

**Cultural Politics & the Promise of Democracy**  
A Series from Paradigm Publishers  
Edited by Henry A. Giroux

*Empire and Inequality: America and the World Since 9/11* (2004)  
by Paul Street

*The Terror of Neoliberalism* (2004)  
by Henry A. Giroux

*Caught in the Crossfire: Kids, Politics, and America's Future* (2005)  
by Lawrence Grossberg

*Reading and Writing for Civic Literacy: The Critical Citizen's Guide to Argumentative Rhetoric* (2005)  
by Donald Lazere

*Why Are We Reading Ovid's Handbook on Rape? Teaching and Learning at a Women's College* (2005)  
by Madeleine Kahn

*Schooling and the Struggle for Public Life, Updated Edition* (2005)  
by Henry A. Giroux

*Listening Beyond the Echoes: Agency and Ethics in a Mediated World* (2006)  
by Nick Couldry

*Michel Foucault: Materialism and Education, Updated Edition* (2006)  
by Mark Olssen

*Pedagogies of the Global: Knowledge in the Human Interest* (2006)  
edited by Arif Dirlik

*Patriotic Correctness: Academic Freedom and Its Enemies* (2006)  
by John K. Wilson

**PEDAGOGIES  
OF THE GLOBAL**  
Knowledge in the  
Human Interest

edited by  
ARIF DIRLIK



Paradigm Publishers  
Boulder • London

2006

14  
Gandhi and the Social Scientists

Some Thoughts on the Categories of  
Dissent and Possible Futures

Vinay Lal



In some recent writings (Lal 2002, 2004, 2005b), I have explored at considerable length the argument, encountered in the writings of a number of public intellectuals and scholars (Sachs 1992), that oppression in the twenty-first century will fundamentally be exercised through categories of knowledge rather than through the military-industrial complex, naked genocides of the type frequently encountered in the twentieth century, and the unabashed racism that enabled physical anthropologists, eugenicists, and other scientists to declare snub-nosed people as inferior to those with the nasal endowments of a Cleopatra. This argument may seem odd, even absurd, at this particular juncture of history: Though each age finds its own crises to be acute and unprecedented, and I am inclined to agree with Walter Benjamin that we—"we" who are thoughtful, sensitive, and touched by the sufferings of others—are perpetually in crisis, I think that not many would demur from the view that we have become wholly accustomed to ever higher thresholds of violence and that armed force remains the chosen means to intimidate recalcitrant states or political actors into surrender or to compel abject surrender. Less than five weeks after New York's Twin Towers were set ablaze in a spectacularly orchestrated act of criminal daring, the American military commenced a campaign with the stated intention of pulverizing Afghanistan and rendering extinct the Taliban regime. Subsequently, the American leadership attempted to deliver on its promise to "shock and awe" the world with the sustained bombing of Baghdad and other targets in Iraq. The National Security Strategy promulgated by George W. Bush in the fall of 2002 is brutally candid in its warning to the world that the United States will

not tolerate any attempt, by friend or foe, to equal—much less surpass—its military might (U.S. Department of Defense 2002). Subtlety is so far removed from the deeds and thoughts of Americans and their leaders accustomed to thinking of Crawford, Texas, as the repository of all that is good, trustworthy, and valuable in life that the very phrase “categories of knowledge” must appear as unnecessarily esoteric, indeed a plot to obfuscate plain and simple truths. Surely no one can doubt that armed force will continue to be deployed by the state, as well as by irredentist movements, private militias, and guerrillas. The burgeoning defense budgets around the world, most markedly in the United States, appear to offer demonstrable evidence that it is much too early to consign the military-industrial complex to the grave.

It is only necessary, however, to consider, and that too very briefly, the fortunes of the word “development” to begin to understand why oppression can no longer be viewed merely as a function of the military-industrial complex or as an aspect of brute domination (Sachs 1992; Rahnama and Bawtree 1997; Apffel-Marglin 2000; Escobar 1995). In common conversation, “development” is not a word or an idea that invites repudiation, and the extraordinarily dense critique, albeit one that is still largely marginal to the social sciences as a whole, that has developed around “development” has scarcely ebbed the enthusiasm with which both the “developed” and the “undeveloped” or the “underdeveloped” still invoke development as an undiminished good. Perhaps very few people will recall that in November 1955, Danilo Dolci, an Italian activist and advocate of peasants rights’ known widely as the “Gandhi of Sicily,” commenced a week-long fast in an effort to induce the government to build a dam over the Jato river on the grounds that it would irrigate the valley throughout the year. Such, then, were the irresistible attractions of “development.” Over the last decade, Medha Patkar and a number of associates in the Narmada Bachao Andolan, a grassroots political and ecological movement that seeks to prevent the damming of the river Narmada in western and central India, have often resorted to fasting in attempts to halt construction work at the Sardar Sarovar and other dams. The resistance to the colossal Three Gorges Dam Project along the Yangtze river in China may have been somewhat less vociferous, but the indubitable fact remains that even many who are committed to development have shown some reticence in regarding dams as the insignia of “progress.” These instances and others will be invoked to show how far the verities of an earlier generation have now been put into question, but one ought not to forget that the resistance to the ideology of development emanates not from the elites but from precisely those sectors of civil society that are alleged to be the beneficiaries of such development. If development in the twentieth century has perhaps accounted for as many lives as all the military conflicts of the same period put together, one can begin to gauge the genocidal potential of the categories of knowledge, development being one of the most

prominent of such categories, bequeathed to us by the social sciences. As functionaries of the World Bank might put it, who, other than illiterate tribals, recondite critics such as Arturo Escobar, Ashis Nandy, and the late Ivan Illich, or allegedly romantic populists such as Arundhati Roy and Vandana Shiva, oppose development?

In this chapter, then, I shall seek to enlarge further upon the idea of “categories of knowledge,” except that I shall do so by suggesting how Mohandas Gandhi, the most radical dissenter of the twentieth century, remains impenetrable to the categories and interpretive mechanisms furnished by historians, anthropologists, and other social scientists. This might well appear as an extraordinarily bold claim, particularly in view of the fact that a dauntingly voluminous scholarly and biographical literature has built up around the life, deeds, and moral and political thought of Gandhi. It is certainly true that the best minds have not been trained on Gandhi in the manner in which they have been attentive to the work of Marx, Freud, or, more recently, Heidegger and Foucault, and Gandhi, for all the public recognition that he has received, occupies a comparatively small place in scholarly narratives and the intellectual endeavors that characterize the academy. It is also the case, conversely, that a halo has not been drawn around the principal intellectual figures of our times as it has been around Gandhi. This is not altogether surprising: Gandhi, for all his shortcomings, was the Mahatma, and as Ananda Coomaraswamy and many others steeped in the history of Indian spiritual traditions have reminded us, a Mahatma is an enlightened soul, one who remains other-worldly while not disavowing the obligations and even travails of this worldly life (Coomaraswamy 1949). The temptation, even obligation, to render Gandhi into a hagiographic figure has not endeared him to those inclined towards intellectual scrutiny and has consequently been fatal to Gandhi scholarship, though it is my submission that the present state of the social sciences renders them in any case singularly ill-equipped to deal with the idioms of Gandhian thinking.

It would be idle to pretend that the life of any individual who is the subject of biographical inquiries can be written as a unitary whole. Thus the task of scholarship, when it is not tethered to the ideological agendas of the state or dominant institutions of civil society, remains to pry open the gaps, fissures, contradictions, and paradoxes that any life presents upon scholarly inquiry. It is also little more than a cliché to suggest that Gandhi’s life was riddled by contradictions, and even as a cliché it is not particularly fecund of insights: to the contrary, one might say that though Emerson could sagely declare that “consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds,” Gandhi was almost frighteningly consistent in his application of the idea of truth. Much hinges on what one construes as consistency, and it is prudent to recognize that Gandhi could also be consistently inconsistent. There are, I would suggest, other measures of the difficulty in comprehending Gandhi’s life through

the categories of history and social science discourses. One measure is that even as Gandhi has a remarkably wide array of constituents and followers, extending from vegetarians, naturopaths, nudists, prohibitionists, and ecologists to peaceniks, political rebels, anarchists, luddites, trade union leaders, social reformers, and moralists, everyone also loves to hate Gandhi. A recent collection, entitled *Indian Critiques of Gandhi*, offers accounts of the opposition that Gandhi encountered not only among Hindu jingoists, the advocates of armed resistance, and such dalits and Sudras as had embraced the teachings of the radical lower-castes leader Babasaheb Ambedkar, but also among Sikhs, Christians, and Muslims (Coward 2003).

