

# CROWDS

**ETHNOGRAPHIC ENCOUNTERS**

Edited by  
Megan Steffen



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## *Ethnographic Encounters*

Edited by  
Megan Steffen

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# Contents

Figures	vi
Contributors	vii
Foreword <i>John Borneman, Series Editor</i>	x
Acknowledgments	xiii
Introduction <i>Megan Steffen</i>	1
1 The Syrian Revolution: Crowds, the Political Field, the Political Subject <i>John Borneman</i>	23
2 The Disappearance of the Crowd and the Rise of Dissent in Thailand <i>Tyrell Haberkorn</i>	39
3 Spectacles of Piety: Prayer and the Politics of Mass Arousal in Democratic Nigeria <i>Ebenezer Obadare</i>	51
4 Crowds and Transformations: On the Pious Crowds of the Hajj <i>Abdellah Hammoudi</i>	63
5 “Too Many People”: Crowds and Cliques in Contemporary China <i>Megan Steffen</i>	79
6 Regarding Others: Metro Crowds, Metro Publics, Metro Mobs <i>Rashmi Sadana</i>	91
7 Emotional Entrainment in Crowds and Other Social Formations <i>Douglas Hollan</i>	105
8 Enduring Crowds: The Ritual Molding of the Anthropos in the Prolonging of Political Protest <i>Bjørn Thomassen</i>	119
9 The Ethics of the Digital: Crowds and Popular Justice in Bangladesh <i>Nusrat Sabina Chowdhury</i>	133
10 Death on the Bund: Crowd Control and the Chinese Dream in Shanghai <i>Scott Moskowitz</i>	151
Guide to Further Reading <i>Megan Steffen</i>	166
Notes	171
Selected Bibliography	180
Index	189

# Figures

5.1	Performers emerge from the top of moveable type blocks after a long routine during the 2008 Beijing Olympic Opening Ceremony	80
9.1	Billboards at Shahbag. March 2013. Photo: Nusrat Sabina Chowdhury	134
9.2	Portrait of a collaborator at Shahbag. Photo: Nusrat Sabina Chowdhury	140

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# Foreword

John Borneman, Series Editor

*Crowds: Ethnographic Encounters*, the sixth volume of this series, examines personal encounters with crowds and crowded situations in the fieldwork experience of contemporary ethnographers in nine countries: Syria, Thailand, Nigeria, China, India, Indonesia, the United States, Ukraine, and Bangladesh. In these encounters, ethnographers not only observe and participate in crowds but are invariably drawn into them, often in face-to-face situations. The intimacy of participation provides access to a quality specific to all experiences of crowds: a movement between individual and collective experience that tends to blend the two categories. Being drawn into crowds in this way affects the relationships of ethnographers with the people they study, creating new solidarities or distances; as well, it affects the environments which generate crowds and their study, blurring the distinctions between emic and etic, insider and outsider, observer and actor. To arrive at an accurate description of the perceptions of their interlocutors in crowds, ethnographers thus also rely on their own perception and embodied knowledge to facilitate the critical process of verifying their own experiences and those of their interlocutors.

This approach to crowds and crowdedness is similar to that adopted by the authors of the other volumes already published in this series, who have taken up encounters with other phenomena with cross-cultural relevance. Thus far, these include encounters with money, violence, children, food, and sex. What is peculiar here is that each encounter is shaped similarly by the nature of the object itself (for example, violence is inflicted and food is eaten in every culture) and differently by the specificity of that object in particular cultural settings (for example, today one can “steal a kiss in France” but not in India or the United States). In any event, this volume considers not crowds in themselves but crowds as experienced relationally and temporally.

Authors in this volume do not provide us with a general definition of crowds nor do they contribute systematically to typologies of forms of gathering together. Although crowds have been widely depicted and theorized within literature and social science, few analysts have been able to draw on their own firsthand

accounts as many ethnographers can. What this volume is able to add, then, is a reflexive analysis of the perception of crowds. Such firsthand experience of crowd formation is important as a basis for a comparative understanding of how crowd behavior partakes of varying complexity, duration, intent, and effects.

Above all, the crowds examined here reveal different forms of sociality in-dissolution or in-formation. The sociality depicted includes that of a subway crowd, a pious crowd, a mass, a revolutionary crowd, a virtual crowd, a crowd of ghosts, a spontaneous crowd, and a choreographed crowd. This diversity of crowds could contribute to a potentially limitless typological classification. What the authors instead point to, however, are aspects of crowd sociality as a product not simply of modernity but of our time, of the early twenty-first century. Crowds are, for example, highly sensitive to temporal conditions of gathering and communication. The contributors comment on some of these: increased urbanization (and thus density), quickened communication that negates geographical distances (through cell phones and digital communication), increased surveillance (by the state and non-state data-gathering agents), and the ascendance of far-right populist-authoritarian leaders. As Steffen observes, we did not anticipate, as this volume took shape, some of the ways in which people are generating new ways of deploying crowds to create significant political and social agents. These new deployments include increased use of deadly weapons on crowds, vehicle-ramming attacks on crowds, and attaching increased importance to counting the bodies in crowds. Future scholars will undoubtedly attend to these new kinds of crowd formation.

We asked the authors in this series to write with a particular concern in mind: to focus on stories that showed their own engagement with “crowds” in fieldwork. We also requested that they resist the temptation to let theoretical concerns dominate their writing. We encouraged them instead to allow their descriptions of fieldwork to show how and in what way cultural difference is learned in an encounter with “crowds.” We invited them, in other words, to write outside the current normative genres of anthropology, and some contributors responded by including unconventional objects, such as videos, along with conventional discussions and interviews. We encouraged them to risk exposing themselves—warts, private pleasures, misunderstandings, and all—in the thick of it. Hence contributors have elaborated their specific interactions and eschewed many of the conventions that authorize most ethnographic accounts, such as footnoting, long bibliographies, or dense theoretical language.

Such rhetorical change makes new demands on our readers: we ask them to enter, openly, into the often threatening, sometimes embarrassing, but always

potentially insight-bearing situations of fieldwork. In return, we hope that the reading of these essays awakens an appreciation for the quality of subjective sensual experience (personal, tied to a particular time and place); for curiosity in difference itself, in translating the strange, foreign, or unassimilable; and for a kind of storytelling that contributes both to the documentary function of the ethnographic encounter and to its analytical potential.

# Acknowledgments

The idea for this volume emerged from a panel on “The Anthropology of Crowds” organized by John Borneman for the American Anthropological Association’s 2014 Meeting, and several of the chapters in this volume were originally presented as papers there. We are grateful to the audience for giving us their attention as we developed these ideas. I am grateful to John for his unwavering confidence. Portions of the Introduction and Guide to Further Reading were presented in Beijing at the Lunch Salon cohosted by the Institute for World Literatures and Cultures and the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures at Tsinghua University. I am grateful to my colleagues at Tsinghua, especially Neal Allar, who provided very helpful feedback. Thanks also to Stephanie Anderson, who encouraged me at very critical moments; I can safely say that this project (but not only that) would not have been possible without her interventions. I would also like to thank Claudia Huang, Megan S. Fidler, and the other members of the panel on crowds at the American Ethnological Society 2015 Meeting in San Diego, California. I am extremely grateful to Perry Sherouse, Casey Miller, David Platzer, and Annie Malcolm for their careful readings and critical comments. Between the proposal for this volume and its publication, my parents, Mike Steffen and Mary Lim, helped me transition through at least three unexpected international moves; this volume would not have been possible without their support and the support of my sister, Mariah Steffen, and my dear friend, William Vega. Finally, none of this would have been possible without the efforts of the contributors and the amazing editorial staff at Bloomsbury Publishers, including Jennifer Schmidt and Clara Herberg who helped me imagine the volume, and Miriam Cantwell and Lucy Carroll, who turned it into a reality. Thank you for your generosity, your labor, and (most of all) your patience.



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# Introduction

Megan Steffen

What exactly is a crowd? Why do experiences and definitions of crowdedness differ from place to place? How can encounters with particular crowds illuminate, refute, or enhance classical social theories of “the Crowd”? Large groups form in every human culture and society, affirming old patterns or creating new ways of being together. Like the related but distinct concept of the masses or the public, the crowd is one of many constructed categories people use to order groups defined not by *who* takes part in them but by *how* they behave. Unlike other groups, such as religious communities, family structures, and ethnic or national groups, crowds are often characterized by a sense that inclusion and exclusion is neither controlled nor necessarily controllable. Despite the negative associations “crowding” as a verb has in English, as an analytical concept “the crowd” putatively describes a social form rather than its content. In other words, crowds can be passionate or bored, elated or furious, unexpected or routine. As the majority of the world’s population shifts from rural to urban areas, the experience of crowdedness is increasingly a defining aspect of people’s lives. In *Crowds: Ethnographic Encounters*, scholars describe crowds, the implications of “crowds” as a category, and crowded situations in Bangladesh, China, India, Indonesia, Nigeria, Syria, Thailand, Ukraine, and the United States. These essays demonstrate how ethnographers, drawing on their own expertise, might use their embodied knowledge of groups as social forms in sociocultural context to help us better understand what it means to invoke crowds analytically, as agents, objects, and experiences.

Unlike the other themes of this series, which could be identified materially—such as food and money—crowds must, to some extent, be created as an object for research before ethnographic identification and analysis can take place. For the contributors to this volume, this definitional ambiguity surrounding crowds



generates new analytical categories, questions, and definitions. Rather than producing a strict, all-encompassing analytic definition of what might count as a “crowd,” this volume asked ethnographers to find and describe “crowd-like” phenomena in their field sites. The resulting chapters reveal the continuities and discontinuities within the concept of the crowd and—at times—demonstrate how the history of “the crowd” as a pejorative term undermines its ability to fully capture the mercurial potential of contemporary group formations. Many of the contributors wrestle with crowds they could not join without putting themselves in harm’s way but find to be illuminating of crowds’ significance within the local context. Some of the phenomena described are what we might think of as uncontroversial crowds that would be recognizable in many different contexts: the routine crowd that forms in a subway during the rush hour commute; the ebullient crowd pouring into the street during political demonstrations; and the passionate crowd of the faithful, praying and participating in religious rituals. Other essays, however, have taken unconventionally crowded social forms as their objects of study: the haunting crowd of ghosts and memories filling a person’s unconscious; the virtual crowd that rallies online in response to an injustice; and the contained, choreographed crowd that cannot help but remind observers of its chaotic cousin, the spontaneous crowd. The contributors are interested both in what these crowds reveal about the places, societies, and communities in which they form and also in how experiences of crowdedness influence other kinds of sociality—such as the formation of cliques or the ability of people to socialize in their workplaces—in a particular context. This volume asks what kinds of social formations an idiom of “crowds” is likely to reveal and what such formations might illuminate about how people think of themselves both separately, as individuals, and together, as group.

To answer this charge, each chapter draws on the analysis of specific examples. What counts as “crowded” in a southern Californian mall might register as spacious to a resident of Bangkok. Similarly, while a visitor might find the flows of people shuffling through a Beijing subway security checkpoint extraordinary—humans reduced to bodies reduced to particles obeying the laws of thermodynamics—this same phenomenon is entirely ordinary to a commuter who passes through it every day. It’s not necessary to travel long distances to find examples of disagreement over what it means to “crowd” another person. Even a group of Americans from Buffalo, New York, who’ve driven only two hours across the border to Canada may find themselves unintentionally causing conflict in Toronto, Ontario, should they fail to understand that what looks—to them—like a relatively empty bar may in fact be beyond capacity. Legal

definitions can create unspoken, embodied social definitions. The ability to react intuitively to “crowded” situations can demonstrate either belonging or else a disruptive lack of familiarity.

Despite the large variations in crowdedness or what people experience as crowding, there are some common, formal elements of crowds. Joining a crowd is often described as a transformative experience that causes people to lose their self-control either by making them more submissive to the group or else by giving them permission to behave in ways they might not dare to as an individual person. In contrast, we might think of a purely crowded situation as one that is entropic in which a collective spirit is not felt and people find themselves in a mutually antagonistic relationship with those in proximity to them. Where people in a crowded situation find themselves paradoxically isolated, together, crowds can be attractive or even seductive to those who join them.

By asking ethnographers to describe and examine their own encounters with crowdedness and crowds in the field, this volume intervenes in the existing theoretical literature on crowds, some of which is speculative, based off of others’ written accounts or produced in controlled laboratory experiments. In the “Guide to Further Reading” at the end of the volume, I describe in more detail the works contributors found particularly generative and the thinkers who shared our approach by foregrounding experience. The validity of people’s reported experiences in crowds—whether they felt liberated or constrained, whether they understood what they were doing, and whether they acted at the behest of specific others or just worked off of a common feeling—is hard to verify after the fact. Ethnographers are therefore in a unique position to analyze and theorize crowds as they form in real time throughout the world. When, where, and with whom crowds form are all questions that can be answered empirically from a distance, but the more complex questions of how exactly crowds form, for what purposes, and which aspects of the experience stay with the members of crowds after they disperse require a researcher willing to be there on the ground. This volume models a comparative approach by insisting on the comparison of distinct, unlike instances of group formation; many of the chapters show what a decision to call these formations “crowds” opens up and what it forecloses. The crowds described in this volume do not all have the same effects on their participants, and the contributors do not always agree on the reasons for certain types of behavior in crowds; however, by considering each of these cases together, not as an example of what “the Crowd” must be but of what a specific crowd can be, each chapter generates insights that travel beyond the particular cases analyzed here.

## Ethnographic encounters with the Crowd or crowds

Although anthropologists often write about other types of group formation—such as those related to kinship, community, or society—crowds have historically posed a challenge for ethnographers conducting participant observation, and the Crowd—that generalized, theoretical object with its implicit, primordial typology—has remained an elusive subject of ethnographic reflection. There are many reasons for this. The first is that for the first few decades of the discipline's existence, anthropologists were trained to focus on the routine, the everyday, the cyclical, and the representative. By definition, many of the spontaneous crowds or sudden outbreaks of mob violence explored in this volume would fall outside of those categories. For example, in his stunning book *Leveling Crowds*, Stanley Tambiah introduces his first hand account of witnessing ethnic riots in Sri Lanka in 1956 by noting that despite his physical proximity to the violence, he did not have “any inkling of the explosion about to happen in our midst” (Tambiah 1997: 86). Similarly, his observation and analysis of events are understandably constrained by the fact that he and the ethnically diverse group of students he was supervising had to be evacuated from the violent area for their own safety (Tambiah 1997: 87). Working from historians' reconstructions, news reports, and witness accounts, Tambiah attempts to determine who “the faces in the crowd” are for a number of incidents of mass, ethnic violence in South Asia. Though the crowd and crowd dynamics are the objects of his rigorous and detailed study, Tambiah is necessarily unable to draw on the kind of first hand accounts found in this volume; to study the rioting crowd through participant observation would have meant putting himself in grave danger. Ironically, it's this grave danger that shapes the high stakes of Tambiah's need to understand and humanize the crowd that transformed Sri Lanka before his eyes.

Another reason crowds have not attracted ethnographic attention is that though crowds are ubiquitous, they are more difficult to interpret and analyze than the occasions that prompt them. When crowds do appear in classic ethnographic accounts, they are often portrayed not as a phenomenon of interest but as an effect of other, more sociologically significant events, such as rituals, festivals, or markets. Recall that Clifford Geertz's (1973) now classic account of the Balinese cockfight opens with the image of the crowds watching the fight and then fleeing—the act that famously gave him and Hildred Geertz ethnographic access. Geertz spends the rest of the article reflecting not on his experience of joining the crowd in flight but on the meaning of the cockfight that drew them together in the first place. For an anthropologist focused on interpretation, this

analytic move makes sense. Experiences of crowds are, on almost every level, more difficult to “read” than repeated, social practices. This may have to do with crowds’ status as a collateral consequence of events or perhaps with the chaotic texture of experience within a crowd. It may even be because, as a social form, crowds are not associated with a specific type of content, function, or meaning, and the multiplicity of “authors” or “agents” means that the crowd’s intent or purpose is difficult to uncover. As the chapters in this volume show, crowds can unite and divide, can be useful for the purposes of the right and the left, and can enable communal recognition or act as dehumanizing experiences that reduce the bodies of others to obstacles. Geertz himself describes the cockfight audience in contradictory terms, first as a united “superorganism” (Geertz 1973: 3) and then as “something not vertebrate enough to be called a group and not structureless enough to be called a crowd” (Geertz 1973: 10). It’s the presence of this audience that creates the drama, the stakes, and the deepness of the play Geertz argues the Balinese engage in through the cockfight, and yet the dynamics of the spectators themselves—as a group or as individuals—are never fully explored.

This avoidance may be due to a third reason ethnographers rarely take on crowds: the challenge people in crowds pose to the ideals and principles that have long been associated with anthropological projects. Consider, for instance, Claude Lévi-Strauss’s (1962) description of the crowds he confronted in Calcutta. He can rationally recognize the hunger and extraordinary demographic shifts that created the crowds of beggars, merchants, and others that rush to greet him (Lévi-Strauss 1962: 4), and yet he cannot escape his own sense of revulsion. Lévi-Strauss finds himself simultaneously dehumanizing the people standing in a desperate crush before him (in the end, he compares them to birds) and being dehumanized by their supplication (Lévi-Strauss 1962: 5). In Calcutta, Lévi-Strauss reports, “Everyday life appears to be a permanent repudiation of the very notion of human relationship” (Lévi-Strauss 1962: 4). He laments,

One is compelled by the other to deny him the humanity which one wants so much to recognise. All the initial situations which define relationships between persons are falsified, the rules of social intercourse are “fixed,” there is no way of making a start. (Lévi-Strauss 1962: 4)

Here we see the ethnographer’s desire to find a connection with those different from him evaporating in the face of reality. There will be no communion with this crowd, no glimmer of mutual recognition. The lingering and loitering ethnographers like Geertz have often employed to advantage will be no help

here. Precisely because his presence provides the occasion for its mobilization and pantomimes, there is no way for Lévi-Strauss to join the Calcutta crowd or even, as Tambiah strived to do after the fact, to recognize the faces in the crowd. Lévi-Strauss can no longer focus on the details of each encounter with every crowd. Instead, he overlays each instance of a crowd in Calcutta over the others until the common elements and characters become clear, and something like a structural form—the Calcutta Crowd, representing the unconscious and actual “wasteland” of India’s great cities—emerges (Lévi-Strauss 1962: 3).

This instinct to create typologies of the crowds ethnographers encounter is a common one. This is perhaps because categorizing is an easy way to order and make sense of difficult and chaotic phenomenon or perhaps because this is one of the most obvious legacies of crowd theory. In the “Guide to Further Reading,” I argue that throughout its history, crowd theory has usually had an instrumental edge. Much of the classic literature on crowds is connected to times of political crisis or great transformations. Even Gustave Le Bon’s racist and yet somehow timeless 1895 book, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (2002), can be seen as reacting to the challenges of new political philosophies that challenged the rule of elites. As Christian Borch argues, Le Bon’s book is “ultimately a Machiavellian manual that advised the statesman on how to combat the revolutionary crowd” (Borch 2009: 275). Similarly, when Sigmund Freud (1921) attempts to explain the mechanics of how and why people submit to a single leader in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, the political implications are clear and troubling. More recently, the atrocities committed by crowds in fascist states during the Second World War motivated the writings of other theorists, such as Elias Canetti, Hannah Arendt, Walter Benjamin, and others, and much of their work appears in the following chapters. Canetti in particular is remarkable in his resistance to say that crowds *always* need a leader and much more optimistic about the capacity of crowds to be liberating.

In these postwar works, the ability of the crowd to act as a projective screen means that these scholars sometimes end up amplifying the anxieties, prejudices, and preoccupations of their times. When reading crowd theory, it’s almost impossible to escape the pressing questions that motivated its writing: Could the seductive power of the crowd have been responsible for something as tremendous as the Holocaust? Would that be an easier or a harder truth to bear than holding each individual accountable? And if it were true—if the triumphs of the right-leaning, fascist regimes demonstrated that crowds did make ordinary people capable of despicable acts—what would that mean for communism and other left-leaning movements that relied on organizing large numbers of people to achieve their

projects of liberation? These questions, which have motivated so much of what's been written in the twentieth century, continue to shape the current conversation about crowds. In this volume, the authors draw on these theories with the hopes of pushing the intellectual debate past these particular, historically shaped questions and toward questions relevant to our own time. For instance: How has the spread of smartphones and social media applications changed the significance of crowds in different contexts? Does technology make us more or less likely to connect to others in a crowd (as opposed to just feeling crowded)? And in a digitally crowded landscape, how does the crowd figure into people's emotional experiences? These are questions that ethnographers, with their expertise and embodied exposure to crowd phenomena, are well positioned to answer.

### Summary of chapters and main themes

Rather than summarize each chapter on its own, I will first give a brief outline and then draw out the details of each contribution as they speak to some of the main themes and issues that emerge in the study of crowds. John Borneman uses his prolonged engagement with his interlocutors in Aleppo, Syria, to analyze how a society that appeared to be without crowds—and where people gathered but only as masses—became the site of revolutionary crowds that ultimately failed. Writing after the 2014 coup in Thailand, Tyrell Haberkorn describes how shifting legal definitions of who could appear in public and for what purpose led first to arrests and then, ironically, to more crowds and more protests. To investigate the role of the crowd in religious experiences, Ebenezer Obadare examines the deliberately spectacular praying sessions government leaders in Nigeria hold in stadiums. Abdellah Hammoudi draws on his experience as a pilgrim in the Hajj crowds to contest the interpretations of theorists like Canetti. Megan Steffen compares three types of groups—a crowd that gathered at the scene of a car accident, the crowd of performers in the Beijing 2008 Olympic Opening Ceremony, and the cliques people form on Chinese social media—to explore the role crowds can play in Chinese social and political life. Rashmi Sadana examines what the figure of the crowd and the metro crowd in particular mean for modernity in India by bringing together the ladies' coach crowd in the Delhi Metro with a violent mob that formed in the metro in 2014. In Douglas Hollan's chapter, dreams from his interlocutors in the United States and Indonesia demonstrate how social formations can become "crowded" with the emotional memories of others who are not necessarily physically present.

Bjørn Thomassen gathers evidence from the 2013 Maidan uprising in Ukraine to argue that crowds can endure over long periods of time. In a chapter that explicitly wrestles with the question of what happens when a digital crowd takes to the streets, Nusrat Sabina Chowdhury teases out the ways class informs the ethics and politics of how crowds form in response to scandals in Bangladesh. Finally, Scott Moskowitz's harrowing account of being caught in the Shanghai New Year's Eve 2015 crowd that killed thirty-six people shows the deadly price many young Chinese people are willing to pay to become cosmopolitan and modern. Even these short summaries show how varied the material analyzed by each contributor is, but there are, nevertheless, important continuities between the chapters. Each in their own way confronts how to theorize crowds, the ability of crowds to generate social meaning, the affect associated with crowds, the political implications of crowds, and the ways crowds can exist beyond physical co-presence in the virtual or imaginary.

### **Ethnographic engagements with theory**

The contributors to this volume have made an effort to use ethnographic knowledge to elaborate theoretical understandings of crowds. This explicit attempt to generate new takes on older social theories seems inevitable given how difficult it can be to define what a crowd even is. Most contributors either specifically delineate parameters for the types of crowds they examine—for example, Hammoudi distinguishes “pious crowds” from other kinds, Steffen compares “choreographed crowds” and “unintended crowds,” and Borneman contrasts “recursively constituted masses” with “revolutionary crowds”—or else rely on existing distinctions described by interlocutors in their field site—for instance, Sadana elaborates on widely held views about the ladies coach crowd vs. the bus crowd vs. the metro crowd. As I already argued, the urge to divide both the concept and the phenomenon of “crowding” into different types reflects the generative ambiguity of crowds as an object of research. Literal, legal, and technical definitions appear insufficient; Haberkorn notes that even in a place where public assembly and protests are outlawed, people still cannot determine the “magic number” that might make a gathering into an illegal crowd. Sadana uses the opportunity to ask when a crowd can become a public; Thomassen argues that a gathering can still be considered a crowd even when it persists for long periods of time; Steffen distinguishes between crowds and other types of group formation; and both Chowdhury and Hollan examine crowds that are not physical but exist virtually or unconsciously.

Each chapter tackles crowds in different geographical and cultural contexts, and this diversity of ethnographic materials has led to a variety of different approaches to building theories about crowds. Borneman draws on his engagement with people in Aleppo, Syria, between 1999 and 2017 to distinguish theoretically between masses and crowds; he demonstrates how a largely imaginary idea of the people as a non-threatening mass transformed into actual crowds that were overtly political. Haberkorn uses her encounters at political protests under a regime that has outlawed assembly in Bangkok, Thailand, to ask what it means to crowd together if such gatherings always anticipate the isolation of prison, and if—paradoxically—imprisonments always anticipate the potential emergence of other protesting crowds. In a chapter anchored by a strong analysis of the existing literature on crowds and masses, Obadare explores old contentions that crowds are irrational and suggestible by analyzing mass prayer sessions called by government leaders in Nigeria. Working in Delhi, India, Sadana similarly works alongside her interlocutors to distinguish between the “good” modern crowds on the city’s Metro and those that devolve into violence.

Indeed, many of this volume’s contributors find their ethnographic experiences pose challenges to prevailing theoretical assumptions about crowds and group formation. Through a detailed analysis of his own experience in the crowds of the hajj, Hammoudi contests Canetti’s (1984) interpretation of hajj crowds in flight and builds a theory of “pious crowds,” which are plural, neither the product of one single crowd and yet also not as overarching as the Crowd, and can be multidirectional, transient, and liminal. In a chapter that also engages with the temporality of crowds, Thomassen examines the Maidan Uprising and proposes the concept of “enduring crowds” to trouble the notion that a crowd must necessarily be short-lived or composed of the same persons to be considered the same crowd; like Obadare, Thomassen challenges the theories that presume crowds are irrational or even anti-rational. Hollan critiques Randall Collins’s (2004) theories of emotional entrainment by comparing cases from Indonesia and Southern California where crowds of physical bodies compete in his interlocutors’ minds with crowds of remembered ghosts. Steffen’s chapter attempts to disentangle crowds in the contemporary People’s Republic of China (PRC) from the Crowd’s association with either fascism or revolution in the work of thinkers like Walter Benjamin, Susan Sontag, and Jacques Rancière. In her chapter on crowds, mobs, and media in Bangladesh, Chowdhury challenges prevailing theoretical assumptions about the visual aspect of crowd formation—what crowd theorists have long referred to as “picture-thinking”—through an examination of how crowds are mediated both by technology and by their



association with certain classes and religions. Finally, in a chapter that also tries to understand which kinds of classed bodies are more likely to join crowds, Scott Moskowitz upends conventional methodological wisdom by arguing that the ethnographic sensibilities he cultivated as a participant observer made him less aware of reality and more vulnerable to injury during an encounter with a fatal crowd on New Year's Eve in Shanghai, PRC.

### **Interpreting crowds as symbols and threats**

The chapters in this book intervene in long-standing arguments about how to interpret the significance of crowds, both to existing political orders and to theories of group formation in general. As Borch (2012: 16) argues, crowds and the idea of suggestion that shaped the way people thought about the transformative effect joining a crowd could have on their behavior posed a threat to “the ideal of the constituent liberal subject” (and thus were unpopular subjects of study for many sociologists). Crowds have, by definition, no single agent or author, and though several crowd theorists—such as Le Bon (2002) and Freud (1921)—are fixated on how to make the figure of a “leader” essential to the crowd's theoretical form, even the leader cannot take full responsibility for the actions of a crowd. Steffen's chapter argues that in the case of leaderless, spontaneous crowds, the actual intentions of a crowd are not easily deciphered and sometimes remain mysterious even to the members of the crowd themselves. As examined by Chowdhury, the “viral” and “contagious” metaphors that describe crowd formation both in actual life and online convey the way crowds are thought to happen to their participants, perhaps without their conscious consent. The actions of a crowd are as likely to generate meaning as incoherence.

Nevertheless, the chapters in this volume show that people—including participants, observers, and scholars—continue to feel compelled to make sense of even the most chaotic crowds. For Hammoudi and his fellow pilgrims, the rites of the hajj, its symbolism, and the significance of joining the crowds as acts of pilgrimage are clear. Moskowitz highlights the tragic irony of the New Year's Eve crowd in Shanghai, for although the crowd represents modernity and cosmopolitanism to Armani (Moskowitz's newly arrived interlocutor), its results (death and chaos) exemplify the very shortsighted backwardness Armani was trying to escape. Sadana (this volume) argues that, within public discourse in Delhi, the experiences of actual commuters are shaped by the idea that the metro crowd “does’ or even accomplishes modernity,” a conviction that further shapes the way they regard other members of the crowd. In Haberkorn's chapter,

political intentions and outcomes cannot be separated from the emergence of crowds. Activists in Bangkok used symbols of dissent—such as reading certain books in public or wearing certain colors—to signify their alliance to a potential, larger crowd of like-minded others who may not be present; these symbols became so potent and threatening that the government made them illegal. When together at a large rally, activists deliberately coordinated actions like releasing balloons all together to produce specific symbolic effects precisely so that others can interpret them as reflecting the intentions of the crowd. As Tambiah (1997) argues, crowds themselves can become ritualized and generate meaning on their own within larger social contexts. The praying, pious crowd Obadare opens his chapter with is itself part of a repertory of signs used by the political elite in Nigeria to achieve specific ends, and particular actions (such as the governor going down on his knees) are recognizable signs to the assembled crowd present at the event and also to observers elsewhere.

And yet the question posed by William Mazzarella (2015) in the subtitle to his article, “Totalitarian Tears,” continues to haunt these kinds of collective interpretations: Does the crowd really mean it? And if the crowd—or rather the people in it—don’t, what difference does it make? In the Nigerian case, Obadare maintains that the prayer session makes the crowd into a spectacle to be watched, which is both an obfuscation of their political significance and also the entire point of the assembly. Just as the governor cynically performs humility for the masses who are present and those elsewhere, so too the crowd performs docility, but the fact of their performance does not—Obadare insists—mean that the ritual automatically lacks transformative power. Thomassen argues that part of the reason crowds were seen as loci for irrationality or emotion had in part to do with the idea that they formed, took action, and then dissipated too quickly to be able to be subjected to reason; however, by examining the enduring crowd—a crowd that lasts over days and during which people have enough time to *think* about what it is—he reaches a conclusion similar to Obadare’s: “human beings in enduring crowds do not lose their character: they step into it” (Thomassen, this volume). In fact, the volume’s contributions suggest that this may be a characteristic of ritual crowds. For instance, the overarching meaning of the hajj as a ritual does not preclude pilgrims from assigning it a distinctly personal significance. On the contrary, it may be that the overarching structure of significance ordering the crowd permits and enables what Hammoudi (this volume) calls “*pockets of reflexivity*” within it (emphasis in original). Though distant observers of hajj crowds, like Canetti, see them as mechanistic, from within the crowd Hammoudi observes distinct outbursts among his companions

that show how one can be within a crowd and yet separate from it, fully absorbed by one's own discrete emotional experience while immersed in a container of togetherness. Like Hammoudi, Hollan examines on two different kinds of rituals (a feast and interactions in the workplace) to work against the idea that crowds produce an experience held in common; instead, he demonstrates that people's experiences of one crowd will not be, as some of the theoretical literature claims, consuming and monolithic but will be variable and ambivalent.

By returning to Mazzarella's generative question ("Does the crowd really mean it?"), we can see how the ethnographic evidence accumulated in other chapters shifts the emphasis in from the problem of intentions (whether they *mean* it) to the problem of experience (whether they mean *it*). Drawing on Hans Loewald's (2000: 249) observation that "the unconscious is a crowd of ghosts," Hollan shows how the public, social meanings of a ritual interaction can differ from the ritual's private meaning to a particular person; grappling with that divergence can leave people haunted by and isolated from those they appeared to share experiences with. Even after escaping from the crowd that trampled several people to death, Moskowitz reports that while he feared for his life, his Chinese companions remained unfazed. Their blasé reactions leave him disoriented and make him doubt that he'd ever even been in any actual danger. Chowdhury goes even further by examining mutually antagonistic crowds, one of which prides itself on being putatively secular (and thus rational); however, by showing how this so-called rational group draws on the language of crowd theory to dehumanize the other, Chowdhury undermines the idea that people's perceptions of their experiences in a crowd are accurate. She also troubles the idea that people might think, earn, or modernize their way out of the basest impulses that can exist in a crowd. In contrast, Steffen's encounter with people rubbernecking at the site of a traffic accident demonstrates that a crowd in which people have openly voyeuristic intentions may inadvertently have altruistic effects.

### **The emotions associated with crowds**

Much of crowd theory—including the work of thinkers as different as Le Bon and Canetti—presumes that entering a crowd intensifies feelings, which is why the actions of a crowd are passionate rather than rational. Many of the chapters address what happens to participants' emotions once they join a crowd. After years of enduring a prohibition against gathering together, Borneman's Syrian interlocutors at first feel joy and a sense of liberation in crowds. People from the enduring crowd of the Maidan Uprising compare joining the crowd to

“falling in love,” a sensation Thomassen (this volume) suggests we use Victor Turner’s work on ritual transformations to understand. The online mobs Chowdhury investigates find themselves drawn together by indignation, righteousness, and fury. The prayer sessions in Nigeria described by Obadare are necessarily emotional, but—as Obadare argues—the question of whose emotions are genuine troubles simple interpretations of the event. During the sustained journey of the hajj, Hammoudi’s and his companions’ emotions vary considerably both with and against the sense of the crowd. Calm—a state not often associated with crowds in theory—appears often in the volume. Sadana records feelings of liberation and righteousness in the mobs that form in the Delhi Metro, while at the same time noting the ordinary boredom and release of vigilance that characterizes the crowd in the ladies’ coach. Steffen encounters a crowd that is poised, quiet, and seemingly impassive even in the face of a violent scene. Moskowitz observes that, especially at its most dangerous moments, people in the Shanghai New Year’s Eve crowd appeared calm or at least passive. Here especially, Hollan’s chapter provides a useful methodological reminder that a multiplicity of emotions can exist not only within the crowd but also within a single person, whose emotional understanding of the crowd after they leave it may be vastly different than the emotion they displayed while they participated in it.

By exploring how people feel as they experience being in a crowd, the volume’s contributors attempt to understand what it is that draws people to crowds or—conversely—repulses them about crowds. Their conclusions often vary. Obadare presents a case in which the crowd of the prayer session is “called for” by a leader, whereas Borneman draws on psychoanalysis to interpret the crowds of the Syrian uprising as reflecting a longing to break away from the paternal register of the oppressive regime and return to a maternal, undifferentiated form. Hollan holds that the reasons people are drawn to or pushed away by crowds are not necessarily socially constructed but individually held. The distinction between choreographed crowds—pulled together, in her case, at the behest of the state—and spontaneous crowds is critical to Steffen’s analysis. Sadana’s interlocutor describes leaving an ordinary commuting crowd to impulsively join a spontaneous crowd for an Independence Day protest. Haberkorn outlines the way protest crowds in Bangkok are both carefully planned by activists and also warily anticipated by authorities. Chowdhury’s interlocutors seem to be defying their own expectations by appearing in the street rather than simply gathering online; she argues that the online crowds she studies are less organized than they are coordinated.

Taken together, part of what these chapters demonstrate is that bodies in an unorganized or unauthorized crowd are exposed to different kinds of dangers than a body alone and that these dangers in turn shape the affective experience of being in a crowd. Death can either provide the occasion for the crowd—as in Chowdhury’s chapter, where the deaths of a blogger and a boy create crowds in the street and online, respectively—or else be its result—as in Moskowitz’s chapter. The fatal crowd Moskowitz describes is the clearest example of how a crowd can become a crisis, but many of the other chapters also associate crowds with death or at least with violence. In Chowdhury’s essay, death and violence are everywhere: the killing of a blogger inspires people to take to the streets, the accidental beating to death of a boy feeds into the righteousness of another online crowd, and the harassment of women fuels the creation of an online mob fixated on finding those responsible for the assaults. The ladies coach crowd Sadana opens her chapter with is similarly created by the differently distributed risk of being sexually harassed in a crowd; by combining this need to protect women’s bodies with an incident where African students were chased and attacked on the Metro, she shows how the metro crowd can suddenly become a violent mob, undermining its own promise of modernity and civility. Both the psychological crowds described by Hollan’s interlocutors are associated with the fear of death, either social or actual. In Steffen’s case, it’s the violence of the accident and the possibility of death that seduces and attracts the bystanders who make up the crowd. In the hajj as experienced by Hammoudi, even beyond knowing that a number of people may die by trampling during the pilgrimage each year, the hajj’s ritual significance is tied symbolically to the violence of sacrifice. Both Haberkorn’s and Borneman’s crowds form despite the knowledge that making their bodies vulnerable in the street means they may *become* sacrifices if and when authorities decide to inflict violence.

### **The politics of and in crowds**

Attempts to restrict crowds through laws, the manipulation of space, or violence reveal how threatening crowds can be to existing structures of authority. As Borneman (this volume) observes, “The very idea of a crowd forming and its intervention has the potential to unsettle the political field.” Haberkorn argues that it is precisely this—the very idea of a crowd—that prompts the regime in Thailand to release activists; perversely, they must release people whose crime was participating in a protest crowd or else face even more crowds of protesters. Within crowds, people often see themselves as part of a transformative force. In

both Syria and Ukraine, respectively, Borneman's and Thomassen's interlocutors associate gathering in a crowd with their hopes for political change. And yet, as Sadana points out, though they may carry the possibility of resistance, many crowds are characterized by submission: to a leader, to a prefigured space, even to a machine like the Metro. By drawing on an example where the representative of a struggling government calls people together in a crowd and uses their hope to buttress his own authority, Obadare complicates the notion that the people are right to feel hopeful within a crowd, which may—like the prayer sessions in Nigeria—turn out to be not the beginning of a transformation but a ruse. While Steffen's chapter demonstrates how the PRC's authorities use choreographed crowds to publicly claim authorship over the country's masses, Moskowitz shows how the Shanghai government undermined its own authority by calling for a crowd it ultimately couldn't control on New Year's Eve. In contrast to Moskowitz's interlocutors, who appear satisfied by official accounts of the tragedy, the people in the online mobs examined by Chowdhury are fueled by the gap between the difficulties invoked by Bangladeshi authorities in the wake of violent crowd incidents ("we couldn't see who did it"), which are seemingly belied by the public circulation of security camera footage ("how can you say that when we can *all* see"). Just as interpreting crowds' significance or intentions can be difficult, so predicting the effects crowds can have on the social and political contexts they form in can be impossible. As Hammoudi points out, the heavy surveillance and regulation of the hajj crowd begins before the trip; even during registration, authorities' attempts to keep crowds from getting out of their control are visible.

Nevertheless, Hammoudi also argues that the crowds of the hajj are leveling; that is, within the crowd, hierarchies are momentarily eliminated and people are equal among each other. This "leveling" is different from the riots Tambiah (1997) describes as destroying property and thus bringing different groups closer to equality, but both Tambiah and the contributors to this volume address how crowds deal with hierarchy. Steffen notes that the leveled status of people in the choreographed crowd and the spontaneous crowd appears in stark contrast to the rigid hierarchy of the cliques and circles that people form elsewhere in the PRC. During the Shanghai New Year's Eve crowd, as people struggled to gain a better vantage point for an event that turned out not to exist, Moskowitz reports feeling a sense of competition *within* the crowd as people tried to get up the stairs. Chowdhury observes instead a hierarchy *of* crowds, where the online crowd of people trying to identify harassers in CCTV footage see themselves as superior to the crowd of men whose faces they fixate on. In Obadare's case, the existence of a leader—even one performing humility—and noted dignitaries makes the

crowd inherently unequal. Hollan's two cases remind us not to generalize too quickly, however; where George's lack of power leads to his haunting by this crowd of unconscious ghosts, Nene'na Limbong's haunting occurs because his superior position in the Toraja feast actually makes him feel vulnerable. Even the leaders of crowds may not necessarily *feel* as powerful as they appear.

These questions of politics and hierarchy eventually intersect with questions of sincerity and experience, which can be addressed empirically, in terms of effects: What can crowds be said to *actually* transform? Throughout the chapters, we see a connection between physical crowds and physical spaces. In Sadana's case, the creation of Delhi's Metro as a modern *space* allows people to imagine themselves as transformed into the subjects of the modern metro crowd; however, the new Metro sociality Sadana's interlocutors describe quickly breaks down in moments when the crowd is transformed into a mob, which then begins to destroy elements of the space. Thomassen suggests that even as people describe themselves as transformed by joining the Maidan crowd, they in fact end up transforming the space of the public square they occupy. Other previously occupied squares end up, to borrow Hollan's term, being haunted by the crowds they once held. For instance, the 1989 student protests on Tiananmen Square in Beijing echoed the crowds of Red Guards who gathered to see Mao Zedong during the Cultural Revolution, and, following the clearing of the square through state violence on June 4, infrastructural changes—such as the elimination of aboveground crosswalks, the building of fences, and the clearing of the square on the anniversary of the massacre—both prevent the emergence of a similar crowd and make its continued absence conspicuous. By the end of Moskowitz's account, the government has shut down the lights on the Bund in Shanghai in a similar attempt to erase the space that held the fatal crowd. As Hollan notes, it is precisely these kinds of ghostly crowds that people carry with them and may hinder personal—or, in this analogy, national—transformation.

### **Encounters with imaginary crowds in minds and media**

Another way the contributors conceive of the ghostly crowds that follow, anticipate, or inspire actual crowds is in terms of images. Many of the chapters deal with the power of virtual or imaginary crowds. In her analysis of the Delhi Metro, Sadana focuses precisely on how people regard others in the crowd and how this sense of becoming one of these others might change the way they imagine themselves. Hollan's interlocutors have troubling dreams about crowds. Thailand's regime legally eliminated the image of crowds even as actual crowds

assembled and—in the case described by Haberkorn—succeeded in advocating for the release of prisoners. In Aleppo, Borneman's first encounter with crowds is of a photoshopped, imaginary image of an orderly, identical mass in 2006; the need to produce this image indicates how threatening the idea of actual oppositional crowds is and prefigures the regime's violent response to them years later. The spectacular elements of the prayer sessions analyzed by Obadare are meant to seize people's imaginations, and in Steffen's chapter, the similarly spectacular choreographed crowds create a concrete image that can stand for the idea of Chineseness or the Chinese nation. Images of crowds and imagined crowds have an eerie ability to call actual crowds into being. Thomassen's interlocutors report being drawn to the Maidan Uprising by televised images of the faces in the crowd on the square. For Moskowitz, the deaths during the Shanghai New Year's crowd are ironically predicted by authorities, who imagine the catastrophic crowd that might gather to watch an actual lightshow, which led them to cancel the event; however, the lightshow as collectively imagined crowd—who did not know it had been canceled—makes the imagined catastrophe into a reality. In Chowdhury's chapter, it's the images of actual faces in the crowd that draw the virtual mob together in Bangladesh; the fact that the crowd is a largely male and stereotypically religious crowd reinforces the sense of self-righteousness that fuels their vigilante actions.

While this volume cannot answer all of the questions posed by thinkers associated with the Frankfurt School and elsewhere about what technologies do to create masses or change their behaviors, many of the chapters address the role new media plays both in their research and in the formation of crowds in their field sites. Chowdhury critiques utopian notions that the internet might create an enlightened, democratic space in Bangladesh by showing how quickly users circulate images of death without nuance and resort to mob tactics. In the PRC, Steffen argues, the social media platform similarly offers not a utopian respite from the hierarchy of actual sociality but rather a reflection of it that repudiates the leveling aspects of crowds. In Thailand, students are caught organizing because of the surveillance of their social media accounts. And yet, in the work of Thomassen, Obadare, Hammoudi, Sadana, Moskowitz, and Borneman, the circulation of crowd images crucial by new media is critical. Thomassen argues that the enduring crowd of the Maidan Uprising might never have lasted as long as it did without the intervention of television broadcasting, Obadare's prayer sessions are similarly performed with a televisual audience in mind, and Hammoudi's own ideas of what to expect during the hajj come from his familiarity with images from the media. Sadana's analysis of the metro mob



is possible because of uploaded video recordings, and Moskowitz is only able to realize how deadly serious the crowd he escaped from truly was because of circulating news reports that come to him the next morning from relatives in the United States. Borneman similarly relied on uploaded videos, social media posts, and video calls to understand the way his interlocutors were feeling in 2011 and how they came to feel in the years after.

## The changing political significance of crowds

In 2014, when I originally conceived of this volume and began soliciting essays, our task seemed simple. Because crowds seem to form everywhere people are, it appeared obvious that ethnographers would have something to say about the different characteristics of crowds in different places and that combining those accounts in a single volume could generate illuminating, theoretical commonalities. What also seemed obvious (to me) was that it was a great privilege to be writing about crowds at a time that was not characterized by fears of impending fascism, by a looming communist revolution, or by the chaotic violence that had generated so much of other thinking about crowds. I thought I could ask the contributors to focus only on the particular, embodied lower-case “c” crowds in their field sites and not on the significance of “the Crowd” with an uppercase “C.” Naively, in 2014, I imagined editing a book on crowds where the object of study—the crowd—could finally be treated as something politically neutral rather than a tool for the right, for the left, or for chaos.

Writing just a few weeks after yet another fatal vehicle-ramming attack on a crowd of pedestrians in Toronto, Canada, on April 24, 2018, I find myself no longer able to write and edit as if that were the case. As I wrote above, to categorize a group as a “crowd” is to bring a host of other connotations into being; it can flatten, dehumanize, and objectify the people it describes. In this volume, the contributors take great care to define their terms while addressing group formation as it exists in their field sites; however, since I began collecting these essays, several trends have changed how I conceive of the significance of their work on crowds and of the figure of the Crowd. Among these trends are:

- *The recent efficacy of crowds to disrupt repressive regimes, and the subsequent increased fear of and regulation of crowds by remaining repressive regimes.* In 2011, the use of crowds by Arab Spring, Occupy Wall Street, and other similar movements seemed to indicate that bodies could be effectively

mobilized in public spaces to demand real political change. Nevertheless, perhaps in response to the threatening effectiveness demonstrated by the Arab Spring protests, governments began responding to peaceful political crowds aggressively. Several chapters in this volume address the shifting meaning of crowding in public in the wake of effective protests. We can also think of the violence that broke out and then escalated in response to crowds in Syria in 2011 described by Borneman (this volume); the unprecedented use of teargas and pepper spray on protesters by the Hong Kong police during the Occupy movement in 2014; the increased display of military-grade weapons by police in response to the 2014 Black Lives Matter protests in Ferguson, MO, and elsewhere in the United States; and the legal banning of public assembly in Thailand after the 2014 coup documented by Haberkorn (this volume).

- *The increased ascendancy of far-right authoritarian leaders appealing to groups of people during mass demonstrations by using divisive and explicitly xenophobic rhetoric.* In the United States in particular, the election of Donald Trump appeared to herald, among other things, a renewed willingness of people to submit to leaders peddling race-based ideas about group psychology similar to Le Bon's, and the "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, on August 12, 2017, revealed how attractive these ideas are even at a grassroots level. Elsewhere, marches and mass demonstrations by so-called far-right, neo-Nazi, and fascist groups in Poland and other countries across Europe also fit into this trend.
- *An increase in attacks on crowds with deadly weapons.* Large gatherings of people become "crowds" in the eyes of the media once they are transformed into targets for people who want to kill indiscriminately. Here we might think of the November 2015 Paris attacks where eighty-nine of the attack's 130 fatalities were audience members at a concert in the Bataclan Theater. There was also the Manchester Arena Bombing on March 22, 2017, that killed twenty-two people at a concert, and the massacre that occurred in Las Vegas on October 1, 2017, when a lone gunman shot into another concert audience and killed fifty-nine people. Even in countries without widespread access to guns, incidents of violence on large groups (or else an *awareness* of such violence) are on the rise; for instance, in the PRC, thirty-five people died when a small group of assailants attacked the waiting passengers at Kunming Railway Station with long knives on March 1, 2014.
- *An increase in vehicle-ramming attacks on crowds.* The realization that cars are deadly weapons that can be turned on crowds has changed

the social significance of being in a group that might become a crowd, particularly near famous landmarks. Some of the groups attacked by cars were assembled for political reasons, like the people counter-protesting the “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, on August 12, 2017. Other vehicle-ramming attacks occur in explicitly political places, such as the vehicle that crashed into a group of tourists at Tiananmen Square in Beijing, the traditional locus of power in China, on October 28, 2013. However, many of the groups attacked by vehicles do not have an obvious connection to power or politics. For example, the attack on Bastille Day in 2016 in Nice, France, that killed eighty-seven people was a celebratory crowd; the truck in Berlin that killed twelve people on December 19, 2016, targeted shoppers at a Christmas market; and the group a van collided with in Barcelona, Spain, on August 17, 2017, was made up of pedestrians visiting a tourist site. Most recently, on April 23, 2018, a man purposefully drove a van into pedestrians on the sidewalk and killed ten people in Toronto who were likely not, it turns out, targeted for indiscriminate violence but because they were women. In many of these cases, the individuals attacked may not have considered themselves as part of a unified “crowd” until they were objectified, their bodies reduced to targets for their attackers and obstacles for others attempting to escape.

