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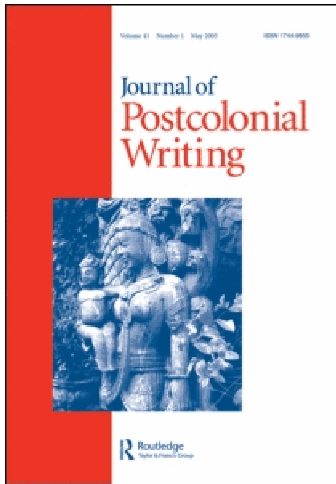

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# City of sieges: Literature, communal violence and urban space

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# City of sieges: Literature, communal violence and urban space

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This article explores the representation of communal violence in Vibhuti Narain Rai's 1988 novel *Curfew in the City*. Through a close reading of Rai's novel, I argue that such violence serves to "communalize" urban space on the Indian subcontinent – framing and reframing the boundaries between communities, establishing distinct ethno-religious enclaves, and attaching new meanings to public and private space. I then discuss the adverse impact this reconfiguration of space has on the status and disposition of minorities, alienating them from their environment and inducing in them a profound sense of displacement or "unbelonging". In order to clarify this process, I invoke the concept of the architectural uncanny – Anthony Vidler's term for the feelings of "estrangement, alienation, exile, and homelessness" to which modern architecture gives rise. In this instance, however, I use it to describe the way in which communal violence defamiliarizes the Indian city, and in so doing transforms minority communities into symbolic foreigners or "virtual" refugees, permanently estranged from the urban space they occupy.

**Keywords:** Vibhuti Narain Rai; communal violence; urban space; architectural uncanny

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It is a city of sieges
None shall escape.
Wrap your terror about you and
Lie still.

Lie still
For on the roads
… Horror spreads its wings.

(Bilquis Zafirul Hassan, "City of Sieges" 2002)

## I

On 13 August 1980, during a service celebrating Eid el Fitr[1] in the northern Indian city of Moradabad, rumours began to circulate that the police had allowed a stray pig to enter the mosque courtyard. In the ensuing clashes with police, 72 worshippers were killed – a figure that would rapidly escalate as members of the Hindu community joined in the violence ("India" 30). Over the following days the conflict spread to other cities throughout Uttar Pradesh, and by the end of August some 200 people had been killed, several thousand injured, and an estimated 3500 arrested. In Allahabad, the police response was decisive: a curfew was immediately declared, 389 people were arrested, and on 21 August six Muslim "rioters" were shot dead ("More Police"). Not long afterwards, during a debate in the upper

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house of the Indian parliament, a member of the opposition Janata Party claimed that these measures bore the traces of institutional prejudice, accusing the Uttar Pradesh police of having treated the Muslim community "like flies" ("Indian Police").

Vibhuti Narain Rai's 1988 novel *Curfew in the City* (first published in Hindi as *Shahar Mein Karfiyu*) focuses on the experiences of a Muslim family living in Allahabad at this time. Confined to a "stinking hell, filled with the stench of several sweating bodies and the littlest children's bowel movements" (*Curfew* 49), Sayeeda, the main character, struggles to care for her sick daughter. "Three days of dysentery had devastated the poor two-year-old [and] she had been vomiting too – an obvious victim of cholera" (53). Eventually, deprived of medicine, the young girl dies, and her grandfather is forced to defy the curfew in order to arrange for her burial. The novel draws to a close as the girl's body is carried from the house in a shroud made from "a tattered sheet that had once been white" (108). In addition to detailing the experiences of Sayeeda and her family, however, the narrative also provides an overview of events taking place elsewhere in the city. In Chapter 3, for instance, we are privy to the vastly different conditions prevailing in a lane inhabited by Hindus; here, "the curfew did not make its residents absolute prisoners in their homes – it merely restricted them to their lane" (39). And in the penultimate chapter Rai makes clear the extent of anti-Muslim prejudice among representatives of the state: "[T]he civil authorities always asked the BSF [Border Security Force] or the CRP [Central Reserve Police] to surround the 'Pakistani' neighbourhood of the city [ …. They] firmly believed that it was the people of that neighbourhood who unfailingly started every riot" (95).

