# Northumbria Research Link

# Crowds, Events, Enaction:
# Liminal Politics at the Chattri Memorial

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**Abstract**

*This chapter analyses how memorialising and heritage-making by an affective crowd asserted a postcolonial politics. The Chattri Memorial is a remembrance space situated near Brighton, UK, built in 1921, to mark Indian soldiers who fought during the First World War. It explores how a heterogeneous community of local veterans, Indian organisations, and onlookers from mixed origins performed a horizontal politics through an experienced event. It engages participants' affective event-making as conscious 'past-presencing' (Macdonald, 2013), and analyses how their annual acts of presencing in this space constitutes the enaction of citizenship (Isin, 2008). The communal rite of memorialising was a political event not only for witnessing, belonging, and gaining recognition, but also for making conscious interventions over the racialising discourses that are a fact of life for participants.*

**Keywords:** Memorialising, Postcolonial, Heritage, Affect, Liminal, Presencing, Horizontal politics

Events are a big part of Heritage Studies, a field that investigates why and how societies designate aspects of the past as important. The *heritagisation* of the past is a process that places value upon places, people, things, practices, histories, or ideas as an inheritance to be passed on to future generations (Ashley, **2014**; Sánchez-Carretero, **2013**). Who is producing and consuming the valuations, and for what reasons, will alter the nature of the process? Issues of power affect official heritage systems, and these are often contested, or alternative significations offered through unofficial sites and activities (see Ashley, **2014**, **2016**; Harrison, **2013**; Harvey, **2001**).

Events are used within heritagisation in both official and unofficial capacities to publicly acclaim, celebrate, or challenge the value of tangible and intangible heritage. The term event is used here to indicate a planned activity or "…an occurrence at a given place and time; a special set of circumstances; a noteworthy occurrence" (Getz, **2007**, p. 18). Yet analysis of the "eventfulness" (Richards, **2015**) of such activities is often overlooked in studies of the heritagisation processes. The aim of this chapter is to analyse "event" as an important process of heritage-making and to examine the radical potential of event "crowds" as affective communities acting within liminal conditions. The chapter investigates the ways that a heritagisation event in a remote location in the UK was used to reinscribe the value of that heritage site within the lives of ordinary people. Argued here is that the liminal, affective, and anarchistic qualities of this intensively experienced crowd event aided an unanticipated postcolonial politics.

The event in question was an annual memorial ceremony in the UK, organised to honour Indian soldiers who fought on the Western Front during the First World War. It was centred around the Chattri Indian monument built in 1921 in an isolated part of the Sussex Downs outside of Brighton, and the site of the cremation of 53 Indian soldiers who died in a military hospital nearby. This was a relatively new event pulled together by local volunteers in the year 2000 but based on an annual British Legion event that had been established in 1950, after the Second World War. I attended the memorial event on two occasions in June 2013 and 2014 and interviewed a series of participants off- and on-site.

I wanted to understand this memorial event in relation to changing valuations of heritage. I felt at the time, during my participation in the activity, that a significant change or turning point was happening around me. Here was an evocative heritagisation event that was carried out intentionally to mark the past; that declared a valuation of the past; and was carried out beside what was clearly a remarkable historical artefact. The ceremony was a charged-up, electric, communal enactment of a heritage in a location that meant something to those involved. So, what was going on here? Why did we feel that this event itself was important, a transformational part of our lives and the lives of those with whom it was being shared? How did the "eventfulness" experienced by the crowd make me think that we were effecting change?

The Chattri monument, and the annual ceremony around it, exemplified heritagisation: the act of signifying and marking the past as valuable within these people's lives. Participants went out of their way to come here to this spot, at this moment, and through their activities of being-there, through the emplacement of their bodies and bearing witness, they participated in this public statement about value. "This is our heritage", some people said. Gathering around that physical heritage object, the Chattri, in an intangible enactment of a ritual , was the point of what we were doing—the act itself. What was striking about the event was its dynamic human atmosphere that combined with the power of its setting. The Chattri's location, high on the windswept Sussex Downs and out of sight of anyone except occasional hikers, marks this place as experientially different from most Great War remembrances. There is no auto access; instead, the site can only be reached by a 15-minute walk across the fields of sheep and cow dung from a local road (See Fig. **14.1**). It feels more akin to Stonehenge or isolated sacred places from prehistory—a boundary or entry point to another world.