- *The heightened significance of counting the number of bodies in crowds during political events.* Within hours of the Woman’s March on Washington, DC, on January 21, 2017, news outlets began covering the “controversy” over whether more people were in attendance at the protest or at the Presidential Inauguration the day before. The political stakes of this debate were oddly transparent. Suddenly, questions whose implications are usually either logistical (how many people were there?) or theoretical (were the people there sincere?) became proxies for a wider, public debate about the legitimacy of the new administration. Even outside of the United States, questions about the authenticity of crowds and crowd imagery have become more urgent to leaders seeking to build their credibility; see, for instance, Zeynep Devrim Gürsel’s (2017) examination of the photos taken at the 2015 Unity Rally in Paris. This public fixation on determining the exact number of living bodies after political events is, in some ways, a mutated derivative of a much more familiar practice, which is arguing over the exact number of *dead* bodies in the wake of violent events. While the importance of keeping the number of dead bodies low is clear in a country like the PRC (where the number of dead bodies determines the official status of an incident

as “serious” or not but “missing” bodies don’t count), it’s less clear what practical and political effects the tallying of living bodies in crowds will have on contemporary political life in different contexts. Particularly in the context of these other violent trends, counting living bodies with the same fervor and controversy that surrounds the tallying of the dead gives one the perverse impression that these bodies in the crowd are important to number precisely because they also make up a different category: the potentially dead.

It’s possible that what I perceive as trends are merely an effect of changing media coverage; nevertheless, changing coverage can lead to shifts in how people think of themselves in relation to crowds. As one must be when within a crowd, the contributors to this volume are sensitive to such changes as they occur: in their field sites, among their interlocutors, and over the course of an encounter. They display the sensibility they’ve developed through ethnographic engagement and demonstrate what kind of sensitive, insightful scholarship that can be done when ethnographers trust themselves to carve their own research objects from life in their field sites. The crowds examined in each chapter differ from each other not only because they form in different contexts but also because, for most of the contributors, this ethnographic material is the result of long engagements with particular people and places. Being able to distinguish which kinds of groups are ordinary in a particular context and which are exceptional informs not only how these ethnographers write but also what things they notice in the field. Though contemporary circumstances may be calling for the type of polemics and instrumental texts that characterized crowd theory in the twentieth century, this volume does not build toward conclusive value judgments; nor does it offer tactical suggestions for those who might want to harness (or evade) the sometimes violent and often politically potent power of crowds. Instead, the authors of these essays reconsider crowds as concepts, as experiences, as symbols, as images, as political tools, and—most importantly—as they encountered them within a specific ethnographic context. As a result, this volume is crowded with insights I hope will continue to remain relevant even after this particular moment has passed.



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# The Syrian Revolution: Crowds, the Political Field, the Political Subject

John Borneman

## Revolutionary crowds

The Syrian revolution that began in 2011 as an unexpected and creative uprising against an authoritarian government quickly morphed into an incredibly destructive, disintegrating force. In 2011, Syrians that I knew, across sectarian, religious, and ethnic divides, basked in a sense of joy and in the anticipation of freedom from political repression. As one friend from Aleppo put it in April 2011, “Our fear is gone.” After slightly more than a year, however, the dominant experience of the revolution had changed. The image of revolutionary crowds was replaced with crowds of refugees in flight. Divisions overwhelmed all attempts at unity. Joy and freedom morphed into despair and dread. This friend from Aleppo had since fled to Beirut with his entire extended family. In the first two years of the uprising, people thought and hoped that things would get better. I strongly identified with their aspirations and experienced with Syrians a similar disappointment and dread as their hopes were smashed.

Revolution may present itself as a sudden reversal in direction, but it is in fact a process of social transformation with a series of reversals and largely unanticipated outcomes. I will first recover the joyful experience of the early revolutionary crowds in the first year of the uprising, before concluding with some reflections on the experience of dread and the massive flight from Syria up to the present. I begin not with the revolutionary crowds, however, but with my first experience of something resembling a crowd or, more accurately, a mass, in 2006 in Aleppo, Syria. I hope to clarify the place of masses and crowds in forming and disintegrating the political field and the political subject of Syria.

## Recursively constituted masses, 1999–2006

During my first visit to Syria in 1999, I observed that the median strip of the M5 highway, which runs north and south and connects Damascus to Homs to Hama to Aleppo, was punctuated with pictures of the authoritarian leader, Hafez el-Assad. The closer one approached the center of cities, the more frequently the pictures appeared on the median strip of the highways. People I met were obviously afraid to speak openly about anything of political significance in either public or private places, and as a result Syria was quiet and stable, with no readily visible conflicts. Gatherings in public of any size, except as kin groups or if organized by the regime itself, were considered illegal assembly. Even small groups of male acquaintances were suspicious in Syrian cities, whereas in Lebanon, which shares a population and culture very similar to that in Syria, I had observed such groups in public places everywhere.

Jump ahead five years to 2004. I am living in Aleppo. Little has changed since 1999, except that President Hafez el-Assad had died in 2000, and his son Bashar had assumed the presidency, formally elected, to be sure, but with the certainty of outcome that negates election as a democratic ritual. Now the enlarged photo mounted on a pole in the median strip of the road is of Bashar in the center, with his father and deceased brother, the heir apparent who had died in a traffic accident, in the background. The public atmosphere is still filled with fear, and there are still no public gatherings or crowds except those few organized by kin groups or by the ruling Ba'ath Party or regime.

I ask members of the Ba'ath Party why I see no political activity—no clubs at the university, no debates, no attempt to link current politics to the founders of and the past socialist vision of the Party. And I find little or no enthusiasm for politics among the students. Some Party members privately admit to me that the Party today has nothing to do with its original socialist politics, that it is an accumulative and distributive machine that in fact only manipulates public divisions for its own ruling interests. Others get impatient or angry at my questions—some demand facts, names of the dissatisfied students I referred to. Still others counter with a list of activities in which they had personally, or in conjunction with a few others, opposed something the regime had done or stood for. The one political demonstration that I was told of occurred the year before I arrived in Syria, and it was by students at the university protesting that the government had rescinded the guarantee of jobs after graduation. The numbers were very small, and the punishment was that two of its leaders, whom I met, were not allowed to finish their degrees and banned from the university. Both had found work elsewhere.

Jump ahead another two years to 2006. I am visiting Aleppo for a month. The city is beginning its stint as the “Arab World Capital of Islamic Culture,” a designation awarded yearly since 1996, following an initiative of the Arab League, promoted by UNESCO. Despite the designation and planned festivities, Aleppo seems remarkably quiet. So quiet that it is not that easy to find out what events are taking place. People I ask either do not know or are uninterested in telling me. One day, as I wander into Aleppo’s central square, the large and aesthetically unremarkable Saadallah Al-Jabri Square adjacent to the Aleppo Public Park, I notice a huge metal ball and an artistic replica of a mosque made out of inflated balloons.

For the first time since I began visiting Syria, I also see a crowd gathered there. My curiosity peaks. I ask a bystander what is going on. He explains that I have happened onto the opening ceremony of Aleppo as Arab World Capital of Islamic Culture. VIPs and lower-level public officials in business suits seem to outnumber private citizens. What makes this crowd so distinctive is the five-story poster that overwhelms it of a crowd pasted to the side of a building facing the square. The poster shows ordinary people densely packed into Al-Jabri Square. These folks on the poster do not look purposeless or random, but I cannot determine for what purpose they formed a crowd. Knowing that all crowds in Syria are political, I ask when the photo was taken, but nobody can tell me. I have never seen such a mass in this square, the largest in Aleppo.

On closer inspection, I see that the poster repeatedly duplicates images of the same people. It is not a crowd but an imagination of a crowd as a colorful, undifferentiated mass. It is an imagined crowd as a response to the specter of a crowd, intended to replace or preempt the apparition of an unpredictable crowd with a more pleasant hallucinatory group. The regime is staging its subjects as public actors, as “the people.” But all Syrians knew, even if they refused or were unable to acknowledge it in public, that the people distrusted anything the regime organized, including its images. The people, I thought, would surely not be able to recognize themselves in this picture except as reflections of the regime’s wish. They would see this picture for what it was, a defense mechanism of the regime: to prevent an image of a crowd of political subjects undoing and redoing the group. A hallucination of an already united and orderly mass took the place of unruly crowd, of the persecutory inner image of crowds that haunted them all.

In 2006 in Syria the spirit or mood of the times, what in German is called *Zeitgeist* or *Stimmung* (public mood), was decidedly paranoid-schizophrenic. Paranoia and splitting were intentionally facilitated by the authoritarian political system of single party Ba’ath rule. I experienced this mood in daily interactions:



everyone assumed at least two selves, one for public viewing and one hidden from view. And they seemed fearful of meeting people they did not already know. I was constantly told by people to be wary of others, and those other people would tell me to be wary of the ones who had initially warned me to be wary. Paranoia's golden rule: trust no one. There was schizophrenia, too; people always had at least two public selves, if not more. Unable to trust others, it was difficult to integrate new experiences into one's self. Best to dissociate and create a new self for each set of encounters. It follows that any public gathering was viewed with suspicion. Was it organized by the regime as a trap (to out those who dared to show disrespect) or a puppet show (to assemble the mass), or was it spontaneous? For the regime, crowds were groups of people to arrange and stage to legitimate its rule. Spontaneous gatherings were thus highly suspicious. People seemed to doubt there were such things, at least not in Syria. In this context, my initial assumption, informed by several decades of personal participation in rights demonstrations in the United States and all over Western Europe, was misplaced; crowds were not a means of producing political subjects with their own will and differentiated relation to language, hierarchy, and order. In 2006, what I saw in Syria was not a crowd but a recursively constituted mass whose only intent was to be together, united behind Assad and the Ba'ath Party.

The idea that the people are a united mass without division is not part of a paternal imagination. In the paternal imagination, the figure of the father (whether it is a male or real father is beside the point) is conflictual and enters relationships from the outside. His first such entrance is between the mother and the child. Bringing dissensus and difference to this dyad, the father himself is always an initial disturbance, a third element in a triangle. Even though he is theoretically and ideally ascribed the role guarantor of order between competing children (not always male), the guarantor is an ideal that today the mother often performs. In theory and ideal, the father is also accorded the primary access to the mother's attention and affection. When a child is born, it must compete with the father for the mother's love—this is the essence of entering the Oedipal complex.

I write this to dispel any notion that the authoritarian, highly male-dominated Syrian regime imagined its relations with citizens in a paternal register. Rather, political directives were to be followed like bees follow their queen, without thought or register of difference—and if such directives were followed, citizens would be taken care of (the Ba'ath Party nominally followed a socialist program), provided they did not dissent. That is all to say, before the uprising the regime presented itself not in the symbolic order of the paternal register (i.e., a

regime to be argued with and opposed) but in the imaginary of the maternal register: undifferentiated, embracing, nurturing (Borneman 2007, 2012, 2016). Moreover, in ruling through the mood of paranoia, the regime created political subjects who had to choose to submit to the regime's perverted representation of reality or else risk harassment, imprisonment, or worse. What I saw on that day in 2006 was the regime's representation of itself: a group of people acting as a mass on Al-Jabri Square facing a huge reproduction of how they were imagined to appear replicated on a poster. When I asked about this discrepancy between actual mass and replication, people viewed me suspiciously. Partaking of the kind of conscious dissociation typical of Orwellian doublespeak, they dismissed my question as a joke or an attempt to humiliate them. Was there, they asked, such a thing as a real crowd of political subjects? It would be foolish to dare challenge this regime-created illusion of crowd reality, this mass, with another (real) representation. The people were, I concluded, only acting as a recursively constituted mass.

## Syrian crowds, 2011

Jump ahead another five years to Spring 2011. The first masses not orchestrated by the regime gathered in the small town of Da'ara in the south of Syria, near the Jordanian border, and only later spread to the population hubs of Homs, Damascus, and Aleppo to the north. For a time in 2011 and 2012, the idea spread like wildfire that one could organize crowds into political demonstrations against the regime, for reform, for the release of prisoners, and for freedom. "Hurriyah"—freedom—became a central call to encourage participation in what was then, primarily in Europe and the United States, optimistically dubbed the Arab Spring. Friends and acquaintances who in 2006 had no sense of their capacity to be political subjects suddenly contacted me through their Facebook accounts and sent me optimistic alerts through URLs pasted in emails about YouTube posts of their amateur protest footage uploaded on the internet. I was not there, but through this new social media Syrians shared their experiences of courage and joy with each other, with a world public, and with me within hours of the actual happenings, in a way that far surpassed in detail and in the multicentricity of perspectives the capacities of traditional reporting and television news.

The crowd demonstrations throughout Syria morphed into an uprising, and the uprising morphed into a violent regional civil war. Ethnically organized resistance and Islamist and jihadi-motivated organizations defeated and overtook

the initially more secular-dominated opposition groups. As of this writing, in May 2017, six years after the uprising began, the war has displaced more than half the population—experts estimate there are 5 million refugees outside the country, 6.6 million internally displaced, and some 470,000 killed.<sup>1</sup> We should not let this outcome efface the fact that the uprising was inspired by a wave of anti-authoritarian actions and crowd protests throughout the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region to reclaim a sense of political subjectivity by undoing and redoing the political field. The first of these protests was in Tunisia, when, on December 16, 2010, the street vendor Mohamed Bouazizi engaged in self-immolation in protest, precisely because of his lack of political agency. Large-scale uprisings in Egypt and Yemen nearly immediately followed, and two months later, in early March 2011, an open rebellion began in Syria, in the city of Dara'a. The sequence of events is itself important, but for my purposes here, I want only to emphasize that by early May 2011 the crowds and mass protests were already met with arrests and killings throughout Syria, not only in Dara'a but also in Deir al Zour, Homs, Kiswa, Hama, Damascus, and Aleppo.<sup>2</sup>

Counting on the help of a large number of informers, the Syrian regime's security apparatus, *Mukhabarrat*, countered these crowds by anticipating their presence in particular places and, publicly representing itself in a paternal disciplinary register, often viciously attacked those gathered. Early on, some demonstrators responded to these disciplinary measures through tactical swarming: spontaneous and accidental gatherings in smaller squares, which drew many participants not because they were informed or coordinated ahead of time but simply through the contagion of massing. The regime assumed, in turn, that every mass was a potential crowd with oppositional intent and, acting according to this logic, refused to negotiate in good faith about proposed reforms. This refusal facilitated the transformation of every mass into what was most feared: a crowd of chanting or placard-holding demonstrators.

As police and regime-sponsored militias began to fire on the crowds, the uprising took on a revolutionary fervor, radicalizing participants in a way specific to the Levant and Syria's place within it. Fighters from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, from Chechen and Bosnia, flooded in, with recruits from the European and Western world Arab/Islamic diasporas, destabilizing the precarious power-sharing mosaics of local communities. They also began fighting with each other while opposing the secular Syrian opposition. The disciplinary instruments of the state—police, army, Party, *Mukhabarrat*—became even more sectarian-identified and reacted with a brutality that later was matched by the religious-motivated oppositional militias.

For its part, the regime used every violent means at its disposal, reigning death first with aerial bombing and chemicals until that received international condemnation, then resorting to crude instruments like barrel bombs (metal containers filled with high explosives), and later, with Russian protection, renewing its chemical war on the population. It first hit select Sunni neighborhoods considered oppositional before expanding to whole cities and regions throughout Syria. In calling every form of opposition a “terrorist threat,” the regime adopted an international language that found adherents both within and outside Syria. Every crowd again presented a challenge to its rule. In denying any meaningful political agency to its own subjects, the regime reacted to crowds with parental rage: of a vengeful father betrayed by its children and a tenaciousness mother trying to protect those still in the nest. Privileged business elites across sectarian divides, the ruling Alewite minority, and members of those minorities (i.e., Christian, Kurd, Druze) who felt increasingly threatened by the radical Islamist groups, united behind this regime, granting it liberty to express and act out their visions of violence.

Although events in Aleppo are obviously tied to those in other cities and states, let me focus on this city, which I know best. In Aleppo, as throughout Syria, the uprising instigated a pervasive reimagination of the political field—of voicing opposition, demonstrating, confronting the police, being arrested—especially among young people. On May 12, 2011, in Aleppo, police made mass arrests of students who had protested, and on May 29 students organized the first large demonstration of estimated 1,000 people. On June 10, fifty student activists were detained following scattered demonstrations. On June 17, the first death by shooting was reported in Aleppo. On June 30, Aleppo experienced its first large coordinated demonstration, in many different squares and city districts. On July 1, there was a demonstration of 10,000; on July 15, it reached 20,000. On August 19, thousands protested in Saadallah Al-Jabri Square, the site of the orchestrated crowd in 2006. And in response, on October 19, 2011, the regime itself organized a huge demonstration in the square—for no purpose other than to demonstrate unity, to try to sway the opinion and perceptions of the uncommitted masses and of foreign audiences. But in this show of unity it also demonstrated, for the first time, the divisions within the people that the uprising had made visible, that the “terrorists,” as the regime called all opposition, had to be acknowledged and fought openly.

Throughout the protests, the regime wanted to retain control, at any cost, of the central symbolic spaces of its major cities, especially Damascus and Aleppo. In Aleppo, this space was Al-Jabri Square. The fighting quickly spread there

and, eventually, the square became the victim of a suicide car bomber, most likely of some opposition group. Today there are no more crowds in Aleppo. There are now sections of Aleppo that the regime controls and sections that opposition groups control and sections in-between, like the largely Christian district al-Jdeideh where I had once lived, not fully in control of either. But in no section of the city are there crowds. The destruction in many of these districts is overwhelming. Suffice it to say that the regime also attacked and severely damaged the twelfth-century Great Mosque adjacent to the old al-Medina souqs, where I lived for the largest part of my fieldwork, which had been painstakingly reconstructed with the help of the regime and rededicated in one of the many inaugural events planned during the year of Aleppo as Arab World Capital of Islamic Culture in 2006.

In many ways crowd behavior took on the specific characteristics of Syrian culture and society, radicalizing latent and often unconscious social divisions and antagonisms. The transformation of crowds into political demonstrators mandated the reflexive and largely unconscious appearance of the paternal function. The regime quickly eliminated the space for massing of any sort. Even those fleeing the conflict were shot at as the regime tried to delimit if not stop all movement of peoples it had no prior knowledge of. The time for ideas such as deliberation, debate, and consensus building was quickly eliminated, though the crack in the window for negotiation with opposition groups had been small to begin with. The accumulation of dramatic events demanded immediate action on all fronts. Initial ideas of regime change gave way to motives ranging from the revenge of a murder to risky defense of friends or neighbors, from organizing “humanitarian” aid to the fight for individual survival, from democratically refiguring Syria to replacing the state of Syria with a caliphate that extended into Iraq. Most importantly, the time necessary to think through an alternative political solution disappeared. The inability to unite behind a single leader, a sovereign, became an accusation of ineffectuality against the democratic opposition and an excuse for the West to largely withhold support to oppositional groups.

### The specter of the failed revolution

The stakes in the revolutions in the Middle East hinged on the capacity to transform the authoritarian political field into a democratic one. We imagine crowds as an integral means to achieve this transformation, and we imagine that

we must participate in them by either joining or opposing to become a political subject. The very idea of a crowd forming and its intervention has the potential to unsettle the political field. Crowds unsettle because they appear to have a purpose, and that purpose is often to change, at its most radical, to revolt. Crowd participation in itself can collectively transform individuals. In a revolution, crowds promise more than change: they will turn the political field upside down. Hence rulers are correct in treating crowds like dynamite, useful if not essential to clear the field but also unstable, volatile, dangerous.

What Marx and Engels (2005: 1) in 1848 in the *Communist Manifesto* called “the specter of revolution” haunting Europe is, in 2016, the specter of failed revolution in the Middle East. A specter is something that has not yet appeared but is nonetheless already present. The experience of a specter is uncanny, similar to an experience of *déjà vu*, a revisit of something not totally unfamiliar coming from the past. A specter comes to us in the form of an apparition or ghost, a being with an incorporeal spirit, a presence with no clearly delineated body. In other words, the specter of the failed revolution in Syria is a presence in the mind already there, an inner object that contains within it associations with fright, or dread, or terror. These objects appeared in Syrian daydreams related to me already more than five years before the revolution (Borneman 2011). More often than not, such specters become persecutory objects.

A specter of revolution contains two kinds of fantasies of political subjects: joyful fantasies—of the just, the comic, of turning the political field upside down; and persecutory fantasies—disintegrating, paranoid, sadomasochistic, fearful. If a revolution fails, its specter differs from that of a successful revolution in that there is no joy. Persecutory fantasies of attack and coerced change overwhelm the joys of inversion. While all revolutions contain elements of both kinds of fantasies, and all seek to transform the political field into something unrecognizable, a failed revolution, or a revolution that cannot participate in the joy of inversion, risks creating the specific kind of subject who feels persecuted and may turn persecutory.

The specter of revolution of which Marx wrote was to bring about a new historical subject: an emancipated one, free of illusion, capable of deciding his or her own fate. This joyful vision of the subject, which Marx shared with some of the proponents of the French and American revolutions, comes out of the European Enlightenment. Despite the failure of the 1848 uprisings, the dream of the joyful political subject did not die with this failure. It reemerged in Germany again in the early twentieth century alongside the fantasy of fascism, and it reemerged after the destructive frenzy of the Second World War, motivating Third World

national, anti-colonial emancipatory movements. The successful Russian Revolution of 1917 also embraced an emancipated subject, free of illusion, but, in its Leninist-Stalinist versions, it resisted the democratic subject. As Claude Lefort (1986) and others have argued, revolution's persecutory outcomes and its constant search for inner enemies were integral to its structure. Nonetheless, up until the 1989 "velvet" revolutions in Eastern Europe and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the vanguard one-party Soviet model competed on a world stage with the democratic Enlightenment model in fantasies about revolution. A key demand of the revolutionary crowds in 2011 in Syria was to end the one-party rule of the Ba'ath Party, whose slogan "Unity, Freedom, and Socialism" had served to enforce unity at the expense of freedom. The revolutionary crowds were largely inspired by the democratic ethos.

### Political subjects

Most theory since the latter nineteenth century has argued implicitly if not explicitly that crowds are an intermediary or liminal form between masses and political subjects in groups. Whereas masses are pre-political gatherings of people with no conscious purpose, crowds are the transformation of these gatherings into groups with particular cultural meanings. Masses come together without knowing what they want. Crowds, by contrast, are signified as having a particular collective intent not reducible to the sum of individual aims; they are ascribed a meaning in a dialectic between collective self-definition and designation from the outside.

Massing is one extreme of sociability, as close to the instinctual as possible in collective human behavior; political subjects are at the other extreme, culturally constructed with no necessary relation between need (instinct) and the specific intent of the collective gathering. The forming of a mass is an atavistic behavior like the "swarming" of bees, the "flocking" of birds, or the "shoaling" of fish, a process of aggregation, conglomeration, and mutual attunement found at times in all human groups. Such swarming in humans is motivated by and results in affect; it is largely unconscious, and it is the dimension of "submergence" that Gustave Le Bon (2002) appealed to as the first step in the formation of a crowd. But we might depart from Le Bon by pointing to the positive as well as the negative or destructive tendencies of massing. Because human intelligence and cognitive capacities are dissimilar if not technically superior to those of other animals, humans use submergence not just for survival but also for specifically

human ends, creative and destructive, rational and irrational. That is, humans might also submerge for the joy of losing themselves or for symbolic aims not tied to utility among which is to create oneself collectively as a political subject. Along these lines, Holger Briel extends insights from scholars working on the particular capacity of “swarm intelligence” to a creative analysis of the new kind of human activity of “blogging” (2012: 168–182, cf. Kennedy et al. 2001).<sup>3</sup>

Massing implies an instinctual longing to be with others in a particular way, to be with others to experience what Freud (1921) called the “oceanic feeling,” a return to being one or being contained by the mother, the pre-symbolic, pre-rational, pre-hierarchical, non-differentiated. Longing to mass would be in the register of what Jacques Lacan (1998) dubs the Imaginary, an originary experience that one must have had but cannot remember. Massing is not, to keep with Lacan’s categories, in the register of the Symbolic; it is not the mediation of experience through language, hierarchy, difference, and social order. The Symbolic, in contrast to the Imaginary, includes those aspects of human existence that are necessary to become a political subject, for instance, speech and differentiation. Freud (1913) identified the Symbolic with the father function, including the archaic father. Massing, then, often appears to us as unplanned, surprising, accidental, unintentional, apolitical, lacking in a purpose, or as an undifferentiated group.

What of the political subject? Most recent attempts in anthropology to theorize this subject have grown out of engagement with social movement theorists. Three of the most prominent—Alan Badiou, Giorgio Agamben, Ernesto Laclau—take surprisingly similar lines of analysis though each creates his own language to describe the coming together of a crowd. Badiou (2013: 182), departing from his earlier Maoist frames, proposes “unbinding” (*déliaison*) in “evental sites” as central to social bonds. He connects this unbinding to a mathematical or set-theoretical ontology that is non-denumerable and unrepresentable, fully disregarding the relational nature of being. Agamben (1993: 65) proposes “singularity without identity,” that is, singularity without being an instance of a particular identity as a condition of a “coming community.” Such philosophical reformulations are useful for utopian thinking but they do not take into account the actual demands for political identity made on actors, for example, in the ongoing dissolution of community in Iraq and Syria today. Laclau (2005: 41) proposes tension between “original particularity” and “representing an (absent) totality.” Like Agamben, Laclau moves quickly to abstractions that rename and serve as substitutes for the particularities of the subject and its relation to diverse Symbolic orders.



In this question of the subject, I prefer to take my initial cue from Heidegger's (1962) distinction between the ontic and ontological. For him, the "*Dingheit*" or thinghood of an ontic being—which for my purposes here would be the person who gathers in a mass—must be distinguished from *Dasein*, a being that is capable of ontology, that is, one who can recursively comprehend the properties of the very fact of its own Being. Put another way, the person capable of becoming a political subject is one who can perform a particular kind of symbolic transformation: to turn from part of a mass, or the longing for a mass, into being part of a crowd of a specific kind, a crowd with a political intent.

To become political means minimally to move out of the ontic to the ontological, out of the domain of what simply is to the intention to transform a mass into a crowd of a particular type. That conscious intention is always nonetheless shadowed by the unconscious, which contains an unarticulated imagination of thinghood, of longing for a non-differentiated, pre-political state. Crowds, this necessary intermediate form between mass and political subject, are therefore experienced as uncanny for containing appeals both to the atavistic longing for the unity of the group and to the conscious particularizing tendencies within groups. As in a ritual process, crowds are both expressions of Symbolic orders and potentially destabilizing of them. To become a political subject in and through a crowd is both to understand oneself as a particular human capable of self-transformation as well as of transforming others and to grasp that only by acknowledging and recursively comprehending the collective nature of being—including longing for the non-differentiated mass—can one become more fully human. This paradox is similar to what Kant (1963: 44) in his Fourth Proposition on Universal History dubbed the "unsocial sociability" of human nature.

Finally, how might this understanding of the relation of crowds to the "political subject" inform our account of the failed Syrian revolution? Participants in the Syrian uprising whom I knew widely envisioned a democratic subject that they expected would arise from the struggle to create and sustain a differentiated and pluralistic political field. They had in fact moved from the ontic to the ontological, joining crowds, reimagining and also often reshaping relations with intimates, friends, and political officials.

As a civil war overtook the uprising, however, a remaking of the political field by nondemocratic groups foreclosed the possibility of acting on these imaginations. A civil war is a chaotic political field, and in Syria outside forces with money and resources that had a stake in the outcome began very early in the uprising to co-opt and shape internal processes of collective self-definition. Some countries, led by Saudi Arabia and the United States, sent money and troops

to local allies to oppose the regime; other countries, led by Iran and later Russia, sent money and troops to support the regime. Mercenaries from sectarian groups such as Hezbollah in neighboring Lebanon and Iranian Revolutionary Guards also played a critical role in propping up the Assad regime. As a result of this external support for the regime, secular groups initially active in the early anti-regime opposition, and united around the “Free Syrian Army,” found themselves lacking the resources for a long fight. Secular ideological commitments proved also difficult to sustain in the face of the more firm commitments of Islamist groups opposed to the regime, who soon proliferated. Neither type of opposition recruited anymore from crowds. The Islamist groups of various stripes—working sometimes regionally, sometimes nationally, sometimes together, sometimes alone or in opposition to others—demanded of civilians complete obedience and engaged in increasingly violent action in this shifting political field of civil war; many imagined an alternative authoritarian order based on Sharia law and began enforcing this order in areas under their control. It is no wonder, then, that faced with this literal anarchy of fight-to-the-death struggle between regime and opposition, within a year of the uprising’s start, many civilians and conscripts in the Syrian Armed Forces began to flee Syria to neighboring countries, and many noncommitted residents sought protection from Assad’s army.

This explanation differs from our understanding of the relation of crowds to reform-minded social movements. Social movements want merely to change the political field; revolutionary movements want to turn the political field upside down. That difference may be crucial to both the appeal of some contemporary movements and their failure or success. With more at stake, revolutions tend to radicalize both opponents of change and those who want to sustain the status quo, and this radicality of stakes attracts outside actors to join the fray. Loyalty and obedience become more critical to a revolutionary struggle over time than the imagination and freedom of local actors, the key motivations for the initial uprising. The more limited goals of social movements, in contrast to revolutionary goals, make it more possible to incorporate different goals into enduring political structures.

To summarize my major arguments to this point:

1. Swarming is an unconscious appeal to sociality, but it can be made conscious and utilized as a political tactic. To understand how affective communication, like swarming, is an every-present potential, more attention must be paid to how affect (unconscious feeling) can trump cognition (identification with a category) (Borneman and Senders 2000; Parkin-Gounelas, ed. 2012).

2. Collectives take shape in a temporal process that appeals to both maternal and paternal registers, both horizontal and vertical registers, which assume different balances and functions over time.
3. The maternal function—the recovery of an imaginary unity, desire for a return to wholeness or dissolution into a mass—is omnipresent in the formation of crowds, but unarticulated.
4. Identification with the leader or father figure is not essential to create the crowd as a group with political intent, but it is often crucial to make this crowd politically efficacious. One of the major reasons that democratically oriented crowds have been of limited efficacy in Syria is because, unlike their more authoritarian competitors, the different sects and interest groups allied with democratic interests refused to identify and submit to a single father figure or commit to a common vision of order.

### The political field and the political subject

Crowds in Syria in 2011 partook in a struggle to undo the political field. They massed in towns and city centers and relied on new social technology to befriend strangers and to create new networks beyond their kinship ties for political purposes. Crowds were essential to undoing the political field, but this undoing has not eliminated the authoritarian field defended by Bashar al-Assad and the ruling Ba'ath Party. The new political field, in turn, no longer resembles what the early revolutionary crowds envisioned. It is as of this writing a political field of civil war, still dominated by Assad but also filled with competing authoritarian groups and small remnants of the early democratic movement motivated to continue fighting. Civil war has undone the potential for a Syrian democratic subject by forcing those so motivated to seek refuge abroad. Most are unlikely to return. The specter of failed democratic revolution is perhaps the greatest legacy of the 2011 Syrian crowds. Although the Assad regime is the major instigator and object of the war, it also—like the participants in the early protesting crowds—is not in control of the civil war, which would continue in some form even if (or when) Assad stepped aside. Of the 23 million permanent inhabitants of Syria before the war, nearly half have been displaced, driven into exile, or killed—desubjectivized, denied any ontological continuity. Moreover, a quarter of the children in exile are fatherless, which means that if they return to Syria they have no claim to citizenship (which is granted only through the father).

The wars in Iraq and Syria have led to a dissolution of state borders between them. This points to the end of the 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement, which divided and distributed the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire to England and France (with the assent of Russia), creating “Syria” and “Iraq” as territorially discrete countries. This dissolution has opened the space for competition between religiously extreme groups, such as ISIS (the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria), which at one time conquered one-fourth of Iraq and much of the north of Syria. ISIS’s promise of a new Caliphate is likely to fail, but it has nonetheless succeeded in propagating a new vision of a pan-Arab political subject that unites around Islam. Its initial territorial victories were dependent on the failure of democratic revolution, but its future victories are likely to be in the domain of the imagination.

That the Islamic State seeks to reach its goals through terror is one of the causes of the current refugee wave. Its policies of terror do not negate its appeal, which is to present itself in this chaos as a “transformative object.” Such an object offers an existential experience in which internal and external environments are transformed. One seeks a relation with such objects not to control or master them but to have an experience that promises to radically alter the self. ISIS offers a vision of return to mythic time, inspired by the time of the Caliphate in the eighth and ninth centuries. Mythic time is not subject to any reality testing; it is a dreamscape imagined as one of purity and pleasure. For followers, the idea of an Islamic state entails not domination but submission, including through death and martyrdom. Submission to ISIS promises to transform them and their environment, to give them a reason to live and a reason to die. ISIS enables this transformation by creating a new political field, imagined as one no longer marked by the disunity and the indignities that Muslims have experienced since the end of the mythical Caliphate.

There are of course other competing visions for this field, but none (at present) so powerful as that of ISIS. The many radical (religious) competitors to ISIS also compete on its terrain of terror and religion but with less mythical appeal and less generalizable visions. The current Syrian government has no vision other than to stay in power. Bashar al-Assad cynically presents himself as the Syrian Sovereign who will redo the social, restore its illusion of unity, and guarantee the order of the masses, an order in the maternal register, undifferentiated, without crowds, without democratic political subjects. For most Syrians, Assad’s vision is both a promise of peace and an inner object of dread—authoritarian, angry, resigned, intolerant, and cruel—too grotesque, too frightening to think. What Assad’s vision actually portends is not a future

but a return to the recent past, to the fighting among male heirs for leadership that marked the pre-Assad family rule.

What of the vision identified with social democracies of postwar Western Europe, constructed around the idea of the Enlightenment subject—free, secular, tolerant? It is, regrettably, mirrored nowhere in Syria today. Most of its articulate proponents were forced into exile even before the 2011 uprising. It would present a challenge both to Assad's government and to the various opposition groups like ISIS if there were a military that backed it up, but there is not. The democratic vision, one should emphasize, has been integral to the imagination of Syrian subjects for nearly a century; even the political field in Syria has afforded few opportunities to citizens to actualize it.

The exodus of Syrian citizens to new places enlarges the territory and imagination of the Syrian political field while dispersing the possibilities to become a political subject. Statelessness is hardly conducive to agency of any sort. Millions have already risked the flight to Europe and the West to find legal security, nurturance, and care. Millions of others are stuck in refugee camps in Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey, where the experience of arbitrariness and uncertainty augments the desubjectivization begun while living in the maelstrom of war within Syria.

By the summer of 2015, of all the European countries considered destinations for flight, Germany had become the preferred country—geographical place, society, and state—safe and stable enough to promise a future. The hundreds of thousands of refugees who arrived in Germany in 2015 found an initially warm welcome. Upon arrival many held up a photo of Chancellor Angela Merkel. The chancellor criticized for her coldness and lack of vision during the Greek debt crisis negotiations had made the unpredictably bold decision to suspend legal protocols and let the masses approaching German borders in. German society responded in kind with massive volunteer support. This action surprised—and pleased—me, also, and my German friends. We were deeply moved. It was spontaneous, unsolicited, not a result of opinion polling, not a marketing device. I would think it was largely unconsciously motivated. What Syrians flee is a crisis in paternal authority, and what they seek above all is an economic future. What they see in Merkel, I suspect, is someone who promises a holding environment and can assume the paternal function, now radically redefined for Germany and Europe as a whole. In this very unexpected turn of events, Germany offers for many Syrians the political field that Syria would be if turned upside down: democratic, free from persecution, with rights, and a vision to live in peace.

# The Disappearance of the Crowd and the Rise of Dissent in Thailand

Tyrell Haberkorn

## Immanent analysis of protest under a coup regime

On May 22, 2014, led by General Prayuth Chan-ocha, a junta calling itself the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) carried out the twelfth successful coup in Thailand since the end of the absolute monarchy on June 24, 1932.<sup>1</sup> The May 22, 2014, coup was immediately preceded by six months of extended street protests and a roving occupation of key parts of Bangkok by a network of groups that called itself the People's Democratic Reform Committee (PDRC), yet was neither democratic nor of the people. The PDRC opposed the elected government of Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra and instead desired a more authoritarian government led by unnamed "good people." The leaders of the PDRC claimed to engage in civil disobedience and to speak for the "great mass of the people" (*muan mahachon*), but they more accurately represented an increasingly violent protest composed of an elite few. The PDRC worked to generate sustained chaos that would topple Prime Minister Yingluck's government and create the conditions for a coup. Reading Hannah Arendt's writings on totalitarianism in light of the PDRC protests, historian Nidhi Eosewong warned that they were creating the conditions for repression in excess of their stated desires.<sup>2</sup> He was correct.

Rather than only a regime in which their opponents were removed from politics, or participation in the imagination, debate, and rule of the polity, the only figures who participate in politics without risking arrest and imprisonment are those clad in military khaki and green. The coup by the NCPO inaugurated a dictatorship that employs tactics revived from the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s as well as those that mark a new era of repression. In the remainder of this essay,

I examine the founding protests organized by the New Democracy Movement (*Prachathipatai Mai*, NDM) and the arrests that followed as an instance of what Judith Butler, following Hannah Arendt, calls “the right to appear, and to claim to be part of the people of the nation in public space” (1966: 153–154). I joined the solidarity movement surrounding the arrest of the NDM members as a scholar-activist who writes about the history of state violence and has been at the fringes of struggles for social justice in Thailand for the last twenty years. I draw on that experience to trace the series of events leading to the release of the NDM activists. Despite the possible consequences of arrest, detention, and prosecution for coming together to form crowds in public, activists continue to do so. At moments when the number of those massed remains small and contained, the expected arrests have followed. But even the most repressive and arbitrary junta orders and legal instruments, it seems, may bend under the possibility of the expansion of protests and the development of a crowd. What might be called the tipping point, the magic number of people needed for the authorities to allow a crowd massed in public to remain, cannot be discerned. Instead, the power of the crowd as a formation of protest seems to be its unknown potential to grow in number or frequency and, in so doing, demonstrate a form of politics both against and in defiance of the regime. Throughout, I am also concerned with what it means to write an immanent analysis of protest against dictatorship during a time when the dictatorship remains in power. Unlike most of my research, which is oriented toward understanding the changes and continuities between the recent past and present, this essay is instead about the incomplete relationship between the present and a possible future. The temporal unboundedness of this essay means that it is impossible to gauge the success or failure of the NDM protests or the broader movement of which they are a part, but it is also an invitation to contribute to the imagination of opposition.

### The emergence of the NDM

I begin with the strictures placed on public assembly, let alone protest, by the NCPO, to highlight the very significance of the existence of the NDM. Suppression of political freedom is central, rather than incidental, to the NCPO’s rule. Martial law was declared two days prior to the coup and it remained in force until April 1, 2015. At that time, it was replaced by the use of Article 44 of the 2014 Interim Constitution, which provides the junta with the power to take any action deemed necessary to preserve order and then makes it de facto

legal.<sup>3</sup> The military placed itself in control of the executive, the legislature, and the judiciary.

There are significant restrictions on freedom of speech; these restrictions are delineated and maintained through both extensive use of the law and ongoing threats and intimidation of students, resource rights activists, journalists, and others who criticize the institution of the monarchy, collaboration between the military and capital, or the coup regime itself. If the number of court cases can be read as an indicator of the regime's concern, the form of political expression that most concerns the NCPO is neither criticism of the monarchy nor the junta but the occupation of public space itself. The NCPO aims to prevent precisely the kind of protest successfully used by the PDRC to create the conditions for regime change. Two junta legal instruments, NCPO Announcement No. 7/2557, announced on the day of the coup, and Head of the NCPO Order No. 3/2558, which replaced it a year later, criminalize any public gathering of five or more persons and make them punishable by imprisonment, a fine, or both.<sup>4</sup> Between the coup and the end of 2016, at least 254 individuals were charged with violation of these instruments.<sup>5</sup>

For the first three days following the coup, citizens poured out into the streets of Bangkok to protest with little concern of being arrested. After the prior coup, on September 19, 2006, there was a swift transition to a nominally civilian government and there were no prohibitions on protests or public discussions. Protests against the coup and calls for a return to democracy began immediately and continued until the emergence of the red shirt movement, which included supporters of former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, ousted in the coup, as well as a heterogeneous group of others, including radical democrats. Protests continued intermittently and the movement grew until elections were held in July 2011.<sup>6</sup> But after the May 22, 2014 coup, police and soldiers began very quickly to arrest those who protested in large groups as being in violation of the prohibition on public gatherings of five or more persons. The forms of protest therefore had to change from large gatherings in usual locations of protest in the commercial and tourist areas of the city into forms of protest that eluded or confounded the authorities. The new protests were carried out by ad hoc groups of students, human rights activists, and citizens, including groups of aunties.<sup>7</sup> They used symbolic actions—reading *1984* in public, performing the three-finger *Hunger Games* salute in public, and eating sandwiches—to protest the illegitimacy of the coup.<sup>8</sup> In nearly every instance, the authorities responded by pulling the individuals engaged in these protests off the streets, but most were not charged with violation of the law.



During the first few months after the coup, I met observers outside Thailand who lamented the lack of a broad-based movement against the regime visible in the streets, but my response was always to wait and give it time. The lack of crowds in the streets was a combination of the fear of likely arrest and the ongoing overt support for the regime whose existence was indicated by the PDRC protests that preceded the coup. By the one-year anniversary of the coup, the protests transformed from diffuse and symbolic protests comprised of small groups of individuals into a new collectivity that went beyond calling the legitimacy of the coup regime into question to demanding an end to dictatorship and a return to democracy. These protests were led by the group of students and youth who formally established the NDM on June 24, 2015, the eighty-third anniversary of the end of absolute monarchy. This day is celebrated annually both in order to honor democracy and, also, given that the monarchy remains an anti-democratic influence in politics, to call for a greater fulfillment of democracy. The NDM's platform is organized around the five broad principles of democracy, human rights, justice, public participation, and nonviolence, and remains fluid. During their first year of existence, which coincided with the junta's second year of rule, the NDM held public seminars that pushed the boundaries of what can be said in public, organized a commemoration of the two-year anniversary of the coup, led solidarity campaigns for political prisoners, and campaigned around a draft constitution. The NCPO allowed most of the events to take place, albeit with unease and a heavy surveillance presence.<sup>9</sup>

But there was a striking instance in which the NCPO put an abrupt end to the NDM's initial activities. Activists who participated in a protest marking the beginning of the NDM in June 2015 were quickly arrested and charged in military court. The military court remanded all fourteen arrested activists for an initial period of twelve days of detention. Had the activists requested bail, the response of the military court in other cases indicates that it is likely that it would have been granted. But all fourteen refused to do so. They did so on the basis that their protests were an exercise of their fundamental rights and not in violation of the law. This claim was at once in opposition to the junta and aspirational in its imagination of a different definition of the people. Even though the protestors were small in number, the junta could not abide their sheer presence on the streets because they signaled the possibility of the occupation of the streets, and the polity, by a much larger group.

The NDM activists were only held for one period of detention before the military court decided to release them. They were released because their detention prompted forays into protest by other groups. If the NDM activists

were not released, an even larger number of people might venture into the streets—better to release them. The criminal accusations remained, but the activists were no longer behind bars. I now turn to this initial NDM protest and the futures it may make possible in order to trace the NDM's reimagination of society in defiance of the NCPO and the concomitant precision of the NCPO's intolerance for the crowd.

## Into the streets in 2015

Refusing the authority of the laws against protest, student activists in Bangkok and Khon Kaen, a provincial city in northeastern Thailand, held protests on the first anniversary of the coup, May 22, 2015. They were all swiftly dragged away and arrested by the police but released on the same day and ordered to report themselves to the police in June. On June 24, 2015, fourteen students attempted to go to the appointed police station in Bangkok but not to report themselves in relation to their arrests the prior month. Instead, they intended to file a complaint of police brutality in relation to these arrests. Ongoing surveillance by the regime of social media, where the planned event was announced, meant that the police knew they were coming. The police blocked off the station and would not allow the students, journalists, and others to enter. The fourteen students held a press conference outside the station and announced the formation of the NDM. They and several hundred supporters massed outside the police station for several hours, making speeches and singing. Many expected the police to quash the protest and arrest everyone present, or at least the organizers, but the police remained on the sidelines. As darkness began to fall, the crowd dispersed. The members of the fledgling NDM went to Suan Ngun Mi Ma, an activist gathering space in Thonburi, across the Chao Phraya River from the commercial and tourist areas of the city, to continue discussions and sleep. The authorities knew where they were staying and intelligence officials were nearby, but the night passed without arrests.

Late afternoon on the next day, June 25, 2015, NDM members and their supporters crossed the Chao Phraya River and made a small circuit around politically significant locations close to Thammasat University, the site of both the birth of a student and people's movement against dictatorship on October 14, 1973, and then a brutal repression of student activists on October 6, 1976. The students' first stop was the memorial sculpture garden to the October 6, 1976 massacre on the Thammasat campus, and then they marched a short

distance down Ratchadamnoen Avenue to a monument to the October 14, 1973 movement, before concluding at the Democracy Monument, an oddly difficult-to-access monument in the middle of a six-lane traffic circle on Ratchadamnoen Avenue. At each stop along the way, they spoke briefly about the NDM and chatted with onlookers. Although there were intelligence officers present, by 7:00 p.m., the NDM members had boarded a public bus to go back to Suan Ngun Mi Ma for the evening without any arrests taking place.

The authorities did not wait to see what the fledgling NDM might do, where they might go, or whom they might talk to on the third day. Around 5:00 p.m. on the afternoon of June 26, 2015, over fifty military and police officials went to Suan Ngun Mi Ma and arrested the fourteen students. The students were first taken to a local police station to be accused of violating Head of the NCPO Order No. 3/2558 by assembling in a group of five or more persons and Article 116 of the Criminal Code, or sedition, a vague charge used against a range of those who criticize the junta. In the late evening, they were then taken to the Bangkok Military Court for an order for their remand to be issued. Although the arrest of the students just after the end of the workday on a Friday was clearly designed to impair their ability to access legal counsel, this had no effect and lawyers from Thai Lawyers for Human Rights, an organization established during the first few days after the coup to defend those targeted by the junta, were present throughout the proceedings.<sup>10</sup> Just after midnight, the court ordered the students to be remanded for twelve days while an investigation was carried out into their crimes. All fourteen maintained that their actions were not crimes and refused to request bail. They asserted that they merely exercised their rights to freedom of expression and freedom of assembly, rights that are given in a democracy. In insisting that they possessed these rights, it may seem as though the NDM failed to notice that they were living in a dictatorship rather than a democracy. But their actions, and willingness to go to prison, were a claim to the very missing democracy that circumscribed their actions.

Under the NCPO, prison, and even the sheer possibility of confinement, “remains the limit case of the public sphere, marking the power of the state to control who can pass into the public and who must pass out of it” (Butler 2015: 173). Protests since May 22, 2014, are powerful because each person who chooses to protest risks prison. Sometimes spoken, sometimes joked about, sometimes left unsaid, this risk is always present when public protests take place. The military court judges did not agree with the NDM’s assessment that their actions were not crimes. Between midnight on 26 and dawn on 27, thirteen men were sent to the Bangkok Remand Prison and one woman was sent to the

Central Women's Prison. Both prisons are located within the same complex on the northern edge of Bangkok filled with a range of prisons and detention centers for different categories and ages of detainees, canals, straggly bushes, and only a few trees to interrupt the blazing sun.

Rather than suppressing dissent, however, the remand of the students had the opposite effect. By Monday morning, groups of faculty from universities across Bangkok and the surrounding provinces began to visit the detained students. Prior to the coup, anyone with a Thai citizen identification card or a passport could visit any prisoner as long as s/he was willing to wait in a long queue of visitors. Following the coup, the Department of Corrections instituted a rule that each prisoner could only be visited by a list of ten individuals s/he specified in advance. Faced with the rounds of academics, and then as the twelve days of remand ticked by, other groups of concerned citizens, the prison wardens elected not to enforce this rule. The prison visits were complemented by a flash protest at a BTS Skytrain station in which participants wrote messages of solidarity with the students on post-it notes and attached them to the station walls. The protest took place in a crowded station at evening rush hour, which made it easy for the participants to quickly leave the area and difficult for the authorities to distinguish between participants and commuters on their way home from work.

The culmination of the protests calling for the students' release, which posed risks first for the participants and then, it seems, for state officials, came on the late afternoon of July 7, 2015, the eve of the students' appearance before the military court for their second remand hearing. For the first time since the initial days following the coup, several hundred people assembled on the Thammasat University campus. I went with a group of activist friends and felt nervous at first. This was the first protest I went to after the coup—partially because I was worried about the risk that my own visibility as a foreigner would increase the possibility of being arrested and partially because I did not want to subject my friends and colleagues to that risk. But my fear soon evaporated in the atmosphere of the protest, which felt like a festival. Several hundred student activists, progressive academics, journalists, lawyers, human rights activists, and other interested people mingled and listened to music performances and speeches calling for the release of the fourteen activists. The events were clustered around the memorial sculpture garden to the October 6, 1976 massacre, one of the sites visited by the NDM less than two weeks prior. There were no uniformed police or military present, although members of various intelligence units were visible with their T-shirts advertising gun brands, ironed jeans, severe haircuts, and ostentatious photographing of everyone present.