Indian feminists, while appreciative of Gandhi's efforts in bringing women into the struggle for freedom, have always been profoundly troubled by his insistence that men and women were to occupy different spheres in life. While scornful of his puritanism, and his (as Jawaharlal Nehru would have put it) unnatural repugnance towards the sexual life, they nonetheless take some solace in the fact that, in insisting that men were to forswear sexual relations as much as women, Gandhi at least did not subscribe to the double standards so otherwise rampant in every culture. At least one prominent Indian feminist has argued that Gandhi's pronouncements on women furnish nothing to be cheerful about, but that nonetheless a particular problem of interpretation is posed by the fact that Gandhi, unlike people who usually enter politics, was typically much more radical in conduct than in his speech (Kishwar 1986). But, still, the preponderant bulk of his writings points to the unequivocal affirmation of separate spheres for men as breadwinners and women as keepers of the hearth (Joshi 1990). Marxists, on their part, have always been dismissive of Gandhi as an example of a bourgeois Hindu leader who hobnobbed excessively with industrialists, and it has been an article of their faith that, in failing to keep religion and politics apart, and in frequently resorting to Hindu idioms in his public speeches, Gandhi forever contaminated and communalized the public sphere (Roy 1989, 2, 152–157, 180–184, 310–315; 3, 457–458, 566–571; Chattopadhyaya 1975). However, having over the course of the last decade witnessed the remarkably swift ascendancy of the Hindu right, and come to the realization that Gandhi's Hinduism was best calculated to steer its more militant advocates away from the fulfillment of their political ambitions, the Marxists are suddenly discovering in Gandhi a figure of ecumenism, sanity, and religious harmony. Since the proponents of a highly masculinized Hinduism have openly derided Gandhi as, in their own language, an eunuch who preferred castrated Muslims to wholesome Hindus,<sup>1</sup> the Marxists infer that Gandhi's soft Hinduism is about as close as one can get to no Hinduism at all in a man who clearly held himself to be a Hindu.

To the evident discomfort that feminists and Marxists have experienced with Gandhi, one can add nearly every other social and political group in

India. Statues of Gandhi have been known to be vandalized—particularly with garlands of shoes, which in India is widely understood to be one of the most forceful ways of expressing disdain and disgust for a public figure that others might honor. If a similar garland of shoes or sandals were placed around the statue of Babasaheb Ambedkar, the revered leader of the Dalits, one can be certain that the entire village or town would be engulfed by violent protests. The hostility for Gandhi among Dalits is palpable, even though every other community recognizes him as the unflinching advocate of the rights of Dalits.<sup>2</sup> Yet the complete disavowal of Gandhi, even by those sympathetic to those who engineered his assassination, and who have ever since staged repeated assassinations of a man whose specter maddeningly continued to loom large long after he had abandoned his body, is all but impossible. The ambivalence of some hitherto unrepentant modernizers, to adduce one example, is quite striking: once wholly contemptuous of Gandhi's critique of industrial society, and prone to rubbish him as a relic of a bygone period of human evolution, they are now viewing Gandhi as someone who was unusually sensitive to what Raymond Williams has described as the "structures of feeling" and what his compatriot E. P. Thompson characterized as the "moral economy of the peasant." Now that the dam of development has broken, figuratively and otherwise, Gandhi is being brought back through such ideas as "sustainable development" and "development with a human face." As is implicit in what I shall argue in due course, these developments, however sanguine they may appear, have themselves become modernity's own way to tame Gandhi, bring him within the orbit of the common frameworks of knowledge, and suck him out of the hermeneutic machine.

In pondering over Gandhi's life, then, one is confronted with a radical democrat who acquired something of a reputation for his autocratic behavior, an exponent of the Hindu texts whose first principle was that any idea that does not conform to one's own conscience must unequivocally be rejected, a believer of *sanatan dharma*—that is in the orthodox idea of Hinduism as an eternal (and hierarchic) faith—who unhesitatingly cleaned public toilets and thereby consented to be viewed as a scavenger, a warrior who not merely refused to trade in arms but conceived of *ahimsa* (nonviolence) as his shining armor, a *bhakta* (devotee) of Rama who resolutely rejected attempts to historicize him, and an ecumenical practitioner of Hinduism who swore by the New Testament as much as by the Bhagavad Gita and yet declared himself unable to accept conversion from one religion to another as a moral good.<sup>3</sup> Some commentators jubilantly view these anomalies as reliably indicative of the fact that Gandhi was a hypocrite and bumbling old fool who was arrogant enough to believe that the norms and rules by which we customarily live are only for ordinary humans, and that he could exempt himself by claiming sainthood. When Richard Attenborough's film *Gandhi* appeared in 1982, the then-prominent critic Richard Grenier wrote an angry expose called

"The Gandhi Nobody Knows."<sup>4</sup> Apart from the fact that such exercises of pedestrian truth-seeking are the most characteristic expressions of anti-intellectualism, Grenier had little to say except that Gandhi was a charlatan who secretly added a dash of lemon juice to water during his occasionally long spells of fasting and, despite his public disavowal of sex, bedded young women in the eve of his life (Lal 2005c, 114–153). Secretly, Gandhi was yet another "dirty old man." A more charitable, indeed I should have said bizarre, reading—were it altogether uncommon—of Gandhi's radical experiments with ahimsa, brahmacharya, and political sexuality has transformed Gandhi into a beacon of light for those desirous of learning how to energize the libido at an advanced age. That might explain why Gandhi occupies a page in the recent book, *Sexual Teachings of the White Tigress: Secrets of the Female Taoist Masters* (Lai 2001), and is recommended as a case study for those wishing to "use the ultimate yin to replenish the yang" (Adams 2004).

The slightly more sophisticated variant of attempts to appropriate Gandhi to known categories turns him into an "eccentric" human being who foisted his foibles upon unsuspecting admirers and marshaled stereotypes, such as that of the fakir who divests himself of everything so that he may possess the world, to unusual political effect. The much-lionized defender of Western freedom, Winston Churchill, who should more justly be remembered as an enthusiastic proponent of chemical warfare against uncivilized tribes,<sup>5</sup> had this Gandhi in mind when he railed against the "half-naked" fakir of a "type well known in the East" who had managed to make his way into the Viceroy's chambers to negotiate with the representative of the British monarch on "equal terms" for India's independence" (Payne 1995, 404). The word eccentric itself calls to mind a departure from the received categories: the referent is a person or a phenomenon (an "eccentric choice," for instance) that cannot be accommodated within the known classification schemes. One can be a liberal, conservative, neoconservative, Republican, Democrat, progressive, libertarian, isolationist, segregationist, integrationist, multilateralist, unilateralist, bipartisan lawmaker, or some such thing in the U.S. Congress, but one would be hard-pressed to find within this institution an example of an eccentric. Incidentally, with the example of Jesse Helms, who not long ago introduced the Prime Minister of Pakistan as the Prime Minister of India on the floor of the Senate, vividly before us, one can be certain that not all old bumbling fools are eccentric. My point here is that "eccentric" is itself a commonly used category, such as in the well known and largely redundant formulation of the "eccentric genius." Such categories have already been emasculated of political force; that is their very *raison d'être*.

