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THE SEMIOSIS OF CIVIL SOCIETY: THEORIZING THE MEDIA IN
POSTCOLONIAL POLITIES

A Dissertation Presented

By

SRINIVAS R. LANKALA

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
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Department of Communication

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POSTCOLONIAL POLITIES

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DEDICATION

To my parents

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

ABSTRACT

THE SEMIOSIS OF CIVIL SOCIETY: THEORIZING THE MEDIA IN
POSTCOLONIAL POLITIES

FEBRUARY 2015

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My dissertation is an attempt to construct a theoretical framework for the

distinctive nature of the mass media in the postcolonial political context through an

engagement with the theoretical legacy of Indian political theory and historiography,

especially the Subaltern Studies school. I draw from Partha Chatterjee's

conceptualization of Indian politics as divided into the two spheres of civil and political

society and interpret these political categories through the rubric of mass media and

televisual discourse, both to locate the mass media in the discourse and practice of

politics, and to also locate political practice as it takes place in a mediatized context.

To extend Chatterjee's understanding of the postcolonial polity, I map these

political categories to Jean Baudrillard's understanding of human communication that is

divided between the symbolic and semiotic domains. I trace Baudrillard's theoretical

trajectory from Durkheim and Marx through social anthropology and media theory. I also

try to interpret his categories through Marx's concept of the subsumption of labor under

capital as a metaphor to understand how the thread of capitalist modernity runs through them.

I posit that the nation-form is the essential embodiment of capitalist modernity in the context of a mediatized political sphere where the nation is essentially what Baudrillard calls a simulacrum, and I try to understand it as a semiotic discourse that is located within the realm of civil society. I explore this aspect of the relationship between media and politics through instances of the mass-mediation of the symbolic domain of political society.

Finally I argue that it is the symbolic domain that is the dominant aspect of communication in the postcolonial context, and it is a recovery of the symbolic that will provide a political challenge radical enough to destabilize the semiotic realm of capitalist modernity. This recovery can only take place if the mass media shifts its location from civil society to the democratic challenges of political society. A radical theory of the media in the postcolonial context will be one that will enable this shift by critically engaging with the absences and silences of the symbolic within current media discourse.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

TOWARDS A THEORY OF THE MEDIA IN POSTCOLONIAL SOCIETIES

I. Introduction

The present work is a meditation on the nature and role of the media in a

postcolonial context, and an attempt at delineating a theoretical approach to the media in

India, based on the epistemological categories of Indian political theory and postcolonial

historiography.

To this end, there are certain terminological categories that are used without a

thorough historical exposition of their range of meanings. One of these is the idea of

'modernity', which I use to mean the historical phase of European colonial rule starting

that is also coterminous with the rise and dominance of European capitalism as a both a

historical movement as well as an ideological discourse. Other categories such as the

'state', the 'nation' and 'civil society' that are essential to my arguments also have a

diversity of meanings that are not acknowledged by my own usage. I have tried to explain

the restricted sense in which I use them wherever necessary in the text. For instance, my

understanding of the 'nation' as a discursive formation that follows the spread of

capitalism and its creation of public spheres anchored in the print media is borrowed from

Benedict Anderson's historical concept of the modern nation as an 'imagined

community':

> "In the process, they gradually became aware of the hundreds of thousands, even millions, of
> people in their particular language-field, and at the same time that only those hundreds of
> thousands, or millions, so belonged. These fellow-readers, to whom they were connected through
> print, formed, in their secular, particular, visible invisibility, the embryo of the nationally
> imagined community.…the convergence of capitalism and print technology on the fatal diversity
> of human language created the possibility of a new form of imagined community, which in its
> basic morphology set the stage for the modern nation". (Anderson 1991, p. 44-45)

Similarly, by the 'postcolonial world', I imply what Partha Chatterjee has called 'most of the world' (Chatterjee 2004), including within this term, the regions of the world which were subject to the transformational effects of the ideologies represented by modernity: I understand the spread of colonialism as inseparable from the rise of capitalism, and these historical movements are linked through the ideological structures that are understood by the term 'modernity'. Here, I understand the post-colonial to mean that which is produced by colonialism, or the state of coloniality, rather than an indication of a stage of historical development.

> "What I mean by 'most of the world'… [is] those parts of the world that were not direct participants in the history of the evolution of the institutions of modern capitalist democracy. 'Modern capitalist democracy' might, in a loose way, be taken to mean the modern West. But…the modern West has a significant presence in many modern non-Western societies, just as, indeed, there are large sectors of contemporary Western society that are not necessarily part of the historical entity known as the modern West. However, if I were to make a rough estimate of the number of people in the world who would be, in a conceptual sense, included within my description of popular politics, I would say that I am talking of the political life of well over three-fourths of contemporary humanity." (Chatterjee 2004, p.3)

In this chapter, I begin with the need for a new approach to theory construction in media studies in the postcolonial world. Taking India as an emblematic example I try to provide the ground for a deeper examination of existing media theory and how political theory can provide a more meaningful foundation for the construction of a new theory of the media.

II. Thinking Media through Political Theory

The difference between the postcolonial nation-states and the polities of their colonizing powers has been theorized effectively in the field of political theory and cultural studies. New forms of historiography, notably the Subaltern Studies school, have inspired a fundamentally different way of explaining and understanding the histories of

postcolonial societies. Other fields of social-scientific research however, have been trapped in a metropolitan framework that is rooted in the singular historical trajectories of Western European nation-states. The incomplete decolonization of academic and policy institutions has allowed the awkward insertion of postcolonial histories of the present into the social and political framework that obtains in the colonizing world. This has led to a lack of theoretical language to engage with the cultural reality of postcolonial polities and their unique trajectories both during and after colonial rule.

The study of mass media has been one casualty of this inability to develop a new theoretical and philosophical framework for mass communication in the postcolonial world. The failure to understand the singularity of mass media institutions and texts that are located and produced in the postcolonial world and the indiscriminate application of a theoretical language rooted in the culturally specific phenomenon of the European enlightenment has occurred primarily because of the lack of *sui generis* philosophical tools that explain postcolonial mass media through a postcolonial lens.

This chapter, and the ones that follow, take India as an emblematic instance of a postcolonial political context and attempt to explain its mass media through a philosophical understanding of its location and role in social and political structures. To do so, without lapsing in to a media-centric view of society that is the bane of such attempts at theoretical constructions, these essays locate mass media within the larger framework of postcolonial polity. Rather than a cultural or sociologically based theoretical framework, this work seeks to harness political theory and philosophy in order to locate and explain mass media. The reasons are twofold:

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1. A cultural theory of Indian mass media would be a vast undertaking, and would not be very useful considering the lack of a 'national' culture in the European sense. 'Indian' media, in a social or cultural sense, thus is not a valid term and is not meaningful in an empirical or theoretical sense, given the diversity of sub-national cultures, languages and language families.

2. India, like other postcolonial countries, is a nation-state constituted through colonial rule and anti-colonial nationalism: 'India' as a singular unit, is thus nothing but polity, and there is nothing left of any other older or alternative political structures except the singular national polity created and bequeathed through colonialism. However, unlike other colonized countries, this is the result of a unique compromise that the Indian national bourgeoisie made with its colonial masters during the last phase of the anti-colonial national movement (Chatterjee 1993). This has resulted in a political structure that draws a thick line between the social and the political and has led to the contradictions inherent in its polity that are the determining characteristics of its mass media as well. These contradictions are at the heart of the chapters that follow and are the foundation for the construction of a media theory that is attempted therein.

Indian political theory is also advanced enough to have generated a unique perspective of understanding these contradictions. Because of the pioneering efforts of the Subaltern Studies school historians, political theory that is based in these historiographical exercises has produced innovative and theoretically meaningful understandings of the polity. Drawing on the fundamental political concepts of the state,

civil society and political society, theorists such as Partha Chatterjee, Dipesh

Chakrabarty, Sudipta Kaviraj and others have attempted to characterize the singularities

of the Indian polity through a unique theoretical interpretation of these enlightenment

terms.

A second imperative that drives this theoretical construction of the mass media in

terms of theories of the polity is the relationship between mass media and contemporary

politics: the media is increasingly a location of political discourse, to the extent that

political discourse is primarily a mediated experience for a large part of the population.

While this is true of all media-saturated societies, it holds greater import for India

because of the contradiction between the political *discourse* that is mediated and the

actual *practice* of politics as it exists outside the media. The ideological elements that

dominate political discourse in India: issues of nationalism, sub-national movements,

secularism, caste and gender identity, and the contingent issues that animate these

elements such as political corruption, terrorism, discrimination and xenophobia are, to a

large extent, mediated discourses. This means the bulk of Indians experience these issues,

or even consider them issues in the first place, due their prevalence in mass media

narratives.

While this perspective might appear to place an undue emphasis on the mass media as

playing an animating role in politics, the structural relationship between media and

politics goes much deeper and is more complex. Subsequent chapters will argue that this

is the result of a foundational contradiction in the Indian nation-state, and is true of all

postcolonial states, where a liberal, ostensibly non-colonial, political order is built upon

an existing non-modern, non-European polity that co-exists, yet is hidden by the screen

of the liberal political arrangement that mimics the arrangement of civil society and the state in western Europe.

A brief excursus through the current scholarship on political theory in India at this juncture will enable me to move towards a foundation for a theoretical engagement with the mass media as part of politics.

The strand of political theory that is of interest to the arguments in these chapters is the school that is descended from the Subaltern Studies group of historians, who, in the 1980s and 1990s attempted to recast historiography of the colonial encounter as it would be observed 'from below', gleaned from texts and narratives that dealt with the actions of the colonized. This was in opposition to the prevalent trend of using official and colonial texts and discourses as the primary sources of historical data. In shifting their gaze to the other side, the Subaltern historians aimed to avoid both the replication of the colonial ideological narrative as well as its mirror image that was found in the nativist discourses of elite nationalists.

The Subaltern Studies group found their name in a concept from Antonio Gramsci which referred to the ideological functionaries of the rulers. Early work of the school focused on elucidating the Gramscian concept of hegemony in the colonial context. By looking at moments in colonial political history that they termed counter-hegemonic, and that were located in small, everyday acts of resistance and rebellion, the school's historians tried to avoid the trap of valorizing nationalist historiography that emerged as the hagiographic narration of an elite movement against colonial rule (Chakrabarty 2000). The subaltern, in their redefinition of the term became the figure who represented the non-modern, who was not part of the colonial or nationalist narrative because these

narratives were both two aspects of the same modernity. As Gayatri Spivak clarified, the

subaltern is not simply a synonym for the oppressed, or the marginal, or the colonized, all

of which are simply categories of the same modern narratives, but was a representative of

the figure that could not be spoken of in the language of modernity and was therefore

absent (Spivak 2005).

> "Subalternity cannot be generalised according to hegemonic logic. That is what makes it subaltern. Yet it is a category and therefore repeatable… Subalternity is a position without identity. It is somewhat like the strict understanding of class. Class is not a cultural origin, it is a sense of economic collectivity, of social relations of formation as the basis of action. Gender is not lived sexual difference. It is a sense of the collective social negotiation of sexual differences as the basis of action. 'Race' is not originary; it assumes racism. Subalternity is where social lines of mobility, being elsewhere, do not permit the formation of a recognisable basis of action." (Spivak 2005, p.475-476)

Political theorists associated with this school then used this methodology to

theorize the postcolonial polity that they understood as having descended from colonial

antecedents and incorporating many of the contradictions inherent in the latter. Prominent

among these were Partha Chatterjee, Sudipta Kaviraj and Dipesh Chakrabarty.

Chakrabarty's thesis focused on the construction of the postcolonial national as an

essentially European institution (Chakrabarty 2000). Kaviraj's work describes the

nationalist movement and the fashioning of a unitary nation-state after decolonization as

an elite attempt to incorporate European political and civic ideals into a non-European

social reality (Kaviraj 2010) .

> "The colonial period saw the appearance of two types of divisions in Indian society: the discursive division between those who made the world they inhabited intelligible via modernist discourse, and those who did not. This division ran decisively between the Indian elite and the lower orders. On top of it, however, nationalism put in place a political division between colonialism and the Indian nation". (Kaviraj 2010, p.23)

Kaviraj and Khilnani's work on the civil society in India also echoes Chatterjee's

radically new understanding of civil society in the postcolonial world and his distinction

between civil society, political society and the state, that he draws from its original Hegelian sense towards a more accurate reflection of the way political life is lived in a postcolonial society like India (Kaviraj 2001). Other political theorists have tried to understand and problematize fundamental concepts such as secularism, community, social movements, social hierarchies of caste, ethnicity and gender which are all deeply embedded in Indian political and popular discourse but whose quotidian use belies their provenance in European modernity and is fundamentally at odds with their original sense in their European contexts. Instead of drawing from their applied meanings in European political thought, contemporary debates in Indian political theory have attempted to refashion these terms in ways that reflect their actual usage and existence in the Indian reality (Chandhoke 2002; Bhandari 2006). Chatterjee's theorization of civil and political society, their historical trajectory and current understanding is the most ambitious of these attempts and is part of a larger wave of political theory that is re-theorizing and redefining modernity in order to draw it away from its current incarnation in existing discourse towards a sense that in which it is experienced and understood by the majority of people it affects (Chatterjee 1998).

To a large extent, this has involved the recognition of multiple fissures and divisions in the ways in which these terms are understood within India itself. The fundamental split, explicitly theorized by Chatterjee, but present in some form or other in all the new debates is one between a colonial élite which rules and the mass of the population which is 'governed'. Chatterjee uses the idea of a governmental state to explain the relation between the population and the state, even while the ruling élite

inhabits a relation to the state that reflects the classic European bourgeois ideal of citizenship.

> "Population, then, constitutes the material of society. Unlike the family in classical theory, the concept of population is descriptive and empirical, not normative. Indeed, population is assumed to contain large elements of 'naturalness' and 'primordiality'; the internal principles of the constitution of particular population groups are not expected to be rationally explicable since they are not the products of rational contractual association but are, as it were, pre-rational. What the concept of population does, however, is make available for governmental functions (economic policy, bureaucratic administration, law, and political mobilization) a set of rationally manipulable instruments for reaching large sections of the inhabitants of a country as the targets of 'policy'". (Chatterjee 1998, p.62)

Chatterjee, like Kaviraj, traces the roots of this contradiction to the 'passive revolution' that both created the native Indian bourgeoisie as a class, and ushered in the postcolonial nation-state led by the same national bourgeoisie as the successor to the colonial state (Kaviraj, 1988, 2010; Chatterjee, 1993) . Drawing on Gramsci's notion of the passive resolution as a substitute for a true revolutionary class and as a 'revolution from above', Chatterjee explains how nationalist thought evolved under colonial rule as the reflection of the colonialists' worldview and supplied the paternalist ideology of 'development' that the postcolonial state used as its foundational logic for hegemonic rule and its identity as the true agent of change in a postcolonial society, and a substitute for a revolutionary class (Chatterjee, 1986).

III. The Postcolonial Distinction

The persistence of coloniality in the post-colony can thus be understood as the result of the continuity of the role of the national bourgeoisie   in sustaining both colonial rule as well providing the logic for the new nation-state that replaced that rule. At its most fundamental level, the logic that animates colonialism – a violent process of extraction, dispossession and displacement that Marx defined as the primary

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accumulation that gives rise to capital – continues mostly unchanged under the postcolonial state, not just in India but in most of the postcolonial world . Whether the national bourgeoisie plays the role of transferring wealth to a neo-colonial elite still based in the colonial metropole, or uses the wealth generated by the surpluses of primary accumulation to reproduce itself has been one of the long-running debates for Indian communists and Marxists for most of the twentieth century and continues to appear in the programmatic deliberations of Indian communist parties (Kaviraj 1988, 2010). However, the distinction is largely immaterial from the perspective of the majority of the population, who Chatterjee calls the 'governed', and who form the object of this extractive logic (Chatterjee 2004).

The national bourgeoisie thus has a different relationship to the state it leads from the majority of the people who are the objects of the violence that accompanied what used to be colonial extraction and is now carried out under the auspices of the ideology of 'development'. These continuities are also at the heart of Chakrabarty's understanding of 'Europe' as not just restricted to a geographic sense but as part of an ideological and ontological framework that is present in the very logic of modernity itself (Chakrabarty 2000). This is certainly true when understood as metaphor for the peculiar rationality that produced colonial modernity and continues to give life to the social and political forces driving postcolonial states, and thus much of the world. In a world that depends on a fundamental level on a system of nation-states engendered by colonialism, Chakrabarty's Europe is seen to be located in the colonies that it created and which continue as contemporary nation-states.

However, we can also see that it is not just in a metaphorical sense that Europe is located in the colony. Much of the structures and institutions of modern capitalism owe their existence to the long period of colonialism and its ideological frameworks. These include the moral ideologies of work and productivity, wage-labor and the corporation. In addition to the wealth generated through colonial extraction that made possible the European enlightenment, the modern urban environment, the institutions of civil society and the reorganization of metropolitan society along the uniform lines of a secular civic rationality, it was also the need to justify the contradiction between enlightenment at home and barbarity abroad that the idea of Europe itself and the modern identity of a Christian European was constructed. These ideas and structures are still the foundation of much of what we take for granted in our contemporary world, including notions of individuality and self-hood, and identities produced through race, gender, religion, caste, language and nationality. The symbiotic link between colonialism and capitalism has now been transformed into a new relationship between capital and the postcolonial élite that replaced the colonizers. The racial difference that was produced by the colonial state to justify the contradictions inherent in colonial rule by an enlightened elite has given to differences based on identities of other kinds, such as of religion, caste and ethnic origins, all of which are identities created by colonial rule itself (Dirks 2001).

The idea of a difference between a secular, rational European polity consisting of a civil society and a state and the non-European world of primordial identities is thus part of this same contradiction of a society based in civic virtues that depends for its existence on the barbarity of the violence it unleashes on its Other. Without this constitutive difference, the logic that makes possible the rule of an élite bourgeoisie over much of the

world's population would not be possible, both empirically and discursively. The effort

of the Subaltern Studies historians was to trace this difference in order to draw a truer

picture of the colonized world. The efforts of Indian political theorists are also directed at

the exploration of this difference and at the delineation of a theoretical framework that

explains this difference rather than becoming part of the discourse that produces the

difference in the first place.