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In this article I shall offer a predominantly spatial reading of Rai's novel. I would like to suggest that sectarian violence on the Indian subcontinent serves to "communalize" urban space – framing and reframing the boundaries between communities, establishing distinct ethno-religious enclaves, and attaching new meanings to public and private space. I shall also explore the adverse impact this reconfiguration of space has on the status and disposition of minorities, alienating them from their environment and inducing in them a profound sense of displacement or "unbelonging". In order to clarify this process, I shall invoke the concept of the architectural uncanny – Anthony Vidler's term for the feelings of "estrangement, alienation, exile, and homelessness" (ix) to which modern architecture gives rise. In this instance, however, I shall use it to describe the way in which communal violence defamiliarizes the Indian city, and in so doing transforms minority communities into symbolic foreigners or "virtual" refugees, permanently estranged from the urban space they occupy.

When it was first published in 1988, *Curfew in the City* provoked a particularly hostile reception from the Hindu right. Ashok Singhal, the leader of the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP), condemned it for being "anti-Hindu" (Rai, "Afterword" 113) in its portrayal of communal bias within the Allahabad police force. What the VHP perhaps found most threatening was the fact that Rai is himself a senior police officer and the novel was based on his personal experience as Superintendent of Police during the Allahabad riots. As well as calling for *Curfew in the City* to be banned, then, and threatening to torch any cinema screening a proposed film adaptation, Singhal demanded that Rai resign from government service. Undeterred, Rai has gone on to publish widely on the role of the police during episodes of communal violence and is currently Additional Director-General of Police (Railways) in Allahabad. In 1999 he wrote an article pointing out that "[e]ven in riots where the number of Muslims killed was *many times* more than the Hindus, it was they who were mainly arrested, most searches were conducted in their houses, and curfew imposed in a harsher manner in their localities" ("Handling Communal Riots" 41). And following the Gujarat massacres in 2002 he published an open letter criticizing the "incompetence,

inactivity and negligence" of the Gujarat state police. "Not only," he wrote, "were the police unsuccessful in containing the violence [ … ] but, it seemed, in many places policemen were actively encouraging the rioters" ("Open Letter" 211). As these interventions suggest, Rai represents a valuable dissenting voice within the apparatus of the Indian state, offering through his writings an immanent critique of its often repressive and discriminatory practices during communal "disturbances". In what follows, however, I shall be restricting my analysis to *Curfew in the City* – to date his sole fictional attempt to explore this contentious subject.

## II

After the Hindu–Muslim riots of 1931 in Kanpur (Uttar Pradesh), a Congress Party report noted that "whole masses of population had shifted their quarters, and Hindu and Muslim areas had become well-demarcated and well-defined from each side. The mixed areas had suffered the most and had practically ceased to exist" (qtd in Freitag 248). This division of urban space into sectarian enclaves is one of the more salient features of communal violence on the subcontinent. During their investigation into the impact of the 1992–93 riots in the Dharavi district of Mumbai, for instance, Deepak Mehta and Roma Chatterji encountered numerous examples of urban space which had been "excised of neutrality" (215) as a result of the conflict. Throughout their interviews we find "repeated references to particular spots functioning as the India–Pakistan border [and] particular neighbourhoods being named as foreign". One of their Muslim informants "identifies a local drain in his area as the India–Pakistan border", while another shows them "a wall that divides a Muslim neighbourhood from a Hindu one and calls this the Kashmir border" (212). Such acts of naming, Mehta and Chatterji conclude, "carve out boundaries and reterritorialize communities so that Dharavi is increasingly torn between polar collectives, whose mark of identity is their difference and opposition to each other" (228).