If it is my submission, to the interpretation and substantiation of which the rest of my chapter will be devoted, that Gandhi is impenetrable to historical and other social science discourses, then it is also necessary to state that I intend my remarks to be viewed as a parable about the social sciences. If

the social sciences have done nothing or little to illuminate the thinking of an extraordinary dissenter, a person who initiated the modern movements against racism and colonialism, and offered the most trenchant critiques of modernity and its knowledge systems long before portions of the academy embraced these tasks as essential, then the ruins in which the social sciences lie become palpably evident. That these are not merely academic considerations should be demonstrably clear from the fact that fifty years of academic labor on the idea of poverty, emanating from economists, anthropologists, historians, sociologists, geographers, and policy planners has left us, as every major index shows, with sharper inequities between the rich and the poor in every nation, and growing inequality between the North and the South. (Incidentally, the empirical data may not openly support the view that more people are now entrenched in poverty, but serious questions would have to be posed about shifting criteria to define poverty, lowered expectations about poverty eradication programs, and the severe disjunction between sociological and economic criteria on the one hand and cultural and phenomenological understandings of poverty on the other hand.) Ideas which are viewed as unequivocal social goods, such as the sanctified notion of "literacy," have scarcely received more than a jolt of interrogation.<sup>6</sup> Yet Gandhi, who cannot be accused of being a scholar, probed, in his own inimitable fashion, whether through the humongous corpus of his writings, his practices of the body, or his peregrinations and pilgrimages, the outer limits of the politics of received categories and ideas. Here, by way of illustration, I shall consider at some length the categories of "history," "ecology," and "nonviolence," though similar ruminations on "orthodoxy," "the body," "dissent," "conversion," and numerous other categories can also be entertained.

## History

Not unexpectedly, the greater body of the work on Gandhi can be attributed to four sets of investigators: biographers, historians, scholars of religion, and the proponents, parsers, and peddlers, whether benign or driven by the managerial ethos, of peace.<sup>7</sup> The set of questions, broadly conceived, around which most interpretations of Gandhi are woven concern Gandhi's place in history, the history of the movement for Indian independence and Gandhi's role in it, the history and contours of nationalist thought, and the efficacy of nonviolent resistance in British India as well as under other conditions of oppression. Gandhi is easily the most dominant figure in the history of modern India, a fact as well known to his detractors as to his admirers; and historians continue to deliberate over the substantive "research questions" that have emerged from scholarly inquiries into the nationalist movement and the history of India in the Gandhian era. Some contemporary historians belonging to the Subaltern Studies Collective have added a great deal more

complexity and theoretical sophistication to the scholarship, and Shahid Amin's landmark article, "Gandhi as Mahatma" (Amin 1985), is justly considered exemplary in this respect. Gandhi's visit to the town of Gorakhpur in north India becomes, for Amin, the occasion for querying the representations of Gandhi from above, what one might describe as the authorized versions of "the Mahatma." Though nationalist historiography assigns a specific and predictable place to the masses—the "followers," generally illiterate, often superstitious, always reverential of spiritual authority, easily duped—it fails to consider that these masses had their own world-wise modes of dealing with the mystique of the Mahatma. Some invoked Gandhi as "the Mahatma" to coerce their neighbors and fellow villagers into accepting creeds—such as the dedication to vegetarianism, or abstention from alcohol—viewed as dear to Gandhi; some, overly enthused by the noncooperation movement that Gandhi had initiated, even committed arson and violence in Gandhi's name, shouting "Mahatma Gandhi Ki Jai" ("Long Live the Mahatma") as they perpetrated killings of state functionaries. The Mahatma's name was hijacked for numerous endeavors, most of which would not have met with his approval; his name became something of a floating signifier. Amin's study is among the first to show, with respect to the teachings that Gandhi's admirers and followers claimed to have imbibed from him, how violence legitimized itself in the name of nonviolence.

Whatever the strengths of subaltern history, of which I have given only one illustration, its limitations are just as striking—and nowhere more so than in the treatment of Gandhi (Lal 2003, 186–230). Since subaltern history is heavily invested in questions about the writing of history, the nature of historical memory, and the cultural politics of the discipline of history, it is reasonable to suppose that Amin might also have wanted to explore Gandhi's own readings of history or reflect on how the category of history operates in Gandhi's writings. Had Amin done so, he might have come to a different kind of awareness of why Gandhi, a relative outsider to his native country after a long spell of more than twenty years in South Africa, was nonetheless able to resonate with the masses and in less than five years after his return to India assume the leadership of the Indian National Congress. Amin's interpretation doubtless gives us a wonderfully nuanced representation of Gandhi in history, but he does not dare enough and so never asks how much of history, so to speak, there was in Gandhi. As early as 1909, in that little manifesto called *Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule* (Gandhi 1939), which is in the form of a dialogue between Gandhi and a highly skeptical interlocutor, and to which he would remain particularly attached to the end of his life, Gandhi made it known that he was profoundly indifferent to history. The English, Gandhi stated simply in a remarkably prescient anticipation of the argument of Said's *Orientalism*, "have a habit of writing history; they pretend to study the manners and customs of all peoples." The writing of history is

productive of power: "They write about their own researches in most laudatory terms," Gandhi wrote of them, "and hypnotize us into believing them. We in our ignorance then fall at their feet" (52). The logical conclusion appears to be that Indian nationalists, if they likewise wish to become reservoirs of strength, must embrace the idioms of historical thinking. But Gandhi, who would shortly stand at the helm of a nationalist movement and yet revolted at the idea of the nation-state, surprises us: in reply to a further query from the interlocutor about whether Gandhi can reasonably hope to accomplish the liberation of India through the nonviolent transformation of the English people when there is no precedent for an occupying power to indigenize and defang itself, he replied, "To believe that what has not occurred in history will not occur at all is to argue disbelief in the dignity of man. At any rate, it behooves us to try what appeals to our reason. All countries are not similarly conditioned. The condition of India is unique. Its strength is immeasurable. We need not, therefore, refer to the history of other countries" (65–66).

Thus far Gandhi might appear to be saying only that there is no universal history, no one master narrative that informs all histories, and if this were so, it would point not to Gandhi's indifference to history but rather to his commitment to history in the plural. With some labor, he might even be turned into a good multiculturalist. His older contemporaries, such as Bankimcandra in Bengal and Bal Gangadhar Tilak in Maharashtra, were firmly of the view that the inattentiveness of Indians to their history had been largely responsible for their subjugation under a series of foreign rulers. A passage from Bankim's essay on "A Few Matters Concerning the History of Bengal," lately made famous by Partha Chatterjee, points to his profound anguish that Indians should have been so self-abnegating as to remain oblivious of their own history. "If the English go out to shoot birds," wrote Bankim, "a history is written of the expedition. But Bengal has no history!" "Indians," Bankim opined, "do not think themselves the subjects of their own actions; it is always the gods who act through them. It is this modesty of attitude and devotion to the gods which are the reasons for our people not writing their own history." Bankim then proceeds to contrast Indians with Europeans, an "extremely proud" people: "They think that even when they yawn, the achievement should be recorded as a memorable deed in the annals of world history. Proud nations have an abundance of historical writing; we have none" (Chatterjee 1965, 330). Bankim, Tilak, and other Indian nationalists took it as their mandate to historicize Indian deities, substitute historical facts for myths, and furnish India with a history appropriate to an aspiring nation-state; thus Bankim's life of Krishna, which deliberately occludes the largely mythic world of the playful and amorous Krishna that has endeared that deity to Indians for well over a millennium, endeavors to turn him into a historical divinity resembling Muhammad or Christ (Chatterjee 1991, 21; Lal 2003, 44–46, 62–63; Pandey 1994). Among the thousands of compositions touching upon

the life of Krishna, Bankim was interested mainly in the Bhagavad Gita, or that portion of the Mahabharata where Krishna counsels Arjuna to fulfill his duties as a warrior.

