell after witnessing the suicide attempt of his comrade and confidant, the brother-like figure of Hamza. Yılmaz was introduced to the Kurdish movement by Hamza when the former was a shepherd and the latter a guerrilla fighter. They ended up in the same

prison in Sinop where Hamza took Yılmaz to his political ward to 'protect' and 'educate' the then young man, sentenced to death for helping him in the mountains. Despite the fear of execution that lingered over both their heads, Hamza convinced Yılmaz to fight against the daunting effect of the death sentence by immersing himself into the institution of comradeship. Indeed, until the last section Yılmaz's entire memoir is a testimony of the will to life that he situates at the heart of dissident politics. If the state exercises necropower not only by killing but also by condemning political prisoners to an endless wait for death, Yılmaz – in concert with Hamza and other prisoners – chose to participate in the daily activities of comradeship as if they would never die. In contrast to his passion for life, derived from the space in between the self and the others, the last section of Yılmaz's memoir, as I read it, defines the limits of dissident politics within the limits of friendship.

Prior to his suicide attempt, Hamza talked to Yılmaz one last time. He wished to explain the reason behind his decision as a politically motivated one, protesting against the administration's mistreatment of political prisoners. As a senior prisoner, he decided to take up the responsibility to end the mistreatment by taking his life, while delegating to Yılmaz the responsibility to witness his death and tell his story to others. The contradictory feelings that occupied Yılmaz's mind, which the author shares with the reader with an incisive tone, illustrate the impossibility of the political in isolation. Reflecting on his conversation with Hamza, Yılmaz writes, 'In our prison cell we were no longer two individuals at that moment […]. Hamza has become me, or I have become Hamza. He was going to hang me together with himself' (Sezgin 2014, 152). Yılmaz could no longer see the point in embracing life or fighting for the Kurdish cause when Hamza tightened the rope around his neck and kicked the chair underneath his feet. Would he be able to carry Hamza's message forward? Pushed to the limits of madness, Yılmaz groaned with pain and finally hung himself too. His passion for dissident politics died out with the presumed death of Hamza.

By the end of the memoir, we learn that the suicide attempts of neither comrade succeeded. Even though Yılmaz's strong bonding with Hamza almost killed him, their friendship made the writing of *The Nights of Execution in Sinop* possible. Certainly Yılmaz would not have been able to write the memoir if he had not spent his prison life with comrades who taught him how to read and write, to develop a taste for literature and to constitute himself as a revolutionary subject. Yet the institution of comradeship that equips political prisoners with the faculty of reason needs other regions of intimacy, which Hamza offered to

Yılmaz, for the endurance of passion and political action. Comradeship and social friendship refer to the different regions of intimacy which cannot be subsumed under one or the other, although they are intimately connected.

This chapter has examined the institutions established in prison to draw and maintain the boundaries of politics. In it I have argued that dissident politics are mobilised off stage in the space between the self and others – tied to each other by ethics, body and affect. It examined prison life through the lens of the ethics of comradeship that cultivates self-discipline while questioning what exceeds it, by paying attention to the private spaces produced through the acknowledgement of bodily vulnerabilities and need for mutual enjoyment. Instead of juxtaposing these two aspects of relatedness, this chapter has contended that political and non-political friendship weave the prisoners together to sustain and substantiate the friend–enemy distinction. Departing from the accounts of dissent that concentrate on the courage of individuals who in isolation from others choose to speak truth to power, this chapter showed that it is the 'in-between spaces' produced by friendship that not only make dissent possible in prisons, but also work against it. It argued that political prisoners commit to the Kurdish cause by committing themselves to their prison friends – who at times strengthen each other's will to life and on other occasions carry one another to the edge of death. In relations of friendship, the revolutionary project is made both possible and remains necessarily incomplete.

Notes

1 I consider comradeship a social institution with a series of norms shared and reproduced by political prisoners.
2 Prison wards are further separated based on gender. The central focus of this chapter is friendship among male political prisoners. A significant number of Kurdish female dissidents are incarcerated in political wards, but there are very few prison memoirs published by these dissidents. This is the topic of discussion of another paper.
3 Candea's interlocutors, for example, accord with thinkers such as Oakeshott and Weber when delineating the boundaries of politics which they separate from the education system. Based on his ethnographic study of bilingual teaching in Corsica, Candea asserts that schoolteachers forge a productive dualism between the French education system and the Corsican nationalist politics. This enables them to translate one into the other and reconfigure the boundary between the two.
4 The rift separating the two is so deep that any expression of sympathy toward the PKK is considered by the judiciary to be a sign of treason to the Turkish state. As each undermines the legitimacy of the other, what one calls an 'anti-colonial struggle' is identified by the other as 'terrorism'.
5 Some state officers, such as the former directorate of the Police Intelligence Service Hanefi Avcı (2010), further claim that the Kurdish captives adhere to the rules of the PKK more strictly than the Kurdish guerrillas in mountains.

6 Seniority is not determined by age, but by status in the organisational hierarchy of the Kurdish movement.
7 Depending on the issue of concern, such punishment ranges from a ban on recreational activities to expulsion from the ward.
8 Note that the case files of this kind comprise numerous conversations tapped over a long period of time. The captives often dispute the inclusion of certain conversations in the file, arguing that some of them have nothing to do with the case.
9 In her work on Islamicate culture of *mahremiyet*, Sertaç Sehlikoğlu (2015; 2016) emphasises that the concept cannot be translated directly into English as it contains multiple meanings, among them privacy, secrecy and domesticity.
10 Counting the number of days when they were *not* on a hunger strike, both men refrained from describing the methods of torture the prison administration used in retaliation. As a way of making their experience commensurable, however, they compared their prison experience with those who had been held in the Diyarbakır Military Prison during the 1980s. This prison has come to be known as a powerful symbol of the Turkish state's cruelty in the collective memory of the Kurds. They finetuned the comparison not by repeating what had happened in Diyarbakır, but by noting what had *not* happened in their prison: 'The only difference was that we were not forced to eat excrement'.
11 In his influential work on nation-states, Michael Herzfeld offers the term 'cultural intimacy' as an antidote to the formalism of cultural nationalism (2005, 14).

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Chapter 5
Intimate commitments: friends, comrades and family in the life of one Sri Lankan activist

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Round the open casket, family members hold open bibles, while a Catholic priest holds forth about today's occasion.[1] An elderly man stands stiffly upright close to the body, sobbing softly throughout. The man in the casket is Joe Seneviratne, veteran journalist and activist. The grieving family members are heavily outnumbered by a crowd of Joe's old friends and comrades. Many of the comrades show signs of irritation as the priest makes one final, rather drawn out attempt to reclaim Joe for the mother Church. It is a humid afternoon and, despite the ceiling fans in the funeral home, it is uncomfortably hot. Across the room from the casket there is a growing hubbub of conversation as mourners take the opportunity to catch up on news and to swap stories of their dead comrade.

Eventually the priest closes his bible with a final, teeth-gleaming smile. The coffin is closed and lifted by a team of pall-bearers who carry it to a hearse. The hearse crosses the busy highway bordering the cemetery, followed by a long stream of mourners – bringing the Saturday afternoon traffic to a halt in both directions. We cross the cemetery and walk past the memorials to assassinated politicians and the graves of the war dead, finally arriving at the crematorium on the far side. Here the coffin is reopened for a final round of farewells. Family members cluster at one end with the priest. The comrades gather at the other end. A young woman and a slightly older man take charge of this part of the proceedings, introducing a sequence of speakers, but not speaking themselves. Remember them: they will return at the very end of this chapter.

The first person to speak holds up a letter from the President, Maithripala Sirisena. The letter speaks of Joe as a media personality, but also as a peace activist. It dwells briefly on his role as a founder member of the Movement for Inter-racial Justice and Equality (MIRJE) in the late 1970s. Someone whispers 'I'm sure the person reading this, rather than the President, actually wrote the letter – but he does know what he's talking about'. The next speaker is a regional politician from Kandy and former politburo member of the Sri Lankan Communist Party. He too mentions MIRJE and praises Joe for his close relations to minorities, his peace work, his humanism and his commitment to revolution.

The next speaker is the first to do so in English. He is Varadaraja Perumal, former leader of the Tamil group Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF). For a brief period in the late 1980s Perumal was Chief Minister in the newly created North East Provincial Council, the devolved body set up in 1988 as part of the Indian imposed peace deal. Joe had been a minister in his administration, along with other Sinhala radicals looking for an opportunity to build an alliance with the more left-wing strains of the Tamil nationalist movement. In 1990, in a final gesture, Perumal declared independence in the North and East of the island, just as the Colombo government closed down his administration. Shortly afterwards 12 of his comrades in the EPRLF leadership were wiped out in a massacre by their rivals, the LTTE, in South India. Perumal talks softly and emotionally about Joe's role as a minister, but he also brings a message from his own wider family, emphasising how close they were to Joe and how fond they were of him.

Next up is Ram Manikkalingam. The MIT-educated son of a former Ambassador, Manikkalingam is today wearing the white *versti* and cloth of a pious Tamil mourner. He starts by apologising for his broken Sinhala, then launches into a story which he will use to illustrate Joe's qualities. It comes from a moment in the mid-1980s when he was imprisoned with Joe under the draconian provisions of the Prevention of Terrorism Act. Manikkalingam was one of three young men imprisoned together, all in their 20s; Joe, the fourth member of the group, was by then in his 40s. Every morning the prisoners were let out of their cells to face a difficult choice. If they turned in one direction they could line up for food – bread and *pol sambol*; if they turned the other way they could find water and bathe. There was never time to do both. Every day Joe would line up for food for all four of them, to allow the others a chance to bathe. He'd hand over the food before taking his turn to bathe. When he returned, every day, they would have eaten almost all the food without him. Joe would complain, but the next day he would line up in the food

queue and share everything with them just the same. That is the kind of man he was.

Ram then turned to face Joe's son, who had returned from his home in the US for the funeral. He explained that he wanted to thank Joe's family for giving him to us. 'I know Joe was not always able to be a good father or a good husband. But we had this great comrade, this great revolutionary, this great humanist. So we want to thank the family for this gift.'

Between the outside speakers, one of Joe's brothers speaks briefly and emotionally. Then Dayapala Thiranagama, widower of the assassinated Tamil human rights activist Rajani Thiranagama, speaks softly, and again emotionally, about his lost comrade. He stresses the violent years in which they had worked together, when their lives were constantly under threat. For long periods they had to live underground, sharing a room with three or four comrades. Whenever one of them had to leave the house, the others could not be sure if they would meet again.

Then it is time to take the coffin into the crematorium proper, with close family in attendance. The crowd breaks up.

All of the speeches on this day shared a set of key words. Joe was constantly spoken of as 'Joe *sahodaruyo*' (brother Joe); one speaker, in English (and apparently unaware of the history of the term in the anglophone left outside Sri Lanka) called him 'Uncle Joe'. He was described as kind, generous and committed. The speeches were peppered with references to 'love' (*adaraya*) – Joe's love, others' love of Joe. And one word stands out: again and again, Joe is described as a great *manusiya*, a Sinhala word most easily translated as 'humanist'.

Histories of post-colonial dissent

We will return to Joe Seneviratne, and what we can learn from his life, shortly. In particular, we draw on Joe's own account of his life to address one of the themes explored in chapter 1: how do intimate relations both work against and produce the conditions of dissent? First, however, we have to provide a bit of context for this chapter. Together with Sidharthan Maunaguru we have been working on a longer-term project, chronicling a history of dissent in Sri Lanka from the 1960s to the end of the civil war in 2009. We have concentrated especially on those leftists who challenged the state, while rejecting the rival ethnonationalisms, Sinhala and Tamil, which fuelled two insurrections in the South of the country and nearly three decades of civil war in the North and East.

Leftists such as Joe Seneviratne and his comrades, and such as the Tamil militants described in chapter 7.

Those speeches at Joe's funeral allow us to sketch in a first round of context. Joe lived through some very violent times indeed. He was part of a generation which came of political age in the 1960s – a decade in which the Old Left-wing parties in Sri Lanka, with their patrician leaders and proletarian bases, were steadily losing their political grip. The LSSP and CP joined Mrs Bandaranaike's coalition government in 1964. The ostensibly Trotskyist LSSP split as a result, with the mainstream party expelled from the Fourth International for its apostasy in joining a bourgeois government. The CP also suffered its own split in the wake of the Sino–Soviet divide, with a rival Peking Wing party, led by Shanmugathasan, emerging in 1964.

This was also a decade in which young people found their political voice, especially in and around the campuses of the country's relatively young university system. Needless to say, faced with a choice between the 'revisionist' Old Left and the 'revolutionary' Peking Wing, young radicals gravitated to the latter. Their tactics and aspirations also changed. While the Old Left had combined trade union activism with parliamentary politics, the young were increasingly attracted by the example of the Cuban revolution. Here a political transformation was conceived as a great adventure, fuelled by a small band of young, would-be guerrillas who took to the hills to build a movement from the periphery. Capturing state power by violent force was not merely seen as a feasible strategy; for many of this generation it attained a certain self-evident quality.[2]

The most important political figure to emerge from the rubble of the 1960s splits was a man called Rohan Wijeweera. A lifelong militant, he saw his scholarship to Patrice Lumumba University in Moscow rescinded when he threw himself behind the Peking Wing after the 1964 split in the Ceylon Communist Party. By the late 1960s he was becoming more and more of a national political figure, leading a new group called the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) or People's Liberation Front. In 1971, with Wijeweera and many of the central committee members already under detention, the JVP launched a sudden and quixotic attack on state power. Across the Sinhala South of the island, young rebels attacked police stations and attempted bank robberies in an attempt to get the resources and *matériel* they needed for their revolutionary struggle. The state responded with a wave of measured brutality. Wijeweera and the party leadership were put on trial and sentenced to long periods of hard labour.[3]

Wijeweera was a charismatic speaker and carefully cultivated his

own image; his long hair and latterly beard were modelled, it seems, on Che Guevara. But new tensions accompanied the emergence of the JVP. One of Wijeweera's key messages was a warning against 'Indian expansionism' – a line ostensibly derived from the Indo-China War of 1962, which happened to mesh seamlessly with the dominant majoritarian nationalism of the Sinhalese Buddhist community that provided his popular base. Some of Wijeweera's political allies in and around the Peking Wing detected an undercurrent of nationalist racism as early as the mid-1960s, and kept their distance from his JVP. That undercurrent was to grow into a central part of the JVP platform in the late 1970s, when the leaders were released from prison and the JVP relaunched itself as a more conventional party with parliamentary aspirations.

In 1983 the JVP was one of three left-wing groups falsely blamed for organising the anti-Tamil riots which precipitated the country's descent into full civil war. The leadership went underground and in the second half of the 1980s orchestrated a second ferocious assault on state power. This time of insurgency and counter-insurgency is still simply remembered as *bheeshanaya* – 'the Terror' – in Sinhala: thousands of insurgents were killed and thousands more detained. The stimulus for this was the 1987 peace deal that India had forced on the government and the LTTE. While the LTTE fought Indian troops in the North and the East, the JVP attacked government politicians, police and army, as well as those on the left deemed insufficiently patriotic because of their support for Tamil rights and their support for the Indian peace deal. People, in short, like Joe and his comrades at the cemetery.[4]

In the Tamil-speaking North and East of the island, a symmetrical story unfolded. Here young radicals aligned with the Peking Wing were heavily involved in challenges to high caste dominance. In the 1970s this kind of radical energy was increasingly diverted into the cause of Tamil separatism. From the mid-1970s a range of small militant groups emerged. All shared a vision of Tamil self-determination, to be achieved by a violent assault on the state and its representatives, but they differed in the extent to which the nationalist vision was subordinated to other more conventional leftist goals.[5] The group that was to achieve domination by the mid-1980s, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), were only peripherally concerned with Old Left issues, in comparison to their whole-hearted attachment to the cause of separatism and their symbolically dense use of tactics such as suicide bombing to achieve it. Unlike Wijeweera, the LTTE's charismatic leader Prabhakaran had no roots in the Old Left; his early fame was based on daring assassinations and a carefully cultivated aura of total command.[6]

The political context for our project is thus a paradoxical mixture of freedom and constraint. The early 1960s splits in the Old Left had opened space for a new generation of radicals with visions of imminent revolution. Their political experiments were of a piece with other experiments in film, music, drama and art. The campuses in Colombo, Peradeniya and, from the early 1970s, Moratuwa and Jaffna became sites of freedom for the first generation of students to leave home for higher education. But the attraction of violence was also a source of constraint. By the mid-1980s new movements such as the LTTE and the JVP often seemed to favour violence as an end in itself, thereby losing sight of other ideas of social transformation. Meanwhile rival ethnonationalisms, both Sinhala and Tamil, steadily closed down the political possibilities for would-be radicals. The condemnation of 'traitors' was invoked by both the LTTE and the JVP to excuse the silencing of alternative voices – especially those, like Joe's, which rejected ethnic division as the basis for a sane radical politics (cf. Thiranagama 2010).

In setting out this context for our project we have emphasised the story of the left and its splits in the 1960s because that is the most relevant context for Joe's story. In our broader project we are also charting the impact of feminism from the 1970s to the 1990s (and its limited presence in the micropolitics of personal relations on the left), and also the important contribution of radical Christians, operating in the space opened up by Vatican II and the arguments of Latin American and Asian liberation theologians. In all three cases a kind of social syntax of breaks and solidarities operates as the condition of possibility for new kinds of activism and for attempts at creating new kinds of people. So, while one point of our project is simply to document and preserve a record of remarkable lives lived under extreme political conditions, we are also concerned to explore what these very particular, knotty, entangled tales can tell us about broader political and ethical questions. We return to the question of what that bigger set of questions might be at the end of this chapter.

Caught as we are in a disciplinary space between history and anthropology, we are also trying to balance different audience expectations. Joe's funeral itself, and the testimony given there, were preeminently public events. As will become apparent, Joe was very keen to have his stories recorded and made permanently available as a record, not least because of the political lessons that might still be gleaned from them. Standard ethnographic rules of anonymisation thus make little sense in this context. In what follows we draw on a series of interviews and conversations, conducted predominantly in Sinhala, with Harini

Amarasuriya. Joe's interviews were spread across a number of sessions in 2017, not least because after the first session he would call Harini up to tell her about some missing detail or to ask for another meeting to continue his thread. We were just planning a further joint interview with him when we learned of his death.

Joe Seneviratne: early life and political formation

Joe Seneviratne was born in June 1943, four years before Sri Lanka gained independence in February 1948. He is one of that generation of activists, as Jayadeva Uyangoda pointed out in a celebrated essay 20 years ago, whose personal biography is coeval with the unruly biography of the independent nation-state known as Ceylon until 1972 and subsequently as Sri Lanka (Uyangoda 1997). Joe's political roots extend into the left politics of the early and mid-1960s.

> I was aware of injustice from my school days, injustice about finance, student organisations, protests, beating, questioning religion, big problem. It was an urban school with children of all religions. We got punished, but that gave us courage. I was taken to Dematagoda police for trying to strike in school. I didn't tell my father about the police. I was 15 or 16 years old. I read Soviet and Chinese literature; I read about Latin American experiences. These were inspirations: Che, Mao, their life stories. I read Maxim Gorky and Dostoevsky. I was influenced by literature, but was not exposed to Western literature because there were no translations.[7]

As an A-level student at another school, he joined a Communist youth movement, participating in a Marxist Study Circle and testing the limits of his father's domestic regime. There were splits in the home and splits in the Party.

> There were all kinds of people from different levels. The classes went on till late. So there were conflicts with my family for not being at home. Once when I came home, my father had given my plate of rice to the dog, saying this dog is better than you. Then I challenged him. I said, my house is not here, but the whole world, and I left home. By then the CP had split. The party said they could train me and then they put me to work with trade unions. I went

with the Peking Wing, which was more revolutionary. The Soviet Wing was reformist.

Joe was by no means an uncritical member of his wing of the movement, working with other comrades on an internal critique of the party and its strategy. That critique was not well received, but in the process Joe learned an important lesson about his erstwhile comrade, the future JVP leader Rohan Wijeweera.

> We started discussing against the policies of the party. People came from far away to discuss these issues. What is the basis for revolution in Sri Lanka? There was no basis. We were not going to abandon the workers, but the party had no idea to mobilise other classes. They had no critique of state power. They were talking about reforms.
>
> 72 Malwatta Road, Dehiwela. This was where some of us lived. We used to meet there and discuss till the early hours of the morning, and we prepared a document to hand over to the party's central committee, an analysis of class etc. For the party to rethink its class strategy. Wijeweera was part of all this, but he refused to sign the document. Mayadunne, Nihal Dias, Senaka Bandara, Colin de Silva all signed. He said I don't have to sign. We didn't understand at that time. We were so foolish. We didn't understand that kind of [in English] political manoeuvring. We saw the world in a very flat way, the relationships between people. We were sensitive. If I don't trust you how can I do politics with you? Those friendships were very strong. How can we mistrust one of our comrades? Someone who had made so many sacrifices for the party?
>
> The politburo rejected our document and the politburo filed a case against us… We were labelled as an anti-party faction. We became very vulnerable. This document is an anti-party document. Are you still standing by this document? We all said yes. Because this was a document we all had contributed to with our heart. [But Wijeweera said] I have nothing to do with this document. I have an entirely different contradiction with party policies. I remember that to this day. His words.

The authors of the critical document were duly expelled from the party. Joe lost the small income he received for party work with the trade union. Life was hard. On one occasion Wijeweera came to visit, with

enough money to buy them a modest meal. But what he said caused further disturbance.

> Wijeweera once came. He asked, have you eaten? I said no. He pulled out everything from his pocket, collected all the money. We could eat a meal of thosai and string hoppers. Five stringhoppers for each person. That was huge for us.
>
> On the walls were photographs of George V, the Queen, Subhas Chandra Bose, D.S.[8] Wijeweera said – can you see? They are still more attached to India. They come here and exploit us and take everything to India. He showed his true colours. I was shocked. I wondered why he talked like that. We were all migrants. My father was also a migrant. My father came here with his brothers and joined the police. I have a Keralite connection. There are still people here who don't talk about these connections. I may be foolish to say this openly.

Joe's complicated ethnic origins were a source of pride to him. His older siblings took a Tamil Christian surname, his younger ones the Sinhala Seneviratne. Many years later, when Joe was drafted in as a key member of the Sudu Nelum movement, President Chandrika Kumaratunga's grassroots peace campaign, in the mid-1990s, he was accused by a hyper-nationalist MP of 'ethnic impersonation'. 'His real name is "Karatara Thomas George" and he is from Kerala, India', his accuser declared.[9] Shortly after their meal Wijeweera was spotted at a rally protesting against proposed language rights for Tamils. This confirmed Joe's suspicions: 'Within him we saw that racist animal'.

Meanwhile, however, Joe was stuck – kicked out of the party with no work and nowhere to live, yet feeling unable to go home to his family. Disillusioned for a time with traditional left parties, he and his comrades concentrated on their studies. For a time Joe worked as a journalist, noting the reluctance of rising figures such as Rohan Wijeweera to join forces in support of Tamil rights. For a time he was homeless and nearly destitute, until he found work labouring in a quarry.

> After I was kicked out of the party, I did not know where to go. I could not go home because when I came I challenged my father, so I just could not go. So I walked to the Fort station. There I met a trade union friend of mine. I told him what happened to me, and he took me to his place, which was located in the slums. When I stayed there for a couple of days I realized that I was a burden on the

family. So I went in search of work after seeing an advertisement at the Chandrika Lake. I tried hard to find, but could not. Then I came across a job where I had to work at a quarry in Udawalawa.

At the quarry a sympathetic overseer saw how quickly Joe's hands, unused to physical labour, broke up and moved him to a driving job. His story then moves between a succession of jobs, with stints of work as a trade union organiser with the railway workers and glimpses of the deteriorating political environment. In 1976 the independent union for which he was working led a successful strike on the railways.

> They couldn't find the leaders – we were underground. That was really successful. Because the left had gone into government coalition, people left those unions. So people joined our independent union. Everything was affected. That struggle went on for a month. They tried to take the railway drivers by force. We threatened to blow up the railway lines. That was the first time we contemplated a terrorist act! They were very committed – they were not Marxists. There was a guy Ponnaperuma – he would say I was his hand – he was the brain. He would say something and I would immediately write it down – that's how I entered the trade union field.

Around this time Joe also met a new generation of activists, including the student leader Daya Pathirana, who would become the first victim of the JVP's second insurrection in late 1986, and the complex figure of Dayan Jayatilleka ('DJ' at times in what follows). Son of the editor of the *Daily News* and would-be major Marxist theoretician, he was later acolyte and apologist for a series of authoritarian politicians from Ranasinghe Premadasa to Mahinda Rajapaksa.