The rainy season was well underway in July, and as dusk turned into night, it began to pour. Everyone present ran quickly for the cover of the overhang provided by the Faculty of Law, which adjoins the memorial sculpture garden. As soon as the audio equipment was up and running again, the speeches and music continued. Every conversation I had that evening centered on the same two topics: why we were being allowed to hold the protest and what would happen at the hearing the next morning. The police could have arrested everyone present since there were many more than five people present. Or they could have simply cut off the electricity to that part of the university campus, which they had chosen to do previously in order to prevent lectures and seminars on various topics. The atmosphere and sheer number of people massed together who were critical of the arrest of the NDM activists and the military regime in general made it feel, almost, for a moment, as though the clock had been turned back to the relatively open period prior to the coup when anyone could go out into the streets to protest. There were no guarantees that there would not be vigilante counter-protestors or that state officials would always respond justly to all protestors, but the streets themselves could be occupied without a baseline fear of being imprisoned for violating the law for doing so. The present came back forcefully that evening at Thammasat every time conversation turned to the possibility that the students' detention could be renewed for another twelve days. There was no confidence that they would be released, and we talked about what kinds of actions and campaigns could be sustained through the next twelve days of detention if they were not released. As the night wore on, and rain intermittently fell, the crowd of supporters of the students and the intelligence officers all drifted home. We went home without daring to conclude what would happen the next morning. To assume that the students would be remanded for another twelve days was to adopt too hopeless a stance. But to be confident of their release seemed foolhardy.

The next morning, the military court was fully blocked off so that supporters of the students could not enter the complex and instead stood under the blazing July sun outside the Ministry of Defense. The students stood firm in their refusal to request bail, but the surprise came when the investigating officers declined to request their further remand. The military court judges ordered the students to be released the next day. The release came as a surprise to many, myself included, because we assumed that the initial remand of the students reflected a willingness by the NCPO to take repressive action against its critics. The NCPO could have facilitated the release of the students at any time during the twelve-day remand period, but they did not. During the days following the students'

release, activists (and myself) reached a consensus about why the students were released and why the protest the night before their second remand hearing had been permitted. The most likely reason was because the NCPO feared that if the students were kept behind bars, more and more people would go out into the streets. The released students, as well as some of those who led the support campaigns for them, were visited and questioned by military officials over the coming weeks and months. The regime felt comfortable in harassing and intimidating people in private but remained unwilling, and perhaps afraid, to take any action, which might again push citizens out into the streets or onto the university campuses. If, as Butler (2015: 185) notes, “every claim we make to the public sphere is haunted by the prison, and anticipates the prison,” then every instance of imprisonment in coup-era Thailand may perhaps be haunted by a further possible claim to the public sphere.

## Toward the future

As if unaware of the symbolism of the day, the authorities once again arrested a group of NDM activists on June 24, 2016, the eighty-fourth anniversary of the end of the absolute monarchy. During the intervening year, NDM carried out a series of protests and seminars and published a regular newsletter, *To Overcome (Kao Kham)*.<sup>11</sup> Although several of their activities during the year led to arrests, in many cases, remand was not requested by the authorities and the activists always chose to request bail in the cases in which it was possible. The authorities obliged, perhaps wishing to avoid a repeat of the swift expansion of protests during the twelve days during which NDM activists were remanded in June 2015. But both the remand of activists and another expansion of protests became unavoidable in June 2016.

When the NCPO launched the coup on May 22, 2014, they also abrogated the existing constitution, put a short interim constitution into place, and began the process of drafting a new constitution. The first Constitution Drafting Committee (CDC) produced a draft in early 2015, which was not to their satisfaction, and so a second CDC was appointed that produced a draft viewed by the NCPO as viable in April 2016.<sup>12</sup> Notably, both CDCs were comprised entirely of members appointed solely by the NCPO. This means that the people—those who would have to live under the constitution—did not have any input into its contents. The NCPO dealt with criticism of the drafting process by arguing that the people would have a chance to express their opinion about the draft by voting

on it in a referendum in August 2016; however, a Referendum Act passed by the NCPO-appointed National Legislative Assembly prohibited anyone other than the CDC or others designated by the NCPO from circulating information about the draft constitution. For example, seminars on the constitution organized by law or political science professors, workshops organized by nongovernmental organizations, and dissemination of information by previously active political parties to their membership were forbidden. Violation of the Referendum Act carried a possible punishment of up to ten years in prison.

The NDM activists' view was that the draft constitution was fundamentally dangerous to the possibility of future democracy in the polity and they were uninterested in the possible punishment.<sup>13</sup> They produced a two-sided one-page flyer with a summary of the lengthy constitution and its concrete implications and, on June 24, 2016, went with a group of women workers' rights activists to distribute the flyers in a market near an industrial estate. The authorities allowed them to do so for several minutes and then arrested thirteen activists. They were taken to the local police station and then transferred to the Bangkok Military Court for a remand hearing. News and video clips of the brief protests, their swift dispersal, and the transfer of the activists to custody immediately circulated via the social media accounts of the NDM and various journalists who were present. Six activists decided to request bail, which was granted by the court, but seven—all male student activists with the NDM—decided not to do so and were immediately sent to the Bangkok Remand Prison for twelve days of detention.

Initially, the atmosphere following the arrests felt very different from the previous year. Instead of hundreds of people visiting the detained activists, visitors only numbered in the tens. After the first day, during which the prison authorities allowed all of the academics and activists who came to visit the activists to do so, including one foreign person (me), they decided to enforce the ten-person rule. Although small actions were held on university campuses across the country calling for the release of the seven NDM activists, they were not on the scale of the previous year's actions. As the end of the first remand period began to draw near, many were concerned that the relative lack of public protest meant that the students would likely be held for another period of twelve days. As one colleague commented, the possible punishment of ten years' imprisonment under the Referendum Act, as opposed to the six months for public assembly, may have been one of the factors. If one called for the release of those who had violated the Referendum Act, might one also be accused of violating it?

But another event at Thammasat University two days before the hearing again seemed decisive. The hearing was scheduled for July 4, 2016, a Tuesday, and the event was held on a Sunday afternoon so that more people could attend. This time, anticipating possible rain, activists reserved a large auditorium on the campus. Several hundred people gathered for an afternoon of impassioned speeches by other NDM activists (including those who were granted bail) calling for the release of their friends, political songs, and other critiques of the regime and appeals to justice. NDM T-shirts, leftist books, and other progressive political kitsch were sold outside the doors to the auditorium. Once again, although many intelligence officials were present, there was not a large presence of uniformed or armed officials and the electricity remained on for the entire event. The program inside the auditorium ended shortly after sunset, and everyone walked outside. We were given pale purple balloons to release into the air. If we turned right, then we would walk off the campus and across the street to Sanam Luang, a big grassy circle, and if we turned left, we would reach the edge of the campus that borders the Chao Phraya River. News came that there were phalanxes of police massed on Sanam Luang, and so we turned left and walked to the edge of the campus next to the river. After another brief speech calling for the release of the imprisoned activists, everyone released their balloons at the same time and the reflections of the lights, balloons and river were quietly beautiful. Similar to the year prior, everyone then drifted away back to their lives. A friend and I caught a ferry across the river to eat rice porridge and muse on why the protest event was allowed to take place without arrests and what would happen at the remand hearing. The outcome seemed even less certain than a year before.

But again, the NCPO seemed unwilling to risk the expansion of protests. On the morning of July 4, 2016, the military court ruled that the students should be released while the investigation continued instead of holding them for another period of remand. All thirteen activists, along with another 194 people, have been charged and face criminal prosecution for allegedly violating the Referendum Act for speaking in public about the draft, sending analysis about the draft via mail, and other forms of dissemination of information about the draft deemed to be criminal. A little over a month after the release of the NDM activists, the draft constitution was passed in the referendum on August 7, 2016. Although there were no reports of overt tampering with the voting process, the prohibition on anyone other than the CDC or other NCPO appointees from distributing information or publicly discussing the draft means that it is difficult to assess the referendum as anything other than unfree.



At the beginning of 2017, as the third anniversary of the May 22, 2014 coup approaches, the visible opposition to the regime remains faint. The NDM and other small groups continue their opposition, but ongoing harassment and intimidation, and the threat of imprisonment and other forms of violent sanction, function to limit their growth. But if the specter of suppression limits opposition, so too does the specter of the emergence of an oppositional crowd suggest the NCPO's possible future downfall. Despite the NCPO's attempts to disappear the crowd, and even the possibility of the crowd, through the criminalization of public assembly, they have been unable to do so. Instead, latent potential crowds await the contingent moment(s) of their emergence. A crowd or crowds may be called forth by continued overt repression, the emergence of frustration with the local effects of NCPO policies, or another as-yet-unknown reason. It is impossible to predict if and how the regime of the NCPO will fall, but this is one clear possible fault line. As the moment approaches, or in preparation for it, documenting and considering the crowd's potential can change how we understand assembly, dictatorship, regime change, and the multiple forms of politics animating dissent in a repressive polity.

# Spectacles of Piety: Prayer and the Politics of Mass Arousal in Democratic Nigeria

Ebenezer Obadare

## Preamble: Praying against enemies of state in Ekiti

In December 2015, a few days before the Christmas holidays, Governor Peter Ayodele Fayose of Ekiti State hosted a prayer session on the grounds of the state's government house. It was a difficult time in Ekiti, consistently ranked by commentators as one of Nigeria's most politically turbulent states. It was also Fayose's second tenure as governor. He took the reins from Dr. Kayode Fayemi in May 2015 after decrying the latter's purported elitism and promising the state's civil servants a return to the ostensibly happy era of his first tenure from May 2003 to October 2006 when, he boasted, salaries were paid as and when due.

But December 2015 saw Fayose clearly struggling to deliver on his campaign promises. For instance, by the time he convened the prayer session in question, civil servants in the state had not been paid their salaries for three months. It was not entirely the governor's fault, of course. As the global price of oil cascaded, Nigeria, reliant on oil revenue to a sickening degree, was taking in considerably less cash, which meant that the federal government's capacity to disburse funds to the state was hampered, which also meant that the state of Ekiti had no "allocation" from which it could discharge its own obligations. Ekiti's situation was therefore not unlike that of other states across the country, and what the

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governor did—paying the workers a percentage of their basic pay as “Christmas bonus”—was in fact what majority of the cash-strapped state governors had done. Still, critics of the state governor charged that the convocation of a special prayer session within the premises of the government house at that point in time was nothing but a ruse by the governor to distract attention from the state’s economic problems, particularly the state’s inability to pay its workers’ salaries.

Whether the critics were right or not, a mere look at the cross section of dignitaries at the special prayer session suffices to confirm that the governor intended at least to have many of the state’s most prominent citizens at his side. Among those in attendance were the state’s deputy governor, Dr. Kolapo Olusola; the First Lady, Mrs. Feyisetan Fayose; the wife of the deputy governor, Mrs. Janet Olusola; Secretary to the State Government, Dr. Mrs. Modupe Alade; Chief of Staff to the governor, Barrister Dipo Anisulowo; and Special Adviser to the governor on political matters, Alhaji Ademola Bello. But this being no ordinary prayer session, there were also in attendance high-ranking naval officers, all suited up in their official navy uniforms, police officers, a cross section of some of the leading clerics in the state, several prominent politicians, and ordinary citizens.

The capstone of the event was the special prayer for the state and against its “enemies.” Given the situation in the state, there were only a few surprised glances when a clearly emotional Governor Fayose, clad in all white *buba* and *sokoto*, went down on his knees in the middle of the yard, his right hand clenched, the left holding on tightly to the voice microphone. This was his favored “prayer warrior” pose, and as he inveighed against the state’s “detractors” and invited “God’s judgment” on them, the crowd, numbering in hundreds, followed his cue. There was a collective charge even as individual supplicants embraced their idiosyncratic poses—some stamped on the ground insistently, some raised both hands, a few (like the governor) sank to their knees, while others spoke passionately in tongues. In short order, a strident clamor of supplication tore the solemn air of the government house premises.

Spectacles like this have become very common since Nigeria returned to civil rule in May 1999, a period that coincided with the explosion of Pentecostal Christianity in the country. One legitimate way to view such spectacles is as ordinary proof of the manner in which Pentecostal forms have become rapidly insinuated into official ceremonies all over the country. For instance, the modality of the Ekiti special prayer session—its orgiastic emotionality and sensationality—is a recognized fixture of African Pentecostal devotional performance. So, also, is the event itself: the resort to prayer emerging here as an expression of Pentecostal belief in the power and efficacy of prayer.

What do these religious ceremonies—which I describe in this chapter as spectacles of piety—typically convoked at the instance of leading public officials, signify? How do such ceremonies advance our understanding of what I call religious politicality, meaning the ways in which those occupying formal political office manipulate religious symbols and performances for political purposes? What insights into the religiopolitical economy do they afford? Who is the audience for these spectacles? What implied and unwitting ideological effects do these spectacles have on that audience? Finally, what can we learn from these spectacles about crowds and about this animated but ultimately rather peaceable crowd in particular? In what follows, I will try to pursue these questions, using the Ekiti prayer session as my immediate empirical material, but also, where necessary, drawing on similar examples from contemporary Nigeria.

### Contending trajectories

These spectacles are undeniably freighted with political and symbolic meaning. For instance, the image of “a whole governor” (as the Nigerian expression goes) kneeling down in public can be seen as a demonstration of calculated humility, ostentatiously staged to curry acceptance in a social context in which humility, especially by highly placed public officials and the “powerful” in general, is seen as a virtue. In going down on his knees, Governor Fayose was merely following the path of ostentatious humility well trodden by other state dignitaries, most notably former president Goodluck Jonathan, who, on at least two occasions in 2012 and 2015 respectively, publicly knelt down for prayers before the General Overseer of the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), Pastor Enoch Adejare Adeboye. It goes without saying that insofar as ostentatious humility<sup>1</sup>—what Jean-Pascal Daloz (2006) describes as “conspicuous modesty”—is inspired by the performer’s need for acceptance by the public; it must be linked to their designs on political survival. For instance, President Jonathan’s diligent, if unpolished, courting of Pastor Adeboye, and indeed the cream of the Pentecostal elite throughout his tenure, has to be seen as part of his determination to leverage the latter’s enhanced social status and control over large congregations.

No less analytically fruitful is the space in which these spectacles are hosted, considering that it is almost impossible to contemplate global Pentecostalism as an “aesthetic experience” (Largier 2009) or indeed its entire presentation as a “sensorium” (Meyer 2012) without thinking about space. Olufunke Adeboye’s work on the conversion of cinema halls in urban centers across Nigeria into

spaces of worship highlights “how Pentecostals ventured out of conventional church halls into general open grounds, and their appropriation of spaces hitherto demonized as ‘abode(s) of sin for worship’” (2012: 146). For her, “Pentecostals need to register their presence publicly and symbolically possess such public sites for Christ as a way of publicly asserting their identity” (156). While I think she is correct, it is equally plausible that common logistics and economic calculations (the crowd for the average open-air crusade is usually tremendous, often numbering in the hundreds of thousands) rather than a simple desire to sanctify or “symbolically possess” account for the fact that an increasing number of Pentecostal mega events tend to take place in “demonized spaces” like sport stadia.

At any rate, given the symbolic interest in sanctification, the hosting of a blatantly Pentecostal ceremony within the premises of a government house must feel like mission accomplished for Pentecostals who believe that the physical space of the government house is in fact one in special need of cleansing. This belief is intelligible in a cultural paradigm in which not only are power and politicians seen as innately amoral, government houses in particular are associated in the public mind with shady deals, oaths, cultic ceremonies, and all sorts of dark rituals. In addition, a Pentecostal ceremony convened by the symbolic “father of the state” himself must be especially gratifying for Pentecostals, who may rightly point to the governor as a unique “capture,” a “symbolic possession” no longer available to both the denominational and nondenominational competition.

When spectacles of piety are convoked elsewhere—in a stadium, say—the associations can be more poignant, perhaps because the visual backdrop is usually strikingly different. No matter the dark monsters supposedly lurking in state houses and government offices, at least they (the state houses, not the monsters) are easy on the (naked, not spiritual) eye, what with their carefully manicured lawns, freshly painted walls, and an unmistakable air of wealth and good living. One can hardly say the same about most soccer stadia in Nigeria, many of which, in their gross dereliction and utter neglect, afford a different sort of testimony to the failings of Nigerian politics and politicians. For example, on February 15, 2013, Emmanuel Uduaghan, governor of Delta State at the time, convened and led a two-day “prayer retreat” at the Stephen Keshi stadium in Asaba, the state capital. An estimated 30,000 citizens of the state filled the stadium for an event that promised the “Power to Recover All.” Unwittingly, photographs of the event tell the story of an uncompleted stadium, the victim of a contract wrangling. The governor did not miss the opportunity to ask for prayer against “the spiritual inhibition stalling the progress of the project.”

Nevertheless, whether held in a swanky official residence or a dilapidated stadium, such prayer sessions are wonderful avenues for an elaboration of what Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift in their work on the affective machinery describe as “affective proximity” or “momentary neural binding” between state officials and the electorate (2013: 15, 168). This happens as, even if only for a fleeting moment, both the governor and the governed occupy the same physical space, join hands in prayer, press flesh, and find temporary unity in a “relation of conviviality” (Mbembe 1992: 24). Yet, even as voices are raised in prayer, furtive glances and complimentary cards are exchanged between social agents eager to “connect,” placing such events firmly within the currents of Nigeria’s omnipresent patron-client networks.<sup>2</sup>

As an instance of what David Morgan (2011) has described as a “community of feeling,” these spectacles provide evolving illustrations of how the political shades into the religious and vice versa and how the notionally “political” or “religious” are dynamically constituted. The political nature of these events is unquestionable. But what is even more fascinating within that political context is the variety of specific political uses to which, depending on personal taste and social circumstance, various public officials put these events. For instance, Udom Emmanuel, the governor of Akwa Ibom State, chose the June 2016 monthly prayer meeting to announce both the conclusion of plans to dissolve the state’s Local Government Transition Committee and news that three new refineries in the state would soon begin operation. By collapsing any assumed distinctions between the religious pulpit and the official platform, Governor Emmanuel guides us into the unstable conglomeration that is the evolving agency of the state governor: part public official, part social engineer, part moral guardian, part theologian.

### A note on context

A better appreciation of these public prayers might be gained by situating them within the evolving theologico-political milieu of Africa. Scattered references have been made supra, but I make the following two observations as a way of further underscoring the context. The first observation is to note the emergent social ecology that has seen Pentecostalism make significant inroads into power and the social imaginary across the continent and particularly in countries like Nigeria, Ghana, Zimbabwe, Ghana, and increasingly, South Africa. Amid what seems like a “democratization of charisma” (Asamoah-Gyadu 2004), not only

do state and society continually crisscross but also the religious idiom is all-encompassing, which reinforces the accepted wisdom of the literature on the conjoining of the sacred and the profane. More to the point, such is the power of the emergent religious public that, for political leaders and other secular authorities, an open declaration of religious allegiance or, more specifically in certain social contexts, an ostentatious affirmation and performance of one's "born-again" status is fashionable, which confirms Pentecostalism's emerging status as "a prestige good" (Daloz 2006).

The second, and closely related, observation is that the emerging identity and popularity of prayer is perhaps the most compelling element within the nascent religious formation in Africa. In David Maxwell's study of the Pentecostal movement in Zimbabwe, prayer is an inalienable element in the transformation of Pentecostals into a community of believers and the means through which "their struggle for betterment is acted out" (2006: 197). Other studies have addressed prayer as "a means of reconstructing nationalism as a spiritual obligation" (Oha 2005); ritual prayer as a means through which Pentecostalism creates modern consumers (Lindhardt 2009a); prayer as a tool of deliverance from "occult forces" (Lindhardt 2009b); and prayer as an instrument of democratic mobilization by a resurgent civil society (Obadare 2012). In a recent study (Obadare 2016), I have formulated prayer as the centerpiece in a new organization of devotion by Christian and Islamic groups and as an interesting sign of convergence in the "dialogic constitution" of Christianity and Islam (Larkin 2008, 103; cf. Hirschkind 2006; and Mahmood 2005). In this latter regard, prayer practices, forms, and performances are sites for the staging of interfaith struggles and at the same time conduits for the incorporation of exogenous forms and modalities. In this chapter, a specific form of public prayer—what I've been calling spectacles of piety—is analyzed as an aspect of the complex political repertory of political elites in Nigeria.

## The argument

We owe the resurgence of interest in religious crowds partly to growing scholarly interest in Pentecostal megachurches (see, for instance, Stevenson 2013). Birgit Meyer's work in this regard focuses on their affective dimension, particularly the "kinds of religious sensations, in the sense of feelings ... generated when religions adopt new sensational forms such as the spectacle" (2008: 713).

This chapter draws attention to an important but largely neglected political dimension of such gatherings. To do that, I note the specific pedigree of the public prayer sessions in question here as ecumenical (by invocation, if not in practice) spectacles “ordered” by important public officials.<sup>3</sup> This sets them apart from conventional religious gatherings organized by particular religious denominations. Paradoxically, however, it makes them sociological cousins of other state-directed crowdsourcing activities directly targeted at the “manufacturing” of civic solidarity. A good example is the series of one-million-man marches organized to drum up support for the ultimately abortive efforts of the late Nigerian military despot, Sani Abacha (1993--1998), to transform into a civilian president (Obadare 2005).

My three main arguments flow directly from this initial postulation of such spectacles as politically laden events as follows:

I argue, first, that these events constitute rituals of demobilization propelled by the desire to create “an obsequious flock” (Canetti 1984). This can happen through the performance of what I have already described as ostentatious humility. The claim here is that insofar as it entails a politician actually repudiating the very basis of his authority (as seen for example in various “humble” admissions that only God can actually do what they were statutorily elected to do, in short by confessing to incapacity), ostentatious humility becomes effectively a project of avoidance, the staging of a ruse that subtly extends the ideology of the state, disguises its impunities, and hence furthers its legitimation. Furthermore, the cause of demobilization may be advanced through constructed transparency, as when a public official puts before a sympathetic crowd “all the facts” of a controversial subject as a way of preempting public discussion of them and legitimating the official position on them. This was arguably the case with Governor Uduaghan of Delta state (discussed above) in the matter of the uncompleted Stephen Keshi stadium. In the end, the governor succeeded in selling the idea that delay over the completion of the project had nothing to do with financial mismanagement, as his critics alleged, but with an unspecified “spiritual inhibition.”

Second, I argue that spectacles of piety have a target audience by which I mean that they are ideological “plays” intended for a clear group of “consumers.” That audience may include not only the immediate participants but also, and perhaps more importantly, distant observers who are invited to behold the piety and humility of the governor. In actual fact, one may rightly surmise that it is this combined piety and humility that is on “display” in such spectacles. In this



way, the staging of public prayer falls within the complex described by Peter Sloterdijk (2013) as the “psychotechnics” of power.

Third, because spectacles of piety are ideological “plays,” they are political scripts staged in anticipation of definite ideological effects, with the most desired effect being the production of manipulable political subjects. They are, therefore, technologies of governance, similar to other activities political leaders engage in (like starting a foreign war) with the aim of distracting the public.

### Crowds: Between irrationality and pose

The argument staked out thus far on the uses of spectacles of piety for political manipulation would seem to place me firmly within the camp of authors who have taken a rather dim view of the crowd and mass audiences in general. For such authors, what stands out about the crowd—and indeed its distinguishing psychological attribute—is its irrationality and suggestibility. The pioneering work in this regard is the French sociologist Gustave Le Bon’s *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*, originally published in 1896. For Le Bon, something happens when an ordinary—and ordinarily rational—individual becomes part of a crowd:

By the mere fact that he forms part of an organized crowd, a man descends several rungs in the ladder of civilization. Isolated, he may be a cultivated individual; in a crowd, he is a barbarian—that is, a creature acting by instinct. He possesses the spontaneity, the violence, the ferocity, and also the enthusiasm and heroism of primitive beings, whom he further tends to resemble by the facility with which he allows himself to be impressed by words and images—which would be entirely without action on each of the isolated individuals composing the crowd—and to be induced to commit acts contrary to his most obvious interests and his best-known habits. An individual in a crowd is a grain of sand amid other grains of sand, which the wind stirs up at will. (2002: 8)

Le Bon’s view of the crowd as “irrational,” “conservative,” even “dictatorial,” was apparently justified by events in pre–Second World War Europe where German Nazism and Italian fascism caught fire amid delirious crowds. The sight may have informed the English writer and philosopher Aldous Huxley’s Le Bon-esque view of crowds as a herd (cf. Ward 1924), an irrational lump susceptible to the whims of malevolent authority. Wrote Huxley:

When crowd-delirium is exploited for the benefit of governments and orthodox churches, the exploiters are always very careful not to allow the intoxication to go too far. The ruling minorities make use of their subjects' craving for downward self-transcendence in order, first, to amuse and distract them and, second, to get them into a sub-personal state of heightened suggestibility. Religious and political ceremonials are welcomed by the masses as opportunities for getting drunk on herd-poison, and by their rulers as opportunities for planting suggestions in minds which have momentarily ceased to be capable of reason or free will. (Huxley 1952: 319)

Le Bon's and, ipso facto, Huxley's approach to understanding crowds and crowd psychology has been criticized by other scholars, notably Rudé (2005), who followed very closely in the footsteps of Georges Lefebvre (1934), in particular the latter's eagerness to draw "a sharp distinction between 'crowd' as an involuntary social gathering, e.g. people queueing for food or talking after church, and 'assembly' as a more deliberate voluntary association, e.g. political meeting" (Holton 1978, 220). Nonetheless, skepticism about the agency of crowds and specifically their presumed susceptibility to "political seduction" has continued to echo in work that addresses democratic populism (see, for instance, Vincent 2011; cf. Furedi 1973).

A rejection of the presumed innate savagery of the crowd and a more positive appraisal of its radical potential seems to be the guiding motif of recent critique of neoliberal hegemony. The key work in this regard is *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (2004) by philosophers Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri. Working in the same register, Mazzarella pursues "the social potential of group energies that relies neither on the fortress of the autonomous liberal subject (crowd theory) nor on a principled but critically disabling attachment to immanent, unmediated potentiality (multitude theory)" (2010: 698). And, as it turns out, AbdouMaliq Simone's analysis of "people as infrastructure" in urban South Africa (2004) is in part, if not indeed, an invitation and a philosophical nudge toward a sympathetic understanding of massed bodies.

A similar rejection of a simplified understanding of the crowd as an irrational horde seems to undergird Achille Mbembe's (1992) notion of "intimate tyranny." Mbembe appears interested less in affirming the reasonableness of "ordinary people" in Africa than in underscoring how complex their social and political practices are. He begins by acknowledging that "people are always trapped in a net or rituals that affirm tyranny, and secondly, these rituals however minor are intimate in nature" (1992, 22). However, this loop of tyranny is never closed

because “ensnarement” is always counterbalanced and undermined by “evasion” or “avoidance.” As a result, what he refers to as “the simulacrum” is in fact

the dominant modality of transactions between the state and society, or between the rulers and those who are supposed to obey. This is what makes postcolonial relations *relations of conviviality, but also of powerlessness par excellence*—from the point of view either of the masters of power or of those whom they crush. (Mbembe 1992: 24, italics in original)

Taken with the ethnographic encounters described above, we are led to the conclusion that such occasions are a “dance” in which all participants, from the state governors through the religious clerics and the military officers to the ordinary citizens, are cognizant of their “roles.” Such a conclusion is not unreasonable. After all, the way in which such events are also an occasion or opportunity for political networking has been acknowledged. However, Mbembe’s point actually precedes that, as he seems to be suggesting (at least in my reading), ultimately, participation in these spectacles cannot result in a net loss for ordinary people who are merely feigning docility as part of the smokes-and-mirrors economy of “the simulacrum.” On this view, not only is the crowd aware of its being manipulated, it is also simultaneously carrying on its own manipulating.

Now, there is great value in not seeing ordinary people as effete subjects totally lacking in agency or invention. But we should be anxious about the analytic and philosophical implications of a social flattening in which there are no winners and losers – such a flattening means that the real consequences and intentions of elite repertoires and technologies to deflect dissent are overlooked. The overriding aim in this chapter is to show how religious belief and feelings can be mobilized to deflect attention, create a discursive smokescreen, and eventually mold a specific kind of political subjectivity.

## Conclusion

Because crowds are protean phenomena with heterogeneous pedigrees and constantly changing forms and behaviors, it is difficult to speak of a “typical” crowd. Not only are no two crowds ever the same, as a matter of fact the same crowd, altering in nature and form, may exhibit contrasting features in the course of its evolution within a period of time. This is why, historically, crowds have been a moving target, analytically speaking. We see confirmation of this

inherent fluidity in the examples referenced here—all unquestionably political, yet deployed in alliance with various local political permutations.

Nevertheless, and as already shown, we can identify certain commonalities that speak to their coherence as carefully staged spectacles of piety. To this end, these spectacles afford us some tentative and rather limited insights into the construction of a narrow category of religious crowds. As already emphasized, the backdrop to these, and arguably the social register within which such spectacles are elaborated, is the explosion of Pentecostalism as a denominational force. Kramer's work in a Latin American context (2005) and Texas Governor Rick Perry's 2011 "Days of Prayer for Rain in the State of Texas"<sup>4</sup> show that the Nigerian scenarios are hardly unique, that Pentecostalism is no stranger to this sort of "staging of power," and that some of the conclusions from Nigeria may well find resonance in seemingly alien regional and cultural contexts.



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## Crowds and Transformations: On the Pious Crowds of the Hajj

Abdellah Hammoudi

When I started the preparations for my participation in the hajj in March–April 1999 (Hammoudi 2006: 25–36), I was familiar with the pilgrimage crowd scenes in Mecca. By then those scenes had been a must for the world media for many years. Alongside pictures of the throngs, there was the omnipresent image of the dense circles of white-clad pilgrims moving around the Kaaba, now a planetary feature. Before joining the mass of pilgrims, I had—like everyone else—participated in numerous crowds, many organized, many spontaneous.

In this chapter I focus on the phenomenon of the crowd as I experienced it first in Medina and then in Mecca, during my participation in the hajj. I will call it, for want of a better word, “pious crowds” and use the plural form, as in the title, because this crowd often divides in several ones. The hajj starts as an organized crowd, yet it frequently turns into a spontaneous one. My aim is to look closely at the passage from the organized to the spontaneous in order to describe the process of transformation. I borrow the notion of the spontaneous from Elias Canetti’s famous work, *Crowds and Power* (1984). In this book the author devotes a large section to the hajj. He approaches it through a mechanistic paradigm he derives from the dynamics of crowd gathering. However the kind of transformations I describe during the passages from the organized to the spontaneous leads me to question Canetti’s approach by privileging processes with moments of practical reflexivities. This enables a move away from Canetti’s unconscious mechanics, influenced as they are by the functionalist and structuralist worldviews prevalent at the time he wrote his work.

Documenting the passage from the organized to the spontaneous, I reconsider a number of Canetti's assumptions, particularly his pendulum-like swing between individual separateness and crowd as liberation. There is a mechanical shifting that goes with his notion of "discharge." The first section of the chapter develops these points; the second examines the transformations of the hajj crowd. It is my aim to show how a large crowd morphs into several different ones, that is, how a crowd becomes multiple and multidirectional. This multiplicity and multidirectionality can only be understood, I think, if we look at it through the idea that processes are open-ended phenomena in spite of the usual formalization of ritual by traditions. The hajj crowd follows strict ritual rules yet undergoes many transformations; its very movements are animated by unceasing becomings. Moreover, change and transformation here occur within and despite the government of the pilgrimage and the very material conditions in which the rituals are performed. In the last section of this work, I make some brief remarks on the use of the concept of becoming in anthropology. Specifically I want to raise questions regarding rules and material strictures.

## Reconsidering some premises

### **The pendulum swing between separateness and merger**

The hajj is the most organized and most surveilled mass event I know of firsthand. Because of the scale of the expected crowds—some 3 million pilgrims—and also perhaps because of the surveillance, a fear of being alone in the pilgrimage was palpable in the very early stages of the preparation for the trip. The hajj bureaucracies, it is true, required that we form groups of six for manifold purposes, chief among them were lodging and supervision—both spiritual and managerial. But the fear came to the open in the (relatively small) crowds that gathered around the offices in charge of the administration of this complex journey. Logistics and security were paramount for the Saudi state and for every state that sends a significant numbers of people to the Holy Lands of Islam. Also, the inculcation of the rituals before the trip was crucial. We were drilled on how to perform the complex actions of worship, staggered on several days, and performed in several places (Hammoudi 2006: 45–46 and map 69).

So I had to join several crowds for this preparation. One of them for the constitution of "the pilgrim file" gathered in front of the Governor's Office in the city of Temara in Morocco, where I had to register. Here everybody

came for the same purpose and hoped to leave as soon as possible. However we also lingered for other purposes: many of us, and especially those who were unable to read and write, searched for information (Hammoudi 2006: 32–33). As I mentioned before, we had to form a group of six without which it was impossible to proceed. Soon enough I realized that the men who approached me for that purpose did it with the same preoccupations. Beside obvious conveniences like companionship, trust, and so on, it was good, I was told, to be together, among people who know each other: “One never knows, with so many people there ...”

Each of us, it seems, wanted a nucleus to retreat to after the crowd, even as we also envisioned doing things alone. Here I must say I was probably the one who went it alone more often, in forays around town. My work as an anthropologist was an important reason for this. However, the people in my group, like myself, didn't feel as strongly the urge to avoid touch and closeness, a compulsion Canetti insists on, in contrast to an equal compulsion, according to him, to jump in the crowd, as a form of liberation (Canetti 1984: 15–16). Indeed, the compulsion to avoid touch, to guard distinctions and hierarchies never was as stringent for us as the one he depicts, perhaps largely due to his Austrian and European experience. From this perspective, Canetti's premise of experiencing a pendulum swing between guarding the frontiers of the self on the one hand and jumping into the crowd as liberation from separateness on the other hand seems unduly universalized. Among Moroccans, and indeed many pilgrims from other parts of the world, that premise, at least in the way it is formulated, did not hold.

### **What does “discharge” deliver?**

I departed with scores of others from a crowded special hajj terminal in Rabat. There were a few sporadic and rather timid collective protests about delays, but a pilgrim must avoid “quarrelling” as we were constantly reminded. We landed in the very crowded Jeddah airport and were immediately sent to Medina by bus, a long journey. However, as soon as we were settled in the room assigned to us, we went out to reach the Prophet's Mosque. We were immediately in a crowd streaming from all the streets and boulevards toward the same place of worship. This streaming was slow, powerful, and serene. “The entire Muslim community is here, what a day! And here, the Mosque!” Abbas exclaimed, overcome with joy as his eyes welled up with tears. I was deeply touched too. The white human flood filled the gigantic plaza around the building and the immense mosque. Like Abbas and Salah, I felt utterly free within this togetherness. As many others



have said, one feels like a child “relieved from the chores (*soucis*) of life,” or “what a feeling of happiness, free at last [from everything else] to worship (*ibada*).”

This liberation however also came with hyper shopping. The crowd instantly transformed from a worshipping crowd into a shopping one, and vice versa. One could feel the energies deployed in both (Hammoudi 2006: 67–93). Shopping, I came to realize, was part of a spending in excess. Calculation was defied in both worshipping and shopping. Spending in excess went with the sense of being returned to youth and spending one’s forces within the crowd. Finally this expense in excess (to borrow a familiar word from Georges Bataille) and this spending of energy ran across the spectrum of all manners of living: walking, running, worshipping, shopping, staying awake, going to sleep late at night, getting up very early—all of it was deemed “sacrifice” (*tadhiya*).

This brings us to Canetti’s notion of “discharge.” Should we want to keep the term, we would have to include in it actions, which break through after exertion in the crowd, for example, utterances, which are quite personal and unusual. I quote one instance from our leaving Medina, in the bus bound for Mecca:

Abbas, who had chosen to sit next to me after putting his wife next to a lady we had met, jumped and strained every time the mosque appeared. He would exclaim loudly, then burst into tears which quickly turned into sobs, “There it is, your mosque, O Prophet ... O my love, O Messenger of God!” Abbas wept anew each time he glimpsed a wall or minaret of the mosque. “There it is, O my brother, there it is.” He was inconsolable and called on me forcefully. (Hammoudi 2006: 125–129)

Here, it seems, a space opens up, within the crowd and simultaneously removed from it. It was a space in which Abbas called on me to witness some givens of a pious self. The word “given” should be taken to mean what was given to perception: movements, words, and sentences uttered in voice, in specific forms (injunctive, exclamatory, demonstrative). Also sobs: sounds and body quakes in rhythmic and random succession. And perception includes vision, audition, tactility, smell, conjunctive and disjunctive motility; all coalesced in a sort of new dimension as Merleau-Ponty evokes: “Do we know whether tactile experience and visual experience can be joined without an inter-sensory experience?” (Merleau-Ponty 2012: 228). The philosopher frames the question here in the context of intersubjectivity, but at this stage he already notes, “Perhaps there are, either in each sensory experience or in each consciousness, some ‘phantoms’ that no rationality could explain away” (Merleau-Ponty 2012: 228). Further on, in *The Visible and the Invisible* (1969), he would deepen this idea and outline/sketch out a new dimension: that of being beyond the duality of subject/object,

precisely in the phenomenon of feel-see-touch, that is, of seeing beyond the unity of being.

This is the space that opened up: intensely illuminated walls or white minarets suddenly appeared against the staggered chiaroscuro of the city planes, only to disappear, then reemerge at different angles and vanish again and again, in the reverse motion of our bus, until we reached the highway. Such an opened space encompassed much more: it encompassed us as well, Abbas, myself, the half-asleep pilgrims in white, the driver, the roaring and rolling machine in that night. In fact, the opened space, in this instance, is virtually unlimited and—this is crucial—amplified by the work of death. Indeed the hajj is sacrifice and, as such, a gateway to death. This being so, Abbas's voice called for the slice of crowd riding the bus to witness it. It escapes the mechanics Canetti, after many others, adjudicates as a permanent attribute to crowds. For that very reason, the crying and sobbing spread to many pilgrims, who entered and left the crying circles at their own pace. A mute sort of reflexivity appears, contingent on moments and transformations, here from big to small, and a fast moving, exhausted crowd of seated people in a hot bus.

## Crowds and intensifications

### **A crowd of 3 million breaking into crowds of differing size: The organized and the spontaneous**

We arrived in Mecca well ahead of the hajj proper to perform *Omra*: basically Circumambulation around the Kaaba in the center of the Great Holy Mosque and the running (*sa'ye*) between two adjacent places, Safa and Marwa. Afterward, we got out of the ritual white garb to lead an "ordinary" life of praying, reading the Koran, and following sermons. We lived in a room assigned by a hajj company. Our life was mostly devoted to worship but also—for me—to contemplating the Kaaba and the human circular waves. And frequenting the gigantic market, as we did in Medina. We went to the hajj proper ten days later by redonning the white garb and heading toward Mina and Arafat.

The 3 million pilgrims gathered there. In a sense, it was the same crowd. However, apart from this gathering, the hajj "pious crowd" subdivides into slices of crowds because not all pilgrims accomplish all rites at the same moment. During the Circumambulation, Sacrifice, and Stoning of the Pillars, pilgrims may separate and complete these rites at different times. However, the station of

Arafat gathers all pilgrims at the same place, on the same day, and at the same moment. This is a mandatory rule. In what follows, I will successively address the three major concentrations of pilgrims: crowds at the Kaaba and Great Mosque, crowds at Mina, and third, the concentration at Arafat some 10 miles further East. In the order of ritual succession, the stoning and sacrifice have to take place after Arafat. For the sake of clarity, I will recount the Stoning before that crucial station. I briefly present Circumambulation, Stoning, and our stay in Mina, and dwell in some detail on the “Standing upon Arafat,” the *sine qua non* of the hajj.

Before proceeding further, let me quote Canetti’s quasi-mythological evocation of the spontaneous crowd to throw in sharp relief the contrast with the organized crowd of the hajj:

The crowd, suddenly there where there was nothing before is a mysterious and universal phenomenon. A few people may have been standing together—five, ten or twelve, not more; nothing has been announced, nothing is expected. Suddenly everywhere is black with people and more and more come streaming from all sides as though streets had only one direction. (Canetti 1984: 16)

The packed circles around the black-clad cubicle (*ka’ba*) never stop; they are fed by constant arrivals who replace people who leave once their rite accomplished. However everyone presses to arrive at the cubicle and the black stone encased in one of its corners. So the crowd is both organized and spontaneous. Although everyone presses toward the center, this crowd never disbands, since it feeds on the millions who come at different times for the same purpose. Also, many more people come back to watch it. Unlike Canetti’s spontaneous crowd, the hajj is expected as both a rite and a sight.

The move to Mina collects everyone for some days in a city of tents and gated compounds before the day of the “Standing at Arafat.” Here it is again: life in the biggest crowd, but a sliced one, between camps and markets under constant supervision, assistance, health care, and surveillance (Hammoudi 2006: 192). The most spontaneous, and potentially deadly crowds, formed at the “stoning” (*rajm*) of each of the three pillars. Although vast works of infrastructure facilitated access such as guards directing pilgrims, spontaneous movements occur and propagate like powerful natural forces with multidirectional and unpredictable currents (Hammoudi 2006: 228–229). Around the pillars everyone pushes to get as close as possible in order to hit every pillar and not miss. The circular movement of the thousands in many circles accelerates in such a way that I myself compared it to a gigantic “whirlpool” and a “tornado” (Hammoudi 2006: 228). Many die; others get injured—as I myself did—or suffer from exhaustion.

Here the crowd pushes toward a center. Everyone knows they have to get there in order to accomplish a valid hajj. However, unlike in Canetti's spontaneous model, there is no unconscious fear of disbanding, which would keep the crowd swelling. The crowd swells because everyone knows they have to reach an objective before the specific times for that ritual run out (one day for each pillar). This is a given, which, it seems to me, comes first; the mechanics of the crowd that give its own inexorable will and direction comes second, as a perverse consequence, so to speak.

I have noted the attraction that the stoning had on everyone even though it wasn't the most important part of the hajj. For example, one could miss it and make "reparation" for it through sacrifice, while missing Arafat invalidates the hajj and cannot be substituted through "reparation." The conjunction of sacrifice and stoning is clear: the first stoning has to be effected after sacrificing in the early part of the day. As I participated in both, we performed them the day after our return from Arafat on March 27, 1999 (Hammoudi 2006: 207 and 225–227, and also Chapter 1).

Reflecting on this scene, an important set of relations becomes clear between power and death on the one hand and life and power on the other hand: sacrificers go from giving death to animals to the deployment of uncommon energies in the midst of the deadly risks of the stoning crowds. However that set of relations is better approached if we map them in comparison with what happens in the biggest pilgrimage crowd: the standing in Arafat.

### **Mechanics and reflexivity in the biggest religious crowd: Juxtaposing two narratives**

Three million pilgrims gathered at Arafat for the "Standing" (*wuquf*) on March 27, 1999. I was one of them with only four of my companions, Haj Abbas and Hajja Zohra his wife, Haj Salah, and his wife Hajja Fatima. We were joined by another couple; I had known the man years before and only met him again in Medina. Since transportation was taken care of by the same hajj company, our segment of the Moroccan crowd was unloaded in the same cluster of tents. Other Moroccan segments were nearby, and all not too far from the Mount of Mercy (*Jabal al-Rahma*). Our bus left Mina at night, and the traffic was so slow that we put in many hours to travel the ten miles. I went to sleep, exhausted like many others. We got up early the next morning for ablutions and prayer. Although the crowd was covering most of it, the Mount of Mercy was still visible in tiny patches. Many people were coming and going, shopping for things to

be taken home from Arafat. Others were taking pictures. Soon the dense white crowd covered everything. I could contemplate the barren mountains far away, surrounding the Arafat plain.

We stood up many times for prayer and invocations for silent meditation, as well as individual introspection asking for God's pardon and mercy. Preaching came to us at very high pitch from loudspeakers from the Namira Great Mosque and elsewhere. Preaching and shouts of *talbiya*—"I surrender to Thy call, O Allah"—came out repeatedly from millions of throats, filling earth and sky. The mighty sound enveloped the white crowds.

However there also were moments of repose and rest and discussions and conflicts about the proper manner to pray or demand forgiveness. One such conflict was provoked by a small group of youth who roamed the camp to teach pilgrimage or force people to perform in what they thought was the right way. The incident involved the segment of crowd with whom I did the "Standing." Some people supported the roaming group; one of them was the young man who joined my companions and myself with his wife.

After the noon prayer, which coincided with the Friday office, followed by a little rest, we were motioned by our imam to stand up for the "*Wuquf*." This was the single most crucial moment of the Arafat station. I described it in the following terms:

The station immediately followed prayers. I couldn't see beyond the camp, but standing up like everyone else, I could feel deep within me the astonishing energy of a worshipping people: dedicated, devout, devoted. The shouts and cries came in endless waves, followed by spells of silence. Collective invocations alternated with individual prayers and supplications, murmured and inaudible when we sat, turning inward. [...] We stood for a long, long time ... until the end of time ... we remained in silence. Then at a final signal we broke rank and left as quickly as possible. (Hammoudi 2006: 212, 213)

We had been instructed, before the pilgrimage, and all along, to leave Arafat at a fast and steady pace. This is called "*ifadha*." The word evokes, among other things, a flood. In any case, this is how it looked like to me on that day, as I watched it through the window of the bus I had boarded with the rest of the multitude who had decided not to travel on foot:

Around eight o'clock in the evening we left Arafat for Muzdalifah. We did so quite quickly, at a rate described as "overflow," as we were spreading like a flood. Millions of people on foot turned their backs on Arafat and ran toward Muzdalifah like a great river that had flooded its banks to spread through the

neighboring valleys and ravines. Nothing could compare to this spectacle, which we watched through our boiler on wheels, moving in twenty-meter spurts, then stopping, interminably it seemed, in an uproar of motors, heat, and exhaust fumes. (Hammoudi 2006, 214)

It was impossible to compare the size of the masses who boarded busses (as I myself did through a push-shove of Homeric proportions) to the masses who went on foot. Both were of the biggest size I have ever seen, and they saturated space. At this juncture I want to juxtapose my narrative of these masses with Canetti's. This will help push my reflection on the Muslim pilgrimage crowd and beyond—specifically, on crowds in worship. Rather than proceed to a detailed comparison, I will highlight the following points, which deserve particular attention.

Canetti translates *ifada* as “flight,” a key word in his narrative. Although I used the verb “running” in my account, it was rather to suggest a fast pace, and I prefer “overflow” because there exist two verbal forms in Arabic from f.r. and h.r.b.: *farra* and *haraba* for “flight.” These have no link to f.dh, from which comes *ifadha*, with the meanings of “flood,” “surplus,” and “abundance,” but also “fast moving.” In fact, Canetti talks unduly about passionate flight, as though people were “possessed.” This ties in with his translation of *talbiya*, the repeated loud utterance of the word “*labbayk*” as “at your command.” This translation goes well with a frequent militaristic interpretation of Islam by many Orientalists. As I see it, one could alternatively translate, “I answer Thy call, O Allah.” But Orientalism usually prefers the one-sided militaristic image. I quote from Canetti's book:

The most important moment of the pilgrimage to Mecca, its real climax, is the *Wukuf*, or “standing upon Arafat” ... An enormous number of pilgrims—sometimes as many as 6–700,000—are gathered there, “standing before Allah.”

The crowd responds with the cry “*Labbeika ya Rabbi, labbeika*”: “We wait for your commands, O Lord, we wait for your commands.” This cry is repeated continuously throughout the day, mounting to frenzy. Then in kind of sudden crowd-fear, called *Ifadha*, or torrent, everyone flees as though possessed, until they come to the next place, Mozdalifa, where they spend the night, setting out from there the following morning for Mina. People run headlong, pushing and trampling on each other. (1984: 313–314)

Canetti goes on to state the crucial point, in his opinion, about the relation between this crowd and power. He does this, first, by stating the notion of what he calls “the expectation of command” and, second, by claiming that the original character of the command is “the compulsion to flee” (313 and 314). The latter, according to him, unconsciously breaks through in this crowd.