Just how far Gandhi was removed from the historical sensibility on display in the writings of Indian nationalists can be judged from his firm repudiation of the notion that the Mahabharata was to be viewed as reflecting the history of the Indian people. During his confinement in jail from 1922 to 1924 on charges of sedition, Gandhi read the Mahabharata and Gibbon nearly side by side. He stated that he had no use for the Mahabharata as a "historical record. It is hopeless as a history. But it deals with eternal verities in an allegorical fashion" (Gandhi 1986a, 183). But Gandhi did not thereby gravitate towards Gibbon as a more authentic work of history. Rather, describing Gibbon as an "inferior edition" of the Mahabharata, Gandhi adumbrated the contrasting strategies of the two texts: while the author of the Indian epic wove enough of the supernatural into his story to warn the reader against taking him literally, Gibbon took pains at asserting that he was delivering facts and nothing but facts to the readers (187). Returning to the subject of the Mahabharata the following year, during which time Gandhi had become acquainted with the lives of the Sikh gurus, Gandhi again affirmed that no evidence could be found to place Krishna on a similar historical footing. "My Krishna has nothing to do with any historical person," wrote Gandhi, adding, with what appears to be a touch of defiance, the following admission: "But if it was proved to me that that the Mahabharata is history in the same sense that modern historical books are, that every word of the Mahabharata is authentic and that the Krishna of the Mahabharata actually did some of the acts attributed to him, even at the risk of being banished from the Hindu fold, I should not hesitate to reject that Krishna as God incarnate" (484-485). Gandhi's homily on history has no counterpart to the reverence with which history came to be treated by Indian nationalists, not least of all Jawaharlal Nehru, whose *Discovery of India* still retains a formidable status as one of the preeminent histories of India. Affirming his readiness to believe that "a nation is happy that has no history," Gandhi declared it his "pet theory that our Hindu ancestors solved the question for us by ignoring history as it is understood today and by building on slight events their philosophical structure" (187).<sup>8</sup>

Gandhi construed the eagerness of educated Indians to embrace history as another facet of their attempt to enter the worldview of the modern West and trade in the intellectual currencies of modernity. Whatever the dissenting, recessive, marginalized, and pluralist strands within the West, Gandhi scarcely encountered any resistance in the dominant sectors of the West to the emerging ascendancy of the historical mode of thinking, except perhaps among such figures as Blake, Thoreau, Tolstoy, and others who spoke, at least occasionally and to the jeers of some of their peers, in the prophetic mode.

He interpreted history as an essentially masculinist enterprise, one calculated to do the bidding of the nation-state; and indeed his most determined foes, such as the Hindu ideologue Veer Savarkar, who spoke glowingly of the "holy work of the historian" (Savarkar 1970, 1), and his assassin, Nathuram Godse, a self-described history buff, understood better the consequences of Gandhi's profoundly ahistoricist tendencies. At his trial for the murder of Gandhi, Nathuram described how the call of duty beckoned him to do away with the life of a man whose creed of nonviolence was an affront to history, a "stupendous fiction" hoisted upon a country that was defenseless in the teeth of aggression from Muslims and the British alike (Godse 1977). To be cognizant of history is to live in awareness of a world that only rewards the powerful, despises the weak, and brooks no nonsense from dreamers. Nathuram was not prepared, after the attainment of independence, to hand over the moral charge of guiding a young nation-state but an exceedingly old civilization to greatness to an old man who was inclined, as he thought, to brandish nonviolence and view the narratives of exploits of martial divinities as mere allegories.

It is a reasonable inference that while not unsympathetic to the newer kind of histories that have valiantly attempted to render the study of history into a more democratic enterprise, responsive to multiple constituencies (Chakrabarty 2000, ch. 4), Gandhi would nonetheless have viewed these additive histories as expressions of something comparable to the technicist sensibility. The only criticism that historians, much like firm advocates of technology, can countenance of their own discipline is to agree that existent histories are, for one reason or another, inadequate; but such shortcomings can be met within the discipline, for instance by broadening the criteria used to describe good or legitimate histories, by allowing that a wider range of material can be reasonably construed as "evidence," by indulging ever smaller voices of history as potentially contrapuntal repositories of insights, or by engaging in various interdisciplinary exercises that are still predicated on the observance of the sanctity of disciplinary boundaries. The ease with which women's history, and the histories of ethnic groups or minorities, have been drawn into mainstream histories is a striking demonstration of the mesmerizing force of history for all constituencies. Now, more so than ever, there can be no people without history; it is the most unacceptable form of political incorrectness to suggest that a people may not have a sense of history, or may not care to have one. Yet Gandhi, let us recall, was willing to be cast out from the Hindu fold before he was prepared to accept that Krishna could be a historical figure. But if historians and other social scientists have no language for understanding the deliberate disavowal of history as a political and epistemological act, if indeed they have no language to describe the ahistorical except to dismiss it as an aspect of the prehistorical, primitive, childlike, and irrational, then how can they expect their interpretations of



Gandhi to be at all illuminating? The Orientalists deplored the indifference to history and historical productions among Indians as an immensely debilitating lack; their modern-day secular critics, who are obligated to dismiss the Orientalist argument as a canard, have deployed the entire gamut of modern interpretive strategies to suggest that Indians had a different notion of history, or that history must be read in the plural mode (Lal 2003). Alone among these figures, Gandhi was content with viewing Hindu India's indifference to history as absolutely fulfilling.

### Ecology

If the modern quest to look for historical texts among the intellectual productions of premodern Hindus is akin to looking for a needle in a haystack, notwithstanding arguments of more or less sophistication about the varying textures in which history has traditionally been written, the search for the word "ecology" in the ninety-eight volumes of *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* also comes up remarkably short.<sup>9</sup> Modern histories of India, and in particular ecological histories of India, are nonetheless in agreement that Gandhi can safely be viewed as a major inspirational figure for twentieth century ecological movements, and many scholars have traced the impact of Gandhi as an ecologist upon the Greens in Germany and elsewhere around the world. The Chipko movement of the 1960s, which takes its name from the women who hugged trees that had been earmarked for destruction by the timber industry, brought India's ecological struggles to the attention of the world, but the principal architects of the movement have all described themselves as Gandhians. The most charismatic figure of resistance to the state project of the construction of a dam in the Tehri-Garhwal region has for many years been Sunderlal Bahuguna, a staunch Gandhian, and a similar story is to be told in many parts of India. And yet the indisputable fact remains that Gandhi never explicitly initiated an environmental movement, nor did he ever lead a forest satyagraha. Some of his concerns were even then so far removed from the considerations animating well-wishers of Indian animal life and the diverse ecosystems around the country that it seems to be something of a labor to view Gandhi as "an early environmentalist" (Guha 1993, 2). When Edward Thompson, an English missionary who spent many years in India and who has since been eclipsed by his more famous son, the historian E. P. Thompson, once remarked with evident concern to Gandhi that wildlife was rapidly disappearing from India's jungles, he is said to have received the following reply: "Yes, it is true that it is decreasing in the jungles, but it is increasing in the towns" (Khosshoo 1995, 18).

Gandhi was also remarkably reticent on the subject of nature, and the fifty thousand-odd pages of his published writings have relatively little to convey about trees, animals, vegetation, and landscapes, or on the relationship of

humans to their environment. V. S. Naipaul's (in)famous diatribe, *India: A Wounded Civilization* (1977), attempts to convey the parochialism of India's most venerated figure of the twentieth century with the observation that Gandhi, in his autobiography, had absolutely nothing to say about his experience of traveling on a ship for well over a month or about the landscapes, very different from those of his native Gujarat, that he encountered in his long stay in Britain. Again, it is a reasonable inference that though Gandhi would have been deeply troubled by man's exploitative lordship over nature, he would not have contemplated with equanimity the setting aside of tracts of land, forests, and woods as "wilderness areas." Thoreau's essay on civil disobedience was of seminal importance in Gandhi's early thinking, but he nowhere adverts to *Walden*. He would not have thought much of the enterprise, rather familiar to him from the Indian tradition, of retreating into the woods. Gandhi was by no means averse to the idea of the retreat, and for most of his adult life he stayed in one ashram (hermitage) or another. Indeed, he endowed the word "retreat" with new meanings, such that his political life can also be envisioned as a complicated set of maneuvers between engagement and retreat. His ashrams were oases of peace, contemplation, and the cooperative spirit, but they were also the epicenter of Indian political activity: everyone, but everyone, flocked to them during the independence movement, and it is from his ashram along the Sabarmati river in Ahmedabad that Gandhi set out on the Salt March to bring an Empire to its knees (Thomson 1993). Arnold Toynbee and George Orwell understood that, after Gandhi, one could only be a saint in the slum of politics. That is one meaning of Gandhi's ashrams. But there is more to it: Gandhi also turned the ashram into a vehicle for political transactions, energizing a place of stillness into the fulcrum of political life, introducing a new element into the dialectic of movement and repose.