> I feel very sad when I think of Daya Pathirana. That was a real tragedy. They can't be forgiven for that. How many JVPers lives have I saved? We didn't want to take revenge. We had a value for human life. That is what I can't imagine – what little value they had for human life. Wijeweera did that – his philosophy took him there. We couldn't do that – we loved human life. That was the big difference between us. We didn't want power at any cost. It was because of this attitude that among our comrades I was considered a softie – not suitable for revolution. Dayan Jayatilleka also had said that about me.

These young activists broadened Joe's political repertoire. He described a picaresque adventure in which contact was made with a group of anti-Khomeini rebels from Iran. The idea was to bring a ship from Galle in the far South of Sri Lanka to the Philippines. There it was to be filled with arms for the Sri Lankans and hashish for the Iranians.

> Jayatilleka was the theoretician, I was the negotiator. We talked within our group. I said we came into this because of our love for people – not because we are bloodthirsty. Where is this stuff going? To destroy lives? How do we know that this Iranian Revolution would happen properly? From then on, they didn't discuss revolution with me. I went to India and while I was away they planned a robbery. They got caught.

In these tales, Joe differentiates himself from some of his former comrades on two related axes. One is his reluctance to embrace violence without regard for the consequences – a position that put him at odds with younger rebels, who by this point were increasingly fascinated by armed struggle as an end in itself. The other was his attitude to discipline and conformity within any group to which he was attached. One of his favoured analogies was with organised religion. Of the early split within the Peking Wing, he comments laconically that the leader Shan [Shanmugathasan] 'was in Albania at that time – that was our pilgrimage site at that time. First it was Peking. Then it was Albania. We always needed a pilgrimage site'. He also gave an account of the Vikalpa group of the early 1980s, in which Jayatilleka was again the dominant intellectual force.

> Then I got involved in the Vikalpa group. That became a church for Stalin. Then there are preachers. I could see that. I wanted to build a people's movement, not build churches. So I started questioning. Then I was called middle-class petty bourgeois. My brother had given me a pair of bell bottoms. I was scared to wear them because the comrades would have questioned me.

In Joe's interviews, he moved back and forth between these tensions within the movement and the tensions in his domestic life. His comment on the problem of the petty bourgeois trousers segues straight into the financial problems he faced at this time; it was a struggle simply to buy milk powder for his young children. Joe also told the story of a point when his baby son had fallen seriously ill, just as he was desperately preparing a document to be submitted to the wage reform commission.

> [My son] was admitted to hospital. On the day of him being admitted, my comrades came and said, your son has become more important, where is the document? I said it's all ready, just get it typed. They said, you have to do it. I typed, got copies. All that had to be done was to hand it over to the commission. My wife was in hospital with my son. My mother-in-law was very angry with me. He was a baby son. Despite all that, I had to do this work. I was very disappointed and angry. The next day I went to the hospital. Do you think my wife would even look at me? I listened to everything she had to say. I had to, I was in the wrong, no? I checked in the afternoon whether the document had been handed over to the commission. They hadn't taken it. I lied to my wife and came to our office. They said there was no one to take it to the commission. I was so upset. I got so angry. They are talking big about socialism. I kept fighting them. Then our discussions came to a breaking point. So I said, you better do the revolution. I gave my letter of resignation and left.

Building cross-ethnic alliances: MIRJE and the NEPC

For a brief period Joe worked as a teacher, initially on a temporary contract, at his brother-in-law's suggestion. The new job went well and the Principal offered him a permanent position. But politically things were changing in the country. The embattled government of Mrs Bandaranaike, which had initially incorporated the leaders of the Old Left parties, the CP and the LSSP, was swept away in a landslide victory for J.R. Jayawardene's United National Party (UNP) in the 1977 election. Jayawardene promised liberalisation of the economy ('let the robber barons come in'), but his election was immediately followed by a serious outbreak of anti-Tamil violence.

> The South was swept by the UNP. Racism also swept the country. No party had a plan how to work on these issues. S Balakrishnan came to meet me and said Paul Caspersz was working in the plantation sector. Now he is starting an organisation to bring all parties together against racism, at a time when nobody was doing anything.

Paul Caspersz was a radical Catholic priest. The new organisation was the Movement for Inter-Racial Justice and Equality (MIRJE).

> We had heard [Caspersz] was a CIA agent. I said that, if that is CIA that is good – if that is what they are doing. I went for the first meeting [in 1979] at the Islamic Cultural centre. VK, AB [Vijaya Kumaratunga and Anura Bandaranaike], Lionel Bopage, all the leftists were there. Bala Tampoe. Very important ideological contribution they made. Lionel Cooray also – who introduced Kumi [Samuel]. There was no one to take this forward. Father Paul wanted to meet me so I met him. He said, 'We need someone with your experience. Can you join us? We will give you the same salary.' I had by now received the forms for a pension [in his teaching job]. My wife scolded me for giving that up. But I felt this was more important than the pension. So I left that job and joined MIRJE.

MIRJE was a path-breaking initiative, cutting across conventional political boundaries and deliberately bringing together radical Christians, academics and feminists, as well as dissident activists on the fringes of both Old and New Left groups. It published regularly in Sinhala, Tamil and English, contesting full-on the increasing polarisation between dominant Sinhala nationalism and violent Tamil counter-nationalism.

As national coordinator Joe was able to work with dramatists such as Parakrama Niriella and Richard de Zoysa (who was to become another victim of the country's violence in 1990), as well as writing regularly for MIRJE's newspaper, *Yukthiya* [Justice]. With hindsight we can see MIRJE as the first of the wave of peace-related NGOs that were to spring up during the course of the war – many of them highly dependent on funding from outside Sri Lanka and all of them eventually burdened by the 'projectification' of their original mission as a result of this funding. But when Joe signed up in 1979, that trajectory was far from obvious.

Another founder member, Rajan Philips, recently described MIRJE's position.

> Those of us in the MIRJE and similar organisations were not at the margins of Sri Lankan politics, but were purposefully active in its interstitial spaces.[10]

Philips' characterisation bears further reflection. If Joe's political activity in the 1960s and 1970s was mostly conducted on the very margins of national affairs, his interstitial position from 1979 onwards involved dizzying shifts of political and social register: sometimes even more marginal than before, underground and on the run from both the authorities

and erstwhile comrades, and sometimes apparently completely central, as a minister in the first devolved administration for the Tamil areas in the country, and later as an adviser close to the new President during the doomed peace initiatives of the 1990s. If we usually think of the slide into civil war in the 1980s as a closing down of political space in Sri Lanka, for Joe and his associates the interstices between rival Sinhala and Tamil nationalisms sometimes seemed to offer opportunities for quite new and creative political improvisations. Significantly these often involved radical departures from the mould set by the Old Left in the 1940s and 1950s.

Joe was by no means a linear raconteur and disentangling some of the more colourful stories from this period of his life is often a challenge. In parallel with the first stirrings of a critical civil society in MIRJE, Joe and his comrades sought to connect with the more radical elements in the new Tamil militant groups in the North. A North–South radical alliance was a particular nightmare for the government, so their activities, not surprisingly, quickly attracted the attention of the security forces. In the early 1980s Joe was sent to Jaffna where he met key figures from the LTTE.

> I went to Jaffna. They gave me an ID, but they said that it was obvious that ID was fake and they advised me to go without one. I was put on a motor cycle… Just as we were nearing the station, we were stopped, and the Tigers scolded that guy with filth… They made me sit on a bench. A boy went and spoke to [LTTE leader] Kittu. And he had summoned me. He was wearing a chain. Short man. Moustache. He spoke nicely to me. He knew I was somebody at MIRJE. They gave me food to eat… He said not to worry, train won't leave without you. He gave instructions to a boy not to let the train go. I couldn't understand – that they could stop a train. He asked me about the strength of the different political parties, trade unions in the South. He spoke about politics – not about the military. What do people say? People in the rural areas? We had a good political discussion. Then I was released and I was allowed to go on the train. People were wondering why the train was delayed. Guard is also there. I got on the train. And the train left! Such an experience – so dangerous.

At this point Joe was brokering a meeting between Vijaya Kumaratunga (VK), the charismatic film star and husband of future President Chandrika Kumaratunga (CBK), and the LTTE. But when he returned from Jaffna,

he discovered that in his absence the planned bank robbery had gone badly awry.

> When I came to Fort station, DJ and Pulsara were there and they took me. They said we are in trouble now. Someone has to tell the others the message. DJ said he can't go. I had to go. But I had to give the message to VK first. Kynsey Road. We couldn't walk freely. Ram said we should hire a car and Ram would be my driver. This degree holder from America was my driver! We got DJ from somewhere in Mount [Lavinia] and we went to VK's house. The watcher said, VK had just come home after several weeks and he is trying to sleep. I said just tell him that Dayan, Joe and Ram have come. We were seated in the garage. I remember CBK walking into the house – and she said, 'I can't make tea'. VK said, no no don't worry, we will be fine. I explained everything to VK. They need to speak to a Sinhala leader – an honest man. You are their honest man. What do you say? VK said he was ready to talk. I said I will send a message for them to contact you. This was after midnight. We went about at night. We couldn't get about in the daytime. Then the CID was hunting for us. An informant got into one of our cells. They created a trap for me. At Kocchikade. I had to give messages to everybody to go back home and go underground.

He continued, 'Only later I understood that DJ was trying to be a hero; [then in English] *adventurous politics*'. And thus it was that Ram and Joe ended up in jail, where Joe dutifully lined up every morning to collect breakfast for everyone, while his young comrades had their baths.

Two years later Joe and Dayan were both cabinet members in Varadaraja Perumal's North East Provincial Council (NEPC). This body was set up under the terms of the 1987 Indo–Sri Lanka Accord, which brought Indian troops to the island and plunged them into direct conflict with the LTTE, even as the South was consumed by the fury of the second JVP rising. Vijaya Kumaratunga was one of the earliest victims of that rising, one of many leftist leaders targeted for their 'unpatriotic' support for the Indian deal. Dayan's tenure with the NEPC was brief and inglorious, but Joe remained in position throughout.

At the time of Joe's death, a picture circulated on social media.[11] It was of Joe with the EPRLF leader Padmanabha and the Tamil activist Ketesh Loganathan. Three young, or youngish, handsome men, confronting the camera, apparently ready for action. Within a few years Padmanabha would be dead, killed by the LTTE. Ketesh suffered the

same fate, gunned down at his Colombo home in the dying days of the war. Only Joe was to survive.

When the North East Provincial Council collapsed, Joe fled to India. Here he met Rajiv Gandhi, who thanked him for his support for the ill-fated Indian intervention. While he was in India, the LTTE assassinated most of the leadership of EPRLF, the group that formed the core of the NEPC. By this time Joe's wife had been pleading with him to come home, but he had heard that he was now in danger – not least because his adventurous comrade Jayatilleka had re-emerged, this time as a prominent adviser to the new President, Ranasinghe Premadasa. Eventually Joe decided to return.

> I didn't have any travel documents. I got an emergency travel document and I came back to SL. I came back and got back silently to my old life. I travelled by bus and train. I had an official vehicle [from his role on the NEPC]. I sold that and I used that for my children's education. For the suffering I underwent, two years in jail, I used that money for my children's education. I got nothing else personally. I gave everything and got nothing. So I don't feel sad.

Or, as Ram said to family members at the funeral, 'You gave us Joe'.

Conclusion

This is where Joe left his story, returning to Sri Lanka as the JVP rising is crushed, Premadasa re-establishes authoritarian rule from Colombo, the Indian Army leaves and war breaks out again between the government and the LTTE. But Joe was to return to the centre of political events soon enough, when Chandrika Kumaratunga was elected President in 1994. She was elected on a promise to find a political settlement for the Tamil problem. Alongside a detailed set of constitutional proposals, her government launched a cultural campaign to promote peace and inter-ethnic harmony. This was called the Sudu Nelum (White Lotus) movement and Joe was brought in as its national coordinator. That initiative eventually foundered in the mire of party political divisions in the South and LTTE hostility in the North. However, Joe remained active in the years that followed as a journalist and television personality.

So what can we make of Joe Seneviratne's life? What makes it worth sharing all these stories of half-forgotten political moves in the shadows of a bitter and, it now seems, pointless civil war?

Firstly, and perhaps most importantly, people such as Joe are extraordinarily interesting figures: complex, flinty personalities that demand our attention. There is so much of this man himself in the speeches made at his funeral, as in the stories he shared with Harini, that our first duties as listeners is perhaps simply to acknowledge what a remarkable life he crafted for himself, rather than rush into a blur of academic interpretation and commentary. In her Afterword to Anand Pandian's moving memoir of his grandfather, Veena Das reinforces the point.

> The importance of looking at a single life, a singularity, is that it can show how forces contingent and structural, from pasts known and unknown, can come together to define a life – not lives in general but life in its singularity. (Das 2014, 200)

In reflecting on this passage, the words 'show' and 'singularity' stand out. In the closing paragraphs of *Life and Words*, Das explores the distinction between 'saying' and 'showing'. The survivors of collective violence, whose presence haunts the pages of that book, above all employ the act of 'showing'.

> What the women were able to 'show' was not a standardised narrative of loss and suffering, but a project that can be understood only in the singular through the image of reinhabiting the space of devastation again. (Das 2007, 217)

So it is that, although Joe is highly articulate about his life and his actions, and quick to acknowledge the relationships in which he was embedded, our first response is to acknowledge the singularity of his achievement through his attempts to reinhabit the spaces of his own past.

In his own version of himself, Joe reveals many things. His achievement, through all that showing, is first and foremost an achievement of self-making, as explained by Alexander Nehamas in his *Art of Living*.

> To create a self is to succeed in becoming *someone*, in becoming a *character*, that is, someone unusual and distinctive. It is to become an individual, but again not in the strict sense in which an individual is anything we can point out and reidentify. To become an individual is to acquire an uncommon and idiosyncratic character, a set of features and a mode of life that set one apart from

> the rest of the world and make one memorable not only for what one said or did but also for who one was. (Nehamas 1998, 5)

So we start with a responsibility to identify Joe for who he was, for the making of himself as an 'uncommon and idiosyncratic character'.

We can do a bit more than that, albeit nervously and with caution, as we come to terms with the hours of material we have accumulated. Minimally the stories and achievements we have been collecting disrupt the bleak claims of rival nationalisms, in which the history of a country such as Sri Lanka is entirely framed and contained within the teleology of what we have all learned to call 'the Conflict'. When we started, we thought of our task as a variant on E.P. Thompson's memorable call to rescue the history of the marginal from the 'enormous condescension of posterity' (Thompson 1968, 13). Now we are not so sure. The reason for our hesitation is one of which Thompson himself would have approved: there were times when Joe's actions, and the actions of others like him, were anything but marginal, and we need to reflect a lot more on what those times were and what was it that folded the margins back into the centre of events, however briefly.

In a 1979 essay the political scientist James Manor argued that the biggest structural problem in Sri Lankan politics was the distance between the political elite and the masses. Other cleavages, notably the Sinhala–Tamil split, could be argued to derive from this originary divide (Manor 1979). Forty years on, Manor's essay seems unusually prescient. Recent events, such as the failure of the 2015 government to address popular dissatisfaction with the criminal activity of its predecessors or the bizarre implosion of that government in late 2018, can be interpreted in Manor's terms, as the Sri Lankan political class remains surprisingly closed, self-protecting and self-reproducing. But in this context the events of the 1980s, and to some extent the 1990s, acquire their importance. In the 1980s young people in both the North and South directly challenged this pattern of closed elite dominance. The LTTE faced down, and effectively silenced, the lawyers and professionals of the 'moderate' Tamil parties. The JVP very nearly succeeded in a similar attack on the Sinhala political class in the South.

Although we think of both these organisations as intent on closing down the space for dissent on the left of their own nationalist project, not least because of the many political rivals they eliminated, we can perhaps start to recover a more expansive understanding of the political possibilities of those years. This was the time when a veteran leftist such as Joe could find himself at one moment jailed alongside a bunch

of over-adventurous younger comrades and then, just a year or two later, being driven around in an official vehicle as a minister in a newly devolved political authority. He may have had to flee to India, but when there he gets an audience with the recent Prime Minister. In a moment of desperation, Joe may throw himself at the mercy of a left-wing film star and his politically ambitious wife. A decade later, when that wife has ascended to the position of President, he finds himself invited into the heart of the political process, commanding state resources to make a popular case for peace. As we continue to work on this material, we will probe further to see what it was about this political period that, however temporarily, opened up such a vastly expanded set of political possibilities.

We should also be wary of telling a story such as Joe's as a story of political 'failure'. One legacy of the political experiments of the 1960s and 1970s was, of course, a long and vicious civil war. But this was accompanied by many important countercurrents: over the years, many of Joe's former comrades have made important contributions to human rights activism, to the creation of new forms of women's organisation and, of course, to public culture more generally through dramas, novels and film. (An obvious parallel is with the later lives of Kelly's Second World War conscientious objectors in Britain, see chapter 6.) MIRJE may have died in the transition to becoming a mainstream NGO, but it has left its mark across a broad range of cultural and political practice. In doing so, it has irreversibly transformed our sense of what we might think politically possible.

But there are other more modest but equally telling themes running through Joe's story. One is age and the responsibilities that this brings. Joe was considerably older than many of his comrades in the heady days of the 1980s and acutely aware of the expectations of his wife and children. Again and again, he records his sense of being torn between the demands of the comrades and needs at home. This intimate tension connects to the more pervasive relational grammar of solidarity and splits, which enabled some of his most remarkable moves. The 1960s splits in the left movement in Sri Lanka are the first condition of political possibility for Joe's political life. His scepticism towards the cheap glamour of the violent politics of gesture gives him the option of a necessary distance in the times of greatest danger. He also had to learn the hard way that political intimacy is not always reliable.

> 'We saw the world in a very flat way, the relationships between people… If I don't trust you how can I do politics with you?'

If Joe was sometimes inconstant as a husband and father, he was also uncomfortable with the totalising demands of the party. His laconic use of religious analogies identifies the recurrent danger of authoritarian claims to solidarity, and the need to leave some space to make one's own judgements. Again, as we go forward with other interlocutors and other stories, we will be probing further into this relational grammar. In so doing we will ask whether the intense friendships and equally dramatic ruptures in people's intimate lives are continuous with the bigger political splits and solidarities of their time.

But a story like this will never be closed to further interpretation. Remember the two mystery figures at the funeral, whose task was to introduce the other speakers, but not to say anything themselves? In his last years, without losing sight of his political commitments, Joe devoted much of his time to the movement founded by the Indian guru Bhagwan Shri Rajneesh – or Osho, as he was latterly known. If you look Joe up on the internet, much of what you will find consists of references to the writings of Osho that he translated into Sinhala in his last years. The two figures at the funeral were members of his Osho circle, a circle equally baffling to Joe's family and to his many comrades on the left. Joe died before we could ask him about this late enthusiasm for an unlikely spiritual hero. We leave our readers with their mute presence as a reminder of the many things left unexplained, and thus of the impossibility of containing a remarkable life like Joe's within any over-neat interpretive framework.

Notes

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2 Lovell's (2019) history of Maoism as a global political force provides a fuller account of the turn to armed struggle by similarly located young people across the world in the 1960s and 1970s. She also draws out the symbiotic relationship between Maoism and nationalism in the history that followed.

3 Early accounts of the 1971 insurrection can be found in Dumont (1972) and Blackburn (1975), and more measured reflection in the memoirs of founding members of the JVP such as Lionel Bopage (Cooke 2011).

4 Moore (1993) remains the essential analysis of the second JVP insurrection. Dewasiri (2010) and Venugopal (2010) bring the JVP story up to the early 2000s. Hughes (2013) provides a moving and powerful account of the still bitter memories of the *bheeshanaya*.

5 Maunaguru explores this world in more depth in chapter 7.

6 We are in the midst of a flood of new publications on the LTTE and their political style. The publications of University Teachers for Human Rights (Hoole et al. 1990; Hoole 2001; Hoole 2015) remain the essential point of departure for this phase of Sri Lankan Tamil history. On

the experience of members of the militant movements see Mantovan (2015) and Thiranagama (2011).

7 Joe's literary education reflects the availability of cheap translations of Russian classics from Progress Publishers in Moscow. As a result Joe's generation of leftists was shaped by its reading of radical kitsch classics such as Maxim Gorky's *Mother* (*Amma* in Sinhala). Assessing the impact of these translations into Sinhala, and dozens of other Asian languages, is an important research project still waiting for its researchers.

8 D.S. presumably refers to Dudley Senanayake, Prime Minister of Sri Lanka in the late 1960s. Bose was the nationalist leader of the Indian National Army, an organisation formed to fight for Indian independence alongside the Japanese in the Second World War.

9 Speech of Sarath Kongahage, 'Unfulfilled promises and suppression of media under PA', *The Sunday Times*, 15 September 1996, http://www.sundaytimes.lk/961215/news3.html, accessed 1 March 2018.

10 Rajan Philips, 'Silan Kadirgamir (1934–2015) – Reflections on his Life and Politics', *Colombo Telegraph*, 2 August 2015, https://www.colombotelegraph.com/index.php/silan-kadirgamar-1934-2015-reflections-on-his-life-politics/, accessed 1 March 2018.

11 This, and other images from Joe Seneviratne's life, can be viewed on our project website: https://anthropology-of-conscience.sps.ed.ac.uk/.

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Chapter 6
Dissenting conscience: the intimate politics of objection in Second World War Britain

Tobias Kelly

There is a contested tradition that runs through the Protestant Reformation, liberal constitutionalism and certain forms of human rights activism which makes conscience an archetypal and valorised form of dissent.[1] Dissent here is understood as a vital good – a powerful way of fostering both public reason and an individual's capacity for self-realisation. And conscience is widely seen as supplying the grounds for such acts of virtuous opposition, speaking from beyond narrow self-interest or instrumental calculation. In this vision, conscience should be protected because it is at the heart of a person's most deeply felt sense of self (Maclure and Taylor 2011). In popular culture, those who seem to make a stand on issues of conscience – people such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Václav Havel, Martin Luther King and (until recently at least, and instructively so) Aung San Suu Kyi, are held up as heroic moral exemplars. From such a perspective, the dissenting conscience represents not only the basis of individual freedom, but also the last residue of the ability to do good in the world in the face of otherwise overwhelming pressure and wrongdoing.

To talk about conscience is usually to talk the language of high principle. But, as we argued in the introduction to this book, those who dissent are not simply people of public ideals; they are also enmeshed in other intimate aspirations and ties. Commitments are never just abstractions, but are also produced and take shape through personal ties marked by reflection and obligation. We can only understand the commitments people make – as well as the intensities, tensions and meanings of these commitments – if we view them from the perspective of the thick social relations in which they take place. People of conscience are also husbands, wives, sons, daughters, friends and neighbours. Public acts

and private beliefs cannot be easily separated. We might therefore ask, in line with the introduction to this book, what is the intimate life of dissent?

This chapter explores what happens when a very particular understanding of conscience is woven through dense social relations. The point here is not to define conscience nor to treat it as a transcendent or universal form of moral agency. Rather, it is to bracket off such questions in order to examine a contingent and historically embedded way of understanding and valuing conscience. This involves exploring the specific cultural life of an ethical category that claims universal valence; focusing on the ways in which it gains meaning, significance and purchase within the context of particular relationships – and the commitments, attachments and conflicts that are produced along the way.

The chapter focuses on the experiences of British conscientious objectors (COs) to military service in the Second World War. If conscience is an archetypal form of dissent, the British conscientious objectors of this period represent a particularly acute angle through which to explore the social and cultural life of conscience. In 1916 Britain became the first state to grant the right to conscientious objection during wartime, and to do so on formally secular grounds. During the Second World War over 60,000 people were granted exemption from fighting on these grounds. Those who opposed the First World War in Britain, and later the Vietnam War in the US, are sometimes held up as heroes, at least on the broadly liberal left. They are viewed as principled and insightful individuals who saw through the fog of war and manufactured patriotism to talk of the waste and injustice of the trenches and jungle warfare, and made great sacrifices in doing so (see, for example, Brock and Young 1999). In contrast, the conscientious objectors of the 1930s and 1940s have a much more ambiguous position in popular memory for refusing to take up arms against fascism. It is for this reason that they have perhaps largely slipped from popular memory, presenting an awkward reminder of where following our conscience may take us. British conscientious objectors of the middle of the twentieth century therefore speak to the limits, potentials and conflicts of conscience as grounds for dissent.