A similar "communalization" of urban space occurs in *Curfew in the City*. As soon as the curfew is declared, Rai writes, "a certain part of the city [is] termed 'Pakistan', and the people living there [ … ] declared 'Pakistanis'. That was the area between Johnsonganj and Atala and between Khuldabad and Mutthiganj" (*Curfew* 31). Indeed, the very division of the novel into chapters which alternate between the foreground of the family's incarceration and the background of the events taking place outside the house replicates this division of urban space, partitioning the narrative, like the city itself, into Hindu and Muslim zones. And the constantly expanding and contracting parameters of the narrative also serve to emphasize the disparities inherent in this communalization of space. As C.M. Naim points out in his introduction to the novel, the chapters concerning Sayeeda and her family are "claustrophobic in effect in being confined to [the family's] one-room house", while those set elsewhere in the city are "spatially more open and varied" (11).

Another boundary that communal violence reinforces is that which separates the interior from the exterior, private space from public. During a riot, the outside world becomes suffused with danger, a place of smouldering bodies and ominous silences. Only by retreating into private space and clearly demarcating these interior/exterior boundaries is it possible to gain some measure of protection from the insecurities of the street. In *Curfew in the City* the prohibitions surrounding public space are made explicit from the outset. The rioting begins at around 1.30 in the afternoon, and within "fifteen minutes, G.T. Road, from the vegetable market of Khuldabad to the Bahdurganj neighbourhood, had become almost empty" (17). Having experienced riots previously, the locals "[do not] need to be told what to do. Their first task was to quickly pull the store shutters down; then dropping all else, they were to

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flee home through alleys and by-lanes" (17–18). By three o'clock that same afternoon, "people had resigned themselves to huddling inside their homes. Outside, in the streets, there was only fear – and the police – and torrents of rain bringing relief from August's wretched heat" (18).

Once a particular part of the city comes to be seen as "foreign", however, the authorities are inclined to believe that "it was the people of that neighbourhood who unfailingly started every riot" (95); and so although at first the curfew is "equally felt in all parts of the city", it soon becomes "less effective in the neighbourhoods which [are] not deemed 'Pakistani'" (37). In practical terms, this means that while the Muslims are confined to their houses, the Hindus are merely kept off the main thoroughfares: "The curfew was fully imposed on the 'Pakistani' part of the city. Some streets went right between Muslim and Hindu neighbourhoods. Life came to a standstill on the Muslim side, while on the Hindu side it merely slowed down" (31–32). Such disparities are both a direct consequence of the ethno-religious division of cities and also a way of reinforcing and reifying these boundaries. In other words, the prejudice of the state creates its own justification, legitimizing itself by rendering hitherto imputed differences empirically verifiable. Because of these disparities, for instance, "[l]ife would go on merrily in the markets of Katra, Kydaganj and Civil Lines", while in the Muslim neighbourhoods a "fearful desolation" prevails. Here, the people are forced to "wait for the few precious hours when the curfew [will] be lifted and they [can …] pour out into the streets and experience some relief from their confinement" (31).

Although such discrimination is usually tacit, after another episode of rioting in Allahabad in 1986 a senior police officer in the Provincial Armed Constabulary of Uttar Pradesh admitted to Ashish Banerjee that the PAC "shared all the prejudices which were commonly prevalent in society". He also said that "while imposing curfew the police tended to be lenient with the Hindus and inordinately strict with the Muslims", a situation he described as one of "comparative curfew" (Banerjee 63). This complicity between the PAC and the majority Hindu community is repeatedly foregrounded in Rai's novel. "The Hindus and the police are like brothers", sings a group of local children at one point. "Where did these *katua* [circumcized] people come from?" (43). And as Gyanendra Pandey has pointed out, such institutional prejudice was also a notable feature of the Partition violence of 1947. "Contemporary reports on Delhi", he writes,