At least 250 people gather at this location on the downs each year in June, with some participants arriving by foot, some by car and motorbike, and others by hired bus from London. Assorted people came from across the country—Indian descendants, local residents, Black history enthusiasts, a military biker group, military officials, and ethnic organisations—mixing with The Lord Mayor of Brighton, the Queen's representative, the local Marquis, and the Indian High Command. There was a liveliness, a sense of chaos, a lack of convention, and an openness to unexpected and random cross-cultural encounters, marked by a profusion of skin colour and lack of dress code. These were mostly strangers, but under unconventional circumstances people moved about the space and talked to each other freely.

The making-valuable of this moment was not just about the thingness of the historic memorial—that marble Chattri monument—or about the place, high on the chalk downs, although that certainly heightened one's emotions. It required the presence of other people, and the interactions and social sense of being-in-each-others'-presence to assert its value. The scene here was chaotic but incredibly moving—both the place and ceremony somehow churned up energy and emotion that participants felt reinforced the making-valuable of this moment. This mixture of people came together to create something new—it referenced the past, but achieved resonance among the participants from seeing, being seen, interacting, and relating with each other, marking out a sense of occasion and asserting eventfulness.

### Memorials, Liminality, and Politics

The liminality of the Chattri monument and ceremony enabled its political potency. The monument, the event, and the participants possessed that liminal character as "betwixt and between" and between" both in time and space, and in culture and sensibility, which heightened the potential for change and transformation. A fundamental feature of liminality is its lack of fixity or permanence, a threshold region where the rules and hierarchies of society are suspended, and expressive actions encouraged (Horvath, Thomassen, & Wydra, **2015**). Liminal settings allow deconstructing, examining, and restructuring of ideas and systems, a postmodern perspective that can particularly favour the colonised by legitimating marginal subjectivities and ways of knowing, and affirming liminality as a valid and recognised space of occupation (Atkinson, **2002**; Bhabha, **1994**).

Yet, the Chattri event here took place beside a monument—something clearly fixed in its situation. Monuments are symbolic political devices, "ritual symbols" that assume a sacred tone (Turner, **1974**), meant to "colonise an imagined future with our values" (Ashworth, **2008**). As suggested by Nora (1989), collective memory is attached to such *lieux de mémoire*, where symbolic elements of a landscape establish and fix the value of the past. Nora writes that "statues or monuments to the dead owe their meaning to their intrinsic existence" (**1989**, p. 22) as solid and monumental heritage markers. But an essential factor of the Chattri monument was its character as a mnemonic device *outside* of mainstream ideas about heritage in Britain. Despite its apparent fixity, the monument's liminal scope was reinforced instead by its remote location, its design, its history, and its connoted meanings that situated the site as singular, marginal, and not quite British in significance (Ashley, **2016**; Littler & Naidoo, **2005**).

Nora points out that some monumental lieux act as "ensembles" constructed over time, "forever open to a full range of significations" (**1989**, p. 23). Material symbols have been shown to be rallying points, an object around which political protests can be mobilised in public, visible events, and the call to decolonise can be voiced (Knudsen & Andersen, **2018**). During such times, social hierarchies are dissolved, and new traditions become possible (Turner, **1974**). I interpreted the actions that I witnessed and felt at this unique marginalised heritage

site as one such liminal political phenomenon. Participation at the Chattri ceremony was not a passive audience event, but an affective community (Slaby & Röttger-Rössler, **2018**), asserting a conscious act of citizenship (Isin, **2008**) triggered by the presencing of the past (Macdonald, **2013**). Macdonald's idea of *past presencing* frames relationships with the past that are more than remembrance and encompass the unconscious or affective, as well as cognitive, levels of experience. It is within this sensibility that heritagisation—the conscious making-valuable of the past through embodied actions—can be understood as an *enaction* of heritage. Seen in this way, the Chattri event was a form of political action on an everyday scale, in a disorganised location outside of the mainstream, where the affective presence of the crowd enacted a postcolonial politics that was *anarchistic* in quality.