If other chapters in this collection examine forms of dissent under various types of socialism or post-colonial nationalism, this chapter seeks to contribute to debates about the limits of dissent under liberal regimes. The category of conscience has played a key role in the history of liberalism. The philosopher John Rawls went to so far as to observe that liberty of conscience is at the historical and normative core of 'political liberalism', providing the grounds for moral autonomy and particular forms of dissent

(1993, 154). The conscientious objectors described in this chapter held commitments to a range of political and religious traditions, but they all sought to participate in a public debate about conviction, sacrifice and exemption dominated by broadly liberal assumptions. This chapter can therefore be understood as part of the anthropology of actually existing liberalism. Liberalism is treated here as a varied and historically contingent set of discourses and practices, rather than a defined set of philosophical abstractions or analytical straw man. Numerous scholars have pointed to the ways in which liberal political regimes can tightly circumscribe the forms of dissent that are acknowledged as legitimate (Mahmood 2012; Povinelli 2002). What counted as a persuasive conscience certainly reproduced narrowly masculine, bourgeois and Protestant ways of being in the world. What I am also interested in here, however, is not just the outer limit of liberal dissent, but its anxious and uncertain core (Walzer 1970; Weiss 2012). Hesitations about claims of conscience are not only produced at the edges of liberal cultures, but at their very heart. The issue is not so much the exclusion of liberalism at its edges, but the anxieties, reversals and instabilities that lie at its heart.

The central argument of this chapter is that claims of conscience are Janus-faced – both valorised and mistrusted, the grounds for sociality yet also socially corrosive. As McGranahan and others have argued, acts of dissent and refusal can not only sever ties, but also create new ties, affiliations and obligations (2016). At one level, throughout large parts of the liberal tradition, conscience is one of the ways in which individuals contribute positively to public life. However, at the same time conscience can also appear egotistical and self-indulgent – perhaps even antisocial. The philosopher Susan Wolf has argued more broadly that a morally pure life seems to lack a human quality (1982; see also MacFarquhar 2015). For Wolf, 'moral saints' have no friends, family, lovers, comrades or even acquaintances. They are unappealing to others, as they are not driven by affection and joy, but by a stark devotion. The point here is not simply that forms of conscientious dissent are not all equal – although that is the case too – but also that all claims of conscience can themselves create unease.

Perhaps no one captured this ambiguity better than Susan Sontag, in her review of Simone Weil's collected essays (1963).

> The culture-heroes of our liberal bourgeois civilization are anti-liberal and anti-bourgeois; … of exemplary lives, there are those which invite us to imitate them, and those which we regard from a distance with a mixture of revulsion, pity, and reverence.… No

> one who loves life would wish to imitate [Weil's] dedication to martyrdom, nor would wish it for his children nor for anyone else whom he loves. Yet so far as we love seriousness, as well as life, we are moved by it, nourished by it.

Here Sontag explores the ways in which people can be both attracted to claims of absolute moral virtue and feel repulsed by them. Such absolute virtue can seem both necessary for the world we want to live in yet somehow antithetical to the richness and diversity of that world. In this light we can see conscientious objectors in Second World War Britain as the source of anxiety, not simply because they refused to fight fascism or to take up arms when others were preparing to sacrifice their lives – although they did that too – but also because they were simply too conscientious.

To put this another way, we might say that ethical commitments are not all good. In recent years it seems that anthropologists have been able to find ethics everywhere (Laidlaw 2013; Lambek 2010; Mattingly 2014; Venkatesan 2015). The 'ethics of this' and the 'ethics of that' have become familiar refrains, much as in previous decades the 'politics of this and that' played a similar role. But ethics has its limits, especially when understood in the relatively narrow terms of the cultivation of virtuous selves, and ethical commitments, except in a very mundane sense, are not the only commitments by which people live. Too much ethics of a particular type – or too much conscience – can make for awkward social relationships.

This chapter is based on the letters, diaries and memoirs of conscientious objectors, their families and friends. These are a group of people who wrote a great deal about their experiences, both at the time and in the months and years afterwards. We can see these writings as a form of justification and reflection, both to themselves and to others. More significantly, perhaps, we can understand the very act of writing about conscience as an attempt to give form to an otherwise intangible and often inchoate concept. It is in these writings, often shot through with doubt, confusion and contradiction, that conscience begins to take on a more or less public form.

Liberalism, ethics, conscience

There are many ways of talking about conscience, ranging from a gift of God that can be found objectively in sacred texts to an innate but

deeply subjective quality found deep within a person. However, British conscientious objectors to military service speak directly to a tradition – rooted in the Protestant Reformation and Nonconformist Christianity – that sees conscience as being rooted inside people and the ground for individual moral autonomy (Andrew 2001; Baylor 1977). During the Protestant Reformation, conscience came to represent the inner presence of divinity within an individual (Walzer 1970, 12). This was also a form of conscience that is potentially radical, as it has no defined content beyond the inner scruples of particular persons. The idea of conscience was therefore also tightly linked to notions of dissent. And this is a tradition that, as Weiss describes in chapter 3, has also played a central role in the linked history of liberalism, gaining particular traction in relation in opposition to twentieth-century totalitarianism. If liberal approaches to dissent stand alongside related terms such as protest, resistance, refusal and opposition, they do so in a way that places an emphasis on the public opposition of specific morally autonomous and conscientious individuals. In doing so, the concept of dissent has accrued specific assumptions about the origins, significance and implications of personal freedom.

But conscience within the liberal tradition does, or cannot, simply stay within particular people, hidden from view. As Hannah Arendt has argued, the key problem for an understanding of conscience as rooted deep inside individuals is how to make that conscience public and persuasive to others (1972). A conscience that exists solely inside of someone would have no social, cultural or political significance. The crucial issue here is *the process of making conscience public* – of making a conscience tangible and persuasive to others. The internal conscience is therefore at once both personal and public, with its meanings and implications formed in the midst of social relations.

We might see conscience as a form of what anthropologists have called 'first person ethics', but of a very particular kind (Mattingly 2014). First person ethics are deeply personal ethical problems, tied up with intimate senses of the self and their associated commitments, and as such do not have universal or straightforwardly objective responses. But, as Veena Das has also pointed out, 'a first-person statement is not a private soliloquy' – but is addressed to someone – 'there is a second person there' (2020, see also Walzer 1970, 22). This means avoiding a sense of conscience as existing on a transmission belt from intimate self to outer public or seeing outward manifestations as merely representations of inner states (Fernando 2010; Howe 2013). Claims of conscience take shape in the space in between an intimate sense of self and wider publics,

and are as such inherently relational. We can therefore understand the diaries, letters, memoirs and oral history interviews of pacifists as a form through which claims of conscience emerged in mid-twentieth-century Britain.

The social life of conscience

Roy Ridgway came from a close-knit family from Liverpool; if his diaries are anything to go by, he had a loving if slightly fragile mother, an overbearing father and two very close brothers. He would eventually register as a conscientious objector, but only after a series of sometimes fraught encounters with friends, family, colleagues and others. Roy seems to have moved to London to get away from his father, only to be followed by the rest of the family as they looked for work. Through the late 1930s the threat of war weighed heavily on his mind. As a teenager Roy attended a Congregationalist Church in Liverpool, but would later describe himself as 'leaning' towards the Quakers. He also remembered not being able to imagine Christ sitting in a plane and dropping bombs. Later Roy would recall that he first realised he might be a pacifist after watching the documentary *Forgotten Men*.[2] The film, released in 1933, shows veterans discussing their lives in the trenches. One clip of a man writhing on the ground after being shot in the stomach would stand out in Roy's mind in later life.

Although conscription had ended in 1919, it was widely assumed throughout the 1930s that – if there was another war – it would be reintroduced. This meant that for many young people growing up in the 1920s and 1930s, such as Roy Ridgway, the prospect of war was not simply a distant abstraction; it was something that they felt in all likelihood they would have to participate in. Roy was anxious that if he did become a conscientious objector he would be lined up against a wall and shot. His anxieties were not eased when an older pacifist told him not to worry, but to think 'of the effect it would have on the soldiers' who had to carry out the order.[3]

Books, rather than films, seemed to have played a particularly influential role for many pacifists. From the early 1930s there was a near flood of writing evoking the horrors of the First World War, and of any war to come. These were books such as Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1929), Vera Brittain's *Testament of Youth* (1933) and Siegfried Sassoon's memoirs (1928, 1930, 1936) – works that, in the words of the critic Valentine Cunningham, dealt 'obsessively

with violence – its images, its tone, its horrors, its pleasures' (1989, 55). While not all of these books were pacifist, and some even saw glory in the suffering of the trenches, they did provide the raw material through which to reflect on the implications of war. And as Doreen Lee and Sidharthan Maunaguru both show in chapters 9 and 7 respectively, the production, distribution and reading of texts produced not just forms of interior reflection; they also created rich forms of sociality and relatedness. Literary texts were often both the deeply intimate and public grounds upon which acts of dissent were understood.

More broadly, there was often an intense sociality that marked the development of a personal opposition to war. Roy would spend hours talking with his brothers and attending pacifist meetings and discussion groups. Similarly, in later life, George Buttery would recall his experiences as a trainee teacher at Goldsmiths' College in London.[4] Amidst all the clubs, lectures and talks, he became increasingly influenced by new anti-war friends. George was also reading widely, particularly the mass circulation and broadly liberal *News Chronicle*, but also the writings of Aldous Huxley, Vera Brittain and Mahatma Gandhi. After graduating he got a job at a boys' school in South London and joined the local branch of the Peace Pledge Union. Much of his time was taken up with distributing leaflets and holding public meetings.

The decision on whether to fight or not was never an easy one, and could result in intense discussions with close family and friends. Roy's father often taunted him, seeing his pacifism as naive. One evening, as Roy was leaving for a pacifist meeting, his father gave him a mock Nazi salute. Roy would write in his diary that 'Dad has never helped me… he has always made things very difficult for me'; he later described his father's attitude to his sons' pacifism as 'ambivalent'.[5]

Similarly Ken Shaw, a Methodist from south London, faced criticism from his father who believed that it was 'everyone's duty' to serve in the military at a time of war. Ken's brother had joined the Royal Air Force and his mother was also upset by the whispers she sensed among neighbours over her son's refusal to join up.[6] Sydney Greaves, who had a younger brother in the Army, recalls that his father was 'deeply disturbed' by his decision to become a conscientious objector and tried very hard to dissuade him from registering.[7] Sydney's parents also mobilised family friends to write letters setting out the case against pacifism, begging him to stop. Ronald Mallone, a socialist trainee teacher, later recalled being treated as a 'weird animal' by his relatives when they heard he was going to register as a conscientious objector; his aunt even suggested that he should have his hard-won college scholarship taken away.[8] Tony Parker,

a pacifist from Manchester, was forced to split from his girlfriend after she was told by her father that if he did not renounce his conscientious objection, she would not be allowed to see him again.[9] Parker refused to change his convictions and his girlfriend said she had to do as her father said, so the couple split.

Roy Ridgway first heard of the Peace Pledge Union in the office where he worked; he went on to sign a card promising not to fight. It was at work that a pacifist stance could also draw most comment, however, as it was here that it was most apparent that men at least were not serving in the armed forces. A female typist at the bakery where Roy was employed passed his desk and on seeing a pacifist badge remarked 'Are you a conscientious objector? Oh no, Mr Ridgway, don't be one of them'.[10] At Roy's work Christmas dinner a telephone operator shouted out, so that everyone could hear, 'What is that badge you are wearing?' When he responded that it was from the Peace Pledge Union, the room went completely silent. To his relief attention was soon diverted as, elsewhere in the room some of his colleagues started a food fight.

Roy Ridgway was not alone in facing issues at work. John Hunt, a clerk in an engineering firm in a small town in western England, confronted similar problems. He would later recall that on turning up at work after registering as a conscientious objector, he was booed by his colleagues.[11] Stanley Hilton, a French polisher originally from Glasgow, was forced to leave his job after some colleagues, on hearing he was a conscientious objector, threatened to strike if he was kept on.[12] Leonard Bird had worked as a solicitor's clerk since leaving school at 14.[13] When war broke out he was in his mid-twenties, on the verge of gaining formal qualifications as a paralegal. After registering as a conscientious objector he had his desk broken into by his boss, who suspected that he was carrying out pacifist activities in the office.

However, despite the issues that Roy, John, Stanley, Leonard and many others faced, the general response to pacifists in the late 1930s and early 1940s was very different than in the First World War. In 1914–18 people who refused to fight were routinely imprisoned, shamed, harassed and stigmatised for being 'disloyal shirkers' (Bibbings 2011). By the Second World War, however, the atmosphere had changed to one of begrudging tolerance. A survey taken in the spring of 1940, for example, showed that only 14 per cent of the British public thought it was a bad thing for pacifists to be able to express their opinions in public.[14] The general position was that while people might not agree with the stance that pacifists took, they accepted their right to take it. The director of the bakery where Roy Ridgway worked took him to one

side and told him that he 'admired' him, but did not agree with him.[15] Similarly, during a pacifist march through the centre of London, a First World War veteran came up to Roy; he declared that he did not blame him, as he knew what war was like.[16]

Shortly after the outbreak of the war Roy's two brothers moved to a cottage just outside Abergavenny in South Wales. They had been given exemption from military service on the condition that they carried out forestry work and had moved west in search of employment. Over the summer Roy went stay with his siblings. One afternoon two policemen, huffing and puffing from the walk up the hill to the cottage, stopped by to ask what the three brothers were doing in the area.[17] The atmosphere seems to have remained convivial, as over tea and cigarettes, and amid much laughter, one of the brothers showed them the short stories he was writing.

There were several reasons for this general shift in attitude from that of the First World War. In part the brutality and loss of life in the First World War meant that war was no longer associated so straightforwardly with heroism (Rose 2003). For much of the late 1920s and early 1930s anti-war sentiment held a firm place in the middle ground of British politics. Against this background there had also been a marked shift in the 'moral economy of sacrifice' (Allport 2010). The Blitz, rationing and evacuation, as well as the 'phony war', all meant that privations on the front line were not as heavily privileged over those on the home front. Finally the British establishment came to see freedom of conscience as a crucial distinction between British liberal democracy and fascist authoritarianism. Cosmo Lang, the Archbishop of Canterbury, expressed the position well.

> At a time when we are claiming… that freedom of conscience must be elsewhere honoured, it is obviously our duty to show that we fully support it.

On the eve of the war Roy went to a local pub with his father. In the blackout everyone sang 'Land of Hope and Glory' well into the night. Roy wrote in his diary that he was despairing of the ways in which the 'ordinary man' was resigned to war and did not mind being used as 'cannon fodder'.[18] The day Germany invaded Poland, he reflected 'in 1937 I pledged never to support or sanction another war, and I will not go back on my word'.[19] He added that he was 'going to try and stay calm and cheerful', but 'one cannot help being perturbed by the unimaginable horrors we will probably witness in the days to come'.[20] At the start

of March 1940 Roy applied for exemption. He wrote in his application that

> I am firmly convinced that love and not force is the ultimate power in the universe… I renounce war and absolutely refuse, on moral and religious grounds, to attach myself to any military organisation.[21]

Roy Ridgway's decision on whether to fight or not had been reached through both the support and criticism of family, friends and colleagues. His claim of conscience was forged out of the raw material of his intimate relations. This was not a commitment that sprung out from inside him fully formed, but one that was produced, given shape and meaning in the midst of late-night discussions with his brothers, slights from people at work and friendly chats with Welsh policemen. As a form of dissent, therefore, conscience did not simply separate him off from others, even those who signed up to fight. Instead it drew him into complex and sometimes contradictory sets of relationships, aspirations and evaluations. As many of the other chapters of this book show, intimate ties served to create the conditions of possibility for large-scale acts of conviction and solidarity, but could also at the same time work against them.

Obligation

Roy Ridgway had initially gone to stay with his brothers on the smallholding in South Wales. He did not stay there long, however, as he began to feel guilty about leaving his mother in London in the midst of the Blitz. By November 1940, with German raids a nightly event over London, he had returned to live with his parents, eventually persuading his mother to go and stay with his brothers in the Welsh mountains. For the pacifists of Second World War Britain, claims of conscience were seldom made in the name of freedom, but rather, more commonly, in relation to obligation. Although conscientious objectors might be seen as archetypical exemplars of liberal freedom, for most of them conscience was experienced as a duty rather than an exercise of freewill.

In the first instance this was a sense of obligation to family and friends. Reading through the diaries and letters of conscientious objectors reveals them to be full of concerns about the potential implications of any decision for parents, brothers and sisters. The worry about

what neighbours might say, and the impact this would have on their parents, was common. This was also particularly the case if relatives were serving in the armed forces. Such concern could cut both ways, however, as the loss of loved ones in previous wars could create a sense that they should not fight.

There was also a sense that conscience required responding to the needs of other people. Roy's application for exemption was made on the basis that he would sign up for some kind of humanitarian work. He wrote to the Quaker-inspired Friends Ambulance Unit asking for work and claiming that 'I do not think we should refuse in any way to alleviate the suffering in this world'.[22] The contrast here was with so-called 'absolutists', who rejected any type of compulsion or cooperation. Roy disagreed strongly with a pacifist friend who declared that he would not provide first aid in the event of an air raid. The friend argued that any aid was merely patching up men to send them back to fight. For absolutists, holding firm to principle was important, above all else. It did not matter what the consequences were; they had to stick to their personal beliefs. This was a form of what Max Weber has famously called an 'ethics of conviction' (1946). Even if the end result is tragic and painful, standing by one's convictions is all that is important. The integrity of the believer is all. In contrast, Roy wrote in his diary that he 'could not stand aside and watch people writhing in agony'.[23]

The sense of exactly whose suffering should be eased was at one level deeply cosmopolitan, stretching beyond the borders of Britain. At another level the sense of obligation was mediated by attachments to community and nation. Roy would write in his diary his belief that 'the love of one's country is inherent in everyone'.[24] Similarly Clifford Simmons, a self-proclaimed Christian anarchist and conscientious objector, later recalled 'it is a great social accomplishment that this country has written into its laws the right of a man to follow his conscience' (1965, 15). In Erica Weiss's account of Israeli conscientious objectors, a claim of conscience is a defiance of the state (2014, see also chapter 3). In contrast, British conscientious objectors often saw their arguments as an attempt to embrace both the British state and other British citizens – by demonstrating commitments that they saw, however problematically perhaps, as deeply embedded in British history. Conscientious objection was thus the space of loyal citizens.

At whatever level they worked, claims of conscience were widely seen by British pacifists as demanding and restricting, rather than a source of untrammelled agency. In his written application for exemption, the railway worker and Christian pacifist Jesse Hillman wrote that

for him 'conscience was something that was so precious' that he had no choice but to follow wherever it 'led' him.[25] Similarly Gwendolene Knight, a Quaker pacifist who worked as a volunteer in an ambulance unit, later argued 'if it is right then that's what you've got to do'.[26] Alexander Bryan, a trainee teacher, explained that he felt compelled to register for exemption by the 'promptings of conscience', and that as a conscientious objector he had 'the right to obey the dictates of my conscience'.[27] Written statement after written statement applying for exemption presented conscience as something that did not allow a choice. Speaking more broadly, obligation has often been described as an 'insoluble problem' for liberalism, as it struggles to articulate the grounds under which ostensibly free individuals should defer to public commitments (Pateman 1985, 1; see also Englund 2006). If we were looking for an exemplary case of freedom of conscience, British conscientious objectors in the Second World War would seem to be a good place to start. However, when you scratch the surface, for the people most concerned with conscience it seems not to be an issue of freedom, but rather of duty (see also chapter 5).

Dissent here is not a form of autonomy, but a commitment both to individual conscience and to others, whether near or far. These obligations do not neatly stack up in a row, however, nor do they fan out in concentric circles; rather they could cross over in different directions (Schielke 2015). Obligations to brothers and mothers could contradict obligations to colleagues, obligations to friends could clash with obligations to country and obligations to the living could rub up against obligations to the dead. But equally this is not simply a matter of competing loyalties to family or nation, comrades or colleagues, as such ties could also cross through one another. To paraphrase Michael Walzer, commitments to principle are usually also commitments to other people (1970, 5). You could be loyal to your country because of your loyalty to your mother. Conscience is given meaning in the awkward space in between all of these.

Doubts

In the context of all these overlapping obligations, duty never came easy. Despite, or even because of the sociality of conscience, it could also be associated with intense doubt. The decision to register as a conscientious objector was far from straightforward for the Ridgway brothers; it was accompanied by periods of anxiety and uncertainty. Roy's diaries

are also full of worries about what his parents really thought about his pacifism. He was relieved when, in late January 1940, his mother finally said that she was proud of her children.[28] This was the first time she had ever voiced any support for her sons. Roy and his siblings discussed among themselves what they would do if and when they were called up. On the very eve of war, they were still undecided. Two dealt with the issue by getting very drunk. At the end of October 1939 Derrick Ridgway, Roy's brother, registered as a conscientious objector at the Hendon Employment Exchange.[29] He later collapsed in the family home. Roy and his parents feared that he had tried to poison himself with a bottle of potassium cyanide, only for the doctor to announce that he had simply drunk too much beer.

Roy had doubts over his own convictions, as he noted in his diary.

> Some of the remarks that slip from me in conversation are not the words of a pacifist… I find myself saying things I ought not to say. It is hard to be an out and out pacifist.[30]

He was worried that the general atmosphere in Britain in the first months of the war was leading him off the pacifist path. He was still convinced that war was wrong and that he could not kill his 'fellow creatures', but had become less sure what that meant in practice. Roy later recalled, looking back on his indecision, that 'my heart said no and my head said yes, I was confused about it'.[31] In retrospect, he described himself as a 'tentative pacifist'. Such experiences were relatively common. Douglas Turner, son of a south London grocer, became a conscientious objector and an ambulance driver. He would later recall that 'No-one, I think, ever came back [from the war] … without finding their concept of pacifism challenged'.[32] Sydney Carter worked during the war as a hospital orderly. He similarly recalled that although he had managed to convince the tribunal that he was a genuine and sincere conscientious objector, he was not so sure that he had ever managed to convince himself. He remembered that his objection was so wobbly that the day before the tribunal he nearly 'packed it in' (Simmons 1965, 28). Vera Brittain, a leading peace campaigner throughout the 1930s, also described the difficulty of making such complex decisions.

> [War] brought succession of sharp anxieties… a series of moral dilemmas… it was all too easy to make the wrong choice, and all too difficult to accept the consequences of a decision that seemed right. (1979, 14)

A pacifist conscience was rarely easy. The diaries, letters and memoirs of conscientious objectors are full of hesitations and uncertainties. These do not just reflect doubts over what conscience is telling them to do, but also about how and why they should follow their conscience. Doubts emerge here about whether they really were helping further the cause of peace or whether they were indirectly contributing to the war effort. There were also concerns about whether the forms of alternative service the objectors were undertaking were really useful and productive, as well as anxieties about what it meant to live a conscientious life at the personal and emotional level.

Personal irritations, fallings out and failure could all create uncertainty. If conscience was embedded in intimate relations, those same intimate relations were given a particular charge, one to which they could not always live up to. Nor did conscience always speak clearly, if it spoke at all. It could either speak in many voices or mumble, leading to hesitations about what it meant to follow claims of conscience. Finally, it could be hard to distinguish conscience from cowardice, self-interest or even vanity; many people who objected to war often wondered about their own motivations and what they truly meant. The moral autonomy of this kind of conscience can also imply the autonomy to be amoral, immoral and even mistaken. Conscience was far from transparent, even to those to whom it seemed to speak.

Conscience has often been seen historically as the ground of an authentic moral personhood. Martin Luther is famously reported to have said that 'Here I stand. I can do no other'. This is an image of conscience that is resolute and individual. Later scholars have understood conscience as being at the centre of a modern sense of self. For Foucault, for example, the subject is 'tied to his own identity by a conscience' (1983, 212). For British conscientious objectors, however, claims of conscience did not simply create a profound and clear sense of themselves, standing against the rest of the world. Instead, for those asking for military exemption, claims of conscience could produce an experience of estrangement and confusion about their own convictions and beliefs.

More generally, Hannah Arendt famously argued that only a 'truly bad' person has a 'good conscience', as she associated conscience with the intense and fraught reflection on your own actions (1972). For Arendt, a sense of guilt and remorse is an essential part of doing good in the world (see also Jankélévitch 2014). In this sense conscience is always troubled. This is a form of conscientious dissent that is not formed from a sense that a person cannot do otherwise, but precisely from the sense that they could.