Taking Chakrabarty's notion of a 'provincial Europe' further, one can argue that

the contradictions embodied today within the polities of the nation-states of Europe and

the neo-colonial powers such as the United States and other settler colonies are thus

attenuated versions of the violent contradictions inherent to the postcolonial world. In the

United States, the most extreme of these cases, political discourse is now largely a mass

media phenomenon, commoditized as a media spectacle. However, I argue, following

Chatterjee, that this is merely a less pronounced version of the political discourse in India

which actually exists in two different realms altogether, a small civil society discourse of

politics based on European metropolitan logic, and a vast set of political practices that is

part of a domain of the governmental control of non-civil populations and that is absent

from media discourse of politics altogether. While all societies depend on the existence of

an excess, a population that does not belong to properly constituted civil society, in order

to constitute themselves and define themselves, this 'population' constitutes a minority of

the people in the metropolitan world and is seen as the exception that supports the rule;

while it is actually the majority of the people in the postcolonial world. Thus, an

exploration of the media discourses of politics in the postcolonial world has the potential

to offer us a new language to theorize the trajectory of both politics and the media in the

European world as well. The difference between the two is one of degree rather than of kind.

IV. Media Research in India

The above concerns motivate the attempts in these chapters to generate a theoretical understanding of mass media in the postcolonial world that actually corresponds to the reality of the postcolonial condition, a condition defined by a fundamental political contradiction, between civil society on the one hand and the actually existing politics that takes place outside it on the other. Unfortunately the pioneering work of Indian political theorists in understanding and explaining the postcolonial condition have found their way into few intellectual formulations in the loosely defined discipline of mass communication and media studies. Much of this influence has been felt in film theory and cinema studies that has looked at the popular culture and public culture in the context of these political contradictions (Prasad 1998, Srinivas 2013, Rajadhyaksha 2003, 2009, Vasudevan 2000, 2001, 2010, Mazumdar 2007, Gopalan 2008), but also Rajagopal's work on television and politics (Rajagopal 2001). While there has also been work on visual and public cultures in general (Jain 2007, Roy 2007, Mazzarella 2003, Fernandes 2006), it is not explicitly linked to this tradition of scholarship in political theory or historiography.

The absence of a critical theory of media that is grounded in the reality of the postcolonial political condition is all the more untenable when we analyze the importance of the mass media image to Gramsci's own theorization of fascism, whose concepts have provided such fertile ground for both Subaltern Studies and for other schools of thought

that attempt to understand the operation of power in the modern world (Landy, 2008). In contrast to this 'Gramscian turn' in modern Indian historiography and political theory, the study of mass media, especially television has proceeded largely in the well-worn path of American behaviorist research, focused on audiences, texts and political economy (Mankekar 1999, Thussu 2007). This research takes for granted an equivalence between societies and polities, especially the relations between members of society, and between individuals, civil society and the state.

The history of mass media in the territories that are now part of the Indian republic is intimately interwoven with the trajectory of colonialism. European trading colonies were established in the subcontinent since the early seventeenth century. In parallel to their development in Europe, print-based media grew in the colonial port cities as the Mughal state was slowly dismantled and the British emerged as the pre-eminent colonial power, starting in the middle of the eighteenth century. As in Europe, print capitalism was the origin of modern mass media in India, and the outsize role the English language plays in the perception of media influence in the country can be traced to these origins as sources of mercantile and political information for British traders.

As in Europe, print media were primarily instruments for capitalist information, and the public sphere they engendered as a result was inevitably biased towards the needs and sympathies of colonial capital, based as it was on extraction and primary accumulation. The spread of English education and the creation of a new Indian elite schooled in European enlightenment values gathered pace following the Indian uprising of 1857, as political control of the Indian territories passed from the Board of the British East India Company into the hands of the British government. This new elite, expected to

smoothen the spread of the logic of capital into all aspects of social life soon became the nucleus of a movement demanding the transfer of power into native Indian hands. The much quoted text from 'Macaulay's minute', a policy document from 1835 attributed to Thomas Babington Macaulay, a colonial administrator sets out the vision for this new class that was to be created:

> "It is impossible for us, with our limited means, to attempt to educate the body of the people. We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect. To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the Western nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population". (Macaulay 2003, Evans 2002)

The nationalists, as they began to organize in the late nineteenth century, created new political print based media to advance the nationalist cause. Nationalist newspapers, however, differed only politically from the European owned press, not in the fundamental logic of newspapers as agents of information for capital. The rise of native capitalists, and the spread of printing technologies also led to changes in the scripts and conventions of native languages and the creation of new literary and journalistic forms (Jeffrey 1997).

The development of radio as a means of mass communication however occurred in an age when the government was seeking to control information to guard against a rising sentiment of nationalism and self-rule. Radio, for its inception, was understood as an instrument of government, and this legacy also determined the policies of the Indian government after independence towards both radio, as well as television when television broadcasts were begun as an experiment in 1959 (Gupta, N. 1998, Butcher 2003, Kumar 2006).

Indian mass media research came into its own as primarily policy-based research for these initial experiments with television. As an American import, the methods for studying its nature, impact and influence were also borrowed from current social science research in the United States. This early research , such as the studies of the Satellite Instructional Television Experiment (SITE) in the 1960s understood television to fulfill primarily a pedagogic role, of training rural Indians to raise themselves and join the urban elites in constructing a civil society of rational individuals. It was thus a tool of calling into being a citizen-subject, who would mirror the ideal citizen who alone had legitimate claim upon all the benefits the new nation-state would bestow: an educated, rational individual, engaged in productive and gainful employment, such as in modern heavy industry, specialized medicine, law and bureaucracy if urban, or as a modern farmer utilizing the industrial chemicals and heavy machinery to generate vast surpluses in the imagined rural hinterland.

This discourse imagined India as the space of an eternal middle class, perfect and self-contained (Prakash 1999, Gupta, A. 1998, Roy 2007). The generic and unmarked members of this class served to specify those who were indeed marked and then included: regional particularities served to construct the non-Hindi-speaker as a lesser citizen, marks of dress and language constructed the Muslim, Christian and Sikh as a separate (to varying degrees) but equal form of citizen, and the clear delineation of the social roles of men and women was enunciated through differences of dress and behavior. The striking absence of the vast differences of caste served only to emphasize the caste identity of the unmarked citizen, thus coding this ideal citizen subject as a Hindu male, upper-caste, middle-class Hindi-speaking from a northern city or village.

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The neoliberal restructuring of the Indian economy in the late 1980s led to a limited form of commercial television within the state-led framework. However, the rise of satellite broadcasters in the early1990s soon made state control of television moot. Initially heavily dependent on popular cinema, the only form of privately produced audiovisual entertainment then available, the new satellite channels soon began to commission their own programming (Kumar 2006, Mehta 2008). Freed from their dependence on the state however, they followed the same path as their print forebears two hundred years ago: they were mainly carriers of capitalist information in the form of advertising, and the programming was suitably structured to enable this logic to succeed.

To a large extent, research on television has also followed the same trajectory as before: as models of successful commercial television, Indian research also followed the dominant television research paradigm in the United States: concentrated heavily on audiences, texts and political economy of production and consumption. Focused on the relationship between the television text and its creator or spectator, it neglected its role in social relations that already exist and its role in the political structures that sustain these relations and are in turn sustained by them.

The exceptions to these studies have been works that acknowledge the specifically political role that television plays, and sought to analyze its location within political discourse. Rajagopal's research on the role played by the new genre of Hindu mythology as a television text in the rise of Hindu nationalism and its associated violence is one instance of this, and its idea of a 'split public' is one that I will revisit in subsequent chapters. In most other research however, television is merely an incidental medium that is used only to instantiate a larger trend, without a problematization of the

medium and its location. This is in stark contrast to recent studies of Indian cinema,

which has seen numerous works that have attempted to re-theorize its role in political and

cultural discourse, its generic conventions and referentiality and its relationship to

political economy and the construction of identity and subjectivity. Madhava Prasad's

work on the Hindi film is one instance of this approach to theory, and his notion of

relating the trajectory of cinematic discourse in the Hindi film to the Marxist notion of

subsumption by capital (Prasad 2001) is one that can be considered a metaphor for the

larger predicament of the public sphere in India, formally influenced by capitalist

modernity, but not fully belonging to it.

The relationship of cinema to politics is another area where Indian film theory has

generated a large amount of theoretical reflection, primarily owing to the study of

political movements in South India that were led by charismatic actors and others

associated with the film industry. The intimate relationship between popular Southern

cinema and political parties, and political subjectivity in general has been dealt with in

great detail by many Indian scholars (Srinivas 2009, 2013, Pandian 1992, Prasad 2001,

Dickey 2007).

The nature and role of the mass media, especially television, constitutes my main

set of problems. Television is representative of mass media discourses in general while

having its own logic and aesthetics. As an offspring of radio and cinema, its aesthetics in

India borrow from both, and it exhibits the tension of the contradictions of state control

and being responsive to hegemonic ideals of 'development' on the one hand while

remaining driven by a commercial market logic on the other. A textual understanding of

this tension is also crucial to generating a theoretical understanding of the medium, but

though Chapter 4 does engage with a representative set of discursive constructions in news narratives, a detailed textual critique of television *per se* is outside the scope of this work.

I use the words 'mass media' to include television, print media and other mass communication technologies. While it is undeniable that each medium has its specificities of technology, aesthetics and formal conventions, my concern in this work is with the relationship of these forms with the practice and discourse of politics. In this sense, I would contend that the media are actually consumed as a whole, as a source of ideological narratives and structures, and not in isolation from each other. In other words, my concern in this work is with the structural and functional logic of the media as such, not with the technological differences which provide the specificities of each form.

Despite this, however, it must be acknowledged that Indian television as a cultural form has had few theorized explanations of its role in the nation-state's discourse and structures. We have already seen that the cinema has a well developed set of critical engagements and theoretical bases, and the Indian press, the other vast and complex set of mass media institutions, has also seen a variety of critical engagement from scholars, primarily in terms of media history, public culture and the history of nationalism. While newspapers as a medium have increased in circulation and reach, with the spread of literacy initiatives and the growing ease of reporting and publication, their influence on public culture and political discourse is slowly being replaced by television news and web-based news networks. The 'liveness' of television has also changed the expectations of the role of mass media within political discourse, with the sound-bite, the immediate reaction of political rivals and media statements tied to the prime time and 24-hour TV

news cycle taking precedence over the earlier primacy of the morning newspaper's printing schedule. The rapid growth and maturing market of satellite broadcasting and private news channels, while still unable to match the reach of the state's terrestrial broadcasting network, has added to this doctrine of the news as an immediate, live discourse available on demand at any time of the day or night.

Television in the contemporary West can be understood as a *medium* that enables the politics of metropolitan societies, in the sense that all legitimate politics is conducted on and through television. In other words, the name 'politics' is now reserved for the discourse that appears as part of the televisual flow. However, in postcolonial polities such as India, this subsumption of politics by television is not complete or perfect. In Marxist terms, we can consider this an instance of merely formal subsumption, where politics is defined by television, but is not -yet- contained by it. The excess that the uncontained and uncontainable politics represents is the focus of my attempt to construct a theoretical framework for Indian television that is founded in political theory.

Television is thus a medium that is essential to political discourse, yet little researched. It is now pervasive in Indian public life and discourse, yet sees little critical engagement as a medium *per se*, as opposed to the attention paid to its content. This is partly due to the complexity of the medium in terms of language: while the English language television channels lay some claim to a national identity and an influential role in national politics, their reach in terms of audience is minuscule and they address a thinly spread elite across the major metropolitan centers. The Hindi language channels, while commanding a large audience share are primarily based in the provincial 'heartland' of the northern states (the densely populated northern plains of the Ganges

river system). The strengthening of India's federal structures has also meant that different

Hindi channels now cater to different states and provincial and regional identities within

the northern regions, with only a handful providing a 'national', i.e., a New-Delhi centric

perspective of politics. Since the majority of India's population speaks languages other

than Hindi, the growth of television in these regional or 'vernacular' languages has

followed the existing trajectory of the development of cinema, press and public culture in

these language domains, such that there now exist vast public spheres of Bengali, Oriya,

Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Marathi, Kannada, Punjabi and Gujarati television, while

lesser languages such as tribal dialects and the non-dominant versions of Hindi have seen

lesser growth, generally as offshoots of the dominant media houses.

All of this implies that there is no single 'public sphere' in Indian television, but a

multitude of spheres, interacting not with each other but mainly with a putative national

public to varying degrees. An analysis of all of these together is an exhaustive exercise

outside the scope of this work, while the analysis of the national sphere, while possible,

will not serve much purpose outside the delineation of a small elite discursive entity. For

this reason, my work focuses on the theoretical basis for these public spheres and

discourses, rather than the discourses themselves.

Gramsci's passive revolution has occupied an important position in the discourse

of Indian political theory. Part of the reason is the similarity between the coalition of

classes that allowed the rise of fascism through coercion and consent in Italy, and the

processes that marked the formation of the postcolonial Indian state and its construction

as an instrument of hegemonic class forces. I argue in subsequent chapters that this

passive revolution, by creating the population as an object of the actions of the dominant

class interests of the time, also created the divided nation-state that exists today and that

is at the heart of any potential theoretical understanding of the state, civil society, and by

extension the structures and institutions collectively called mass media. The contradiction

engendered by this division is also the focus of my own attempt at arriving at a

theoretical clarification regarding the media.

V. A Summary of the Present Work

I have tried to lay the ground for my motivation in attempting an exercise in

theory formation. The brief discussion in the preceding pages about the trajectories of the

postcolonial state in India and of the mass media, especially television, since

independence is clearly not an exhaustive account of either. A nation-building project on

such a vast continental scale that India's élites began is clearly a complex and

multifaceted subject, and there continue to be multiple scholarly exercises from diverse

perspectives that try to capture its historical essence. However, the discussion in this

chapter should be sufficient to create a schematic understanding necessary for the

arguments that follow.

The following chapter of this work engages with the idea of the 'split public', a

concept that can be traced in or teased out from almost all scholarly work on Indian mass

media. I borrow the phrase from Arvind Rajagopal's seminal work on the relation

between the televising of religious myths in the late 1980s and the rise of right-wing

nationalist political forces in the following decades (Rajagopal 2001), but try to elaborate

on its possible meanings and conceptual origins. I also posit that this is merely a

conceptual reflection of what Partha Chatterjee has theorized as the division between

civil and political society as a characteristic feature of politics in India (Chatterjee 1998, 2004). I argue for the primacy of this concept as a prerequisite for any understanding of non-Western mass media. The second half of this chapter deals with the obverse of this relation between political theory and mass media: I argue that by understanding the media as a location or ground of politics, and not just as a set of structures or institutions, enables us to further problematize the ideological function of mass media in postcolonial polities.

The subsequent chapter invokes Jean Baudrillard's usage of the concept of the 'semiotic' as a heuristic explanation for civil society in a postcolonial state and its relationship with mass media. I discuss Baudrillard's theoretical treatment of the mass media, his understanding of communication as symbolic exchange and of contemporary media discourse as a process of semiosis. I draw on his concepts as a way to deepen the preceding discussion of politics through the medium of television and to illuminate my arguments about the divided national society that we find in Chatterjee's framework. I discuss Marx's notion of the distinction between formal and real subsumption as yet another way to understand this division between Baudrillard's symbolic and semiotic realms, where we find politics being differentially subsumed by the mass media, representing the same logic as capital in its subsumption of labor. I also briefly discuss both the wide-ranging intellectual roots of Baudrillard's concepts in the work of Marx, Durkheim, Mauss and Bataille, among others; and also the cultural context to his larger theoretical framework of simulation and simulacra within which his theories of the media are situated.

In the fourth chapter I extend both Chatterjee's concept of a political society and Baudrillard's notion of the symbolic to formulate a new understanding of the postcolonial nation as a simulation. I argue for an understanding of the nation as a mediatized – or semiotic – construction and the citizen as one element of this mediatization. I explore this new understanding in the empirical terms of the absence of specific narratives around identity, subjectivity and privilege in order to foreground the actual mechanics of this process of mediatization or semiosis. I focus on three particular instances of this absence as a means of illustration: the reportage of protests against the construction of an oil refinery and industrial complex in Eastern India, the differentiation of a semiotic 'national' political discourse around corruption from the symbolic politics of a provincial mass movement for autonomy, and the privileging of dominant markers of identity through the criminalization of Muslim political discourse as 'hate speech'.

The fifth and final chapter is my attempt at understanding the possibilities for resistance to the processes of mediatization and the recovery of the symbolic. I re-interpret Chatterjee's concept of the political society as a reflection of the symbolic exchange still co-existing with the semiotic domain of civil society, seeing it not just as the 'politics of the governed', but as a potential site of resistance to the hegemonic logic of civil society. I also deal with the radical possibilities present in Baudrillard's 'refusal to respond' as a means of recovering communication from the semiotic and restoring the process of symbolic exchange. I conclude with a discussion of what this would mean for existing struggles against the hegemonic logic of the nation-state and civil society in the post-colony.

CHAPTER 2

CIVIL AND POLITICAL SOCIETY IN A MEDIATIZED CONTEXT

<u>I. The 'Split-Public' Sphere as a Sign of the Postcolonial</u>

One of the most common threads of argument running through every description

of public cultures in India, including television and other mass media forms, is that of the

indeterminacy of a specific national public. While this might seem commonplace in terms

of problematizing any theorization of cultures anywhere in the world, it takes on a unique

position in India which is emblematic of the country's origins in coloniality and its

aftermath. This position is that of a 'split public', or of a public sphere riven by a

fundamental contradiction that is obvious in even a cursory examination of its discourses.

Rajagopal uses the term in his discussion of the relationship between the Indian public

sphere and political mobilization:

> "I use the term split public as a heuristic in thinking about an incompletely modern polity,
> standing for the relationship between the configuration of political society desired by modernizing
> elites and its actual historical forms. Central to this split is the unfulfilled mission of secularism in
> a society where a compromise between Hindu orthodoxy and progressive nationalism launched an
> anti-colonial independence movement, one that culminated in the declaration of a secular state.
> The distinction between an officially maintained secular public sphere and a more heterogeneous
> popular culture was not likely to survive the proliferation of new electronic media, however, as the
> boundary-piercing character of television ensured the blurring of programming genres. Sure
> enough, political parties themselves began to invoke the authority of faith to reinforce their
> diminishing electoral credibility, while citizens drew on the narrative resources of religion to make
> sense of an often disorientingly unstable polity." (Rajagopal 2001, p.152)

However, this contradiction – of having separate sets of cultural spheres that are

united and made mutually intelligible only through the mechanisms of the nation-state –

is not just restricted to its public culture. It is a mark of its polity as well, and has been

exhaustively theorized by several Indian political philosophers from diverse perspectives.