Anarchism is a political philosophy that advocates self-governed societies based on voluntary, non-hierarchical associations employing what is called a *horizontal politics* (Springer, **2014**). The search to reshape daily life around different "structures of feeling" is critical (Williams, **1977**). Springer says that anarchism is primarily "about actively reinventing the everyday through a desire to create new forms of organization" (**2014**, p. 252). Actions are self-initiated, rather than waiting for political occasions organised by political systems. Instead, people simply start doing. They begin organising alternatives by following their own areas of concern outside of authorised locations and open themselves to the transformative possibilities that unorganised and inexpert experimentation have to offer.

**Crowds, Events, and Affect**

To think about, and better understand, the ways that the Chattri event incorporated both liminal and anarchistic tendencies in a politicising heritagisation process, four key characteristics will be discussed here:

- The *crowd* as an unformalised constituency of people, often strangers
- The *event* or happening as a mode of activity through which change might occur
- *Affect* as a shared sensibility that maintained the group-ness of the collective and generated a "collective courage"
- *Enaction*, as a consciously performed act by people, without "permission", that makes public statements about citizenship.

An anarchistic politics says that community is necessary, people coming together, but they step beyond kin and neighbour and instead develop a relationship with strangers; strangers coming together in a shared experience (Kropotkin, **2008**; Warner, **2002**). Interest in unformalised groups acting together has been enhanced in recent years by the web and online platforms (Conway, **2013**). Nowadays, such groups are often characterised as "The Crowd"—we might think of crowdsourcing (Owens, **2013**) fundraising from multiple small sources, or the crowd as the public invited to tag digital cultural heritage collections. Business talks about the "wisdom of crowds" where anonymous masses create knowledge through sites like Wikipedia (Warner, **2002**). According to Gustav Le Bon (**1897**), the crowd is a distinct form of temporary collectivity. The crowd doesn't have a history and is not held together by unstated norms. But the crowd can also be more than just an aggregate of disembodied individuals. When embodied, a crowd holds itself together affectively, via imitation, contagion, and suggestion. A primary characteristic of a crowd is that its operation can become a force of its own, no longer individuals, but an organism with a sense of its own invincibility (Katz & Dayan, **2003**). But there is much uneasiness about this notion of crowds: the idea of loss of individuality and of rationality—the masses, chaotic, suggestible; the mob. Scholars employ the idea of Bahktin's carnivalesque to describe the character of these crowds, where the masses get their chance to reverse the status quo, be playful, or vengeful—which can also be called liminal and anarchistic.

People get meaning and belonging from doing things in concert with others. They are part of something bigger than themselves with a collective sense of purpose. This is sometimes expressed as a process of commoning—of joint action, of creating things together, of cooperating to meet shared goals (Esteva, **2014**). Within heritage studies, Simon and Ashley (**2010**) have called such purposeful crowds "publics", in the way that people come together as strangers in the public realm around heritage practices to create something new. Crowds as publics are performative, sociable, reflexive, committed, reflexive, stable, and issues-oriented (Dayan, **2005**). This form of crowd coalesces around issues and calls for attention in their performance.

In social psychology, crowds come together in intensely felt moments of "discharge" or "events" (Dean, **2015**). Such events are significant occurrences rather than simple happenings. Historians view an event as a process that is unique, in motion and contingent, then marked as a point of rupture or change like the phrase "events that change the course of history" (e.g. Sewell, **2005**). Events can signify something as important by drawing and focusing attention on a happening and assigning value in a public way. In Deleuze, events involve activity and change. But events are impossible to pin down—never a beginning, nor an end, but always in the middle; they are "wholly immanent, original and creative productions" (Stagoll, **2010**, p. 91). Deleuze describes events as "sense itself", an intense becoming and an effect (Badiou, **2007**, p. 40). An event might constitute a place of becoming that has no predetermined outcome but entails new possibilities: an effect that can change relationships. An "event-effect" can constitute a turning point in the material constitution of things; the change in intensity that is produced alters the relations between things (ibid.). For Dean (**2015**), the "egalitarian discharge" of the crowd event can be an intense experience of democracy , where the crowd is The People, not just a faceless mob. The here and now of their presence asserts political change. Studies of social movements have pointed out how across the globe such crowd events are pressing their opposition and bringing about change (Springer, **2014**).