Canetti insists on the density of the crowd, and on what he says is the incessant repetition, which “expresses the situation clearly” (314). The people “think of nothing but the lord’s commands and beg for them passionately” (314). He then comments on fear and flight thus:

For the sudden fear which overcomes them at the given signal, there is a cogent explanation, namely that here the original character of the command—the compulsion to flee—breaks through, although without the faithful being consciously aware of it. The intensity of their collective expectation increases the effect of the divine command to such an extent that it reverts to what all command originally was: a command to flee. God’s command puts men to flight. (314)

Canetti insists that the fear is not exhausted at the Muzdalifah—the next stop where the pilgrims spend the night. He claims that the flight continues the next day until the pilgrims reach Mina, adding that it is not exhausted until “they try to escape [from death] by passing it on to the animals they slaughter in Mina” (314). However, he doesn’t mention the collecting of the stones at Muzdalifah, a collection ritually destined for the stoning of Satan in Mina. The conclusion Canetti reaches is intended to drive his point home:

There is no other religious usage which so forcefully illustrates the nature of a command as this *Wukuf*, the “Standing upon Arafat,” with the ensuing *Ifadha*, or mass flight. Islam is in any case a religion whose ordinances retain much of the original immediacy of commands, but in the *Wukuf* and *Ifadha* expectation of command and the command in general find their purest expression. (314)

First, there is a wording gap between this narrative and my narrative. I heard nobody crying, “*labbeika ya Rabbi*.” The utterance we repeated was “*labbyka allahumma ... , allahumma ...*” since this was the proper language form of invocation as I was instructed, and we cried in unison. I felt we did not so much “cry” or shout as sing those words. The difference between the two narratives reaches a crucial point when it comes to the key words used by Canetti: “command,” “commands,” “we wait for your commands, O Lord.” I use “I answer thy call, O Allah, I answer,” with a possible rendering as “here I am ...” And no “Lord,” for the simple reason that Muslims never call Allah “Lord” in that invocation.

We were instructed to leave in the direction of Muzdalifah in fast and steady pace. I describe *ifadha* with the metaphor of flood. What I saw was a very powerful collective movement, not what Canetti calls a “torrent,” and running headlong as though people were “possessed” or a “mass flight.” Leaving the scene

of death, leaving death, “escaping” from it, as Canetti says, certainly gives its energy to the movement. Indeed, many a pilgrim likened the *Wuquf* to the “Day of Judgment.”

Canetti’s knowledge of the hajj is from reading only and reading mostly orientalist accounts. There is no evidence he had ever spoken to any Muslim. So what about his “mass flight,” “trampling,” etc.? For my part, I haven’t seen any in that massive movement toward the next station. To be sure this may have happened in places far from where I was, lost in the crowd. I haven’t heard of it, though, and if so, it would be better understood as another spontaneous transformation of the crowd, similar to the ones that happen at the Stoning in Mina. Where I was, after *Wuquf*, I lived through such a transformation: a protracted sort of huge battle scene in which everyone—who tried to board a bus—engaged, for almost four hours (Hammoudi 2006: 213–214). The crowd ceaselessly broke up into unpredictable waves of people, running mindlessly in unpredictable directions, following rumors about where the available buses stood.

Finally, there is a factual gap between Canetti’s narrative and my narrative. I have described our journey to Muzdalifa sitting or standing quietly in our packed busses. More importantly, I wrote of our stopping there to collect stones for the next step of hajj and spend the rest of the night before heading, early, to Mina (Hammoudi 2006: 214–215). This was the return back to Mina after Arafat: a return in two stages. Canetti, I already noted, omits the actions of worship in Muzdalifah. Most importantly, perhaps thinking of nothing other than “mass flight” and of fear of not being exhausted until sacrifice in Mina, he fails to see that the “haste” was related rather to the necessity of performing sacrifice and stoning the very next day, and in a limited window of time, this being prescribed by the ritual rules.

In conclusion, I note that, for Canetti, power dynamics is to be accounted for by an unconscious pendulum swing: between distinctions and hierarchies on the one hand and crowd as liberation from those constraints on the other hand. The correlative power dynamics in his view is a disposition he calls “expectation of command” and “flight.” It is important to keep in mind that in his opinion command inherently contains a “death sentence” and an original compulsion to flee. Canetti finds illustration of this in the roaring lion and correlative flight of the animals, which are potential prey (Canetti 1984: 303–304). Finally, command, death sentence, flight—all these connect in the “survivor” (231–233), Canetti’s model for the paranoid and/or schizophrenic ruler, the despots and modern (European) mass dictators (424, 434, and epilogue 465). Be that as it may, I hope I have shown that Canetti’s “expectation of command” (311, 313) and “flight” at



Arafat suffer from a systemic flaw and from a poor knowledge of the succession of the hajj rites and the rules, which govern them. Especially problematic, in my view, is the mechanical character of the dynamics he suggests. It is inconsistent with the many moments of what I would call *pockets* of reflexivity, conflicts, and the transformations of the pious hajj crowd.

To be sure, the hajj crowd, a pious crowd, looks quite like what Canetti calls “closed crowd” insofar as it accepts limits (17). However, transformation indicates that it breaks away from the set limits imposed by the ritual and ethical norms, as well as the bureaucratic management. Panics break into speeding clusters, and unpredictable coalescences and dispersals, yet these movements include stopping and reflecting groups, which can have influence and give new direction to the crowds. I have seen that happen not only in confused struggles around busses at Arafat, at the stoning in Mina, but also during a panic I lived through in the great Mosque of Mecca, the beating heart of Islam.

### Life, liminality, immanence: Some remarks

My aim is not to comment on what the almost unlimited array of things *life*, *liminality*, and *immanence* stand for in anthropology; nor is it to dwell on their philosophical histories. Life is one of the most powerful catchwords from Michel Foucault’s genealogies to biomedicine, science, and cultural studies. Immanence, a venerable notion in philosophy, has been revived, especially by the work of Gilles Deleuze. In a kind of replica of the earlier Foucauldian move, some anthropologists have been recently putting immanence to work together with related notions, such as ontology as becoming. In contrast, I note that the notion of the liminal has been elaborated by well-known and influential anthropologists. It can be summarily traced back from Victor Turner to Emile Durkheim via Arnold van Gennep. Its influence is evident in the massive literature on religion and politics in non-Western and (later) in Western formations.

The idea of life as immanent force, which knows no direction or meaning but only multiplicities of manifestation and formation, including human ones is a basic Nietzschean insight reformulated by Deleuze in particular. Also life as “repetition” in manifold forms, a re-elaboration of the famous “*eternal return*” by Deleuze is a well-known idea. Canetti’s metaphor of the roaring lion and the flight has its roots in this concept of life. It is also a similar notion of the unconscious that we find in all these interpretations based on “*life*.” An unconscious that works as “absolute memory” in the words of Foucault and Deleuze: unrecoverable, yet determinant, because it is as “immanent” as life itself.

Here I want to suggest that the *liminal* might be a more productive notion to work with. Transformations and becomings are central to liminality. Also, central to it is the notion of process. The latter to be sure admits of multiplicity and transformation, yet these transformations happen within structures and institutions. This aspect is either downplayed or quasi absent in the works centered on becoming. Let me go back to the hajj to illustrate the point.

Hajj crowds are transient. Pilgrims know they are there for a limited time. These crowds are also very much on the move until everyone returns home. By definition they are liminal: their moment, place, and life here are liminal, much in the way Turner described liminal phenomenon (1969). For many whom I encountered this was a lifetime journey that engaged faith and fate. Although a number of them pursued other objectives—such as trade, knowledge, religious reform, or revolution—all these were included within a most distinctive journey: one with special promise regarding salvation.

Because movement, space, and time were no longer in conjunction producing clear and fixed coordinates, Kaaba became a most potent anchorage, a marker of space-time concentrations. Other such markers were Mina and Arafat. Nevertheless, the movement and intensity of worship threw the crowd into a sort of fourth dimension. For this reason, a *sui generis* disorientation in varying degrees affected scores of pilgrims, including myself. Many were found wandering, lost in the desert. A man came back to our camp, after we had—with members of his family—performed prayer of the dead for the sake of his soul. Indeed, he was deemed dead in the desert for several days.

Turner in particular also signaled changes in the direction and in the process toward limited insubordination. Others, such as the historian Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie (1979), wrote about moments of piety followed by carnivalesque celebrations, which ushered in civil war. For my part, I have attempted to recast the notion of process to include potential multidirectionalities by emphasizing how differing paces of change affect with differing impacts the overall forms through which every formation articulates itself (Hammoudi 1993, 2009).

This multidirectional conception of process helps illuminate the frequent and sometimes unexpected passages from organized to spontaneous crowds I have tried to describe in this chapter. While I insist that I deal here exclusively with a religious crowd and arguably the biggest pilgrimage on the planet, I submit that these passages may be useful for the study of other crowds. On the other hand, I leave out for the moment how this crowd works through globalized social media. A study of synergies between the hajj as global image and other crowds

worldwide would be especially crucial. Leaving this point aside, I will end this section by some brief remarks on process and politics.

In the hajj crowd, I find many features of masses as Canetti characterizes them: big quantities, concentration, divisibility, a global style of sociality here encouraged by piety, centralized organization, and equality. Equality is paramount in the Islamic discourses about hajj. Also, the masses here create signs through their sheer movements and fluctuations. Within this mass, I have noted roaming groups of preachers and reformers who do not belong to the organization that runs the pilgrimage. These can also work in the form of networks, of loosely connected individuals, each operating within different slices of the big crowd. These groups show similarities with what Canetti calls “band” or “pack.” I do not, however, agree with the frequent ethological-like grounds of Canetti’s developments. For one reason: the hajj crowds evince moments of reflexivity, something I also have attempted to show in my discussion of “discharge.” This frequently incipient reflexivity often becomes explicit. Argument and fights about creed and the right practice broke out from time to time and were settled by pilgrims themselves. Imams and officials mediated settlements. And the Saudi forces were always in the background.

So, back to process: anthropology after the so-called critical turn seems to have confined many earlier works and ideas into a kind of “epistemic unconscious” only to reach for them again as if they were just invented. This is the case for the notion of “process,” among others, particularly as it has been treated by some ontologists. Advocating yet another turn—anthropology as ontology—process and “becoming” play a key role in their writing. To be sure, the accent on change and transformation, including self-transformation is welcome (for example in Biehl 2013). But here the parallel process of the “metamorphosis” of subjectivities of the anthropologist and his interlocutor remains unclear. Time and again we are incited to witness the proliferation of the metamorphoses of peoples and places in the Deleuzian mode of the rhizomatic (Deleuze and Guattari 1980: 1–37, 46–49, 333–37; see also Biehl and Locke 2010). Yet we witness little in the manner of ethnographically documented processes. Moreover, immanent becoming is sketched in such manner as it looks rather like a solipsistic business. For even when places, institutions, material environments, and strictures are evoked, their impressionistic presence relates little to peoples’ becomings (as in Biehl and Locke 2010, 323–324 and 333; Biehl 2013, 581, 584, and 585).

This seems the more so when becoming is locked in from the point of view of self and enemy, or self and predator. One wonders who becomes a subject through “the cannibal cogito” and if the devoured one nevertheless achieves

subjecthood by being assimilated by the other (for more on this problematic “becoming,” see De Castro 2004: 477–78 and 479). Such a transformation—and this is the problem—seems to be entirely predicated on the status of representation and the subject/object divide in Western knowledge. Sure, one can rethink those categories through the alterity of non-Western practices and categories; nevertheless, “monism” and “immanence” are simply alternative Western categories through which the other is reinterpreted and put to work in Western epistemic discussions. In the end, alterity seems to dissipate altogether. A particularly telling case of this predicament can be found in Martin Holbraad’s “ontographic” re-elaboration of anthropological truth (2009). Here, we are told that the truth of divination is radically other, one that is incommensurable with traditional anthropological truth predicated on falsifying and representation. So, for example, when the diviner says, “I am bewitched,” the “oracle transforms me from a person who stands in no particular relation to witchcraft into a person who is bewitched” (Holbraad 2009, 88). Holbraad is at pains to show just how that happens. Ultimately, he relies on a thought experiment involving what I would call the notion of immanence, a plane on which words, things, and other beings coexist and can be made to combine as to redefine him as bewitched (Holbraad 2009, 89). Here, life as flux of energy, an idea so dear to Deleuze, appears to be lost on the anthropologist, so concentrated is he on his “thought experiment.” The transformation of someone into a bewitched person, it would seem, happens in time, and it often takes a good amount of time of work with diviners in changing circumstances and environments. One would have to follow the ways in which elements become assembled and evolve in the metamorphosis. A regime of truth in and of itself does not generate actual becomings.

What for Deleuze and Guattari, with others, was an experiment in anarchist philosophy and action, after the failure of revolution, is now at the heart of an ontological and disparate group of anthropologists who have rallied around the master word “becoming.” Deleuze and Guattari wanted to do away with all institutions, starting from family all the way to the state, via the university. Ontology as anthropology often chooses to simply ignore those institutions. I have shown how hajj masses and bands move within institutions and often break through them. Transformations happen and recede. Creativity opens up new and unexpected possibilities, but institutions endure and are either destroyed or change at their own pace. In anthropology, it seems, we do not have a way to account for change once we break away from representation and meaning. For we fall back on the many sorts of unconscious concepts the discipline has invented (production structures, structures of the mind, formation and structures of the

Ego and so forth) or else on a conceptual creation divorced from the lives engaged with suffering, the difficulty of knowing, and the impossibility of deciding the ultimate reasons for a course of action. So much so that life and immanence are often evoked by the anthropologist pretty much in the same way that Canetti evokes the life, which animates the roaring lion's flight. When Deleuze and Guattari invoke "life" as reality, they map it in terms of some universal, energetic (and unconscious) mechanism, where the prime mover is desire. Theirs is a metaphysical engine of change and revolution, immanent in the energetic flow itself. How ethnography might work with that set of notions may not be all that clear. For one thing, immanence, while conceivable, remains a pure if powerful philosophical intuition. In anthropology, it frequently operates in modes of performance, which only mimic induction or the analysis of language.

## “Too Many People”: Crowds and Cliques in Contemporary China

Megan Steffen

Even in the dark, the crowd was visible from blocks away. I was passing a busy intersection around ten at night, later than I usually dared to be out on my bike. People in front of me in the bike lane were slowing, then stopping, and then finally either continuing on or else dismounting to watch the spectacle blocked from my view by a mass of bodies. Without the crowd there, I might never have realized what I was approaching, even though I was in the People’s Republic of China (PRC) to study the unpredictable and its most visible manifestation: accidents. The crowd was the thing that transformed the site of the traffic accident into a scene. This scene in particular was especially bad—the driver had abandoned the car, which had no license plate and whose front end had crumpled after colliding with a pedestrian, who at that moment lay motionless on the ground outlined by a wreath of glass and blood. The chain of cause and effect seemed clear, and yet I knew from experience that should more than one of the parties reemerge after the accident, each of these artifacts—the inert man’s battered body, the crumpled car, and the long-departed driver—would become the focus of angry contestations, which was one reason why the police officer on the scene was diligently taking photographs from a set of predetermined angles. I, too, dismounted from my bike and joined the crowd. Later in this chapter, I’ll return to this accident, which featured what I’m calling an unintended crowd: a crowd whose formation is unplanned and whose purpose is uncertain. I will also discuss more broadly the aesthetics and social implications of group formation in the PRC and specifically three types of groups: the unintended crowd, one of which I’ve just described, cliques or *quanzi*, and the choreographed crowd.

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The choreographed crowd is what we're used to seeing in the PRC during its periodic public displays of national unity and strength. Think back to the 2008 Beijing Olympic Opening Ceremony, which is probably the most widely watched example of the PRC's choreographed crowds. The Opening Ceremony began with 2008 drummers dancing and chanting in unison; later, a new set of performers hid inside a set of human-sized movable type blocks moving up and down in an extremely coordinated display until finally emerging from the top to smile and wave at the audience (Figure 5.1). This sudden shift both breaks the fourth wall by demonstrating the method behind the spectacle and forces the audience to have a revelation reminiscent of Charlton Heston's character's disturbing epiphany at the end of the film *Soylent Green* (1973): *This impossibly complicated routine is made out of people!* And indeed, that seems to have been the intended effect. Throughout the ceremony, thousands of performers showcased what director Zhang Yimou called a "human performance" where "uniformity brings beauty" in a 2008 interview with *Southern Weekend*.<sup>1</sup> Zhang argued that this uniformity reflected something particularly Chinese: an ability to be disciplined, hardworking, and obedient unparalleled by all other nations (besides North Korea).



**Figure 5.1** Performers emerge from the top of moveable-type blocks after a long routine during the 2008 Beijing Olympic Opening Ceremony

To say that Zhang's comments are troubling is a wild understatement, and to think that his probably purposefully inflammatory opinions reflect the reality of actual life in the PRC would be a grave methodological error for an ethnographer. Nevertheless, Zhang—who bragged in the same interview that the Opening Ceremony “had the highest level of political review since the founding of the People's Republic of China” with orders coming from the Central Committee itself—is on to something. He is describing the logic underlying what I think of as the aesthetics of legitimacy in the PRC; he is explaining why, in the twenty-first century, the PRC has largely chosen to represent itself abroad as an obedient, anonymous mass of uniform objects who can, as Zhang says proudly, “do it like computers.” These displays invite Chinese viewers to imagine themselves as one of the anonymous units in the performance and simultaneously remind them that this is how the rest of the world sees them: as just one more Chinese person within an undifferentiated and intimidating mass.

The aesthetics and political implications of crowds—both choreographed and unintended—have troubled thinkers inside and outside of China for nearly a century. Lu Xun, one of the most important Chinese intellectuals of the twentieth century, famously made the decision to become a writer after seeing a photograph in which a crowd of Chinese spectators gathered to apathetically watch a Japanese soldier execute a Chinese spy. This is a spontaneous crowd drawn by a scene of gore whose moral and political implications Lu Xun believes they ignore. “The people of a weak and backward country,” he wrote in 1922, “can only serve to be made examples of, or to witness such futile spectacles” (1960[1922]). Again, this statement is problematic; it operates within the logic of a type of chauvinism that assumes the failings of Chinese people are particularly Chinese rather than symptomatic of broader problems in the modern world.<sup>2</sup>

That said, Lu Xun's observations and concerns about crowds are very much in line with his contemporaries from Europe and North America. In his essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility,” Walter Benjamin described the social significance of people increasingly being conditioned to gather in large groups to consume art at museums, in movie theaters, and through the type of newsreel photographs that would eventually drive Lu Xun to become a writer (2008: 22). For example, Benjamin argues that the “cult of the movie star” creates a “cult of the audience” in which the people who would otherwise be becoming class conscious instead are becoming “masses”—a group formation he identifies as more “useful” for fascism than for communism (2008: 33, 20, 41). Notably, Benjamin's examples of the proto-communist crowd map



better onto the international viewers of the Beijing Opening Ceremony than they do onto the coordinated performers themselves, who, at the center of collective adoration or at least attention, become more like the movie stars and museums than like the Chinese masses they're meant to stand for metonymically.

Writing in 1936, Benjamin's main concern was fascism, which at the time was a very real and tangible threat. At the outset, he defines his mission as an attempt to "neutralize a number of traditional concepts—such as creativity and genius, eternal value and mystery—which ... allow factual material to be manipulated in the interests of fascism" (Benjamin 2008: 20). It's useful here to turn away from Benjamin for a moment and toward Susan Sontag. In "Fascinating Fascism," her takedown of Leni Riefenstahl (another choreographer of Olympic crowds), Sontag (2002: 96) presents a similar list of concepts fascism stands for: "the ideal of life as art, the cult of beauty, the fetishism of courage, the dissolution of alienation in ecstatic feelings of community; the repudiation of the intellect; the family of man (under the parenthood of leaders)." Fascist aesthetics, she writes, are characterized by

the massing of groups of people; the turning of people into things; the multiplication or replication of things; and the grouping of people/things around an all-powerful, hypnotic leader-figure or force. The fascist dramaturgy centers on the orgiastic transactions between mighty forces and their puppets, uniformly garbed and shown in ever swelling numbers. (Sontag 2002: 91)

Think now of the parades held in Beijing to celebrate the Sixtieth Anniversary of the People's Republic of China in 2009, when hundreds of thousands of people created designs with their assembled bodies and supported gigantic portraits of Chinese leaders. Like Benjamin, Sontag saves her harshest critiques for right-rather than left-wing movements (though it is worth noting that at the time of its writing in 1976 accounts of the death and destructions at the hands of the left were not as available as accounts from the Nazi death camps). Although she acknowledges that there are similarities between communist and fascist aesthetics, she attempts to distinguish between the two by saying communist art reinforces a "utopian morality" while fascist art displays a "utopian aesthetics" (Sontag 2002: 92). Nevertheless, it's difficult to read Sontag's (2002: 91) statement that in fascism "masses are made to take form, be design" and not also hear Mao Zedong's (2007: 19) assertion in 1958 that the masses are "poor and blank" like a "a blank sheet of paper free from any mark" on which "the freshest and most beautiful characters can be written." Indeed, it's the legacy of the PRC's aesthetics of legitimacy—both the crowds of the Cultural Revolution and the mass political performances of today—that haunts and troubles Benjamin's and

Sontag's attempts to separate the aesthetics of extreme right-wing movements from those of the putatively left.

This is where Jacques Rancière makes an intervention. Writing in 2000, after which the sins of what were once perceived as communist states could no longer credibly be denied, Rancière seeks to distinguish his theory of aesthetics from Benjamin's. To resist Benjamin's (2008: 42) idea that fascism "aestheticizes politics" while communism "politicizes art," Rancière maintains that aesthetics are already political because "politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it" and aesthetics is a series of "regimes" that defines what can be art and how it can be reflected upon (Rancière 2004: 13). I am not interested in answering the chicken-and-egg question of whether the sensible was suddenly distributed differently—which allowed for humans to imagine technological reproduction—or whether, as Rancière insists Benjamin argues, a work of art's technological properties come with certain political or aesthetic properties (Rancière 2004: 31). Instead, I want to focus on Rancière's determination to rehabilitate the aesthetics of crowds for the left.

In *The Politics of Aesthetics*, Rancière (2004) makes a long digression into the work of Rudolf Laban. He writes,

Let us consider as well the contradictory destinies of the choreographic model. Recent research has evoked the metamorphoses undergone by Laban's notation of movement. It was developed in a context favoring the liberation of bodies and became the model for the large Nazi demonstrations before regaining, in the anti-establishment context of performance art, a new subversive virginity. Benjamin's explanation via the fatal aestheticization of politics in the "era of the masses" overlooks, perhaps, the long-standing connection between the unanimous consensus of the citizenry and the exaltation of the free movement of bodies. (Rancière 2004: 18)

It's difficult to parse exactly what Rancière means in this passage, especially if we read his invocation of "consensus" here with an eye to his work on dissensus. What remains clear is that, unlike Benjamin's historically situated argument, Rancière's position is intentionally reductive. Family resemblances between aesthetic forms need not, he argues, correspond with political similarities. To redeem the crowd for leftist political action, Rancière would discard the notion that any particular form must carry an inherent political property determined by its context or its deployment in history. Thus, we should disregard any formal visual similarity between performances by Laban's dancers (and their wild, Dionysian context) with the famous shots of coordinated aerobics from Riefenstahl's *Olympia* (and their rigid, fascist context). Although these political movements share formal

similarities, Rancière argues later in the essay, these forms are *all* they share (2004: 19). In other words, the intention behind the use of a visual form at a particular moment should not be considered when that form appears at other moments; contemporary context, not historical precedent, is king.

In theory, this argument could be convincing. In reality, in this particular historical moment and in the PRC, Rancière's position is much more difficult to justify. Because the state insists its authorship of spectacles like the 2008 Olympic Opening Ceremony is absolute, any interpretation that discards allusions to the choreographed crowds of other historical contexts seems naive. A more nuanced understanding of choreographed crowds in the PRC would have to include Laban and Zhang as well as Mao and Riefenstahl. Echoes of *Olympia* might linger in 2008 alongside echoes of the Cultural Revolution's mass rallies alongside still fainter echoes of Laban and Riefenstahl, who is perhaps the most obvious influence on Zhang outside of the North Korean mass performances he cites as inspiration.<sup>3</sup> Both the formal visual and the contextual historical evidence are against Rancière in this case.

So much, then, for the emancipatory properties of the choreographed crowd in the PRC—though I might add that this doesn't preclude it from having liberating properties at other times or in other places. Let's return, though, to the time and place I've promised to talk about: today's PRC. Between March 2013 and March 2016, I conducted twenty-five months of fieldwork in Zhengzhou, the capital of Henan Province, which at the time was the second most densely populated province in the country. When he was writing about the "poor and blank" masses, Mao Zedong bragged that at 600 million the PRC had one of the largest populations in the world; today, there are over 1.36 *billion* people in the PRC, and the only thing nearly everyone I met during my time in Central China could agree on was that there were simply "too many people" in China: *ren tai duo*.

This phrase of "ren tai duo" gets repeated all over the PRC and has become a kind of blanket excuse or explanation for almost any situation or problem.<sup>4</sup> "Ren tai duo" has become an acceptable idiom to describe situations that would otherwise be unacceptable. In the same way that an American might shake off an unpleasant social experience by saying "well, it's a free country"—to indicate that the behavior of others is both endemic to the national character and also something they have no control over and thus shouldn't worry about—so someone in the PRC may turn to the idea of there being "too many people" to justify, explain, and ultimately relinquish responsibility for everyday hardships.

Perversely, the knowledge that there are too many people may inspire many people in the PRC to view strangers almost as a different species than their

friends and family. Strangers are not relevant social actors in the way one's family members or work colleagues are. People I worked with often admit to acting according to two completely different codes of behavior: one for people they do not know, and one for friends, family, and people they do know—people who exist within their *quanzi*, which literally translates to “circle” but which I here translate as “clique” to highlight its exclusionary qualities. My interlocutors in Zhengzhou define their *quanzi* as all their friends, family, and coworkers, as either everyone they know or else as all the human resources at their disposal; however, all these people do not necessarily mix. People may have many *quanzi*, and they often speak about each one as being *used* for a different purpose. This *quanzi* is for business; that one is for socializing; this one is for their children; that one is for buying things online. And yet *quanzi* are more than just groups of like-minded acquaintances. People spoke of *quanzi* as being determinative, as either limiting someone's potential or else enabling it. During my interviews with entrepreneurs, they would frequently cite a person's *quanzi* as one of the most important factors leading to their success or failure. As one coffee shop owner put it: “If you don't have successful people in your *quanzi*, you can't even imagine what success is, much less achieve it.” This quote—with its unquestioned assumption that already established and successful people would naturally be interacting with people just starting out within a given *quanzi*—reveals a crucial characteristic of *quanzi*. Unlike *guanxi* (connections), in which people tend to alternate between hierarchical roles (as either supplicant or patron) during their encounters, *quanzi* not only bring people at different stages of life together but also create contexts in which their respective hierarchical positions are momentarily leveled so that important information—like advice—can be exchanged freely (see, e.g., Chumley 2016: 172).

The increased popularity of the word “*quanzi*” is perhaps due to its use on WeChat or *Weixin*, a social networking tool used by almost all of the people I work with in Zhengzhou.<sup>5</sup> The area of WeChat known as “Moments” in English goes by the name of *Pengyou Quan* or literally “Friend Circle” in Chinese. Within their *Pengyou Quan* people post pictures, links, poems, videos, long emotional (but abstract) confessions, items for sale, and pleas for help or advice. This last genre of post generally begins with an apostrophe to this new, seemingly omnipotent crowd: “All-powerful friend circle (*wanneng de pengyou quan*), who can tell me how to do X?” People also comment on each other's posts, but these comments are only visible to people who are mutual friends on WeChat—in other words, to people who are already an existing part of a person's particular *quanzi*. This is in stark contrast to the exposure-driven algorithms of platforms

like Twitter or Facebook, which will sometimes lead users to look at strangers' posts if a friend has liked them or commented on them.

WeChat hasn't been popular for more than a few years, but its effect on social life among people in Zhengzhou has been tremendous. Unlike Google Plus's now defunct "Circles" or Facebook's elaborate (and often unused) methods of sorting social network contacts, WeChat's formulation of the *quanzi* virtually mimics the groups my interlocutors actually formed. WeChat has approximated a type of preferred social interaction, which is intimate because it is exclusive and has given its users the ability to distinguish the people they know from the anonymous masses: a way of taking the otherwise overwhelming social and separating the figure—in this case, a *quanzi* or circle—from the unfamiliar ground. The difficulty of entering a *quanzi* is to become a familiar in the first place, and, at its heart, this is the essential difference between *quanzi* and *guanxi*.

Much has been written about *guanxi*—translated literally as connection or relationship, but practically meaning something closer to one's social and professional networking connections.<sup>6</sup> So much has been written about *guanxi*, in fact, that it's now become a sort of albatross hanging around the neck of scholars who can't deny the importance of having connections and a wide social network in the PRC but who are weary of its reductive and one-size-fits-all use. I often heard expats and Chinese interlocutors alike speaking about *guanxi* the way seventeenth-century scientists spoke about phlogiston: as an elemental substance that had mysterious properties (e.g., "Oh he didn't have enough *guanxi*" or "Oh his *guanxi* was not strong enough"). Like the phlogiston theory, this folk theory of *guanxi* is comforting but not accurate. Even though it's true that in Mandarin one speaks of *guanxi* as something you can possess (we have *guanxi* or *women you guanxi*), *guanxi* is less like a substance and more—as fire would turn out to be—like a reaction. *Guanxi* is not finite, not a resource that you can monopolize to the dismay of your adversaries. Like relationships, *guanxi* is not fixed. Whatever connections one may have, linguistic conventions cover up the fact that these too are in motion, that all *guanxi* is a process, a verb masquerading as a noun. Especially in the wake of what will probably end up being called President Xi Jinping's Anti-Corruption Campaign, when your connection in whatever government ministry you relied upon to do business might be there one day and gone the next, people in Zhengzhou admitted that *guanxi* was frequently fragile and always a little bit beyond one's total control.

*Quanzi*, on the other hand, are thought to be more reliable because the people who make up your *quanzi* are, in general, your friends. While your network

of relationships-as-resources or *guanxi* grows stronger by expanding its reach toward the outside and including more and more people, your cliques or *quanzi* grow stronger by closing in what's already there and creating intimacy through exclusion. A person who is good at managing her *quanzi* can emerge at the center of a powerful network of *guanxi*, but she cannot treat them the same way. Nothing about one's *quanzi* should be spontaneous or accidental; everything should be carefully coordinated and choreographed. Creating a strong *quanzi* is less like a crowded political rally and more like a careful tango or maybe even a piece by Laban.

Let me give you an example. Olivia was one of my most powerful friends in the field. Even though she was not originally from Zhengzhou but a small city near Zhengzhou, she had the largest number of *quanzi* in the city of anyone I knew, and often I would sit with her for hours as she ignored me in favor of sending countless WeChat messages, connecting people she knew who needed something to the person she knew who could give it to them. As someone else's salaried employee, Olivia herself did not occupy a particularly powerful official position, and people would not automatically seek to cultivate a relationship with her to gain specific favors; however, people understood that she had access to a large number of powerful *quanzi* and could act as a conduit to people with power. Through the various cliques she maintained, Olivia could do anything: change a visa, get a permit to open a school, rent an apartment, get an invitation to dinner or refuse an invitation to dinner (an even more delicate task), help a friend get a job, set a friend up on a blind date, or find out if someone had a reputation for being corrupt or not.

Olivia often complained that the employees she managed did not understand that one could not “just treat work business like work business.” “If you meet someone through work, you have to be willing to be friends with them,” she explained to me while simultaneously driving and sending off a WeChat message to a reporter who was also, she claimed, a friend,

If you go out to eat with them, chat for a bit, and then become friends, you'll find that all your work business becomes easier. If you treat it like a duty or difficult work task, though, people can tell and it will make work business more difficult. My coworkers do not understand that being friends and doing business are not two separate things!

Olivia's boss, however, did understand this, and she was free to leave the office to socialize even during the workday. Whatever money Olivia's boss lost in the salaried hours she spent drinking tea with wealthy housewives or lunching with

Fujianese businessmen, he knew he would make back eventually in the new clients, programs, and contracts Olivia's numerous *quanzi* provided.

Just before I left for nine months in October 2014, Olivia offered to host a dinner for me. She told me to invite anyone I had met through her; when I began naming the various entrepreneurs and officials I'd like to see, her nose scrunched up—a sign that I'd displeased her. “Those people are all from different *quanzi*,” she told me. “They are my friends, but they are from completely different *quanzi*, and it wouldn't be appropriate to eat together with them.” In the end, she decided I could not be trusted and made the guest list herself. To be honest, I understood why this was a delicate procedure, and I had been deliberately testing the limits of her generosity; I knew the people I wanted to see were from radically different backgrounds from those she'd already invited, and I wanted to see how they'd interact with each other. Olivia, to my anthropological chagrin but personal relief, valued the integrity of her *quanzi* more than she worried about offending me.

It's the primacy of the *quanzi* in today's Zhengzhou that makes the unintended crowd I described at the beginning of this paper so interesting. There are so few situations where people form groups—even temporary ones—without thoroughly understanding in advance the backgrounds of the people will be involved. Usually, the people one joins in crowded, group settings have already been vetted through personal introductions (as at large banquets like weddings), through their access to institutions (as in schools) or their shared economic profiles (as in commercial events like the ones that take place at malls or during real estate development promotional events). There are exceptions to this, of course. Train and bus stations, tourist sites on national holidays, and temples during festival days were crowd situations that “had all kinds of people” (*shenmeyang de ren dou you*), and because of this (and the general discomfort of being in a crowd) many of my urban interlocutors would try to avoid them or find themselves embarrassed to have exposed me to them.<sup>7</sup> While crowd situations in the PRC are often necessary to endure, they are not necessarily desirable.

So it was with great surprise that I noted how many people *willingly* joined the crowd at the scene of the accident that night. The crowd, as I said, was composed of people like me—strangers who had happened to be passing by and decided to stop. Some of the people were clearly voyeurs. “Is he dead yet?” yelled a visibly drunk man who flailed his way out of a black Audi before taking pictures with the victim's prone body in the background. Horrified and confused, I started asking people in the crowd why they were watching. “It's exciting and stimulating (*hen renao*),”<sup>8</sup> one replied. “Because we have no other things to do right now (*yinwei women xianzai meiyou biede shiqing*),” said another. Finally, an older woman gave

me an answer I could live with: “We’re all caring for him (*women zai guanxin ta*). Once the ambulance arrives, we’ll all relax.” This woman may have been performing for me, since I was an obvious foreigner—she continued to tell me that she was going to United States the next month and even gave me her business card as we watched the victim bleed on the asphalt, an attempt, perhaps, to create some *guanxi* with me—but her assessment was also, on a superficial level, accurate. After the victim had been carried to the ambulance, the crowd of people dispersed without a word. Maybe people left because the gore and excitement was gone, but then again, there was still plenty of destruction to dwell on—the car, with its concave bumper and bloody shattered window, was still present.

What seems more likely to me is that people left because without the victim there, no emotional or social gravity remained. To interpret the scene a little more bluntly, the woman I spoke to may have been right, and people may have left because they had achieved their unarticulated and perhaps even unconscious goal. Forced to perform before a crowd of twenty or more witnesses, the traffic policeman had acted professionally and with a sense of genuine urgency. A crowd of strangers had united and by doing so ensured the safe transit of an unidentified and unfamiliar person; an accident had allowed the victim to separate himself from the social ground and, even if only for a few moments, to become an important and legible figure to those who passed by.

Think back, now, to the photograph that inspired Lu Xun to save the so-called backward people of China and become a writer. Like the crowd he saw apathetically watching a Japanese soldier execute the Chinese spy, the crowd that I’ve described here is not choreographed but unintended—formed spontaneously, without plans or directions. Were I only to have looked at their faces, these people too would have seemed quite indifferent—only when I began asking them questions did their expressions change and their interpretations of the scene become clear. Far be it from me to correct a thinker like Lu Xun, but at least in this case, a crowd that might have looked voyeuristic and in fact had contained some individuals with voyeuristic intentions succeeded not just in futilely witnessing violence but also in calling an agent of the state to account. Unlike in *quanzi*, where curated individuals submit to known figures within a closed circle in order to gain resources, or Sontag’s fascist aesthetics, where the anonymous masses submit to a superior leader out of a longing for romantic ideals, here assembled individuals willingly and serendipitously submitted to an anonymous victim whose uncertain fate allowed him to separate from the social ground. If fascism is, as Sontag argues, “history become theatre,” then this was life-and-death “become theater”.



An alternate interpretation of this crowd as a diversion of otherwise ineffectual political energy exists. After all, the members of the mostly silent crowd—excluding the black Audi full of drunk men that pulled over to stop, gawk, and comment loudly—were on electric scooters or pedal bikes. This mode of transportation united them, either through shared economic constraints or else shared risk profiles. They did not have the liberty of declaring, as Olivia once did from the comfort of her car, that they did not like scooters and found them to be dangerous. They were not, like the driver of the car that hit the pedestrian, able to scramble away mostly unharmed from whatever incidents awaited them on the road. Instead, they whirred through the city with their bodies exposed to larger vehicles, sometimes in the designated sidelanes but sometimes—particularly when cars parked in the street as they often did—in lanes meant for cars. It is an interpretive reach to say that the people who eventually made up the crowd stopped because of some unspoken class solidarity among the vulnerable walkers, bikers, and scooter riders of the city.

Nevertheless, in a social context where relating to others through *quanzi*—a social formation enabled by the censorship of outsiders' claims to personhood—is more and more common, an event like this stood out to me. I am aware that I may be choosing the explanation that is the easiest for me, personally, to live with; however, I also think I have chosen the most empirically defensible interpretation. The collective effect of the each subject's absorption into the so-called "audience"—and their separation from a default national community defined by having "too many people"—was to ensure the fair treatment of the victim, regardless of their own intentions. This crowd and the control it exerted mattered not to the nation within whose borders it formed, or to the "too many people" who called it home, or to the politics of aesthetics on the right or left, but to the man who that night lay prone and unresponsive in the dark, surrounded by a crowd of onlookers comprised of people whose importance he will never socially recognize, whose names he will never know.

## Regarding Others: Metro Crowds, Metro Publics, Metro Mobs

Rashmi Sadana

On the Metro, there is a potential frenzy to the crowd, and yet, over the years I have been riding Delhi's, attempting an ethnography of this confined, multifarious set of spaces spread out across the city in at least a dozen directions, I have come to see crowds and infrastructure as a highly managed affair. It is this management that is part of the marvel of the Metro. There are no stampedes; people seem to "get" the technology and their place in it. There is little unpredictability. And when things happen in excess of what planners and designers might have expected, the crowd is redirected by shifting physical barriers or sometimes just by a change in signage. In the ladies' coach, I can often get a seat since it's always less crowded compared to the rest of the train. It's not that I don't feel comfortable in the general coaches—I do—but I sometimes have a nagging sense that I could go elsewhere, that I should be elsewhere.

Many had been against the idea of a ladies' coach when the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation first announced they would start having one back in October 2009.<sup>1</sup> In the early years of the Metro, part of the wonder of it was just how men and women coexisted in this new, confined public space. The "metro crowd," people said, was different from the "bus crowd," which was a way of talking about the class of the men who rode the much-maligned buses. The crowd you get on the Metro, so many women told me, was a different crowd. It is true that the Delhi buses are notorious sites for the sexual harassment of women. And it is hard to find a woman who has grown up in this city or especially gone to college here, who has not been harassed in some way, often repeatedly, on the city's buses. Nevertheless, the men I see on the Metro and on the buses do not seem radically different. On the Metro there are more office workers, as many students, and plenty of working-class men, from shopkeepers to day laborers. What *is*

markedly different from the bus is that the Metro is an enclosed space, a system with heavy security and CCTV cameras. If I noticed those formal features, then surely others did too. So, in those early years, the sight of women and men sitting and standing together on the Metro seemed to herald a future where men would be more accepting and respectful of women in public places, and where women would feel they had as much right to be in those spaces as men. It seemed a practical way forward in the endless debates about the greater numbers and expanding roles of women in public, their safety, and their legitimacy to be in such spaces at times of their choosing.

Hence, there is the crowd as physical entity, with physical properties, and then there is the discourse on the crowd, the ways we talk about it. In regard to the Metro, it's not the crowd itself that is of utmost interest but rather how the crowd, or elements of it, may be identified all of a sudden, or in parts, as a public, or how the crowd in certain moments can change into a mob. These shifts have to do with the physical parameters of the Metro itself, as public transport, built environment, and high-technology, but they also have to do with the image and idea of the Metro and how they might reflect on the crowd or be reflected upon by the crowd in critical moments or junctures. The question therefore is not "What is a crowd?" but rather "What might the crowd become or be taken for?"

\* \* \*

In the Metro, small crowds gather and disperse at all times, all over the city. Although this is a new routine and discipline, it also carries the energy and force that comes from repetition. One winter morning at Nehru Place station, I am absorbed by Drishti's description of the crowd. She has come from Vishwavidyalaya station, in the north of the city. She studies at a college in Noida to the east and takes the Metro there each day with her sister.<sup>2</sup> They want to be designers, and Drishti wants to design kitchens, specifically. It has been her dream since childhood, she tells me. She has come here, to Nehru Place in south Delhi, to buy thread and materials. We have just come off a crowded train in the mid-morning rush and are sitting outside on the station premises, on a small ledge near a landscaped lawn where people sit eating from tiffin boxes. The Bollywood actor, Deepika Padukone, looms large above us on a billboard, selling a new brand of mobile phone. We are now, Drishti and I, away from the metro crowd, but we still can't help talking about it. I am struck by how her description of being in the crowd differs from the rest of what she has to say. Her Hindi gains speed and stress as she goes along. It is already a language that relies on repetition for emphasis, and her speech plays this feature up by repeating whole

phrases in quick succession. It is as if her words are running into one another, pushing up against each other, or maybe just spinning.

“Sometimes there’s a big crowd there,” she starts,

people don’t give others the way (*rasta*) to come and go, you don’t get any space at all and no one gives you the right of way. In the morning there’s such a crowd that people don’t let people get off; first they push; the safety guard who is there tells them that they have to stay behind the yellow line, and they say this announcement so many times, but however many times they say the announcement, people don’t stay behind the yellow line.

There is a kind of desperation and plea in her voice by this point, but also a sense that you do not *not* ride the Metro, you don’t give up, you endure it. “Sometimes people bang into each other,” she continues,

and sometimes someone even gets hurt (*chotte bhi lugtha hai*). They don’t give people space to get out at the station they need to get out at. They don’t let you go forward; they say, “Stay behind, Stay behind. You have to stay behind the doors.” They tell people to stand behind the doors, but what they don’t understand is that people can get stuck behind it (*pus jathay*). People will say, “Let us out first,” but no one lets the people on the train out first.

The way she describes it, there is a back and forth between speech and movement, what people assert through speech vis-à-vis the limits of what their bodies can do. “In the evenings,” she concludes, “when people get out of work, there is such a crowd and they don’t stay behind the line, when the doors open, everyone pushes; they don’t stop, then they push.”

At the end of the description, Drishti is out of the crowded space of her own language. She becomes more relaxed and her tempo slows as we move on to other topics—her college, her sister, her uncle. Anyone who rides the Metro in Delhi knows what she is talking about when she describes the way people push into each other or push people aside when entering or exiting trains. The crowd is a physical sensation; one is either in it or not. Being on the edge of the crowd is to be out of it. Watching a crowd, as people often do on platforms as trains go by, is to regard the crowd, often with resignation, sympathy, and occasional longing.

Indian cities may not have had metro systems on this scale before, but they have long had crowds.<sup>3</sup> What is perhaps novel in Delhi is this meeting of a managed, hyper-modern space like a metro with those crowds. It is a kind of working out of past and future. If mobility is modernity—and the Metro is no doubt a crucible of that—the crowd nonetheless remains an impediment to that vision. It is a kind of relic, representing chaos and unpredictability (Mazzarella

2010). A crowd can turn into a mob. And yet it can also be an indication of a public or a new way of thinking about the people who live in the city. People don't ride public transportation to enter crowds purposefully; they do so out of necessity. A crowd may be a passing nuisance, and yet, once in one, it is impossible to avoid the experience. The promise of the metro crowd, with all its compressions and contortions, is its link to (and performance as) a form of mobility that "does" or even accomplishes modernity. It might therefore be a crowd worth enduring.

Writing about the crowds of Calcutta in the early 1960s, Claude Levi-Strauss (1962) described his very personal reaction to what for him was the shock of the Indian city. "The great cities of India are a kind of wasteland," he writes and yet also notices that the "blight" he sees—among the post-Partition hungry and displaced of that city—is "the ultimate expression of urban living." Here "urban living" is not merely the proximity of people to one another but also a quest and demand for life itself. It is not the kind of aspiration that we speak of today in regard to the Indian middle masses but rather something more elemental. Levi-Strauss is shocked and disgusted by the crowd, by its neediness, by its questionable humanity, and with himself and what he represents to them as a white European. It is a crowd that he will always stand apart from and, as he sees it, be subject to (on beggars, he writes: "they debase you by their veneration"). The crowd, then, as form and locus of desire, sparks a moral questioning for both the observer and the observed.

For Elias Canetti (1984: 75–90), fire, river, sea, rain, and other elements all recall the crowd in one way or the other. The natural elements symbolize attributes of the crowd: the way a fire spreads, the river flows, the sea changes, or the rain discharges. The elements highlight a crowd's changeability. In the Metro, the crowd is alternately rivulet, stream, and eddy; it collects, passes through, and disperses. It does so to the rhythm of departing and arriving trains and to the tempo of foot traffic during different times of day. It is the movement from one form to another that is significant, I realize one afternoon while talking with Anuraag Chowfla, whose architecture firm designed some of the early metro stations in Delhi. This movement—allowing for it and predicting it—is what goes into the "science of sizing" in station design. "You have to create a scenario," he explains, "where there are three missed headways, meaning three trains don't show up on time, which means when the train is at full capacity—the crush load—there could be 9,000 people on the platform. The station has to be designed in such a way so that people can be evacuated in four minutes."

In this explanation he captures something I often feel while riding the Metro—the possibility of the range of scenarios that could play out. As in every metro system, late trains on one side of the platform means a crowd will collect, a kind of stagnant crowd, hemmed in by the train, the platform, and time. When the train finally arrives, the crowd still has no space to expand since the train will arrive with new passengers, some of whom will want to get off. This is when the push and pull begins and when space and matter will come into conflict, when bodies themselves will become part of the architecture of the station. How much can people be pushed?

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Delhi has a population of 16 million people, but it is not a crowded city in the way Mumbai, Hong Kong, or New York is. Or at least it doesn't feel like it is one in the way those other cities do. It is not bounded by oceans or bays but rather by a dwindling river, and even then, one that merely traverses the city rather than creating a hard-and-fast border around it. It is spread out. There is no natural limit to it, only other cities at its far perimeter—Gurgaon, Ghaziabad, Noida, Faridabad, Bahadurgarh, and Sonipat. It is a desert city, in a bowl, in the vast Gangetic plain. And perhaps it is for this reason that the Delhi Metro, over the last dozen years, has given not only shape and new definition to the ever-expanding megacity but also a greater awareness of those who live and work and depend on this city. Because the Metro is a system in a set of linked, enclosed spaces, it gives a kind of cohesiveness to the city, even if it is illusory. Its crowds, then, stand for something.

The central areas of Delhi have always been for the city's rich—politicians, bureaucrats, lawyers, and the like. These areas form an elite geography cordoned off by large roadways and roundabouts, big bungalows, and imposing monuments. On the streets you see hawkers and office workers, but it is clear they are there to do the bidding of others more powerful than them. Older market areas like Karol Bagh or the lanes off Chandni Chowk in the old city are markedly different in that they teem with people, activity, and a vast array of specialized markets for spices, paper, cloth, and electronics—all domains far from the office crowd. The Metro connects these two realities: the older markets and the newer malls. Riding it can be a revelation of not only who you see—the people, the crowds—but also how they connect to different parts of the city and the new cultural geographies that are laid bare.

Some are surprised that the Delhi Metro feels so crowded, as if they knew that the city had a large population but did not realize what that felt like. It is a “car” city, not because most people have cars—they don't—but because so much

of the city's acreage is given over to them. Since the liberalization of the Indian economy in the 1990s, cars are attainable like never before. If reaching the middle class used to be marked by the possession of a refrigerator and a scooter, it is now marked by having a car. The Delhi state government, meanwhile, has virtually no restrictions on or costs for parking; it quite literally gives the city up to being occupied by cars. Maybe it is not surprising that in this city of crass power symbols, the size of one's car has become the measure of one's worth and sway on the road. The bigger car can always "honk down" the smaller, and the smaller usually gives way. Moreover, Delhi has more cars than the four other largest Indian cities combined.<sup>4</sup> As a result, traffic jams are everywhere, but you don't feel the crowd when you are in a motorized vehicle, since you don't *move with it*. Instead you are in a traffic jam, fuming in your own space or stuck in place, metal to metal. You are not in a crowd.