In this chapter, while I argue for the importance of theorizing mass media through the

lens of this contradiction, it is necessary to begin with a brief survey that traces this contradiction through Indian political theory, history and media studies.

As a postcolonial society and polity, India is a country formed, not just in the aftermath of the colonial encounter but because of it. The post in post-colonial has been argued to represent this causality rather than a temporal progression from one state to the other. The process of colonization and the experiences of the colonized peoples and states cannot of course be reduced to a single experience or narrative: it varies widely across what is now the Global South, and it even occurred in a diverse variety of forms in the Indian subcontinent itself. However, what can be understood as a common link through all these experiences, which gives the word 'colonialism' its contemporary meaning and force, is the violent introduction of modes of European capital and ideological narratives to displace a diversity of modes of being and thinking across the world. This violent encounter is at the root of contemporary capitalism, law, governmentality and thus the modern nation-state and the condition of modernity itself. The violence of the encounter was a result not just of the extractive logic of capital, or of conflicting modes of thought and being, but of the European urge, especially in the latter phase of colonial expansion, to reconstruct the defeated societies and polities in a state of mimicry or simulation of Western European forms. This process is at the heart of the 'lack' that came to define the colonized, which Dipesh Chakrabarty underscores in his project of 'provincializing' Europe. The colonized were now to be seen only as eternally struggling to match the state of existence of their colonial masters, never being able to achieve that state by definition. This process of the production of the 'native' was also essential to constructing a self-image and identity for the European as well. There was no Europe in the modern sense

before its colonies, even as there was no white man before the construction of the colonized non-white subject.

> "There is, then, this double bind through which the subject of 'Indian' history articulates itself. On the one hand, it is both the subject and the object of modernity, because it stands for an assumed unity called the 'Indian people' that is always split into two—a modernizing elite and a yet-to-be modernized peasantry. As a split subject, however, it speaks from within a metanarrative that celebrates the nation-state; and of this metanarrative the theoretical subject can only be a hyperreal 'Europe', a Europe constructed by the tales that both imperialism and nationalism have told the colonized. The mode of self-representation that the 'Indian' can adopt here is what Homi Bhabha has justly called 'mimetic'. Indian history, even in the most dedicated socialist or nationalist hands, remains a mimicry of a certain 'modern' subject of 'European' history and is bound to represent a sad figure of lack and failure. The transition narrative will always remain 'grievously incomplete'." (Chakrabarty 2000, p.40)

This drive to construct a divided society, fundamentally and eternally fated to exist as separate and distinctly unequal entities, lay behind the creation of colonial cities and built environments, following the destruction of older urban and rural spaces. The imagining of a colonial order of living, more European than Europe itself, led to the simulation of a European public sphere, along with its attendant and requisite physical and cultural paraphernalia: newspapers and communicative technologies, courts of law and government, universities, social clubs, corporations of cities and capitalists, and a panoply of political and social organizations that are deemed necessary to mark the establishment of a functioning public sphere, ruled by the latest artifices and techniques of the recent European enlightenment.

> "If 'political modernity' was to be a bounded and definable phenomenon, it was not unreasonable to use its definition as a measuring rod for social progress. Within this thought, it could always be said with reason that some people were less modern than others, and that the former needed a period of preparation and waiting before they could be recognized as full participants in political modernity. But this was precisely the argument of the colonizer—the 'not yet' to which the colonized nationalist opposed his or her 'now'. The achievement of political modernity in the third world could only take place through a contradictory relationship to European social and political thought. It is true that nationalist elites often rehearsed to their own subaltern classes—and still do if and when the political structures permit—the stagist theory of history on which European ideas of political modernity were based. However, there were two necessary developments in nationalist struggles that would produce at least a practical, if not theoretical, rejection of any stagist, historicist distinctions between the premodern or the nonmodern and the modern. One was the nationalist elite's own rejection of the 'waiting-room' version of history when faced with the Europeans' use of it as a justification for denial of 'self- government' to the colonized. The other

was the twentieth-century phenomenon of the peasant as full participant in the political life of the nation (that is, first in the nationalist movement and then as a citizen of the independent nation), long before he or she could be formally educated into the doctrinal or conceptual aspects of citizenship." (Chakrabarty 2000, p.9)

II. The Transfer of Power as a Sign of the Postcolonial.

In India, this process, in terms of political change, can be dated precisely to the transfer of control of the British territories from the ownership of the East India Company into the hands of the British crown, following the defeat of a military uprising in 1857. The rapid military successes of that uprising in its early phases and the unexpected coalescing of Indian provincial rulers under the banner of the titular Mughal emperor surprised the Company, who may have seen in it the incipience of an Indian nation founded on a revival of the pre-British polity. The barbaric reprisal against the leaders of the uprising was followed by the immediate dismantling of the remnants of the Mughal state, the exile of the emperor and his court, the dissolution of the Company, the installation of the British monarch as the new empress of India and the creation of a 'Government of India' to oversee further colonial expansion and the maintenance of colonial rule.

This rapid succession of political events was, on an ideological level, also the culmination of a process set in motion early in the nineteenth century, to create, in Macaulay's words, a new class of people 'Indian in blood but English in spirit and outlook' who would act as intermediaries between the vast subject population brought into being by modes of capitalist extraction on the one hand, and the new government based in the colonial port cities of Madras, Calcutta and Bombay on the other. As the Mughal empire and its structures of government were slowly decimated over the course

of a century from 1757 onwards, the inauguration of this passive revolution that created

in a stroke new classes of people, in the form of both a simulated native aristocracy and a

native bourgeoisie, required new institutions and apparatuses to function: these came into

being in the form of new universities in the three colonial capitals and the creation of an

education system premised on this foundational split between rulers and ruled, between

an urban bourgeoisie in the colonial port cities and an undifferentiated population in the

hinterland.

Colonial India can thus be understood as a place of simulation above all: of a vast

simulacrum of European social and political life built on the ruins and detritus of the old

society. This simulation found its apogee in the orientalist fantasy of the 'Delhi Durbar'

of 1911, when the British king-emperor and his consort came to India to acknowledge the

allegiance of their Indian provincial allies. This show of pomp was intended to be a

recreation of Mughal imperial ceremonies, but ended up as an exhibition-like simulation

of an idealized Indian empire. The construction of a vast new imperial capital outside the

old walled city of Delhi that began soon after was intended to literally cast this fantasy in

stone (Legg 2007).

Today, this city of New Delhi is a remarkable emblem of this simulacrum: a

bombastic city of superhuman scale, a showpiece of the colonial empire intended only as

a space for Europeans and their collaborators, and divided into sectors for the government

and military administration and shopping arcades, public squares, plazas and parks for its

citizenry whose Indian members comprised members of the aristocracy, the haute

bourgeoisie and the bureaucracy. Apart from discreet servants' quarters, the majority of

its original inhabitants were expected to live in the ruined Mughal city to its north or the

many villages that surrounded the new capital and that were now dispossessed of their farmland and pastures by this gargantuan simulacrum.

The maintenance of this simulation required the miserable subjugation of an entire population through a combination of legal, governmental and military means. While racist at its core, it required the willing servitude and cooperation of the newly anglicized non-white bourgeoisie and aristocratic class, who served in the enormous new bureaucracies, founded industries and trading concerns, and participated in the rituals of civic life modeled on a European pattern. It is this class that can be called the kernel of a new civil society in India. However, unlike in Europe, this civil society did not share a straightforward relationship with the state on the one hand and the family on the other. From its inception, and by necessity, it consisted only of a very small minority of anglicized Indians, and it depended for its existence on the state's forced oppression of the majority of the Indian population. This population, which did not belong to any civil society whatsoever, was still the putative 'people' in whose name both state and civil society sought justification for their existence.

The relationship of the state to the members of civil society was of a dual nature: racist hostility of a white state to a non-white civil society that was coupled with the mutual understanding of a state and civil society both founded on a shared European logic of social life. The relation between the state and the majority of the population on the other hand was one of unmitigated oppression: outright military control in the early years giving way to systems of governmental control through legal and bureaucratic means (Chatterjee 1998, 2004).

It is this state of affairs that saw the rise of nationalist discourse in Indian civil society in the late nineteenth century. Initially focused on providing a measure of autonomy and self-government for the Indian subjects of the colonial provinces, Indian nationalism in its early years was one of anglicized Indians raising the issue through the institutions of civil society in the form of petitions, legal representations, journalism, legislative processes, the public sphere engendered by print capitalism, and the formation of political organizations to press for their demands. One such organization, the Indian National Congress, was soon transformed in the early twentieth century into a mass cadre-based organization that used protests, civil disobedience, demonstrations, rallies and mass agitation to press their demands with the colonial government.

Far from erasing the gap between an elite civil society and the subject population however, the élite Indian leadership of the Congress only amplified it, by calling into being a nationalist struggle that was a response to the colonial government coded in the very same discourse of that government. This was civil society taken to its extreme end, to the stage of mass revolution that the bourgeoisie had earlier reached in Europe and which had been replicated in various ways in their other colonies. However, the Indian revolution was one without a revolutionary subject, a revolt without an insurrection. This passive revolution, where power passed peacefully from white to non-white, from a colonial British civic élite to their counterparts in Indian civil society, preserved intact all the structures and institutions of colonial government including the oppression of the majority of its population and the fiction of a civil society that maintained it (Kaviraj 2010).

In order to achieve this simulated revolution, the nationalist élite also had to erase from view any question that interfered with their definition of the new Indian nation as consisting of a rational enlightenment-descended public sphere that would represent the masses of people. One instance of this erasure was the resolution of the 'women's question' through the creation of a patriarchal private sphere outside the scope of civil society, replicating the division of society under colonial rule still further (Chatterjee, 1993). It is these aspects of the nationalist movement that allow Chatterjee to call it a derivative discourse, a discourse steeped in the logic of the very structure it was ostensibly in conflict with (Chatterjee 1986).

The transfer of power in 1947 and the adoption of a new republican constitution in 1950 changed the demographic nature of the relations between state and civil society. Both were now inhabited by the same group of people and the new postcolonial state came into being with the same kind of violence, war and mass killing that accompanied the existence of the original colonial state. The new Indian state had also lost a large part of its territory in its east and west and a large proportion of its Muslim inhabitants to the new state of Pakistan. At the same time it had invaded and occupied the independent states of Hyderabad and Kashmir and deposed their governments to incorporate them into the new republic (Muralidharan 2014). However this bloody new beginning did nothing to erase the fundamental control of the majority of the population by a civil society based élite. The maintenance of the new fiction of representative government engendered not only new forms of governmental control and coercion, but also the necessity of hegemonic discourse and the consent of the governed. These new forms gave rise to all the new developments in Indian polity that we can see today. It is these forms that

Chatterjee labels the 'politics of the governed', and he defines this set of structures and institutions that enable this politics as 'political society' in the Indian context (Chatterjee 2004, 2011).

Chatterjee's conceptual understanding of the postcolonial state is borne out by the experience of the immediate aftermath of the transfer of power: the decades of what are now termed the Nehruvian consensus: the maintenance of the state as a benevolent, technocratic, welfare-oriented authority which is inhabited by a coalition of landed gentry, industrialists, intellectual élites and a bureaucratic-managerial class, speaking on behalf of the mass of the people and wielding its coercive power in the interests of general welfare. This power was manifested in a continuation of the colonial policy of dispossession and displacement, but this was now done in the name of the interests of the 'nation', which demanded large dams, factories, mines and mechanized agriculture in the rural hinterland and the concomitant migration and sprawl in the cities. The 'steel frame' of the colonial bureaucracy and the massive standing army of the erstwhile state remained intact through the transfer, and were even enhanced under the new dispensation. The new government also moved into the vacated colonial capital in New Delhi, later enhanced with even more monumental administrative buildings in its vast open spaces as if in fulfillment of its governmental destiny.

The nation, in the nineteenth century sense popularized by Renan, Gellner and others, depended on a unified *volk*, speaking one language, following one confessional tradition and with a shared body of ritual and tradition. While this was not true of Europe nation-states in the nineteenth century, this was certainly not true of India in the twentieth. The creation of the nation however depended on the construction of a citizen,

and one was suitably constructed by the Nehruvian consensus: a rational subject, a member of civil society in the public realm, shorn of the primordial markers of confession, caste and clan affiliations, yet also inhabiting a private realm of patriarchal authority where the traditional identities still held sway. This double faced citizen was true to the nationalists' own version of themselves and was the result of the passive revolution that created and sustained the Indian state (Chatterjee 1993, Kaviraj 2010).

III. Civil Society as a Domain of Coloniality

Benedict Anderson has discussed the constitution of the nation as an imagined community by the technologies of print capitalism (Anderson 1991). The Indian nation is certainly true to this definition but only if the 'nation' is restricted to the civil society that is recognized as the legitimate citizenry, if the nation is understood to comprise the small minority of people who are educated in its mores, who share a common culture because of access to mass mediated discourses of nationalism. It is not true to Anderson's definition if we are to include the majority of Indian people, who appear not as citizens recognized by the nation, but as populations governed by the state. This distinction will be clarified if we dig deeper into Chatterjee's understanding of civil society, political society and the state.

Civil Society as a concept has a long history. It is not my intention here to trace its long and complex historical trajectory which has been amply done elsewhere (Kaviraj and Khilnani 2001). In its early usage it was synonymous with both the state and with *polis*, politics in general, and was in contrast to the realm of the family or the *oikos*, the household. This concept, is complicated by Hegel's definition of the term, drawn from

Locke and Montesquieu where he posits civil society as an autonomous domain, between the family and the state: distinct from both yet connected to them in myriad ways (Jones 2001, Chatterjee 1998). It is this Hegelian concept which Marx uses to locate the realm of capital and its new revolutionary class the bourgeoisie, whose domain the civil society is, and in which it thrives against both the ancient privileges of the state, and the private life of the family. It is also this Hegelian concept that Chatterjee invokes to complicate the trajectory of the postcolonial state and contemporary politics in India. At the same time, Chatterjee's categories also draw on Ranajit Guha's influential early framework of subaltern consciousness as representing the unique condition of 'dominance without hegemony' (Guha 1997).

Chatterjee's civil society is the autonomous realm of citizens who are recognized as such by the state. The citizens engage with the state through the institutions of civil society, such as parliament, the legislatures and the local deliberative bodies, the courts, the universities, social clubs and professional associations and the variety of organizations, groups, political parties, sports teams and local bodies that are rooted in the notion of a European public sphere. In this sense, they share the common attributes of a freedom of entry and exit, an independence from communal and primordial identities such as caste, tribe and religion, and an autonomy from both the state and the traditions governing the private life of the household. This civil society consists of theoretically free and equal members who are related to each other and to the state through the ties of bourgeois citizenship. They are fellow citizens of the same nation and can relate to other national citizens on an equal plane. The state to them is the embodiment of the nation in the form of a modern nation-state. This is the nation-state created through the nationalist

movement against British rule, and the members of civil society can recognize themselves as the descendants of the self-same nationalists of that movement.

Chatterjee defines *modernity* as the animating logic of this postcolonial civil society. Modernity can also be understood as coterminous with both capitalism and colonialism. The age we define as modern is coeval with the development of both within Europe and in the rest of the world. The ideological structures of capital as we understand them today, in terms of corporations, labor, managerial ideologies, the organization of labor and society are the product of the colonial companies set up to trade in the seventeenth century. Colonialism is the movement engendered through this trade and the ideological justification for the exploitation inherent to it. Modernity, understood as the new age of the bourgeois nation-state in Europe is the product of colonial capital. In the rest of the world, modernity is synonymous with the advent of European colonialism and capitalism and the consequent destruction of the pre-colonial world system. Since this civil society in India is the result of colonization and the remaining embodiment of the colonial encounter, it is appropriate to understand its driving force as the drive towards modernity. Civil society's role vis-à-vis the nation state is also understood by itself as being the site of the discourse of 'development', another synonym for the discourses of modernity in the postcolonial world.

> "In the case of the formerly colonial countries of Asia and Africa, the dominant approach is to apply the same yardstick of the abstract model of the modern nation-state and place the different, actually existing states on a scale of 'development' or 'modernization'. The overwhelming theme is one of lack, sometimes with an additional story that describes the recent decay of a moderately satisfactory albeit inadequate set of institutions." (Chatterjee 1998, p.66)

Writing in the tradition of Indian political theory, Chatterjee's interventions have to be understood in the context of a political theory that, in the western sense, would have

stopped there in terms of an ontology. However, Chatterjee defines this civil society to be

a very small ruling élite of the Indian nation-state. If political theory were to be

concerned merely with the domain of this civil society, it would be rendered meaningless.

The vast majority of the inhabitants of India are not part of this civil society and thus are

not really *citizens* in the same sense as the members of civil society are. This is not to say

they are not engaged with the state, but that their engagement is qualitatively different

from that of the legitimate citizens. In this majority, Chatterjee includes the small

peasantry, unorganized and informal labor, the homeless, squatters, street vendors, and

the bulk of Indians who fall outside the legal and civic structures of the nation-state. This

majority, which Chatterjee calls the 'governed', form part of a population or populations

that the state acts upon in its form as the government. It is the politics of the governed

that Chatterjee defines as being the true subject of Indian political theory, since this is the

actualized realm of Indian democracy, where Indian politics is located. Chatterjee calls

this realm 'political society'.

> "The major instrumental form here in the postcolonial period is that of the developmental state,
> which seeks to relate to different sections of the population through the governmental function of
> welfare. Correspondingly, if we have to give a name to the major form of mobilization by which
> political society (parties, movements, nonparty political formations) tries to channel and order
> popular demands on the developmental state, we should call it democracy. The institutional forms
> of this emergent political society are still unclear. Just as there is a continuing attempt to order
> these institutions in the prescribed forms of liberal civil society, there is probably an even stronger
> tendency to strive for what are perceived to be democratic rights and entitlements by violating
> those institutional norms." (Chatterjee 1998, p.64)

This split polity is an emblematic feature of colonialism and is still present in

India in its present form because Indian colonialism and its anticolonial struggle were

both forms of a passive revolution engineered upon a population by a governmental state.