Thus far I have only hinted at Gandhi's impermeability to the category of ecology as it is commonly understood, but perhaps it need not be entirely jettisoned. A different intellectual and ethical exercise to comprehend the ecological dimensions of Gandhian thinking and practice may well be in order, and we shall have to go far beyond the ordinary implications conveyed by the categories of "ecology" and "environment"; indeed, we may not even find much in these words to bring us close to Gandhi, unless we are prepared to concede that ethics, ecology, and politics were all closely and even indistinguishably interwoven into the fabric of his thought and social practices. Gandhi deployed fasting, for instance, not only to open negotiations with the British or (more frequently) various Indian communities, but to cleanse his own body, free his mind of impure thoughts, empower feminine practices of domesticity, and even to partake in the experience of deprivation from which countless millions of Indians suffered. He deplored the idea of waste, and fasting was a sure means of ascertaining the true needs of the body



and preserving its ecological equanimity. Similarly, to take a less frequently explored aspect of Gandhian political ontology, his practice of observing twenty-four hours of silence on a regular basis was a mode of conserving his energy, entering into an introspective state, and listening to the still voice within; but it was also a way of signifying his dissent from ordinary models of communication with the British and establishing the discourse on his own terms. The filmmaker Amar Kanwar, whose recent silent documentary, "To Remember," is staged in Delhi's Birla House where Gandhi was assassinated on 30 January 1948, has understood that silence is not only a way of rendering homage to the fallen leader but an important gesture of communitarian politics (Lal 2005a). One reason why Gandhi could never be assimilated into the known models of dissent familiar to the British is precisely because Gandhi stood for what I would describe as an ecological response. By that I do not mean, as is obvious, that Gandhi prevented them from logging trees, or that he would have thought the idea of making one's home in a tree for several years, as some have done in California to save endangered Redwoods,<sup>10</sup> to be an astute sign of political wisdom or the enhanced moral sensibility.

The ecological vision of Gandhi's life opens itself before us in myriad ways. It will suffice to entertain only a few considerations. First, as nature provides for the largest animals as much as it provides for its smallest creations, so Gandhi allowed this principle to guide him in his political and social relations with every woman and man with whom he came in contact. His close disciple and attendant, Mirabehn, wrote that while he worked alongside everyone else in the ashram, he would carry on his voluminous correspondence and grant interviews. "Big people of all parties, and of many different nations would come to see Bapu, but he would give equal attention to the poorest peasant who might come with a genuine problem" (Gupta 1992, 286–287). In the midst of important political negotiations with senior British officials, he would take the time to tend to his goat. Gandhi remained supremely indifferent to considerations of power, prestige, and status in choosing his companions; similarly, he was as attentive to the minutest details as he was to matters of national importance. One of his associates has reported—and such stories proliferate—that when news reached Gandhi of the illness of the daughter of a friend, he wrote to her a long letter in the midst of an intense political struggle in Rajkot, detailing the medicines that she was to take, the food that she was to avoid, and the precautions she was to exercise (Kalelkar 1960, 165–166). His own grandniece, pointing to the meticulous care with which Gandhi tended to her personal needs, all the while that he was engaged in negotiations for Indian independence, perhaps showered him with the most unusual honor when, in writing a short book about him, she called it *Bapu—My Mother* (Gandhi 1948). Gandhi's enemas were just as important to him as the struggle for political independence: one could, following Naipaul, Grenier, and some of his more quarrelsome critics, describe

this as characteristic of his self-absorption, or can one attempt to understand how he mapped the world onto his body. In his own way, I am tempted to say, Gandhi was something akin to those Jain cartographers of the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries who theorized and lived the correspondence between the microcosm (the body) and the macrocosm (the body politic) (Schwartzberg 1992, 332–387).

Secondly, Gandhi transformed the idea of waste and rendered it pregnant with meanings that were the inverse of those meanings invested in it by European regimes, which represented the lands that they conquered as "unproductive" and "wasteful," and required only the energy and intelligence of the white man to render them useful to humans. Gandhi, contrariwise, was not averse to the view that man was just as prone to transform whatever he touched, howsoever fertile, fecund, or productive, into waste as he was to render waste productive. His close disciple and associate, Kaka Kalelkar, narrates that he was in the habit of breaking off an entire twig merely for four or five *neem* leaves he needed to rub on the fibers of the carding-bow to make its strings pliant and supple. When Gandhi saw that, he remarked: "This is violence. We should pluck the required number of leaves after offering an apology to the tree for doing so. But you broke off the whole twig, which is wasteful and wrong" (Kalarthi 1960, 31). Yet this alone was not wasteful: there was also human waste, around the disposal of which an entire and none too savory history of India can be written. While it was a matter of shame that Indian society had set apart a special class of people to deal with the disposal of human excrement, whose occupation made them the most despised members of society, Gandhi found it imperative to bring this matter to the fore and make it as much a subject of national importance as the attainment of political independence and the reform of degraded institutions. Unlike the vast majority of caste Hindus, Gandhi did not allow anyone else to dispose of his waste. His ashrams were repositories for endeavors to change human waste into organic fertilizer. Moreover, during the course of the last twenty years of his life, he was engaged in ceaseless experiments to invent toilets that would be less of a drain on scarce water resources. If Gandhi had done nothing else in his life, one suspects that he would still find a place in histories of sanitation engineering in India; he would also be remembered as one caste Hindu who did not hesitate to wield publicly the toilet broom.

Thirdly, and this is a point that cannot be belabored enough, Gandhi did not make of his ecological sensitivities a cult or religion to which unquestioning fealty was demanded. One writer credits him with the saying, "I am a puritan myself but I am catholic towards others" (Khoshoo 1995, 11). His attitude towards meat is illustrative of his catholicity in many respects: Gandhi was a strict vegetarian, some might say in the "unreflective" manner in which many Indians are vegetarians from birth. He was aware, as his writings

amply demonstrate, of the cruelty to animals, but he may have been unaware of the argument, which is widely encountered in the ecological literature today (Rifkin 1993), about the extreme pressures upon the soil and water resources induced by the meat industry. In this matter, as in many others bearing upon critical elements of his thought and ethical practices, the anecdotal literature is more revealing, more suggestive of the extraordinary notion of *largesse* which informed every action of his life. Once, when he had an European visitor at his ashram, where only vegetarian meals were prepared, Gandhi had meat served to him. This surprised everyone but Gandhi, who had come to understand that his visitor was habituated to eat meat at every meal, construed it as unacceptable coercion to inflict a new diet upon him. He himself partook of milk and milk products, unlike those who style themselves "vegans" in the United States, and his reverence for life and respect for animals did not border on that fanaticism that is only another name for violence. One is tempted to say that Gandhi's vegetarianism was his religion<sup>11</sup>—except that his religion was not religion as it might ordinarily be understood, and that his religious sensibility has little in common with the sensibilities of those who describe themselves as religious or devoutly religious.