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The Metro is, if anything, a study in crowds. It is a leader-less crowd, a collective of a sort, yes, but one that obviously and regularly submits to the authority and regularity of the state and the machine. It is also a locatable crowd, one with a potential of having a common goal or purpose beyond transportation.<sup>5</sup> This goal or purpose has an organizational aspect to it, through the Metro, with the Metro. The Metro identifies individuals and enables crowd formation all over the city. Kapil, a Delhi youth organizer, describes it to me this way as he recounts his involvement in the 2011 anti-corruption protests led by activist Anna Hazare. It is hard for Kapil to conceal his passion about what he sees as his political awakening. "This was not about ordinary politics but a revolution," he explains to me two years later as we sit in a Café Coffee Day near Lajpat Nagar Metro station in Delhi. It is the kind of idealism that the Anna Hazare movement was known for, and it fueled people's passion for politics in the lead up to the 2013 Delhi state election of the Aam Aadmi Party (Common Man's Party) as well as the 2014 national election leading to the victory of Narendra Modi. "There was a fire inside us," Kapil continues. "Let's not waste this opportunity; we told ourselves." The Metro, he believes, formed part of this awakening of consciousness or at least set the stage for it. It made him see that he could connect to others—right on the platform, it turned out. He continues:

On August 14 [2011] I went to the Hauz Khas metro station and met some friends from IIT [Indian Institute of Technology] there. I had a tri-color band in my hand and so did they.<sup>6</sup> We boarded the Metro for Civil Lines. After a few stations we came to know of other people. When we got to Central Secretariat to change, we met a group of people on the platform—about twenty-five people—

coming from Gurgaon. They were all carrying flags. The crowd kept on growing, and then we got down. People were there painting faces, flags were being sold. Independence Day fever was already there. At Civil Lines [Metro station] there were 150 people, people joining from other Metro stations. There were also hired and state buses. We were going to the Chhatrasal Stadium at Vidan Sabha. Leaders were there. On the Metro, we asked people, “Where are you going? Come along with us.” You could see who was in the movement and who was not in the movement. Another day we’d gone to Pragati Madan Metro station. The police asked us to get into police buses, then a little later they told us to get down; they had just wanted to disperse us. Then another day, police got wind of the fact that a group from IIT was going to Sonia Gandhi’s house to protest, so police were there at the IIT gate. They wouldn’t let us pass; when some [students] came forward, they put them in the police bus; we also came forward. They took us to Vasunt Kunj police station and left us in an open space—not in the jail—and took our names and addresses. They kept us there for 3–4 hours, and then let us go. They didn’t charge any one of us.

He pauses after telling his story and grins and tells me how from childhood, he always “wanted to do something.” For Kapil, the Metro was a place that could conjure a public through rhetoric and identification, by carrying symbols such as the national flag, but also through mere presence and common destination. It was a public that already had been introduced to each other through social media and had been “addressed” through print and television media (Warner 2002).

As the nation’s capital, Delhi is the site of many protest marches, often drawing people from neighboring states depending on the cause. And because it is the capital, those protests are highly surveilled by the state. The Metro has become a way for protesters to get around the city, to join causes; it has also been a way for the state, through the local police, to manage the crowds of protesters, often by closing key stations before, during, and after protests. This was the case for the Anna Hazare anti-corruption rallies in August 2011, the anti-rape demonstrations of December 2012–January 2013, and the anti-farm bill protests in 2015. The Metro and the protest have begun to have a symbiotic relationship.<sup>7</sup> In these protests, an idea of the nation is defined and articulated by protesters, most often through demands for inclusion or reform. The Metro enables the circulation of ideas and symbols, and protesters rely heavily on it (along with buses) to get to protest sites. At the same time, the Metro itself is an extension of the state infrastructural apparatus and is ultimately a control mechanism for state-controlled movement in the city.



At Kashmere Gate station, one of the largest interchange stations in the system, people stand clustered to watch the lighted, moving Metro map, while others ascend the tall escalators that afford them a view of the massive station and their fellow passengers on the escalator beside them, moving in the opposite direction. Behavior is not only tempered, it is also considered. This consideration is a not only characterized by reflection but more specifically by regard. It is not that Metro riders show great regard for one another; they certainly don't when entering crowded trains and not letting passengers get off before they push on. Yet there is regard in the sense of recognizing others in a new milieu that offers access to a wider swath of the population than most other urban spaces. There is a potential in each crowd and recognition of the crowd, by those in it and those just beyond it. This recognition—of people by people—is a new kind of “regarding” that is happening in this city, in these closed quarters, banked by booths and electronic gates, low ceilings and yellow lights, and also in those aboveground, fair-like stations, which are breezy and wide. This regard, which is something more than just visibility, does not necessarily translate into greater consideration for people, but it does widen the sense of the urban as a shared space with some shared goals, to see oneself in relation to others with a kind of regularity. And for this reason, social conflicts in the Metro demonstrate the nature of the urban as much as moments of reconciliation might.

When might a metro crowd be recognized as a public? This question has shadowed the arrival of the Metro almost from its beginning in late 2002. What kind of collection of people, of commuters, of occasional riders, would assemble? And what might their newfound relationality to one another mean? As Aasheesh Sharma et al. write in “The Social Engine,” in the *Hindustan Times* (October 1, 2011): “It is in the air-conditioned Bombardier coaches that the BMW crowd meets labourers, Chawri Bazaar traders discuss property prices with IT consultants and doctors quarrel with babus over standing room.” Here the value of the Metro public is the meeting of people across social classes. As the title of the article suggests, there is a sense that the Metro naturally accomplishes a kind of social work involving cross-class recognition.

If the crowd is characterized by a physical experience and set of sensations, bounded in a specific time and place, then a public is different. A public is not necessarily connected to a reality in the here and now but rather to life experiences and circumstances beyond a physical grouping; it is an idea as much as it is a lived reality. Publics are multiple but also evanescent. So perhaps the question is really about the nature of the metro crowd, which is surely composed of different publics, with different political interests and proclivities. The Metro allows new

forms of circulation of people and goods, but also of texts, such as advertisements and announcement boards.<sup>8</sup> A Metro public, meanwhile, might be recognizable as such both off the train and on one. It comes into being through discourse rather than the physical manifestation of crowds.<sup>9</sup> In Delhi, the discourse on the Metro public is often framed in terms of the ameliorative affect the Metro is meant to have on “unruly” publics. The idea is that its order and cleanliness will rub off on people and make them more in touch with their civic sensibilities. Rather than be seen as regressive, Delhi’s metro crowds have more often symbolized a new social order, and the Metro itself a kind of governance. An aspect of this order homogenizes people’s behavior, creating new norms required for the trains to operate, and yes, run on time. Nevertheless, there is a kind of social, political, and cultural exposure that is happening to people as they ride the trains, too. This aspect is harder to characterize. I sense it happening to me as I see others in a new way and see the city itself, its landscapes and buildings, and people on its rooftops, in new ways. It is a kind of recognition. And yet it may be empty of politics.

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On September 28, 2014, three African students riding the Metro were chased after and attacked by a metro crowd turned mob. The three males—two from Gabon, one from Burkina Faso—were taking the Metro back to their home in Noida when they got into an altercation with three other Metro passengers. The dispute moved from the train to the platform when one of the African students was pushed out of the train when it stopped at a station. The students were then pursued all the way to a Delhi police kiosk in the busy Rajiv Chowk station at the city’s center, Connaught Place. They were then alternately heckled at and jeered at by the mob and beaten with metal rods. Locally, the shock was initially about the fact that something so untoward, so chaotic and so undisciplined could happen on the Metro. Then, once videos of the event were uploaded on YouTube, stories in the national and international press focused on the racial aspect of the story.<sup>10</sup> The students were not only black but also foreign nationals studying at one of the country’s new private universities. There was first a rumor that the students had been harassing a female passenger when three Indian males intervened and started beating them up. This narrative was celebrated minutes after the event when the mob started chanting *Vande Mataram* (“Hail to the Mother”), the colonial-era nationalist chant. More than anything, it underlined the xenophobic nature of the attack.

The story from the perspective of the African students emerged only after the incident. They said three Indian passengers were taking photos of them while laughing, and when they protested, a scuffle ensued. At Rajiv Chowk

station, one of the African students was pushed out of the train, and the others followed, thrashing all three of them on the platform, where a Delhi policeman also happened to be. The policeman took the six to the police kiosk within the station, and it was during that period that people began to relentlessly pursue and attack the three African students. On this point the story told by the African students, which appeared on the online news website, Firstpost, is supported by the videos taken of the event, which went viral and led to the story being picked up internationally.<sup>11</sup> One of the students, Yohan, who studies at Amity University in Noida, described what happened:

They were daring us to come outside. As the policemen who had rescued and brought us to the enclosure left the spot, the cop who was deployed in the kiosk also stepped out after some time and told the mob gathered outside something in Hindi, which we could not understand. We bolted the booth from inside to save our lives, but the frenzied mob smashed the glass facade and entered the police booth. They started hitting us with sticks and rods. Some of them were throwing furniture on us.<sup>12</sup>

In the video, the African students are in the police kiosk, with clear panes of glass all around. Their panic inside the booth is visible from the outside as they scramble and climb through the windows of the kiosk to the roof in an attempt to escape the mob violence. Then one of them gets on top of the roof; he is a tall man; he could almost look imposing were it not for the fact that he is hunched over, looking down at the mob jeering at him. Then, men from the mob climb up after two of the students, striking them with long metal objects. Police at turns look concerned and bored but act only to separate the mob from the African students at the end of the video, which lasts a painfully long five minutes. On the sidelines of the video footage, blurred and shaky, stands a Yes Bank ATM, with a poster reading, “Invest in a Prospering India. Say Yes to Growth.” It is not right side up for most of the video but becomes strikingly legible by the end.

There is something disturbingly light and almost festive about the look and sound of the crowd turned mob. At the edges of the crowd, people—nearly all of them men—are holding their phones high, capturing it all and perhaps trying to negotiate the line between participant and observer. Where one stands in this crowd can distinguish one from being an accomplice to being a witness, especially for those buffering their own involvement by holding up their phones.

The African students were eventually saved from the mob and taken to the hospital by several policemen who cordoned off the area near the Delhi police kiosk. On the one hand, this could be seen as an isolated event, and it is

certainly not what usually happens on the Delhi Metro. On the other hand, it was a story that everyone could believe, especially in light of other recent racist episodes targeting Africans in Delhi.<sup>13</sup> Racial slights and insults among Indians and between national and ethnic groups are not uncommon in the capital city. In this case, the Metro could be read as a microcosm of urban society, with all of its diversity and its prejudices. It could also reveal the underside of the new civility that has come to be expected and even celebrated on the Metro. The aspect of the story that seemed to turn it into a national and then international news story was not that it was just a racially motivated attack in a cosmopolitan city but rather that it happened on the Delhi Metro, which has been cast as a liberal, disciplined space. If the Metro is meant to be the city's new social engine and social leveler, it came as a shock to see it as the site of an unruly mob.

Is, then, the telling of this story of the violent metro "crowd" or, rather, the metro "mob" another way for people to talk about "society"? By "society," I mean the much larger set of relations between people off the trains. To what extent is the Metro an enclosed space, cut off from the outside, or a space contiguous with the city? For the youth activist, Kapil, the space of the Metro was a place to find like-minded people, a physical manifestation—or possibility—of a public. In the video of the mob attacking the African students, the metro mob represents a kind of mobilization. The mob has intent and purpose; it has rallied around a particular cause, or been rallied to a particular cause, with partial or faulty information or else an indifference to the accuracy of the information. The mob moves in unison and ramps up the physical intensity of the typical metro crowd. But the mob is also subject to management. In both the protest described by Kapil and the attack on the African students, the national, in very different contexts, is invoked through flags and song. In key moments, it can become a unifier and identifier for any purpose.

This unpredictability—or malleability—of the crowd raises the question of whether or to what extent design and infrastructure matter. What might turn a crowd into a mob? On the one hand, a metro system is a form of global mass transit; and on the other, it is embedded in local issues, politics, and communities. While, for example, the ladies' coach of the Delhi Metro certainly creates a secure and safe space for women commuters, it also skews the ratio of men to women in the rest of the train, altering all manner of social dynamics and crowd formations. The ladies' coach may be celebrated as a refuge for women, even as the skewed gender ratio in the general coaches creates the dominant social formations on the train. It is impossible to say whether the presence of more

women in the general coach would have prevented the attack on the African students, but it may very well have altered the dynamics.

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On the way to Mundka on Tuesday morning, I take the Violet Line in south Delhi to Central Secretariat where I change to the Yellow Line. At Kashmere Gate, I take the Red Line to Rithala, this time changing at Inderlok station to the Green Line. I then travel due west aboveground to Mundka, the end of the line station a few miles from the Haryana state border. The crowd in the ladies' coach changes along the route: women wear more synthetic fabrics, the designs on saris become bigger, the gems on jeans shinier, there are more downcast looks and fewer confident bodies. These details are hard to assess, hard to document, but when all else in the Metro is constant, they are also hard to miss. The view outside is miles and miles of three-story concrete buildings, stacked one against another, chipped and crumbling. Nevertheless there is an unmistakable beauty in the hazy sky and the wide vista.

It is days before Delhi's state election of February 2015. On the way out to Mundka, Bharatiya Janata Party posters, featuring Prime Minister Narendra Modi, beseech passengers to "*chalo chalein Modi ke saath*" ("Come along with Modi"). Returning to central Delhi, ads from the Aam Aadmi Party promise the institution of a mobile phone safety button and CCTV cameras covering the entire city. Women sleep and chat under the posters.<sup>14</sup>

When you get down at Mundka, a line of small white vans waits for passengers at the bottom of the escalator. Young men call out place names, all across the Haryana border. Cow dung patties dry in the sun to one side of the station escalator; jagged lines of cars and buses jostle on the other. Half-built Metro stanchions to support future stations rise up in the distance. Leaving Mundka, Raveena, a woman in her twenties, gets on the ladies' coach with me. We start to chat, and she tells me that her father drops her and picks her up at the station each day. She lives in Bahadurgarh, which is a few kilometers from Mundka, just over the Haryana border. She takes the Metro a few stops eastward to Paschim Vihar, where her college is. She is certain that she would not be on the Metro at all if it were not for the ladies' coach. "After Mundka, it's good," she says, "but before Mundka, it's very bad, the crowd and all." For Raveena, "crowd" is about place, about where you are from and the attitudes you may hold. It is an imagined likeness and social reality but perhaps more a public than an actual crowd. It is also, of course, a manner of speaking. Nonetheless, in her discourse we see where crowd and public might coalesce. "Haryana is not good, not good for girls. Men

are not good, even boys. They stare at me, sometimes they vent at me. I can't do anything," she explains. "Vent" is typical Delhi-speak to describe when someone lashes out in a stream of verbal abuse erupting like a volcano. On the street they see her as a species rather than a person. What are they angry about? That she is a girl in public, that she moves with confidence, that she is protected, that she studies, that they don't have girlfriends, that they don't have jobs, that, ironically enough, there aren't more women around.<sup>15</sup> The metro crowd is simply more "neutral," Raveena says, and I also see that it allows her to imagine, and perhaps enact, a future beyond it.



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## Emotional Entrainment in Crowds and Other Social Formations

Douglas Hollan

The sociologist, Randall Collins (2004, 2009), has recently argued that emotional entrainment—the process whereby interacting human nervous systems can become physiologically and rhythmically attuned to one another—is a primary element of all social formations, including crowds. Collins uses and endorses recent research from a variety of disciplines suggesting that biologically based, embodied forms of imitation and mutual attunement, including empathy, mirror neurons, and sensitivity to facial expressions, are far more central to human social and cultural behavior than previously imagined. In this chapter, I use ethnographic and clinical material from rural Indonesia and the urban United States, respectively, to critically examine some of Collins's claims about the role of emotional entrainment in crowds and other social formations.

I argue that while Collins is certainly correct in drawing our attention back to the ways in which social formations are embodied in deeply emotional and intersubjective ways, he errs in suggesting that people entrain to other bodies in fairly uniform ways, under the influence of a mutual focus of attention. People in crowds and other groups entrain to one another, but they entrain to particular bodies in particular historical and cultural moments. These histories of mutual encounter leave particularized emotional residues in people that loop into future engagements in complex and emergent ways that cannot be predicted from a person's habitus alone. Because Collins overgeneralizes the way emotions become entrained for people—a key part of his theory—he is unable to account for the *various* ways in which people's emotional ghosts and memories are aroused to new life by social interaction.

I begin by reviewing Collins's theory of the centrality of emotions and emotional entrainment in human sociality and then use some of the



psychoanalyst Hans Loewald's observations about the fluidity and contingent emergence of unconscious or preconscious thoughts, feelings, and images to suggest the limits of his theory. I illustrate and discuss these theoretical points by analyzing clinical and ethnographic case material from Toraja, Indonesia and the greater Los Angeles area of southern California. I conclude by suggesting that the "crowd" of emotional ghosts circulating within any group of people always far exceeds the number of concrete bodies present per se, which is why many social formations, whether highly organized and scripted or not, remain as emergent and unpredictable as they do.

My critique of Collins's entrainment theory is based on data gathered through an ethnographic and clinical approach that Robert I. Levy and I have referred to as person-centered ethnography and observation (Levy and Hollan 2014). Person-centered ethnography attempts to represent human behavior and subjective experience from the point of view of the acting, intending, and attentive subject and to actively explore, rather than to assume, the emotional and motivational saliency of social, cultural, political, and economic forces. The focus is not only on the behavioral environment in which a person acts, but also on how individual persons are reacting to, embodying, internalizing, and transforming that environment. This includes investigating—often through open-ended interviewing techniques—what a person might be thinking, feeling, sensing, imagining, fantasizing, and dreaming as well as what they might be enacting through more overt forms of expression and behavior. Such a fine-grained ethnographic approach is well suited, indeed even necessary, to evaluate the kind of broad claims Collins makes about the role of emotional entrainment in the formation and reproduction of social groupings, including crowds.

### Collins's theory of interaction rituals

In two recent books, *Interaction Ritual Chains* (2004) and *Violence: A Micro-Sociological Theory* (2009), Collins develops a theory of interactions rituals as central to human life. Collins uses the concept of a "ritual" very broadly to include nearly any type of social interaction imaginable, including what are often referred to as "crowds," though he focuses primarily on face-to-face interactions in real time. The physical presence of human bodies interacting with one another is critical to his theory, since it is the emotional entrainment these bodies generate in one another that drives and explains much of social life. According to Collins, "Interaction rituals in general are processes that take

place as human bodies come close enough to each other that their nervous systems become mutually attuned in rhythms and anticipations of each other, and the physiological substratum that produces emotions in one individual's body becomes stimulated in feedback loops that run through the other persons' (2004: xix). Here Collins uses and endorses recent research from a variety of disciplines suggesting that biologically based, embodied forms of imitation and mutual attunement—including empathy, mirror neurons, and recognition of facial expressions—are far more central and critical to human social and cultural behavior than previously imagined. Nevertheless, he argues forcefully, in good sociological fashion, that it is social interaction that drives these chains of emotional and physiological arousal and entrainment, not the other way around.

According to Collins, then, emotional entrainment does not happen in a social vacuum. It primes and is primed by common actions or events or by a mutual focus of attention, separating out those people who are part of the interaction from those who are not. Bodies can be drawn near by a mutual focus of attention, or the emotional arousal caused by nearby bodies can facilitate a mutual focus of attention, but both must be present for a “successful” ritual to occur, and both processes are mutually reinforcing. As feedback and reinforcement between emotions and mutual focus intensify through rhythmic entrainment, the interaction ritual generates, when successful, a collective effervescence leading to a sense of collective solidarity, to symbols of social relationship, and to common standards of morality, such that participants in the ritual feel righteous anger and indignation when the ritual frame or sense of solidarity is violated in some way.

Successful rituals also generate positive emotional energy—a collective effervescence—in participants, so that they feel confidence, elation, strength, enthusiasm, and initiative, much of which is carried away from the ritual and into other arenas of life. Collins argues that people tend to seek out, consciously and very much unconsciously, gatherings, crowds, and rituals that give them a sense of emotional energy and social solidarity while avoiding those that do not. “We operate,” he says, “through an emotional magnetism toward and repulsion from particular thoughts and situations in the flow of everyday life; we are seldom reflective about this, and are often grossly inaccurate in our assessments when we are reflective” (Collins 2004: 97).

Collins is a sociologist and so of course he cites primarily sociological work in the development of what he refers to as his “radical microsociology” theory of “mutual focus/emotional-entrainment” mechanisms and processes, drawing on and integrating especially some of the classical ideas and concepts of Emile

Durkheim and Erving Goffman. Yet his theory resonates deeply with some earlier anthropological work as well. The emphasis on complex feedback and feedforward loops among dynamically related and mutually sensitive bodies leading to predictable types of interactional patterns closely resembles Gregory Bateson's (1972) identification of what he referred to as "schismogenic" patterns of social interaction and his ideas about an "ecology of mind." The idea that people are unconsciously drawn to certain kinds of interactions, roles, meanings, and symbols while unconsciously avoidant of or repelled by others, overlaps considerably with Gananath Obeyesekere's (1981, 1990) concept of "personal symbols," nonobligatory aspects of culture that can acquire deep, usually unconscious, significance and expressive capacity for some people but not for others. According to Obeyesekere, it is the unconscious differential emotional investment in certain kinds of symbols and meanings but not in others that distinguishes personal symbols from all other types of meanings in the cultural and social world.

### The limits of Collins's theory

Collins theorizes that the "emotional magnetism" driving social circulation and interactional participation can be explained in fairly straightforward sociological terms: as people participate in the interactional rituals that are available to them, they find themselves attracted, usually in a less than conscious way, to those interactions that enhance their emotional energy and sense of social solidarity while avoiding those that do not. Over time, this pattern of social participation becomes internalized, such that people's thoughts, dreams, fantasies, and internal dialogs begin to mirror and reproduce the meanings and emotions of the interactions they have participated in, which sustains their emotional energy between rituals and which in turn, inclines people back toward social gatherings where those meanings and emotions can be evoked and enacted with others.

Collins acknowledges that many attempted rituals, crowds, and social gatherings fail, leaving participants feeling flat or even drained of energy, and that even in successful interactions, the emotional energy field is often unevenly distributed among the participants, so that some people are deeply engaged and energized while others may remain on the margins. He argues that some of this interactional failure and emotional inequality can be explained by structural variables such as power or status differentials, but I think it is exactly here where his model of emotional entrainment begins to fail him. This is because the model's basic assumptions—bodies entrain, people mutually focus, leading to a common emotional experience

and sense of solidarity—do not capture the kind of emotional complexities and ambivalences, whether for structural reasons of power and status or otherwise, that can haunt people in even the most successful of interactions. Indeed it is such emotional complexity and variability that helps to explain why so many social formations, including many types of crowds, can be as messy, unpredictable, and emergent as they are. I turn now to the work of the psychoanalyst Hans Loewald to help illuminate some of these emotional complexities.

### Ghosts of the unconscious

In one of Loewald's most widely cited articles, "On the Therapeutic Action of Psychoanalysis" (2000), he discusses the centrality and importance of "transference" in human life. By transference he means not only the unwitting transfer of emotional reactions and expectations developed in interaction with known intimates onto others who are less well known and with whom one is less intimate—the traditional psychoanalytic sense—but also the way unconscious memories and emotions come to infuse and animate consciousness and experience more generally and, in turn, how more conscious and organized parts of mind come to give form, meaning, and expression to thoughts, feelings, and perceptions that otherwise remain latent and unformulated. Such transference or communication among different parts of the self-system and between the self and other people and objects is critical, he argues, for the linking of past to present and future, of memory to perception, and of emotion and motivation to action and behavior. When such linkage breaks down, people can become haunted by the "ghosts" of the less conscious parts of mind, which may press for recognition in the form of recurring dreams and memories or somatic and emotional sensations or symptoms of various kinds.

Loewald borrows the idea of ghosts of the unconscious from Freud, who in chapter seven of *The Interpretation of Dreams* likens the persistence of unconscious thoughts and wishes to the ghosts of the underworld in the *Odyssey*: "If I may use a simile, they [unconscious thoughts and wishes] are only capable of annihilation in the same sense as the ghosts in the underworld of the *Odyssey*—ghosts which awoke to new life as soon as they tasted blood" (Freud 1965: 592n1). Loewald uses this metaphor of unconscious ghosts to discuss how psychoanalysts use the transference between analyst and client to evoke the client's most troubling but unconscious thoughts and feelings, so that they can be brought into the light of conscious awareness and given new meaning and conscious articulation:

Transference is pathological insofar as the unconscious is a crowd of ghosts, and this is the beginning of the transference neurosis in analysis: ghosts of the unconscious, imprisoned by defenses and symptoms, are allowed to taste blood, are let loose. In the daylight of analysis the ghosts of the unconscious are laid and led to rest as ancestors whose power is taken over and transformed into the newer intensity of present life, of the secondary process and contemporary objects. (Loewald 2000: 249)

The concept and image of a person's inner world and unconscious that we get from Loewald (and many other psychoanalysts) is very different than the one we get from Collins. Collins focuses on the social aspects of this inner world: how over time, through a process of internalization, a person's thoughts, dreams, fantasies, and inner dialogs begin to mirror and reproduce the meanings and emotions of the interactions they have participated in. He suggests, for example:

If we had a large enough collection of chains of thoughts from people in particular situations, it may well turn out that they think many of the same elements, even arranged in many of the same combinations. With greater theoretical abstraction, examining the formative conditions of inner IR [interaction ritual] chains, the commonality we find must be still greater. (Collins 2004: 220)

And indeed this is a key aspect of his entrainment theory: that through rhythmic entrainment of emotion and attention, successful interaction rituals produce common and collective thoughts and sensations of solidarity and effervescence that, in turn, motivate people to seek out similar interactions and rituals in the future and to avoid those that do not reinforce such emotionally gratifying thoughts and sensations.

Loewald's unconscious "crowd of ghosts," on the other hand, is the emotional, cognitive, and fantasy residues of a person's past interactions with others that have either been pushed out of awareness for defensive purposes or which have simply remained out of conscious thought because attention and symbolic and linguistic elaboration have been drawn elsewhere (Hollan 2000). While some of these ghosts become socialized and reflective of collective thought and sensation in just the way Collins suggests, many of them remain highly particular to the individual, resulting from a person's unique history of interaction with other people in which emotionally related thoughts and feelings become associated to one another in a nonlinear looping way (Hollan 2012). Such associations of emotionally connected thoughts and memories, linking past interactional experiences to each other and to those occurring in the here and now, may "haunt" present interactions with thoughts or sensations that, from a third

person point of view, often seem to undermine, contradict, or be inconsistent with the most readily observable and apparent aspects of the interaction. For example, a person's apparently joyful interactions might be haunted by the sense that the joy cannot possibly last for more than a moment. A person about to receive some form of social recognition or appreciation might be haunted by the sense that she is really a fraud deserving of nothing more than contempt. Expressions of love for another might be haunted by feelings of anger and disappointment, and so on.

From a Loewaldian perspective, such emotional hauntings reflect the ambivalence and ambiguity that are a part of almost all social interactions. Although overt enactments of most public behavior can receive relatively direct feedback and socialization from others, and so can be brought into conformity with cultural expectations or ideals fairly easily, the emotions and imaginings accompanying many enactments are not so easily socialized and controlled. People can and do experience thoughts, emotions, and fantasies during an interaction that are at odds with its ostensible meanings and purposes. Such contrary thoughts and feelings can be left unattended or pushed out of conscious awareness, but they remain labile and can be stirred back into consciousness if they are allowed to taste new blood; that is, if present or future interactions present emotional stimuli to which the unattended or repressed thoughts and feelings can be associated.

Loewald notes that psychoanalysts inevitably and deliberately evoke the transference of these unattended and repressed thoughts and feelings during the course of analytic treatment, but of course they are inevitably stirred and evoked by other types of interactions as well, including crowd formation. And indeed, this is where Loewald's model of emotional evocation and entrainment differs considerably from Collins's. Rather than assume that emotional entrainment and common focus lead to the development of common and collective inner worlds, Loewald would maintain that people may respond to social interactions in various and unique ways—depending on past relationship experience—and that some of these less common thoughts and feelings will remain durable, susceptible to being reignited and expressed if presented with the right emotional stimuli. From this perspective, the crowd of unconscious ghosts that people bring into social interactions always far exceeds the number of actual participants present, and the range of ways in which these unattended or repressed thoughts and memories may be stirred (or further repressed) by an interaction will also remain broad and contingent, depending on whom the other participants are and on how the interaction unfolds. There is emotional action and reaction here, but of

a kind that is much more emergent and unpredictable than Collins suggests. Let me now present some ethnographic and clinical “hauntings” that illustrate some of these points and which allow me to develop the discussion further.

## Hauntings

### **Nene’na Limbong, Toraja, South Sulawesi, Indonesia**

Nene’na Limbong was one of the men I knew well during the time I was doing fieldwork in a mountain village in Toraja on the island of Sulawesi in Indonesia in the 1980s and ’90s (Hollan and Wellenkamp 1994, 1996). Nene’na Limbong was a high-status man, and a relatively wealthy one by local standards—meaning only that he and his family could afford to eat rice throughout the year rather than needing to supplement their diet with sweet potatoes, cassava, or other foods that were considered inferior to rice. Most Toraja at that time were wet rice farmers, living in small, widely scattered hamlets across high valleys and mountainsides, though many of the younger people were beginning to migrate to other parts of Sulawesi and Indonesia for employment and education.

In part because Nene’na Limbong had the social means and position to do so, he was an active participant in community feasts, especially feasts at funerals,<sup>1</sup> at which he would slaughter as many water buffalo, pigs, and chickens as he could afford and thought appropriate, so that meat could be distributed throughout the community according to people’s relative social position, and so that he himself could gain prestige through this contribution of animals. These funeral feasts were often large and lively events, drawing not only the immediate and extended family of the deceased, but also many of the deceased family’s friends, neighbors, and feasting partners. People were excited to see how many and what kind of animals were being contributed by whom and to whom the slaughtered meat of those animals would be distributed. Meat was supposed to be distributed according to relative social status, but determinations of relative social status were always in play, given that people could enhance their status by donating and slaughtering more animals. This made the meat division at a funeral a highly charged event, and one that could be quite contentious at times, as people argued about who deserved what kind of meat and how much. Indeed, by the 1980s, such disputes and the great expense of many funerals had led some Toraja, especially younger and more educated ones, to think that funerals had become a waste of time and resources.

Nevertheless, the Toraja feast remains, in many ways, the classic effervescence-generating social gathering that is central to Collins's theory: bodies come together in close proximity with a heightened mutual focus, in this case, an intense focus on the kind and number of animals to be slaughtered and on to whom the animals' meat will be distributed. Nene'na Limbong certainly gained emotional energy and a sense of satisfaction from these feasts, since as long as he continued to contribute animals to them, they reasserted and maintained his social position. He was considered a "big" and important man in large part because he was known for having donated many animals to feasts over the years and it was assumed that his own funeral would be an important event, to which many people, in turn, would contribute large numbers of animals for feasting. Yet even such an obvious beneficiary of feasting activities as Nene'na Limbong was ambivalent about his participation. This was not obvious from his public behavior, much of which was reinforcing of the feasting culture, just as Collins might predict. But when we were once talking about his past and present nighttime dreams,<sup>2</sup> he told me one in which he had seen his body being cut up and distributed to people in just the way a buffalo is butchered and distributed at a feast.<sup>3</sup> He had been frightened by this image of himself as a sacrificial animal—in part because such dreams were thought to be prophetic—and the memory of the dream from several years prior was still fresh in his mind and easily and vividly narrated to me.

Loewald would probably argue that the dream captured Nene'na Limbong's implicit awareness that his life-sustaining interdependencies with others, as epitomized on feasting occasions, were also at some level overwhelming and even murderous to him. The dream captured this awareness graphically and dramatically and drew Nene'na Limbong's focused attention in a way that his day-to-day complaints about lower status people using the local rules of reciprocity to take advantage of him did not. His wariness and fear of others' needs and demands had been pushed out of his everyday consciousness for the most part, but were not absorbed and replaced by collective focus and effervescence as a result of his participation in feasting. Rather, his wariness had remained durable and could be stirred into dream consciousness, and then into waking consciousness, by his chance encounters in everyday life in a transference-like way. So while Nene'na Limbong's participation in feasts and other communal gatherings elevated his mood and energy in some ways, it also aroused and entrained contrary emotions and images that were far from promoting solidarity, trust, or confidence. The same kind of interactional ritual not only attracted, but also repulsed, and left behind a distinctive emotional residue of wariness



and fear. While many people knew that Nene'na Limbong often complained that others' were taking advantage of his obligation to share his relative wealth, few could imagine that such a fortunate and high-status person could actually envision himself to be as helpless and vulnerable as a sacrificial animal.

### **George, Southern California, USA**

Let me now move to a psychotherapeutic consulting room in southern California where George, a white, middle-aged, middle-class, unemployed man I have known for several years, described to me what it feels like to have the possibility of being hired back for contract work by the same corporation that let him go only the year before to downsize payroll and pension obligations. I am turning to this example to illustrate the broad range of social rituals and interactions that Collins's theory is meant to cover and explicate. Work interactions and rituals are less crowd-like than the Toraja funeral feast since they usually involve fewer people, are more scripted, and occur on a regular and routine basis, but they too involve the mutual focus of attention and rhythmic entrainment that optimally lead workers to a sense of collective solidarity and achievement. The issue once again is, does rhythmic entrainment and a mutual focus of attention, which are common to many social formations (including work rituals), lead to the kind of common, collective feelings and inner dialogs and to the kind of predictable future social behavior as a result of emotional magnetism, as Collins claims? Or, as someone like Loewald would no doubt argue, must things inevitably be more complicated than this, given the significance and ubiquity of transference in human life?

George began by telling me how torn he was about the idea of returning to work. On the one hand, he needed the money. But he also enjoyed his work, and he was very proud of the long and successful career he had had with his previous employer. He had also enjoyed the collegial relations he had developed with some of his co-workers and the opportunities they have given him for learning new skills and new approaches to his work. Collins would probably argue that George's strong urge to return to work illustrates that his previous work rituals and interactions had been successful ones, and that the positive emotional energy and sense of collective solidarity they had developed in him were now impelling him back to work, just as his theory would predict.

However, George's self esteem had been deeply wounded by his laying off, this despite the fact that he "knew" rationally that his managers were just responding to corporate orders and to the changing world economy. The job he

was being asked to return to, including salary, was nearly identical to the one he had left, but now that his bureaucratic and legal status had changed from regular employee to contract worker, he felt differently about things. He felt ashamed about returning to the same job with a diminished status, and he worried what others would think of him if he did such a thing. Would they think he had no shame or that he had no better prospects, even though from the point of view of Collins's theory, he is being offered an opportunity to reestablish gratifying rituals with people?

While George was telling me about these mixed feelings and motivations, he began to remember a disturbing dream from the previous night in which a gang of men had been pulling him into the darkness to assault him. This then led to a number of recollections about how he was often bullied as a child, and how ashamed he was then and now that he was never able to stand up for himself.

A week later, George decided to accept the temporary contract work, feeling that he had no choice, given his financial situation. While at first glance the level of coercion or ambivalence that George feels about returning to work would seem to indicate a different kind of interaction ritual than the ones Collins is concerned with—those in which participation is determined more by emotional attraction or repulsion than by structural or other deterministic variables—I want to suggest just the opposite: that many interaction rituals, including everyday work rituals and other types of crowd formations, generate more ambivalence in people than Collins's model would indicate. Very few social interactions involve complete "choice" or "free" emotional magnetism or repulsion on the part of participants. If people do not feel constrained or pressured to participate in social interactions by financial or economic necessity, as does George, they may feel constrained by cultural or political expectation, or by fear of hurting people, or by fear of loss of status or esteem, or by fear of ostracism, and so on. George's case may be a strong example of how a social interaction may engender or entail emotions that run counter to its most explicitly communicated goals and purposes, but it is by no means unusual in this regard. And while people may be fully conscious of some aspect of their ambivalence toward a certain type of social interaction, other aspects only become more conscious as repressed or unconscious thoughts and emotions become stirred or triggered by immersion in the interaction, exactly as someone like Loewald would hypothesize.

When George eventually learned that he would have to undergo a standard background and financial check before he would be given access back to the same offices where he had worked for over twenty years as a full-time employee, he was angered and humiliated yet again, and his ambivalence about returning to

work grew even stronger. In this context, he remembered another recent dream: “I am in a classroom of some kind, towards the back, feeling distant from the teacher and other students up front.” As he is recounting this dream, he tells me it reminds him of the second-grade teacher he told me about before, one who once pulled him out of class to tell him how disappointed she was in him. “You are smart enough to be in the front of the class with the other good students, if you would just put your mind to it,” she told him.

While George is consciously aware of how humiliating it is for him to return to work under the circumstances that were presented to him, he is mostly unaware of his own implicit tendency to emotionally link together actual and imagined episodes of humiliation from throughout his life: his feelings of humiliation about returning to work precipitate dreams about being assaulted and about sitting in the back of a classroom feeling alienated and ashamed, which in turn stir up memories of never being able to defend or stand up for himself and of being reprimanded by his second-grade teacher for not working hard enough. These linkages become more conscious and recognizable for George, and for myself, as he spontaneously verbalizes his thoughts, feelings, and dreams in a stream of consciousness sort of way. Prior to this, however, there is no awareness, only the sense that the thoughts and emotions flood over him in an unbidden way.

Of course the flip side of this from a social interactional point of view is that George’s interlocutors are also not likely to be aware of his tendency to re-experience emotions and memories in this way. George’s manager, for example, may know that George might feel embarrassed about coming back to work as a contract worker, but of course he has no way of knowing that George actually dreams of it as a kind of assault. As with Nene’na Limbong, there is a haunting entrainment of emotion going on here, but it is a nonlinear, looping one, linking together emotional resonances from past and present in ways that would elude Collins’s model of relatively smooth social participation and reproduction.

### Toward a specificity of emotional entrainment

Collins theory of interactional rituals does us a service by drawing our attention back to the ways in which social formations, including crowds of all kinds, are embodied in deeply emotional ways. I think he is also right in his efforts to acknowledge and attempt to integrate new biological and neuroscience research about emotional entrainment into social theory. As Collins notes, to acknowledge this research is not to give it a privileged position, but rather to

acknowledge and understand better some of the mechanisms through which social formations may affect and shape emotions, bodies, and physiology in very concrete, identifiable ways. I have also suggested, however, that Collins's model of emotional entrainment can be misleading, implying as it does that a mutual focus of attention, coupled with close bodily interaction, will lead to a fairly uniform emotional experience for members of a group that will in turn, incline those same people back toward similar interactions and emotional experiences in the future, or conversely will lead them to avoid interactions that are less gratifying. In contrast, my ethnographic and clinical examples illustrate that the overt meanings *of* an interaction ritual, no matter to what extent attention is focused or constrained, do not necessarily coincide with the implicit emotional meanings *for* the participants involved, which may be varied and contradictory (cf. Spiro 1984, Obeyesekere 1981, 1990). That is why someone like Nene'na Limbong can be haunted by dreams and images of himself as a sacrificial animal even though the Toraja feast reinforces and enhances his social position in many ways.

George's case is also problematic for Collins's theory: the theory of emotional magnetism implies that people will either gain emotional energy and a sense of solidarity from participating in a certain kind of interaction or they will not. If they do, they will be drawn back to similar interactions in the future. If they do not, they will learn to avoid those kinds of interactions in the future. But George both did and did not want to return to work, for very particular reasons. He wanted an opportunity to work and to learn, he wanted a chance to reestablish collegial ties with his former workmates, and he wanted and needed a chance to earn money. In many of these ways, he is just like any other person who has had gratifying work experiences and wants the chance to have them again—just as Collins's theory would predict. What the theory would miss, however, is that George's previous work gratifications were also different from other workers. As a single and relatively solitary man, George used work more than anything else to provide a structure to his time and activities. Without that work structure, he felt lost and disoriented, unlike many of his co-workers who had preferred to work from home in order to be closer to their families.

But it is not only George's attractions to work that differ, but also his aversions, and it is these complicated emotional ambivalences about social interactions that Collins's theory has the most trouble accounting for. While some people would not think twice about returning to work under George's circumstances—always preferring to work rather than not work—others, like George, would likely feel embarrassed or ashamed to return to the same job but with a

diminished legal and bureaucratic status. But what would set George apart from these others is that his sense of humiliation is quite specific, linking together his treatment at work with memories of a castigating second-grade teacher and with dream images of assault. Such particular memories and images are noteworthy because they mean that while George may not be the only unhappy and disgruntled employee at his place of work, he is unhappy and disgruntled in his own particular way. The persistence of George's emotionally associated memories and dream images, as punctuated, looping, and nonlinear as they may be, illustrate that past emotional experiences are not as easily smoothed out and revised by present-day interactions as Collins's social imprint model would imply. They can be smoothed out and revised in light of present-day interactions, but they can also remain quite inert, strongly influencing the way a person experiences an interaction, even when attention is otherwise mutually and communally oriented, linking together different parts of the phenomenal field—people, objects, ideas, imaginings, past, and present—in ways that can be surprisingly idiosyncratic and contrary to the prevailing habitus.

The larger point here is that while people in groups, including crowds, do emotionally entrain to one another, they do not do so in uniform ways. Rather, they entrain to particular bodies in particular historical moments, and these histories of encounter leave particularized emotional residues that loop into future engagements in unpredictable ways. The crowd of emotional ghosts circulating within any group of people always far exceeds the number of concrete bodies present per se, which is why, I would argue, that many social formations, whether highly organized and scripted or not, remain as emergent and unpredictable as they do. During social situations of almost any kind, these latent emotional ghosts are often stirred to new life in divergent, transference-like ways, not uniformly. What triggers one emotional ghost—a sight, a smell, a touch, a focus of attention—will not necessarily stir another. The complex emotional effervescence produced by any social formation, including crowds, is certainly constrained by such variables as number and proximity of bodies and by the extent and kind of mutual focus and attention, but its emergent, dynamical properties, related in part to the contingent way latent emotional meanings associate to one another and are aroused by social interaction, will always exceed and overflow those parameters.

# Enduring Crowds: The Ritual Molding of the Anthropos in the Prolonging of Political Protest

Bjørn Thomassen

## Introduction

In this short chapter, I propose a novel concept that can supplement existing approaches to the study of crowds: “enduring crowds.”<sup>1</sup> My starting point of discussion relates to the question of temporality, and to the trivial yet crucial fact that in many locations, since the period that we still talk about as the “Arab Spring,” the protesting crowds that occupied the central city squares stayed on for longer periods of time—weeks, months, or even years. I argue that this protracted temporality forces us to rethink basic axioms of crowd theory. The recent revolutionary events thus represent unique opportunities for us to develop a more articulate anthropology of the political crowd and of crowd behavior. I will do so by highlighting the dynamics of the 2013 Maidan uprising in Kiev, Ukraine,<sup>2</sup> and by posing the simple question: What happens to crowds when they endure over time?

I will first discuss the question of temporality in classical approaches to crowds, and then ask what it means to rethink crowds as “enduring.” I will link the discussion to a series of anthropological concepts that speak to crucial dynamics of enduring crowds, including Victor Turner’s notion of *communitas*. My aim is thus to make a theoretical contribution at the intersection of sociology and anthropology. While the study of crowds constituted a core theme in classical sociology and onward, the same was never the case for anthropology. In line with the overall ambition of this volume, I argue that anthropological perspectives can enrich and refine our understanding of crowds and crowd phenomena, not only by providing badly needed ethnographic accounts of crowding, but also—and just as importantly—by adding analytical depth. While my focus is

on the Maidan uprising, I will draw parallels to the dynamics of political protest movements that emerged in early 2011 in the context of the Arab Spring, where crowds conquered main city squares around the world and provoked seismic political changes—the dramatic effects of which we still live with.

### When crowds do not have short lives

The situations I refer to in this chapter all took place on public city squares. The 2011 events in Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen, and many other places thus evidenced the crucial spatial dimension of mass mobilization, as crowds literally conquered the central squares of the main cities of those countries peacefully. In some cases, these mobilizations provoked regime change, in others they did not. This question of outcomes is not my primary focus here, although I will address it in the conclusion. The concreteness of this spatial framing is a reminder that even in an age of social media, face-to-face encounters still matter. Squares form the frame for ritual action. Christian Borch's (2010) discussion of Georg Simmel's work highlights the ability of urban squares in particular to stimulate crowd formation. Squares—in contrast to narrow streets, or open fields—endow people with a new kind of breathing space, and can come to signify liberation in a very real and physical sense. The square is thus no mere “context.” To use the language of Gregory Bateson (1972), the square functions as a message about the message: a meta-communication that enables meanings and deeper layers of symbolism. The frame that signifies is the square itself.

While the spatial dimension of crowd formation and the productive use of public space in recent and ongoing political uprisings are absolutely crucial, I argue that they intersect with the temporal dimension in ways that require more scrutiny. In practically all sociological approaches to crowds, crowds are considered phenomena that emerge very suddenly, and that have “short lives.” As Elias Canetti famously wrote, “The open crowd exists so long as it grows; it disintegrates as soon as it stops growing. For just as suddenly as it originates, the crowd disintegrates” (1984: 16). Only “closed crowds,” with erected barriers and fences, can keep people together for more than a little while, Canetti argued. Importantly, this view of the “suddenness” of the crowd was intimately related to a deep suspicion found among crowd theorists throughout the twentieth century, who have tended to see the crowd as a deeply anti-rational force where individuals lose their autonomy. This “suspicion” can be traced all the way back to Kierkegaard's analysis of the crowd as the source of “untruth” and loss of

our “human-ness” (Kierkegaard, see in particular SKS 16, 86; SKS 20, 125), an account that directly inspired Adorno but probably also Simmel (see Thomassen 2015). Of course, for the Frankfurt school, the “crowd” was not any crowd: it was the crowd that had materialized with the Nazi frenzy.

The attraction of the crowd of course always had a “positive” element to it, connected to the concrete experiences undergone by human beings merging into a crowd. Canetti contended that the crowd provides individuals with the opportunity to rid themselves of the inequalities of everyday life, or “the burdens of distance” in his terminology. In the crowd, “distinctions are thrown off and all feel *equal*” (1984: 18, his emphasis). Canetti understood this as the “discharge” brought about via the crowd. Via this discharge, the crowd thus provided the individual with a sense of closeness that had gone lost in modern industrialized cities. But this always involved a loss: a loss of oneself. Simmel described such a process of de-individualization with the metaphor of the *avalanche*, referring to a social process by which persons are pushed by an external and overwhelming force, in short and dramatic moments. In his writings on “the quantitative aspects of the group” (1950: 87–104), Simmel described the fusion of masses, and how people are brought under one feeling, “in which all specificity and reserve of the personality is *suspended*.”

In classical scholarship the crowd produces a toxic excitation that carries away the individual without meeting any resistance. It is no coincidence that some of the most important strands of crowd theory originated in France—the country that had seen a revolution sparked by crowd mobilization. Nor is it surprising that some of the first debates in crowd psychology were between criminologists, as in the discussion between Scipio Sighele and Gabriel Tarde, concerning how to determine criminal responsibility in the crowd (Sighele 1892; Tarde 1892). The crowd was irrational, dangerous, and uncontrollable. In fact, the word for crowd in all Latin languages is synonymous with folly.

The term that Le Bon used to underscore this total loss of individuality was that of “contagion,” his second defining feature of the crowd, and one that follows naturally from the first quality of “suggestibility.” As Le Bon saw it, contagion involves a weakening of the individual, and he likens it to a sort of hypnotism, or a magnetic influence, where people are driven by unmediated instincts. As Borch says, in his recent summary of sociological crowd theory, “the individual loses his/her individuality in the crowd and is, however temporarily, absorbed in a collective entity that levels all personal characteristics and suspends his/her reasoning” (Borch 2006). As Le Bon put it, the crowd is “like a savage,” an accumulation of stupidity. While aware that the crowd had paved the way for



the French revolution, early thinkers of the crowd still posited the crowd as the dangerous annulment of the autonomous liberal individual onto whom a rational and democratic political order could be built.<sup>3</sup> To Le Bon and others, this irrational component also related to the fact that crowds so easily could fall prey to the spell of image-power and the chaos of “picture thinking,” which overruled conceptual thought. It is exactly because the crowd generates an intensified emotional stirring that it attracts people, against, beyond or even despite their rational will.

While many of the tenets of classical crowd theory have been scrutinized, the notion of a sudden massing followed by a quick dissolution has remained surprisingly untouched. The stress on suddenness and short duration has also been incorporated into all working definitions of “revolution,” as in Skocpol’s definition, which famously starts with the word “rapid” (1979). Crowds still tend to be talked about as a paradigmatic social formation of an earlier “mass’ phase of modernity” (Mazzarella 2010: 699). Social theorists today still prefer to avoid the term “crowd” when describing the contemporary setting; as William Mazzarella observes, “Marx and Engels had their crowds; Hardt and Negri bring us multitudes” (2010: 700). We therefore need not only to revitalize crowd theory but also to relate existing theory to a social setting that is different from the late nineteenth or early twentieth century.

Simply put, it seems to me that we have to start our thinking exactly from the unquestioned assumption that crowds by definition have short lives. This view has persisted up until today, and yet it flies in the face of evidence. It is true that in all of the mass mobilizations that erupted in 2011, things *started* with an extreme suddenness: first there was one person, then two, then 100, and the next day a 100,000 people massed together. Yet, consider Yemen, perhaps the most enduring setting, where people appeared on the Change Square in January 2011. And then they stayed. For a week, for a month, for a year, and then another year (see Porter 2016, for an excellent account). The easy way to deal with such a situation is to claim that such cases are simply not crowds any more, since temporal brevity is a defining feature. I think this would be very wrong, because what happened on Change Square, on Maidan, on Al Tahrir, and on many other squares, were indeed quite classic examples of crowds, not “multitudes.” People who participated in these events did indeed go through very emotional “letting go experiences” and have indeed described their own sense of having been carried away by a larger “will.” To be sure, images and “picture-thinking” played in all cases a huge role. In fact, televised images of the square quickly turned into exactly such a picture, functioning as symbolic vector and as collective

focal point, not just for the global television audience, but certainly also for the protestors themselves. Yet, several other assumptions of classical crowd theory do not seem to hold true, and let me try to illustrate why not.