Loneliness

For all their sociality, the lives of conscientious objectors were also often marked by loneliness. Before the war, hundreds of people had attended Roy's local pacifist meetings. By October 1939 just 13 people were attending. The chair left, announcing that he was going to join a community of German Protestant pacifist exiles known as the Bruderhof. Roy was becoming to feel increasingly isolated, as he described in his diary.

> [I am] a bundle of nerves… I can't talk to people in a normal way. Everyone seems to avoid me. It is my own fault… I can't interest myself in the things that most people are interested in.[33]

He told his diary that 'the pacifist plows a lonely furrow'.[34] The same day he wrote that he could tell what everyone was thinking, even if they did not say it: 'coward, coward, coward…. You're afraid to fight'.[35] He felt that women in particular were very critical and lacked sympathy for his stance.

Other conscientious objectors did not always provide much solace. Corrado Ruffoni, for example, a conscientious objector born in London to Italian parents, went to work on a farm and appeared slightly uncomfortable in the company of so many other conscientious objectors. He described them as all wearing 'beards and long hair' and moved out of the collective accommodation, finding it hard to live with others.[36] Similarly the conscientious objector, farmer and playwright Ronald Duncan would write in his published journal about the 'depth of stupid childishness to which so many moderately intelligent people are brought' (1944). Cyril Wright, another conscientious objector and socialist, would write at the time that living with other conscientious objectors 'has not lived up to expectations'.[37] One conscientious objector described his fellow pacifists as 'bloody awkward sods' and another thought they were 'difficult to relate to… narrow minded'. What all this speaks to is the way in which claims of conscience, although created in the midst of social relationships, can also serve to pull people apart. Conscience here risks slipping not only into a solipsistic vanity, but also an alienating individualism. The moral autonomy of 'me against the world' can easily become 'me alone'.

The anti-social conscience

Although both politicians and the wider British public routinely supported the right to conscience, conscientious objectors could still cause unease, and not just for themselves. More specifically, alongside their refusal to fight fascism, or take up arms alongside everyone else, they were also routinely criticised for the intensity of their sense of personal virtue. The Marxist critic Christopher Caudwell wrote in 1938 that pacifists are 'so imbued… with bourgeois notions of sin, that it never occurs [to them] that a preoccupation with one's own soul and one's own salvation is selfish' (1938, 117). Cyril Joad, once a leading light of the pacifist movement, criticised it for being 'aimed at the preservation of individual integrity in the face of war, rather than the prevention of that war' (Wallis 1991, 26), while Clifford Allen, former chair of the First World War No-Conscription Fellowship, was critical of conscientious objectors for being 'far too often in the spirit of half arrogant pride' (Wilkinson 1986, 104). All too often conscientious objectors were perceived as being too virtuous for their own good.

The social unease caused by conscientious objectors can be seen clearly in Robin Jenkins' novel *A Would-Be Saint* (2001 [1978]). Jenkins was himself a conscientious objector who spent the Second World War with a forestry unit on the West Coast of Scotland, and many of the book's elements mirror his own life story. The novel tells the story of Gavin Hamilton, a Scottish conscientious objector who provokes a mixture of respect and disdain from both the residents of the small town where he grows up and other pacifists. Gavin falls in love, but the relationship ends after he invites a homeless former prostitute to move in with him. When the Second World War is declared, Hamilton registers as a conscientious objector and is sent to a forestry unit in Argyll, where he lives in a hut with other pacifists. He becomes increasingly concerned that he should be forced to compromise on his principles, eventually leaving the communal hut and moving further up the mountainside to sleep and eat alone.

Throughout *A Would-Be Saint* Gavin's friends and acquaintances feel uneasy in his presence. But there is also some residual respect for his stance. One of his fellow conscientious objectors, in reference to other pacifists, comments that 'they had long ago put down their idealistic protest against the war… they lie awake at night, despising themselves for adding to the world's falseness and hypocrisy. Then they remember Gavin and feel instantly absolved' (2001, 212). In the last chapter of the book, as the war ends and the conscientious objectors are allowed

to go home, Hamilton goes missing. His fellow pacifists think he may have walked out into the wilderness to die, unable to live with others according to his deeply felt pacifist principles. They seem slightly disappointed when he eventually walks off the mountain. The critical response to Gavin's character in the book was equally ambivalent. Jenkins himself appeared slightly confused by the reaction.

> Somebody in the *Times Literary Supplement* said of Gavin that he was the most obnoxious hero she had read in modern fiction… I meant him to be a saint. (Murray 2006, 119)

In the responses to Gavin Hamilton, or the arguments of Caudwell, Joad and Allen, conscience is seen as coming close to a form of anti-social moral narcissism. Or, as George Orwell put it, 'it's probable that some who achieve or aspire to sainthood have never felt much temptation to be human beings' (1949). In such a vision, if we were to follow our conscience at all times, we would miss much of what makes life with other people worth living.

Conclusion

To speak of conscience is often to stand apart and alone – to stand up for what is right despite what everyone around us is doing and saying. We often think of conscience as a morally authentic reason for dissent, precisely because it causes us to step back from the day to day, the ebb and flow of personal loyalty and calculation, in order to stand up for what is right. In the popular imagination, acts of conscience are associated with the heroic defence of high principle, even when done on a small scale. Conscience is a valorised form of dissent, the ultimate form of moral autonomy, where people step back from their day-to-day ties and concerns and make a judgement about what is ultimately the right or wrong course of action.

However, the opposition between commitments of grand principle and the more prosaic and intimate ties of family, friends and colleagues can be overplayed. It is only through the seemingly mundane and everyday practices of specific relationships that broader commitments take effect and play out. It is out of these relationships that claims of conscience emerge and gain significance, as claims of conscience are entangled in multiple relations to friends, family, colleagues and nation. Yet this relationship is never easy. Although intimate relations are always

threaded through claims of conscience, acts of conscience can also undermine the very relationships from which they are formed.

The difficulties of living a socially meaningful and conscientious life point to the problem of grounding commitments within particular individuals. When conscience is understood as internal and autonomous, it also risks becoming unknown, unchained and unsocial. Claims of conscience therefore seek a mooring in collective life. But when those claims of conscience are threaded through social relations, the risk is either that the freedom in freedom of conscience becomes shackled or that very individualised notion of conscience undermines collective life. As claims of conscience are woven through social relations, conscience is itself a source of constant anxiety and unease – neither entirely apart nor inseparable, but always fraying bonds and causing disquiet.

As Raymond Williams put it, the individual moral 'search of self-fulfillment' that marks contemporary liberalism can also end in the denial of what makes life worth living (1966, 102). Yet at the same time it is this commitment to principles and a willingness to dissent in the most difficult of circumstances, when it would be easier to keep our heads down, that can give our lives both hope and meaning. As Susan Sontag wrote, 'We are moved by it, nourished by it. In the respect we pay to such lives, we acknowledge the presence of mystery in the world…' (1963). Such are the difficulties of living a conscientious life with others.

Notes

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Chapter 7
Friends with differences: ethics, rivalry and politics among Sri Lankan Tamil former political activists

Sidharthan Maunaguru

Ideological divergences and ethnic boundaries can test intimate relationships. Maintaining friendships despite these hurdles can thus appear to be an attempt to live one's political life in an ethical way.[1] The Sri Lankan ethnic conflict offers a case in point for such intimate relationships within a highly charged political context. The conflict has a long history, dating back to colonial times. However, for many scholars (Daniel 1996; Tambiah 1986; Spencer 1990) the crucial tipping point appears to be the 1983 ethnic riots, effectively a pogrom against Tamils. This took place in the capital, Colombo, igniting the violent ethnic conflict that had long simmered between the Tamils and the Sri Lankan government.

Tamil militant/youth movements started emerging in the 1970s to fight for Tamil minority rights. Ideological and power struggles subsequently resulted in conflicts and killings within and between the Tamil militant movements until, in the mid-1980s, the Liberation Tigers for Tamil Eelam or LTTE (one of the militant movements) wiped out the other Tamil militant movements. It then claimed to be the sole representative of the Tamil cause. The intense and brutal civil war is dated from approximately 1983 to 2009. During this time the LTTE was eliminated by the Sri Lankan state (Thiranagama 2011).

In this chapter I focus on the period between the early 1970s to the mid-1980s – a time when Tamil militant movements emerged and major debates abounded within and between these youth militant movements. Topics such as the armed struggle, Tamils' rights, rights of the minorities, caste issues, independent state and so forth provoked intense debate. Young people at that time joined different groups according to their diverse ideologies. However, they were also friends, school mates,

relatives and comrades, broadly fighting for the same objective and coming from the same sociality despite being members of different militant movements. Due to the killings and conflicts between and within Tamil militant movements, a number of militants refused to take part and left. Dissent within Tamil militant movements during this time created a dangerous situation both for those in Sri Lanka and for people forced to seek refuge in other countries.

As people described to me how their lives had been marked by such dissent, I most often heard the term 'conscience' and reference to the choices made with the intention of not harming others. My interviewees were struggling with and between forms of intimacy (friendships) and their ideological positions, forced to consider whether they should publicly display their dissent or hold it private and in silence. How do they deal with being both a friend and an ideological rival? Why and how could political dissidents publicly claim their stand, yet at the same time withdraw from the public claim because of the potential harm to their intimate others?

This chapter examines two of the central questions that run through this collection. It asks what are the ways in which intimate relations work through and against forms of political dissent. In doing so it also examines the cultural and social resources on which people draw to explain and understand – to themselves and others – the grounds and purpose of their dissent. Thiranagama (2010) argues that the language of the traitor had become one of the ways in which people were marked and killed during the inter-militant conflict or internal killings within militant movements. LTTE used this term to justify such murders: LTTE's own cadres or other Tamils were described as those who had betrayed the Tamil cause and Tamil community. In other words, the 'traitor' comes from within a community, and from the intimate relationship and sociality that one has with others. Consequently a 'traitor is distinct from enemies and strangers by virtue of being potentially ourselves, a betrayal from within' (Thiranagama 2010, 128).

However, in my ethnographic setting and my conversations with ex-political activists, a different narrative emerged: that of political dissidents who left the movements, refused to kill fellow activists or challenged the internal killings. Here we see the flip side, if you like, of the same tensions between similarity and difference. Furthermore, such activists constantly struggled to maintain their friendships even as they opposed the ideological views of their friends or fellow activists. Some of them refused to write about the past murders because it might harm their friends who were still alive. In liberal political discourse, the intimate

and the political are perceived as separate. Political activists are treated as individuals and their ideological commitment is separated from their social relationships.

In this chapter, I map out the relationships and struggles of political activists who sought to remain a friend to someone with an opposing political ideology. I argue that the struggle to maintain friendships with those who held dissenting ideological views, or were members of different militant movements, can also be a political claim. In Schmitt's famous formulation (2007), friendship marks the boundaries of the political, with no alliances or ties crossing the line. In contrast, I contend that both politics and friendship can be concerned with maintaining relations across boundaries. Politics is not devoid of intimacy and friendship, but rather driven by them. In other words, if we were to think of friendship as based on 'emotion' and 'reciprocity', with a possibility of rivalry (Pitt-Rivers 2016), I argue that being a friend to people with dissenting political ideological views or ex-militants from adverse groups is an ethical stance. For my Tamil interlocuters, friendship is not only about care – although it is about that too – but also about politics and more importantly, about the *ethics of and in politics*.

Ranjan

I met Ranjan in Europe. He comes from Sri Lanka, but has been living in a foreign country as a refugee for more than 25 years. Ranjan was involved with PLOTE, a Tamil militant movement with a leftist ideology that emerged in the mid-1970s. Deeply fond of reading, he spent most of his time in the village library during his childhood and later became involved in establishing *vasagar vatam* (readers' circles) in his village. He was introduced to Marxist ideologies through the books and magazines that came to the library. In his village he fought against caste discrimination. Ranjan decided to join the People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE) when he was approached by them, because their ideology was based more on Marxist ideology and class revolution along with Tamil nationalistic struggle. He engaged in PLOTE's political activities, taking classes and recruiting other young people to the movement. All of them dreamed of what obtaining rights for Tamils could achieve in a few years and of liberating the most oppressed class of people in Sri Lanka. They held a *pasarai* event (a political workshop that took place once in a while to educate, learn and converse openly about their cause and activities), in which members discussed, debated and

even undertook a self-criticising exercise. However, an internal power struggle emerged that Ranjan ascribed to some members' desire to gain control of the movement.

Ranjan told me that he always believed in democracy and collective decision-making within the group. He joined PLOTE because of its democratic policy and support for class struggle, believing that the organsiation had a democratic space and that its decisions were taken collectively by the central committee. The internal power struggle served to reduce the democratic space, despite protests from members, including Ranjan. He and other comrades believed that people needed to be educated before taking up arms, to ensure this truly was the people's revolution. They believed the national struggle aimed to find a solution to the ethnic conflict, but also that the class struggle should continue to include the Sinhalese from the South to achieve a revolution countrywide. However, he added, differences of opinion led to internal killings, endangering the democratic process.

> We had a very strong democratic structure within the PLOTE. For example, a book was published with the leader's speech (leader of the PLOTE) and his photo on the cover, so we refused to distribute it in Sri Lanka because it would create a personal cult. Now, I think at that time we were following extreme democracy. But we believed in it. When internal killings and problems occurred some of us, from Sri Lanka, had a 7 days conference in Jaffna, where we decided to have the same conference in India where the leader was living. We decided to go to India to hold a conference and hand over our resolution to the central committee. But the central committee did not support our resolution. We were disappointed and wanted to leave PLOTE.

After the internal conflict and killings, some members did leave for Sri Lanka or other countries; others joined alternative militant movements or remained in India. Some of them had multiple discussions which were published in books or magazines or pamphlets, believing that these discussions and debates needed to be communicated to the people. During the internal rift Ranjan's outspoken behaviour led to him being targeted; he was indeed shot, but survived. During this time he was involved in recruiting other young people and ex cadres who wanted to form a united front. However, he soon realised that not everyone supported a democratic process or was ready to make collaborative decisions. So he abandoned his efforts.

Rajan did not want to leave India because he could not leave his fellow ex-fighters. But in the end he decided to go abroad. With the help of friends, he left and ended up in a foreign country, where he works as a sweeper and cleaner. Since then Ranjan has been helping his fellow ex-fighters to move out of India or with their daily expenses. He sends most of the money he earns to his former fellow fighters and friends back in India and Sri Lanka. He explained that he felt responsible for their situation.

> These people came and joined the movement because of my campaigning. So I feel that I have a duty to help them and bring them to a position where they can survive after what has happened to our movement.

Ranjan remained active, continuing to participate in political activities even after settling in a foreign country. He explained that he had always taken a stand against power (*athikaram*), from his early questioning of caste discrimination when he was a young boy in his village. Since then Ranjan learned to challenge all forms of power and authority. He went on to question his teachers' authority in school, then to question not only LTTE's power but also that of the Sri Lankan state, PLOTE and other movements that used their power to control people or their own cadres. Ranjan acknowledged this was a recurring trait.

> Most of the people know me as critical about everyone, not just LTTE. I have always believed in democracy and raised my voice whenever democracy was under threat.

He repeatedly voiced his conviction that a democratic process is of utmost importance in fighting for freedom and minority rights, strongly believing that he needed to speak out whenever people were silenced by force. Yet Ranjan's own movement, PLOTE, turned against him when he took a stand for a more democratic process. Despite this strong stand for democracy and a socialist ideology without compromise, he managed to maintain friendships with those who opposed his views. Ranjan is still convinced that through conversation, 'we could realise and acknowledge our mistakes and reform the struggle against any power'.

Some of his friends share his belief: one of them, while being a strong supporter of another militant movement opposed to Ranjan's political views, provided him with the money to establish a journal that

criticises that same movement. As for Ranjan, he even helped a former PLOTE cadre who had tried to carry out the organisation's order to kill him during the internal struggle. The men had been good friends as PLOTE members before the friend changed sides and started to follow the leaders' orders. However, on his friend's arrival in Europe, Ranjan helped him to settle down, explaining that he still remains critical about his friend's current political views and activities.

> We all believed in this and joined the movement to fight against the Sri Lankan state. He still wants to do something. He believes in it and feels that Tamils are suffering. I am critical about how he wants to achieve rights for Tamils, but that should not stop me from helping him. He was my friend and he still is. We can be friends, but at the same time I can be critical about his activities. But you should talk to him, he may have a different view on this.

Ranjan thinks this – maintaining your friendship despite holding opposite views – is what constitutes a democratic process; everyone is entitled to his or her own view. Keeping friendship and conversation going, while being critical of the opinions expressed, answers to his claims of conscience and his belief in supporting a democratic process. Ranjan joined PLOTE for that belief, then left it because that democratic space was withdrawn. But he exercises such ideological belief in his daily life with intimate others. Being a friend and being critical are thus for him interconnected – a public embodiment of his stand for democratic choice.

I advised Ranjan to write his autobiography, but he rejected the idea. He explained that if he were to write his story it would expose many people, friends or former friends, as well as former fellow cadres, to risk. He does not want to harm them, so prefers to keep silent. In other words, the act of keeping silent is a way of managing to hold on to his former and current friends, and to avoid harming them in the present. The struggle between publicly criticising his political opponents and at the same time maintaining their friendship also reaches a limit at these moments. Ranjan can publicly criticise, but he is aware that he cannot reveal 'too much' because it may affect others' lives. Through this careful manoeuvring between acts of silence and acts of speech, he crafts and produces what he calls his conscience (*manasaatchi*) when articulating his political views and belief in democracy.

The notion of friendship here is cultivated not through political theorist Carl Schmitt's ideas of 'friend and enemy' as a binary narrative

(2007). Nor is it related to the intimate betrayal from which the 'traitor' emerges (Thiranagama 2010). Rather, it is formed through the very struggle and the ambiguity attached to the friendship. In *The Concept of the Political* (2007) Schmitt argues that politics emerges from being able to distinguish between friend and enemy. The political enmity is public, not personal. Further, for Schmitt, political enmity arises from many origins related to different ideologies and identities (class, ethnicity and so on). Friends come together, fighting and dying for each other as well as killing those who oppose them. Vinx (2019) points out that Schmitt in *The Concept of the Political*, argues that:

> Apolitical community exists, then, wherever a group of people are willing to engage in political life by distinguishing themselves from outsiders through the drawing of a friend-enemy distinction (Vinx 2019).[2]

The political community is based on identifying and belonging to a particular identity which relates to the duality of friends versus enemies (the latter comprising those who are opposed to that identity or have a different identity). Furthermore, for Schmitt any life 'that does not involve the friend–enemy distinction would be shallow, insignificant and meaningless' (Vinx 2019).[3] A de-politicisation occurs where the enemy and friend distinction is erased. Pitt-Rivers argues in his article the 'Paradox of Friendship' (2016) that friendship is not opposed to kinship-related ideas of reciprocity. It is rather an 'implicit demand for a reciprocal counter-gesture', one that 'is more usefully compared to Maussian gift'. Pitt-Rivers further argues that friendship is not only about choices or emotions or based on love, but is also based on reciprocity and responsibility.[4] The paradox of the friendship for him resides in not only speaking about it, but also acting upon it.

> The gesture of friendship demands a reciprocal countergesture (more or less immediately depending on the local mores), and if this countergesture does not come, it means that the friendship is refused and the initiator humiliated such that he will surely become an enemy… but it cannot be given expression with the aim of provoking the countergesture, nor reciprocated out of mere convenience or with an eye to profit… *The paradox can be summed up thusly: to defend the purity of one's sentiments one must act in (blind or hypocritical) ignorance of the consequences of one's actions*! (Pitt-Rivers 2016, 448–9)

In other words the friendship is not just a reciprocal or instrumental act, but also a moral act enacted in daily life. However, for this very reason an ambivalence is also attached to friendship like the one attached to the idea of a gift, since it relates to ideas of danger and humiliation when it is returned. The friendship gesture from a possible friend could also result in a challenge or a refusal. In other words, a rival and a friend can coexist within the friendship.

> The potential enemy hidden under the surface of friendship, like the hatred concealed in love's centre, is in this case exposed for all to see, and this inverts everything: there is, of course, exchange, but the things exchanged lose their habitual meaning. (Pitt-Rivers 2016, 450)

The friendship is not devoid of possible challenge or rivalry, like the blood brothers who can challenge each other in the name of honour without breaking the brotherhood (Pitt-Rivers 2016). Pitt-Rivers reminds us that the paradox is always present, but the friendship is seen in the act rather than through the words – an act with ambiguity and potential danger. This idea of friendship provides a more complex picture of being friends, breaking away from the binary notion of friend and enemy. Ranjan's story of struggling to be a friend with people who have opposite political views and former militants from different groups is thus an ethical struggle placed in politics. He embodies the politics of his belief through maintaining the friendship with friends/rivals holding opposite political views, beneath which a potential for challenge and danger is always present. But, as Pitt-Rivers reminds us, it is the act more than the moral ground of words that defines the friendship. Here in Ranjan's case, the act of being a friend with his rivals in political ideology, and of struggling with it, is an act in the everyday that defines his ethics, politics and the friendship altogether. For him politics is not about defining the enemy, but opening the conversation.

Fighting an ideological battle while maintaining the friendship is also an ethical manifestation of the type of politics Ranjan believes in. Furthermore, he told me that he cannot write or disclose more about certain matters because of the risk that such information might be used by the state or power against militants in the Tamil movement. In this sense, he refuses to articulate intimate knowledge. According to Thiranagama (2010) the term 'traitor' became a powerful category – and at the same time a category to be destroyed because of the intimate knowledge and relationship that the person had betrayed. They were

thus found to be worse than enemies and consequently deserving of punishment and death. Ranjan occupies a space of neither enemy nor traitor; it is rather the ambivalent space of friendship, which contains the potential to turn into any of these.

Conscience and ethics in politics and friendship

While we were having multiple conversations, I asked Ranjan one day about his views on conscience (*manasaatchi*). He expressed a close relationship with conscience, which underlies his act of maintaining friendship with political dissenters, through which he practises the ethics of politics. According to Ranjan, conscience is formed in two ways. The mainstream conscience, a collective conscience, emerges from the people who are in power and so becomes the 'majority conscience'. Ranjan claims that the conscience of the majority of the Tamil community reflects an orientation towards violence and a hunger for power, which is epitomised by the LTTE. He believes that the other conscience emerges from marginalised people like himself, declaring that 'We are very few people and we are crazy people; you could call us the *manasaatchi* (conscience) of the marginalised people'. Ranjan further argued that *manasaatchi* (conscience) is both individual and collective, the collective version deriving from power and class. However, individual conscience is based on the *mana uruthal* (constant stressful uncertainty of whether one has done right or wrong). He said that now he mostly cares about helping the people who have suffered from the war and armed struggle than about politics.

> I am helping people because of my *mana uruthal*. I have *kuttra unarvu* (feelings of guilt). I brought so many people into the movement. We believed in the movement at that time, but things went wrong. We lost everything and they also lost their lives. I feel bad about what I have done. So I help people. I need to help the person who is trying to do something for the society because I am not doing anything myself. But people also used me. They used what I sent them for doing wrong things or lied to me. But I still helped them. I do not have any savings because of my *kuttra unarvu*. That is how I appease the claims of my conscience. Many people may think that I am stupid and crazy, but I think I have always stood for justice and democracy. My critics also agree how crazy I could be to have stayed on that path. I think the conscience is connected to *kuttra unarvu*.

He further claimed that his conscience is also based on, or comes from, people who are oppressed.

> Before 1985, we went with a belief in social change and revolution. I did not join for attraction of arms. I was interested in Marxist ideology, that is why I joined PLOTE rather than LTTE because of my conscience of the oppressed people. Also, I left PLOTE because some people wanted to monopolise the power and it changed into leader's worship. I could not live with my conscience, being thus away from the oppressed people's conscience.

More generally, the concept of conscience has historically shifted. It has often been associated with particular traditions, such as Christianity, Protestantism and the Enlightenment, but now also encompasses modern secular thinkers. These arguments revolve around God, individual inner sense, reason, being human and the need to protect human dignity or foster moral autonomy (Badiou 2003; Andrew 2001; Maclure and Taylor 2011). Conscience is about doing or differentiating between bad from good in a classical sense. As Kelly argues, conscience can be perceived in many ways, from feelings to rational practice based on judgement and intuition. It can consequently be located both in the individual and social, even in the divine. It may also be seen as a site of doubt (2015).