However, the crucial feature that complicates matters is that the postcolonial Indian élite

chose to construct the state as a democracy with universal franchise. The maintenance of

the small élite of civil society was thus made dependent on the active consent of its

political society through a franchise renewed every five years. It is this contradiction in

Indian society that makes the postcolonial state unique and gives it its character. Any

scholarly or intellectual engagement with Indian society that does not recognize this

duality at its foundation and engage with it cannot accomplish a meaningful

understanding of its subject.

While critics of Chatterjee's typologies have taken issue with its perceived crudity

or over-simplification of political and social categories (Gudavarthy 2012, 2013) , it is

important to understand that these terms, civil and political society, are intended not as

empirical descriptors of groups or individuals but as heuristic devices to understand

processes and structures that constitute the polity in India. To be sure, an individual can

be part of both civil and political society in different contexts, and an institution such as

parliament or a court of law or a university can be located simultaneously in civil society

as well as political society. For instance, parliament and the provincial legislatures are

frequently the site of bargains, transactions and negotiations that are not part of their

official existence but depend on allegiances and networks of kinship, caste, clan,

linguistic and regional affiliations. This aspect runs parallel to their existence as robust

deliberative bodies of elected members that exist in a world of Westminster-style

parliamentary procedure. Similarly courts of law sometimes function as arbiters of justice

that is negotiated through traditional kinship groups and communities while still

maintaining the fiction of operating within a common legal code: at other times the

courts are indeed the site of legal contestations between parties within a common law

framework, existing within civil society. Similarly a university may function as an

education institution indistinguishable from its European origins, but may also be the location of fierce political contestation on the basis of identities such as caste, clan or religion. Seen in this sense, as a device to make sense of these contradictions and dualities, Chatterjee's typologies are useful and inherently true to the complexities of Indian politics and civic life.

In his own work Chatterjee provides instances of street vendors and hawkers negotiating space to do business with the agents of the state, or of slum residents negotiating the provision of municipal services to their settlements (Chatterjee 2004). In these instance, Chatterjee says that law cannot provide for these extra-legal contingencies and the usual political domain of civil society cannot accommodate these people or their demands. They have to be conducted in another domain, that of political society, directly between the state and the population, without and outside the scope of, the domain of civil society. At the same time, the animating logic behind the state's willingness to occupy this space of political society is that of *democracy*, since the population, while not citizens, are still voters and therefore political actors, and in this sense more powerful than citizens. But, because these transactions occur within the realm of political society, they do not officially exist: the vendors are never legally entitled to their space of work, and the slum residents are never legal owners of their houses or rightful recipients of the state's services. Since they are not rights-bearing citizens of civil society, they exist in a space of contingency, that depends for its existence only on the tenuous foundations of *democracy*.

IV. Media in/as Civil Society

Understood as a form of simulation, colonialism takes on a new meaning as a location for mass media discourses. This simulation exists in the institutions that comprise colonial civil society. One of these institutions is the media which create the conditions for a civil society in the first place. The public sphere seen as essential to a civil society is sustained by the mass media, by newspapers and print publications comprising part of the various discursive structures that make up colonial government.

Television entered this space as part of the postcolonial passive revolution in 1959. Controlled by the state until the 1990s, it was the medium through which the state presented itself as the nation. Several studies of the state monopoly on television since then have emphasized the propagandistic character of television in India (Kumar 2006, Mehta 2008, Butcher 2003). However, since economic liberalization in the 1990s and the concurrent development of satellite broadcasting that was free of territorial limitations, the state has been forced to cede control of the airwaves to private capital. Currently, India has a vast number of private satellite broadcasters, may of them broadcasting news channels 24 hours a day. This has led to a rise in the demand of news as a commodity, since it now has to feed empty airtime that is of a magnitude more than was available to terrestrial broadcasting, but also to the sheer number of channels in every Indian language. The majority of news channels in all languages are owned and operated by particular political parties or by corporations and individuals allied to one. (Ninan 2007, Kohli-Khandekar 2006, Thussu 2007). This makes the consumption of one or other news channel not simply a way to consume the news itself, but as a way of allying with political organizations through the act of identification with the appropriate media house:

it is thus an act of consuming politics itself as commodity, and of seeking to construct and define ones ideological identity through such an act of consumption.

Private news channels have also proliferated in the entertainment sector, largely resulting in a visually and thematically similar serial entertainment format modeled on the American soap-opera. (Munshi 2009, Gokulsing 2004). Both these genres of broadcasting however are not that different from each other, since the majority of what they do is not merely reportage or scripted entertainment, but the active and constant construction of the nation and its attendant contents: the citizen-subjects who inhabit it.

Consuming television is thus an act of consuming politics in a context where politics is only ever a commodity. Political acts increasingly come to be performed on primetime news and conversely, primetime news itself seeks its own *raison d'être* in the active staging and exhibition of such performances. The liveness of news television lends itself well to such a commodification and performance.

Within news channels, there exists a fundamental gap between the English channels, which keep the semblance of being unaffiliated to a political party *per se*, and the Indian language channels which, tied as they are to a local and grounded political context, do not and cannot make such an assertion, but in fact are *de facto* political and partisan entities in order to remain relevant in the political context of their locations. Politics in India today is thus definable in two ways: the grounded activity that takes place in neighborhoods, town and village squares, government offices, streets and rallies on the one hand, and the discursive activity that is consumed as part of the 24 hour news. (Rajagopal 2001). To be sure, these are not discrete entities or domains: on the contrary, both clearly inform each other and sometimes exist in conjunction in multiple locations.

However, the activity on the ground, Chatterjee's political society in action, is an autonomous realm, that will of necessity continue to exist regardless of its existence in the days primetime news. The discourse on the news networks on the other hand exists in its own realm, a play of signifiers in a closed loop, with its terms of reference clearly located within Chatterjee's civil society. This distinction gives us an opportunity to precisely understand the nature, location and role of news television, and media discourse in general, in India today.

The main blind spot in Indian political theory is the lack of an understanding of the material location of politics as discourse. In this sense, the mass media, especially television can serve as the ground on which the practice of politics is staged. Television in India can be understood as the location of politics as practice, as well as an institution that is part of political discourse.

The fundamental defining feature of postcolonial societies is thus this split nature of its public sphere. This has been part of the commonplace of political theory as well as studies of public culture and the public sphere. While Chatterjee's political society captures this division with precision, the autonomist Marxist idea of the multitude (Hardt and Negri 2004, Virno 2004) also corresponds to the same notion of a population that has to be dealt with by a state, as does Foucault's notion of governmentality as the defining characteristic of modern technologies of rule (Chatterjee 1998). The notion of the existence of two polities within a shared territorial sovereignty is also hinted at but not explored in almost all popular conceptions of Indian politics and society which understands the division between the two as between rural and urban India, or between an anglicized elite and a vernacular subaltern population. However, all such conceptions

understand this division as further evidence of a lack, as Chakrabarty's work says, on the part of the subaltern, while the élite is seen as representing the fully developed eventual destiny of the majority of the population. This is of a piece with orthodox Marxist versions of capitalist and national development which sees the nation state passing through several 'stages' of capitalist development, with the primary accumulation characteristic of the subaltern domain being the 'primitive' starting point of capital that will eventually evolve into the organized mass-manufacture that characterizes bourgeois civil society and the eventual higher-order, non-manufacturing, service industries of the modern West. The persistence of primary accumulation with the highest stages of contemporary capitalism within the same sovereign territory, and the same society and state, leads to a questioning of these stages of capitalism, but still attempts to portray the realm of primary accumulation as a lack, or as a less developed version of the advanced domains of capital within that state. However, Chatterjee's analysis makes it clear that both realms necessarily coexist, and depend on each other. Higher-order organized capital and the civil society it engenders depend on the surplus of violent primary accumulation for their existence.

The domain of primary accumulation can also be understood as the domain that is not yet fully integrated into the formal organization of capitalism. Unlike the West, where capitalism depended on primary accumulation in the colonies in order to build more advanced forms of surplus distribution and generation at home that were divorced from the bloody and violent conditions of actual extraction, advanced capital in India has to exist in the same territorial realm as its more overtly exploitative version.

In this sense, society in India can be understood as being subsumed into capital to different degrees. Civil society would be that domain of society that is entirely part of the organized capitalist world, existing in a global continuum with its national counterparts in other parts of the world, while political society is part of capital only partially. This is comparable to Marx's understanding of the formal subsumption of labor under capital in its early stages, as opposed to its real subsumption under advanced capitalism (Marx 1977).

Political society thus maintains a link both to the world before capitalism and to a world without it, while civil society is entirely part of the capitalist structures. Political society can be understood as maintaining a relationship to the lived reality of the majority of the people, as providing a location for the 'politics of the governed', as opposed to the idealized politics of the restricted (non-) public sphere that civil society represents.

It is in this sense that I argue for civil society as representing a form of simulation of politics: a discourse of politics as it should ideally be practiced in a society of the European model. The negotiated and messy material reality of quotidian politics as it actually takes place is subsumed within the neat discursive sphere of an idealized polity based on colonial laws and European reason; the democracy of political society is always subsumed within the modernity represented by civil society discourses. It is the search for the mechanics of this subsumption, the actual material location and site of this process that drives my attempt to situate it within the space of interaction of mass media and the domain of political activity. In other words, I argue that this subsumption, this process by which the political activity as it exists is erased through its absorption into the idealized logic of modernity represented by civil society, occurs through its mass-mediation,

through its representation in media narratives. The absorption of the materiality of political society into the narrative of civil society is therefore also the subsumption of politics into mass media.

Anderson's conception of the growth of print capitalism in Europe and the consequent creation of nationalism through the virtual communities engendered through the print media is continued today but through the visuality of television. The changes wrought by television in terms of defining the idea of India to the people who live in its territory are a discourse yet to be examined, and it is an examination beyond the scope of the present work, but in so far as the nation exists solely in and as discourse for its national subjects, that discourse is located in the visual narratives provided by television. Whether this is in the form of news, advertising, entertainment or information is unimportant: the unity of televisual form is more than the sum of the particularities of generic differences. The discourse of the nation and citizen-subjectivity overcomes the differences of genre of programming (and advertising), since the consumption is of the cultural form of television itself, not of particular programs or commercial messages.

Given the extent to which the nation, in terms of form and discourse, is located within television, and given the centrality of the discourse of the nation to the activity of politics in both civil society and political society domains, it is surprising that the field of political theory and philosophy is generally separate from the study of television and other visual media. Television is now central to the understanding of politics in India, both for its practitioners as well as for the public, and its importance cannot be ignored in the field of political theory. At the same time, politics – in a broad sense of discourse about the nation, state and society – is central to television as a cultural form. Any study

of television content in terms of discourses or genres, whether of news, entertainment or advertising, in terms of political economy of its institutions and structures, or in terms of audiences, cannot exist in a field devoid of an understanding of the nation and its citizen-subjects; in other words outside of the domain of political theory. Politics and television are now so intertwined that any study of one must involve the other.

Scholars such as Couldry have warned of the dangers of the trap of media-centrism in any understanding of the role of the media in social and political discourses (Couldry 2004). Such a trap exists when one attempts to conflate the domain of the media with that of politics as it exists. My intention here is to argue the opposite: that there is indeed a conflation of politics and television, but this conflation is located in the domain of civil society and this politics is the idealized discourse that necessarily has to be so conflated , simply because it does not actually exist outside of television: this is politics as televisual discourse. It exists only in television, particularly in television news. Conversely, television understood as an institution, as an ideological apparatus exists within this discursive realm of an idealized polity. They form a set of mutual referents, of signifiers indicating only each other. However, I argue, following Chatterjee that this is not politics as it actually exists in society, in most of the world: the 'politics of the governed', the politics that is animated by *democracy* as opposed to *modernity* finds no place in television, precisely because it belongs to a different domain, it does not fit into the civil society discourse that television as a form has constructed for itself and in which it is located; it is not part of the play of signifiers that comprises the politics of civil society and television news. This domain, of actually existing politics is therefore a domain that is always under erasure. This can be thought of as the domain of politics as

speech, and it is equally ephemeral and cannot be *written* into the narrative of politics that is authored by television news.

This cycle of signifiers referring to each other – a simulation of politics that subsumes actual politics – is the crux of any understanding of political discourse and the media in the postcolonial context. To elaborate and expand on this relationship and to deepen this understanding of politics, I turn to the theorization of simulation and signification of Jean Baudrillard, whose concepts of the simulation and simulacra and of the semiotic and symbolic are useful in extending the ideal of the civil and political society distinction into the realm of the mass media, where this division of politics is ultimately located. Baudrillard's concepts are essential to this project not just because of their incisive insight into contemporary mass mediation, but because of their political significance in terms of their distillation of a radical political tradition of understanding society through signification.

In the following chapter I introduce Baudrillard's theorization through its antecedents in this tradition, including the critical elements of the later Marx, the radical sociological tradition represented by Durkheim and the social anthropological tradition of Mauss and its somewhat forgotten trajectory in the work of Bataille, the radical communication theories of McLuhan, Debord and the autonomous Marxist tradition. I argue in the following pages that it is this radical tradition in political theory of looking at signification and mediation as an essential component of politics that make Baudrillard's work invaluable to my own.

CHAPTER 3

THE SYMBOLIC AND SEMIOTIC DOMAINS IN THE POSTCOLONIAL

CONTEXT

I. The Intellectual Trajectory of Jean Baudrillard

Jean Baudrillard's theory of the media is rooted in the notion of human
communication as a form and manifestation of symbolic exchange. In this, he borrows
from the tradition in social anthropology that studied non-western cultures and societies
to posit a non-capitalist mode of economic life centered on divestment rather than
accumulation. This was detailed in Marcel Mauss' analysis of the Gift and the economic
structures it was a part of, that included the 'potlatch' as the culmination of the exchange
of symbols. Baudrillard also borrows from the tradition of radical economics of Georges
Bataille, the situationism of Guy Debord, the communication tradition represented by
Marshall McLuhan and Daniel Boorstin, and the autonomous Marxist tradition of
Antonio Negri, Paolo Virno, Gilbert Simondon and others to formulate an understanding
of human communication as a similar form of exchange of the symbolic.

Despite the diversity of theoretical antecedents for Baudrillard's project, my
interest in his work derives from his status as an inheritor of radical Marxian thought that
attempts to move beyond the orthodox logic of Marxism that is stuck within a
productivity framework to a critique of political economy that attacks the consumer
society phase of contemporary capitalism. The study of mass media and the mediatized
society that we live in is part of his larger project of a society that has moved beyond
communication as symbolic exchange and now lives in the realm of pure semiosis, of a

universe of signs signifying other signs. He calls this universe the 'simulacrum', a reference to the philosophical concept of Plato's cave where the shadow is mistaken for the real. As William Merrin has pointed out however, the lack of understanding of Baudrillard's critical position among the anglophone academic world has led to a confusing of his critical description of our world with a stereotyped notion of a prescriptive postmodernism (Merrin 2005).

A brief excursus of Baudrillard's broad range of scholarship will serve to delineate the trajectory and antecedents of his thoughts on the media. In the critical Marxist tradition, Baudrillard's initial scholarship was in the footsteps of Barthes and Lefebvre, as evidenced in his early work *The System of Objects*. He followed that with a deeper critique of the shift in advanced capitalism in the western world from a focus on the domain of production to the increasingly important problem of overproduction and plenty, which had to be managed through the creation of a new domain of consumer capitalism, which he engages with in *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures*. Here, influenced by the work of Herbert Marcuse, Georg Lukacs and the Frankfurt School, he argues that the old Marxian critiques of alienated labor are no longer useful in a context where all domains of human life – and not just work - have been commoditized and brought under the domain of labor, such that alienation itself is total. His short following work, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* takes this trajectory further to add the concept of 'sign value' to the traditional Marxian concepts of use value and exchange value of commodities. He argues that the increasing centrality of the sign value of a commodity has led to the development of a new form of capitalism that orthodox Marxian categories are no longer able to comprehend. His subsequent work takes this

approach to its logical end, and turns into a criticism of actually existing Marxism that, as he explains in *The Mirror of Production,* is merely the obverse, or mirror-image of capital, since its critique is limited to the superficial effects of capital such as the distribution of surplus or alienation of labor, without attacking the fundamental logic of productivity and value that is responsible for its dominance. This leads, in his words, to the failure of actually existing socialism which becomes in the end merely a more efficient and equitable mode of the dissemination of capitalist logic in society, rather than overthrowing that foundational logic itself. At this stage, Baudrillard's critique of the orthodox Marxian project locates him within a tradition of a critique of mainstream liberal thought together with Georges Bataille's critique of what he called the 'restricted economy' of both liberal and Marxian economics in his work *The Accursed Share*, itself influenced by Mauss' work on the gift economy and potlatch, and Nietzsche's work, *On the Genealogy of Morals.*

Baudrillard's subsequent work, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, is probably his most sustained adaptation of Bataille's work to his own thought. Drawing from Bataille's theory of the general economy, Nietzschean critiques of the 'slave morality' of modern society and Maussian anthropology among others, Baudrillard builds a theoretical critique of a Marxism that is stuck in the critique of political economy and ends up as a reformatory phase of capitalist logic. He contrasts this with the possibility of a radical politics beyond Marxism, which can erase the productivity based logics of scarcity, value, labor and a production-centric political economy, and replaces them with the politics of excess, waste, destruction, festivity and pleasure and its ultimate valorization of death in the form of sacrifice as embodying a fundamental critique of capital. He uses

Bataille's notion of 'symbolic exchange' to mean not just the pre-capitalist and non-capitalist modes of gift exchange, but also a new liberatory mode or domain of social relations that has the potential to destabilize the existing relations between people that have been commoditized and are hence restricted to notions of utility, rationality and value.

The subsequent works *Simulacra and Simulation* and *Fatal Strategies* elaborate on the concept of simulation itself and the notion of simulacra that he characterizes as the defining feature of modern societies based on signification. *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities* takes his critique of the liberal emancipatory project further to argue that in a world where political action itself has been commoditized, the majority of people have been rendered 'masses' who are acted upon by mediatizing capital. However, instead of the futile project of raising and spreading consciousness among these masses of their status as an oppressed class or classes, Baudrillard proposes extending his 'fatal strategies' of political action that are grounded in a radical passivity towards capital rather than an active opposition. By consuming to excess, by taking the mediatization of society and the commoditization of social relations to its extreme end, it is possible for the masses to destabilize and destroy the logic of capital more thoroughly than through a traditional call to arms founded on a symbolic subjectivity that no longer exists.