### Becoming an individual in the enduring crowd

I am reluctant to provide a sharp temporal delimitation of the “enduring crowd;” for now I have in mind crowds that have social existence for several weeks, months, or years. What happens to crowd experience during such longer time periods? The first and very simple suggestion I would like to make is that people are indeed transformed by such enduring crowds, but that while this initially happens as a part of the Freudian “oceanic feeling” that Borneman has captured so well (this volume), the ultimate transformation taking place at the level of the individual is of an entirely different nature than what is implied in classical crowd theory: precisely when persons come to feel deeply connected to an organic whole, they also start to gain a new sense of individuality. Using theatrical terms, human beings in enduring crowds do not lose their character: they step into it.

Let me offer one example from what happened at Maidan (see Georgsen and Thomassen 2017). On the Maidan square in Kiev the “enduring” dimension began with the erection of barricades on November 30, 2013. This was a visible sign by the protesters that their intention was to stay. Once the barricades were up, one witnessed a classic case of Canetti’s “double crowd,” with police and protestors massing in front of each other. By relocating themselves on the square, the protestors separated themselves from their former social reality and from the previous status quo of the surrounding society. The square became a moving space, as the environment continuously changed during the fights with police and Berkuts. Barricades were built, improved, then destroyed, then rebuilt again, then seized by Berkuts who at some point succeeded in emptying the square, at which point they likewise started to build barricades out of concrete blocks—which remained when the protesters took back the square.

In early December a huge tent was erected on the square where the protesters could get food and drinks. By now the whole square as well as the radial streets were fenced off by barricades and encamped by the protesters. This occupation further signaled how the protest was more than just a momentary act of folly. The encampment was also necessary, since a lot of the protesters were not from Kiev and had no opportunity to leave the square at night. It became their home.

This lasted from December 22, 2013 until July 2014, for a total duration of seven months.

Life at the site consisted of everyday activities: cooking, fetching water, repairing items, cleaning, lighting a fire, military street fight training, etc. Various social activities were arranged, including an open theatre stage, a library, a cinema, poetry readings, and an “open university.” A hospital was set up as well, and functioned so efficiently that even non-protestors came to the square for treatment rather than visiting the official hospital. There were thus clear elements of Ehrenreich’s idea of “governance by spectacle” (2007). Preexisting distinctions, temporal rhythms, and ordinary spatial figurations were up in the air, giving space to new forms of sociability and communication, breaking down boundaries of self and other.

These concrete activities brought people together in ways they had not experienced before; indeed, people rid themselves of preexisting inequalities, and got rid of Canetti’s “burdens of distance.” Being part of the crowd was thus linked to a particular and very concrete experience of freedom generated in such a setting; however, this involved not a “loss of self” but its opposite. Persons on the square would consciously talk about how they became *aware* of themselves, and how they gained a new understanding not just of the political situation of their country, but also of their own role within it. People did not lose their individuality: they gained it along with a sense of selfhood and individuality in the enduring crowd.

This happened not just as an act of reflection but very much via concrete social action. The enduring crowd did not annul social action of the individual; it fostered it. For example, on the square a camp was constructed called the “Open Mic Camp”: a microphone, a loudspeaker system, and a small homemade stage. In the description made by participants this created an opening for parrhesiastic speech acts (Foucault 2001). The occupants of the camp explained that they “created this place as a place of free speech [...] people can come here and speak or sing in this microphone and it is like small out cries of thoughts.” This speech practice was consciously seen as a contrast to the false and “trickster” type of political speech rhetoric exercised by the regime (Horvath 1998). The process—and the speech modality captured by Foucault—is simple yet deep: one becomes by saying. A parrhesiastic speech act is courageous, open, and sincere. The sincerity conveys its truth-value, in the relationship between the speaking subject and the words pronounced. The enduring crowd created the setting for people to find a new way to form an identity around words and statements, in a society which they up until then had been experienced as corrupt and false. The

loss of self was prior to their crowd experience, something they had experienced during “ordinary” social life.

The experience of Maidan had much to do with Canetti’s “discharge” (1984: 17). The crowd experience was about the loss of former distinctions and a spontaneous form of equality; however, the differences that were annulled over time opened the space for other differences to emerge: a difference in oneself. As participants saw it, this did not therefore imply a loss of will or responsibility, quite the contrary. A young woman addressed her hope for a better future in this vein: “The level of self-responsibility is so high now. Before people didn’t care, they just minded their own business, you know. Now everyone is so into it.” She described how people changed, completely: “And there is no way back! I hope” (Georgsen 2014: 8). Her friend added: “Even me. First I just thought it was a political game and I tried to separate myself from it. Here in Ukraine we have had a lot of political games, which haven’t been initiated by the people. But at some point I realized that it was not just a political game” (Georgsen 2014: 44). As another young girl stated it, even more directly: “The people who went to Maidan have changed inside.” The initial process of undifferentiation thus led to a process of differentiation in the form of a deep-bound subjectivation process that was jointly political and personal.

## Communitas

If one stays within the language of classical social theory on crowds, the process through which the individual merges into a larger whole and yet also gains a stronger sense of self (rather than a mere loss of individuality) remains obscure and contradictory. This process, however, can be captured with precision through a central term introduced and examined by Victor Turner: *communitas*. Turner elaborated on this term in his analysis of rites of passage and that particular kind of bonding that takes place in a cohort of people going through the same liminal experiences, exposed to the same testing (Turner 1988).

Protestors on Maidan indeed referred themselves to being part of an *organism* and a “human corporation” characterized by solidarity and collaboration (see Georgsen 2014; Georgsen and Thomassen 2017). In people’s description of how they, for example, built barricades, what emerges is a tacit collective experience animating their actions. They did not talk, they did not think, nobody defined any plan of action. People just acted spontaneously. The informants’ description of their crowd experience here echoes Turner’s

notion of a “social will”: “What is being introduced into situations of crisis is the non-rational, metaphorically ‘organic’ order of society itself, felt rather than conceived as the axiomatic source of human bonding” (Turner 1988: 91). In other words, people lived through a series of “flow experiences,” something they described as immanent beauty. Here, as elsewhere,<sup>4</sup> crowd participants explicitly likened their experience of what happened as a falling in love, a feeling accompanied by a spontaneous non-voluntary smile even when talking about it—a sheer joy of being.

Such stirring of emotions are absolutely central to any anthropological understanding of crowd phenomena, but staying within a ritual framework, this stirring does not work separately from reason or rationality. I stress this point, and with emphasis, as it serves to reformulate classical crowd theory, which always assumed that the emotional discharge and loss of self involved in crowd experiences was made possible by the (momentary) loss of reason and autonomy. Turner’s insights help us to realize, that affective and cognitive processes are not necessarily “opposites” but should rather be understood as dimensions that form part of a singular process of social and personal transformation. They work together, not against each other. In his late works, Turner argued that “there is a structural relationship between cognitive, affective, and conative components of what Dilthey called lived experience” (1988: 90). This is shown in the tripartite structure of the social drama, which harkens back to van Gennep’s recognition of the sequential structure of ritual passages divided into (a) separation, (b) liminality, and (c) re-aggregation. The different worldviews coexist in each phase, but each of the phases tends to be dominated by one or the other. An analysis of the actors’ usage of symbolic codes in each of the three phases thus demonstrates how “a particular psychological tendency” corresponds to their practices (Turner 1988). In the first phase, the affective attitude is often primary. The rupture with the existing order needs an emotional appeal, a stirring of emotions, “though an element of cognitive calculation is usually present, and the transgressor’s will to assert power or identity usually incites the will to resist his action among representatives of the normative standard which he has infringed” (Turner 1988: 91). In the second, the crisis or liminal phase, all three “propensities” are equally present. In principle, the third redressing stage is dominated by the cognitive or “legal” attempt to reinstall order via redressive action. A strong act of “will” is also needed to “terminate the often dangerous contestation in *crisis*,” yet “cognition reigns primarily in judicial and legal redressive action” (Turner 1988: 91, italics in original; for an extended discussion of this point, see Thomassen 2012). To

put it simply: crowds with short lives may indeed be carried and energized almost exclusively by emotional forces and “instinctual” drives. In the enduring crowd, one instead recognizes a sequence where emotional, conative, and cognitive components come into work as part and parcel of the same process—and not as elements contrary to each other.

### The transcendent square—Maidan, the “unknown quantity”

What I have said so far does not imply that the square was only the total sum of individuals gaining new forms of self-awareness—it was, at the same time, something *more* and something *else* than this sum. This “something” became ethnographically observable as protestors turned the square into a collective voice. They did so in a *conscious* manner, and as a conscious discursive strategy. Crowd experience is indeed about how hitherto separate individuals start to feel and act like a collective body. We would, however, be very wrong to assume, that this propensity to act stands in any opposition to reason, as Le Bon did: “Little adapted to reasoning, crowds, on the contrary, are quick to act” (Le Bon 2002: xi). What happened on Maidan was very similar to what has been documented on other revolutionary protest squares; there as well the gathering of people was driven by an emotional charge. However, what happened then, during these enduring events, involved explicit and conscious political reasoning and on-the-spot formulations of goals. We might here talk about a “reasoning crowd,” or perhaps even a “teleological crowd,” where a sense of shared aims and goals, even worldviews, took shape in the form of a living future.

The Maidan square was quite concretely subjectivized by the participants, with expressions, political slogans, symbols, and images. This was summed up very well by one of the participants, analytically and reflexively reporting in the middle of the events (writing in February 2014):

Maidan, that is the subject, the unknown quantity, that has had Ukraine holding its breath for three months. According to the time of day and the occasion, within a few hours it can swell to a crowd of several hundred thousand, before shrinking again to a few thousand. Often you hear: “The opposition parties don’t represent Maidan.” Or “Maidan is shocked.” Or “Maidan demands this.” Or “We ask Maidan to ensure that ...” Or “Maidan doesn’t accept that.” Maidan is a social body. (Belorusetz 2014: 25)

The square became imagined as an affective field of forces, a collective focal point for political statements that belonged to everybody and no-particular-

body at the same time. If this was a projection, it remained an extremely conscious one. The square became a transcending figure of the crowd, imposed by impulses from below, but articulated within an explicitly formulated series of political demands. The square, I insist, did not emerge as a social force beyond the control of individuals. It was not a super-ego imposing its being upon docile egos dissolved in the mass—the square became the crowd and the crowd became the square, because the members of the crowd wanted it to. It is also in this exact sense that the square emerged as a Batesonian space of meta-communication. New voices were heard, new claims were made, but it was not only the messages but also the very frame around them that had changed, emerging as a new kind of signifier which transformed those messages. The participants created the square as a subject in order to speak through it. They created the square to gain voice, not to lose the one they had.

### The shifting crowd

The points I have made so far relate to another crucial aspect of enduring crowds: their composition, or more precisely, their *shifting* composition. Toward this discussion, I propose another straightforward term: “the shifting crowd.” As said, in all classical accounts of crowds and crowd states, it is assumed that a bunch of persons quickly mass together quickly and just as soon disperse. This view prevents us from addressing a crucial fact about enduring crowds, namely, that the composition of particular people may change over time. Some might leave, while others join; some come to stay, others pass by for shorter moments. On the surface, this likens the protest crowd with street fairs or markets, where people quite simply come and go, while the massing of people continues. In short, the “coming and going” indicates that what we are not really dealing with a crowd as understood by crowd theorists. Here it is important to stress, that in the enduring crowd the people composition might indeed change while the consciousness of belonging to a protesting crowd persists, or may even be strengthened by continuous injections of new “energy” by people from the outside. The crowd, in contrast to farmer markets or fairs, can formulate aims, and raise consciousness among the participants. The temporal endurance thus intersects with the unfolding group dynamics, and neither is an *a priori*. I think this aspect deserves much more attention than what it has received so far. Let me again refer to Maidan as an example.

Who were the people to first go out into the streets and occupy the square? Because the mobilization initially happened via Twitter and other social media, it is safe to conclude (and this is confirmed by eyewitnesses as well as online documentation) that early protesters were young people already trained in social media usage and “Euromaidan was the revolution of people born after Ukraine declared its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991” (Hudoschnyk 2015: 23). However, interesting patterns emerge from a series of surveys taken from the construction of the first barricades and the following weeks (as summed up in Hudoschnyk 2015: 23ff). During the first 6–7 weeks of the crowd mobilization almost 70 percent of protesters were older than 30 years, and 25 percent of participants were older than 55 (Onuch, as cited in Hudoschnyk 2015). At the last stage of the revolution, the number of participants with higher education remained steadily high (43.1 percent), whereas the number of students had decreased (from 10 percent to 6 percent). Almost 60 percent of protesters were specialists, entrepreneurs, and managers (Hudoschnyk 2015.).

These are significant numbers that reveal dynamics of a “shifting crowd,” and they serve to correct the stereotypical description of Maidan (or other square mobilizations) as youth rebellions. They *started* as such, but it very quickly turned into something else. As observed by Hudoschnyk (2015: 23–25), students played a major role in inspiring the initial stage of mobilization; “early joiners” and “stalwarts” were undergraduates, journalists, and “self-identified members of civic organizations” (Onuch 2014, as cited in Hudoschnyk 2015). Initially this was indeed a youth-led movement, apparently similar to Occupy. However, this changed over time—and this change connected to changing policy goals and political claims made by the participants. As Hudoschnyk (2015: 23–24) writes:

“Early joiners” did not necessarily stay on the Maidan throughout the revolution as the numbers indicate. The percentage of youth, activists and experienced protesters dropped as soon as protesters’ demands shifted from foreign policy claims to human and civic rights. It leads us to reflections about the importance of studying the role of youth as a catalyzer of the social movement versus a sustainer of the Euromaidan revolution.

This prompts a series of questions concerning the role of youth as a catalyzer of social movement mobilization, to be distinguished from the social forces and categories of protestors that actually ended up sustaining the revolution. Here again it seems to me that what happened at Maidan speaks to an open-ended processual pattern that can be observed in most other public square protest crowds. It also shows that any blind notion of an “anonymous” crowd will only bar us from even asking these questions.



## Conclusion: nonlinear time and political becoming

Taras Fedirko, a Maidan protestor, reflected on the question of chronology in the middle of the events of Maidan with these words: “The linearity of a chronology cannot adequately convey a nonlinear process. Therefore, it cannot capture the ambiguity in all of the moments that make up the overarching horizon of events, the common denominator that does not conform to any unified interpretation.” Fedirko’s on-the-spot reflection bears testimony to an essential aspect of the Maidan experience, namely, ambiguity. “Ambiguity” is from such a perspective not to be understood as a negative, as a “lack” of unified interpretation or common denominator. Fedirko’s reflection also captures, in condensed form, how this open-ended process intimately relates to temporality. In fact, his words help us to sharpen what we might mean by “enduring crowds”: not simply an extension in time, but also—and more fundamentally—a relativization of chronology.

In this chapter I have argued that we need to think anthropologically about the social life of “enduring crowds.” The permanence of such crowds is by no means secured by “closing boundaries,” as Canetti suggested in his typology. “Closed crowds” in Canetti’s (1984: 17) terms, are the kind of crowds that put their stress on permanence, and they do this by operating a closed boundary: endurance is achieved by renouncing expansion. This is simply not so. In the political crowds that conquered the squares around the globe from 2011, endurance was achieved while holding boundaries open. Expansion happened as a consequence of endurance, not at the exclusion of it.

As discussed above, to “mass” implies an instinctual longing to be with others in a particular way, to *really* be with others and “to experience what Freud (1921) called the ‘oceanic feeling,’ a return to being one or being contained by the mother, the pre-symbolic, pre-rational, pre-hierarchical, non-differentiated” (Borneman, this volume). I have tried to stress that such emotional experiences cannot be separated from either “reason” or “will.” Following Borneman, crowd experiences of political protest can in this vein be considered a necessary intermediate stage between the unmediated mass and conscious political subjecthood; the setting of public liminality engages a particular form of ritual experience where the molding of the anthropos takes place. The crowding of human beings is in this sense not an anti-thesis to the rational, deliberating individual that normally grounds our notion of the modern political subject we are rather dealing with two aspects or instances of ritual dramas as acted out by political protestors who, in constant movement, and with shifting actors and audiences, give life to enduring crowds.

There is of course much more to say about temporality—there always is. By stressing endurance, I have not only indicated a “quantitative” temporal stretching of crowd processes, but also an experience of time and “sequence” that is not easily summarized in the chronology of historians—as understood so well by Fedirko, writing from Maidan, quotes above. The experience of time in liminality (Thomassen 2014) is inherently open and ambivalent, and multiple temporalities are always in play. Such nonlinear temporalities do in fact relate to the question of “outcomes” and to the question what enduring political crowds can actually achieve—or what they have actually achieved. In a recent article on the Yemini revolution, Ross Porter talks about a revolutionary logic he calls “being time,” “a temporal formulation that asserts a fusion between means and ends, presents and futures within a single enduring moment.” (Porter 2016: 59). Porter develops this notion in his analysis of a square occupation that lasted for several years. His point is extremely well-taken, and speaks to a broader phenomenon: that the change brought about in and by enduring crowds cannot be restricted to the externally visible signs of toppled regimes and deposed dictators. The change that takes place is one that relates to formative processes of subjectivation. I have argued in this chapter that while we are indeed living in yet another “era of the crowd,” what we witness is perhaps not the anonymous drowning of individuality in contagious crowds, but rather the emergence of new forms of political becoming.



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# The Ethics of the Digital: Crowds and Popular Justice in Bangladesh

Nusrat Sabina Chowdhury

“Bloggers are not really street activists,” Anik,<sup>1</sup> a Bangladeshi online activist told me. We were chatting weeks after a massive crowd of protesters had taken over a major junction in the capital city in early 2013. A group of bloggers who had long been demanding justice for war crimes sensed a conspiracy in the workings of the International Crimes Tribunal (ICT). Set up in 2010 by the government of Bangladesh under the leadership of the Awami League to try the collaborators of the war of independence of 1971, the ICT had become the target of a spontaneous outburst. The bloggers occupied Shahbag, a busy crossroads in the middle of Dhaka and had rallied a crowd of thousands in a matter of days. The platform that quickly became known as the Shahbag Movement questioned the seeming lenience in one of the tribunal’s verdicts. Because 2013 was an election year, the protesters suspected strategic negotiations between the government and Jamaat-e-Islami, the largest Islamist opposition party. A number of Jamaat-e-Islami’s high-ranking members were under trial, and it was believed that the verdicts could very well be used in exchange for political concessions. In other words, long-held suspicions of foul play in the judicial process, the electoral system, the party in power, and the state in general had stoked the anger of the relatively young organizers of the protests.

My warmest thanks to Megan Steffen for including me in this exciting conversation. Her deft editing and encouragement were critical to finalizing the chapter. Nazmul Sultan has shared valuable comments and ethnographic knowledge. The essay has also benefited tremendously from my conversations with William Mazzarella, Francis Cody, Lotte Hoek, Lawrence Liang, and Nishant Shah, who have all read or heard different parts of the argument. I am grateful for the feedback I received at the American Anthropological Association meeting in Denver (November 2015); Department of Anthropology at Jahangirnagar University, Bangladesh (January 2016); Center of South Asian Studies at University of Edinburgh (March 2017); and the Unit for Criticism and Interpretive Theory at University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign (May 2017).

Anik was right in pointing out the curious role of online activists in Shahbag. It was not the street but rather the virtual medium that was generally their playground and political field. And yet, in this movement, part of the blogging community had transferred its grievances from the keyboards to a hectic but historically meaningful corner of one of South Asia's most crowded cities (figure 9.1) (Rosen 2016). Anik was one of the 135 protesters who formed a human chain during the afternoon of February 5. They were angry about the ICT's second ruling of life imprisonment and were demanding the death penalty for Abdul Kader Molla, a convicted war criminal and member of Jamaat-e-Islami. Theirs was generally a disembodied passion, Anik seemed to imply, but it was their transition from the screen to the street that gave the bloggers rare political recognition and unforeseen notoriety.

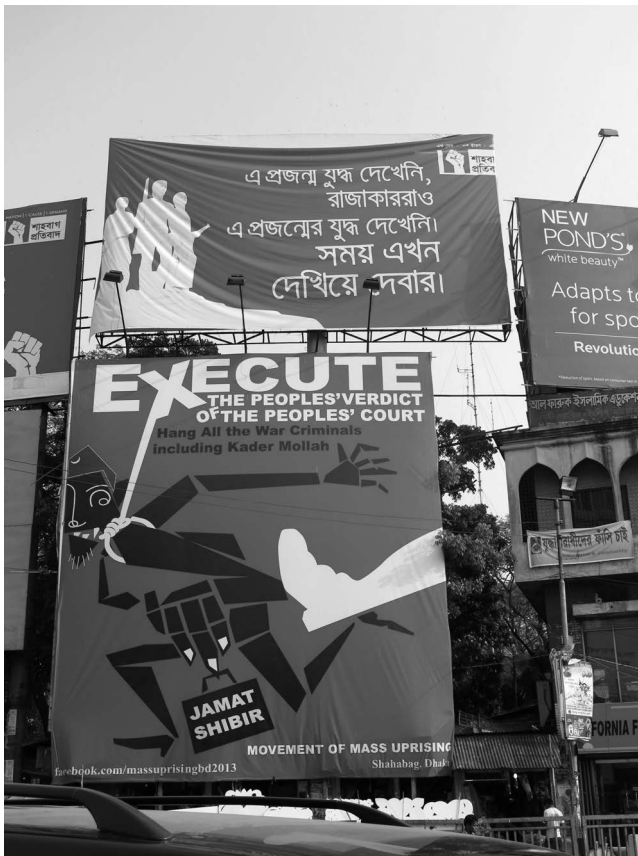


Figure 9.1 Billboards at Shahbag. March 2013. Photo: Nusrat Sabina Chowdhury

I met Anik while walking around Shahbag just a couple of days before. The area was still cordoned off from the city's infamous traffic. Small groups of students, activists, bloggers, and political workers socialized, as billboards with graphic appeals for justice and capital punishment hovered nearby. Some of them were already peeling off. Peeking through them were familiar commercial exhortations of fairness products and mobile phone connectivity. Those who were gathering to start a torchlight protest to commemorate the 42nd year of national independence remembered the giant crowds of which they had been a part when the Shahbag Movement was at its peak in early February. "You have no idea what it was like," a friend who had fought in the liberation war told me as he guided me through the impromptu shrines that had cropped up on the street and the sidewalks during the protest. They glorified and memorialized the war and were now at various stages of ruin. Even as our procession of hundreds started its journey from Shahbag, glowing under the flickering flames and circling the nearby University of Dhaka campus, I could tell it was nothing compared to the crowds of early February 2013, images of which were beamed across the globe almost instantly thanks to the tech-savvy urban protesters.

This rally held in March 2013 was a little over a month after the killing of Ahmed Haider Rajib. A self-proclaimed atheist blogger, Rajib was stabbed to death near his house in Dhaka for his anti-religious Bangla blog.<sup>2</sup> Rajib's death had rejuvenated the crowd, if only for a little while longer. By May 2013, however, the equation had changed for good. The members of Hefazot-e-Islam took issue with Shahbag's secularist agenda. In response, they too occupied a congested roundabout only a few miles east of Shahbag, at Motijheel, the business district. Hefazot is a coalition of about a dozen religious associations based in more than 25,000 *qawmi madrasas*.<sup>3</sup> By 2013, with the support of the main opposition party and its allies, Hefazot was intervening into national politics with a confidence rarely seen before. Mirroring the very incitement that they were opposing, the Hefazot rally also demanded capital punishment for the bloggers. It took issue with the atheism expressed in the "blasphemous" writings of the Shahbag Movement's organizers. The Hefazot activists demonstrated in the thousands, presented a thirteen-point manifesto to the government, which included harsh indictments of bloggers, and they vandalized public property. The state repressed the uprising with force. The full extent of the nighttime operation is still unclear. To deflect accusations of harboring the atheists, the government arrested four bloggers under the Information and Communication Technology Act.<sup>4</sup> The self-consciously secular and religious crowds at Shahbag and Motijheel, respectively, revealed a competitive mimesis between the now powerful

categories of atheist (*nastik*) and militant (*jongi*). While Shahbag was resolutely nonviolent, the Hefazot activists organized anti-government showdowns that relied on well-known strategies of urban unrest.

In the shadow of the state killing of the Hefazot members, the arrest of internet activists, the ritualized murders of bloggers, and the crowds of secular and religious citizens that set the events in motion, I offer here some thoughts on crowdedness and the politics of visual evidence-making in Bangladesh. The image-politics that emerged in the wake of Shahbag and Hefazot are symptomatic—and not simply representative—of the ideological and social fissures that the protest movement of 2013 had cracked wide open. They played out partly in the streets of Dhaka, from Shahbag to Motijheel, and partly in the blogosphere. The traffic between physical space and cyberspace that these events so powerfully brought to public attention is now a part of their lasting legacies. No longer hidden behind usernames and moderated blog spaces and sheltered from print and satellite news media, bloggers and their words became now fodder for the mill of contagious rumor that invited public scorn, governmental scrutiny, and at times, fatal violence.

Contagion and crowds are intimately if ambivalently tied (Mazzarella 2010). From Gabriel Tarde's "imitation suggestibility" and Elias Canetti's fire-like insatiable crowd, to the viral circulation of user-generated material on the web, the epidemiological metaphor of contagion has captured the aura of the crowd at once vilified and celebrated (Canetti 1984; Sampson 2012; Tarde 2014). Technologies of sociality and connection produce crowds that are digitally enabled. Virality is located in this epidemiological space in which a world of things mixes with emotions, sensations, affects, and moods (Sampson 2012), all of which are supposedly in abundance in the overly embodied crowd. A few images of crowds that went viral on Bangladeshi mass media in the months and years after the Shahbag and Hefazot face-off bring into relief the cultural valences of contagion and crowd action. These images were either featured in television news reports or posted on Facebook, or both. The content and the form of the visual texts, and public responses to them, do at least two things. First, they expose the social and political fractures along religious and class lines that were rejuvenated in the post-Shahbag political atmosphere. Second, on a more conceptual level, the images—made and consumed by what can best be described as digital crowds—are symptomatic of the crowd as a category of social analysis. By attending to some of the effects of the encounters between these crowds—virtual and actual, religious and secular, progressive and traditionalist—this analysis highlights the relationship between crowds and mass mediation in shaping public life in Bangladesh.

## The *jongi* in the crowd

Let me discuss a couple of crowd-related incidents from 2015 that are seemingly unrelated to either the Shahbag or the Hefazot showdowns in 2013. The first happened on April 14, 2015, the first day of the Bengali New Year, when groups of men physically assaulted multiple women and children amid the celebrations near the University of Dhaka campus. A group of 20–30 young men attacked twenty women and one 10-year-old child near the Teachers Students Center on campus. They were molested for hours at different locations, not far from each other. A crowd of men stood by and watched. Many were seen with cell phones in hand taking photos or shooting videos on their handheld devices. Witnesses have claimed that the police officers standing merely 20 yards away did not intervene.<sup>5</sup> Except for one political activist, who happened to be at the spot and managed to rescue a victim from the melee, there was no immediate interference into the attacks. Most explanations ascribed this unfortunate fact to the density of the crowd. Incriminating CCTV footage, however, became public soon after. The surveillance camera feed made its way into newsroom exposes and was played on a loop on multiple cable television channels. The videos made the rounds on social networking sites and video-sharing websites.

The attacks were particularly shocking because the Bengali New Year or *Pahela Baishakh*, along with the primary site of its celebration on or near the Dhaka University campus, is widely considered to be the last bastion of Bengali secularism. On New Year's Day when the festivities start at the crack of dawn and go on all day, one of the largest crowds gathers at Ramna Park and the university's campus. A well-known cultural institution, *Chhayanat*, has been organizing the morning celebrations with live musical performances at the public park for half a century. The nearby Faculty of Fine Art brings out a rally (*Mangal Shobhajatra*) that showcases local traditions with vibrant papier mâché installations every New Year's Day. In 2016, the ornate procession made UNESCO's Intangible Heritage of Humanity list. The *Pahela Baishakh* fanfare is a national holiday and the country's biggest nonreligious festival. A particular brand of national, cultural secularism that these celebrations embody, one that the educated, secular-progressive bloc of Bangladesh holds dearly, was evidently under siege. In 2001, for example, a bomb blast at the same spot had killed ten people, including a suicide bomber. This was one of the early incidents of militant violence. *Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami*, a religious group that was eventually banned for extremism in 2005, took credit for the deaths.



Ekattor Television ran an exposé on the 2015 incidents of sexual violence at the festival. Ekattor TV (TV '71) is Bangladesh's fourth private satellite news channel, and its name is telling. By referencing the year of independence in its proper name, the TV channel directly sides with Bengali nationalism—a fetishized domain that has been officially coopted by the ruling Awami League. As the mainstream party, Awami League claims recognition for representing the voice of East Pakistan, now Bangladesh, during its fight for independence from the Western wing. Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the nationalist leader and icon who steered the party in those heady days, is both the biological father of the current prime minister and the metaphorical father of the nation (*Jatir Pita*). The Awami League had a sweeping victory in the 2008 national elections. Two of its campaign promises caught the imagination of the youth, who came out to vote in large numbers; the first was establishing trials for war crimes (of which ICT was the logical conclusion), and the second was the promise of a Digital Bangladesh by 2021. “Digital” here denotes a rather nebulous future-looking agenda to help the country cope with the challenges of the twenty-first century.<sup>6</sup>

Despite the manifesto's key focus on technological advancements, the Awami League essentially drew from a glorified version of the nation's past. In 2009, the President of Bangladesh Computer Samiti stressed the connection in his book, *Digital Bangladesh*: “As the citizens of Bangladesh had to fight against the armed forces of Pakistan to achieve independence, they have the right to live free, independent and developed lives. So it is important to implement the Digital Bangladesh program to fulfill the hopes and desires of the nation by using digital technologies” (Jabbar 2009; cited in Shoesmith et al. 2014: 219). Through its name, Ekattor Television spells out its closeness to precisely this brand of nationalist political affect and by extension, its distance from religious politics, such as the one practiced by Jamaat-e-Islami and supported by Hefazat-e-Islam. The verdict against one of the Jamaat members had fueled the Shahbag movement, which went on to demand a moratorium on religious politics of any kind.

The channel aired a couple of videos of the harassment incident right after it happened in mid-April 2015.<sup>7</sup> On average two to three minutes long, the video reports were culled from hours of recording from the actual sites of the crime. They start by showing a festive crowd. Women in their ethnic best are pushing through the crowd along with men in traditional wear. Street vendors are seen hawking foods and souvenirs while cycle rickshaws paddle through a throng of pedestrians. On Pahela Baishakh, the area near Ramna Park is off-limits to cars and other motor vehicles as is the nearby University of Dhaka campus. The video story starts in color as the female voice over reminds the viewer that the

surveillance footage does not come with any sound. Farzana Rupa, a journalist well known for gritty and investigative reporting, edited one news report. The video of 2:40 minutes, Rupa tells us, was edited down from sixty minutes of CCTV footage. Though it was made available on YouTube, it has since been taken down.

In Rupa's report, the camera zooms in on a second screen shot of the CCTV footage, taken around forty-four seconds into the video. The video also turns black and white at this point, presumably to facilitate identification. Seen here is a bearded man in a white tunic standing in the middle of a crowd of men, women, and motorcycles. The viewer learns that during the few hours of the recorded footage, men far outnumbered women and almost no woman was seen without a male companion.<sup>8</sup> Within seconds, a red circle on the screen locates a specific spot in the crowd where a group of men surround a rickshaw carrying two women. One of them is being forced to get off. Other color photographs of the same incident in print media have the faces of the women blurred out.

In the second installment of the video available on YouTube, the figure of the bearded man resurfaces. The super-imposed circle separates this particular individual from a sea of people. For the first time the physical description of the man in question holds a clue to the source of the gendered violence. He wore an embroidered *panjabi* (tunic) and sported a beard, the journalist noted, a fact she repeats at least twice in the short report. The man seems to have been hovering aimlessly for a while around this one spot, leading the journalist to inquire after his motive.

A few seconds later in the same report, this particular individual reappears near a large group seen moving around together and allegedly participating in more than one episode of harassment. Some of these men also sported beards, bandannas, and long tunics. A traditional piece of clothing, a *panjabi* is everyday attire for Bangladeshi men similar to the *kameez* is for women; it is also a traditional equivalent of holiday formals for men regardless of religious affiliation, though devout Muslim men often wear simple long tunics when praying. The aimless wandering of the man with a beard, his proximity to the scene of crime, and his sartorial choices, according to the report, implicate him in the crimes. The report's focus on his outward appearance—which hints at his faith—is crucial. Long before the Shahbag movement took its distinct shape, numerous artistic and satirical representations of the collaborators of the war highlighted and mocked the skullcaps and beards that are often read as signs of religiosity (figure 9.2) (Mohaiemen 2011; Mookherjee 2015). The collaborators, some of them war criminals, were known to have betrayed the Bengali-dominated East Pakistanis in their quest for freedom, not on the basis of Islam but on shared



**Figure 9.2** Portrait of a collaborator at Shahbag. Photo: Nusrat Sabina Chowdhury

cultural heritage. In this particular interpretation of the footage, the journalist draws from a well-worn language of culture wars—Bengali/secular vs. Islamic—that found loud expressions in the antagonism between Shahbag and Hefazot crowds. The reporter concludes by suggesting that an Islamist conspiracy is behind the attacks on Bangladesh’s largest secular cultural institution.

There were multiple lines of reasoning running through the news coverage. From the chief of the local police station to the Proctor of the University to the Minister of Education, various authoritative figures gave public statements. A few of them completely denied that any harassment ever took place. The police said they were unable to identify the faces in the crowd despite the fact that avid users of social media were already locating, accusing, and shaming the men caught on camera by going into their Facebook accounts. Still others

casually dismissed the public disrobing and molestation of women as boyish mischief. Until now, nobody has been punished for the crimes. Most people chalk this lack of prosecution up to the fact that many of the perpetrators were thought to be student cadres of the ruling party and therefore more or less unaccountable.

The televisual reporting of the New Year's Day events opens up several analytical possibilities about crowds and democracy in Bangladesh. The figure of the crowd resists individuation and identification. The resulting confusion is more generally symptomatic of crowds; it is a form of confusion that challenges the "actuarial gaze" of the state and the media devoted to biopolitical policing (Feldman 2005). This kind of forensic visualization, Allen Feldman argues, helps identification and the management and mass marketing of risks. The reports on crowd violence on Pahela Baishakh used digital manipulation, such as slow motion, freeze-framing, and spatialization to disaggregate a collectivity. This was done to resurrect and then incriminate a figure of religious alterity: the radical Islamist. The sleeper body is the currency of the public safety apparatus, Feldman would say. A rise in surveillance technologies in public spaces in Bangladesh also points to efforts to control spaces and bodies more rigorously.<sup>9</sup> Ekattor TV tried to reinstate this controlling gaze through investigative reportage for its own purposes that need to be situated historically, since its roots remain firmly grounded in a brand of Bangladeshi nationalism. This secular, nationalist impulse gained renewed urgency in the post-Shahbag political climate of resurgent extremism, paranoia, and divisiveness.

The stereotype of the religious crowd as highlighted in the photos bears many of the significations attached to the crowd in canonical social theory (Canetti 1984; Freud 1921; Gould 2009; Jonsson 2013; Le Bon 2002). The crowd represents a childish moment of savage indistinction; it is corporeal, affective, and irrational (Mazzarella 2015: 105). The opposition between the revelers at the secular (Bengali) cultural event and the bigoted Muslim predators with their tunics and beards reenacts the distinction between the crowd and the autonomous citizen/subject at the heart of the modern democratic imagination (Mazzarella 2010). Crowd-like behavior is often associated with face-to-face gatherings, embodied affect, and with the dangers of new technologies (Cody 2015: 52). In this sense, the Hefazot-e-Islam uprising of 2013, or the Islamist crowd more generally, symbolized the quintessence of the crowd. The way mainstream media covered the Hefazot protests brings the point home. A major vernacular news outlet wrote the following when covering one of the oppositional rallies organized by Hefazot:

When asked the question, “Why did you come to the rally?” a couple of madrasa students (age 14) from Gazipur anonymously told banglanews24, “They [the bloggers] have insulted our prophet, they have insulted Islam, that’s why we came to the procession” ... When asked how they were insulted, they answered, “We don’t know. Our *Boro Hujur* [senior teacher] knows. He told us to come, so we came.”

The highlighted naivete of the madrasa students contrasted sharply with the perceived power of the youth of Shahbag. Urban, middle-class children gathered here with their parents carrying placards that demanded death for the collaborators. Some even sported painted-on pro-hanging slogans on their bodies. The idea of children lending their voice to the demand for capital punishment has been lauded in die-hard patriotic circles as a sign of a nation coming of political age. The Hefazot activists, often quite young themselves, were bereft of such innocence or potential. They were alternatively criminalized and infantilized. Their gullibility resulted from their backwardness and their lack of (secular) education and proper political tutelage. Even when their protests were criminalized, the political insincerity of the madrasa student boiled down to ignorance, poverty, and distance from the mainstream of Bangladeshi society. The enlightened secular crowd, so to speak, was the constitutive other of the immoderate religious crowd.

Here one also needs to keep in mind the gender of the crowd. The South Asian crowd, as an empirical reality and a subject of intellectual enquiry, does not adhere to the gendered thinking that has informed classical European literature on the masses. In the writing on mass psychology and its fascination with the crowd, individuality has been understood as a masculine phenomenon and the masses a feminine one (Jonsson 2013). In the vast repertoire of South Asian studies, however, one finds a quintessentially masculine, if not male-dominated, crowd. Among the ethnic rioters across South Asia’s cities (Tambiah 1997), the unruly peasants in colonial Uttar Pradesh (Amin 1988), or the mourning fans at the funeral of their favorite film star in Dhaka (Hoek 2012), we see crowds as men. They participate in protest or celebration the styles of which are culturally tied to young men. The *jouissance* of the urban masses ever present in political rallies, communal showdowns, cinema halls, and religious functions is also culturally male (Hansen 2001; Prasad 2009; Verkaaik 2004). Trivializing sexual harassment as youthful dalliance is to be placed against this background. Men enjoy certain comfort in and control over public space that are not available

to most women. For women in Bangladesh, from congested streets, markets, and public transport to New Year's revelries and cricket victory celebrations, all carry explicit threats of bodily and verbal violence, a phenomenon that is widely recognized in South Asia by the unfortunate euphemism, "eve teasing."

The video report also brings up what many may recognize as the familiar problem of "bad apples."<sup>10</sup> On the one hand, crowds are blamed as crowds for crimes such as the incidents of sexual molestation discussed above because, as Freud (1921) famously pointed out, people are capable of certain excess, or madness, when they are in crowds. On the other hand, the crowd is exonerated as crowd by singling out the wrongdoers in it, the always-already criminal individuals who cynically try to do their business hiding in the crowd. Soon after the Bengali New Year incident, social media in Bangladesh went into overdrive. The uproar gave way to online activism. A Facebook group called "Moja Loss?" started identifying the homepages of social media users seen in the CCTV footage. Moja Loss? has been known for spreading satirical memes about everyday social inconveniences and for trolling public figures, including political leaders and celebrities. The name of the group is equally significant. In Bangla, it is a colloquial and mildly accusatorial phrase that roughly translates as, "Taking Fun?" The phrase has been popular among the youth and addresses (in the second person) the gazing spectator who is only interested in gratuitous viewing pleasures.<sup>11</sup> The group itself has become more politically outspoken in recent years and in 2015 the moderator of Moja Loss? was taken into police custody in relation to an investigation into the group's apparently seditious and anti-government posts.<sup>12</sup> In this case, theirs was an activist reaction to the idle responses of those in power. Neither the police nor the university officials attempted to or succeeded in incriminating anybody from the crowd. The ways in which Moja Loss? exposed the faces of the miscreants, by singling them out and sharing information about their personal lives drawn from their Facebook pages forged a sense of *communitas* among the users of social media. In their quest for justice, they mimicked the very crowds that they held responsible, the same crowd capable of committing acts of public violence against women. After all, the Pahela Baishakh celebrations are legendary because of the kinds of crowds it attracts, which are ideally educated, civic minded, and secular. The vigilantism of social media, then, is a product of multiple factors including politics, class, religion, and gender. The next section elaborates on this confluence.

## Mob 2.0

In July 2015, a 13-year-old boy, Samiul Alam Rajon, was killed by a group of men in Sylhet, a city in the northeast. Rajon, a poor boy who sold vegetables, was suspected of stealing a rickshaw van. He was tied to a pole and beaten by a rod. The twenty-eight-minute shaky cell phone video was shot on the spot and was uploaded to Facebook by someone who found it on the internet. Many people reasoned that the 2–3 men who were torturing the boy did not expect him to die and failed to contemplate the repercussions of sharing evidence on the internet. Regardless, the voyeuristic pleasure of vigilante violence is not new to South or Southeast Asian public culture where physically punishing thieves and pickpockets, or at times public lynching of petty criminals or witches, is neither novel nor the most shocking among other acts of public violence (Siegel 2005). The recording and digital circulation of Rajon's murder, however, added a whole new element to an otherwise routine affair in a peripheral town. Facebook erupted over Rajon's death. Those tying him up, torturing him, taking photos, and laughing were identified from the camera footage. In late 2015, six people were given death sentences for the murder of Rajon and another young boy who fell victim to a mob attack soon after.<sup>13</sup> The man who shot the video was given life sentence. The verdicts that came out only four months after Rajon's murder were uncharacteristically fast for a system infamous for a corrupt and long drawn-out judicial culture. One of Rajon's torturers was a migrant worker in Saudi Arabia who was recognized on Facebook. He had fled soon after the video got public attention and was brought back to Bangladesh with the help of his Bangladeshi coworkers and the Saudi authorities.

Rajon's death is not a one-off case of public cruelty against minors. Multiple stories of vigilante violence targeting poor and working-class children, often household help, have been in the news, mostly, it seems, because they end up on the internet. #JusticeforRajon became a hash tag and a Facebook page almost immediately. Bloggers and regular internet users voiced their outrage, frustration, and trauma. Some were more introspective and acknowledged their collective complicity in this culture of raw vengeance. Haunted by the sound of Rajon's cries in the video, a well-known blogger Arif Jebtik wrote, "I will probably not be able to sleep tonight. I will hear 'Somebody please save me' repeatedly. But I will probably sleep tomorrow. [M]aybe even the day after tomorrow."<sup>14</sup> Another person expressed her fear in becoming the crowd on her Facebook post: "And those who are crying out in revenge that the perpetrators should be killed this

way (eye for an eye), I am asking them what is the difference between those people and you?"<sup>15</sup> "We all have blood on our hands," said Anushay Hossain in an article titled, "Why Is My Country Numb to a Child's Murder?"<sup>16</sup>

One of the striking contrasts between the case of Rajon's death and the violence against women is the curiously contradictory responses of the state. The crowd of molesters successfully evaded the actuarial gaze of the state, though not the gazes of digital media consumers, as the case may be. Rajon's murderers, on the other hand, many of whom were from working-class backgrounds themselves, were swiftly brought to trial. Some commentators have claimed that they would have never been caught without the help of social media. That may very well be the case. The issue, I believe, is not simply that everybody knew about Rajon because his death was filmed; what is of note is how the filming presupposed and harnessed crowd-affect. The kind of crowds that Rajon's death energized brings us again to the distinction between the so-called responsible citizens and criminal crowds. The tiresome tension between reason and affect that undergirds much thinking about crowds stops us from seeing how and when the differences are blurred, as middle-class users of social media respond to the supposed primitivism of the religious and/or the working-class crowd. This is a moment, in other words, when publics and crowds become one and the same (Cody 2015). Nested in this story is also a history of the arrival, proliferation, and supervision of technologies of sociality and surveillance such as the internet, cell phones, and close-circuit cameras in an otherwise struggling economy with inadequate infrastructure. This technological unevenness and its contradictions embody, enable, and capture some of the fundamental ambivalences of the specific shape mass democracy has taken in Bangladesh. And yet, this shape and its ambivalences are surely not unique to Bangladesh. The contradictions that this technological unevenness embodies and enables capture some of the fundamental ambivalences of mass democracy have taken a specific shape in Bangladesh, and yet surely is not unique to it.

The global spread of flash mobs and the curiously Chinese phenomenon of "Human Flesh Search" are two instances of the so-called dark underbelly of cyberspace. The Human Flesh Search started in China around 2001 and spread to other parts of East Asia where crowdsourced virtual detective work engages and rouses a large number of internet users. Many of them are online virtually at all times. These "netizens" (another coinage from East Asia) are powered by a combination of computer networking skills and human connection. They trace the original video links of crimes and reveal the identities of the perpetrators.



Scholars of new media have been well aware that these sites, where collaborative production of information and peer-to-peer, loose affiliations take place, can also generate dangerous and destructive ideas and actions (Tsou 2015). Idealized as a democratic space of exchange and an unregulated playground, the internet, in the Asian context and well beyond, is in actuality neither (Shah et al. 2015; Shoosmith et al. 2014). In their ability to form crowds and indulge in affects associated with crowds, such as collective vengeance or sudden outbursts, digital natives are able to stoke governmental and ethical anxieties that travel between cyber and physical spaces. In India, the state has banned the self-proclaimed apolitical flash mobs, even when the meetings are planned to take place in upscale shopping malls just for “fun” (Shah 2007). The Human Flesh Search, for its part, tells a story that resonates with the digital responses to mob violence in Bangladesh. The cyberposse, as Tsou calls them, makes every possible detail of people’s lives known and has been responsible for their targets quitting or being fired from jobs, changing address or even leaving town. The Human Flesh Search, according to Tsou,

graphically depicts this kind of search that is conducted by human connections rather than machine-based algorithms of locate the sources of information as well as calculate the relevance of the data for the sake of ferreting out and hunting down the human target who has committed all sorts of wrongdoings, ranging from telling a lie, blocking the ambulance and flashing the middle finger, refusing to yield the seat to the elderly, abusing a cat, sexually harassing a girl, having an affair, hit-and-run to anything that is considered “immoral” or “improper” by the wide wired world which could virtually go wild in the name of justice and vengeance. (Tsou 2015)

The curious and far-reaching effects of the Human Flesh Search, and its inchoate manifestations in the internet culture in Bangladesh, bring us back to contagion. In the cases of molestation of women and torture of children, active social media users were responding to affective contagious encounters. As Tony Sampson argues in his eponymous book, virality is not simply an analogy; it is more than a representation of the hyper-connected nature of digital sociality (Sampson 2012). By unraveling the discursive and rhetorical references to viral disease, Sampson focuses on how discourse is intimately tied to a flow of contagious affect, feelings, and emotions (Sampson 2012: 3). He believes human emotions spread universally like viruses across networks (Sampson 2012: 2). The anger, pity, and pain felt by the members of social media when watching, parsing, and analyzing the video footage of violence generates behavior that, true to crowd

affect, has a mimetic quality. In revealing the criminals, some sheltered by the state and others not, the internet users of Bangladesh became yet another crowd, or rather, Mob 2.0, as Tsou calls the participants in the Human Flesh Search. In so doing, these “upright” citizens continually aim to secure the borders between themselves and the perpetrators and the stigma of mob violence. The latter are also users of social media and regular subscribers to cell phone technologies, thereby blurring the boundaries of social and economic distinction.

There were 129.584 million mobile phone subscribers in Bangladesh at the end of February 2017 ([www.btrc.gov.bd](http://www.btrc.gov.bd)). The number soared since the early 1990s when mobile technology first arrived. Its use grew fast, which is not uncommon for developing countries where rundown infrastructure and a labyrinthine bureaucracy make access to other means of communication, such as land lines, money exchange, face-to-face interaction, etc., far more cumbersome (Rafael 2003). In a rather striking statistic, Dhaka has been ranked second among global cities in terms of the number of active Facebook users.<sup>17</sup> It outranked Jakarta and Mexico City. Most of these users access social media on their phones. The widespread popularity of cell phone technology in Bangladesh is duly noted in *Bangladesh's Changing Mediascape* (2014) in which the authors mention the two familiar figures of urban poverty—the rickshaw puller and the domestic worker—to make their point:

Initially a tool of rich urbanites the mobile phone has rapidly percolated down to the poorest sectors such as the rickshaw pullers and domestic servants ... Phone costs are cheap by world standards: for example, a basic Nokia 1280 handset may be purchased BTB 1650 (approximately US\$25, and time credits purchased from street vendors for as little as US\$1) ... Mobile phones and the Internet, unlike the mass media per se, have been incorporated into Bengali culture as seemingly organic extensions of an essentially oral culture of the masses. (Shoesmith et al. 2014: 8)

The cell phone and the crowd enable each other in a process through which the “oral culture of the masses” comes into contact and remediates virtual space. In this rapidly growing site of ambivalent inclusion, rickshaw pullers and domestic workers seemingly brush virtual shoulders with the bourgeoisie. Here, identifying the so-called bad apples helps others in distancing themselves from the excessively cruel crowd, even when doing so demands indulging in comparable crowd affect. The negative intimacy between the secular and religious crowds mobilized in the Shahbag-Hefazot phenomenon finds analogous expression in the vigilantism across virtual and actual crowds.