What is the relationship between Ranjan's particular claim of conscience and his desire to maintain friendships with people with an opposing political ideology? Ranjan learned to live with his ideology: he follows his conscience by staying true to it. What he believes to be political is shaped by the everyday struggle, failures, limits and his relationship with others. By being a friend to someone who possesses opposing political views, debating and struggling to maintain the relationship while strongly articulating his own opinions through silence and writing, Ranjan cultivates both his ethics of politics and his belief in democracy and freedom. His conscience would not let him kill or negate others' points of view, but instead urged him to debate with them. Although Ranjan admits people might disagree with him or call him crazy, all of them agree that he never strayed from the path of justice and democratic process. The friendships that he struggles to maintain with rivals bring a return (reciprocal as we have seen earlier): a recognition by these friends/rivals that his beliefs and his practices are for democracy and freedom.

Such recognition enables Ranjan to check and live with his conscience, which is attached to *mana uruthal* (stressful uncertainty of

whether one is doing right or wrong). His conscience as a form of ethics of doing and acting is translated in the friendship that he maintains with someone possessing an opposing political ideology, refusing to denounce him or her as an enemy and/or traitor. Thus the recognition Ranjan receives from friends/rivals of his stand for democracy, despite their different political views, is based on his experience of living his political view (of democracy) in practice. Maybe for Ranjan, as for many others like him, friendship is not only emotional or instrumental, focused on care: it is also political and relates to the ethics of/in politics.

Let us now turn to Murali's story to explore how friendship and politics play out between two persons from different ethnic groups.

Murali

Murali came to Europe as a refugee. I met him in the small town where he lives with his family and works in a shop. From a young age Murali started reading books from the school library, ranging for the stories of Jeyakanthan[5] to articles about Tamil identity and the god Murugan (a Hindu deity). He was a devotee, but his father encouraged him to read both religious texts and books about Mao. His father, a teacher, received a Marxist newspaper every week which Murali started to read. His readings led him to become a rebel, asking questions and being critical about power. He was involved in caste issues and spoke out against the discrimination practised in his own village. At an early age Murali became a supporter of *Tamil arasu katchi* (a Tamil political party that supported the Tamil cause). Later his friends pointed out that this political party did not address caste discrimination; they observed that not all 'Sinhala people' were bad, but maintained that one should fight only against the Sinhala state. After the burning of the public library in Jaffna,[6] Murali decided to leave home to join a political movement.

> Some of us were discussing among ourselves that we should join a youth movement that will find a solution for Tamils without hurting Sinhala people. And at that time only PLOTE claimed our enemy was the Sinhala state, not the people.

Murali thus decided to join PLOTE. In a similar way to Ranjan, however, he was concerned by the internal conflict and division within PLOTE because he was against internal killings. He always believed that we have the right to speak and voice our own opinions in the democratic process

of decision-making, and to challenge decisions in a political group. In the end he left PLOTE. Since Murali was friends with a member of another Tamil movement with left ideology, he joined this movement. During this time LTTE banned every other Tamil militant movement. Murali was printing a magazine criticising LTTE's activities when he was arrested one day by the LTTE; he was only released after a year. Later, he left for the capital, Colombo. Here Murali met a couple of friends and they discussed establishing a political paper. Eventually they established a Tamil paper with support from a non-profit making organisation. The same organisation also released a Sinhala progressive paper, and as a result Murali was introduced to Sanjay, a Sinhala human rights activist. He claims that they all became very good friends. During Chandrika Kumaratunga's presidency in the mid-1990s, the paper ran into trouble because it published an article that claimed Chandrika's policies were not bringing about any big changes.

Following this criticism, tension surfaced with colleagues and friends attached to the Sinhala paper. This tension escalated one day when Sanjay mentioned indirectly that Murali was a *Koittiya supporter* (LTTE supporter). Murali was so upset that he took the matter to the organisation's central committee. After discussion Sanjay was asked publicly to apologise, which he did. Murali maintained that after this apology they continued their friendship. He believes Sanjay, his Sinhala friend, is an honest man who shares the same ideas of fighting for people who are oppressed. Murali believes that Sanjay has made mistakes and they fought about it, but their friendship still continues. To Murali, Sanjay is not his enemy, but rather a friend with a different ideology.

Many years later Sanjay told Murali one day that only when one experiences the pain of the minority can one understand their feelings. Sanjay had to travel and claim refugee status in a European country as a result of political pressure from the Sri Lankan state; he thus experienced life as a second-class citizen, confronting racism, and thus appreciated the feelings of Tamils in Sri Lanka. Murali appreciated his friend's honesty in accepting his mistakes. He considers that although Sanjay sometimes speaks without thinking, he is basically an honest person.

Ranjan's story describes the maintenance of friendship with others who differ politically but come from the same ethnic group. In contrast, Murali's friendship with Sanjay cuts across different ethnic groups and encompasses a different ethnic sociality. Thiranagama (2010) points out that there is a difference between the term of 'traitor' and the term of 'enemy'. A traitor is attached to a betrayal from the inside – an intimate

betrayal that emerges only within the same ethnic groups – whereas the concept of an 'enemy' is based on the notion of a stranger or someone coming from different ethnic groups or a non-familiar space. The social location of a person, and the historical struggle that defines the person's social location, are both important in understanding how one learns to live with the other (Thiranagama 2018). The ethnic reality and the ethnic conflict of Sri Lanka played out in the friendship between Sanjay and Murali when he was accused of being a LTTE supporter. Such an accusation is a stereotypical generalisation of Tamils whom the majority of Sinhalese perceive or suspect to support the LTTE.

Even though both Sanjay and Murali were – and are – political activists with a left-leaning ideology, the long history of ethnic conflict, and ethnic identity formation as majority and minority, played out in their struggle to maintain their friendship. Here it seems that maintaining the friendship is not about the recognition of one's political stand for democracy, as it is in Ranjan's case. It is rather about a friendship based on recognising the pain and politics of the ethnic other. After Sanjay's accusation against Murali he apologised in public, and recognised Murali's social location when faced with living as a minority in a European country himself. Maintaining the friendship becomes possible between political activists from different ethnic groups once they understand and accept one another's ethnic and social location and appreciate their political history and struggle. A sense of ethnic difference was central to the friendship of Murali and Sanjay. The ethics of/in politics in this friendship across ethnic lines is not only in maintaining the relationship with rivals or people with different political ideologies, but also in recognising and being aware of each other's ethnic and social location and political history. Otherwise, a friend always carries the potential risk of turning into an enemy.

Murali never wanted to leave Sri Lanka or liked any other country, but he was forced to go. His name became incorrectly linked with an accusation of anti-government activities, at a time where the Sri Lankan government targeted anyone who was speaking against the state. One day he heard that the police were looking for him. Murali immediately called Sanjay, who told him not to worry. He asked Murali to come to his office, where he could stay safely until he looked into his case. Sanjay then arranged a lawyer to accompany him to a meeting with the police. This they duly attended, and Murali said that Sanjay stayed with him and took his side against the police. He told the police that he handed over Murali to them and that it was now their responsibility to release him soon after the inquiry. Eventually he was released from police custody.

Murali acknowledges that his friendship with Sanjay is full of contradictions, conflicts and ideological differences. Yet such conflict neither resorted to violence nor broke the friendship between them. Murali believes that it is because Sanjay also has a conscience and is essentially an honest person. Sanjay publicly questioned the activities of Sinhala political movements even as Murali did when these became something less than what he stood for.

Ethnicity, friendship and political ethics

For Murali, conscience is a form of ethics that is inseparable from politics. When we discussed what conscience means to him, Murali explained:

> Conscience is connected with ethics/*arum*. All the rights that you have apply to other persons as well. That is an equality which is based on *arum*. Otherwise there is a problem. I think every human is a political being, so *arum* is ethical as well as political. Politics is based on equality – everyone has equal rights and has the right to claim those rights when those are not given. Equality is a form of *dharma/arum*. The conscience is to make sure that you and others practise that equality.

The story of Sanjay and Murali tells us how, even though they have taken different stands and ideologies at different times of their lived experience, they maintained their friendship, seeking to understand each other within the political history of the ethnic conflict despite coming from different ethnic backgrounds. Especially in a period of crisis and under threat to their own lives, they tried to be there for the other when he needed it. On the other hand, however, they continually fought on ideological grounds. Murali's claim that the ethics of one's action is political is an important part in his relationship with Sanjay. Despite the conflicts and Sanjay branding him a LTTE supporter, Murali recognised Sanjay as an ethical person and with correct politics: a politics of equality. For Murali, Sanjay's public apology shows that the latter's ethics are right even though he was wrong in making such an accusation against Murali. Murali appreciates Sanjay's ethics and politics not only because Sanjay apologised in public, but also because he recognised the pain of being a minority and the politics surrounding this. Murali's understanding of what is ethical and political are interwoven with his subjectivity and enacted in performance. Claiming he will not ask anyone to do what he

cannot perform or do (which would go against his conscience) is a nexus where his ethics, politics and conscience converge.

Murali's conscience also stands for equality in rights and speech. Thus Sanjay has the right to express his views, but also he has the ethics in politics publicly to acknowledge his mistakes in accusing Murali and to respect his friend's freedom, and equality in expressing his opinions and politics. The mutual understanding, learning and correcting are the ethics of/in politics that both men enact, despite their ethnic differences. Being there for his friend and constantly struggling to maintain their friendship, even while opposing and challenging his ideology, is part of each living according to his conscience.

Murali also said that he will fight for the right of a person to say what he or she wants to say, even though he completely disagrees with that person. Yet that does not necessarily mean that he compromises with his beliefs and political ideology. He turns to Sanjay when his life comes under threat by the police, even though Sanjay is Sinhala. This decision is made possible by Sanjay's ethics and politics, on which their friendship is based and which makes Sanjay more trustworthy than others. Maybe learning to be friends with Sanjay, struggling to understand him, continuing his friendship over many years, is Murali's way of calming his claims of conscience based on democracy and equal rights. The ambivalent nature of any friendship has the potential danger for the friend to turn into an enemy or a rival. In this case, however, the everyday act of being a friend and the reciprocal gesture make the friendship endure.

Here the recognition is perhaps about correcting oneself in relation to another – recognising one's privilege, its limits and the ethnic historical and political struggle of the other. In so doing they establish a politics that each relates to: an ethical politics. The intimacy between Sanjay and Murali is also a political and ethical act of politics, learned through their many years of friendship. Murali's claims of conscience lead him not only to preach or write about democracy and equality, but also to embody it, and to demonstrate it in his everyday life with others, his friends.

Conclusion

The stories of Murali and Ranjan and their articulations of the concept of conscience, friendship, politics and ethics are not delimited by neat boundaries or clearly defined concepts. They are lived experiences, articulated through being intimate with others in their daily lives. The constant struggle of learning and relearning to live with intimate

others with opposite political ideologies while continuing to stand for one's ideology is where the lived experiences of conscience are made, unmade and remade. Many political dissidents may appear as extraordinary people who left their home, family and work for revolution or social change and engaged in extraordinary activities. Now they live in many parts of the world and work as cleaners, dishwashers, taxi drivers and shopkeepers. However, in between the extraordinary and ordinary moments of their lives, these dissidents learned to embody and perform what they believe is their political ideology. In their intimate relationships with others, when confronted with conflicting ideologies, they did not frame them as betrayers or enemies; rather, they struggled to maintain the relationship because the claims of their conscience fostered the right of others to speak and think differently. Struggling and working to hold onto their friendships is lived through not writing about those who opposed their ideology or silencing themselves about them in public. Such acts also point to the fact that these political activists are concerned about the harm they could bring to others' lives. Holding, struggling and living with intimate others, friends, without breaking away or harming them is a form of living according to their conscience – a conscience as form of ethics and politics.

The concepts of politics, ethics and conscience are embedded in everyday life. As Das argues, 'if the concept has vitality this must be drawn from the life they participate in and not from their desire for abstract reasoning alone' (Das 2015, 8). In other words, for Das ideologies or concepts do not transcend the everyday, but emerge as parts and particles of the everyday and ordinary activities, words and performances. Das argues that ethics emerges from the ordinary everyday life of world making and world unmaking (2015). Ethics is not pre-given; it is rather an 'ethical affordance' (Keane 2016, 31) that is constantly evolving. Scholars have sometimes placed ethics outside 'dirty politics' as a moral ground for criticism and reflection (Scheper-Hughes 1995; Farmer 1999). But as Mattingly and Throop (2018) show in their very recent article, in recent years a number of anthropological works have emerged to rethink politics and political subjects through the lens of ethics: political agency and ethics in Mahmood's work (2005), politics of care and humanitarianism in Fassin's work (2011).

Recent studies on politics and ethics also help us to think 'through how the ethical may yet still exceed its specific political emplacement' (Mattingly and Throop 2018, 485; Pandian 2009). Politics and ethics at times come together and at other times remain separate (Dave 2012; Stevenson 2014; Zigon 2017; Throop 2014). These works provide new

lenses to rethink politics and ethics. In my ethnographic setting of political dissidents and their struggles in maintaining friendship with their political rivals or people with opposing political ideologies, there is an ethical stance in the forms of relationality they practise with others.

Friendship provides a way to think about ethics and vice versa, and particular forms of 'moral experience' (Throop 2014; Zigon and Throop 2014). I argue in this chapter that friendship, and its formation and struggle, is entangled not only with ethics, but also with politics and ethics in/of politics. In Murali's and Ranjan's stories, friendship is at the core of their practice of politics and becomes a 'form of life' (Das 2007) – an ethical life they embody. The friendship is not only about choices, but also a reciprocal gesture through which the friendship endures.

However, friendship is ambiguous; a friend always has the potential to turn into a category of enemy, traitor or a rival. Struggling, maintaining and learning to be a friend with another person with opposing political views involves practising, cultivating and embodying the ethics in/of politics. In this sense the friendship with a person holding an opposite political view is both intimate and public. The struggle to maintain the friendship without referring to it through the terms of 'traitor' or 'enemy' is the work of a new politics that Ranjan and Murali are trying to achieve. It is not about right or wrong in following and practising political ideologies, but it is about learning and living political ideology through their intimate interaction. Through careful and deliberate silencing, writing and voicing their political stands with intimate others possessing opposing political views, the ethics in/of politics emerges.

However, the friendship and ethics of/in politics plays out differently based on where the friendship is coming from and its ethnic, social and historical context. In Ranjan's case, the friendship with political dissenters is a struggle in which he cross-checks with his conscience his practice of politics, a politics of democracy and freedom of speech. In Murali's case, and his friendship with Sanjay, the ethnic other, it is not about maintaining the friendship with political dissenters. It is rather about identifying and connecting with another person with opposing political views who nevertheless has same ethics in/of politics. The friendship and ethics are not divorced from ethnic, social and historical realities. The friendship with the ethnic other, who has different political ideological views, is a different kind of ethics of/in politics that confers an asymmetrical relationship. Such friendship becomes possible by identifying, recognising and knowing the shared ethics in/of politics of each other. However, in both cases the friendship holds the danger of either becoming a traitor or an enemy.

The ethics and politics that people such as Murali and Ranjan hold on to and struggle to keep in their everyday lives is to maintain and practise friendship with political dissenters to keep their friendship from reaching its limits. In other words, politics and ethics mutually shape and absorb one another through the concept of friendship. Politics and ethics emerge only in relation to others, as rivals or friends within the social historical process, not as an abstract individual ideological stand. However, the friendship also has its limits. When one of the friends' political ideologies and practices become unrecognisable or exceed the other's fundamental political ideologies, then the friendship does reach its limits. One of my interlocutors told me that when he heard about the domestic violence committed by his long-term friend, with whom he politically disagreed, he broke off the friendship. In other words, the struggle to maintain a friendship with a person with an opposed political ideology is overpowered when the bases of the *ethics of/in politics* on which this friendship is maintained come into question.

The conscience that both Murali and Ranjan claim in their politics and in their friendship is both political and ethical. The testimonies of Murali and Ranjan evoke how they live with, and learn to live with, *mana uruthal* (stressful uncertainty of whether one is doing right or wrong) and *kuttra unarvu* (feelings of guilt) which are related to *manasaatchi* (conscience). The *manasaatchi* is located not only within the individual, or in the abstract concept or ideology he or she embodies, but also the stance he or she takes in the everyday act of living with their intimate others while being critical about their activities and ideological beliefs. The living and learning to live congruent with one's ideology and ideas while maintaining their intimacy with others brings the concepts of politics, ethics and conscience to life.

Notes

1 The writing of this chapter was made possible through the support of an ERC Horizon 2020 Consolidator Grant (648477 AnCon ERC-2014-CoG).

2 As cited in https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/schmitt/. Accessed 29 December 2018.

3 As cited in https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/schmitt/. Accessed 29 December 2018.

4 'Rather than exploring successful friendships in different societies, we ought to examine friendships gone wrong to assess the effect of different ideas of friendship' (Pitt-Rivers 2016, 447).

5 A famous Indian Tamil writer about social issues.

6 This major event took place in the early 1980s. The public library of Jaffna, which contained many rare books, was burned down. This fire was to prove a decisive factor in many young Tamils' decision to join the armed struggle against the Sinhala state.

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Chapter 8

The intimacy of details: a Tibetan diary of dissent

Carole McGranahan

The dissenter is a political figure that people think they know. Yet, if the public nature of political dissent can generate widespread external knowledge, what exactly is it that is known? The topic of dissent or the dissenter – or both? In each case, claims to truth are key. People make claims to the what and why of dissent, as well as to the character of the dissenter. Some make claims as unqualified truths; others qualify their statements as being things that they have heard, but have not been able to confirm. Rumour and gossip about dissent and dissenters dwell in the elastic realm of plausible evidence that connects qualified and unqualified truth claims (White 1994, 2000). Central to such claims and their repercussions are details (Lutz 2006). Details are crucial to storytelling, to making an argument, to building evidence for or against something. If dissent is a challenge to the status quo, detail is often an important part of supporting or rejecting that challenge. Details are not neutral, but can instead enable action. They are part of an interpretative politics of knowledge. Used skilfully in the right (or wrong) hands, details can be devastating.

Public political dissent can connote a false sense of intimacy. Public personas are not necessarily the same as private ones, yet the two may be very strongly entwined. The private informs the public and vice versa. But who is privy to knowledge of the intimate? Intimate relations – whether of family, friends, lovers or enemies – are not always part of the story of public dissent or dissenters. Yet this is where the details of dissent flourish: those that do matter and those that are made to matter. In their positioning as evidence in a story, details carve out a narrative. Is this a story of resistance or refusal, a cause that was justified or not, with an outcome that was successful, tragic or forgotten? Dissent is not a self-evident aspect of any act. Instead it is relational and embedded

in contextual forms of interpretation. The same act can be perceived in different ways depending on political context. What for some is a mundane or unimportant act may for others be rich with significance. Details can shape stories and interpretations in meaningful ways. It is often in the details of everyday life, including those of intimate relationships, that we can find components of dissent.

In a review of the scholarship on political dissent, anthropologist Tobias Kelly suggests that intimate domains such as family have been mostly overlooked in favor of the liberal subject and attendant notions of personhood, agency and individual freedom (2019). Consideration of the intimate, of the relations and commitments of both kinship and friendship, require analysis that precedes and exceeds a liberal (or any other sort) of individual. Instead, in some instances it is more resonant with now longstanding anthropological thinking of the 'dividual', following Marilyn Strathern's 1988 articulation of a self who is created and situated in a network of intimate kin relations. In taking the 'dividual' as a possible, and even primary, self of political dissent, we enter the world of familial relations, of obligations and connections to family that are manifest and acknowledged in society. For a figure of public political dissent, tracking familial and other intimate relations can be a matter of surveillance, speculation and strategy. If intimacy is a relationship of proximity and an intense form of knowing, then acts of dissent might both find shape in and reverberate through our most intimate of relationships. Individuals may be dissenting with or against family, lovers or friends, and thus the details of these social relations may themselves challenge societal expectations as well as political projects.

Situating the dissenter socially involves understanding political dissent within 'the thick social and cultural relations out of which they emerge and take effect' (Amarasuriya et al. chapter 1). Dissent takes place within societal frameworks, even as it may challenge them, and is thus positioned against a normative belief, form or practice. There must be a hegemonic or authoritative condition against which dissent unfolds. Beyond this, dissent may take a range of forms. It is not singular nor even constant within or across cases. Conditions of possibility for dissent shape form and content. In the period of early to mid-twentieth-century Tibet, prior to and following Chinese communist invasion and colonisation, conditions for political dissent were highly circumscribed by a range of factors: region, class, education, religious sect and more. Family was sometimes also on the list of indicators for dissent.

Only some families in historical Tibet had names and were known beyond their own immediate region. The Pangdatsang family was one

of them. In the span of one generation, this family rose from being important traders in the eastern Tibetan region of Kham to one of the country's wealthiest and most powerful families. Dissent is an important part of their story, but not always in a straightforward way. Theirs is a family history of challenge to the socio-economic status quo – challenges that were sometimes polite and sometimes brash, as well as of classic political dissent. It is a story of how forms of dissent are positioned in relation to both public and intimate domains, and how dissent may at times be a politics of submission rather than refusal. As submission, dissent is subtle and strategic: a form of consent with ulterior motives (Simpson 2016). As refusal, dissent is bold and public: a rejection of the probable in favour of the possible (McGranahan 2016a).

The Pangdatsang family's ability to manoeuvre within aristocratic Lhasa society, for example, rested on their willingness to consent to Buddhist logics of patronage, including support of the Dalai Lama and his family. This entrance into society, and their efforts to maintain and even to amplify their new position and power, were paired with various forms of subversion and dissent, ranging from economic monopolies to armed rebellions to political organising. As provincial outsiders, the Pangdatsangs gained access to power in the Tibetan capital of Lhasa. Over the decades, both as a family and as individuals, they effectively subverted the system from within and without. While one family member was challenging the political status quo, another might have been directly involved in reproducing it. At such times, dissent can hide in plain sight. While these were not necessarily coordinated actions, nor even complementary ones, they all relied on familial connection and status. Considering both submission and refusal as forms of dissent requires attention to the details of intimate relations.

What do details tell us about intimacy and dissent? What might they reveal that broad strokes do not? The intimate was a major, if overlooked, focus of European colonial governments. In Asia colonial officials intervened in the intimate relations of both colonised and coloniser – the details of lovers, parents, nursemaids, of who could have sexual relations with whom, who could touch whom or who could care for whom – in efforts to produce certain types of people: essentially those who would conform or dissent, or otherwise be problematic (Stoler 1995; 2001; 2002). As Ann Laura Stoler has so long argued:

> It was in the gendered and racialized intimacies of the everyday that women, men, and children were turned into subjects of particular kinds, as domination was routinized and rerouted in

> intimacies that the state sought to know but could never completely master or work out. (Stoler 2001, 864)

Beyond sexuality, everyday intimacies of kinship and friendship can be a form of care and also a means of grounding ourselves in the world. This works at multiple scales and on multiple levels. The Pangdatsang family, for example, were individual and collective dissidents. Telling their story is to move between the scale of family and individual to that of the family in Tibetan society and the world, as well as of individual personal relationships. It is to join in the broader project of considering 'intimate relationships, intense commitments, and political action in the same analytical frame' (Kelly 2019), rather than separating the political and the intimate into public and private domains. Intimacy is, at least in part, about knowing and relating to another. There are many ways in which the 'tense and tender ties' (Stoler 2001) of both kinship and friendship inform and are impacted by political dissent.

Dissent: the Pangdatsang family of Tibet

Can consenting to social norms be a form of dissent? In the early twentieth century Tibetan social politics favoured the hereditary Central Tibetan aristocracy based in Lhasa, the capital of Tibet. People from other regions of the country were always positioned lower on national social hierarchies. Against this socio-political landscape, the Pangdatsang family's ascent to power was extraordinary. They gained national power by simultaneously breaking the rules and playing by them. Especially important for the family's rise to power were Tibetan practices of religious and political patronage. The family had the wealth to serve as a financial guarantor for, and make substantial donations to, the most important monasteries. In Tibet these were not just religious institutions, but also governmental ones.

Paired with this patronage, the family also built a relationship with the Dalai Lama. The Dalai Lama was not only the religious and political leader of Tibet, but also a bodhisattva in whom many Tibetans, including the Pangdatsang family, had deep faith or *depa (dad pa)*. To be close to the Dalai Lama and a patron of monasteries were not just politically strategic actions; they also comprised a form of Buddhist religious devotion and merit-making. In regard to its social and economic gains, the family's success was widely seen as an example of stereotypical Khampa (eastern Tibetan) insolence. It was viewed as an example of insistence, that is of refusal rather than resistance.