The idea of the consuming subject as an object produced by the mass media is the main argument of *The Ecstasy of Communication* and *The Transparency of Evil* where subjectivity has been replaced by the construction of humans as objects of capital, created through the ideological apparatus of the mass media. The power of the mass media to define history itself was demonstrated further in his essays on the first Gulf War of 1991,

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where he argued that the symbolic nature of the actual war was rendered immaterial by the semiotic narrative that passed for the war on the television screen. As the first war to be broadcast live on primetime news, the Gulf War became a televisual narrative even as the actual bombs dropping in Iraq were rendered invisible through the hyper-visibility of the semiotic narrative Eventually , he argues, the mediatization of the world leads to the disappearance of the reality principle itself. As the semiotic narrative of signs referring to other signs takes over, we are left with a world in the form of a simulacrum, a copy of our world, and then a copy of the copy, but each more real than the last, such that reality now refers to a fetishized set of features that he calls 'hyper-reality', which is more 'real' than the symbolic representation of the reality that has been abandoned.

Baudrillard's subsequent work is more derivative in nature, being the repetition of his theoretical insights to his travels in the United States and around the world (*America* and *Cool Memories*), apart from his increasingly abstract treatment of aspects of our commoditized world in the realm of art and media. His later work is also concerned with the meta-theoretical questions of the role of scholarship itself, such as in *Impossible Exchange*, where he argues that theory itself is locked in a kind of potlatch with reality that cannot end, and the way out is to look towards a kind of 'pataphysics' popularized by the artist Alfred Jarry which replaces metaphysical thought by concerning itself with the imaginary and the possibility of other realities. He sees this as the only way in which theory can leap ahead of reality and anticipate it, rather than being locked in an endless struggle of truth-claims and counter-claims.

The last significant evocation of the concept of the potlatch to his theory occurs in his short text *The Spirit of Terrorism*, which saw the attack by terrorists on the World Trade Center in 2001 as a form of final gift, that could not be exchanged. He sees the attacks as firmly located in modernity and as the inevitable conclusion of the escalation of violence that the United States was engaged in for many decades. By giving the ultimate gift of a spectacular violence through sacrifice to the United States, the terrorists in Baudrillard's view escalated the symbolic exchange of war to a point of no return, since their gift cannot ever be matched by its recipients.

Despite this diversity of his oeuvre, Baudrillard's work does exhibit a common thread that runs through his thought and has evolved in different directions in his myriad texts. This is the idea of the disappearance of the real and its replacement with a simulacral universe as part of the progress of capitalism and modernity through the world. Even his topical political writings, whether on the Cold War, the Gulf War or terrorism, are mainly concerned with the inexorable spread of this simulacral logic of capital to ever more areas of the world that were hitherto unincorporated. This disappearance of the real is evidenced by the disappearance of its actual representation, in the form of the symbolic, and its replacement by a new form of representation masquerading as the real which he calls the semiotic. For the purposes of studying human communication and the media, this distinction between the symbolic and semiotic and the division of social relations between a disappearing domain of symbolic exchange and the new realm of the semiotic are the essential concepts that I will elaborate further in the following pages.

II. The Real and the Simulacral: Symbolic and Semiotic Domains.

For Baudrillard, the 'symbolic' refers to an order of representation of reality that is still close enough to the real to be recognized as a mere representation. It thus exists as a field of signification where the sign consists of a signifier that points to a signified embedded in a recognized reality. The symbolic cannot exist without reference to this reality and depends on the recognition of the reality principle to fulfill its role as a system of representation. Communication is thus part of the social relations characterized by symbolic exchange, an affective process that is outside the commoditized domain of social relations that are produced by capital. Baudrillard borrows the term and the idea from Bataille's references to social relations grounded in the exchange of gifts, where the driving forces are of waste, generosity and divestment that are dictated by the spirit of excess that is seen as natural to the human condition, rather than utilitarian forces based on prudent accumulation and investment that are dictated by a scarcity-driven logic of capital. As capital spreads its logic to ever more areas of human life and social relations that were once beyond its control, Baudrillard says that more and more human communication leaves the domain of symbolic exchange and enters the realm of the semiotic, where the exchange is only one of signs referring to other signs, and loses the representational connection to reality that symbolic exchange once engendered.

> "The entire political sphere loses its specificity as soon as it enters the media's polling game, that is to say, when it enters the integrated circuit of the question/answer. The electoral sphere is in any case the first large-scale institution where social exchange is reduced to getting a response. Thanks to these simplified signals, the electoral sphere is also the first institution to be universalised: universal suffrage is the first of the mass-media. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, political and economic practice merge increasingly into the same type of discourse; propaganda and publicity were fused, marketing and merchandising both objects and powerful ideas. This linguistic convergence between the economic and the political is moreover what marks a society such as ours, where 'political economy' has been fully realised. By the same token, it is also its end, since the two spheres are abolished in another reality or media hyperreality. Here again, each term is elevated to a higher power, that of third-order simulacra." (Baudrillard 1993, p. 65).

Baudrillard's understanding of the contemporary mass media runs counter to the mainstream notion of the media as a conduit for communication. He suggests that the media are in fact an apparatus that actively *prevents* communication in the form of symbolic exchange from taking place, and in fact are a means of non-communication, since they belong to a domain of signification that is removed from the symbolic. This domain is what he calls the 'semiotic', and he defines it as a system of signs that consist of signifiers that only ever refer to other signs. This means they are a replacement of a recognized reality rather than a representation of it.

> "Thus the media are producers not of socialization, but of exactly the opposite, of the implosion of the social in the masses. And this is only the macroscopic extension of the implosion of meaning at the microscopic level of the sign. This implosion should be analyzed according to McLuhan's formula, the medium is the message, the consequences of which have yet to be exhausted. That means that all contents of meaning are absorbed in the only dominant form of the medium. Only the medium can make an event - whatever the contents, whether they are conformist or subversive. A serious problem for all counterinformation, pirate radios, antimedia, etc. But there is something even more serious, which McLuhan himself did not see. Because beyond this neutralization of all content, one could still expect to manipulate the medium in its form and to transform the real by using the impact of the medium as form. If all the content is wiped out, there is perhaps still a subversive, revolutionary use value of the medium as such". (Baudrillard 2007, p. 102-103)

Following Baudrillard's understanding of communication, it is possible to trace the increasingly dominant role of the mass media in human communication as a means of increasing their role in social relations as well, relations which are dependent on human communication. The history of the media under capitalism for Baudrillard is thus the story of the disappearance of the symbolic and its replacement with the semiotic. For Baudrillard, the symbolic is not 'reality' as such, but a means of representing reality which is meaningful and through which reality can be perceived and felt. The semiotic on the other hand, by replacing the connection that humans have to an independent reality, creates its own bubble, a closed loop of communication, where signs only ever refer to other signs.

In a mediatized society, all social relations exist through the technological structures of the mass media. This includes the fundamental meta-social relations represented by political actions and events. In a capitalist system, which Baudrillard sees as inseparable from modernity, these relations are commoditized as well, and exist as elements of a code that operates through the structures of the mass media. On a superficial level, this can already be observed as a phenomenon in the politics of the advanced capitalist countries, where 'politics' refers to a discourse located in mass media, and the news, primarily through television, plays a vital role in creating and maintaining this discourse. Relations between people and groups are also defined through the codes constructed through mass media discourses. However, Baudrillard's own reference to semiosis is to a deeper structural process. In his essays n the Gulf War, he provides an empirical instance of his theorization in terms of current political events. His critique of the media is not directed at the purported falsity or ideological misleading that is usually attributed to them, but to the transformation of society itself, such that it is not possible to connect to a reality that does not exist within the media, at any level of experience. It is thus a critique at a deeper level of media form, rather than at the level of media texts. In today's mediatized world, it is not possible for a human being to know in a meaningful way the truth about the world, even a truth as stark as the sight and sound of bombs and the destruction of populations, as long as such a truth does not exist in some form in the mass media that the person consumes. The problem for Baudrillard is not the truth or falsity of the media images and narratives, but that the very existence of those narratives in our lives has rendered it impossible for us to know the world as it exists outside them.

In other words, the semiosis represented by the media narratives has destroyed the symbolic connection that we would otherwise have had with our own reality.

> "Just as the psychical or the screen of the psyche transforms every illness into a symptom (there is no organic illness which does not find its meaning elsewhere, in an interpretation of the ailment on another level: all the symptoms pass through a sort of black box in which the psychic images are jumbled and inverted, the illness becomes reversible, ungraspable, escaping any form of realistic medicine), so war, when it has been turned into information, ceases to be a realistic war and becomes a virtual war, in some way symptomatic. And just as everything psychical becomes the object of interminable speculation, so everything which is turned into information becomes the object of endless speculation, the site of total uncertainty. We are left with the symptomatic reading on our screens of the effects of the war, or the effects of discourse about the war, or completely speculative strategic evaluations which are analogous to those evaluations of opinion provided by polls". (Baudrillard 1995, p. 41).

The question of the media and of the simulacrum that the media represents is therefore not simply a question of the technologies of mass communication, in terms of the television or the internet, but of the transformation of our society by those technologies. The privatization of social lives – whether in the increasing walling off of social groups and communities from each other in cities and towns in the developed world or the commoditization of social services and political action, the changing nature of work, pleasure and life in general – can be considered a part of the evolution of the simulacral society that the semiotic process represents and portends.

Baudrillard identifies the simulacrum with the most advanced phase of capital. The commoditization of everything implies that everything now has a sign value, which supersedes any use or exchange value it may have had. Since the problems of production have been solved decades ago, capitalism cannot survive any longer on the surplus generated through the use of labor power. Capitalism now enters a phase where the generation of more and more consumption is necessitated in order to solve the problem of excess, a necessity that leads to the primacy of the sign value of what is produced, since

consumers no longer have any actual use for commodities, and exchange value by itself

no longer leads to the surpluses that sustain the continued multiplication of capital.

The commoditization of society implies the commoditization of politics as well.

In the West, politics can therefore no longer adequately generate a response to the

simulacrum since it has become part of it and become subsumed within it. The recovery

of the symbolic is the only way out of the endless loop of semiotic signification, but that

recovery is also no longer possible in the West. However, as I argue in the following

pages, Baudrillard's idea of a society divided between symbolic and semiotic domains is

far more valuable and relevant as a description of the postcolonial condition alluded to in

the previous chapter, especially in terms of providing an actual location for Partha

Chatterjee's theoretical devices of civil and political society.

> "The dwindling of the political from a pure strategic arrangement to a system of representation, then to the present scenario of neo-figuration, where the system continues under the same manifold signs but where these no longer represent anything and no longer have their 'equivalent' in a 'reality' or a real social substance: there is no longer any political investiture because there is no longer even any social referent of the classical kind (a people, a class, a proletariat, objective conditions) to lend force to effective political signs. Quite simply, there is no longer any social signified to give force to a political signifier". (Baudrillard 2007, p. 47).

The reasons for this relevance of these epistemological categories to the

postcolonial world in general and to India in particular can be better understood if we

think of the difference between the West and the 'rest' in terms of their degree of what

Marx called 'real subsumption' under capital. A brief historicization of the concept of

subsumption is helpful in order to correspond Marx's own very specific understanding of

this concept to the relation between capital and labor, with a broader meaning of the

encapsulation of social relations within the logic of capital.

III. The Process of Subsumption

Marx refers to the relationship between labor and capital as passing through two stages, at the end of which the pre-existing forms of labor, which are always prior to capital, are transformed through a process of absorption within capital. In 'The Direct Process of Production', an originally unpublished chapter of *Capital*, Marx labels this process 'subsumption' and invokes it in the context of explaining the origins of the distinction between absolute and relative surplus value. Subsumption, for Marx, is also a way of drawing the relation between a capitalist universal and the particular represented by pre-capitalist forms of labor. When the universal encounters the particular, it subsumes it within itself, such that what was once an autonomous external particular is now merely one instance of the universal logic of capital.

Marx sees this process of subsumption occur in two distinct phases. In the first phase, capital encounters labor and subsumes it in order to generate surplus value. Marx calls this absolute surplus value and says that labor is subsumed only to the extent that this surplus value is generated by capital, and not any further. Thus labor retains its particularity in other respects, but is implicated within capital only as far as the generation of surplus value is concerned. Marx takes the example of the small peasant farmer or the handicraft artisan to illustrate how capital uses their labor in order to generate surplus value that can be appropriated, but where the actual form of labor itself, whether small peasant agriculture or handcrafted artisanal production, is left untouched. Marx calls this the 'formal subsumption of labor under capital'.

> "The labour process becomes the instrument of the valorisation process, of the process of capital's self-valorisation — the process of the creation of surplus value. The labour process is subsumed under capital (it is capital's own process) and the capitalist enters the process as its conductor, its director; for him it is at the same time directly a process of the exploitation of alien labour. I call this the formal subsumption of labour under capital. It is the general form of any capitalist

production process; but at the same time it is a particular form alongside the developed mode of production which is specifically capitalist because the second involves the first, but the first by no means necessarily involves the second" (Marx 1977, p. 975)

However, the relentless drive of capital to constantly increase the amount of surplus value that can be generated from its subsumption of the peasant's or artisan's labor necessitates changes to the proportion of necessary labor that sustains the worker and the labor that is used to generate a surplus for the capitalist. This brings Marx to the notion of 'relative surplus value', that is made possible only if the form of labor itself is changed, such that the primary goal of the activity of labor is no longer the growing of crops *per se*, or the creation of a handicraft, but the generation of surplus itself. This leads to a change in the process of labor itself, and is achieved through the destruction of any pre-capitalist logic underlying production that does not treat surplus value-generation as its primary objective. Marx calls this phase the 'real subsumption of labor under capital' and marks this phase as the actual triumph of capital over labor, since now labor is no longer an instrumental means of generating surplus value, but becomes a fundamental aspect of the reproduction of capital itself.

> "This development of the productive power of socialised labour, as opposed to the more or less isolated labour of the individual, etc., and, alongside it, the application of science, that general product of social development, to the direct production process, has the appearance of a productive power of capital, not of labour, or it only appears as a productive power of labour in so far as the latter is identical with capital, and in any case it does not appear as the productive power either of the individual worker or of the workers combined together in the production process. The mystification which lies in the capital-relation in general is now much more developed than it was, or could be, in the case of the merely formal subsumption of labour under capital. On the other hand, the historical significance of capitalist production first emerges here in striking fashion (and specifically), precisely through the transformation of the direct production process itself, and the development of the social productive powers of labour…
>
> Just as the production of absolute surplus value can be regarded as the material expression of the formal subsumption of labour under capital, so the production of relative surplus value can be regarded as that of the real subsumption of labour under capital". (Marx 1977, p. 975)

While Marx wrote about subsumption in terms of its relation to surplus value, it is clear from his notes that he intends real subsumption to invoke something more than merely the relation between capital and labor. The transition from formal to real subsumption also marks a transformation of social relations in general, and is to be understood as a phenomenon broader than merely a reference to the change from absolute to relative surplus value.

> "What is generally characteristic of formal subsumption remains valid in this case too, i.e. the direct subordination to capital of the labour process, in whatever way the latter may be conducted technologically. But on this basis there arises a mode of production — the capitalist mode of production — which is specific technologically and in other ways, and transforms the real nature of the labour process and its real conditions. Only when this enters the picture does the real subsumption of labour under capital take place…
>
> The real subsumption of labour under capital is developed in all the forms which develop relative, as distinct from absolute, surplus value.
>
> With the real subsumption of labour under capital there takes place a complete [and a constant, continuous, and repeated a] revolution in the mode of production itself, in the productivity of labour and in the relation between capitalist and worker". (Marx 1977, p. 976)

The autonomous Marxist tradition in the 1970s saw in the idea of subsumption a useful tool to explain the social changes in Western capitalism after the tumultuous years of the 1960s. In their view, Marx's idea was useful to speak about labor in the 1860s, but in an age where the commodity form had replicated itself in every aspect of human life, subsumption of labor now implied the subsumption of society itself under capital. Antonio Negri, for instance saw the theory of surplus value as essentially the a theory of exploitation (Negri 1991). While the domination of capitalist forces in modern society had hitherto led to the formal subsumption of social relations within the logic of capital, they held that post the 1960s, capital had reached a new phase that was more totalizing, where all social relations were 'capitalized' in a sense, such that they only made sense

any more within the narrow utilitarian logic of increasing surplus value. Society itself had undergone a process of real subsumption under capital.

If we understand 'social relations' to imply human communication, this phase is coterminous with the increasing mediatizing of communication such that it is clearly the mass media that is the location for this process of real subsumption. The 'media' are thus literally in the middle, in the sense that they represent the mediation of human communication through the means of capital. This is real subsumption in the context of communication, and the media can thus be understood as the location of this new totalizing phase of capital.

If we reflect on the distinction between the trajectory of capital in the West and the postcolonial world, the correspondence of Marx's two-phase trajectory of capitalist subsumption to the divided societies comprising the postcolonial nation-state becomes clear. While Western societies are characterized by their real subsumption of human communication under capital, a postcolonial country such as India is evidently a divided entity in this respect: while certain domains of society are clearly implicated in capital and subsumed within it, the majority of the country's social relations are still outside capital. This is not to imply that they are in some way untouched by the logic of capital, otherwise known as modernity, but that their domination by capital is only partial, and more specifically, *formal*. In India, therefore, while certain aspects of social life are fully within the sphere of capital, many other aspects are still only formally subsumed. This difference in the characteristics of subsumption of social relations under capital is the same as the distinction that Chatterjee draws between a postcolonial civil society (that is fully subsumed within the logic of capital, hence an instance of modernity), and a

political society (that is only partially modern, and therefore reflects a location in social relations that are not fully amenable to the colonial logic of modernity). This formally subsumed domain can also be understood as analogous to the domain of subaltern consciousness that the Subaltern historians attempted to invoke.