As the examples from contemporary Bangladesh show, secular and religious crowds, in their desires to be seen and heard, have ended up mimicking each other. In order to mete out justice, individual online users of social media have acted in tandem, coming together and performing the excess and volatility associated with crowds. The mimetic quality of crowd behavior is also noticeable at yet another level. The Shahbag crowd was mostly celebrated for avoiding familiar routes of anti-governmental protests and holding peaceful demonstrations that involved forming human chains, signing petitions, singing songs, lighting candles, and flying balloons. Its fundamental demand for the death penalty, however, made it a rather unique group of vigilantes. The relentless slogan, “We want the noose” that defined Shahbag’s core affect, made many of its detractors and some sympathizers ambivalent of the movement. Demanding capital punishment on the streets by bypassing due process would cast long shadows on the neutral functioning of the judiciary, many observers feared.

Still, reading Shahbag’s demand as either spontaneous outburst or governmental ploy would be to simplify a social context in which people seek justice in ways that challenge and/or exist outside a liberal democratic framework. In the absence of a state owning up to its actions—the lack of accountability for public molesters or the death of Hefazat supporters are cases in point—people take matters in their own hand, as they say. To say this is not to absolve the cruelty or criminality of their actions but to take note that whether physically violent or not, the call for adequate punishment demands a crowd for its execution. It also takes a crowd to protest the cruelty of collective violence against the disenfranchised or to make those in power answerable. The Bangladeshi state, in turn, has made its allegiances known in an opportunistic fashion, either by indulging or by repressing certain crowds over others. Since 2013, both Shahbag and Hefazat crowds have fallen in and out of favor with the ruling political elite for reasons that ultimately come down to political expediency. And yet, the story of the crowd, its remediation through so-called new technologies, and its vexed relationship to institutions of power are not reducible to the vagaries of the state. What happens when we start rethinking the public sphere, as Francis Cody has recently urged us to do, from an illiberal perspective? For Cody, this means making the libidinal, corporeal, and poetic ties of kin and community and not the empty stranger/citizen as a starting point (Cody 2015: 61). What happens, one might ask, when we start with the crowd—and the possibilities of politics that it opens up or forecloses—as constitutive of South Asian political modernity and not an aberration from it?

## The Bangladeshi crowd

When it comes to crowds, few places are as overdetermined as Bangladesh. Its 57,000 or so square miles are some of the world's most inhabited. The landmass of Bangladesh is one-118th the size of Russia, but its population exceeds Russia's by more than 25 million, says the *New York Times* (Rosen 2016). Comparisons of scale are strategies to put an out-of-the-way place on a familiar map. They make the global south legible to the Euro-American reader. These reports also point out that comparisons can be inadequate if not misleading. Jody Rosen finds himself in Dhaka on a day of *hartal*, a tried-and-true model of political protest that aims to halt the regular movement of people and things. The traffic during *hartal*, depending on who is calling the strike, is relatively thin. But as Rosen discovers quickly, "relatively thin" is highly relative, particularly since he ranks Dhaka crowds above those of Mumbai and Cairo. Moreover, this density is exaggerated when the cities and townships have to accommodate a different kind of traffic, that is, the flow of a *michhil* or a procession powered by the movement of people. The scourge of a traffic-clogging political procession—a regular fixture of South Asian cities—is worsened by rapidly shrinking spaces of public congregation: "On occasions when these programmes draw big crowds, the entire city, already well known for congestion, experiences traffic gridlocks."<sup>18</sup>

Whichever political side one is on, the goal is to take over the street—not the agora or the arena but "the asphalt in-between" (Morris 2013). These are not spontaneous outbursts of angry citizens, though those too happen with relative frequency—Rajon's death is a grim reminder—but are more or less rehearsed spectacles of presence. They are a visible gauge of popularity for a cause, an institution, or a leader. Indeed, political crowds in the form of processions and meetings have been a big part of the origin story of the nation. The crowd of thousands at Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's 1971 speech at the Ramna Racecourse (the same place where Pahela Baishakh celebrations now take place) is a part of national folklore. The March 7 event by the future first president of Bangladesh was a grand moment of declaration, if not as yet of independence then surely of a more concerted voice of the Bengali majority population of Pakistan. A little over nine months after the event, and at the end of a war between Pakistan's two wings, Bangladesh became a separate nation.

To rethink crowds against developments in digital technology discussed in this chapter is politically consequential and theoretically productive for Bangladesh and South Asia for sure, but that is only one part of the story. The

trends here follow the course of contemporary geopolitics. “From around the world rises the repeated specter of a crowd that calls for change,” writes Rosalind Morris in her theses on the New *Offentlichkeit* (Morris 2013). Recent public protests in the Middle East, Southeast Asia, Europe, and northern Africa make a transnational language of democracy seem truly global. Yet these manifestations of crowd power across borders also translate into paranoid policies of safety and security. They have impacted South Asian regional politics, with India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Myanmar particularly resorting to an anxious rhetoric that at once vilifies religious and secular affect, particularly when targeted against the ruling authority. These modes of instituting sovereignties invoke governmental strategies that immediately individualize and privatize public life. In Bangladesh, the current fetish of isolated figures of transgression, for example, the blogger and the militant, purposely downplays and displaces the power of the crowd. By moving political threats from the masses to marked individuals is a move against politics. It runs the risk of limiting what one might call the sphere of the political (Rosanvallon 2006). Still, any event of political value in Bangladesh must take place in the street and gather a huge crowd to have any significance.

Revolutionary politics in South Asia has long relied on the power of the crowd, as has counterrevolutionary forces from the colonial to the contemporary (Chakrabarty 2007). In vibrant rallies that rouse mass affect, and political violence where homemade bombs are hurled at jam-packed buses to kill as many ordinary commuters as possible,<sup>19</sup> the crowd is truly a political *pharmakon*; that is, it is both a remedy and a scapegoat. This duality remains fundamental to the idea of the crowd in modern mass democracies. A fast-growing number of urban Bangladeshis waste time and exhaust public resources being stuck in traffic in an increasingly atomized capital city (Rosen 2016). At the same time, they are apparently logging on to social networks much more frequently than people living in some of the world’s most populated cities (Murad 2017).<sup>20</sup> Being ethical, both online and on the street, as Anik had told me in 2013, has become a rising concern in profoundly shifting political and digital climates. Like Anik and his contemporaries, ethnographers must also attempt to make sense of the interactions and inter-textualities between the disparate crowds that make up Bangladesh’s contemporary urban life.

# Death on the Bund: Crowd Control and the Chinese Dream in Shanghai

Scott Moskowicz

## Prelude

On New Year's Eve 2010 I found myself at a party held in the offices of an investment firm several floors below the executive suite of the Bank of China building, located in Shanghai's historic Bund neighborhood. Looking down at the once sleepy Bund, I was startled by the mass of people assembled there in the first year of its reopening, following significant investment by the Chinese government to refashion the Bund into an elevated walkway and premier tourist attraction. The Bund delimits Puxi (*West of Pu*) and stretches along the banks of the Huangpu River in front of Shanghai's grandest colonial architecture, directly across from the skyline of Pudong's (*East of Pu*) futuristic Lujiazui financial district. The crowd below me moved as one, packed tightly into the streets, spilling up onto the viewing platform, the two masses separated by a long retaining wall but linked by sinews of revelers ascending and descending stairs at intermittent access points. I was in awe of the assembly, puzzled by the crowd's appeal to its participants, worried for their safety, and thankful to be viewing the phenomena at a distant remove. Five years later, I would suddenly recall this sense of proxy alarm and relief, while fighting to escape a deadly stampede in this same spot.

## An ethnographer in the crowd

The day before New Year's Eve 2015, I find myself in Shanghai again, that night in 2010 completely absent from my mind. Although I have been conducting

research in Western China, I have flown in and out of Shanghai on a brief trip to Europe and am stuck in the city awaiting the arrival of a first-time visitor to China who I have promised to shepherd around before returning to my research commitments out west. Around midnight I check into a hostel in a dilapidated colonial building several blocks from the Bund. All windows are open to the near-freezing street.<sup>1</sup>

Hoping the hostel has a bar or cafe where I might warm up while my room reaches a sleepable temperature, I inquire at the front desk. A young man in his twenties wearing a crisp black baseball hat informs me regretfully that there is only an “activity room,” but it has already closed for the night. His tone draws a sharp look from a more senior colleague, and perhaps to change the subject, he compliments my hat. I am wearing a knit acrylic winter hat, bright red and blue, adorned with the logo of the New England Patriots and topped with a large red and white pompom. It is not, objectively speaking, stylish. But it is warm. I thank him for his compliment and ask if he is a fan of “American-style olive ball,” the Chinese name for the sport played by the “New England Country Lovers,” or Patriots. He has never seen a game but assures me he *has* heard of the sport and invites me to come drinking with him after his shift. With no plans beyond fighting jetlag in a freezing room, I accept, and, encouraged by my receptiveness, he begins to tell me his story. A high school graduate from Shandong province, he was hoping to travel before furthering his education or properly joining the workforce, and had taken a job at the hostel several months earlier, but has had so little off time he hasn’t been able to explore Shanghai much. Another glare from his coworker cuts our conversation off. Agreeing to meet soon, we exchange social media contacts and I note that his chosen handle is the English phrase “Armani’s Chopsticks.”

Upstairs, near the closed activity room, a couple of young travelers from Taiwan lounge in the hallway. When I first registered, they had been downstairs discussing the differences in divorce laws between China and Taiwan with Armani’s colleague. I nod hello and soon find myself in a discussion about the broader cultural and legal differences between Taiwan and China. One young man, nicknamed Minmin, expresses disappointment at his failure to connect with other young Chinese people during his first trip to Mainland China, where his family is from.

Several in the party depart for bed and I find myself alone with Minmin. I invite him to join Armani’s Chopsticks and me for a drink. For all his professed disappointment at failing to connect socially with his Mainland Chinese peers, Minmin is unnerved by the offer, hesitant to come. But he appears incapable of

refusing in a way that will not embarrass him or me. Annoyed at his prejudgment of Armani, and by proxy, me as a judge of character, I don't really want Minmin to come either. I suspect he may say something offensive about Mainland China to Armani, compromising all three relationships. But, thousands of miles from my field site, I am essentially still on vacation and not thinking strategically as an ethnographer. I am jetlagged and, having flown a surprisingly dry Russian airline, could use a drink. "*Zouba*," I say authoritatively. *Let's go.* "*Zouba*," Minmin replies, meekly, and follows me downstairs.

In the lobby I make eye contact with Armani and then nod back at Minmin by way of introduction. "Taiwanese friend," I say. Armani nods having encouraged me to invite any and all friends. "*Zouba*," he says and heads out the door, turning left and walking briskly toward some undisclosed location. "Where are we headed, to a bar?" I ask. "No, no bars around here," says Armani. Minmin looks at me nervously. We end up getting beers and kebabs at a barbecue stand down the street. After we sit and toast each other Armani begins questioning Minmin on his opinions of China and young Chinese people. Minmin's responses are hesitant and diplomatic, but Armani's opinions are far harsher. He bemoans that while young Taiwanese people like Minmin come to China to explore, young Chinese are parochial and careerist, that there is no sense of camaraderie at the hostel, only hierarchy. He is looked down on for not having attended university, even though he eventually plans on continuing his education. Minmin and Armani are soon deep in conversation about the role of youth in traditional Chinese culture. I try to remain engaged nodding in agreement at various points, though my opportunities to contribute are few. Eventually food and drink are finished and we return to the hostel.

Still jetlagged, I wake in the late afternoon on New Year's Eve to an imploring message from Armani on my phone. "Hey, where are you?" He has been working all day but hasn't seen me, and last night we apparently made plans to spend New Year's Eve together. "Have you eaten yet?" I ask, thinking we might get an early dinner while sorting out the evening's plan. But of course in Chinese this is also a standard greeting, akin to asking "how's it going?" and does not necessarily imply an invitation. Armani responds that he has eaten and inquires back the same. I have been in my room all day and so have not eaten. This confounds Armani. After a time he urges me to go eat and then return by 7:30 p.m. at the latest. "Tonight there will be very many people. Also, the Taiwanese guy has returned." I assume this means he has invited Minmin to join us.

I don't manage to make it out before 7:30 p.m., but Minmin is downstairs with several of his traveling companions and they have not eaten dinner yet either.



Armani is distressed, explaining that there is going to be a laser show at the Bund, and we will never secure decent viewing positions if we don't hurry. It is his first day off in ages and he is excited to participate in the kind of large group activity he could never experience in his home city. Cosmopolitan opportunities like this are the reason he traveled to Shanghai. I offer that I am fine with street food in a hurry, but the Taiwanese insist on introducing us to a nearby Fujian-style *chaoshou* restaurant they have discovered that reminds them of home.

Outside the dumpling shop, the streets are more crowded than normal, if not alarmingly so. Armani takes the lead, marching us vigorously several blocks to the Bund, and up the elevated platform where we begin to search for a prime viewing space. As with most public holidays, the night is bright and clear without a trace of the haze that normally obscures views. This may owe to a happy coincidence of weather, aided by the holiday closing of local factories, or possibly to the type of strategic measures undertaken by the government to ensure clear skies whenever its cities will be on public display. Sweeping shots of China's iconic cities, including Shanghai, are sure to feature in the New Year's Eve variety shows that will be broadcast on nearly every station.<sup>2</sup>

We have arrived a little after nine, according to the clock on the British-built former Shanghai Customs House, which looms behind us. Nearby is the Bank of China Building. I am suddenly reminded of New Year's Eve in 2010, when I looked down toward the street and its startling crush of humanity. While the walkway is crowded, it doesn't feel as claustrophobic as I had imagined, looking down from above. People are packed several rows deep at the water's edge, jostling for position, but the area behind them is relatively empty. I can think of no reason to enter this fray. Pudong's glittering skyline, towering over the negative space of the darkened Huangpu River between us, is fully visible from all parts of the viewing platform.

Behind the fray, the crowd is mostly listless. Some people pose for pictures against the backdrop of Pudong and futuristic Liujiazui, and a few hawkers are pedaling headbands adorned with fuzzy ears evocative of cartoon animals, the *tchotchke du jour*, which nearly every woman in sight has purchased, along with some of their partners. Some carry plastic neon hand-clappers, but no one is using them. Mostly though, as on any given day on the Bund, people simply stare across the water at Pudong's sparkling promise of the future. Though at street level Liujiazui is largely absent of cultural or economic life—among the bases of its mega towers, wind howls at traffic snarls but there are few shops, vendors, or pedestrians—from across the river, its skyline is a developmental triumph, featuring the city's three tallest buildings, each of which topped out as

the second tallest building in the world at the time of their construction. To gaze across the water at Pudong and its prosperous articulation of the future, what President Xi Jinping is referring to when he frequently invokes his trademark slogan “the Chinese Dream” is to situate one’s self in the present with your back to China’s colonial past. The grand stone facades of all the Western-built banks and custom houses that originally came to constitute the Bund were once the beating economic heart of Colonial Shanghai, though most ordinary Shanghai residents were largely excluded from this activity and the attendant cosmopolitan cultural life that made Shanghai famous. Today, spotlights illuminate the names of the old colonial landlords carved into the stonework facades, as well as the larger modern signs of their new tenants—mostly Chinese state-controlled banks but several posh Chinese-owned hotels and nightclubs as well—and the five-star Chinese flags flapping triumphantly from the roof of each.

The evening is relatively quiet. The air of revelry one might expect from a large public gathering on New Year’s Eve in a major global city, like the iconic yearly gathering of revelers at New York’s Times Square, is absent. Mostly, people are just milling about, expectant but unsure, as if waiting for further instruction. The crowd stretches off to both sides of the Bund’s visible horizon and I ask Armani where he thinks the light show we have apparently come for will be focused. “Just ... Pudong,” he says, gesturing across the water. Eventually we settle in front of the green-roofed former Sassoon Mansion. Armani stares straight ahead at Pudong as if willing the show to begin.

I am wearing a fleece jacket over a heavy Fair Isle sweater, which matches the color scheme of my Patriots hat. Once we stop moving I immediately feel the cold penetrating my layers. The Taiwanese are mostly sporting stylish but flimsy windbreakers and I can tell they are not used to the cold. I fish around in my pockets and dig out a single glove and another winter hat, which one of them gladly accepts. By ten o’clock, the idea of waiting another hour begins to seem untenable and I suggest we find a restaurant or cafe to warm up in before returning. After all, the Bund is not nearly as crowded as Armani had anticipated. Reclaiming our spot should be easy.

We walk toward one of the exits at the back of the platform and immediately stop. At the base of the stairs is a thin plastic cordon reinforced by two officers yelling into a megaphone at a mass of people determined to ascend. They fill the streets, which have been closed to traffic, stretching from the far sidewalk all the way to the base of the stairs. This is more people than I have ever seen in one place, except possibly in the same exact place, from my perch in the Bank of China Building back in 2010. They are fighting for position, craning to see up

the stairs, jostling to be first in line in case someone leaves and the police allow another to pass, like bouncers at a popular nightclub. There will be no chance of returning to the viewing platform if we leave, and even the possibility of leaving seems remote, if not dangerous.

Our agency arrested, I stare at the crowd for several minutes, transfixed. At one point, a young Eastern European couple ducks under the cordon and sprints up the stairs. The crowd yells angrily after the transgressing foreigners and a police officer sprints after them. I decide not to linger near the stairs, in case my foreignness elicits resentment when so many locals are packed together beneath me, seemingly intent on ascending to the privileged location I currently inhabit.

And yet the situation doesn't quite make sense to me, as a participant or observer. Pudong's skyline, the sight of the evening's promised "activity," will be just as visible from the street as from our inexplicably coveted vantage. There is no real advantage to our position, beyond the intrinsic superiority of higher ground, and perhaps, in this moment, space itself. There are no activities, or entertainers, or diversions of any kind on the platform, not even the sort of overly cheery volunteers one might expect to be directing people or handing out programs at such an event. Below is a mass of humanity collectively fighting for the right to ascend upstairs where there is simply more space and an opportunity to view the lights of Pudong from a slightly different, though not necessarily superior, perspective.

I am cold and quickly losing interest in the promised light show, about which no announcements have been made to indicate format, or start time, or even to confirm its existence. Ultimately, the spectacle will be little more than flash and sparkle above the water, a testament to the showmanship of the local government, a conceptual extension of Pudong and of the Chinese Dream itself. Such public spectacle is necessary because it is the kind of thing one expects from a prosperous society, the promise of the Chinese Dream. The government must provide such spectacle to reassure that social life in the PRC is developing, moving toward the experiential mean of prosperous societies around the world, even as the PRC's political life and civil freedoms have regressed under Xi Jinping.<sup>3</sup> But the delivery of such promised experiences is ultimately inhibited by the PRC's sharp restrictions on independent civic life.

The lack of apparent civic involvement in this event, besides that of the police, has leant a thin, formless quality to the evening and the social atmosphere up on the platform. Rather than the light show arriving as a grand finale after a night of public celebration and communal revelry, there is little interaction among those gathered on the platform—and with no side shows, street performers, volunteers,

or licensed vendors, nothing to foment it—merely a sense of guarded anomie as the would-be revelers stand around, biding their time and their carefully staked positions, waiting for the promised spectacle to materialize in the night sky.

Meanwhile, on the street below, a perceived lack of access to the payoff of this promised spectacle has created a dangerous tension in the crowd. Whereas external activities—performers, even food carts—might divert the flow of traffic by splitting attentions, such potential diversions have all been banned, in typical Chinese fashion, so as to ensure both aesthetic and public order. While awaiting the main spectacle, there is nothing to do on the street but clamor for entry and ascension to the platform above; likewise, there is nothing to do on the platform above except fret about those below and the chaos and compromise their hypothetical ascension could bring. To me, this tension highlights the experiential gap between urban life in the PRC and much of the developed world, a dangerously yawning chasm between the reality of public life in China and the much ballyhooed “Chinese Dream.” But to Armani, the gathering crowd below is not ominous but affirmative, and the evening is still full of potential. He is proud to have secured entry to the platform, despite having been waylaid by his foreign charges, a testament to the urban savvy he has already accumulated, a small payoff on his risky investment in personal development through travel. I glance at the Taiwanese and they appear unsure, but Armani is buoyed by his accomplishment and its yield of our superior position on the platform; he is eager for an experiential opportunity far superior to anything available in his comparatively small hometown. For now, I see little chance of leaving, and though unsure I want to be at this event at all, I am, admittedly, relieved to be up on the platform, rather than below on the street with the crowd.

This relief is short lived, however. Soon, an indistinguishable cry rises from the crowd below, and I turn to see a column of people streaming up the stairs into the elevated walkway. The police line has either broken or the police have simply given up. At some point, I realize I have lost track of my friends, or they have lost track of me. I determine to hold my position and hope they will find me. The platform does not fill quickly, and at first I am unconcerned, hopeful that the shifting dynamic will equalize the two crowds, creating egress at the base of the stairs. The new arrivals immediately rush toward the water, fighting for position with those already there. The back of the platform has yet to fill in, however, and I ease away from the crowd, toward the rear wall. From here I can keep an eye on the ascending column. I hope to leave once the column thins, but the initial wave is nearly the width of the stairs, and exiting against the tide seems risky.

The negative space around me slowly fills. I edge toward the stairs but am soon buffeted by people surging out of the upward funnel of the stairway. Slamming into my shoulders, some look up at my foreign face in surprise before pushing toward the water. Rebuffed, I back away from this stream of people and wait again for the crush to relent, keeping an eye on the stairs. Despite the growing crowd, the situation on the platform is still not quite alarming; it feels like the type of crowd one might encounter on a busy thoroughfare in Shanghai at rush hour, but without the threat of errant motorbikes.

I am in an hourglass, the crowd spilling off and settling around me like grains of sand. Despite the obvious metaphor of danger, I am more perplexed than anxious until, quite suddenly, I find myself pressed against flesh from all sides. The cocoon of personal space most Westerners take for granted has entirely disappeared. It is likely that my self-conception as a foreigner, as a sociologist apart from the Chinese crowd I normally study, has enhanced my danger, allowing me to view myself as symbolically—and, as such, physically—separate, isolated from the crowd even while being consumed, or rather absorbed, by it. The experience stands as a resounding physical lesson against the myth of objectivity, a myth that even if long laid to rest intellectually, may still smolder deep within the ethnographer at an emotional level. All attempts to remain “objective” or separate from events are, at best, attempts at self-soothing or, at worst, delusions allowing me to deny the very real risk of physical harm I now face.

Sure enough, the false safety of my observational locus soon dispels, like vapor squeezed from my lungs by the tightening of the crowd. With difficulty—and increasing alarm—I rotate 180 degrees to better assess any opportunities for escape. I am now a great distance from the stairs and at least eight people from the back wall, beyond which, a drop of significant but not life-threatening distance still separates me from the safety of the sidewalk below. That is, if the sidewalk is clear of people, which it likely is not. Confronted by the utter impossibility of lateral movement I think to myself, *If I were the kind of person who freaks out, I might start freaking out right now.* I am bemused by the idea of sharing this thought with my neighbor, with whom the colloquialism will surely fail to resonate. But while thinking to myself narratively in English, I have apparently already begun to communicate verbally with my neighbor in ardent—if surely confused—Chinese. I have been repeating the phrase, “We are not safe. We are less and less safe,” though I only become fully aware of this when he responds. “Friend, no one likes this situation. There is nothing we can do.” His tone is even and he wears the broad, uncomfortable grin that is commonly

offered in Chinese cities in response to an emotional display by a stranger. I am embarrassed, but this is oddly calming. He is wrong of course. I reassure myself that, as improbable as it may seem, the crowd is now so tightly packed that, if I could just muster enough vertical leverage, I might escape by walking over the heads and shoulders of others.

And yet, if too many people were to attempt such a feat, the crowd might collapse in on itself. It is the very density of the crowd—now pressed so tightly that breathing is a labored act but falling to the ground and getting trampled would be impossible—that assures its momentary safety and must, for now, be preserved. As the crowd had filled in, I remained falsely calm, still able to envision myself as apart from the crowd itself. Now, the knowledge that I have unwillingly been absorbed into the crowd, and have no control over when I will be able to depart, is causing me a great deal of anxiety, even though I am, at this moment, perhaps safer than I had been while calmly surveying the crowd rushing up the stairs, buffeting me, surrounding me, absorbing me. I heed my rear neighbor's annoyed calm and realize that my anxiety, my very individuality, my foreign self-regard, is a liability to myself and to us all. In this sense, the crowd is a paradox, a suddenly arising mass form born of many individuals seeking a brief individual advantage, a space above and apart from the mass. But instead the individuals end up trapped together in a formation where all individual advantage is negated. There is a brief and immediate social contract struck in and perpetuating of such stasis, however unstable, a version of what Emile Durkheim might have called collective effervescence.

As if to demonstrate this stasis, the crowd begins to ripple, confronting us with our own inability to act individually while reinforcing the tentative safety of our rebirth as a singular organism. Shrieks of terror and excitement travel northward through the crowd, heralding a great, approaching wave crest of flesh. All along the winding Bund, we are the flesh of an undulating Chinese dragon, covered not in shimmering scales but tacky cartoon ears.

No one around me seems to be bracing for the surge. To react against the crowd's energy is dangerous but to allow oneself to move with it, invigorating. I loosen my body and allow the wave to pass through me, lifting me so that my weight is redistributed from my feet and onto my neighbor to my right. For a moment, my toes are barely touching the ground and I can lift my feet without falling. Everyone around me is stacked at a similar, improbable angle. Falling to the ground is an impossibility. The wave soon passes back in the other direction with growing cries of excitement and diminishing screams of terror. My anxiety

gives way, briefly, along with my sense of self. The pattern repeats three or four times before subsiding.

Suddenly, with no logic or forewarning, the crowd breaks and space appears around me. There is a palpable anxiety as individuals emerge again from the collective effervescence of the mass formation and spill from the guts of that roiling tacky-eared dragon. I am relieved but keenly aware that this is a moment of potential agency and, as such, high danger. There is no way to know how long this new physical iteration of the crowd will last or what form it will take next. Whereas moments ago escape was impossible and the crowd negated the individual on a physical and, to some extent, emotional level, now each individual must confront the possibility of escape but also the possibility of harm at the hands of others attempting to escape. I am reminded of the hoary cliché, beloved by authors of business articles, that the Chinese word for crisis, *weiji*, is formed from the concatenation of the characters *wei* and *ji*, danger and opportunity.<sup>4</sup>

Amid the confusion, my companions reappear. After confirming that everyone is unharmed I suggest we take advantage of the momentary relent to escape. Visibly shaken, my Taiwanese friends nod in agreement. It is now after eleven and Armani concedes that we might as well leave since the promised light show has not materialized. He shakes his head in frustration, embarrassed to have led us all this way for no payoff.

We push toward the exit. On the stairs we are pressed against the far wall, part of a single-file column attempting to exit against a countervailing current at least five wide. "Friends, it is not safe to go up. It is crowded and very dangerous, go down go down," I urge to anyone who will listen. No one does. "The activity has been canceled," Armani clarifies, "There *was* no activity."

Several of our party have managed to successfully descend when suddenly the crowd tightens up again. I find myself pressed forcefully against a girl in her early twenties whose head comes up to my chest and whose back is against the wall. With my hands on the ledge and my back stiff against the crowd, I strain to maintain a protective frame so as not to crush her. I will not be able to hold the position for long and I urge her to use this moment to climb over the wall and escape the crowd. She is so small, unable even to see above the crowd. My forearms are shaking now but the nobility of my effort is invigorating. I know the unpredictable crowd seems scary I tell her, but I will be right behind, protecting her and making sure she can climb over the wall safely; my friends, who are on the other side calling to me, will make sure she is not hurt climbing over the wall. "Thanks," she says, her face implacable. "No need. No need." She is still hoping for a chance to make it up the stairs, she tells me. After all, everyone

is struggling to get up there, and she has already made it this far. Whatever is at the top must be worth the risk.

I feel my resolve start to give way, along with the rigidity of my forearms, and I swear in frustration. Not at her, but at the absurdity of the situation. At myself, for misreading this crowd so badly and ending up trapped dangerously in a stairwell. But also, maybe, at her. Am I wrong to be scared? Why isn't she scared? What is so alluring about the platform? Did I miss something while I was up there? Would I still be trying to get up there if I hadn't already been, or is there something particular to the state of being young and Chinese and of a certain income bracket at this particular moment in time that is propelling this stampede? They seem driven—in this instance, to near frenzy—by a thirst for new experiences. Understandably, in this anxious moment of rapid cultural and economic expansion, there has arisen a palpable, all-possessing ache to possess what until recently seemed unpossessable—not merely in terms of material goods but in a potential variety of imagined lives—but are now suddenly within reach, yet may still, just as suddenly, recede, a sense conveyed to me by many informants.

I wedge myself between my reluctant rescuer and her neighbor and, using a railing for leverage, manage to hoist myself above the wall, pausing to steady myself and assess the state of the crowd at its base of origin. A huge mass continues to shove its way into the mouth of the stairwell against the trickle of those attempting to descend. Rather than individuals digging their way through, several have committed their fortunes to the success of the entire group, having planted their feet for leverage, in attempts to drive the entire scrum up the stairs, like the transit officials hired by the Shanghai Metro to “shove commuters into trains” in response to complaints over the inefficiency of overcrowded lines.<sup>5</sup> The crowd seems possessed—and is, itself, a type of possession—by the idea that effort alone might overcome the physical limitations of the stairwell's width. In truth, it just might.

And yet, beyond the mass formation surging up through the base of the stairwell, the rest of the street is comparatively calm, if slightly more crowded than on a normal evening. My friends have gathered beneath me, extending their arms to help me over the wall. I straddle the ledge on my stomach, one leg pinned painfully by the crowd before finally releasing. I land solidly, but on my feet and otherwise intact. Immediately we begin to retreat. Animal-ear headbands litter the ground and crunch under foot. We are moving against the flow of most pedestrian traffic, but there does not seem to be a clear destination that is drawing people. Whatever might be transpiring on the platform, there is no sense of urgency or panic in the street.



We walk in silence most of the way and several blocks from our hostel, I stop to buy a steamed bun even though I am not particularly hungry. The group pushes on, anxious to return to the relative calm of the hostel, and I hang back, relieved at the prospect of being alone for the first time since the evening began. I eye bottles of cheap watery lagers at a convenience store but am overwhelmed by the variety and leave without a purchase. When I finally make it back, the alley by our hostel is dark and nearly empty and it barely feels like New Year's Eve, let alone as if a riot could be happening nearby. I am beginning to wonder if I haven't completely misinterpreted the situation when a young man suddenly appears, waving his arms and shouting excitedly about the Bund. At first I assume he has escaped the stampede as well and is requesting help, but he is asking for directions to the Bund. It is still several minutes to midnight.

I explain that whatever was supposed to happen there tonight appears to have been canceled. The situation is dangerous, the police have abandoned the street to the mobs, and he should stay away at all costs. "WHERE ... is ... the Bund?" he repeats loudly, slowly, revealing a Southern Chinese accent. He is frustrated to have discovered that I am a foreigner and have obviously not understood his question. Resigned, I point behind him in the general direction of the waterfront. "Thank you, thank you," he repeats, relieved. He has come all the way to Shanghai for New Year's Eve after all and is not going to be deterred now, moments before midnight. He turns and scampers off, buoyant with the possibility of the New Year, of this megacity with its megatowers, its live holiday extravaganzas, its iconic waterfront at the crux of history, its seemingly empty alleys filled with foreigners who speak Chinese and can, with a little insistence and slow enough speech, point you in the right direction when you are lost.

## Death and departure

At the front desk Armani's boss is reading. She is surprised I am back before midnight. I try to convey the sheer mass of people, the crush of humanity that seemed to almost swallow us before spitting me out onto the street. She looks at me with a mix of pity and annoyance. "Of course there were crowds. It's New Year's." When I am not immediately mollified, she explains further: "Shanghai has a lot of people."

Back in my room, I can hear the peppy voices of a young male and female host couple counting down to the New Year somewhere nearby. I wonder if we weren't in the wrong location the whole time and flip on the TV looking for

any sort of news to confirm my recent experience, which already feels distant, even imagined. There are no news reports about any sort of stampede, and flipping the channels I find mostly New Year's programs and one seems to match the voices outside my window, though it doesn't appear to be broadcast from anywhere recognizable. I will eventually discover the source of revelry as a large LCD advertising screen installed temporarily at a nearby intersection.

I turn off the television and crawl into bed, though the broadcast continues to spill in with the cold through my single-paned windows. At midnight the hosts wish each other a happy new year and a festive holiday song plays. The expected crack of fireworks is absent. New restrictions meant to combat air pollution, I had read. The light show that never materialized was supposed to have taken their place. I pull my knitted cap back on and curse at the noise from the unseen party—that, of course, is virtual and isn't actually there—and then at myself. It is barely midnight on New Year's Eve and I am alone in a dark room complaining about street noise. I am supposed to be a sociologist studying what it means to be middle class in contemporary China, how this idea shapes and is shaped by tastes, experiences, and desires. And yet, here I am, cowering alone in my room, having retreated from experience, from the people I supposedly came here to study because ... there were too many of them in one place? What did I actually experience tonight? Was I ever in real danger or was I simply afraid of something because, even though I had claimed to study this phenomena, I had never gotten close enough to properly experience or understand it?

The next morning I wake to a frantic text message from my brother back home, anxious to make sure I am OK, which is surprising. Minmin has sent me something as well, a link to an article. Apparently, just moments after we had escaped the previous night, a stampede on a stairwell leading up to the Bund's elevated platform had critically injured many people, with thirty-six eventual fatalities. Authorities, wary of their ability to control expected record crowds, had actually canceled the public light show we had come for several days earlier, moving the event to a smaller venue and restricting admission to those lucky enough to receive tickets. With the venue changed, crowd control measures at the Bund were cut further. But news of the change, which would likely have led to public resentment, was never widely disseminated, and record crowds materialized anyways.

According to some accounts on social media, the tragedy occurred after nightclub owners dumped boxes of coupons, in the guise of American currency, to the street below, causing the mob on the stairs, struggling desperately to ascend to the platform for an event that did not exist, to suddenly reverse course. Wary

of a narrative in which striving young urbanites, deprived of a promised public spectacle, ultimately trampled each other to death while grasping for fake US currency dumped from the windows of an exclusive nightclub, officials issued numerous reports in which they sought to disseminate a clarified timeline. The official microblog—the Chinese equivalent of Twitter—of the Shanghai Public Security Bureau reassured the public that an official investigation had concluded that the stampede had already occurred by the time the fake money was released.<sup>6</sup> The thoughtless stunt had not caused the tragedy. The coupons merely fluttered down, harmlessly, into a street already littered with the dead and broken bodies of the young. Minmin and I exchange missives exclaiming our thankfulness and shock at having learned that we escaped just moments before tragedy. Downstairs, I ask Armani if he has heard the news. He shakes his head in somber disbelief of what he is saying, “There never was any light show to begin with. They canceled the activity.” His boss shoots us a fierce look. “No talk of disaster. This is not a good discussion.” Armani looks down at his desk.

Minmin checks out later that day, apologizing by text for not finding me to say goodbye in person after what we had experienced. He assures me that we are fated to meet again. I check out later, bidding farewell to Armani who tells me quietly that he doesn’t plan to stay on at the hostel much longer. I head to Beijing to collect my cousin, feeling ill-prepared to play tour guide. Several days later we would return to Shanghai, working our way south before heading inland along the Yangtze to my primary field site, where he would depart and I would continue on with my research.

## The Bund, darkened

I was anxious about returning to the Bund but excited to be able to walk through the events while they were still fresh, as well as to introduce a first-time visitor to this fascinating nexus of history, the juxtaposition of austere colonial buildings lit up on one side of the platform, Pudong’s empty dazzle reflecting off the dark water opposite. When our cab driver stopped it was already early evening. I didn’t recognize the area and thought at first he must have misheard. He assured me that we had arrived at the Bund—“yes the main part of the Bund”—and I began to register the colonial stonework receding into shadows. The usual spotlights were absent, their facades drained of drama. Across the river, Pudong’s skyline was similarly darkened, and what stood out against the resurgent post-holiday haze was fast disappearing. A few garish tour boats shaped like creatures from

Chinese mythology still lit the water, but the buildings themselves were soon swallowed by the night.

The walkway was nearly empty of tourists, the extra police officers, patrolling against signs of public grief and outrage, all the more conspicuous. I stopped a senior-looking officer patrolling with a younger female partner.

"The lights are all off," I said, immediately feeling foolish for stating the obvious.

"Yes," he replied, nodding patiently.

"But they were on before ..."

"Yes."

"I mean, not just during the holiday, but normally. They are normally on at night."

"Yes."

"So why are they off now? Will they turn on later?"

"No lights this evening," he explained, no less patiently.

"Do you know when they will be turned back on?"

His partner looked at me nervously and then turned to him, expectant. He gave a slight snort and then shrugged at the absurdity of the question, as if he might have any more idea than me. The lights would not be off forever of course. They would be off until public anger had died down or moved on to some other momentary outrage. It was too soon to turn spotlights on the site of tragedy. But to keep them off forever would risk memorializing the event with absence. There would be no official announcement of their return, lest it be acknowledged that the lights were off for any particular reason; they would simply be turned back on at the unknowable but exactly appropriate time. The officers turned upriver, toward Chenyi Square, fading into darkness like the Pudong skyline.

# Guide to Further Reading

Megan Steffen

This Guide to Further Reading is for students looking to read more about crowds. It is by no means an exhaustive review of the scholarly literature on crowds. It draws mainly on works that were either written in English or have been translated into English. In addition, many major works on crowds have been omitted, either in the name of space or else because I found the premises of their investigations repulsive. In the Introduction, I gestured to the fact that much of the earliest conceptual work on crowds was developed in concert with the (then) emerging field of eugenics (Resina 2006; van Ginneken, J. 1992: 101). As several contributors to this volume point out, the taken-for-granted association of irrational behavior with non-white, non-male, and “non-modern” bodies is foundational to popular and scholarly thinking about crowds. While it’s tempting to patronize early thinkers who employed discriminatory analogies by historicizing them, one can easily find the same misogynistic and racist logic in books published by well-regarded university presses as recently as 1981. I have refrained from engaging with authors whose thinking I found unimaginative, discriminatory, and essentialist unless it was unavoidable. Instead, I encourage students reading this to pursue texts that the contributors to this volume found helpful to their own thinking, texts that have been unusually generative within the field of crowd studies more generally, and texts that are similar to the chapters in this volume. I have organized the guide roughly by time period, topic, and approach.

Students searching for an overview of the history of the major theorists of crowds will find *The Politics of Crowds: An Alternative History of Sociology* by Christian Borch (2012) extremely useful. Borch examines the history of crowd theory up to the late twentieth century, but his intervention into the early scholarship on crowds is particularly helpful as it links the emergence of crowd theory to the emergence of the discipline of sociology. As this volume shows, many of the works analyzed by Borch continue to be read widely today. For instance, in this volume Bjørn Thomassen draws on Gabriel Tarde’s *The Laws of Imitation* (2014), and several of the contributors make a passing reference to Gustave

Le Bon's *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (2002). Borch's (2012) well-documented assertion that Emile Durkheim developed his ideas about collective effervescence in opposition to Tarde and other contemporary theorists of crowds explains, perhaps, why many of the authors in this volume make reference to Durkheim's theory of collective effervescence—a sense of heightened solidarity with others that could emerge from crowd-like experiences—but do not directly engage his work. Where Durkheim remained devoted to the power of collective, crowd-like experiences to transform people into mutually constitutive social beings, thinkers like Le Bon and Tarde highlighted the irrational behavior and suggestibility of crowds, respectively.

Students who want to understand the importance of crowds in religious contexts should examine many works that may not explicitly mention crowds. Beyond outlining the idea of collective effervescence, Durkheim's *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1995) offers a theory for how people form groups and become part of a society through worship. Victor Turner's work on the dynamics of rituals to transform people within groups may be similarly useful; for instance, in this volume, Thomassen draws heavily on Turner's (1988) *The Anthropology of Performance* to think about collective experiences. Abdellah Hammoudi also refers to Turner's analysis of liminality in his chapter on crowds during the hajj. For students who want to know more about crowds during a specific religious event, Hammoudi's (2006) book-length account, *A Season in Mecca*, is indispensable. Hammoudi's vivid, firsthand narrative brings not only the hajj's crowds to life but also its context; the people surrounding Hammoudi are pulled together and pushed apart by their beliefs, bureaucracy, and the market forces behind their pilgrimage. As I noted in the Introduction, there have historically been methodological, logistical, theoretical, and political reasons anthropologists and ethnographers have not frequently taken up crowds as an object of study; however, there are several notable exceptions, including Hammoudi's book. Stanley Tambiah's *Leveling Crowds: Ethnonationalist Conflicts and Collective Violence* (1996) uses archival materials and firsthand accounts to analyze ethnic violence in South Asian contexts. "Crowds," an essay by Claude Lévi-Strauss (1962) analyzed in the Introduction, provides an account of one ethnographer's confrontation with a crowd in what was then Calcutta. Finally, contributor Nusrat Sabina Chowdhury's (2019) book, *Paradoxes of the Popular*, provides an in-depth, ethnographic examination of crowds, protests, and politics in Bangladesh.

Although crowds are not exclusively a modern phenomenon, writers often associate crowds with the social shifts that accompanied industrialization

and democratization. Students who want to read more about how early industrialization affects group formation can find more of Durkheim's thinking on solidarity in *The Division of Labor in Society* (1984). Stefan Jonsson charts the historical construction of the crowds, masses, and revolution in *A Brief History of the Masses* (2008) and *Crowds and Democracy* (2013). Drawing on art criticism, intellectual history, and social theory, Jonsson analyzes not the crowds and masses as phenomena in the world but representations of them. In his analysis of religious crowds in this volume, Ebenezer Obadare relies on the work of historian Georges Lefebvre (1934), who sought to understand the crowd's role in revolution. He also draws on the work of Marxist theorists Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2004), who separate crowd theory from their own concept of the "multitude" that resists and transforms the existing structures of neoliberalism. Finally, George Rudé's (2005: 210, 257; 1959) historical work on crowds in England and France offers an empirical critique of theorists like Le Bon.

As they read, students would do well to be mindful of the historical factors that shaped the literature on crowds. In *Crowds, Psychology, and Politics 1871–1899*, Jaap van Ginneken (1992: 3) shows how the erosion of monarchies and elite structures of power in the nineteenth century motivated the first wave of writing about crowds. Borch argues that the world wars of the twentieth century similarly inspired a new set of scholars to begin theorizing "the transformation from crowd to mass: the features typically associated with crowds of co-present individuals suddenly appeared to seize the entire nation, which therefore emerged as a mass" (2012: 98). Borch identifies Max Weber, Georg Simmel, and Robert Park as some of the first thinkers to identify the masses as an object of inquiry in their studies of urbanization and capitalism's consequences. The election of authoritarian leaders, rise of totalitarian governments, and adoption of nationalism in the twentieth century created a new sense of urgency for thinkers trying to understand what it was about the modern society that had made people capable of horrific acts of mass killing during the Holocaust and throughout Asia in the Second World War. In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Hannah Arendt explicitly links concentration camps to the crowds of supporters who pushed authoritarian leaders into power, writing, "The insane mass manufacture of corpses is preceded by the historically and politically intelligible preparation of living corpses" (Arendt 1966: 447). Her analysis of the historical factors that made totalitarianism possible is unflinching, and she ultimately argues that totalitarianism emerged from a modern society made up of the masses, where class structures had broken down, leaving individuals atomized and lonely (1966: 317). Not all thinkers saw crowds, modernity, and

totalitarianism as inevitably linked, however. Elias Canetti's (1984) *Crowds and Power* is in many ways an attempt to rehabilitate crowds both from the anachronistic notion that crowds were an exclusively modern phenomenon and from the assumption that their effects on the individual were always negative. In this volume, Hammoudi takes issue with Canetti's analysis of the hajj crowds, but many of Canetti's typologies of crowds remain good to think with, if only because they manage to depart from the Machiavellian impulses that animate so much of the crowd theory that preceded him. To Canetti, crowds can be violent and irrational, but they can also be liberating.

Students searching for more on the connection between mass media and group formation will find scholars approaching the topic from many different angles. Benedict Anderson (2006) argues that newspapers, mass media, and other forms of print capitalism were essential to the formation of national identities in *Imagined Communities*. While Anderson does not explicitly address the types of co-present crowds that many of the chapters in this volume describe, his analysis provides insight to those looking to understand how groups form around circulating images of themselves. In *The Mana of Mass Society* (2017), William Mazzarella synthesizes media theorists with some of anthropology's earliest thinkers to better understand the relationship between so-called modern mass phenomena (advertising and propaganda) and the putatively primitive ones that anthropologists studied. While Mazzarella's focus on the history of anthropology as a discipline may be beyond the scope of what's useful for students pursuing further reading on crowds, his identification of the Frankfurt School's major thinkers' contributions to the study of mass media will be helpful. Mazzarella pulls the works of Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, and Max Horkheimer with social theorists like Claude Lévi-Strauss, Bronislaw Malinowski, and Durkheim. For a theoretical approach concerned with understanding the specificity of crowd formation on the internet, students can turn to Byung-chul Han's (2017) *In the Swarm: Digital Prospects*. Han helpfully distinguishes between different types of media. "Electronic media such as radio *assemble* human beings," Han argues, "In contrast, digital media *isolate* them" (Han 2017: 11). While some of Han's observations sound hyperbolic, his attention to the emotional experience of using contemporary digital media is urgent and prescient.

Many other disciplines have also produced works that will help students understand the principles of crowding and group formation. Psychology in particular has focused on understanding group decision-making and the effects of density on individual behavior. In this volume, several of the contributors draw on Sigmund Freud's (1921) *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the*



*Ego*, which may have more in common with Le Bon's work than the later contributions of social and environmental psychologists. Students interested in these approaches can start by turning to classic works like Irving L. Janis's (1972) *Victims of Groupthink* and Jonathan Freedman's (1975) *Crowding and Behavior*, respectively; more recent work can be found in journals specializing in social psychology and environmental psychology. For help further distinguishing between crowds, crowding, masses, mobs, and other related concepts, students can turn to *Crowds*, an eclectic volume edited by Jeffrey Schnapps and Matthew Tiewis (2006). With contributors from many different disciplines, the chapters vary in their approach. Some, like John Plotz's (2006) essay on alienation and the crowd in the thinking of sociologists like Erving Goffman, Robert Putnam, and David Reisman, offer probing analyses of why certain theories of crowd behavior gain traction in particular times and places; others, like Urs Staheli's (2006) chapter on finance and business literature, offer critiques of the return of crowd theory in contemporary economics. In *Among the Thugs*, students can find one of the most unflinching, firsthand accounts of violent crowd behavior in journalist Bill Bufford's (1992) examination of English football hooligans. Finally, issue 2 of *Limn* is devoted to the theme "Clouds and Crowds" (Irani et al 2012); it links anthropology, the digital, and several of this volume's other themes.

# Notes

## Chapter 1

- 1 See, for instance, “Syria refugee crisis: Facts You Need to Know,” World Vision website, available online: <https://www.worldvision.org/refugees-news-stories/syria-refugee-crisis-war-facts> (accessed May 24, 2017) and “Syria! Confronting Fragmentation: Impact of Syrian Crisis Report,” Syrian Center for Policy Research, available online: <http://scpr-syria.org/download/1269/?v=1480> (accessed May 24, 2017).
- 2 There are many active private individuals and organizations documenting the planned violence of the regime and the human rights violations of all combatant organizations during the conflict. See especially the reports of the Syria Justice and Accountability Center (<https://syriaaccountability.org>), which is gathering evidence to be submitted to the Commission for International Justice and Accountability (CIJA) and the excellent summary article of evidence gathering by Taub (2016).
- 3 The idea of “swarm intelligence” has been most developed out of several disparate fields, including evolutionary biology and cognitive and computational processes. Drawing on studies of ant behavior and fish schooling, the sociobiologist E. O. Wilson (1975) has theorized how the social sharing of information among conspecifics offers an evolutionary advantage. From this, scholars in other fields have extrapolated to processes of optimization of nonlinear functions using what they call “particle swarm methodology.” For humans, the peculiarity of this intelligence rests, I assume, on the ability to recursively use such atavistic intelligence for particularly human, i.e., nonadaptive, affect-motivated, culturally specific ends.