Bodily effects contribute to the sensibility of eventfulness and the communal power of the crowd. Affect is part of the material dimension of any event—we experience sites and happenings at an immediately bodily, enfleshed, and sensuous level. This applies both to the materiality of the location and to the body. An affective encounter is about experiencing an aesthetic thrill—a sense of being alive. The process of *commoning* has also been described as *aliveness*—of joint action and creating things together that requires creativity, situational relationships, and experiential practice (Bollier & Helfrich, **2015**). For Deleuze , the body's affectivity does not refer to what the body is but rather what the body can do when entering into relations with other bodies, images, and things to "become-others" (Golańska, **2015**, p. 782).

Peter Linebaugh maintains that the idea of commons is not a resource or a place, it is an activity: "if anything, it expresses relationships in society that are inseparable from relations to nature. It might be better to keep the word as a verb, rather than as a noun, a substantive" (Linebaugh, **2008**, p. 279). This is not a purely visual experience, but involves other senses and sensations and involves place, bodies, and sensations. This does not come from isolated individuals but in relationship to others. Out of this complexity of experience—our heightened experience—we narrate for ourselves a story. This sensation is never simple. It is always doubled by the feeling of *having* this feeling. It is self-referential—a combination of the affective and our conscious awareness of being in an event and understanding its significance (Golańska, **2015**). And this is where the political potential lies, the potential for change and disruption inherent within liminality.

In their discussion of publics, Simon and Ashley (**2010**) note the way purposeful crowds come together in encounters or events through heritage practices. These events can entail a break or turning point in existing patterns of social existence, thus hold the promise of bringing something new into the world. Importantly for Simon, an event gathers people together over a duration, in a performative *mise-en-scène mise-en-scène* into which they enter. It is the *mise-en-scène mise-en-scène* that sets the terms of the event's legibility and affective force: the crowd displays a particular mode of attentiveness to the address of this scene, where its affective character structures the possibilities of thought and judgement (Simon, **2014**). The experience of the striking setting with embodied performance—its eventfulness—creates an experience that then influences how participants subsequently think about it; that this happening is important.

The Chattri memorialising possessed these features: participants performed affectively in this space and this gathering each year. The ethereal quality of the location was part of the impact of the *mise-en-scène*: because of the powerful sense of place at this site, the aura of its physicality as sacred object and evocative space, the affective sensibility was heightened.

*There is something genuinely haunting… You feel very spiritual…you're at peace… when you're there you feel that you're looking out at the city at a particular spot and know, um…it has more significance standing there than if you were anywhere else, because you're actually somewhere that carries a lot of history behind it* (Interview M, 26 March 2014).

The excitement within the crowd was palpable. All were willing to come from a great distance, and for older people with some discomfort, tramping over the fields in order to place themselves at this spot. Participants

described or marked this as an event they could not miss or had to attend; their participation in that annual occurrence became a significant part of some people's personal narrative.

*I had a woman; an elderly lady and her grandson, came down from Leicester…. And she came up to me in a wheelchair; her grandson pushing her, and said to me that she wanted to attend [the Chattri] before she died. And I felt very touched by the people that use that as a place to visit, before they die… there's nowhere else in England* (Interview B, 9 December 2013).

Something unique was created here—an unexpected and non-traditional experience that depended on and referenced the past, but achieved resonance from seeing, being seen, interacting, and relating with each other, marking out the occasion. A Hindu song, sung by Bindu Vachhani, is now cemented into the event. A participant responded to Bindu: "Men cry when you're done with it". Said another of the entire occasion,

*I've seen people cry, I've cried. It's also a very spiritual occasion, very emotional, very peaceful, very solemn. You can feel all those things. You can really sense it when there's the two minutes of silence and you can hear birds tweeting and it's rather beautiful in a spiritual way…* (Interview D, 27 October 2013).