IV. Mapping the Simulacrum in the Postcolony

The line I am trying to trace here from Chatterjee's description of the Indian polity on the one hand to the explanation of human communication that Baudrillard posits as his proposed theory of the media thus goes through the common ground of capital and the concomitant discourse of modernity that unites them. Society in the West is fully subsumed under capital: this also means that civil society in the West is a more totalizing entity than that in India, since it encompasses the totality of social relations. In this sense civil society emerges in a new definitional sense as the material manifestation of capitalism in terms of the organization of social relations. Rather than the idealist public sphere beloved of liberal political theory, or the autonomous domain free of state and the household in the Hegelian sense, civil society has to be understood as the form in which capital manifests itself in society, where it leaves the domain of mere production, and enters into the totality of social relations, by absorbing into itself – subsuming – any and all aspects of social relations that pre-date it and are therefore inimical to its driving logic of generating value. Social relations that once signified human needs that were prior to capital and unrelated to the creation of value are now mediated through the logical prism of capital and emerge on the other side as referents to new needs within the

capitalist system, and lose any connection to what existed before and may still exist outside.

Civil society thus represents the arrival of modernity in the realm of human relations, and it is no surprise that the foundations of our current understanding of civil society as an autonomous public sphere lie in the rise and spread of print capitalism. Civil society in this sense is another name for the mediatization of the organization of social relations, for the absorption of an older system of human organization into the logic of modernity, that is synonymous with the teleology of capital.

It is in this sense, I argue, that as a mediatized entity from its origins, civil society is synonymous with what Baudrillard calls the semiotic. It is the domain of communication that is autonomous precisely because it is self-referential. The classical public sphere, as found in the work of Jürgen Habermas, that owes so much to this idealistic view of civil society, depends on the existence of this domain only because of its freedom from any association with the state. The state is still encumbered by the exigencies of democracy, or the needs of its populations, while the public sphere exists in a new, autonomous realm, free of such encumbrances, and contained within itself. Both the public sphere, and the civil society that is its necessary condition, comprise an autonomous universe of signifiers referring to signs located within itself, a true domain of the semiotic, and a sign of the most advanced phase of capitalism, embodied in Baudrillard's notion of society as simulacrum. If we understand civil society in the abstract in these terms, it will enable us to locate its material existence more specifically in postcolonial societies and will allow us to make sense of Chatterjee's heuristic categories in a more grounded fashion.

But what of the symbolic? Just as Baudrillard's sees in the loss of the symbolic the foundational loss of a pre-capitalist and potentially non-capitalist set of social relations, it is the recovery of the symbolic that has the radical potential to destabilize capitalist modernity and restore human communication to its original connection with a lived reality. In this sense, the symbolic cannot be located within civil society, but always outside it. The difference between the West and the postcolonial world in terms of the symbolic is also just as acute: in the West, the symbolic has to be recovered or rediscovered anew, because all of society is now subsumed under civil society, just as all of the West's social relations are now mediated through capitalist modernity. However, in the rest of the world, Chatterjee's 'politics of the governed', takes place outside the domain of civil society, and the bulk of the population is thus not subsumed within the semiotic domain that civil society represents. The symbolic is therefore a domain that can be mapped onto the relations between people and the state that Chatterjee calls political society. These are relations that are grounded in a material connection between the population and the state, without the ideological mediation provided by the discourse of civil society (such as that of citizenship, nationhood, law, reason, and so on). Of course, what Chatterjee calls political society is as much a discursive set of relations as well, just as the symbolic is as much a *discourse* of representation as the semiotic is; the difference in both cases, is that it is a *representational* discursive construction at one remove from reality, and which cannot exist by itself, but only as a way to mediate that reality that is prior and independent of it. This is unlike the semiotic domain or the discourse of civil society that is a domain unto itself, and refers only to itself.

The question of political action in the 'rest of the world' is therefore a question, not of recovering or recreating a lost domain of the symbolic in social relations as Baudrillard suggests for the West, but rather the challenge of developing a new language or idiom of politics that is located within the symbolic realm of political society that is already not only extant but is also the dominant domain of politics in the non-West. To elaborate, the challenge for politics in India, is that while actually existing politics, what Chatterjee calls 'democracy', takes place in the material domain of political society, outside the narratives of an élite civil society, it can only be spoken of in terms of its discursive presence in civil society, or in other words in terms of its appearance in the semiotic domain that Chatterjee says is represented by modernity.

To restate my earlier contestation about the distinction between colonizing and colonized societies in Baudrillard's terms, this disjuncture between an unspeakable symbolic and a discursively dominant semiotic is for me the defining characteristic of postcolonial politics. I argue that in material terms the location of this disjuncture is the mass media, since that is where the discourse of politics (as opposed to politics itself) is both produced as well as deliberately ruptured from its representation of reality. The mass media is therefore a component of civil society in terms of function and structure, but it is a unique component, since it is also the location where the ideological foundation of civil society in the form of discourse is generated and where contemporary civil society is itself located. In other words, if we consider, as I argue, that civil society in the postcolonial world is nothing but a discursive construction, that it only ever exists in the realm of discourse and has no material existence in actual politics, then it is the mass

media that is the location of that discourse, and by extension the location where civil society is to be found.

This brings me to the crux of my definition of the media in India and its relationship to politics: the media is the repository of civil society and therefore the site of its discursive realm of politics. No theorization of politics in India can ignore the media simply because without it, the very discourse of politics would not exist. At the same time, no theory of the media in India can exist outside the consideration of this discourse of politics, because the media is but the manifestation of this discourse: any attempt to theorize the media – whether as narrative, structure or institution – is bound to be incomplete if it ignores the primary function of the media which is to provide a location for the existence of the discourse of civil society. As an ideological apparatus, the media thus play a very different role in the postcolonial context: instead of representing a discursive reality that is dominant outside it, it creates a new discursive reality that is unrelated to any dominant reality outside. Any theory of the media has to account for this ideological role, a role that is present in the very form of the mass media, irrespective of generic specificities of content such as news, entertainment or advertising.

The final chapter of this work elaborates further on the potential for political action in the non-West in this scenario, where traditional political forms are subsumed under the semiotic domain of civil society. Before that however, it will be useful to look at certain specific instances of politics that take place in political society but are rendered as intelligible events in civil society only through the discourse of news. The process of subsumption that civil society engages in, wherein the politics of the majority of the population is sought to be absorbed into the universal idiom of modernity represented by

civil society can be clarified further through these instances. This idiom, I argue, is represented primarily by the domination of the nation-form and its corollary, the normative citizen-subject that is a prerequisite for modernity.

The next chapter therefore is a brief summary of three such instances of politics within the domain of democracy, as Chatterjee calls the logic of political society, but which lack a necessary idiom of theory to be successfully rendered as politics per se. In this scenario, the ideological apparatus of civil society in the form of the mass media step in to subsume these acts of politics into themselves, producing new narratives that are part of the pre-existing semiotic system and which enables civil society to exist as a discourse.

CHAPTER 4

THE NATION-FORM AND THE ABSENT PRESENCE OF THE SYMBOLIC

I. The Nation-Form as a Simulacrum

The idea of the nation as a discursive construct rather than a concrete and material entity is one that runs through all contemporary theorizations of the nation-form, from Renan to Gellner to Anderson. Chatterjee himself, in an earlier work, distinguishes three kinds of such discourses that enable the nation to exist (Chatterjee 1986). The nation as a form, is of course a discourse that needs a constant narrativization so as to maintain its ubiquity and normativity, as distinct from the modern state, which indeed exceeds the realm of discourse, and exists in material terms in everyday life. The connection between cultural forms and the nation has been the crux of all arguments about the nation as discourse, and Anderson came closest to identifying the origins of the nation as engendered through the practices of print capitalism, or perhaps more broadly, through a particular mode of mass communication.

In my project, which is to construct a theorization of the mass media in the postcolonial political context, an engagement with the form of the nation is crucial. Understanding the relation between the nation and its media is important not just to locate the discourse of the nation itself, but also to define the role, purpose and nature of the mass media as institution, structure and a set of discourses. At the outset I posit that the mass media exist in order to provide a location for the discourse called the nation to exist. In other words, in so far as the nation has a discursive existence, distinct from the state, it is located firmly in the texts produced through print and broadcast media, and their

current extensions located on the internet as a distribution platform. This chapter is an attempt to delineate this location with more precision in light of my argument that the media are a part of both Chatterjee's civil society in terms of the divided polity of a postcolonial context, and a part of the domain of Baudrillard's semiotic in terms of the processes that define the divided public sphere in India.

In this chapter I instantiate this attempt at location with three examples that are emblematic of how this discursive construction of the nation is actually materialized through mediation, its relationship to the state (and the hyphenated nation-state that subsequently emerges) and to modernity by way of capital. These instances are not a form of textual analysis of the content of these discourses in an empirical sense, but an attempt to cover the variety of ways in which this process of semiosis takes place and in which this location is achieved. In this sense, these are instances at random and are part of a continuum of media form, which I argue, following Raymond Williams, is itself the essential element of the discourse, apart from any consideration of the specificities of genre or content (Williams 1990). Marshall McLuhan's much-quoted dictum about the equivalence of the medium and the message is also another way of arguing the primacy of the media form – which is always already the communicated message – over the textual elements of the narrative content which are of secondary consideration, and which are not particularly of import to my argument (McLuhan 1994).

Seen from the other side of the lens, i.e., from the standpoint of the nation-as-discourse, one can also argue that political theory is itself impoverished by its neglect of this essential characteristic of the nation: the nation-as-media discourse. In its emphasis on institutions and structures of power, and the materiality of the processes that constitute

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the nation-state, political theory ignores the importance of the mediating processes and the mass media structures in the very constitution of the discourse that it studies. By treating the media as a either an ideological apparatus within an *a priori* state, or as part of the restricted field of political discourse, it fails to acknowledge the actual location of the nation-form in the contemporary world, a location that is necessitated by the transformation of capital into a signifying process centered in the consumer society. In so far as the nation is a product of capitalism and colonial modernity, the shift in capitalism from the domain of production to one where consumption is the primary concern and the primary source of surplus value has also transformed the location of the nation itself, into a semiotic discourse in a consumer society. This chapter therefore is as much an attempt to theorize the media in a postcolonial polity as is it is an attempt to open political theory to the possibilities inherent in understanding political categories as inherently elements of a mass-mediated discourse and thereby argue for a greater emphasis on the mediated nature of the epistemological categories of politics.

The primary effect of the nation as media discourse that is of concern to my argument is its consequent production of the category of the citizen, or rather of the subjectivity of the citizen as a fundamental element of the nation-form. This citizen-subject is always an idealized discursive element, whose very normativity is the most important aspect of the banality and ubiquity of the nation as discourse. I approach the location of the nation in mass media therefore through this rubric of the normative citizen-subject. In quotidian terms, I argue, the discursive existence of this citizen-subject is the way the population of a state experiences the discourse of the nation itself. In the broad context of the meta-textual elements that make up the media form, as well as in the

deeper sense through the actual textual elements, it is the citizen-subject that is at the heart of the mediated discourse of the nation. An approach to the nation through the means of the citizen-subject is thus the most material way in which we can engage with the nature of this discourse.

Chatterjee's assertion of the distinction between civil society and political society also pivots on his definition of the relationship between the state and the people who constitute these domains. While the majority of the people are treated as an undifferentiated mass of population by the state and thus come to constitute political society, the small élite that comprise civil society are the ones who occupy the exalted position of citizens. The 'citizen' therefore refers to an actually existing group of people who share certain common characteristics and a common relationship to the state because of those characteristics, but who are nevertheless not the majority of people who constitute politics. In this sense, the normative citizen, despite being a discursive construction, is not quite an imaginary entity: the discourse is open to a certain group of people who are enabled to occupy, embody and populate it. This group of people is of course the membership of civil society and the citizen is therefore the embodiment of civil society's relationship to the state.

It is also helpful to remember the colonial origins of both the nation-form as well as civil society in Europe: the free and open membership of civil society and the secular nature of the new nations of Europe after the Reformation were a part of the emergence of capital as a secular power in itself, and was also enabled through the primary accumulation of natural resources in the colonies and the brutal savagery of the colonial encounter. This aspect, the "darker side of modernity" (Mignolo 2011), and its originary

advent "dripping from head to foot, from every pore, with blood and dirt" (Marx 1977) is as true of capital as it is of its institutions of rule such as the nation and civil society. The response of Napoleon Bonaparte to Toussaint L'Ouverture of Haiti is as much evidence of these origins as are the relationship of the United States to the Atlantic slave trade and the lofty parliamentary debates of Westminster to the deadly brutality of British rule in India and much of the world. The common element underlying these historical events is the exigencies of European capital and its search for resources and profits. In this sense, in a global context, the European nation-form as well as its ideals of civil society were always already a domain of the semiotic *avant la lettre*, with the colonized world falling into the tragic shadowy realm of the symbolic. The only difference with the contemporary context of postcolonial India is the absence of any relationship between colonial political society of the time with the logic of popular democracy.

In postcolonial India, on the other hand, capital no longer has recourse to this externalization of violence abroad that can sustain the idealized domain of civil society at home. On a global level, there is of course still a quasi-colonial division of the non-West into zones for resource extraction by capital that provides for the maintenance of civil societies in the West, a phenomenon sometimes defined as neo-colonial or neo-imperialist. However, this perspective obscures the situation in India where the existence of a small European-style civil society in the colonial fashion goes together with the existence of capital that depends on primary accumulation and the violent exploitation of entire populations. The dynamics of this co-existence are what fuel my own concern with the process of mass mediation, since I argue that it is the existence of the civil society as media discourse that sustains this hitherto unparalleled situation of colonialism without a

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colonial power in the classical sense, what M.K. Gandhi called "English rule without the Englishman." (Chakrabarty 2000, p.34)

The constitution of the normative citizen occurs through the embodiment of several aspects of this subjectivity. In India, they include the identity-based markers of class, caste, religion, gender, race, language, regional origins, ethnicity and sexuality among many others. The citizen therefore, as an element of civil society, is one who occupies and embodies the most privileged and dominant aspects of these roles. These roles are not just an outcome of majoritarian political discourse or the strength of numbers, but the product of a specific history of privileges that originate in coloniality. The colonial definition of normative and acceptable forms of identity, the enumeration of populations based on these identities, the division of the population along these lines of identity and the privileging of certain groups at the expense of others, whether based on considerations of colonial politics or ideology, has led to the current set of ideal-typical characteristics of the normative Indian citizen.

The postcolonial state has been unable to erase this history of coloniality in its constitution of citizenship mainly because the postcolonial state itself is a product of the nationalist struggle against colonial rule that was born out of these colonial privileges. In its final phase, the nationalist movement was the movement for the transfer of state power from the colonial government to a new class of citizen-subjects that was created by colonialism and occupied the domain of civil society within which the nationalist movement took place. The partition of the Indian empire into two nation-states based on religious identity was also a factor behind the overtly Hindu religious identity that the postcolonial Indian state acquired, along with the other ideological biases and practices of

the colonial state that were transferred wholesale to the new state. This superficiality of the Westminster system that was set up in the wake of this transfer of power is perhaps what B.R.Ambedkar, who chaired the new republican constitution's Drafting Committee was referring to when he warned "Democracy in India is only a top dressing on an Indian soil, which is essentially undemocratic".

Like Baudrillard's notion of the hyper-real, the new postcolonial state was, if anything, more colonial than the colonial state it replaced. Despite its massive power and force of arms, the colonial state was never able in its close to two centuries of conquest to subdue entirely the remnants of pre-colonial political forms in the subcontinent. While militarily subservient to the colonial state, these remnants survived in the form of over five hundred principalities and kingdoms scattered as enclaves of widely various sizes, and with varying degrees of autonomy, across the colonized territories. At a stroke, the new postcolonial state negated the treaties that had enabled these incipient nations to survive colonial rule, and incorporated them through military invasion into the new state, erasing any alternative conception of modernity and political belonging that these 'native states' may have represented. The totalizing nature of the postcolonial state with respect to a hegemonic modernity was therefore far more awesome than that represented by its predecessor.

II. The Simulacrum under Capital and its Symbolic Challenge

The extractive aspect of the postcolonial state is perhaps the most visible sign of its continuity of colonialism through other means. This aspect has undergone a drastic upsurge in importance since the neoliberal reforms of the Indian government in the late

1980s and early 1990s allowed greater freedom to global capital to engage in primary accumulation and create a consumer society within Indian civil society. In order to overcome the lack of an external colony where the violence of resource extraction and its consequent displacement and dispossession can be staged, the Indian state has continued with the colonial practice of designating certain portions of its territory, that belong to the symbolic realm and are thus not part of the semiotic domain of modernity, as acceptable domains for externalizing the violence of primary accumulation. Many of these areas are the lands inhabited by tribes that fall outside the state's conception of the nation-form ad the citizen subject. Some of these instances of accumulation by capital are in territories which have seen the formation of guerrilla armies as a tribal response to the state's violence, in many ways replicating previous tribal resistance to the colonial state a century ago (Guha 1999). Most of these are organized by the Communist Party of India (Maoist) and are also remnants of older localized communist insurgencies against the state from the 1940s, 1960s and the 1980s. One such instance, relevant only in its currency rather than any other distinguishing feature is the opposition of the Dongria Kondh tribe of the eastern state of Orissa to the mining of bauxite from a range of hills where they live.

The hills, principally the peak Niyamgiri, are a considered a particularly rich source of bauxite and are located in a fertile and water-rich area that is currently thickly forested. While the peak itself occupies a sacred space in the Kondhs' self-identity, their opposition to its destruction and the consequent building of a massive aluminum plant to process the mineral is premised on a deep understanding of the Bataillean 'general economy' of the region: the bauxite in the bedrock is what gives the region its uniquely

fertile soil through its superior absorption of rainwater and the regeneration of underground aquifers that feed the numerous streams and rivers on which the Kondh depend. The destruction of the hills and the depletion of their constitutive minerals will therefore lead to the desertification of the forests: a process that will be hastened by the massive quantities of fresh water that the aluminum plant will draw from the ground. The corporation that has purchased the rights to the bauxite from the state is a British-registered but Indian-owned entity called Vedanta Resources plc. Vedanta itself has grown into a transnational corporation only recently mainly through the cheap purchase of formerly public state-owned mining companies in order to obtain access to their vast territorial rights. It is therefore an excellent and overt instance of the relationship between the postcolonial state and global capital. (Tokita-Tanabe and Tanabe, 2014).