To refuse is to insist on another way. It is to redirect rather than to resist, and to do so in a landscape of claimed equality rather than of subordination (McGranahan 2016a; 2016b; Simpson 2007; 2014; 2016; Sobo 2016; Weiss 2016). As powerfully theorised by anthropologist Audra Simpson, refusal is a social and political practice generative of affiliations, of sovereignty and of change based on notions of exchange and equivalence (2014; 2016). Not all Pangdatsang family actions were refusals, however. Instead some were strategic, as well as genuine acts of culturally structured submission. For example, equality in a Tibetan sense could never be achieved in relationship to the Dalai Lama. One could achieve only the highest form of service and devotion to him and, importantly, to his family.

It is here that the Pangdatsang family entered into a relationship of intimacy crucial to their socio-political ascent and later to their fall. The Dalai Lama's family is referred to as the *yabshi (yab gzhis)* family, and the Pangdatsangs built their relationship with the 13th Dalai Lama and then, following his death in 1933, became a primary patron for the family of the 14th Dalai Lama. The Pangdatsang family's very presence in Lhasa and meteoric rise in both society and government was a form of dissent. It was enabled, however, through masterful forms of acquiescence to norms. While each member of the family has their own story of submission and refusal, their overall story of dissent led to their public downfall, that is, to social death. The conditions for their dissent are more than just the classic 'cracks in hegemony' political model, but are rather a refusal of certain aspects of hierarchy in favour of a claimed equality. The possibilities for dissent as refusal are an unpredictable combination of luck, savvy and, as Tibetans would argue, karma. As a result the possibilities are not only unpredictable: they are also infinite.

When people talk about the Pangdatsang family they often use the term 'the three brothers'. There were other siblings, sisters as well as a half-brother, but for over half a century the family has been known as 'the three brothers'. The eldest brother was Yamphel, born in 1900. He followed in his father's footsteps by both leading the family trading business and by growing family power in two important new ways: entering the aristocracy and holding key government positions. Yamphel became governor of the Dromo border region between Tibet and India, thus controlling almost all movement of goods and people between the two countries. This was not his sole domain of government power, however. Yamphel was also the first Trade Minister for the whole of Tibet, from which position he controlled all trade in and out of the country.

The middle brother of the Pangdatsang family was Rapga. Born in 1902, he was a rebel intellectual and is still remembered today as a figure of political dissent. Persona non grata to both the Tibetan and British colonial governments, the details of Rapga's dissent have long been controversial. This is due, in part, to the very systems he strove to replace: British colonialism/imperialism and Tibet's conservative monastic government. The youngest brother, Tobgyal, was born in 1904. He remained in the eastern Tibetan region of Kham in charge of the family estates and holding various economic, political and social responsibilities. In 1934 Tobgyal and Rapga led a revolt against Tibetan government troops in eastern Tibet in protest against conservative, centralised Lhasa politics. Their revolt was put down and their brother Yamphel in Lhasa made to pay for the damage they had done. The family then split geographically: Rapga went into exile in Kalimpong, India, while Tobgyal remained at home in Kham and Yamphel resided in Lhasa and Dromo.

All three brothers – Yamphel, Rapga and Tobgyal – paired submission with refusal. Refusal to play by all the rules of the cultural game, even if they strategically played by many of them. The Pangdatsang were one of the very few ordinary families to enter Tibetan aristocracy. Against many odds, Yamphel became the wealthiest man in Tibet. Rapga founded the first Tibetan political party. Along with other Tibetan leaders, Tobgyal tried but failed to maintain Tibetan political autonomy under the People's Republic of China. Two decades after the colonisation of Tibet by the People's Republic of China, the youngest brother Tobgyal was officially and publicly 'struggled against' – verbal and physically abused – as part of the Cultural Revolution. The Communist government forced the eldest brother Yamphel to witness the abuse of his brother; both men died soon after.

Such is the story of the three Pangdatsang brothers: powerful traders, regional leaders and devotees of the Dalai Lama. While each brother had a distinct public persona and place in Tibetan society, as individuals they were also understood in the context of family name, power and obligation. Their story of dissent is thus individual and collective, both intimate and brazenly public.

Family: dissent and the limits of imperial speculation

How and for whom does the intimacy of family matter in political dissent? Consider this sentence written by a British colonial officer in

1946: 'He was accompanied on one or more occasions by a son of about 12 years of age, dressed in English style, and speaking English'. The 'He' of the sentence refers to the middle Pangdatsang brother Rapga, at that time living in exile in Kalimpong.

Rapga was an advocate of modern democracy as an alternative to Tibet's conservative, inward-focused government. The political party he founded needed application forms and membership cards, and so Ragpa, together with his son, travelled to Calcutta to have these printed. However, his order aroused the suspicion of employees at the British printing shop. They contacted the police who agreed Rapga's order was of concern and placed him under surveillance. In a 'TOP SECRET' report on his political activities, W.A.B. Gardner, Additional Deputy Commissioner of the Police, Security Control, Calcutta wrote the above sentence describing Rapga and his son. Both observation and potential accusation, this sentence is part of a document that set in motion Rapga Pangdatsang's eventual deportation from India for being an enemy of empire. In determining Rapga to be a dangerous political figure, Gardner also observed him to be a family man. But what work did British officials hope for from this particular ethnographic detail?

Son, brother, husband, father, friend, rebel intellectual: Rapga Pangdatsang was all of these things. His political activism unfolded in the context of community, but not only that of his fellow exiles and dissidents. Who he was and what he politically desired were shaped, in part, by family. Thus while Rapga's political party was his own endeavour in partnership with like-minded intellectuals, his family status always formed part of the context for his political actions. Yet in this case of Tibetan dissidents in British India, the significance of Tibetan family relations was not necessarily understood by imperial officials.

Tibet was not colonised by the British, and so Tibetans' experiences with British empire were imperial but not colonial. If colonial empire was ethnographic (Cohn 1987; Dirks 2002), then imperial empire was speculative (McGranahan 2017). That is, the ethnographic effort to know colonial subjects in order to rule them effectively was in the case of imperial subjects merely speculative. In both contexts, the conceit of empire enabled claims to knowledge even when this was not actually held. As imperial subjects in British India, Tibetans' political subjectivity was also reckoned along an additional axis: were they pro- or anti-British? Rapga was neither. His political activities revolved around neither England nor empire, but focused instead on political possibility for Tibet. For British officers in India, this indifference to empire in one's political view of Tibet was unthinkable (Trouillot 1995).

It is no surprise that governments use family ties in efforts to know and maintain surveillance on dissidents, as well as to punish them. Details about the Pangdatsang brothers are sprinkled liberally throughout documents in the British imperial archives in London. The focus is narrowly on the brothers; other family members do not make appearances. This is one reason why the detail about Rapga's son has always stood out for me. In my reading and re-reading of related files, he never appears again. Yet his political education in the hands of his dissident father would shape his life. Sonam Dorji, the archival English-speaking son, went on to be a beloved history teacher at a prestigious school in Kalimpong. Teacher to a multiethnic Himalayan student body, he was assigned to teach Indian history. Instead he taught Tibetan history – within which, as more than one of his students fondly recalled, all of his historical examples were from Kham, the eastern Tibetan region that was home to the Pangdatsang family. 'We called him 'Mr. In-Kham,' explained a former student. 'All of his examples in class began with "In Kham…."' Other students recalled that he was a happy, nice man who liked telling jokes – a 'jolly good fellow', according to one of his former students – and who was passionate about Tibet. Rapga's granddaughters recalled similar stories about their father, smiling and laughing at the memory.

> If students didn't know the answers on exams, they would write 'East or West, Tibet is best' at the end of their exams and hope he would give them points.

Imperial speculation about the condition, form and audience of Rapga's dissent paled in comparison to his actual project; in other words, the British got much wrong (McGranahan 2005, 2017). But in the hierarchical operations of empire, lack of substantative knowledge was not an insurmountable obstacle for imperial officials. In its absence, ethnographic detail was deployed as actionable truth. Rapga was proclaimed guilty via speculation. Ann Laura Stoler (2020) argues that the force of details in colonial writings serve to mark difference as meaningful and even explanatory.

> It's not just that details matter, but rather their placement and timing as evidentiary claims.

Placed in his file as evidence against Rapga, the detail about his son misses as much as it tells. For if Sonam's appearance in British imperial

archives is only fleeting, he nonetheless features strongly in Rapga's own personal archives – his diary, newspaper clippings and family stories. When he was deported from India, Rapga took Sonam with him on the long journey through China back to Tibet. Eventually they returned to an India that was no longer under British rule, where father and son lived until their respective deaths.

Diary: a record of family, everyday life and politics

Not all details are imperial. If details in imperial archives are crafted and used as evidence, then what of details elsewhere? What of details written for oneself, with no intention of others reading or using one's words? A diary provides just such a counter-archive to British files. Rapga's diary from the period following his deportation from India to China provides a counter-narrative to British political claims about him (McGranahan 2017), but it does much more than that.

If a diary is generally understood to be the record of an individual's days and thoughts, that of Rapga fits this description. In reading his diary from this period, when he was in Shanghai and Nanjing in China, and then travelling overland to and in Tibet, his entries are noteworthy not so much for form as for content. They portray the thoughts of a Tibetan dissident returning to his homeland after over a decade in exile, doing so as a civil war raged in China, to be followed by the victory of Mao's Communist Party. His writings reveal an individual's response to vast political change, firstly in China and eventually in Tibet as the Communist People's Republic of China took control. Amidst Rapga's accounts of his travels, daily activities, moods, thoughts and reports on politics are constant references to his family.

Sonam's first appearance occurs in the diary's third entry on Saturday 21 August 1948, which notes that 'Sonam and Dashen went to a movie'. This sentence appears in the middle of his entry.

> Read and wrote in the morning as usual. Then did application notes for India. Sonam and Dashen went to a movie. Went to Tangshen to see Lingthang la. The mail carrier arrived. In the evening… played mahjong.

Rapga's entire diary is mostly in this style, a recording of his days with plentiful references to family throughout. Three other examples follow this consistent pattern.

Monday 30 August 1948: Read and wrote after getting up. Cost for food 14 GY. Went to market. Paid 3 GY for cleaning lens of camera. Paid 20 GY for underpants and shirts for Sonam and wife.

Wednesday 15 September 1948: Paid for medicine, 'sprin' [aspirin], 1.5 GY. Both wife and I are not feeling well from something like flu. In evening sent telegraph to younger brother Tobgyal in Dardo. Went to see trangshi [performance].

27 November 1948: Received telegraph from younger brother Tobgyal. Sent letter to wife. Made new boxes. Gave 4 GY to Dahrang's servant. In the evening washed body and went to bed at 10.

His family – his wife, his son, his brother – are a consistent and ordinary but loving presence in the diary.

Such minutiae of everyday life matter. They provide ground and structure, tethering us to routine and relationships. Throughout this one diary, written during his time in China as well as in Tibet, Rapga tracks just such minutiae. Consider these entries from his time in Shanghai: 'Bought a fan. The temperature is high', followed by 'Went to have Indian curry for dinner' on 3 September 1948, followed by 'Bought envelopes for letters to America' and 'The monsoon starts' on 5 September 1948. After Rapga's return to Nanjing on 11 September 1948, the entries become increasingly political and reflective of the situation around him. This example is from 19 September 1948.

> Got up early and went to buy books on Chinese scholars who travelled the world, and read.

Three days later, on 22 September 1948, he was working again.

> After I got up in the morning, I read travel guide. … In the evening I studied important English words until late.

Rapga also kept word lists in his diary. He clearly read with a dictionary alongside him, as his books are full of underlined English words with Tibetan definitions written neatly in the margins. Some of the words on his word list give a sense of Rapga's political interests at the time. They are written in his diary in the following order.

bland temerity
religious zeal

confounded
liberalism
effeminate
ethnological justification
anthropology
feudalitory [sic]
chronic misrule
infectious liberalism of the west
mediocre gain
geographical propinquity
perfunctory
concealing truth [and]
insidious tactics

This is the vocabulary of a man seeking political change. Such aspirational learning, monitoring politics, reading and writing were all parts of Rapga's everyday life.

Let us return to the colonial officer who in 1946 described Rapga's son Sonam as 'about 12 years of age, dressed in English style and speaking English'. These and other archival details were used by British officials to build a case against Rapga in which they claimed that he was not a Tibetan political dissident, but a dangerous and duplicitous Chinese political operative. The officials' dishonest accounting of details and politics was used to deport Rapga to China. For them it mattered less who Rapga was and more who they needed him to be. Thus the imperial portrait of the dissident – as an individual whose political aspirations for Tibetan democracy and modernisation directly challenged Britain's desire for Tibet to remain a buffer state between India and China – did not so much sketch the man himself as present a misleading caricature.

Rapga's brand of Anglophilia was anti-imperial, schooled in Asian ideas of nationalism and modernism inspired by Sun Yat-sen, leader of the Chinese Kuomintang Party. He was thus not the 'mimic man' memorialised in literary scholar Homi Bhabha's writings (1984) as an individual who strove to become, say, English (or Chinese, for that matter) in a rejection of their colonised identity. Instead Ragpa was proud to be Tibetan; he was someone who attempted to use an international set of linguistic and ideological tools to improve his own country, Tibet. These desires extended to Sonam. In China Rapga set about securing a Tibetan language tutor for his son and enrolling him in an English language school. This time, however, his orientation was to the Americans rather than to the British.

On Saturday 18 September 1948 Rapga went to the US Embassy in Nanjing to inquire about enrolling Sonam in the American school. His efforts were successful, as he recorded two days later in his diary.

> *Monday 20 September 1948.* Had breakfast at 8. Called for a car and went to the American Embassy. The driver lost the way and we were late. When we arrived, we were treated with respect by the staff. Met [name unclear], the ambassador's personal receptionist. … We were given the letter for Sonam to go to school, which was written by the ambassador himself. Then we met someone who is going to the school. We asked if Sonam would stay with the younger kids. Wrote Sonam's age as 14 years, his birthday on 15 January and his nationality Tibetan. … The school fee was said to be US 15 dollars per month.

Sonam started school one week later, on 27 September. At this point the political situation in China had become more one-sided as Mao Zedong's Communist Party gained important ground in their civil war with Chiang Kai-shek's Kuomintang (KMT) government. Rapga tracked the unfolding events in his diary.

> *Sunday 7 November 1948.* Worried after hearing about serious problems from the Communists.
>
> *Monday 8 November 1948.* There is nothing in the market in the town. The Communists are said to be very dangerous. … The price of everything is raised. The price of rice is raised up to 1,200.
>
> *Tuesday 9 November 1948.* The condition of the [KMT] military is bad and the price of gold is raised up by 3,000 and rice up by 900. I went to the Indian Embassy.

On Wednesday 10 November the KMT government imposed martial law in Nanjing following public uproar over prices of food and other goods. The same day Americans began evacuating the city.

> *Wednesday 10 November 1948.* Couldn't get anything in the market. The American school was closed. The whole day we could hear the sound of airplanes taking [away] American families. On that day I was anxious, but couldn't do anything.

Rapga collected Sonam from his school and attempted to get the family out of Nanjing by boat or aeroplane. The costs of both had doubled or were rising sharply. Two days later he described the situation.

> Everyone, rich or poor, is continuing to leave [Nanjing]. There are too many empty houses around where we live, as everyone has escaped, and this is making me feel anxious. Since I haven't slept for a few days, I went to bed at 7 pm.

Eventually he was able to get Sonam safely out of the city, and then departed himself. The family was reunited a few months later in the city of Chengdu, close to the Tibetan border; it was en route to the home that Rapga had left 15 years earlier following the revolt mounted by him and his younger brother Tobgyal. Rapga's journey home to Tibet in 1949 unfolded alongside the increasing victories of Mao's Communist army.

Friends: the details of connection and commitment

As the situation in China deteriorated, politics took over Rapga's diary. Each day's entry was a record of some combination of the following: meetings with various political leaders, thoughts about the situation, books he was reading to try to find responses to the situation and, as ever, notes on family and now, increasingly, on friends. After his long exile Rapga returned to Tibet, arriving by donkey in the border town of Dartsedo on 15 June 1949. He described his return in his diary entry for that day.

> All the Khampa Tibetans welcomed me. They gave a reception at Pum. Permanent residents of Dartsedo also came. In the evening someone named Keshab Sodor presented me with *khata* [*kha btags*, a Tibetan religious scarf] and meat.

Two days later he noted further meetings.

> Got up early in the morning and went to see Sadhu[tsang], two Shikhang Li Auyon, the chieftains of Derge, Chatreng, Lithang, and the fourteen families of Trehor and Go-Dag-Mar-gsum [Gojo, Dagyab, and Markham].

These details are crucial in preserving indelibly the Tibetan socio-politics and hierarchies of the day. However, the meaning of these details is not

evident without context. Where some scholars will stop and see cause for revelation, or even revolution, others will keep reading, unaware that something of importance has just been shared. Context is needed for shaping narratives beyond the limits of political expediency.

As Rapga travelled throughout Kham, he was received with respect and honours. In each location he was offered gifts such as *khata*, leopard skins, meat, barley and sheepskins; in turn he offered gifts such as Chinese and Indian cloth, salt, sweets and fruit. Many of the people he encountered were old friends and acquaintances; if not individuals he knew personally, they were friends of his younger brother Tobgyal or admirers of, or competitors with, his elder brother Yamphel. Rapga was not just any political dissident returning home. He was a Pangdatsang. As a member of such an important political family, he was bound to individuals and communities through that kinship as well as through his own personal friendships.

An anthropology of friendship is not always part of our stories of political dissent. Yet friendship – including but not only that of political comrades – can be an important source of strength for dissidents (Maunaguru 2019). On 22 October 1949, in the middle of a caravan journey lasting several months, undertaken on foot and horseback through Kham, to discuss the political situation with other Tibetans, Rapga recorded the following news.

> Left at 9. Arrived at the bottom of a mountain peak. There is good grass and water. Heard Geshe [Gendun] Chopel was released [from prison in Lhasa] and that he is well. I felt happy.

Gendun Chopel is possibly the most famous Tibetan religious and political dissident-intellectual of the early to mid-twentieth century (Lopez 2006). He and Rapga had been close colleagues in Kalimpong, where they developed a friendship built around politics and the idea that change was needed in highly conservative Tibet. Just as Rapga was deported from India on trumped-up charges of being a Chinese Kuomintang spy, Gendun Chopel had been imprisoned in Lhasa on similarly contrived charges. He was accused of being not only a KMT spy, but possibly also a Communist one.

The connection between Rapga and Gendun Chopel was cause for government suspicion. Friendship as evidence of guilt is another way in which details of intimate relations may be used (Hakyemez 2019). There are forms of intimacy that come from living together in shared spaces – dormitories, army camps, prisons – or from intense work together

on common causes, be they political, social, environmental, religious or other. On other occasions intimacy may follow rather than precede friendship. One such form of connection found in many societies are sworn friendships.

In 1934, the year of Rapga and Tobgyal Pangdatsang's rebellion against the Tibetan government, Rapga became *shagpo* (*shag po*), or sworn friends, with two brothers. On 28 October 1949, after 15 years of separation, these sworn friends were reunited. Rapga records the moment in his diary.

> Arrived in Golog Gyatso village. In the village, Lithang dButhub dPon Achu and his youngest brother came to see me as we took *nagen* (*mna' gan*) in 1934.

To take *nagen* means to swear to be friends for life. It is a lifelong promise to be faithful friends, to share things such as property and to die for one another; to break this promise was considered a sin. Along with the verbal commitment, taking *nagen* includes making some sort of physical connection. For example, individuals becoming *shagpo* may lock fingers together, take snuff from each other's fingers or prick fingertips and exchange blood to seal their oath. Rapga stayed longer in this village than in his other stops, and then continued on his way toward the Pangda family home in Bathang [commonly referred to as 'Ba'] where his brother Tobgyal was waiting for him. Also expecting him in Ba was a small group of American and British Christian missionaries, including one who was to become part of Rapga's close circle of kin and friends.

'Went to Western man *Pakerson's* birthday.' 'Pakerson' refers to George Patterson, a renegade, anti-imperial Scottish Presbytarian missionary, journalist and political advocate for Tibet. On 23 May 2000 I read this diary entry for 9 August 1949 and promptly picked up the phone and called George Patterson (with whom I had already done several interviews). I read the entry out loud to him. He laughed and said that his birthday is 19 August (1920) and so he must have had his birthday party early that year. He remembered that he had invited Rapga, his brother Tobgyal, Gara Lama and 'the French girl' with whom they all thought Patterson should have an affair. Being a Christian, he implied, he did not pursue that. Turning back to Rapga, he reflected on that period from June to October 1949 when they were all together in Dartsedo.

> Rapga was constantly writing, translating Sun Yat-sen, Marx's *Das Kapital*, and he had an international law book. He was always

> drafting policy. Rapga was the brains behind Tobgyal. Tobgyal was the charismatic one, the horseman, the Braveheart. He was a gem.

Patterson would go on to write numerous books about Tibet, all of which featured the Pangdatsang family in some way. Many of these books were in Rapga's library in Kalimpong, in the home he returned to as the Chinese communists came to Tibet and where he lived out the rest of his life. Rapga was someone who read with a pen and ruler at his side. The books in his library were all dog-eared with numerous sentences underlined and copious notes written in the margins. One book, however, had just one sentence underlined in it. The book was *God's Fool* by George Patterson, published in 1956. The sentence underlined read: 'Rapga sat silent and inscrutable'.

Conclusion

Details disrupt. They challenge the confidence of historical and political claims we make about others. They provide a counter-narrative to accepted versions of not only who people are or were, but also of the histories that they lived and made. Details can also distract or seduce, turning our attention to tangents or implications or beliefs in service to other projects. In the case of political dissidents, and in the use of details as evidence, both disruption and seduction are often in play. Even as Rapga's own life and archives provide details of the intimacy of dissent, for example, other sources such as British imperial archives turn the same details of family into self-evident accusations of guilt. Once imperial officials determined that Rapga's political dissent against the Tibetan government did not advance British interests, they decided that accumulated details could be converted into evidence against him. Details were made to matter to facilitate a certain outcome. The irony is that these details were important in ways not apparent to agents of the British empire. As descendants of the Pangdatsang brothers consider the family's complicated and controversial place in twentieth-century Tibetan history, the details of dissent and its repercussions are still important today.

This story of dissent took place in a period of great societal and global change. The efforts made by the Pangdatsang family to challenge the Tibetan status quo and political system were both situated within the system and positioned against it. Their story, like so many others, is full of contradictions. Tracking their connection to the Dalai Lama

illustrates this. The patriarch of the family, Pangda Nyigyal, father of 'the three brothers', is the one who cultivated the family's relationship with the 13th Dalai Lama. The Dalai Lama gave trade concessions to the family. After the murder of Pangda Nyigyal in 1921 he gave the family even more economic opportunities, as well as entrance into the Lhasa aristocracy (McGranahan 2002). The period of chaos following the death of the 13th Dalai Lama in 1933 saw the revolt of Tobgyal and Rapga against the interim Tibetan government – in part for its treatment of individuals close to the late Dalai Lama and regression on his modernisation programmes for Tibet.

After the 14th Dalai Lama was discovered in 1937, he and his family were brought to Lhasa. Here the Pangdatsang family became patrons for his family – a cultural position of social prestige and spiritual merit as well as of economic investment. To be a patron or sponsor, a *jindak* (*sbyin bdag*), was to contribute to the family's expenses, to offer them shelter when travelling and to take care of them as needed. Yamphel would send gifts to the young Dalai Lama – apples, puppies and other wonderful things – and reserved the best room in his Kalimpong home for the Dalai Lama's mother.

Being a patron in a traditional sense is not necessarily a progressive undertaking. Patronage in this sense is not dissent – or is it? For a family from the provinces, rather than the civilised capital of the country, said to have entered the aristocracy through the 'back door', it might indeed be an example of how submission, or playing by the rules, can be a form of social challenge. This is an example of what Audra Simpson (2016) calls 'consent's revenge'. Revenge has its own series of complications. At the same time that the family sponsored the Dalai Lama's family, Rapga was writing and organising against various institutional aspects of Buddhism as anti-modern. He proposed reforms for Tibet that included secular education rather than only monastic education and pondered out loud the viability of the Buddhist reincarnation system, especially in relation to political governance. He did this alongside taking the Dalai Lama as his spiritual guide and treasuring a personal visit from him in his last years. Ragpa also dissented while simultaneously participating in the Pangdatsang family's sponsorship of the Dalai Lama's family. While he was in China, the Dalai Lama's elder brother Gyalo Thondup was also there; he was aged just 20, while Ragpa was 46. Rapga recorded all of their interactions in his diary, using the formal title *yabshi seyku* (*yab gzhis sras kyu*) ('respected son of the Dalai's family') or various shortened forms of the title to refer to Gyalo Thondup. Here his entries are given in their entirety:

26 October 1948: Yab gzhis sras kyu arrived.
11 December 1948: Yab gzhis sras kyu arrived.
12 December 1948: Rented a residence for *yab gzhis sras* and received the bill for it.
15 December 1948: Yab gzhis sras arrived.
16 December 1948: In the evening *yab gzhis sras kyu* left.
6 January 1949: Received letter from *yab gzhis sras*.
11 January 1949: Sent a telegram to *yab sras*.
13 January 1949: Received salary and wages from [the KMT] Tibet Office.
14 January 1949: Yab gzhis sras came for money.
17 January 1949: Went to the Pakistan Embassy with *yab gzhis sras*.
19 January 1949: Sras kyu arrived and said that he was leaving for Shanghai.
26 January 1949: Yab sras arrived … *Yab sras* stayed at my place for the night.
30 January 1949: In the morning, *yab gzhsi sras* asked me to find out the price of gold.