It is my submission, then, that though Gandhi was no philosopher of ecology and can only be called an environmentalist with considerable difficulty, he nonetheless strikes a remarkable chord with all those who have cared for the environment, loved flowers, practiced vegetarianism, cherished the principles of nonviolence, been conserving of water, resisted the depredations of developers, recycled paper, or accorded animals the dignity of humans. But the difficulties of accommodating his life and thought under the rubric of "ecology" as that category is customarily deployed are nowhere more evident than in the extremely uneasy relationship he would have had, in my view, with deep ecology. Arne Naess, the Norwegian philosopher with whose name deep ecology is inextricably linked, has testified that from Gandhi he learnt that the power of nonviolence could only be realized after the awareness of "the essential oneness of all life" (Rothenberg 1993, xix). This awareness, however, has been central to nearly all the religious traditions emanating from the Indian subcontinent, most certainly Jainism and Vaishnavism, but these traditions have also with utter deliberation eschewed the political life. Gandhi, by contrast, was deeply enmeshed in politics, and his autobiography ends on the remarkable note that those who claim that politics and religion are two different and sharply separated spheres of life know the meaning of neither. One may be inclined to argue in the defense of Naess and other deep ecologists that they have often shown the kind of political sensitivity that I have attributed to Gandhi (Naess 1965), but the very language of their ruminations shows how far they are trapped in the discursive formation of "ecology." In a trenchant criticism of Naess, the Australian feminist Ariel Kay

Salleh observes that deep ecology represents "a spiritual search for people in a barren secular age." The texts of deep ecology abound with references to "implementation of policies," "exponential growth of technical skill and intervention," "rules," "postulates," and other phrases suggestive of the instrumentalist and managerial approach to the resource crunch said to be at the heart of the modern environmental crisis. As Salleh argues, "the masculine sense of self-worth in our culture has become so entrenched in scientific habits of thought, that it is very hard for men to argue persuasively without recourse to terms like these for validation" (Salleh 1984, 342–345).

Though I have elsewhere suggested that Gandhi was a deep ecologist long before the term's theorists had arisen, I am now aware of the deep inadequacy of "ecology," even in its most diverse usages, as a category that attempts to capture the nuances of Gandhi's thinking. The broadest conception of "deep ecology," I have been arguing, is not capacious enough to accommodate the radically ecumenical aspects of Gandhi's life. One way to locate the notion of ecology in relation to both Gandhi's thinking and the broader politics of knowledge that it calls to mind is to understand how Gandhi stood the popular axiom "think globally, act locally" on its head and became the advocate of a new categorical imperative, namely "think locally, act globally." There is a saying of Gandhi's, now emblazoned on T-shirts, posters, advertisements, and bumper stickers, that the newly revived peace movement has made popular: "Be the change that you would want the world to be." The ordinary applications of this aphorism apart, such as the implied injunction to put practice before theory, or to never ask of others what one would not ask of oneself, it is possible to interpret it as a plea to turn one's entire life into an ecosystem. Gandhi wrote no ecological treatise, but made one of his life: this is one life in which every minute act, emotion, or thought was not without its place. The brevity of Gandhi's enormous writings, his small meals of nuts and fruits, his morning ablutions and everyday bodily practices, his periodic observances of silence, his morning walks, his cultivation of the small as much as of the big, his abhorrence of waste, his resort to fasting, his political campaigns—all these are expressive of how Gandhi himself became the embodiment of an ecosystem.

### Coda

The American occupation of Iraq is striking proof of the fact that war is the first, rather than the last, refuge of scoundrels. War has generally been the business of every empire, and it is not necessary here to enter into a protracted discussion of war-making as the soul of American politics and American political science alike. Although the politics of anthropologists generally rests on a more sound ethics, their order of business is also unambiguously clear: they first think of violence, and only then, if at all, do their thoughts turn

to nonviolence. Take, as an example, the scholarly studies of the Chumash Indians who inhabited the Santa Barbara Channel Islands. The bulk of the studies are devoted to the period, somewhere in the eleventh century A.D., when violence peaked, as suggested by evidence of cranial injuries gathered by physical anthropologists, rather than to the periods before and after this peak of violence.<sup>12</sup> I am not aware that social scientists or even humanists have lavished on nonviolence the attention customarily conferred on violence, and I have found it just as noteworthy that studies of nonviolence, or of communities where violence is scarce, are usually undertaken with the intention of demonstrating that violence is as not as ingrained in humans as evolutionary biologists might think, or that it need not be decisive in shaping the culture and history of a particular society. To be sure, subtle theorizing of even violence may be much less adequate than the present circumstances warrant. "Among the paradoxes of this long century of violence," writes one social scientist, "is the paucity of reflections within contemporary political theory, including democratic theory, on the causes, effects and ethicopolitical implications of violence. . . . While there are certainly plenty of case studies of wars, civil wars and other violent conflicts, political reflection has lagged far behind empirical events" (Keane 1996, 6–7, cited by Nordstrom 2004, 55). This observation is much less prescient than it seems: political theory is the provenance of only a few practitioners of political science, having been banished to the margins by the vast majority who are determined to mathematize political science and turn it into a branch of economics, and it is more accurate to say that there has been very little reflection on anything from among those who inhabit political science departments.<sup>13</sup>

Raymond Williams (1983), one of the principal figures in the emergence of postcolonial theory and cultural studies more broadly conceived, could find no place for "nonviolence" in his *Keywords*, and scores of dictionaries of ideas are similarly bereft of such risk-taking. Even academics who are associated with calls for "resistance" have disowned any interest in nonviolence, and the likes of the late Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., have much preferred Fanon to Gandhi. In his voluminous commentary on the systematic violation of the rights of Palestinians, Said was relentless in his critique both of the violence inflicted upon them by Israel and the brutal authoritarianism of Arafat. He deplored, as has nearly everyone else, the alarming drift towards suicide bombings; and yet there is hardly any systemic critique in his work of the culture of violence, nor much evidence of his support for the handful of nonviolent activists whom the state of Israel and the Palestinian Authority were alike determined to thwart. I am aware, needless to say, of the possible rejoinder to this view, namely that Said's own response to this violence was not merely to persist heroically in the task of cultural criticism, but to initiate new enterprises in interculturality, such as the East-West Orchestra that he partnered with the

pianist Daniel Barenboim, with the express conviction of creating forums for cultural exchange between Israelis and Palestinians. But that appears to me to be an aesthete's response to violence, and that also points to the fact that Gandhi has never had much of an aesthetic appeal to public intellectuals and modern theorists of culture. It is no exaggeration to suggest that nowhere in the British or American academy is there an important thinker with an international reputation in the entire domain of postcolonial studies who has bestowed any serious attention upon Gandhi.

One has to accept it as a brute fact that political and social theorists have overwhelmingly affirmed the primacy of violence over nonviolence. The Marxist tradition is often viewed as furnishing the most unambiguous examples of the glorification of violence, but the most prominent theorists outside that tradition have been scarcely less vocal in their pronouncements in favor of violence. If Marx was of the view that "violence is the midwife of every old society pregnant with a new one," Max Weber described anyone who failed to see that "the decisive means for politics is violence" as a "political infant" (Schell 2003, 104–105). The elevation of violence over nonviolence in the preponderant part of sociological literature and that large and amorphous domain that goes by the name of cultural criticism can be attributed to several reasons. Much of history is what can be called event-oriented: since nonviolence in its most passive construction is what characterizes the activities of most people and most communities all the time, it does not seem particularly newsworthy or conducive to analysis. Ranajit Guha's *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency* (1983) conveys the impression that peasants spend the greater chunk of their waking hours in rebellion against the structures of everyday life, but we know otherwise. Even more so than violence, nonviolence appears to belong to the realm of the quotidian; in modern terms, it doesn't have much sex appeal. The advocates of nonviolence, moreover, are continually faced with the onerous task of demonstrating that nonviolence can succeed, as though violence had established a track record of successes. Nonviolence is asked to justify itself through results; violence is represented as part of the natural order of things.

Language itself is complicit in the politics of knowledge surrounding these two terms, and nonviolence points to the ontological primacy of violence. Nonviolence appears to be condemned as the "remainder." Nor is this problem particular to English: *himsa* in Sanskrit denotes violence, and *ahimsa* is, apparently, the negation of *himsa*. In a lively and still unmatched exchange that took place between Gandhi and Tagore in the early 1920s, in which Tagore expressed his unease with the noncooperation movement launched by Gandhi, suspecting that it was leading to a wholesale rejection of Western modernity, Gandhi in turn took the view that the poet had an unfounded dread of the negative. While no one would be prepared to believe that postmodernists, deconstructionists, and postcolonial theorists

have a similar dread of the negative, since some of them doubtless make their living from trading in it, many interpreters remain convinced that any system of conduct or worldview based on the embrace of the negative will be unable to command precedence. They also overlook the fact that founders of religion and moralists have largely marshaled their teachings as sets of negative prescriptions, partly because it is easier to have agreement on what constitutes "evil" or inappropriate conduct than on what constitutes "good." Agreement on what is to be avoided is surely more easily gained than agreement on what is to be accepted.