The meaning of the Chattri event was fluid for most participants and characterised by some as the creation of something new. Its heritage connotation might soon be stabilised through further *representation*—an important effect of heritage-making. But the meaning created here has not yet been stabilised in representation, although the website, newspapers, and lately even national television have labelled this an Event of Consequence. For some, the event had potential for a new sense of Indianness in Britain:

*I just feel that we're creating our own culture because there's nothing here for us… you can walk around Brighton and not see anything to refer to that - nothing for the Indian man around Brighton.* (Interview C, 23 March 2014)

*I'm looking for a community here, an Indian community, bringing them, together, you know. And one way of doing that is to get the Indian community involved in the history* (Interview D, 27 October 2013).

Reflecting on Springer's characteristics of anarchism and horizontal politics, I suggest the Chattri event was anarchistic in sensibility. It drew together a heterogeneous crowd at this unlikely location, clearly outside of the mainstream, in an event that was out of the ordinary for the people there, and where the affective presencing of the past enacted a desire for something more. Change and politics emerged through *enaction*—affective acts that we understand as significant.

**Publics, Politics, and Enaction**
Radical geographers examine the "horizontal politics" entailed by the Occupy Wall Street and Black Lives Matter movements as anarchistic in quality. Springer (**2014**) highlights the materiality of their occupation of public spaces in cities around the world and the assertion of politics, the here and now, through an affective presence outside of established structures. The creation of an exceptional event in Occupied spaces by an amorphous crowd in a disorganised fashion, and the physical transformation of space through active, sensory bodies created a material and symbolic statement of presence. Importantly as well, commentators have noted that such anarchistic political actions do not just lie in large public spectacles of protest, but also in community actions located in the everyday. Chomsky (**2005**) points out that the traits of anarchism are always in existence; in practical terms, society has always organised itself in spaces outside of authority. This coming together is a creative practice of "world-making", a kind of productive enaction that lies at the foundation of democratic practice (Arendt, **1989** [**1958**]).

At the Chattri event, a "public" was formed; loosely organised, and political in the sense of strong motivations, attitudes, and ideas (Simon & Ashley, **2010**). This mixed group of participants assembled to reinterpret old rituals in relation to each other, enacting an affective politics that consciously aimed at asserting a "heritage" and their right to shape their world. Interrelations were a strong aspect of the crowd dynamic—realising one's own positioning while empathising with others (Ashley, **2016**). Through this mutual recognition occurred here; heritage-making processes that enabled the formation of a democratic public.

*What is interesting about this is that it is very intercultural. You get people who under normal circumstances would never meet. You get bikers, your Hindu culture – it's culture—it's really nice actually* (Ceremony participant, 9 June 2013).

*English people come up to me and say what an amazing feeling there is at the Chattri… They feel that, you know, the community spirit. And the diversity of the people that are there, black, white, Indian - they're Indian—they're all there. And they feel that. This is a very 'white' County - East County—East Sussex and Brighton and Hove. So, this is a good example of multiculturalism in practice, if you like. Where everybody just comes in and there's a bond* (Interview D, 27 October 2013).

People were *enacting* themselves as political beings, consciously performing new acts that made public statements about their place in the UK and their relations with others. Participants could feel that something innovative and something valuable was created here.

*It's about humanity, right? Humanity rises above nations, we are all humans. Anybody doing similar things in another country, as a human being, we will be respectful* (Focus Group—23 March 2014).

But as a democratic politics, this enaction was never unified: such a process involves ongoing conflicts and contradictions that are unresolved (Lynch, **2014**). For example, while the Chattri memorial event was perceived by many white participants as multicultural integration in action, some Indian participants took the stance that they were publicly asserting the values of an outsider non-white minority in relation to the insider English heritage. Such is the nature of anarchistic communal enaction: not state-sponsored acts but local relationships through which individuals and groups struggling for decolonisation, recognition, or other matters of concern, but also interacting purposefully to change the shape of society (Cornwall & Coelho, **2007**; Isin, **2008**; Knudsen & Andersen, **2018**).