Chatterjee's description of the ways in which the state deals with the political society (into which the Kondh tribes clearly fall) can be observed in the progressive evolution of the issue of the opposition to the mining in the last few years. Faced with a growing Maoist insurgency in the regions adjoining the mineral belt in Orissa, the state responded to the massive increase of environmental destruction that has accompanied the rise in primary accumulation since the 1990s through a series of progressive legislation since 2004 that enables local elected bodies to have greater control over the exploitation of resources in their territories. This has led to the village councils in Orissa being empowered to vote on the permission given to Vedanta to displace them by mining in the Niyamgiri hills. All villages located in the displacement zone unsurprisingly voted to ban the company from mining in their territories.

Here, while it appears that the tribe is now a part of the civil society discourse of an elected council that can discuss and debate the issue, this is not how it appears in the actually existing civil society embodied by the national news. Driven by the Leviathan-like discourse of 'development' which the nation-form sees as the embodiment of the greater good, the modernity represented by heavy industry is seen as essential to the making of an evolved nation-form, and to fulfill the destiny promised by the discourse of civil society. The stubborn persistence of non-modern forms of life within he same territorial boundaries as civil society creates a contradiction that did not exist in the age of colonialism, when it could be explained as a form of resistance to colonialism rather than to capitalism or modernity. The opposition to resource extraction and environmental destruction is therefore seen not primarily as anti-modern or anti-capitalist, but as anti-national. This leads to the construction of the Maoist guerrilla as a terrorist figure, familiar from decades of anti-communist tropes about insurgency and the recent discourses of terrorism. The opposition is therefore reconstructed as a sign of Maoist agitation and incitement to violence of the otherwise simple and innocent savage that the figure of the tribal represents in the narrative of the nation-form.

The opposition of the village councils to the mining permission given to Vedanta has not stopped the company from constructing the aluminum plant itself, and from recently applying for a permit to expand production facilities. The construction and expansion occurred under quasi-military protection from the state and its local political leadership. This may have the appearance of a legal contradiction, but it is clear from the material progress of Vedanta's work on the ground that the decision of the village councils and the reality of the law that enabled that decision is itself in question. Thus,

the tribes, while ostensibly allowed into the discourse of civil society, are in reality being

dealt with just as the state deals with other aspects of political society: as a population

that has to be somehow managed, whether through the coercive means of the state police

or through the consensual approach of an opportunity to speak to the state as a village

council. This dual approach can be seen in the reportage of a recent development in the

process of expanding production in the plant: as part of the law, Vedanta is now required

to submit to a public hearing where any member of the public can ostensibly speak and

voice their opinion abut the project. Again, this may appear as a sign of the penetration of

civil society discourse into the tribal heartland of India, and indeed it is reported in the

media in such terms. All the news agency reports, from Reuters and the Associated Press

to the Press Trust of India narrated a fictionalized account of a deliberative process that

seemed to have rationally debated the pros and cons of expanding production in the plant,

and democratically come to a consensus that permission should be granted[1].

In reality, as video testimony from activists present showed, the hearing was a

semi-secret event, with a heavy presence of the police, local political leaders, bureaucrats

and Vedanta staff[2]. A group of people who are clearly not normative citizen-subjects (and

are therefore intended to be tribal, in order to provide the stamp of authenticity), hold a

set of neatly printed signs proclaiming support for the company, for development of their

region and the expansion of the plant. The first half of the hearing includes laudatory

speeches from the assembled dignitaries before a group of people walk in to protest the

hearing and demand to speak in opposition. Clearly not expecting this disruption to the

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[1] See Chitrangada Choudhury's report 'What you've read about the recent Vedanta hearing was wrong'
http://www.caravanmagazine.in/vantage/what-you-read-about-recent-vedanta-hearing-was-wrong

[2] See the video testimony at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MsSGBnNmM-U

script, the police and other staff try to stop the new entrants before being persuaded to allow a representative to speak. While the tribal representatives speak of their opposition to the mining and the plant and ask how the plant can function without the bauxite that has now been theoretically denied to them, the entire hearing is abruptly brought to a halt by the police and bureaucrats present even as it turns into a violent confrontation between the tribe and the local leaders. News reports the next day make no mention of the contested nature of the hearing, only neatly merging the hearing into a discourse of democratic disagreement that led to consensus. Permission was granted to the plant to expand, and its applications for permission clearly indicate it intends to continue with its original plan of mining the Niyamgiri hills to make use of this expanded capacity.

Rather than the fundamental question in political society of the nature of modernity and the role of the nation that is posed by the Kondhs' opposition to the mining and the aluminum plant, the issue in the domain of civil society becomes one of managing pollution, legality and economic development. The semiotic nature of the civil society and the media that it is located in only allows for a restricted set of signifiers which have the language or means to connect to the domain of reality outside the semiotic. The Kondh's discourse of the sacredness of the mountain, of the freedom to live in a different mode of modernity, of a relationship to the local rather than to the national and of the undesirability of capitalist development are unable to find a place in the media discourse because they exist as signifiers of real conditions, in a plane of symbolic discourse, which the semiotic nature of civil society does not allow the mass media to enter. At the same time, the state itself has to manage the Kondhs' demands as that of a population, given the competition that it faces from the proximity of Maoist guerrillas

ready to take over its role, and has evolved several discursive means for this purpose while reserving the right to use armed force in the last instance.

III. The Simulacral Center and its Provincial Symbolic

The primacy of the nation-form in civil society leads to the persistence of a distinction between the 'national' media mainly in English and Hindi, and the 'regional' media in the vernacular languages of the non-Hindi states. Despite the existence of a Hindi public sphere and civil society, of which the Hindi media is a part, it does not occupy the same national space as English. As a continuation of colonial and nationalist-era prejudices, the Hindi media is the national as imagined by the provincial public of the northern hinterlands, while English, given its metropolitan provenance, enables the English language media to become the public sphere of no one and nowhere in particular and therefore of the nation in general. The Hindi media, therefore, despite claims to national representation still speak to a resolutely provincial imagined audience and this is reflected in their idiom and perspective, reflecting the needs and concerns of their north Indian public, while the English media are in a sense purely semiotic, without the qualifying need to be responsive to specific set of consumers and therefore it is in the English language Indian media that we see the semiotic domain in its most advanced form. This is seen in the way in which political events are represented and narrated, but it can also be seen in *which* political events even become events in the first place. The difference in visibility between two mass movements that came to a climactic head in the period 2011-2013 exemplifies this choice that the semiotic has to make over the definition of an event and its incorporation into the narrative of civil society.

As a federal republic, the Indian state oversees twenty nine states, which owe their current boundaries to a variety of factors. Some, such as the large northern states were simply continuations of administrative units under colonial rule, while others such as Bengal in the east and Punjab in the west are the rump territories of much larger sub-national provinces that were partitioned to create the nation-state of Pakistan in 1947 (which itself split after a civil war to create Bangladesh in 1971). To a large extent, in the majority of the country that does not speak Hindi, the states are reflections of linguistic communities, where the Stalinist idea of 'one language, one state' was put into practice in the years following independence.

The Linguistic Reorganization of States in 1956, redrew the existing provincial boundaries to create new states whose only reason to exist was a shared language among their respective populations. The first linguistic state to be so created was Andhra Pradesh in 1956, created by merging two distinctly different Telugu-speaking regions, one that included coastal districts from the colonial province of Madras, and the other that was part of the native kingdom of Hyderabad. Since the creation of Andhra Pradesh, the former citizens of the Hyderabad region had been agitating to reverse the merger and create a new smaller state of Telangana. This grew into a popular movement after several promises of regional autonomy went unmet in the decades that followed. It came to a ahead in 2009 with massive street protests and a wave of popular demonstrations in the city of Hyderabad led by university students and government employees, mainly from the hitherto oppressed castes (Kannabiran et al 2010). As the city and many of the region's towns came to a standstill for months, the movement grew into a general strike and a reaction against the neoliberal ideological framework that was the foundation of the

regional inequalities of wealth in the state[3]. Since all of the local Telugu language media, including newspapers and satellite television stations were owned by coastal-area political leaders and prominent capitalists (who were usually the same group of people) (Pingle 2010, Maringanti 2010), the leaders of the movement set up their own media houses to counter the discursive construction of their protests as a problem of law and order.

The dynamics of the media war in the Telangana movement and the relationship between the new public spheres that were hereby created through this conflict is a fascinating issue that deserves a deeper study and is outside the scope of the present work. However, my concern here is the relationship between the national and the provincial and the space the semiotic realm of the nation-form makes to accommodate the symbolic struggle represented by such a popular movement. In sum, the relationship was one of apathy, primarily because the issue at hand was not one that affected the civil society that constitutes the English language media in any conceivable way. For several months, except for brief mentions during particularly violent clashes, a political movement that was raging for over two years in India's fifth largest city and its hinterland was almost entirely absent from the national media.

The provincial public sphere is therefore one that is entirely divorced from the semiotic domain at the national level. However, this plays an insidious role in terms of defining the identity of the participants in the struggle themselves, by marking their concerns and issues as secondary in importance. This definition of what constitutes the 'national' is even more apparent when we consider that this period (2011-2012) also saw

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[3] See 'An extraordinary general strike for Telangana: A Suneetha, Vasudha Nagaraj and Others' at http://kafila.org/2011/09/28/an-extraordinary-general-strike-for-telangana-a-suneetha-vasudha-nagaraj-and-others

massive street protests, and an upsurge of violent clashes in the Kashmir valley against Indian occupation and in support of Kashmiri independence, another grassroots movement which was also conspicuous by its absence. This erasure of the symbolic through apathy is necessary to construct the discourses that are acceptable to the semiotic domain, which becomes apparent when we consider next what the English language media was actually reporting during these months.

In 2011 a septuagenarian social activist called Kisan Baburao 'Anna' Hazare and his followers from the western state of Maharashtra came to Delhi as part of a movement to demand an end to corruption (Jenkins 2014). As the leaders were mainly upper-caste Hindus speaking in a Gandhian idiom, their movement was joined by various progressive groups, non-governmental organizations, and generated sufficient media attention since it was taking place during a particularly slow news period in the heart of the national capital where many of the English language news channels are based. As the highly conservative and reactionary nature of the movement's leaders became apparent, they were also joined by two highly successful Hindu religious preachers, who had made fortunes through their yoga franchises and television appearances and were popular among the aspiring middle classes. These *gurus* brought many of their congregations with them and the media attention followed. When Anna Hazare was arrested and later released, he decided to fast indefinitely to press his demands for an end to corruption, which he did not define, but in his view would come about through the constitution of a new 'guardian council' headed by a *lokpal* or ombudsman, who would be appointed by eminent and morally sound people. As the media attention forced the parliament, also based in Delhi, to debate this amendment to the constitution, Hazare and his motley

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collection of followers provided a ready-made 24/7 narrative for the television news channels. Cameras were positioned all over the large square in Delhi where he had pitched his marquee and the yoga gurus and other sundry religious figures, already television stars in their own right, provided ample diversion to keep the cameras busy and the sound-bites flowing. In a matter of days, this phenomenon had metamorphosed into a national crisis as news anchors breathlessly compared the events to the then recent protests that had been labeled the 'Arab Spring' and ominously foretold the end of Indian politics and the crisis of the nation-state. Crews fanned out in other metropolitan cities to chronicle a supposed national movement with reports that announced an impending revolt of the middle classes that would cleanse the political system of its corruption, in language that was thinly disguised as to its animosity both to the 'deepening of democracy' that had seen the increasing participation of lower castes in electoral politics in recent years (Jaffrelot 2003), and to the current Congress Party government which was (unfairly) seen to be less favorable to capital and was creating new laws to slow the rapid exploitation of natural resources, such as the one represented by Vedanta in the previous pages. This was part of the behavior that was recast as 'corruption', a word whose essentially indefinable character made it easy to associate it with any attempt to stop the ongoing liberalization of the economy (Muralidharan 2011, Rajagopal 2011).

Needless to say, no such crisis materialized in real life, and the movement existed primarily as a purely 'civil society' moment in the semiotic realm. Unable to articulate any relation to the symbolic struggles that ordinary Indians did indeed wage against official corruption in daily life, it remained a purely media-created movement that lived by the media and eventually died by it. Even as the reports of revolution reached a shrill

crescendo on television, the movement was already dead, a victim of falling viewership as the audience moved on to the next big thing, which happened to be a new (also media-created) cricket tournament. The opportune timing of the movement has been pointed out as a factor in its success, coming as it did between the triennial cricket World Cup on one end and the new made-for-television Indian Premier League cricket tournament on the other. However, politics in other non-televised domains still took place in other parts of the country, some like in Telangana creating actual crises of the nation-state through its challenge to the basis of the political divisions of the republic, and others such as in Kashmir, questioning the Indian state's legitimacy through mass violence and civil disobedience.

Anna Hazare's fast-unto-death, which precipitated the 'crisis' of the anti-corruption movement has also been compared to another indefinite fast, which was met not with gushing television anchors, but with arrest and force-feeding. This was the fast of Irom Sharmila, a political activist from the northeastern state of Manipur who had not consumed food or water for the last *decade*, even as Hazare was preparing for his own televised fast which lasted four days. Irom Sharmila's action was in protest against the massacre of civilians in Manipur by the Indian Army (Mehrotra 2009). Her demand was the repeal of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, which enables such violence by paramilitary troops in certain parts of India and has normalized the brutalization of whole populations by Indian soldiers. She has been kept alive through forcible feeding by the state administration and is under arrest for attempted suicide. Now largely out of the public eye, her fast briefly came to national attention during Hazare's own as a

comparison, but only as a sideshow, since the media lacked the language necessary for this symbolic act to be a legitimate narrative element on its own.

The 'national' is thus an element of civil society discourse that is purely semiotic, and exists only within the narratives of the 'national' television channels, mainly in the English language. Lacking an actual public, the media construct one of their own and are thus suspended in what Homi Bhabha, citing Althusser, calls "space without places, time without duration" (Bhabha 1990): an instance of the media as a pure semiotic, unencumbered even by an audience they can call their own.

The response of the English language media to the 'hate speech' case of Akbaruddin Owaisi, a Muslim politician from Hyderabad qualifies this idea of the 'national' further[4]. Owaisi, one of the leaders of the Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen, an avowedly Muslim political party in the city of Hyderabad was addressing a political rally in December 2012. A few days previously, a controversy over an illegally constructed Hindu temple in the city had led to a rally by a Hindu nationalist organization called the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) , whose leader Praveen Togadia threatened to let loose hundreds of thousands of volunteers to demolish mosques if the temple in question was not allowed to expand. He was referring directly to the demolition by the VHP and its sister organizations of the sixteenth-century Babri mosque in northern India in 1992 despite a massive police presence at the site (Hansen 1999, Nandy et al 1997), and obliquely to the killing of over a thousand Muslims in the western state of Gujarat (Varadarajan 2002, Engineer 2003) also by the same organizations with the cooperation of the local police. Owaisi, in his response, called for the police to stand aside so that the

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[4] See 'Now that Owaisi is in jail, how about Praveen Togadia?' by Mahtab Alam at
http://kafila.org/2013/01/09/now-that-owaisi-is-in-jail-how-about-praveen-togadia-mahtab-alam

Muslims could face the VHP volunteers on their own. It was both a rhetorical flourish, as well as a critical reference to the generally accepted fact that the police are largely sympathetic to Hindu right-wing organizations and did not attempt to stop violence against Muslims on numerous occasions since then.

However, Owaisi's remarks were immediately seized upon by the television news as a grave provocation and incitement to violence. Labeled 'hate speech', the impression created was of a dangerous threat to public order, despite the fact that no violence had actually occurred or showed any signs of occuring. Owaisi was arrested and sent to prison for two weeks, while Togadia's speeches, and susequent appearances as well, went unremarked and unreported. The religious basis of the nation as discourse is clearly evident from the choice of elements that make up the daily narrative of the news. The nation, through the silent invocation of a normative citizen-subject is largely coded as Hindu, with Muslims existing as a visible minority on sufferance. The visibility of the Muslim other is emphasized in order to buttress the Hindu-ness of the nation, and narratives like Owaisi's perceived 'hate speech' are essential elements of the banal construction of the Muslim as terrorist. The religious identity of the citizen is also foregrounded through other genres of national television: almost all television fiction, mainly in the form of daily soap operas in Hindi, consists of Hindu protagonists, who live in a place without location and are always upper-caste, Hindi-speaking north Indians. This caste, religious, region and linguistic identity continues in advertising and commercial messages, in other non-fiction shows such as studio-based reality programs, talk shows, music and variety programs and others.

The essential difference between the postcolonial context and the Western media environment lies in this vast gulf that separates the symbolic and semiotic in the postcolonial world, as seen in the gap between the ostensibly national media in India, both in other media spheres, as well as in real life in general. The crux of this disparity lies in the location of the national media: in the non-place of civil society, itself exisitng in an endless loop of signifying practices such as the nation-form and the citizen-subject. While life in political society goes on through the practices and processes of democracy, it is absent from the discourse of the national media, which only has space for the modernity represented by civil society.

A theory of the media in this context would therefore need to be located firmly in the domain of the symbolic, which requires a fundamentally different perspective on the media in India. Instead of the 'Indian media', the scholar would have to recognize that the nation is irrelevant when it comes to the symbolic domain of political society, and the many and diverse public spheres that political society includes are reflected, not in the vacuous empty discourse of the national media, but in the thriving local, regional and vernacular media narratives that completely eschew any discourse that involves the nation. As the previous chapters argued, the role of the media theorist cannot be separated from the theorist of politics, in an age where politics is mainly a media discourse. Any scope of politcal action is also therefore an action in the realm of the mass media.

A politics that is against the increasing spread of capitalist modernity through the postcolonial world still has the potential to destabilize the logic of capital where it is weakest, in the non-modern spaces where there is still a symbolic struggle with reality and where politics is not subsumed into the semiotic. This is the domain of political

society in the postcolonial world. A media theory that begins here and takes seriously the media sphere engendered through political society has a much greater chance of arriving at a meaningful understanding of communication as it actually happens. As the next chapter argues, such a theoretical intervention is also best placed to radically destabilize the domain of the semiotic and the discourses of he nation, modernity and capital that are contained within it.