Further reflection on the place of nonviolence in Gandhian thinking should suggest the immense struggle Gandhi had to undertake when he sought to confer ontological, epistemological, moral, and aesthetic primacy on nonviolence. His allegorical reading of the Bhagavad Gita, at a time when the idea of armed resistance to British rule was being justified by recourse to Krishna's teachings to Arjuna in the Gita, suggests how far his views were at odds with the prevailing sentiment; yet, in considering himself beholden to the Gita, Gandhi was also signifying his own ambivalence in demarcating violence and nonviolence as separate spheres. Abstention from harm or injury constituted only the most immediate layer of meanings conveyed by nonviolence; in its positive sense, Gandhi writes somewhere, "*ahimsa* means the largest love, the greatest charity." Expectedly, he adds, "If I am a follower of *ahimsa*, I must love my enemy. I must apply the same rule to the wrong-doer who is my enemy or a stranger to me, as I would to my wrong-doing father or son" (Gandhi 1986b, 212). The perfect practice of *ahimsa* may require us, among other things, to eschew the historical mode, which is tethered to the nation-state and the ideology of violence, and to turn our life into an ecosystem. Anyone with more than a cursory knowledge of Gandhi's writings is aware that he thought of some forms of nonviolence as akin to violence, just as some forms of violence were in spirit closer to nonviolence. Gandhi's distinction between the nonviolence of the strong and the nonviolence of the weak is the grounding for his view, which has surprised many of his admirers, that "perhaps the most brutal act of the British Government was to have disarmed and thus emasculated the Indian people." Only those people were endowed with the power of exercising the *dharma* of *ahimsa* "who although fully capable of inflicting violence" deliberately forsook it (217). More than five decades of the practice of *satya* [truth], *ahimsa*, and *brahmacharya* [celibacy; immersion in the Godhead] equipped Gandhi to make razor-sharp distinctions between violence and nonviolence.

The political theorist Bhikhu Parekh concedes that "all his life Gandhi sought to articulate and live out an original and powerful vision of human existence" and abide by the dictates of a nonviolent life. The "care of the soul was, for Gandhi, a full-time job," and Parekh takes the view that, in consequence, Gandhi remained insensitive to "the intellectual, scientific,

aesthetic, sensuous, and other aspects of life." Gandhi "rarely saw a film, read a book of poetry, visited an art gallery, watched a game, or took any interest in history, archaeology, modern science, wildlife, unspoiled nature, and India's natural beauty" (Parekh 1997, 93, 99). One hesitates to ask whether Parekh ever ran a newspaper (much less four), swept a public thoroughfare, experimented with low-cost toilets, fed a goat, offered solace to thousands of women, men, and children, walked into the midst of rioting crowds, organized a boycott of goods, led a political movement, addressed crowds in the tens of thousands, administered enemas to fellow ashram inmates, and so on. One detects in Parekh's objections the compulsions that animate social scientists to work with the categories to which they are habituated by their training and that are easily recognized as part of dominant knowledge systems. I started with the proposition that the categories with which historians, anthropologists, and social scientists customarily work have little light to shed on the life, thought, and cultural practices of Gandhi, while what is assumed to be the matter-of-factness of other categories such as "nonviolence" means that they gather scant attention within the broader discursive formations of the social sciences. If, as I have maintained, Gandhi is the ultimate dissenter of the twentieth century, indeed of the modern period, then the consequences of diminishing, marginalizing, and taming Gandhi extend far beyond him to the critical question of the possibilities of dissent in our times. Such is the hegemony of the gargantuan American academy that even this reading of Gandhi will, after it has received a due hearing, be reduced to an instantiation of the academy's tolerance for dissenting views. Nonetheless, the interpretation of Gandhi that I have put forth should serve as a suitable warning to the social scientists that the most imperative consideration before them is how far they are prepared to contribute to the creation of dissenting futures.

## Notes

1. This sentiment is frequently encountered in the public speeches of prominent ideologues of Hindutva, such as Praveen Togadia, Uma Bharati, and Sadhvi Ritambhara. Kakar (1995) makes for arresting reading.

2. Eleanor Zelliot (2001, 137) explains this seeming anomaly with the observation that by terming the untouchables "Harijans," or "children of God," Gandhi rendered them into objects of pity—"Compassion also, but always pity." By contrast, Zelliot affirms, "Ambedkar's 'Dalit' is a man or woman filled with pride and self-respect. Social movements thrive on pride. The multi-faceted Dr. Ambedkar stands for both qualities: pride and self-respect." A more subtle interpretation of the relationship of Gandhi to Ambedkar is to be found in Nagaraj (1993).

3. This portion draws upon Lal 1999.

4. First published as an article in *Commentary*, the article was transformed into a very short work: see Grenier 1983.

5. Churchill openly advocated using chemical weapons "against recalcitrant Arabs as an experiment," and was exasperated enough with the criticism of his proposals to say, "I do not understand this squeamishness about the use of gas. I am strongly in favour of using poison gas against uncivilized tribes." Cited by Simons 1994, 179–181; Glancey 2003. It is imperative to recognize that Churchill spoke, moreover, not as an "eccentric" individual, but as one of the most important members of the British cabinet.

6. The work of Ivan Illich is an obvious exception; see also Sanders 2005.

7. This section draws upon some of my earlier published work: see, in particular, Lal 2003.

8. This passage from 1924 underscores, as well, the continuing importance of *Hind Swaraj* in Gandhi's thinking. Though many of his admirers predicted that Gandhi would be much too embarrassed by his diatribe against industrial civilization and condemnation of lawyers, doctors, and professional politicians to even look at the book again after its publication, to the end of his life Gandhi stood by everything he had stated in his 1909 manifesto. In Chapter Seventeen one encounters this passage: "History, as we know it, is a record of the wars of the world, and so there is a proverb among Englishmen that a nation which has no history, that is, no wars, is a happy nation (77–78)."

9. This section draws from my earlier published work, 2005c, 148–177.

10. Julia Hill, who lived on a Redwood tree for nearly three years, may possibly have inspired an episode from *The Simpsons*, "Lisa the Tree Hugger" (2000): <http://www.tv.com/simpsons/lisa-the-tree-hugger/episode/6576/summary.html>

11. The late T. G. Vaidyanathan, a teacher to many students who have since risen to considerable eminence, was a strict vegetarian. At a meeting we had in late 1992 or early 1993 in New York, he confessed that the closest he came to being a Hindu was through his observance of vegetarianism.

12. I am grateful to Professor Jon Erlandson of the Department of Anthropology, University of Oregon, for drawing my attention to the following references: Walker (1989); Lambert and Walker (1991); and Fischman (1996).

13. Political theory appears to be much more enlightened in relation to "political science," but it is resoundingly insular in its own fashion. See Lummis 2002.

## Bibliography

- Adams, Cecil. 2004. "The Straight Dope." *Chicago Reader*, August 13, p. 3.
- Amin, Shahid. 1985. "Gandhi as Mahatma: Gorakhpur District, Eastern UP, 1921–1922." In *Subaltern Studies III: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, edited by Ranajit Guha. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1–63.
- Apffel-Marglin, Frederique. 2000. *The Spirit of Regeneration*. London: Zed Books.
- Chakrabarty, Dipesh. 2000. *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Chatterjee, Bankimchandra. 1965. "Bangalar itihās sambandhe kayekti katha." In *Bankim Racnabali*, vol. 2, edited by Yogesh Chandra Bagal. Calcutta: Sahitya Samsad.
- . 1991. *Krishna-Charitra*, translated with an introduction by Pradip Bhattacharya. Calcutta: M. P. Birla Foundation.
- Chattopadhyaya, Sudarshan, ed. 1975. *Against the Stream: An Anthology of Writings of Saumyendranath Tagore*. 2 vols. Calcutta: Saumyendranath Memorial Committee.