## Chapter 2

- 1 A successful coup is one in which the existing government has been ousted and replaced by the junta who launched the coup. There have been at least seven additional unsuccessful coups and likely many more imagined but never realized.
- 2 Shortly after the rise of the PDRC in late 2013, Nidhi wrote, “Totalitarian dictatorship, no matter where it arises, destroys the principle of the democratic majority entirely. A majority that holds that every person is politically equal

is the very problem. Everyone should not be politically equal—not when they have different levels of education, hold different shares in the country, and view the collective differently .... When the principle of the majority is destroyed, it dissolves the legitimacy of the institutions of the majority as well. The government that came from the approval of the majority in parliament is null and void. Even the parliament or assembly that gave the approval is null and void. The state offices that are under the direction of those who have become null and void inevitably are as well. Everything is completely null and void. Or everything has been cleared out for the ‘great mass of the people’ to create anew, or for a ‘good person’ prime minister selected by the ‘good people’ to be royally appointed” (Nidhi 2013).

- 3 On April 1, 2015, Article 44 was used to order the continued force of many measures of martial law, including provision for the arbitrary arrest and detention of those deemed problematic by the NCPO and the criminalization of public gatherings of five or more persons. For full details, see the original Thai-language NCPO Order 3/2558, published in the *Ratchakitchanubeksa* [*Royal Thai Government Gazette*], Book 132, Special Issue 73 Ngo, April 1, 2558 [2015], 1–4. The 2014 Interim Constitution was replaced by a new, permanent constitution following passage via a referendum on August 7, 2016. Article 44 and all orders issued under it still remain in force.
- 4 NCPO Announcement No. 7/2557 was made on May 22, 2014, and stipulated that public gatherings of five or more persons were illegal and punishable by imprisonment of one year, a 20,000 baht fine, or both. This was replaced by Head of the NCPO Order No. 3/2558 on April 1, 2015, after the revocation of martial law.
- 5 The Internet Dialogue on Legal Freedom (iLaw) compiles monthly statistics of arrests and criminal charges; see <http://www.ilaw.or.th>.
- 6 Protests were held by both the red shirts as well as their opponents, the first color-coded political movement, the yellow shirts, who launched the movement calling for the ouster of Thaksin Shinawatra beginning in early 2006 that led to the September 19, 2006 coup. The most significant of the protests was an extended protest by several hundred thousand red shirt protestors who came to Bangkok from all over the country between March and May 2010. They were protesting the unelected government of former Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva and calling for elections. Abhisit and his deputy prime minister, Suthep Thaugsuban (who later became a key PDRC leader), ordered a military crackdown on the protestors that led to ninety-four deaths and over 2,000 injuries. See Keyes (2014) and Tausig (2013) for analysis of the red shirt movement.
- 7 Metta Wongwat (2014), “Aunties on the Frontline against the Coup: A Special Report,” *Prachatai*, June 9, available online: <http://www.prachatai.com/english/node/4105> (accessed December 4, 2016).
- 8 After the NCPO banned demonstrations and began breaking up and arresting groups of activists who massed in public with signs and banners, the Thai

dissident toolbox expanded. One of the new and unexpected symbols of protest was sandwiches. In early June 2014, students at Kasetsart University in Bangkok organized a protest in the form of a walking distribution of free sandwiches in a neighborhood near the university. As they handed out sandwiches, which are easy to handle, they shared anti-coup messages with those around them. The NCPO then tried, unsuccessfully, to ban the eating of sandwiches.

- 9 Since the coup, any organization, university department, or other collectivity that wishes to hold a seminar or other event on any political topic must request permission from the authorities first. If permission is not requested, then events may be shut down. Even if permission is requested, all events are surveilled by a range of intelligence officials and in some cases have been shut down while in progress.
- 10 For more information on Thai Lawyers for Human Rights, please see <http://www.tlhr2014.org>.
- 11 For more information on the New Democracy Movement and PDF copies of *To Overcome* (in Thai), please see <http://www.ndmth.org>.
- 12 On the 2015 draft constitution, see McCargo 2015: 329–354. For an English translation of the 2016 draft constitution, see International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance 2016.
- 13 An analysis of the myriad problems of the draft constitution is beyond the scope of this essay, but a very concise assessment of the primary ones was done by the Khana Nitirat, a group of progressive law lecturers at Thammasat University (Khana Nitirat 2016).

## Chapter 3

- 1 In the particular case of Ekiti state, perhaps we may include as part of this practice of “ostentatious humility” the very act of granting access to the premises of the new government house itself to ordinary citizens. Following his election, Governor Fayose had openly criticized his predecessor, Dr. Kayode Fayemi, for what he, Fayose, described as a “show of wickedness to Ekiti people,” referring to the N3.3bn reportedly spent on the project.
- 2 I thank Rosalind Hackett for urging this particular point on me.
- 3 All the cases cited here involved incumbent state governors. However, other examples in this category may include regular prayer sessions convened by state houses of assembly and university vice chancellors.
- 4 See Egan, T. (2011), “Rick Perry’s Unanswered Prayers,” *The New York Times*, August 11.

## Chapter 5

- 1 Zhang Yimou (2008), “Only China Can Produce This’: An Interview with Zhang Yimou,” *Southern Weekend*, September 5, trans. by China Digital Times, available online: <http://chinadigitaltimes.net/2008/09/only-china-can-produce-this-an-interview-with-zhang-yimou-2/>(accessed May 25, 2017).
- 2 Other scholars have made versions of this argument but none perhaps as incisively as C. T. Hsia (1999).
- 3 Zhang (2008), *ibid.*
- 4 See, for instance, the response of the hostel operator in Moskowitz (2018, this volume).
- 5 Although, perhaps not; see Chumley (2016) for an ethnographic description of circles and *quanzi* recorded well before WeChat became popular.
- 6 For a recent review of the literature on *guanxi*, see Osburg (2013).
- 7 My interlocutors’ aversion to crowds is in stark contrast to the enthusiasm Scott Moskowitz’s informants display in Shanghai (Chapter 11, this volume). While to Moskowitz’s informants from rural areas, crowds represent city life, modernity, and cosmopolitanism, my upper-class, urban interlocutors associated crowds with chaos and backwardness. Upper-class real estate developments all marketed themselves with photoshopped pictures of eerily empty landscaped courtyards, and when upwardly mobile people spoke wistfully about the appeal of Zhengzhou’s wealthy New East District, its lack of people was one of the first things they mentioned.
- 8 *Renao* is a phrase that literally translates as “hot and noisy,” but I am grateful to Saiyin Sun for pointing out that a more idiomatic translation was more appropriate here.

## Chapter 6

- 1 The Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) is the half-central government, half-Delhi state government that built and operates the Metro. Its first managing director, Elattuvalapil Sreedharan, was the one who decided that the Metro should have a ladies’ coach, after reported incidents of harassment. For pros and cons of the ladies’ coach, see Rhitu Chatterjee, “Why I Love Riding on the Women-Only Car on Delhi’s Metro,” April 4, 2016, National Public Radio: <http://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2016/04/04/472997605/why-i-love-riding-on-the-women-only-car-on-delhis-metro> and Ankita Rao, “Why the Delhi Metro Needs to Get Rid of the Ladies’ Compartment,” *Scroll*, November 24, 2014: <http://scroll.in/article/691395/why-the-delhi-metro-needs-to-get-rid-of-the-ladies-compartment>.
- 2 “Noida,” a planned city standing for “New Okhla Industrial Development Authority” is across the Yamuna River in the state of Uttar Pradesh but is part of the National Capital Region (NCR).

- 3 It is true that Kolkata (formerly Calcutta) has a metro that was built in the 1970s and began running in 1984, but it only ever boasted one line with sixteen stations. It was a sign of that city's modernity at the time; however, the scale and scope of the project always remained limited. I contend that Delhi's Metro—considering its vastness, scale, and the various ultra-contemporary technologies it deploys—is transforming the city's landscape and social mores in new and completely unprecedented ways in the context of South Asia.
- 4 Those cities are Mumbai, Chennai, Hyderabad, and Bangalore. By comparison, Mumbai is more populous than Delhi but has much more public transportation and many more restrictions on motor vehicles and where they may ply.
- 5 These goals and purposes at first seem more limited as compared to the railway blockages as protest (*rail roko*) detailed by Mitchell (2011). This limitation likely has to do with the kind of enclosed set of technologies that the Metro is and represents. Yet the Metro is also an evolving space, and it remains to be seen how it might be used for diverse political communications.
- 6 "Tri-color" refers to the Indian flag that has bands of orange, white, and green with a *charkha* (wheel) in the center.
- 7 As a point of comparison, see Lisa Björkman's (2015) example of Mumbai street protest crowds whose assembly she characterizes as a mass political performance in which the crowd becomes its own audience.
- 8 Michael Warner (2002) has emphasized the relationship between texts, their circulation, and publics, as when he asks, "Can a public really exist apart from the rhetoric through which it is imagined?"
- 9 This public is routinely referred to in the Indian news media, though usually in terms of "commuters" or "Delhi-ites" as in the *Hindustan Times* article, "Commuter Behavior Worries Metro as Games Draw Near" (Indo-Asian News Service, May 11, 2010), which discusses the perils of crowd behavior in Delhi in advance of the October 2010 Commonwealth Games.
- 10 See Mackey, R. (2014), "Beating of African Students by Mob in India Prompts Soul-searching on Race," *The New York Times*, September 30, available online: <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/01/world/asia/ beating-of-african-students-by-mob-in-india-prompts-soul-searching-on-race.html> (accessed October 2, 2014).
- 11 For one of the videos uploaded to YouTube of the attack at the Metro police kiosk, see "Fight at Rajiv Chowk Metro Station—New Delhi," posted September 28, 2014: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0XHBOE93Oks> (accessed May 24, 2017).
- 12 Anwar, T. (2014), "Delhi's Everyday Racism: African Students Recount Lynch Mob Attack in Metro," *Firstpost*, available online: <http://www.firstpost.com/living/delhis-everyday-racism-african-students-recount-lynch-mob-attack-metro-1739881.html> (accessed October 5, 2014).
- 13 For one example, see "Delhi L-G Gives Nod to Prosecute AAP's Somnath Bharti in Connection with Khirki Extension Raid," *First Post*, April 4, 2015, available

online: <http://www.firstpost.com/india/delhi-l-g-gives-nod-prosecute-aaps-somnath-bharti-connection-khirki-extension-raid-2378502.html> (accessed May 24, 2017).

- 14 The AAP would go on to win the election a few days later, making anti-corruption activist, Arvind Kejriwal, the chief minister of Delhi.
- 15 Haryana has the lowest ratio of women to men, according to the 2011 Census of India. There are 877 females to every 1,000 males in the state, whereas the all-India rate is 940 females to 1,000 males. See the Government of India 2011 census website: <http://www.census2011.co.in/sexratio.php>.

## Chapter 7

- 1 The Toraja are well known in Indonesia and elsewhere for their elaborate and expensive funeral feasts. See, for example, Volkman (1985) and Adams (2006).
- 2 Many Toraja believed that certain types of dreams were prophetic, which made them of great interest to people and one of the topics I raised in my person-centered interviews (Levy and Hollan 2014) with people.
- 3 He mentioned this dream while talking about a number of other disturbing dreams that had to do with the many social, political, and existential problems he had had to overcome in his life. For further discussion of these dreams, see Hollan (2003).

## Chapter 8

- 1 Taking here a cue from Porter (2016).
- 2 I thank in particular Mie Scott Georgsen, and her permission to draw on her interview and observation data from Maidan. The empirical material from Maidan was collected by Georgsen for a postgraduate project work in the social science department, Roskilde University. The interview material is accessible via Georgsen (2014). We have recently discussed some of this data in an article focused on the connections between liminality and affectivity (Georgsen and Thomassen 2017).
- 3 Of course, Le Bon's ideas also lent themselves to positive phantasies about the productive use of such crowds; it is well known that Le Bon's work greatly inspired professional crowd leaders, such as Mussolini.
- 4 See, for example, testimonies from Tahrir participants, as documented in Al Jazeera: Al Jazeera (2012), "Tweets from Tahrir," July 29, available online: <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/2012/02/201221612278666943.html> (accessed July 29, 2016).

## Chapter 9

- 1 Pseudonym.
- 2 See Hammer, J. (2015), “The Imperiled Bloggers of Bangladesh,” *The New York Times*, December 29, available online: <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/03/magazine/the-price-of-secularism-in-bangladesh.html> (accessed August 14, 2017).
- 3 Qawmi madrasas are outside the purview of Bangladesh Madrasa Education Board. They are charitable organizations that run on private donations.
- 4 Hossain, E. (2013), “Bangladesh Arrests ‘Atheist Bloggers,’ Cracking Down on Critics,” *Huffington Post*, April 3, available online: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/04/03/bangladesh-bloggers\\_n\\_3009137.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/04/03/bangladesh-bloggers_n_3009137.html) (accessed August 14, 2017).
- 5 Amin, L. A. (2017), “Bengali’s Biggest Celebration, Pohela Boishakh, Tainted,” *Dhaka Tribune*, available online: <http://archive.dhakatribune.com/weekend/2015/apr/23/bengalis-biggest-celebration-pohela-boishakh-tainted> (accessed June 7, 2017).
- 6 See Mursalin, T. E. (2009) “Towards Vision2021 of a Digital Bangladesh,” *The Financial Express*, February 8, originally available online <http://www.thefinancialexpress-bd.com/2009/02/08/58247.html> and Rahman, F. (2009), “Towards a Digital Bangladesh,” *The Financial Express*, January 10, originally available online: <http://www.thefinancialexpress-bd.com/2009/01/10/55476.html>.
- 7 Another video published by the same user who uploaded the Ekattor TV report (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x-LyMjoliths>) shows the women being attacked in the crowd much more clearly. It includes interviews with the person who tried to help a victim, the Vice Chancellor of the University of Dhaka, and other eyewitnesses. This installment, however, does not offer the analysis found in the video I analyze in the chapter.
- 8 This footage was initially available at Babu, A. (2015), “TSC at Pohela Boishakh | Farzana Rupa’s Investigation,” available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ki0Q59ASJeg> (accessed June 7, 2017).
- 9 See, for instance, [banglanews24.com](http://www.banglanews24.com) (2016), “CCTV in Govt Buildings Soon,” on <http://www.banglanews24.com>, July 28, available online: <http://www.banglanews24.com/english/national/article/54229/CCTV-in-govt-buildings-soon> (accessed August 14, 2017).
- 10 I thank William Mazzarella for alerting me to this aspect of the crowd.
- 11 I am grateful to Nazmul Sultan for explaining this and for his perspective that as the name of the Facebook group, the phrase has lost some of its initial denunciatory undertone.
- 12 The vigilante impetus of Moja Loss? preceded the New Year’s Day events. In 2014, the group had publicized a video on Facebook in which a man was seen slapping a woman riding a rickshaw on her own. Moja Loss? asked for help in catching the



- perpetrator from the footage, which eventually led to his identification. See Bangla Tribune Report, 2015, “‘মজা লস’ নথি: যত কথা: অ্যাডমনি দুই দনিরে রমিন্ডে;” *Bangla Tribune*, December 11, available online: <http://www.banglatribune.com/country/news/59563> (accessed August 14, 2017).
- 13 See BBC News (2015), “Bangladesh Boy Killings: Six Sentenced to Death,” *BBC News*, November 8, available online: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-34761620> (accessed August 14, 2017).
  - 14 Sanyal, P. R. (2017), “A 13-Year-Old Boy’s Horrific Death Becomes Viral Facebook Video in Bangladesh,” *Public Radio International*, available online: <https://www.pri.org/stories/2015-07-17/13-year-old-boys-horrific-death-becomes-viral-facebook-video-bangladesh> (accessed June 7, 2017).
  - 15 Ibid.
  - 16 Hossain, A. (2015), “Why Is My Country Numb to a Child’s Murder?” in *The Daily Beast*, August 17, available online: <http://www.thedailybeast.com/why-is-my-country-numb-to-a-childs-murder> (accessed August 14, 2017).
  - 17 Murad, M. (2017), “Dhaka Ranked Second in Number of Active Facebook Users,” *bdnews24.com*, April 15, available online: <http://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/2017/04/15/dhaka-ranked-second-in-number-of-active-facebook-users> (accessed August 14, 2017).
  - 18 Tribune Online Report (2013), “No Open Space in Dhaka for Political Programmes,” May 5, available online: <http://archive.dhakatribune.com/politics/2013/may/05/no-open-space-dhaka-political-programmes>.
  - 19 Sultan, N. (2015), “Anonymous People and the Insidious Logic of Petrol Bomb Terror,” *The Daily Star*, February 10, available online: <http://www.thedailystar.net/op-ed/anonymous-people-and-the-insidious-logic-petrol-bomb-terror-1606> (accessed August 14, 2017).
  - 20 According to Jody Rosen’s *New York Times* article, “Dhaka’s traffic jams eat up 3.2 million working hours each day and drain billions of dollars from the city’s economy annually” (Rosen 2016).

## Chapter 10

- 1 Shanghai sits just south of an imaginary national divider called the Qin-Huai Line that originates along Western China’s Qin Mountains and Huai River, following various provincial and county borders near the 33rd parallel. The line had long unofficially demarcated the split between Northern and Southern China, and during an energy crisis in the 1950s it was decided that new technology from the Soviet Union, where buildings were connected to city-wide heating grids, would only be installed in cities north of the line. Shanghai’s colonial buildings were

never retrofitted, and new construction was required to feature neither heat nor insulation. For more, see Julie Makinen (2014), “For Central Heat, China Has a North-South Divide at Qin-Huai Line,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 15, available online: <http://www.latimes.com/world/asia/la-fg-china-heat-20141115-story.html> (accessed May 2014, 2017).

- 2 Netizens coined the term “APEC Blue” to describe the preternatural hue of Beijing’s skies—typically obscured by a curtain of acrid smog—while the capital played host to the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit. Ten thousand factories were closed, and tens of thousands more forced on reduced production schedules. Compulsory vacations for workers and students removed nearly 12 million cars from the road and Beijing’s myriad construction sites were shuttered so dust could settle from the air. This had the added aesthetic benefit of hiding undesirable human elements like migrant workers from the visiting delegations. For more, see Christina Larson (2014), “How Did Beijing Achieve ‘APEC Blue?’” *Bloomberg Business*, November 18, available online: <http://www.bloomberg.com/bw/articles/2014-11-18/beijings-blue-sky-act-for-apec> (accessed May 24, 2017).
- 3 For a summary of some of the changes, see Charlie Campbell (2016), “Five Ways China Has Become More Repressive under Xi Jinping,” *TIME Magazine*, October 6, available online: <http://time.com/4519160/china-xi-jinping-cecc-human-rights-rule-of-law/> (accessed July 7, 2017).
- 4 For commentary on the history of this saying and the misunderstanding behind it, see Victor Mair, “How a Misunderstanding about Chinese Characters Has Led Many Astray,” available online: <http://www.pinyin.info/chinese/crisis.html> (accessed May 24, 2017).
- 5 See, for instance, Bao Daozu (2010), “Shanghai Metro Hires People to Shove Commuters into Trains,” *China Daily*, February 4.
- 6 See, for instance, this post from the “Official Microblog of the Shanghai Public Security Bureau” issued at 10:18 p.m. the following day titled “Zhendui wangzhuan ‘12–31’ waitan chenyiguangchang yongji caita shijian xi you ren zai waitan 18hao paosa ‘meijin’ yinfa yishi de jingfang diaocha,” which translates as “To the internet regarding the ‘12–31’ crowd trampling incident at Chenyi Square, a police investigation of whether or not the incident was triggered by the scattering of ‘American currency’ by people at Bund 18” (Shanghai shi gonganju 2015), available online: [http://weibo.com/2493592183/BDzUU0H8q?type=comment#\\_rnd1443494484830](http://weibo.com/2493592183/BDzUU0H8q?type=comment#_rnd1443494484830) (accessed August 14, 2017).

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# Index

- Abacha, Sani 57  
Abbas, Haj 65–7, 69  
Abhisit Vejjajiva 172 n.6  
activists 11, 13–14, 29, 96, 101, 129, 134  
    anti-corruption 176 n.14  
    arrested 172 n.8  
    Hefazot 135, 142  
    human rights 41, 45  
    NDM 42, 46  
    online 133  
    resource rights 41  
actual crowd 6, 9–10, 14, 16–17, 27, 81,  
    102, 111, 116, 136, 147  
Adeboye, Enoch Adejare 53  
Adorno, Theodor 169  
Agamben, Giorgio 33  
agent, agents, agentive 1, 5, 10, 55, 89  
Alade, Modupe 52  
Amin, L.A. 177 n.5  
*Among the Thugs* (Bufford) 170  
Anderson, Benedict 169  
Anisulowo, Dipo 52  
Anna Hazare movement 96  
anthropology 33, 64, 74, 76–8, 119, 169, 170  
*The Anthropology of Perfor* (Turner) 167  
Anti-Corruption Campaign 86  
anti-corruption protests 96  
Anwar, T. 175 n.12  
APEC Blue 179 n.2  
Arab Spring protests 18–19, 119–20  
Arab World Capital of Islamic Culture 25, 30  
Arendt, Hannah 39–40, 168  
audience 90  
authority 13, 17, 38, 40–1, 43–5, 47–8, 56,  
    57–8, 96, 150, 163, 173 n.9  
    Bangladeshi 15  
    PRC 15  
    Saudi 144  
Babu, A. 177 n.8  
backwardness 10, 142, 174 n.7  
Badiou, Alan 33  
Bangladeshi crowd  
    blogger and militant 150  
    contemporary urban life 150  
    landmass 149  
    *michhil* 149  
    political crowds 149  
    revolutionary politics 150  
    traffic-clogging political procession 149  
*Bangladesh's Changing Mediascape: From  
    State Control to Market Forces*  
    (Shoosmith, Genilo, & Asiuzzaman)  
    147  
Bao Daozu 179 n.5  
Bateson, Gregory 108, 120  
Bello, Alhaji Ademola 52  
Benjamin, Walter 81–3, 169  
Bharti, Somnath 175 n.13  
Björkman, Lisa 175 n.7  
Black Lives Matter protests (2014) 18–19  
bloggers 133–4  
bodies 2, 5, 9–10, 14, 18, 31, 66, 79, 82–3,  
    88, 90, 93, 95, 102, 117–18, 127,  
    141–2, 145, 164, 166  
    Collins's theory of interaction rituals  
    106–8, 113  
    massed 59  
    during political events 20–1  
Borch, Christian 6, 10, 120, 166  
Borneman, John 7, 9, 14, 17–18, 130  
*A Brief History of the Masses* (Jonsson) 168  
Bufford, Bill 170  
Bund (Shanghai, China) 151  
    darkened 164–5  
bus crowd 91  
Butler, Judith 40, 47  
Calcutta Crowd 6, 94  
Campbell, Charlie 179 n.3  
Canetti, Elias 6–7, 9, 11–12, 63–9, 71–4, 76,  
    78, 94, 120–1, 123–5, 130, 136, 169  
chaos 10, 18, 39, 157, 174 n.7  
    of picture thinking 122

- as transformative object 37
  - and unpredictability 93
- Chatterjee, Rihitu 174 n.1
- chauvinism 81
- Chinese dream 155–7
- choreographed crowds 2, 8, 13, 15, 17, 79, 81, 87, 89
  - PRC 80, 84
- Chowdhury, Nusrat Sabina 8–10, 12–14, 17, 167
- Chowfla, Anuraag 94
- cliques 2, 7, 15, 79, 85–7
- closed crowds 74, 120, 130
- co-presence 8
- Cody, Francis 148
- collective effervescence 107, 159–60, 167
- Collins, Randall 9, 105–6
- Collins's theory 113–15
  - critique 106
  - of interaction rituals 106–8
  - limits 108–12
- communism 6, 81, 83
- communitas* 119, 125
  - crowds with short lives 127
  - lived experience 126
  - particular psychological tendency 126
  - ritual passages 126
  - social will 126
- communities, community 2, 4, 28, 33, 55–6, 65, 82, 90, 101, 112, 134, 148
- community of feeling 55
- commute 2
- commuters 10, 45, 98, 101, 150, 161, 175 n.9
- conspicuous modesty 53
- constitution 40, 42, 47–9, 56, 64, 172 n.3, 173 n.12, 173 n.13
- Constitution Drafting Committee (CDC) 47
- contagious 10, 131, 136, 146
- cosmopolitanism 10, 174 n.7
- coup regime 39–40, 171 n.1, 173 n.9
  - legitimacy 42
- criminalization, public gatherings 172 n.3
- crowd(s)
  - aesthetics and political implications 81
  - attributes 94
  - definition 1–2
  - ethnographic encounters 4–7
  - irrationality and pose 58–60
  - overt repression 50
  - as physical entity 92
  - as symbols and threats 10–12
- The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (Le Bon) 6, 58, 167
- crowd theory 6, 12, 21, 59, 119, 121–3, 126, 166, 168–70
- crowding 1, 3, 8, 19, 119, 130, 169–70
- Crowding and Behavior* (Freedman) 170
- Crowds: Ethnographic Encounters 1*
- Crowds, Psychology, and Politics 1871–1899* (van Ginneken) 168
- Crowds and Democracy* (Jonsson) 168
- Crowds and Power* (Canetti) 63, 169
- Cultural Revolution 82, 84
- Daloz, Jean-Pascal 53
- de-individualization 121
- death, dead 10, 12, 14, 17, 20–1, 29, 35, 37, 67, 69, 72, 75, 82, 89, 137, 142, 148, 172 n.6
  - and departure 162–4
  - of Hefazat supporters 148
  - Rajib's 135
  - Rajon's 144–5, 149
  - sentence 73
- Deleuze, Gilles 74, 77–8
- Delhi (*see also* metro crowd)
  - Anna Hazare movement 96
  - car city 95–6
  - central areas of 95
  - metro stations in 94
  - mob 99–101
  - Mundka route 102–3
  - protest marches 97
  - push people 93
- Delhi Metro 7, 13, 16, 91, 95, 101, 174 n.1, 175 n.3
- democratic majority 171 n.2, 172 n.2
- demonstrations 2, 19, 24, 26–7, 29, 53, 83, 97, 148, 172 n.8
- density 72, 137, 149, 159, 169
- digital, online, blog, social media 2, 7–8, 10, 13–15, 17–18, 27, 43, 48, 75, 85, 97, 100, 120, 129, 133, 135–6, 138, 140, 143–7, 149–50, 152, 163, 169–70
- Digital Bangladesh* 138
- dissent 11, 26, 60
  - in Thailand 39–50
- The Division of Labor in Society* (Durkheim) 168

- double crowd 123  
dreams 7, 16, 31, 108–10, 113, 116–18,  
176 n.2, 176 n.3  
Durkheim, Emile 74, 107–8, 159, 167,  
169
- ebullient crowd 2  
Egan, T. 173 n.4  
el-Assad, Hafez 24  
*The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*  
(Durkheim) 167  
Emmanuel, Udom 55  
emotional entrainment 105  
    centrality of emotions 105  
    emotional evocation 111  
    specificity of 116–18  
emotional magnetism 107–8, 114–15, 117  
emotions, emotional 7, 9, 52, 85, 89,  
105–18, 122, 126–7, 130, 136, 146,  
158–60, 169  
    calm 13  
    death 14  
    falling in love 13  
    ghosts 106  
    hauntings 111  
    liberation 12–13  
enduring crowds 9, 11–12, 17, 94  
    *communitas* 119, 125–7  
    individual in 123–5  
    nonlinear time and political becoming  
    130–1  
    shifting crowd 128–9  
    without short lives 120–3  
Eoseewong, Nidhi 39  
ethics 8, 133–50  
ethnic 1, 4, 23, 101, 138, 142, 167  
ethnographer in crowd  
    anxious moment 161  
    Chinese Dream 157  
    civic involvement, lack 156  
    collective effervescence 159–60  
    cosmopolitan cultural life 155  
    mass of humanity 156  
    myth of objectivity 158  
    possession 161  
    Taiwan and China, divorce laws 152  
    transgressing foreigners 156  
    traveling companions experiences  
    153–4  
    youth in Chinese culture 153
- ethnographic 1, 4–7, 12, 21, 60, 105–6, 117,  
119, 167, 174 n.5  
    engagements with theory 8–10  
    hauntings 112  
Euromaidan revolution 129  
expectation of command 73–4  
experience 1–5, 12–14, 16, 21, 23, 25–6,  
33, 37–8, 40, 63, 65–6, 84, 98, 106,  
109–11, 117–18, 121–4, 131, 149,  
158, 163, 167, 169  
    aesthetic 53  
    lived 126  
    Maidan 125, 130  
    pilgrim in hajj crowds 7, 9  
    specter of revolution 31
- faith, religion 28, 75, 139  
fascist, fascism 6, 9, 18–19, 31, 58, 81–3, 89  
fatal crowd 14, 16, 18  
Fayemi, Kayode 51, 173 n.1  
Fayose, Feyisetan 52, 173 n.1  
Fayose, Peter Ayodele 51  
Feldman, Allen 141  
field sites 2, 8, 17–18, 21, 153  
fieldwork 30, 84, 112  
formation, group formation, social  
    formation 2–4, 7–10, 17–18, 32, 36,  
40, 43, 56, 74–5, 77, 79, 81, 90, 96,  
101, 105–6, 109, 111, 114–17, 120,  
122, 159–61, 168–9  
Foucault, Michel 74  
Freedman, Jonathan 170  
Freud, Sigmund 6, 10, 33, 109, 130, 141–2,  
169
- Geertz, Clifford 4–5  
Geertz, Hildred 4  
Georgsen, Mie Scott 176 n.2  
ghosts, ghostly, haunted, haunting 2, 9,  
11–12, 16, 25, 31, 47, 82, 105–6, 118,  
144  
    fieldworker (Toraja, Indonesia) 112–14  
    George (southern California, USA)  
    114–15  
    unconscious 109–11  
Goffman, Erving 108, 170  
government 7, 9, 11, 19, 23–4, 38, 41, 51–2,  
54, 59, 64, 86, 135, 143, 154, 156, 168,  
171 n.1, 172 n.2, 172 n.6, 173 n.1  
Bangladesh 133

- Chinese 151  
 Delhi 96, 174 n.1  
 Shanghai 15–16  
 Syrian 37  
*Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (Freud) 6, 169–70  
 groups 1, 5, 7, 18  
*guanxi* 85–6, 89, 174 n.6  
 Gürsel, Zeynep Devrim 20
- Haberkorn, Tyrell 7–9, 13–14, 17  
 Hackett, Rosalind 173 n.2  
 hajj crowd 7, 9, 11, 14–15, 63, 169  
   discharge 65–7  
   equality 76  
   organized crowd 68  
   pious crowd 67, 74  
   reparation 69  
   separateness and merger 64–5  
   transformations 64  
 Hammer, J. 177 n.2  
 Hammoudi, Abdellah 7–12, 15, 167, 169  
 Han, Byung-chul 169  
 Hardt, Michael 59, 168  
 haunting crowd (*see* ghosts, ghostly, haunted, haunting)  
 Heston, Charlton 80  
 Holbraad, Martin 77  
 Hollan, Douglas 7, 9, 12–13, 16  
 Horkheimer, Max 169  
 Hossain, Anushay 145, 178 n.16  
 Hossain, E. 177 n.4  
 Hsia, C. T. 174 n.2  
 Hudoschnyk 129  
 human performance 80  
 Huxley, Aldous 58
- ifadha* 70–1  
 imaginary crowds 8–9, 16–18, 27, 33, 36, 55, 178 n.1  
*Imagined Communities* (Anderson) 169  
 imitation suggestibility 136  
*In the Swarm: Digital Prospects* (Han) 169  
 Information and Communication  
   Technology Act 135  
 intensifications, crowds and  
   organized and spontaneous 67–9  
   religious crowd, mechanics and  
   reflexivity (*see* religious crowd)
- intent 5, 26, 28, 32, 34, 36, 101, 156  
   *Interaction Ritual Chains* (Collins) 106  
   interactions rituals 106–8  
   internalization 110  
   sense of solidarity 107–9, 114, 117  
   social formations 116  
 International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) 133  
 Internet Dialogue on Legal Freedom  
   (iLaw) 172 n.5  
 interpretation 4, 7, 9, 11, 13, 71, 74, 84, 89–90, 130, 140  
 irrational behavior 166–7
- Janis, Irving L. 170  
 Jebtik, Arif 144  
 Jonathan, Goodluck 53  
 Jonsson, Stefan 168  
 justice 40, 42, 49, 133–50, 171 n.2
- Kejriwal, Arvind 176 n.14
- Laban, Rudolf 83–4, 87  
 Lacan, Jacques 33  
 Laclau, Ernesto 33  
 Larson, Christina 179 n.2  
*The Laws of Imitation* (Tarde) 166  
 Le Bon, Gustave 6, 10, 12, 19, 32, 58, 121–2, 127, 141, 166–8, 170, 176 n.3  
 Le Roy Ladurie, Emmanuel 75  
 Lefebvre, Georges 59, 168  
 legal, law 2–3, 7–8, 19, 38, 41, 44, 115, 118, 126, 152  
*Leveling Crowds: Ethnonationalist Conflicts and Collective Violence* (Tambiah) 4, 167  
 Lévi-Strauss, Claude 5–6, 94, 167, 169  
 Levy, Robert I. 106  
 liberal subject 10, 59  
 liberation 7, 12–13, 64–6, 73, 83, 120, 135  
 liminal, liminality 9, 32, 74–5, 125–6, 130–1, 167  
 Loewald, Hans 12, 106, 109–10, 114  
 Lu Xun 81, 89
- Mackey, R. 175 n.10  
 Maidan crowd 8–9, 12, 16–17, 119–20, 123, 125  
 Maidan square (unknown quantity) 127–8  
 Makinen, Julie 179 n.1

- Malinowski, Bronislaw 169  
*The Mana of Mass Society* (Mazzarella) 169  
 marital law 40  
 mass(es) 1, 7, 11, 15, 17, 33, 36–8, 58–9,  
     64, 71, 81, 83, 86, 89, 94, 121–2, 128,  
     130, 142, 151, 159–60, 168, 170,  
     175 n.7  
   demonstrations 19  
   features 76  
   modern 169  
   oral culture 147  
   of pilgrims 63  
   and political subjects 32, 34  
   poor and blank 82, 84  
   recursively constituted masses 8, 24–7  
 mass media 136, 147, 169  
 mass mobilization 120  
 mass transit 101  
 Maxwell, David 56  
 Mazzarella, William 11–12, 59, 122, 169,  
     177 n.10  
 Mecca 63, 66, 67, 71, 74  
 media 7, 9, 19, 21, 27, 43, 48, 63, 75, 97,  
     120, 129, 139–41, 143–6, 152, 163,  
     175 n.9  
   imaginary crowds 16–18  
   mass 136, 147, 169  
 Merleau-Ponty, M. 66  
 meta-communication, space of 120, 128  
 metamorphosis process 76  
 metro crowd 7–8, 10, 14, 16, 91–4, 101, 103  
   cross-class recognition 98  
   older markets and new malls 95  
   physical experience and sensations 98  
   push and pull 95  
   social conflicts 98  
   unruly publics 99  
 metro mob 101  
 Meyer, Birgit 56  
 militant (*jongi*), crowd  
   antagonism 140  
   on Bengali New Year (2015) 137  
   cultural secularism 137  
   Digital Bangladesh 138  
   eve teasing 143  
   forensic visualization 141  
   *Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islami* 137  
   Islamist conspiracy 140  
   Moja Loss (Facebook group) 143  
   recorded footage 139  
   social media users 140  
   surveillance technologies 141  
   trials for war crimes 138  
   urban masses 142  
 mob 4, 7, 9, 13–14, 16–17, 92, 94, 99–101,  
     162–3, 170  
 mob 2.0  
   cell phone technology 146–7  
   hash tag and Facebook 144  
   Hefazat supporters, death 148  
   “Human Flesh Search” 145–6  
   labyrinthine bureaucracy 147  
   mimetic quality 147  
   responsible citizens and criminal  
     crowds 145  
   sociality and surveillance 145  
   torturers 144  
   vigilantism 147  
 mobility 93–4  
 modern, modernity 7–10, 14, 16, 56, 73,  
     81, 93–4, 121–2, 130, 141, 148, 150,  
     155, 167–9, 174 n.7, 175 n.3  
 modern mass 169  
 Moja Loss 143, 177 n.12  
 Molla, Abdul Kader 134  
 momentary neural binding 55  
 Morgan, David 55  
 Moroccan crowd 69  
 Morris, Rosalind 149  
 Moskowitz, Scott 8, 10, 12–14, 16–18,  
     174 n.4, 174 n.7  
*Mukhabarrat* 28  
 multidirectionalities 75  
*Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age  
 of Empire* (Hardt & Negri) 59  
 multitude theory 59, 168  
 Murad, M. 178 n.17  
 Mursalin, T. E. 177 n.6  
 myriad problems 173 n.13  
  
 nation 17, 40, 80, 90, 97, 99, 138, 142, 149,  
     168  
 National Council for Peace and Order  
   (NCPO) 39  
   announcements 41  
   CDC 47  
   drafting process 47  
   Referendum Act by 48–9



- nationalism 56, 138, 141, 168  
 Negri, Antonio 59, 168  
 neoliberalism 168  
 netizens 145, 179 n.2  
 New Democracy Movement (NDM)  
     173 n.11  
     activists 42, 48–9  
     arrest of students 44  
     at Democracy Monument 44  
     emergence of 40–3  
     massacre on Thammasat campus 43  
     principles of democracy 42  
     protests and seminars 47
- Obadare, Ebenezer 7, 9, 11, 13, 15, 168  
 Obeyesekere, Gananath 108  
 object 1, 2, 4, 8, 18, 21, 31, 36–7, 66, 77, 81,  
     100, 109–10, 118, 167–8  
 Occupy movement (2014) 18–19  
 oceanic feeling 33, 123, 130  
*Offentlichkeit* (Morris) 150  
 Olusola, Janet 52  
 Olusola, Kolapo 52  
*Olympia* (Riefenstahl) 83–4  
 online activists 134  
 online mobs 13  
 ontology 77  
 open crowd 120  
 Open Mic Camp 124  
 order 1, 6, 10, 26, 33–7, 40, 42, 44, 68–9, 81,  
     99, 114, 117, 122, 126, 157, 172 n.3  
 organized crowd 67–9  
*The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Arendt) 168  
 ostentatious humility 57, 173 n.1  
 others, other, the other, othering 1–9, 12,  
     18–21, 24, 26, 29, 32–5, 37–42, 45,  
     48–50, 53, 56, 57–8, 65, 69–73, 75,  
     77, 84, 88, 91–103, 105, 107–11,  
     115–17, 120, 122, 126–8, 130, 139,  
     143–4, 147, 148, 159–60, 165,  
     169–70, 174 n.2, 177 n.7
- Paradoxes of the Popular* (Chowdhury) 167  
 Park, Robert 168  
 particle swarm methodology 171 n.3  
 passionate crowd 2  
 Pentecostal ceremony 54  
 Pentecostalism 53, 55  
     born-again status 56
- denominational force 61  
     occult forces 56  
     staging of power 61  
 People's Democratic Reform Committee  
     (PDRC) 39, 171 n.2  
 People's Republic of China (PRC) 79  
     aesthetics of legitimacy 82  
     Beijing Olympic Opening Ceremony  
         (2008) 80  
     choreographed crowds 80, 84  
 Perry, Rick 61, 173 n.4  
 person-centered ethnography 106  
 personal symbols 108  
 picture-thinking 9  
 piety, spectacles of 54  
     argument 56–7  
     community of feeling 55  
     contending trajectories 53–5  
     democratization of charisma 55  
     political scripts 58  
     prayer 56  
     target audience 57  
 pilgrimage 10, 14, 64, 69–71, 75–6, 167  
 pious crowds 8, 9, 11, 63, 67, 74  
 Plotz, John 170  
 police 19, 28, 29, 41, 43–6, 48–9, 52, 79,  
     89, 97, 99–100, 123, 137, 140, 143,  
     156–7, 162, 165, 175 n.11, 179 n.6  
 political 2, 6–11, 18–21, 23–38, 41–2, 48–9,  
     52–3, 55–60, 81–3, 87, 90, 98–9, 106,  
     115, 120, 122, 124–5, 127–31, 133–4,  
     136–8, 141–3, 148–50, 172 n.6, 173 n.9,  
     175 n.5, 175 n.7, 176 n.3, 178 n.18  
 political seduction 59  
 political significance  
     attacks on crowds 19  
     bodies in crowds 20–1  
     mass demonstrations 19  
     repressive regimes 18–19  
     vehicle-ramming attacks on crowds  
         19–20  
 political subjects  
     fantasies 31  
     identification, leader 36  
     massing 32, 33  
     maternal function 36  
     political field and 36–8  
     swarming 33, 35  
     symbolic transformation 34

- politics 14–16  
*The Politics of Aesthetics* (Rancière) 83  
*The Politics of Crowds: An Alternative History of Sociology* (Borch) 166  
 population 1, 24, 27–9, 84, 95, 98, 149  
 Porter, Ross 131  
 power 6, 11, 16, 20–1, 28, 40, 44, 52, 54–5, 60, 61, 69, 71, 96, 108–10, 122, 133, 142–3, 148, 150, 167–8  
     dynamics 73  
     psychotechnics of 58  
 praying/prayer 2, 7, 11, 51–3, 67, 139  
     defined 56  
     against enemies in Ekiti 51–3  
     identity and popularity 56  
     ritual 56  
 progressive crowd 136  
 protests 7–9, 13–14, 16, 19–20, 24, 27–9, 48–9, 65, 96–7, 101, 123, 127–8, 134–6, 141–2, 148–50, 167, 173 n.8, 175 n.7  
     color-coded political movement 172 n.6  
     coup regime 39–40  
     railway blockages as 175 n.5  
     into streets (2015) 43–7  
     students, NDM 42  
 psychoanalysis 13  
 Putnam, Robert 170  
  
 Qawmi madrasas 177 n.3  
 Qin-Huai Line 178 n.1  
 quanzi 79, 85–6, 88, 90, 174 n.5  
  
 race 19  
 racism 175 n.12  
 radical microsociology theory 107  
 Rahman, F. 177 n.6  
 Rahman, Sheikh Mujibur 138, 149  
 Rajib, Ahmed Haider 135  
 Rancière, Jacques 83  
*Ratchakitchanubeksa* 172 n.3  
 rational, rationality 12, 33, 58, 120, 122, 126, 130  
 reasoning crowd 127  
 reciprocity, rules of 113  
 recursively constituted masses 8, 24–7  
 regime 6, 9, 13–14, 16–17, 24–5, 27, 35–7, 46–7, 49, 50, 77, 83, 120, 124, 131, 171 n.2  
     coup 39–42  
     repressive 18–19  
     Syrian 26, 28  
 Reisman, David 170  
 relation of conviviality 55, 60  
 religious crowd 136, 141, 147  
     closed crowd 74  
     death sentence 73  
     expectation of command 74  
     *ifadha* 70–1  
     life, liminality and immanence 74–8  
     metamorphosis 76  
     Moroccan crowd 69  
     power dynamics 73  
     preaching 70  
 revolution 9, 18, 23–7, 30–2, 35, 75, 77–8, 82, 84, 96, 121–2, 129, 131, 168 (*see also* Syrian revolution)  
 revolutionary crowds 8, 23–4  
 Riefenstahl, Leni 82  
 ritual crowds 2, 4, 11–14, 24, 34, 54, 59, 64, 67–9, 73–4, 110, 114–15, 117, 120, 130, 167  
     Collins's theory of interaction 106–8, 116  
     of demobilization 57  
     sequential structure 126  
 ritual prayer 56  
 Rosen, J. 149, 178 n.20  
 routine crowd 2  
 Rudé, George 168  
 Rupa, Farzana 139  
  
 Sadana, Rashmi 7–10, 13, 16  
 Sampson, Tony 146  
 Sanyal, P. R. 178 n.14  
 schismogenic patterns 108  
 Schnapps, Jeffrey 170  
*A Season in Mecca* (Hammoudi) 167  
 secular crowd 136, 147  
 seduce, seduction 3, 6, 14, 59  
 sensorium 53  
 Shahbag Movement 133, 135, 139  
     billboards 134  
     collaborator 140  
 Shanghai New Year's Eve (2015) crowd 8, 10, 13, 15  
 Sharma, Aasheesh 98  
 shifting crowd 128–9

- short lives, crowd without  
     de-individualization 121  
     discharge 121  
     loss of individuality 121  
     mass mobilization 120, 122  
     revolution 122  
     suddenness 120, 122  
     suggestibility 121  
     urban squares 120
- Sighele, Scipio 121
- significance, meaning making,  
     interpretation 2, 7, 10–11, 14–15,  
     18–21, 24, 81, 108, 114, 150  
     NDM 40
- Simmel, Georg 120–1, 168
- Simone, AbdouMaliq 59
- simulacrum 59–60
- singularity without identity 33
- Sloterdijk, Peter 58
- the social, sociality 1–3, 5, 8, 11–17, 33, 35,  
     37, 53, 56, 59, 76, 89–90, 98–9, 102,  
     105, 107, 112, 114, 117, 121, 123–4,  
     127, 129, 136, 145–6, 167, 175 n.3
- social media (*see* digital, online, blog,  
     social media)
- solidarity 42, 90, 107, 109–10, 117, 167
- Sontag, Susan 82, 89
- South Asian crowd 142
- Soylent Green* (1973): *This impossibly  
     complicated routine is made out of  
     people!* 80
- spectacle 11, 71, 79–81, 84, 124, 149, 157  
     of piety (*see* piety, spectacles of)  
     public 156, 164
- spiritual inhibition 57
- spontaneous crowd 2, 10, 13, 26, 28, 67–9,  
     81
- Sreedharan, Elattuvalapil 174 n.1
- Staheli, Urs 170
- Steffen, Megan 7–8, 10, 12–13, 15, 17, 63
- street protest (Thailand)  
     across Chao Phraya River 43  
     arrest of students 44  
     culmination 45  
     at Democracy Monument 44  
     flash protest 45  
     massacre on Thammasat campus 43  
     repression of student activists 43  
     support campaigns 47
- subject 4, 10, 16, 23, 25–7, 29, 31–8, 45,  
     57–60, 76–7, 90, 94, 101, 106, 124,  
     127–8, 130, 141–2, 152
- suddenness, crowd 120
- suggestion 10–11, 13, 16, 21, 50, 59, 71, 74,  
     75, 98, 106, 110, 112, 115, 123
- Sultan, Nazmul 177 n.11, 178 n.19
- superorganism 5
- swarm intelligence 33, 171 n.3
- swarming 35
- Syria Justice and Accountability Center  
     171 n.2
- Syrian revolution  
     failed revolution, specter of 30–2  
     political field and subject 36–8  
     political subjects 32–6  
     recursively constituted masses 24–7  
     revolutionary crowds 23–4  
     Syrian crowds (2011) 27–30
- Tambiah, Stanley 4, 6, 11, 15, 167
- Tarde, Gabriel 121, 136, 166–7
- technology 7, 9, 36, 91–2, 147, 149, 178 n.1
- teleological crowd 127
- Thaksin Shinawatra 41, 172 n.6
- Thaugsuban, Suthep 172 n.6
- theory 1, 6–10, 12–13, 26, 32, 59, 83–4, 86,  
     105–11, 114–17, 119, 121–3, 125–6,  
     141, 166–8, 170
- Thomassen, Bjørn 8–9, 11, 16–17, 166
- Tiew, Matthew 170
- Toraja 112–14, 176 n.1, 176 n.2
- totalitarianism 39, 168–9
- traditionalist crowd 136
- traffic jams 96
- transference 109–11, 118
- transform, transformation 6, 13, 15–16, 23,  
     28, 30–2, 34, 37, 56–7, 63, 67–74,  
     77–8, 123, 126, 167, 168  
     hajj crowd 64  
     liminality 75  
     worshipping and shopping 66
- tri-color 175 n.6
- Trump, Donald 19
- Turner, Victor 13, 74–5, 119, 125, 167
- Uduaghan, Emmanuel 54, 57
- uncontroversial crowds 2
- unintended crowds 8, 79, 81, 88, 89

- Unite the Right rally 19–20  
 unorganized/unauthorized crowd 14  
 unsocial sociability 33  
 urban squares 120  
 utopian morality 82
- van Gennep, Arnold 74, 126  
 van Ginneken, Jaap 168  
*Victims of Groupthink* (Janis) 170  
 violence 4, 9, 14, 19–20, 40, 58, 100, 137, 139,  
     141–4, 146, 148, 150, 167, 171 n.2  
*Violence: A Micro-Sociological Theory*  
     (Collins) 106  
 viral crowd 10, 100, 136, 146  
 virality 136  
 virtual crowd 2, 8, 10, 16–17, 134, 136, 145,  
     147, 163
- The Visible and the Invisible* (Merleau-  
     Ponty) 66  
 voyeurism 12, 88–9, 144  
 vulnerable, vulnerability 10, 14, 16, 90, 114
- Warner, Michael 175 n.8  
 Weber, Max 168  
 Wilson, E. O. 171 n.3  
 Wongwat, Metta 172 n.7
- Xi Jinping 86, 155–6
- Yingluck Shinawatra 39
- Zedong, Mao 82, 84  
 Zhang Yimou 80–1, 84, 174 n.1