CHAPTER 5

THE SYMBOLIC CHALLENGE: POLITICAL POTENTIAL OF A RADICAL

REFUSAL

I. The Symbolic Demand and the Question of Media Theory

Baudrillard's notion of the recovery of the symbolic gives us a starting point to try

to salvage the potential of a radical media theory even as human communication is

subsumed by the semiotic domain. The incompleteness of this subsumption in the non-

west, in the form of Chatterjee's political society, gives Baudrillard's attempt a greater

urgency and relevance than it has in the fully subsumed West.

This concluding chapter addresses two related issues that arise with the

juxtaposition of the politics of the symbolic with the existence of political society in

India. The first is the question of media theory itself, which until now has been concerned

primarily with the questions of representation in a narrow and banal sense, that of textual

elements corresponding to observable types in the world. In its place I would like to posit

that a more relevant media theory for the postcolonial world is a theory that foregrounds

the *absences* of representation in some parts of the media, and the *excess* of

representation in others, thus bringing to light the invisible line in media studies between

the media forms that are purely semiotic with those that have a connection to the

symbolic realm. If communication is to become symbolic exchange, rather then the play

of signifiers, then the concern of media theorists has to be with the mediation of the

symbolic, which is absent in the media, rather than with the semiotic, which is ever-

present. The second, and to my mind the more important question is the question of the

mass media itself, in terms of its practices and location. Baudrillard's work challenges us to question the disconnect between the mass media and the symbolic representation of the real, a disconnect that is all the more relevant and significant in the colonized world. To overcome this disconnect, a truly radical media will have to avoid the trap of semiosis, of becoming part of the civil society discourse of the (post-)colonial public sphere, and develop forms of existence and idioms of exchange that are grounded in the democratic spaces of political society.

Baudrillard's concern with the recovery of the symbolic is an essential aspect of his radical communication politics. This recovery involves the recognition of current media practices as existing in a purely semiotic domain, and dependent on the non-event for their narrative content. Studies of the media in terms of actually existing content fall into the trap of being mired within the semiotic and becoming part of the play of signifiers that refer only to themselves. Unfortunately most scholarship under the media studies, television studies or mass communication rubrics is currently of this kind: studies of signifying practices, textual elements, audience reactions, narrative and aesthetic conventions and policy studies. Even studies that are ostensibly broader in scope restrict themselves to a framework of politcal economy, ownership or production-centered analyses, thereby missing the deeper and more fundamental truth about the media-form and its relationship to reality on the one hand, and to the domain of symbolic exchange or actual human communication on the other.

Studies that do engage with the kind of meta-theoretical framework that Baudrillard proposes are few and far between. Baudrillard's work itself draws on three important figures in this tradition. In its emphasis on form over content, it echoes the

Canadian theorist Marshall McLuhan's ideas about the influence of media on society, although McLuhan's work is far more equivocal about the politcal prospects inherent in this perspective.

Another deep influence is form the marginal work of Daniel Boorstin, whose work *The Image* provides Baudrillard with the notion of the pseudo-event, an event that only takes place within a specialized mass media realm but becomes part of the accepted narrative of reality. Baudrillard's concept of the semiotic borrows this idea to posit the *non-event* which he says is the actual building block of the media narratives in the age of sign value and the stage of capitalism that is dependent on the consumption of signs, rather than production. This is also the concept that prompted his series of essays on the Gulf War, which led to a basic misunderstanding of his work and ideas in the anglophone academic context. In those essays, published in English as *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*, Baudrillard attacks the mass media narratives of the war as creating non-events, a simulation of the war that would prove to be more 'real' than what actually took place on the ground. His argument is to emphasize the simulacral nature of the Gulf War on television, where it is disconnected with the symbolic existence of the war on the ground in Iraq, and therefore exists in a semiotic domain of war narratives. In this process, the actual war, that could have existed within and through a symbolic representation is lost to the television audience, who thereby become merely consuming spectators of the media spectacle of war. In this sense, Baudrillard also owes a good deal of his theoretical concepts to Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle*, although he differs from Debord as to the political potential the spectacle represents.

Baudrillard's simulacrum is also useful in terms of measuring the political possibilities that are available in a mediatized capitalist environment. In a world, where all human communication is mediated through the simulacrum, political acts are themselves only recognized as legitimate if they take place within the simulacrum. A symbolic challenge to the semiotic domain is impossible through the usual discourses of radical politics, since those discourses also exist in the realm of signifying practices only. By reducing all human communication to signs, capital has subsumed politics into its semiotic domain as well. Baudrillard's solution is to engage in a potlatch of sorts in this scenario. He urges a politics of excess, of a challenge that increases the stakes for capital through a challenge in the realm of the semiotic, and a refusal to engage in the semiotic political acts that capital provides as the only political possibility. The answer for Baudrillard lies in the absence of events, in understanding why something does not take place (in the semiotic), rather than to engage with the things that do. To refuse to respond to the questions posed by the semiotic realm also requires a refusal to occupy the role of the audience or the spectator in the form that the semiotic requires. For him, the semiotic realm that the media constructs on the ruins of the symbolic that it has destroyed is also the realm of non-communication, where only a simulated interplay of signifiers is enabled by the new semiotic, even as the lost field of human communication, which was once peopled by humans exchanging symbolic representations is now replaced with the silent masses, an implosion of the symbolic into itself. To Baudrillard, the masses represent a much more radical potential of subverting the trajectory of the semiotic, than any participation in the semiotic process ever can. The masses, the 'silent majorities' that overshadow the new simulacral communication enabled by the media, are the repository

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of the imploded social that could still serve as the location for a new politics, but a

politics based on the refusal to play a role, a refusal to participate or even 'communicate'

and a refusal to engage in semiotic political speech. Baudrillard likens politics in the

semiotic to the surveys and questionnaires that are beloved of marketing professionals,

and for him the only meaningful response is a lack of response. While the semiotic can

subsume any political challenge that is thrown at it and make it part of the semiotic, it

cannot engage with silence or a lack of response or participation.

> "We will not destroy the system by a direct, dialectical revolution of the economic or political
> infrastructure. Everything produced by contradiction, by the relation of forces, or by energy in
> general, will only feed back into the mechanism and give it impetus, following a circular distortion
> similar to a Moebius strip. We will never defeat it by following its own logic of energy,
> calculation, reason and revolution, history and power, or some finality or counter-finality. The
> worst violence at this level has no purchase, and will only backfire against itself. We will never
> defeat the system on the plane of the real: the worst error of all our revolutionary strategies is to
> believe that we will put an end to the system on the plane of the real: this is their imaginary,
> imposed on them by the system itself, living or surviving only by always leading those who attack
> the system to fight amongst each other on the terrain of reality, which is always the reality of the
> system. This is where they throw all their energies, their imaginary violence, where an implacable
> logic constantly turns back into the system. We have only to do it violence or counter-violence
> since it thrives on symbolic violence not in the degraded sense in which this formula has found
> fortune, as a violence 'of signs', from which the system draws strength, or with which it 'masks' its
> material violence: symbolic violence is deduced from a logic of the symbolic (which has nothing
> to do with the sign or with energy): reversal, the incessant reversibility of the counter-gift and,
> conversely, the seizing of power by the unilateral exercise of the gift." (Baudrillard 1993, p.36)

Faced with the total subsumption of the symbolic in Western societies however,

Baudrillard's later work is more pessimistic in terms of political possibility of the silent

majorities. He evolves his expectation of politics in the west to a potlatch of excessive

response to the semiotic as well: a response that involves excessive speech, excessive

consumption and an excess of participation that can lead to the overloading of the

simulacrum and lead to its collapse. In other words, he sees new political possibilities in

the simulacrum itself, and a politics that increases the stakes, throwing the semiosis of the

simulacral realm back at itself to a point of ultimate simulation where the semiotic

domain can no longer find an adequate response and is forced to collapse and

acknowledge the symbolic. His work on the 2011 attacks on the World Trade Center draw on this new potlatch driven politics to understand the spectacular terrorism of the attacks as one way of the simulacrum challenging itself, and thus collapsing under the weight of that ultimate challenge.

Baudrillard's idea of what media theory should be is also based on a similar understanding of using the symbolic weapon of the potlatch to attack the semiotic subsumption of the real. His vision of theory is that it should be not merely an attempt at truthful reality or description, but to leap beyond the current context to a prescriptive mode of truth-seeking. It has to avoid the current truth to arrive at the future ahead of actual events. This is only way that theory can challenge the semiotic nature of society: by engaging with what is not there, and what could or should be. A theory that is merely engaged with the observable reality is for Baudrillard a theory that has already failed, since its truth claims are both mired in the semiotic domain and also obsolete as the semiotic moves faster than the theorist can anticipate. The many shelves of media scholarship that is now of mainly historical interest are testimony to the truth of Baudrillard's assertion.

In India, Baudrillard's understanding of the symbolic and semiotic maps very neatly onto existing concerns in Indian political theory about a polity that is always already split because of factors located in its colonial history. The creation of a class of Indians who were collaborators of colonial rule also led to the creation of the civil society composed of this class. The idea of a nation-state, the "imaginary institution" of India, in Kaviraj's words, came from the colonial encounter with this class. The form of the nation is thus historically determined through this civil society and it is where the nation is and

has always been located. Most theorists of the Indian polity, while holding divergent views about all other aspects of politics, do coalesce around the common idea that the public sphere in India, where political discourse is located is not a unitary thing, but is split irredeemably into mutually unintelligible spheres, whose only common link is through the structures and institutions of the state. Theorists of the Indian media, whether of television or of cinema, also recognize that the Indian public exists in two domains, or as two separate and unequal publics, with little in common between them.

Given the existence of this divided public sphere, or rather of two sets of publics, Chatterjee's usage of civil and political society, and the logics of modernity and democracy to name these publics is thus a useful and essential element in formulating an Indian theory of the media. The question that arises then is of the nature and role of this media in material terms , and the role of media theory in such a context.

In the divided polity of India, there are three salient characteristics that any theory of the media has to consider:

1. The significance of language: there is no Indian media as such, just as there is no actual public sphere in India: there is however an English language media which has its own public sphere, a Hindi media with its own sphere with both laying claims to a national location. The difference between the two is that the English media is a public sphere without an actual public, and is therefore a purely semiotic entity. The Hindi, for all its claims to a national perspective is still the media of the northern Hindi speaking publics, and is responsive to the political and social exigencies of these publics. (Rajagopal 2001, Naregal 2002). At the same time, as media forms, both occupy a location in the civil society discourse of

the nation and of capitalist modernity. They may therefore be said to occupy divergent semiotic realms, where the signifiers are different but with certain characteristics in their valorization of he nation-form and of modernity.

2. The significance of the provincial: Each regional (non-Hindi) language community is a public sphere of its own and is home to its own mediation processes. The linguistic diversity of the subcontinent and the federal nature of the polity (which has increased in intensity in recent years) lends itself to the existence of multiple spheres with different relationships to the hegemonic discourse of the nation-form. All these public spheres have their own discourses of politics and their own narratives of symbolic representation. Given their subordinate relationship to the nation-form and the Hindi publics, they may be thought of as provincial public spheres.

3. The significance of the divided polity: As Kaviraj points out, the nationalist movement was born of a diglossia reflected in the national bourgeoisie's relationship to English on the one hand and the vernacular on the other, and this diglossia ultimately led to the sundering of connections between the vernacular realms themselves, except as could be mediated through the nationalist discourse (Kaviraj 2010). This lies at the root of the current divided nature of the Indian polity, between an elite 'national' civil society and the multiple, localized domains of political society. The tragedy of colonialism lies in the erasure of connections between and among the members of political society, which can be thought of as part of the lost symbolic realm, and replaces these connections with the mediation of civil society. Thus, the multiple political societies are unable to

create and maintain a real and thriving public sphere, indeed are unable to even call into being a truly representative public or publics, because the links between the spheres are broken. The only way to communicate among them is to seek recourse to the discursive structures of civil society and its alien idiom of modernity. The only truly 'national' entity is thus the civil society, divorced from the logic of democracy or from the logic of symbolic representation. Any theory of the media that takes the nation-form for a given is thus caught in the semiotic trap of civil society, even as actual communication is still taking place in the vast diversity of political society, despite the absence of a relevant mass mediation structure or process.

Addressing the absence of the symbolic in the media is similar in many ways to the question that animated the original Subaltern Studies scholars: the absence of the non-modern in colonial discourses. The Subaltern historians were concerned mainly without overcoming the deliberate erasure of the 'peasant consciousness' from both the nationalist historiography that dominated the intellectual space in the postcolonial Indian academy. To them, this consciousness still existed in the silences and absences of colonial source texts, and had to be teased out through what was unsaid and unwritten. If we consider the study of the mass media to be in some sense a historiography of the present, the project for a radical media theory is similar to that of the historians: to invoke the absent narratives and silent voices, rather than to amplify through examination the loud presence of the semiotic.

The challenge of the divided polity thus provides us with a starting point of what a truly radical mediation process in India, or in any postcolonial context would need to do:

engage with the lost domain of the symbolic in order to restore the connections between the members of political society, so that the process of mediation represents a true technological intervention into actual symbolic exchange, rather than a futile play of signification. This requires a stepping away from the primacy and hegemony of the nation-form and a re-entry into the localized domains of politics. It also requires a de-legitimization of the politics of civil society, centered as it is on the discursive hegemony of parliamentary forms, legality and public order, the nation-state and other such elements of a colonial/capitalist modernity. In their place, it would need to restore to importance the symbolic elements that modernity tries to erase: the affective issues of identity and subjectivity, the localized relationships to a collective and its consciousness, the elements of lived reality such as the natural environment and the diverse systems of language, thought and belief. These characteristics of the symbolic cannot be restored through the monolingual nature of modernity which only recognizes the primacy of a single identity, selfhood or subjectivity encoded in a single hegemonic language. The symbolic requires a media that is open to the plurality of human experience that characterizes the actually existing quotidian 'politics of the governed' that Chatterjee defines as democracy.

II. The Symbolic Demand as Political Practice

The radical Durkheimian tradition, which has also influenced Baudrillard's concept of the symbolic refers to this domain as the 'sacred', and it is in many ways a recovery of the sacred that can destabilize and de-legitimize the discourse of capitalist modernity. The erasure of the symbolic domain takes place also because of the

disappearance of the sacred from human experience and human communication, and thereby from social relations and society in general. Here, the 'sacred' of course refers not a religious or spiritual domain, but to the non-modern, anti-utilitarian logic of the gift economy that animates the process of symbolic exchange and therefore gives meaning to human communication; in contrast to the profane realm of capitalist modernity, concerned as it is mainly with value, productivity and accumulation.

The road to a recovery of the symbolic and the creation of a symbolic system of mediation however goes through the destruction of the semiotic realm, and here again, it is Baudrillard's politics of refusal and silence that serves to show the way. In the semiotic realm of the media as it exists today, actual human communication in the form of symbolic is absent, the media are thus means of non-communication rather than communication. Actual communication is only found in the absences and silences in the semiotic, in the events that do not take place, rather than the ones that do and can be seen. These absent events are the silent signifiers of the actually existing politics that is still occuring everyday but in another domain. Faced with the silence of the media the strategy of a radical passivity by its mass audience seems especially appropriate. By removing itself from the responsibility of answering to the media, by refusing to respond to its demands, by playing its role of the silent mass, the 'silent majority' actually engages in a more radical gesture than any pretension of an 'active audience' or any positive critical action of protest would allow.

> "To defy the system with a gift to which it cannot respond save by its own collapse and death. Nothing, not even the system, can avoid the symbolic obligation, and it is in this trap that the only chance of a catastrophe for capital remains. The system turns on itself, as a scorpion does when encircled by the challenge of death. For it is summoned to answer, if it is not to lose face, to what can only be death. The system must itself commit suicide in response to the multiplied challenge of death and suicide." (Baudrillard 1993, p. 37).

The idea of a refusal as political practice is not to be understood in a negative

sense as the denial of politics itself, but as a necessary means of creating a new

paradigmatic context for a different mode of politics. This is similar to the Autonomous

Marxists' position on the 'refusal to work' as a radical practice, such as Paolo Virno's

idea of the exit, which "changes the context within which a problem arises, rather than

deals with the problem by choosing one or another of the alternative solutions already on

offer" (Virno 1996). As Kathi Weeks argues about the refusal of work as a liberatory

mode of politics,

> "The refusal can make time and open spaces both physical and conceptual within which to construct alternatives. Rather than a simple act of disengagement that one completes, the refusal is, in this sense, a process, a theoretical and practical movement that aims to effect a separation through which we can pursue alternative practices and relationships". (Weeks, 2011, p. 100)

Baudrillard's idea of theory as a form of potlatch with the profanity of reality is

also a useful way to think about the relevance of media and communication theory in this

context. A radical theory of the media in the postcolonial context would have to

foreground the absence of communication in the media and thus engage critically with

what is not and cannot be found in the media, what lies outside and beyond its narratives,

in the realm of politics and symbolic representation. A theory of the media that is

concerned only with the media itself is a theory of nothing at all, except of a closed loop

of signifiers. This is particularly relevant to the postcolonial context and to India, where

the symbolic realm is present in the form of political society and is a thriving source of

democratic politics and discourse, yet is absent and silent in the narratives of the mass

media. A new theory of the media that is more concerned with the truth of human

communication than the media as they currently exist will thus need to engage with the

forms of communication that political society engenders daily. It will also need to engage

critically with the idiom of political society which is the means of symbolic exchange. In other words, a theory of the media in the postcolonial world will have to become the theory of the media as it should be, not of the media as it is. This is the meaning of the impossible exchange that Baudrillard envisages, where theory is always locked in an escalating series of challenges to its object of study. A theory of the media should take the form of a challenge to the media, rather than be a mere *a posteriori* description. For Baudrillard, the challenge of theory to its object is a way of challenging conceptions of the real in order to provoke an escalation of truth-claims, to create a situation where it is reality which will need to rise to the challenge of theory, rather than the other way around.

In sum, a theory of the media that locates itself in the discourses of politcal society, that concerns itself with the everyday practice of politics and that engages critically with the domain of symbolic exchange will emerge as a true theory of human communication. In the context of the postcolonial polity, such a theory will need to begin as the theory of political society and its idiom of democracy. Ultimately, the intervention of such a theory may be the challenge necessary to push the semiotic realm to rise to meet its demands. The end of such a demand will always be the construction of new public spheres that are responsive and responsible to their publics, where the language of media discourse is the same as the idiom of democratic politics.

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