Dissent is often entangled in webs of obligations and relations, just as life is. Such obligations and relations give us family and friends with whom to take a stance – and/or family and friends against whom to take a stance. Taking a stand against existing political systems is a bold step, often not well received. Challenge to existing systems is discouraged, with Tibetan sayings such as 'The nail that sticks up gets hammered down' providing a cultural background to this.

Taking action in the world is something we do in community, even when we act alone. In many situations, responsibility for the actions of an individual is communal. You may be representing your family or your employer or your country, for example. However, there is a difference between political responsibility and symbolic representation. The actions of a dissident may be either. Yamphel Pangdatsang was held financially responsible for his two brothers' revolt against the Tibetan government. In contemporary Tibet, under the rule of the People's Republic of China, families of Tibetans who self-immolate in protest at Chinese oppression have been arrested, simply for being family members of the self-immolator.

Intimate relations thus both matter and can be made to matter in specific ways to political dissent. Relationships make people. Individuals are produced through being in relation with others (Strathern 2020). Details of kinship and friendship reveal intimate ties between knowing and being, including the multiple facets of an individual. There is the

person who is the dissident, who has their own individual and communal ways of being in the world. Yet there is also the person whose subjectivity is governed through external, sometimes imperial management of intimate relations. These are not discrete individuals, but may often be one and the same. Details matter to both, and learning how to read them and discover how they are used can provide insight into the dissident as a social, not just a public, person.

However, detail is not 'thick description'. In anthropology, 'thick description' means to describe something – be it a practice, a person, an interaction, a belief – in the necessary cultural, political and historical context (Geertz 1973). It relies on participant observation and is a hallmark of contemporary anthropological scholarship. Thick description might use details in arriving at thickness, but it is a different project than mere attentiveness to detail. Instead, analytical attention to detail brings us in close to the relational aspects of selfhood, of being. If, as Tobias Kelly argues (chapter 6), scholarship on dissent has mostly presumed a liberal subject, then details of kin and friend relations can dislodge this misleading presumption. They can direct us instead to other ways of configuring and understanding how and when people take a stand for, or against, something.

Details about Rapga gathered from his family, his friends and from his own diary provide testimony to the person he really was. They bear out the truths of the person, the political dissident, the intellectual, the family man that he presented in public. They do not confirm the suspicions of British officials, who accused Rapga of being a duplicitous Chinese spy. Instead, through words spoken and written over the decades in (at least) two languages, these tell the story of a dissident as his family and his friends, including his fellow dissidents, knew him.

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In this text, Tibetan words are transliterated and presented two ways. Upon first mention, I provide a pronounceable rendering of the word followed by an official transliteration using Wylie style, as follows: *jindak* (*sbyin bdag*). In subsequent uses of the word only the pronounceable version of the word is presented.

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Chapter 9
Dissident writing and the intimacy of the archive in authoritarian Indonesia

Doreen Lee

Dissident texts harbour a strange temporality. Their ideas burn in the present, but their authors intend them for future generations. Often they are written in isolation or exile. Papers are voluntarily thrown away and books banned. Yet their impact cannot be measured by the size of their readership or their contents alone. For whom are these works written? Why are they written and how are they made? The ephemerality of dissident texts forces us to think about political work encapsulated by texts in other ways – not through the successful popularisation of radical ideas, nor by the veneration of texts as sacred source material for political movements, but as surviving evidence of activist creativity and activist relations in hostile political environments.

In this chapter, I focus on the production of activist archives and dissident papers in the final authoritarian decade of New Order Indonesia (1988–98) to explore issues of circulation, intimacy and dissent. Why was writing such an important dissident tool for young student activists and political prisoners? How did dissident papers transform social relations? These questions locate the intimacy of dissent in the crafting of activist propaganda, in the small moments where illicit materials were handmade or reproduced and in the ways activist relations were remade and implicated by imprisonment (this is especially apt in political contexts where ideologically tainted citizens are shunned). Intimacy, in this case, is a term that captures the emotive and relational qualities of shared political work, including the technological aspects of such work (Shokooh Valle 2018). I deploy the concept of the 'intimacy of dissent' alongside the other authors in this volume to highlight how Indonesian activists produce socio-political objects and relationships that challenge the interwoven forms of state citizenship and family belonging.

In her ethnography *Young Heroes*, anthropologist Saya Shiraishi reveals how the safety and security of everyday life for middle-class families in New Order Indonesia are in fact political templates for state power: children are unable to make their own choices and family harmony can only be maintained in alignment with the Father's (read: the dictator Suharto's) benevolent authority (Shiraishi 1997). Dissidents do not appear in this family portrait at all. My chapter uncovers the flip side of that official portrait, where an assemblage of misfit and disavowed individuals gather *against alignment*. On this flip side strangers are vital, mothers are trusted couriers, sisters become comrades and fellow prisoners act as mentors. In doing so, this chapter examines two themes at the heart of this edited collection: how intimate relations produce and are informed by the conditions of dissent, and the historically, politically and culturally specific ways in which dissent is performed, mediated and interpreted. It does this by foregrounding the production and circulation of particular textual forms, showing how the acts of writing, copying, circulation and reading form a chain of dissent that is unevenly embedded in intimate experiences and in newly emerging publics.

Anti-communism as political weapon

Anti-communism was a prevailing feature of New Order governance; its myths and narratives outlasted the Cold War to remain an effective political weapon against New Order dissidents. The political 'crime' of communism was therefore the most severe political charge that the New Order regime (1966–98) could level against its dissidents. Its political and social consequences were vast. The criminalisation of communism is rooted in the aftermath of an attempted coup by left-wing army officers that occurred on 30 September 1965. The coup lasted less than a day, but the violent military response it provoked took over one million lives in a massive crackdown on the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) and its alleged sympathisers, including artists, farmers, teachers and ethnic Chinese. Once Suharto's New Order regime came into power, it outlawed all Marxist-Leninist ideas, and sought to displace the populist rhetoric of Indonesia's founding fathers with its own state-building tenets. Even after the killings were over, the New Order took care to suppress signs of resistance by calling for society's constant vigilance against *bahaya laten* (latent dangers) – a term that specifically referred to a conspiracy theory about an underground communist resurgence. Over time all forms of activism acquired the lethal possibility of being labelled communist.

In its final decade of power (1988–98), the New Order regime in Indonesia pursued left-wing university student activists, accusing them of disturbing society, insulting the state and of being communists. Activist youth, many from relatively comfortable urban backgrounds, became national figures as a result of extensive press coverage. The evidence for their 'subversion' often consisted of activist papers. In 1988 three students, Bambang Isti Nugroho, Bambang Subono and Bonar Tigor Naipospos, were arrested for possessing and distributing illicit anti-regime literature, including student publications, banned 'communist' books, and the novels of the political prisoner and writer Pramoedya Ananta Toer. Most of these materials were no doubt home-made underground copies bearing the classic tell of mimeographed pages – the letters with holes (a, o, p ,b, q and d) were dark with ink and the texture of the paper was thin and rough (*kertas buram*, lit. blurry paper).

In 1989 a student activist named Bambang Bithor Suryadi was arrested in Jakarta for the crime of passing out 'dark leaflets' (*selebaran gelap*). He was caught with 2000 political leaflets that were critical of the regime, put on a show trial in 1990 and jailed (Lee 2016, 25–9). The year 1996 was particularly bad for dissident students, many of whom were caught up in the Suharto regime's violent efforts to suppress then-opposition leader Megawati Soekarnoputri's political party, the Indonesian Democratic Party, and its supporters. The nation's attention turned to several young activists in the PRD (People's Democratic Party) who were captured in a multi-city hunt by police and military for pro-democracy activists. They were put on trial and jailed; their papers and leftist books were seized and catalogued by the state.

PRD activists were among the most radical and erudite of student groups to emerge in the New Order. This chapter highlights their literary production for those reasons. Their prolific writing culture followed an autodidactic tradition similar to other leftist student groups; they translated important theoretical texts from other languages, wrote and distributed political essays, printed their organisation's magazines and pamphlets for workers, students and the general public and wrote letters and other political writings in prison. These young intellectuals were released in 1998 after nearly three years of incarceration, following Indonesia's transition to democracy. *Reformasi* (Reform), as Indonesia's democratisation movement was called, inaugurated a new period of media freedom, digital innovation and popular protest.

The political constraints set by the New Order regime and the New Order prison allowed student activism to flourish in unexpected ways.

In this chapter I analyse how two different modes of activist writing, one produced surreptitiously but freely 'outside' and the other produced inside the prison under the all-seeing censor's gaze, are vested with meaning, intimacy and sensuous affect. Under what conditions, and by what technologies, is activist writing made? What social relations and different publics do they call into being? How and what do imprisoned activists write in their letters? How is a photocopied piece of paper from a defunct organisation significant? How do their paths of circulation reflect the meaning-making and contingencies of political work in New Order Indonesia?

These questions speak to a political economy of paper that dissolves the hierarchical distinctions between different genres of writing and, indeed, different grades of paper. Faced with the dispersed matter of student activist archives, the ethnographic and historical project has less to do with assembling a collected whole for analysis (i.e. form and content united; an orderly collection that fulfils the definition of an archive and forces the texts to 'speak for themselves') and more to do with the examination of a cluster of affects and memories associated with making and assembling such scraps in the first place. Indonesian pro-democracy activists were constrained by a high level of political repression and surveillance; they had to combat powerful state institutions that included the Ministry of Information, the Attorney General's office, the army and police, as well as their own campus authorities. In this climate of repression, activists produced, shared and attempted to control information through print materials. The paper economy of the Left suggests an informal and yet accessible print economy through which dissident ideas and materials circulated.

In the first half of this chapter, I analyse how activist material culture in the 1980s and 1990s was dependent on a small range of printing technologies, such that activists became familiar with the sight and smell of mimeograph machines and photocopy toner. Pamphlets, leaflets and other documents were often crafted or laid out by hand, laboured over by a few dedicated writers and printed in small batches that reflected the limited financial means of students and the narrowed arena of print itself. Photocopies and mimeographed material were a significant yet unremarkable part of activist culture. I pay attention to the materiality of these photocopies and print materials, how their constitution of a shadow archive reveals what Ann Stoler has called the 'epistemic unease' of New Order power and authority (Stoler 2009). Photocopying shops, printing shops and mimeograph machines became unstable but necessary nodes of production within Suharto-era radical politics, while

students became consumers and borrowers of reproductive technologies that they did not control.

The second mode of activist writing reflects a much longer tradition of writing from the New Order's jails, what former prisoner Hersri Setiawan calls 'an Indonesian art of exile within Indonesia itself' (Setiawan 1995). Prison writing is a creative, defiant practice of artistic survival that crosses generations of dissidents in colonial and postcolonial Indonesia, most famously represented by Pramoedya's collection of writings from the penal colony of Buru Island. Over 14 years Pram wrote and researched, even as his work was repeatedly confiscated and destroyed. Prison writing often represents the essence of individual suffering and political subjectivity, yet – being born of extremely politicised and oppressive conditions – it is never properly private. It is instead sociological writing that contains the seeds of its future forms.[1]

Wilson, the PRD activist who gave me a copy of his prison writings, practised this view. For him the prison was also a university. Wilson was an observer of everyday life in Cipinang prison and he was an avid historian. He met other political prisoners whose experiences he helped to record and distribute in his letters. The monotony of prison life led him to spend his days writing letters, compiling an important record of networks and connections forged between generations and between a culture of incarceration and a culture of knowledge. I view prison writing as an underground technology of dissent – a necessary continuation of political work that began outside, but was not fenced in by prison walls. Literature from New Order prisons reached a wide international audience of supporters who became part of the Indonesian struggle for freedom and human rights (Missbach 2014).

Taken together, these modes of writing trace the endurance and adaptation of dissident methods in a climate of authoritarian repression. Their continuous exclusion from the public sphere reflects conventions in media practice and political hegemony; dissident political papers are fragile, in part due to their anachronistic analog character in the digital age ('it's only paper!'), and partly to do with their undeniably left-wing critiques and hence illegitimacy ('it's written by communists!'). Between the outside world and the 'world behind bars' (Wilson 2005), activist writing shifted shape and proliferated even under surveillance. Writing got them imprisoned, but imprisonment produced more writing! Again, what made activist writing possible? How do we understand its textuality, its archives?

Paper flows

This chapter originated from my observations of the commonplace act of photocopying print materials among Indonesian activists engaged in political resistance and activist dispositions toward such acts of replication and the copies themselves. These observations concern the material outcomes of 'technological reproducibility' (Benjamin 2006) and arose from my study of the vibrant material culture of the *Reformasi* (Reform) movement after the fall of Suharto in 1998. From 2003 to the present I carried out fieldwork in Jakarta and various cities with activists of leftist and populist persuasions.

It was obvious that the Reform movement generation of pro-democracy activists who had fought the dictatorship were adept at DIY culture. Their paper productivity combined an expertise in bureaucratic practices of documentation and organisational flow with more creative expressions of activist labour. Activists made their own propaganda fliers, books, posters, T-shirts, banners, graffiti, commemorative mugs, grant proposals, political analyses, demonstration strategy blueprints, websites and so on. On top of crafting the objects and ideas of political resistance, activists had more routine paperwork to deal with, such as budgets, press releases, petitions, applications, form letters, meeting notes, organisational reports and reading materials for seminars.

My reflections on these forms deepened when it became evident that replicating documents was an embedded practice that escaped political discourse and yet formed an infrastructural guide to how activists responded to political work and ideas, both within themselves and between each other. Benedict Anderson's famous argument about print capitalism's role in shaping nationalist and globalist imaginations resonates here (Anderson 2016 [1983]). Print capitalism conditioned an individual's experience of 'imagined community'. It also shaped the expectations of a reading public for the dissemination of information, in particular of political information. At the same time the friendships and alignments that constituted activist community could be traced in the production, tactility and trajectory of its print material.

It would be easy at this point to rely on the analytical purchase of the concept of *mediation* to argue that activist papers and reproductive technologies mediated or produced activist sociality. Faye Ginsburg, Lila Abu-Lughod and Brian Larkin have described how anthropologists of activist media tend to focus on the dissident intentions of activists in making such media and on their often unintended effects or contradictions. In this framework, mediation becomes the process by which

control over receptivity and perception is lost and agency given over to technological factors – or, as I prefer to think, mediation is the point at which the context of media ecology is realised (Ginsburg et al. 2002, 9–10).

Equally natural is the idea that some forms of writing hold their intimate register in a more stable way than others: are, indeed, always *more* intimate than others. Letters or personal diaries for example, are more intimate than human rights reports or manifestos. Dissident papers, however, by their temporal evolution (in particular their strange turns and complex routes of travel), trouble such classifications about what is properly private or public. They invite a careful examination of *when* things are private and when things are public, and by what historicising or politicised affects or even scholarly interventions. The examples below are taken from my fieldnotes. They sparked my thinking in this regard, with more examples to follow when I discuss the space of the prison. For now, a chance encounter captured in my research notes from more than a decade ago conveys the generic efficacies of activist paperwork for instilling and recalling embodied political practice.

> 15 March 2005
> A visited me to borrow Ed Aspinall's dissertation on the Indonesian student movement which I had read earlier and thought would be useful for him. [*I lived in Benhil, a neighbourhood lined with large and small photocopying shops, so it would be easy for A to make his own copy.*] He surprised me because the first thing he said was 'I ran into B on the street. He was in Benhil, making photocopies of *selebaran* (fliers), and he asked me to help him pass them out, so that's what I did. He gave me a big stack, and I passed them out along the way here.' The small, palm-sized flier was titled in all caps: *RAKYAT BERSATU TAK PERNAH DIKALAHKAN* (THE PEOPLE UNITED WILL NEVER BE DEFEATED).
>
> A had not been in touch for many years with his former comrade-turned-enemy B. They had started City Forum together, the largest student alliance during *Reformasi*, but one by one activists left the alliance to start their own organisations, often under a cloud of antagonism and conflict. A had been one of the first to denounce B. But the passage of time had resulted in a friendly encounter on the street, doing familiar things that they used to do together, making copies and passing out fliers to passersby in advance of the demonstration.

In the spirit of exchange between ethnographer and activist, I had lent a copy of an academic work in English to be copied. The exchange necessitated a face-to-face encounter. These were still the days before digitised texts circulated freely by email or PDF, and for both pre-digital and precautionary reasons would pass from hand to hand. Just prior to meeting me, A had his coincidental and yet not unexpected run-in with B on a street full of photocopying shops. A's account of his encounter with his former adversary B was strangely pleasant. Even though the two men had not spoken for years, each had treated the other in a friendly manner. Both knew what to do with a giant stack of leaflets. Passing out leaflets was advance work, a way of broadcasting activist media and announcing the details of a coming demonstration directly to the people. A naturally accepted the task from B. In sharing the labour for B's planned demonstration, the two connected as potential comrades once again, falling into habits forged during the tumultuous mass demonstrations of 1998.

This example from my fieldnotes emphasises my earlier point about how photocopies are a taken-for-granted part of the infrastructure of dissent – recognised by activists themselves as necessary political work, but not as uniquely valuable work. The demonstration remains the main event. The scholarly bias in the literature on recent social movements is similarly slanted, focusing on the rallies and speeches of direct action, instead of the labour behind the scenes, the small-scale routine practices that lead to such performances of direct action.[2] As David Graeber writes in his withering analysis of bureaucracy, anthropologists do not like to talk about the 'socially efficacious' aspects of paperwork, for 'paperwork is boring' (Graeber 2012).

An anthropology of archives

In the last decade there has been growing theoretical interest in the contingencies of the archive – from revisitations of Jim Scott's canonical contribution to studies of subaltern resistance in *Weapons of the Weak*, which urges us to read against the grain and between the lines of dominant epistemologies for hidden transcripts, to Ann Stoler's attention to the epistemic instabilities inherent in the colonial archive; from the insight of Matt Hull and Veena Das into the graphic ideologies embedded in bureaucratic paper forms to Katherine Verdery's reflection on the similarity between ethnographic methods and spycraft (Scott 1985; Stoler 2009; Hull 2012; Das 2007; Verdery 2014). These approaches point to an emerging consensus about the historical, cultural and

political importance of content and form contained within paper and documentary practices – an epistemic, relational and analytic significance that proliferates our ethnographic reserves.

The archive idea is especially apt for describing the sense of discovery and urgency linked to potential resources or repositories for unofficial histories. My interests in activist practices of using and making print propaganda introduce a more technical slant on the production and circulation of paper. As I have written elsewhere, paper must be thought of in terms of what Heidegger pronounces *techne*, a craft or practice that brings forth revealing forms (Lee 2016, 30). From this perspective it is evident that it is not enough to study activist propaganda for its controversial ideas, but rather as a specific experience of paper.

Between 2003 to 2005 I built my own archive through fieldwork, picking up leaflets from the street and buying T-shirts supporting the pro-democracy movement, as well as copying the personal papers of individuals. In subsequent years (2008–2015) I made copies of numerous prison letters, demonstration diaries and other artefacts that remain unpublished. Indonesian activist material culture was flush with different kinds of paper, yet the prodigious production of paper materials has still to find a stable home within Indonesia. I became aware of a post-*Reformasi* shift in attitude among activists, who now saw themselves as historical agents of change and therefore gained a new appreciation of the value of papers from the past.

Everyone I talked to, it seemed, was hoarding something of documentary value. Powerful and personally meaningful papers in activists' possession might include a copy of an important speech, a rare out of print text, a real (*asli*), uncensored investigative report that was never released to the public, a secret document related to the destroyed Indonesian Communist Party and, most often cited, copies of the works of the dissident and imprisoned writer Pramoedya. Almost all were photocopies instead of originals. Some of these texts have found their way as copies or originals to archives abroad, notably in the Netherlands and the US, but in Indonesia itself there are no official archives for Generation 1998 and the *Reformasi*-era student movement. Papers remain scattered in private hands, and as such are susceptible to loss, loan or sale. Student materials were not designed as a secure archive, yet photocopies have gained an afterlife as historians and archivists turn copies of found material back into 'authentic' documents of the student movement (Lee 2016, 55–6).

In general, Indonesian activists did not view photocopies, especially contemporary papers in everyday use, as artefacts of importance, until

over time they became part of the historical record. From live matter to freeze-dried memento. Once photocopies moved into the realm of documentation (*dokumentasi*), they acquired a value that made them authentic (*asli*) artefacts of the student movement. Certain documents were more valuable than others, especially based on notions of rarity and radical content. I received offers to buy *Reformasi*-era papers or commemorative volumes of activist publications for a tidy sum, often a few hundred dollars, by activists who needed funds and were willing to relinquish these papers.

Scholarship too is tied to class and civilisational distinctions about the value of particular kinds of pasts. Gastón Gordillo makes the point that our sentiments are formed by institutional and educational ideologies that are tested by the conceptual chasm between 'ruins' and 'rubble' (Gordillo 2014). The bourgeois world-view sees ruins as monumental, romantic and resonant landscapes, as remnants that survive and create the appropriate class attachments to tradition, heritage and historical meaning. Ruins are 'a favored view of a vanished past' to be preserved for the future (Stoler 2016, 347), whereas rubble denotes nothing more than bare form, as in the phrase 'reduced to rubble'. Gordillo's insight into rubble as nothingness and his own cultural attachment to ruins is similar to the contrast between the archivist's ruinology (the notion that artefacts, photographs and documents are precious residues of the past) and the Indonesian activist's necessarily practical view of paper.

My interviews with activists, and my fieldwork observations of how activists interacted with paper – when they expected or disregarded the appearance of paper and propaganda, as well as the relations that paper facilitated – provide ethnographic insights into copying technology's political salience. On the one hand the ubiquity of photocopying technology reflected broader changes to institutional and political behaviours in urban Indonesia, signalling the entrenchment of bureaucratic paper flows and downstream technological access. On the other hand, however, activist technologies did not automatically proceed from analog to digital (mimeographs to photocopies to emails and text messages to online platforms) according to an evolutionary scale of speed, scale and efficiency. The next two sections of this chapter draw on archival material as well as on interviews with activists and archivists who made and collected copies from the analog activist era to examine activist strategies during the era of expanding copying possibilities.

An endless supply of paper: the photocopy revolution

The modern bureaucracy of the twentieth century is defined by the sheer magnitude of paper, film and photographs that individual and organisational activities generated. Copying technologies such as microfiche, photostats and mimeographs were introduced to libraries and other institutions in the US as early as the 1940s. The 1950s saw the introduction of photocopiers for commercial use. By the 1960s the photocopying revolution had forced archivists to reckon with the massification of copies by developing new guidelines for documentation, incorporating new types of data beyond the traditional forms of paper, photograph and film (Hinding 1993). As Hillel Schwartz put it, copying technologies fed 'the illusion that to copy was to comprehend' (Schwartz 1998, 235).

In the 1980s and 1990s Indonesian copy shops were common in small towns and large cities alike. They often doubled up with photostudios that provided yet another service of technological reproduction: film development. The combination of photostudio-copy shop served ordinary people's needs on a daily basis. For each bureaucratic transaction, including enrolling in school, applying for jobs or getting married, citizens had to comply with the New Order rule that a copy of their KTP (*Kartu Tanda Penduduk*, identity card) be submitted. As photocopiers became more affordable to buy or rent, photocopy shops opened in dedicated streets and lanes surrounding business districts and universities. More prosperous offices operated their own machines, where the 'office boy' made photocopies in addition to tea or coffee. NGOs also embraced such trends, providing dependable copiers, internet service, desktop computers and fax machines for financially challenged activists to borrow.