- Coomaraswamy, Ananda K. 1949 [1939]. "Mahatma," in *Mahatma Gandhi: Essays and Reflections on His Life and Work*, edited by S. Radhakrishnan. London: Allen and Unwin, 63–67.
- Coward, Harold, ed. 2003. *Indian Critiques of Gandhi*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Escobar, Arturo. 1995. *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Fischman, J. 1996. "California Social Climbers." *Science* 272, no. 5263: 811–812.
- Gandhi, M. K. 1939 [1909]. *Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule*. Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing.
- . 1986a. *The Moral and Political Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 1, *Civilization, Politics, and Religion*, edited by Raghavan Iyer. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- . 1986b. *The Moral and Political Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 2, *Truth and Non-Violence*, edited by Raghavan Iyer. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Gandhi, Manubehn. 1948. *Bapu—My Mother*. Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing.
- Glancey, Jonathan. 2003. "Our Last Occupation." *Guardian*, April 19. Available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/comment/story/0,3604,939608,00.html>.
- Godse, Nathuram. 1977. *May It Please Your Honor*. Poona: Vitasta Prakashan.
- Grenier, Richard. 1983. *The Gandhi Nobody Knows*. New York: Thomas Nelson.
- Guha, Ramachandra. 1993. *Mahatma Gandhi and the Environmental Movement*. Pune: Parisar.
- Gupta, Krishna Murti. 1992. *Mira Behn: Gandhi's Daughter Disciple*. New Delhi: Himalaya Seva Sangh.
- Joshi, Pushpa, ed. 1990. *Gandhi on Women*. Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing.
- Kakar, Sudhir. 1995. *The Colours of Violence*. New Delhi: Viking.
- Kalarthi, Mukulbhai. 1960. *Anecdotes from Bapu's Life*. Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House.
- Kalelkar, Kaka. 1960 [1950]. *Stray Glimpses of Bapu*. Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing.
- Keane, John. 1996. *Reflections on Violence*. London: Verso.
- Khosho, T. N. 1995. *Mahatma Gandhi—An Apostle of Applied Human Ecology*. New Delhi: Tata Energy Research Institute.
- Kishwar, Madhu. 1986 [1985]. *Gandhi and Women*. Delhi: Manushi Prakashan.
- Lai, Hsi. 2001. *The Sexual Teachings of the White Tigress: Secrets of the Female Taoist Masters*. Rochester, VT: Destiny Books, Inner Traditions/Bear and Company.
- Lal, Vinay. 1999. "Gandhi, the Civilizational Crucible, and the Future of Dissent." *Futures* 31 (March): 205–219.
- . 2002. *Empire of Knowledge: Culture and Plurality in the Global Economy*. London: Pluto Press.
- . 2003. *The History of History: Politics and Scholarship in Modern India*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- . 2004. "Home Truths and McData." *Little Magazine* 5, nos. 4–5: 68–74.
- . 2005a. "The Travails of the Nation: Some Notes on Indian Documentaries." *Third Text* 18, no. 2 (March): 175–185.
- . 2005b. "The Concentration Camp and Development: The Past and Future of Genocide." *Patterns of Prejudice* 39, no. 2 (June): 220–243.
- . 2005c [2003]. *Of Cricket, Guinness, and Gandhi: Essays on Indian History and Culture*. Delhi: Penguin.

- Lambert, Patricia M., and Philip L. Walker. 1991. "Physical Anthropological Evidence for the Evolution of Social Complexity in Coastal Southern California." *Antiquity* 65: 963–973.
- Lummis, C. Douglas. 2002. "Political Theory: Why It Seems Universal, But Isn't Really." *Futures* 34, no. 1 (February): 63–73.
- Naess, Arne. 1965. *Gandhi and the Nuclear Age*. Totowa, NJ: Bedminster Press.
- Nagaraj, D. R. 1993. *Flaming Feet: A Study of the Dalit Movement*. Bangalore: South Forum Press.
- Nordstrom, Carolyn. 2004. *Shadows of War: Violence, Power, and International Profiteering in the Twenty-first Century*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Pandey, Gyanendra. 1994. "Modes of History Writing: New Hindu History of Ayodhya." *Economic and Political Weekly* 29, no. 25 (June 18): 1523–1528.
- Parekh, Bhikhu. 1997. *Gandhi*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Payne, Robert. 1995 [1969]. *The Life and Death of Mahatma Gandhi*. New York: Smithmark Publishers.
- Rahnema, Majid, and Victoria Bawtree, eds. 1997. *The Post-Development Reader*. London: Zed Books.
- Rifkin, Jeremy. 1993. *Beyond Beef: The Rise and Fall of the Cattle Culture*. New York: Plume Books.
- Rothenberg, David. 1993. *Is It Painful to Think? Conversations with Arne Naess*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Roy, M. N. 1989. *Selected Writings of M. N. Roy*. 3 vols. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Sachs, Wolfgang, ed. 1992. *Development Dictionary: A Guide to Knowledge as Power*. London: Zed Books.
- Salleh, Ariel. 1984. "Deeper Than Deep Ecology: The Eco-Feminist Connection." *Environmental Ethics* 6, no. 4 (Winter): 342–345.
- Sanders, Barry. 2005. "Literacy." In *The Future of Knowledge and Culture: A Dictionary for the Twenty-first Century*, edited by Vinay Lal and Ashis Nandy. New Delhi: Viking Penguin, 157–162.
- Savarkar, V. D. 1970 [1908]. *The Indian War of Independence, 1857*. New Delhi: Rajdhani Granthnagar.
- Schell, Jonathan. 2003. *The Unconquerable World: Power, Nonviolence, and the Will of the People*. New York: Metropolitan Books.
- Schwartzberg, Joseph. 1992. "Cosmographical Mapping." In *The History of Cartography*, Vol. 2, *Cartography in the Traditional Islamic and South Asian Societies*, edited by J. B. Harley and David Woodward. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Simons, Geoff. 1994. *Iraq: From Sumer to Saddam*. London: St. Martin's Press.
- Thomson, Mark. 1993. *Gandhi and His Ashrams*. Bombay: Popular Prakashan.
- U.S. Department of Defense. 2002. "Bush's National Security Strategy." *New York Times*, September 20. Available at [wysiwyg://3/http://www.nytimes.com/2002/09/20](http://www.nytimes.com/2002/09/20).
- Walker, Philip L. 1989. "Cranial Injuries as Evidence of Violence in Prehistoric Southern California." *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 80: 313–323.
- Williams, Raymond. 1983. *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Zelliot, Eleanor. 2001. "The Meaning of Ambedkar." In *Cultural Subordination and the Dalit Challenge*, Vol. 2, *Dalit Identity and Politics*, edited by Ghanshyam Shah. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 129–142.

## 15 Thinking Dialectically Toward Community

Grace Lee Boggs



Over the last sixty years I have had the enormous privilege of participating in most of the great humanizing movements of the second half of the twentieth century—labor, civil rights, black power, women's, Asian American, environmental justice, antiwar. Each was a tremendously transformative experience, expanding my understanding of what it means to be an American and a human being, and challenging me to keep deepening my thinking about how to bring about radical social change.

However, I cannot recall any previous period when the issues were so basic, so interconnected, and so demanding of everyone living in this country, regardless of race, ethnicity, class, gender, age, or national origin.

What is going to motivate us to start caring for our biosphere instead of using our mastery of technology to increase the volume and speed at which we are making our planet uninhabitable for other species and eventually for ourselves?

How are we going to make our living in an age when technology and the export of jobs overseas have brought us to the point where the number of workers needed to produce goods and services is constantly diminishing? Where will we get the imagination, the courage, and the determination to reconceptualize the meaning and purpose of work in a society that is becoming increasingly jobless?

What is going to happen to cities like Detroit that were once the arsenal of democracy? Now that they've been abandoned by industry, are we just going to throw them away? Or can we rebuild, redefine, and respirit them as models of twenty-first century self-reliant, sustainable, multicultural communities? Who is going to begin this new story?