This politics was enacted at the Chattri through a communal rite of memorialising—a public consciousness-raising where alternative ideas were celebrated and actually lived without seeking permission. This was not about protest as is typically seen, as the way that subaltern groups react to dominant agendas. Instead, horizontal politics here involved direct action, an everyday doing outside of those agendas in ways that were transformational. The Chattri was once a colonial memorial, intended in 1921 to speak about India and Indians in a way that would reinforce imperial power. That aspect of its heritage is now invisible, with new activities of immigrant Indians that have no reference in most cases to the origins of the monument. Instead, participants were attracted to this site and activities by the desire to make their presence known in the UK, and to support intangible spiritual values through their attendance. The actions of the crowd on the ground and the Indians performing on the platform, created a new heritage in this annual event using affective power. Knudsen and Andersen call this "an affective politics using nonrepresentational bodily strategies" which they argue is essential now for "actual social movements to mobilize in current political controversies" (**2018**, p. 1). At the Chattri, this was achieved not through protest, nor was it an institutionally driven desire for "engagement" and "participation", it was just *doing things* following an alternative logic.

The horizontal logic of this enaction could be seen in the blur between stage and audience, where this performative and anarchistic sensibility ensured that the crowd could not be "curated" or controlled (Fischer, **2015**). There were frequent crossings between staged ceremony activities and the crowd: crowd members brought tokens onto the burial platform, and prayers, hymns, and music broke the barrier between. At the end, the crowd surged onto the platform for a jolly group photo (See Fig. **14.2**). This was an anarchic political moment when the materiality of the space and the people allowed a collective courage that inspired a sense that we were all, together, enabled and powerful—we were all equal members of this event.

Can this event be considered liminal in the sense of transformative and effecting change? Daniel Dayan (2015) discusses political talk and civic culture as a continuity between the pre-political and the political. He notes that turning everyday ordinary talk into something more involves the coming together of strangers with shared concerns in a new form of autonomous organisation. Here liminality is accepted as a legitimate status: a threshold region of uncertainty and emotional intensity, expressive imagination and inversion of social hierarchies (Atkinson, **2002**). But the key to an event's liminal qualities lies in public performance—being obvious and in the open (Dayan, **2005**, p.15). p. 15). Decolonial movements have historically used public, visible activist events to contest colonial heritage (Lasky, **2011**). In the minds of those I interviewed, it was the

participation in public with others, made through the body and emerging from this communal witnessing of each other, and the enaction of their presence at that time and in that place, that was the core value of this heritage-making event. The public here created a world in Arendt's terms, understood as a creative doing; as action that carries emergent potential. I interpret *heritagisation* as this process: moving from an affective experience to a cognitive comprehension of the value of the past and asserting the right to make new claims of value by our actions.

## Conclusion

From its origins in 1921 as an imperial gesture towards India, the Chattri memorial has been both tangible historical resource and place of heritage-asserting practices; a symbolic sign and ritual site marked by communal felt experiences. When the memorialising ceremony was taken over in 2000 by the local Indian community, the monument and activities at the site took on new meanings. The affective crowd event by this minority culture has been interpreted here as performative heritage-making, an example of past presencing using Macdonald's concept, where a diverse group of people came together in an embodied act of being-there in relation to the past and each other. These activities acted heterogeneously to consciously foreground an outsider heritage in a conscious public expression of politics by minority people, but also enacted relational connections and support of those outside this heritage. Lasky has drawn attention to the importance of "being-in-relation" in the practice of equality in addition to the reconnection to tradition as sources of strength, as an end in itself for political change (Lasky, **2011**). The Chattri event was a political event not only for witnessing, belonging, and gaining recognition, but also for making conscious interventions over the racialising discourses that are a fact of life for participants.

*What I am saying is why WE should be, why Indian people [should] only remember this thing. I think the most important thing is that BRITISH people should be remembering them as well* (Focus Group—March 23, 2014).

Past presencing at this unusual event was an enactment that made demands on the attention and attitudes of the broader UK society to embrace the potential for transformation exemplified by the multiplicity, plurality, and liminality of the Chattri, thus contributing to the postcolonial possibility of being-in-relation in the here and now.

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**Fig. 14.1** Chattri Indian Memorial site north of Brighton on the Sussex Downs. Photo by author

**Fig. 14.2** Participants converge on the steps of the Memorial for a final group shot, June 2013. Photo by the author