In an essay on the role of new media in the democratisation of post-socialist Hungary, Dányi reveals the limits of the technological determinism that inspired the philanthropist George Soros to flood Hungary with cheap photocopiers in the 1980s (Dányi 2006). Soros aimed to help the pro-democracy movement discreetly and in indirect ways to realise his vision of a democratic 'open society' of critical debate and free speech. His foundation purchased nearly 1000 Xerox copiers and sold them cheaply in exchange for Hungarian forint, which the foundation then used for scholarship monies, thus hitting two dissident goals with one stone. However, the machines became a new locus for state surveillance; few Hungarian dissidents were able to go undetected in using the new copying technology.

Such anxieties also existed in 1990s Indonesia. Activists had to learn and discern which copy shops were safe for producing dissident

texts. Khori, an activist who had gone to university in Salatiga, East Java, described the caution that had to be employed.

> Salatiga was a military town. So copies only took place in selected shops. It was scary but the spirit of resistance was everywhere. If you used the word 'regime' [to refer to the New Order], it was a sign that already made you stand out. Your plans would wither on the stem (*layu sebelum berkembang*, lit. wither before blooming).

Khori's description of Salatiga as a place simmering with resistance beneath the surface stands in contrast to its domination by the military. As he notes, simply writing the word 'regime', let alone stating what kind of regime the New Order was, risked setting in motion a chain of consequences ending in arrest. Recall the 'dark leaflets' made by university students in the 1980s that became evidence of subversion.

Technological choices necessarily involved economic calculations. As Jafar, another activist involved in the student movement in Salatiga, East Java, put it, there were limits to each technology.

> The limits were that propaganda always meant a lot of copies. If we needed to print one ream (500 copies), it was cheaper on the *mesin stensil* (mimeograph machine). If we were only printing 100 copies, then why exhaust ourselves typing it out [on stencil paper] only to print 100 copies; it would be easier to photocopy.

Another activist surmised the relative advantage of stencils versus photocopies.

> Stencils are cheap and yield large quantities, but are time-consuming. Photocopies on the other hand are expensive, can yield small quantities, but are fast.

These technological limitations, and the considerations of speed and efficiency versus cost, show the practical decisions student activists made that informed the 'traditions' and look of activist material culture.

Intimate memories of the *mesin stensil*

When I asked individuals to recount who made propaganda and how, activists emphasised the sensuous and material qualities of paper and

various reproductive technologies, varying from photocopies to the manual mimeograph machine (*mesin stensil*). They mimicked the sounds so that my interviews were punctuated by the *jedeng-jedeng-jedeng* mechanical thud of the mimeograph machine and the whine of the fax machine and, in one humorous instance, the extended whirr of the old-fashioned dial-up modem. Activists remembered the techniques of making documents vividly and it was during these descriptions of how things were reproduced, assembled and disseminated that we see both craft and expertise as activist sites, as well as the embeddedness of an involuntary memory – a technological habitus that had become a part of bodily experience. People would get excited in remembering how they made propaganda, how they figured out daily routines of dissidence (which shops, what time to send email, which office facilities to borrow). In short, they remembered the creative labour rather than the objects themselves. Gunawan said to Hengky:

> What was the name of our publication? [*LAPAR*, i.e. hunger] I wrote all of them. The acronym meant something [but he couldn't remember what].

Talking about paper, copies and propaganda triggered a classificatory response in activists, who situated the role of paper within the economic and material decisions and opportunities they faced. 'Before' or 'in the past' [i.e. before *Reformasi* in 1998] activists had no money to make more sophisticated propaganda nor to pay for mass amounts of photocopies, After the fall of Suharto, however, they received paper donations (*bantuan kertas*) from the public, among other logistical gifts. In the scarce economy of the New Order years and in the boom economy of the *Reformasi* years, activists had to manage the costs as well as the risks of producing anti-regime propaganda. They knew exactly how much it cost to print rather than photocopy large numbers of propaganda fliers and what grade of paper they could afford to use. Specifically for the small *selebaran* (flier), they always used a cheap yellowish newsprint on the *mesin stensil*, but to duplicate reading materials they would always use photocopiers, so that they did not have to create a master stencil, which was very time consuming. In the *Reformasi* years activists budgeted more consistently for paper and photocopying services for their training materials or for their office support needs. They would include a budget line for paper supplies and photocopies in their funding proposals to donor agencies, providing snapshots of these costs in that given year.

The stencil duplicator, more commonly known as the mimeograph machine, was the copying technology that evoked the most sensuous memories for activists. In Indonesia people called this the *mesin stensil* (stencil machine). Even non-expert practitioners of the craft recalled the machine in minute detail. They described it through the sensory pleasures of memory, mimicked its overwhelming loud noise when the stencil went through the barrel (*'jedeng jedeng jedeng'*) or recalled its distinct smell. 'An odd thing,' Yunus, a former activist, commented, 'you'll notice that stencil machines were always hidden in a corner, whether in an office or elsewhere.' At first he implied that there might be a relationship between the illicit materials being replicated and the concealment of machines in the dark shadows – but then he broke into a laugh and explained the real reason.

> It stank! The ink was black and thick as toothpaste, its grease inevitably got on all your clothes and its smell pierced your senses (*baunya menyengat*).

The time and emotional investment in creating the stencil was necessitated by the fact that the process left no room for mistakes. It was a one-off print run. If you made an error in the inking and printing, activists intoned, *'habis lah'* (it's over) or *'mati lah'* – you're dead. Round letters were especially impacted by the degradation of the master stencil. The letters would be filled with ink, with the result that the letters A, O, P and B bore the obvious signature of the mimeograph machine. The 'midline' sag from the pressure caused by the ink drum in the print process would cause the front end of the stencil to break. Another problem might be the imperfect transfer from the Daito brand wax paper (a plasticised microcellulose), which left a permanent squeezed line on the page or mashed lines together. The legibility of the document testified to the skill of the printer.

Although it was obviously associated with anti-establishment propaganda usage, activists justified their preference for the mimeograph machine as a matter of scale and economy. They claimed that the technology did not discriminate in terms of content and ideological leanings. Indeed the word *stensilan* (stencilled material) is still used as a genre name, implying racy, sexual or pornographic material. Three activists I spoke to named the types of materials most likely to be mimeographed during the New Order: Pramoedya's books, dime store novels and pornography, and the Bible. This list appears as an eclectic assortment of sacred and profane texts, but in fact it catalogues the popular and transgressive genres of underground *stensilan* (non-Islamic religious

texts, 'decadent' and low-brow material and left-inspired social realism) that circulated in opposition to Suharto's Java-centric state culture and the increasing literary poverty in New Order schools. It is Pramoedya's presence on that list that most explicitly stands for the growing political consciousness of youth at the end of the New Order.

Letters after Pramoedya

There are those dissident intellectuals who survive state violence in various forms, much like Pramoedya, who withstand their terrors to live and make new ways of knowing, remembering and creating. Hersri Setiawan, another Buru captive, tells us that the arts survived on Buru by commission from the military command and through acts of individual bravery. Musicians formed orchestras and *wayang* (shadow puppet) troupes, storytellers broke the rules to visit other camps after dark and writers 'were able to "play with two books"', writing one set of works for the authorities and another for themselves (Setiawan, 19).

Between 1965 and 1979 Indonesia's best-known author oscillated between severe punishment for having a pencil in his cell to the daily use of a typewriter. Pramoedya was granted permission by the Buru prison authorities to carry out writing work full time in 1973. He later wrote that he had to teach himself how to think again. His writing discipline and ability had been undone by the hard labour forced on all prisoners on the undeveloped island of Buru. Like other prisoners Pramoedya cleared jungles, built roads and buildings and planted rice with his bare hands. Forcing prisoners to build their own prisons and to labour to feed the guards was particularly cruel.

Compared to the political exiles sentenced by the colonial government in the 1920s, Pramoedya's generation of political prisoners was far worse off. Indonesia's first vice president Mohammad Hatta, for example, famously sailed for the prison island of Boven Digoel accompanied by his entire library. Pram's literary world in prison was self-made and fragile. He was never sure what would survive inspection. Many times in his life he watched his work be confiscated, destroyed and burned; he was even forced to destroy it himself. His writing conditions not only on Buru, but even after his release in 1979, reflected the arbitrary and zealous punishments of the New Order state.

> Had these materials fallen into unwanted hands, they no doubt would have been the reason for yet another interrogation. Thus the

> opportunities I found to write very much depended on my intuition for safety. (Pramoedya Toer, *The Mute's Soliloquy*, ix)

Pramoedya's notes from Buru were first published in Indonesian in two volumes in 1984. They were later translated and edited into a single English-language volume, entitled *The Mute's Soliloquy*, in 1988. The book is a collection of letters to the author's adult children, written in the knowledge that they would not receive them. Certain things might be able to enter the prison after a difficult sea passage and tricky navigation through official channels (occasionally Pram received a rare parcel from his family, for instance), but it was impossible to imagine smuggling things out. In a reply to his daughter Astuti's precious letter, Pram describes the collective emotions prompted by a letter from the outside.

> A letter is such a personal thing, but here, on Buru, it's a public possession, to be read and perused by anyone curious about a fellow prisoner's family. Letters circulate from hand to hand, from one barracks to another, forever producing a flood of tears in their readers. (*The Mute's Soliloquy*, 216)

Pram's letters are full of history. They tell alternate accounts that have been vanquished by the New Order state; they witness death and humanity in exile. The appendix contains a list of 315 prisoners who died on Buru, a documentary project that Pramoedya was forced to abandon when it came to the attention of the military. It detailed the myriad ways in which Buru was lethal; prisoners were routinely beaten and brutalised, and death might come from ordinary infections, toothache or drowning (*The Mute's Soliloquy*, 344–64).

The young PRD activists adored Pramoedya. They read his work underground, called themselves 'Minke' after the main character of the Buru Quartet[3] and, of course, reproduced his books for their libraries. Pram himself became an honorary member of the PRD and received a PRD award in 1996 – a proud moment for the youthful activists and for Pram himself. He became a living icon in his final years, visited by admirers and ardent leftists from a small, liberal circle.

Writing from behind bars

The intergenerational contact between *Reformasi*-era activists and different generations of political dissidents strengthened both groups at

the end of the New Order. The *Reformasi* generation was heavily involved in transitional justice advocacy and historical accountability campaigns on behalf of the large number of survivors of state violence. Dissident writing across generations can appear disconnected by the specificity of each individual's cause and coming-of-age story, for the elderly appear to us through memoirs while the young continue to agitate; yet they share the condition of being marked by the state as that against which society must be defended. Ann Stoler reminds us that the populating of prisons, camps and (penal) colonies shares a 'filiation' despite their different forms, borders and locations. Only the inhabitants of these spaces change according to who and what the state designates a risk (Stoler 2016, chapter 3). Together the different holding patterns enact a 'carceral archipelago' that hides its common purpose – a spatialised matrix for displacing dissenting bodies – to create exiles, criminals or, as the New Order liked to encourage, 'transmigration' to the outer islands.

The carceral archipelago is a state-driven experiment with different containment strategies; from the prisoners' perspective, the carceral archipelago created pockets of concentrated knowledge and artistry. Both perspectives express the experience of political modernity. Rudolf Mrázek's joint examination of the Nazi concentration camp of Terezin and the Netherlands East Indies penal colony of Boven Digoel reveals the historical (and natural?) outcome of *concentrating* so many socialists in one place. The outcome of political exile was not despair, but the realisation of a futuristic and experimental refashioning of everyday camp life. The Terezin camp lectures were exemplary, as was the orchestral music. The Boven Digoel socialists established communes and practised voting (Mrázek 2016, 135). The urbane and cultured Jewish population in Terezin had all carried books into camp; so had the Dutch language-educated nationalists in Boven Digoel. The New Order prison had the potential to be similarly concentrated. Prison sociality produced bursts of activity. Wilson, the PRD activist who was jailed in 1994 and then again from 1996 to 1998 in Cipinang, Jakarta, wrote a letter with various requests for more materials. 'Jakobus [PRD activist and Wilson's cellmate] requests a German dictionary because he is learning German.'[4] 'Please bring me music cassettes. The selection here is poor.'

To read Wilson's letters is to *overhear* Pram's influence on the younger generation (Mrázek 2015). Like Pram, Wilson had a historian's mind and eye. Joesoef Ishak (Pram's longtime publisher and a former prisoner himself) wrote with rhetorical flip in the foreword to Wilson's book *Dunia di balik jeruji* (*World Behind Bars*): 'How lucky Wilson was imprisoned' (Wilson 2005, viii). By this he meant that no one else could

have captured the details and textures of life in Cipinang prison so well. Wilson reserved the more mundane aspects of prison life and his personal thoughts for his family's letters. He could watch some television, listen to the radio and play football when it did not rain. He could even speak to other political prisoners occasionally, including members of the 1965 generation (political prisoners labelled as communists) and even Xanana Gusmao, the famous East Timorese revolutionary who was under constant guard in a separate cell block.

The elders of the 1965 generation reached out to the PRD activists first. Knowledge of the young activists' sentences had circulated and, not long after they arrived in Cipinang, Colonel Latief introduced himself to Wilson. Colonel Latief was by that time the only surviving actor of the coup that occurred on 30 September 1965. Following that first encounter, Wilson would receive a summons to visit from Colonel Latief's cell-mate – although these visits were often hampered by the older man's poor health. Seeing Xanana took more bureaucratic effort. Wilson persisted with the burdensome paperwork needed to establish a prison football league led by Xanana and co-directed by himself (personal communication, Jakarta, August 2018). Armed with an official letterhead that bore the requisite signatures and stamps from the warden, Wilson gained regular access to Xanana Gusmao. One can only admire his apt calculation that, in football-mad Indonesia, the desire for sport would generate its own priorities for prisoner welfare – to the extent that a recently convicted political prisoner could visit a high-ranking political prisoner under heavy surveillance in another block.

These interactions and encounters with prior generations of political prisoners prompted Wilson to write. He wrote essays about Xanana for publication in alternative media. He even lent his ears and hands to piece together the autobiography of Colonel Latief. The colonel had suffered a stroke in prison and his poor health made the work difficult. True to his military background and colonial-era education, the colonel had strong beliefs about the importance of history-as-chronology. His life story had to begin with his birth and work its way to the present. The process began with his giving Wilson sheets of handwritten paper that, because of his stroke, were covered with nearly illegible writing. Wilson would type this up and hand it back to the colonel to read and correct. The following day the colonel would resume his story from exactly the end point of those typed notes. Wilson described the process in one of his letters.

> Speaking with him is like speaking to a person from another planet. Sometimes he has to repeat himself many times to be clear. Finally I

asked him to type. I gave him the typewriter and ribbon. His writing is no longer chronological.[5]

After a few days fuelled by his own enthusiasm for the work, the colonel fell ill from his exertions. Colonel Latief's limited ability to share his story reflects the broader public health issues and social isolation faced by former 1965 prisoners outside. Vannessa Hearman's research into the disappearing memories of the survivors of the 1965 genocide in Indonesia draws attention to the extreme fragmentation of oral histories inflected by trauma (Hearman 2013). Hearman argues that neglected histories suffer when the regime's narratives are strong, resulting in a 'poor sociality' for dissident memory. Ironically it is only in prison, and close to the end of his life, that the deteriorating memories of Colonel Latief find a new anchor. When the elderly prisoner could no longer continue, Wilson stepped in to organise the pages they had produced together. To his regret, the project ended in the biographical year 1946, leaving out crucial reflections on Indonesia's post-Independence years and, importantly, one man's truth about the 1965–6 anti-communist purge.

The prison writings of Pramoedya and Wilson show the extent to which left-inspired solidarities could carry on in a right-wing climate, even with the state's paranoid intrusions into daily life.[6] Pram's fellow prisoners became his family through their bodily sacrifice for one another. Wilson and the other PRD activists lived together in Cipinang prison with dissident farmers, union organisers and East Timorese activists fighting for independence, as well as the political prisoners of 1965 who had been condemned to die. In Cipinang prison Wilson wrote copiously, for himself and on behalf of others. Letters to his family end with poems that he composed, many featuring sad stanzas about the passing of the seasons in the outside world.

Wilson also maintained a lengthy correspondence with supporters abroad, notably Carmel Budiarjo in London and Max Lane (addressed affectionately as 'Bung' or 'Brother Cokro') in Sydney.[7] These letters contained much more political information, a decision driven by Wilson's awareness that he had to risk becoming the secret source for international advocacy groups' human rights reports on political prisoners in Indonesia. In a letter to Carmel Budiarjo, dated 3 June 1997, Wilson shared a comprehensive list of the 39 political prisoners housed in Cipinang prison, from the death-row inmates of the 1965 generation, accused of being communists, to imprisoned journalists and opposition politicians from various political parties. He included an account of their health; all had some ailment or the other and, perhaps expectedly, the

PRD activists were afflicted by failing eyesight. This letter concludes with the recent arrests and prison transfers of his comrades. Several of the young PRD activists were denied visits and were confined in isolation. Please, he wrote, publicise this information widely without mentioning where it came from, as it might put me and my comrades in danger.

I end with another of Wilson's letters, addressed to his ally Max Lane in Australia and dated 18 November 1997. Still another seven months to go until the New Order fell and nine months to pass before he received amnesty. Wilson's tone in this letter is both determined and melancholy. He and his comrades are trying to be political activists as best as they can inside the prison. It is increasingly evident that letters are his lifeline.

> Our visitors are decreasing. This means that we are getting less news about the outside world. We only receive news of the national situation through newspapers and magazines that enter the prison. I'm getting more concerned that we are becoming stupider in here, just as the rulers intended with our imprisonment. The information we have gotten is very fragmented, in pieces and at times not believable. People do give us books, but the majority [of books we have here] are theory books and history books that I brought from home (via my mother). The contents are boring, unlike reading Links or Greenleft. Alternative publications such as Suara Independent [Independent Voice] are also no longer making it in because of the tight surveillance in Cipinang. We are still holding our small discussion sessions. Anom organizes them. I focus more on the search for logistics. I write letters to many people about many things, and receive few replies. (So this is our fate in prison, brother) So please brother, you or whoever in Australia should write letters to me. Send them to my house in Depok (I'll give you the address at the end of this letter). If it is hard to send a letter, send a postcard. [*Letter continues on to the next page.*]
>
> One thing the regime wants psychologically from us is for us to feel alienated from the outside world. I try to resolve this by diligently writing letters to various people or institutions. I even wrote to the political attachés in the American and Swedish embassies. Only the American embassy responded by sending me a state department publication about human rights in Indonesia and other countries. If Bung Cokro cannot write me a letter or postcard, then surely people from ASIET or other Resistance [*sic*] can write to my address. My mother will be the one to smuggle them into

> prison. She's become an expert at this. Write things that don't have to be 'always political'. Letters from outside prison, quoting the words of Nelson Mandela, 'are like garden flowers in a desert'. I will reply to every letter that comes in. There's plenty of time for it all. [Translation mine]

We begin to see here the strenuous effort required to maintain the links to an outside world. Whether due to dwindling public interest or the regime's attempts to isolate its dissidents further, the exchange rate between inside and outside is climbing ever higher: one densely packed six-page letter in exchange for a postcard; meagre scraps of low-quality news circulating within the prison; the value of a non-political, personal word is as a flower in the desert. At the same time dissident connections to their intended publics cannot be completely cut off, even as the political situation becomes volatile. The steady stream of prison writing makes its way through personal links as mothers, fathers and friends join the cause as couriers. In hindsight the letter became one of the few dissident techniques that survived the tests of time and prison life itself. Letter-writing preserved the knowledge generated by political imprisonment and distributed news to international human rights groups and advocates abroad. These then recirculated the news in their publications to sympathetic audiences in Western democracies. It is, as Wilson himself indicates above, the start of a logistical chain of relationality, of redistribution and connectivity between dissidents and their supporters.

Wilson's letters were a small fraction of what the PRD activists actually produced. Without fail, with revolutionary discipline, with the anticipation that their movement legacy could be read by future generations of activists as a blueprint for resistance, the PRD activists had held weekly discussion sessions that they then recorded as typed notes. Wilson funnelled some of these political notes through his letters, sent out through trustworthy family and known persons. When the political situation worsened outside, the activists made a difficult decision to pulp thousands of pages they had written. Like Pram, Wilson sacrificed his work in response to a political intuition that prison surveillance would get worse.

Conclusion

This chapter reads two modes of activist writing, the propaganda flier and the prison letter, as interconnected methods of dissidence in authoritarian Indonesia. They are, I argue, exemplary genres of activist writing that reflect the evolution of ordinary things such as photocopies and letters into media for subterfuge, testimony and resistance. They are locations for certain vivid memories, intimate, radical and otherwise. Importantly, the ordinary nature of a copy and the dispersed and intimate quality of personal letters have normalised such technologies and techniques of dissidence so as to render them forgettable repositories of sentiment and labour.

In this chapter I have tried to situate activist copying practices within a broader frame of technological influence and historical legacies in political resistance movements. The production, circulation and consumptions of texts produces novel forms of dissent, alongside new forms of solidarity and emerging publics. In a political context enframed by action-oriented narratives of social movement, the unremarkable nature of paper is noteworthy. It forces us to rethink the historical and social reconstruction of such movements through scripts other than ideological propulsion or the overwhelming force of protest. Finally, I draw attention to the ways that intergenerational and international friendships and solidarities are forged through the work of writing and making papers. The last argument I wish to repeat is this: the space of the page is a space of endurance. The activist archive has survived the strengths and weaknesses of state power and individual and collective resistance. It is the fruition of only one of a variety of futures that activists imagined; in many cases it has yet to come together.

Epilogue

Activists may also withhold their papers from circulation if it renders their communities vulnerable. Two decades after *Reformasi*, many Indonesians continue to believe New Order narratives about PKI threats to the nation. At the time of writing (January 2019), new cases of anti-communist rhetoric have emerged. An environmental activist named Budi Pego has been sentenced to four years in prison, allegedly for brandishing a banner featuring the hammer and sickle image at an anti-mining protest, and police have seized 'communist books' from independent bookstores in Kediri, Java. The attorney general, a political

appointee, has endorsed the unconstitutional action of banning all books thought to contain communist ideas. The public response encapsulates the indeterminacy of leftist, progressive and liberal futures in Indonesia, muffled and amplified as they are by indifference, avoidance, support for the state authorities' decisions, hardliners' call for more anti-communist vigilance and NGO-led protest.

Notes

1 Antonio Gramsci's prison notebooks, Nelson Mandela's autobiography and Ahmed Kathrada's letters from Robben island, Ethel Rosenberg's letters and the burgeoning number of memoirs by Indonesian political prisoners from the 1965 generation who were victims of arbitrary state detention and violence come to mind.
2 An exception can be found in critical and feminist strands of the digital humanities, which pay attention to the intersectional (raced, classed, gendered) aspects of new media platforms.
3 The Buru Quartet takes place during the dawn of Indonesian nationalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The character of Minke is a Dutch-educated Javanese aristocrat who gains a nationalist consciousness over the course of the novels. By the end of the third novel, *Footsteps*, Minke is arrested and prepares to go into exile.
4 Two decades earlier Pram too was teaching himself German in Buru and making little headway. The character Minke in the Buru novels also speaks a broken German.
5 Wilson's letter dated 24 February 1998. Author's collection and translation.
6 Former political prisoners, especially those accused of communism, were forever marked by their status. They carried ID cards with a special designation for *eks-tapol* (former political detainee) and were required to report routinely to the local military installation. The families of *eks-tapol* were similarly stigmatised and had difficulty obtaining work, housing or education.
7 Carmel Budiarjo is a British woman who runs a London-based organisation called Tapol (*tahanan politik*, political prisoner) that advocates for Indonesian political prisoners. Max Lane is an Australian former diplomat and a scholar-activist who at the time of Wilson's incarceration was involved in ASIET (Action in Solidarity with Indonesia and East Timor). He is the translator of Pramoedya's Buru Quartet.

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Index

The Intimate Life of Dissent examines the meanings and implications of public acts of dissent, drawing on examples from ethnography and history. Acts of dissent are never simply just about abstract principles, but also come at great personal risk to both the dissidents and to those close to them. Dissent is, therefore, embedded in deep, complex and sometimes contradictory intimate relations. This book puts acts of high principle back into the personal relations out of which they emerge and take effect, raising new questions about the relationship between intimacy and political commitment. It does so through an introduction and eight individual chapters, drawing on examples including Sri Lankan leftists, Soviet dissidents, Tibetan exiles, Kurdish prisoners, British pacifists, Indonesian student activists and Jewish peace activists.

The Intimate Life of Dissent will be of interest to postgraduate students and researchers of anthropology, history, political theory and sociology. Written in a clear and accessible style, it is also suitable for teaching introductory undergraduate courses on political anthropology.

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