> make it clear [ … ] that Hindus and Sikhs were never restricted in their movements to quite the same extent as Muslims, even during curfews and in the worst affected areas. Lamentably, the practice has continued over much of northern India into recent years. (131)[2]

For Rai, these disparities have a direct impact on the ways in which different communities inhabit and relate to public space. Sayeeda, for example, often uses an empty plot of land not far from her house as an open-air toilet. As a young girl living in a village, she had grown accustomed to rising at dawn and walking out into the fields for this purpose; and although she now lives in a building with a latrine, she finds it too nauseating to use. So every morning she gets up before daybreak and makes her way over to "squat in the corner of that empty plot" (52), thereby escaping the "miasmic air" and "steaming heat" (53) of the interior. Once the rioting begins, however, she is prevented from using this area as a toilet, and as a consequence her public space, her external world, shrinks to the size of a latrine, "six feet by three" and with a roof "so low that it was impossible to stand in it" (51). Her family is also consigned to "a stinking hell", and here too we are given the precise dimensions of their internment: "Ten persons were confined to a space defined by a room thirteen by eight feet, and a verandah eight by five feet" (49). But as Rai emphasizes, Allahabad is

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a place of comparative curfews, and elsewhere things are quite different. In another part of the city the residents had "remained shut up in their homes only the first few hours; then they unlocked their doors, threw open their windows, and started looking around to see what was going on" (37). This particular lane is located in a "dense neighbourhood of closely built homes, except for a small expanse in the middle which lay empty". Over time, this empty plot had become the "neighbourhood's garbage lot; also, for years, women of the neighbourhood, in moments of collective joy or sorrow, would gather there and talk". And this is exactly what they do on the first night of rioting. Despite the curfew, despite the dangers associated with being outdoors, they gather together in that "open space" to discuss the violence and await the return of their husbands and children. This lane, Rai tells us, is "almost identical to another not too far away in which the Muslims lived": both have overflowing gutters, both are "filthy, poverty-ridden, and stinking" (38). But because this is a lane of Hindus, "the curfew did not make its residents absolute prisoners in their homes – it merely restricted them to their lane" (39).

Significantly, within the lane itself, there is an even more striking example of comparative curfews. Although most of its Hindu inhabitants pass the first night of rioting "scattered in small groups on stoops and terraces [ … ] confident that they were entirely safe where they were" (44–45), one family bolts their front door, and piles against it "all the planks and charpoys they [can] find" (46). This is the family of Yusuf, the Muslim tailor, whose brothers had emigrated to Pakistan in 1947. Every time there is a riot, he resolves to move to a safer location, but for some reason he never quite manages to do so. "The riot would make only one change in his family's life: they would all become prisoners in their home. They would seal up the house from inside, piling planks and charpoys against the front door, and themselves huddle in the rooms – dead silent" (45). One of the distinguishing features of Yusuf's house is the unusual height of its parapet walls, which he has "raised out of concern for his six daughters and the frequent riots" (46). These precautions reflect the fear that grips his family during episodes of communal violence, the "unimaginable terror" (47) that forces them to erect such barricades as protection against their neighbours. But Yusuf's reaction also suggests that comparative curfews of this kind are not always a result of state intervention or institutional prejudice. Although the district in which he lives remains largely unaffected by the curfew, Yusuf nevertheless seeks refuge behind bolted doors and high walls, retreating into an atmosphere of "terror and silence" (46) that isolates him from his Hindu neighbours. Of course, the reason he does so is precisely because of his Hindu neighbours and the district in which he lives. For this is a "curfew" that has been imposed not to suppress the violence on the streets, nor in response to it; rather, it is a direct and deliberate product of the violence itself – of the immolations, the rapes, the lynchings and stabbings. And that, I shall argue, is to a large degree the point of such atrocities: to instil in the other a fear of the exterior, a fear of leaving the confines of the home and entering a public space that is so fraught with danger and hostility.

## III

When discussing the violence of 1992–93 with their local informants in Dharavi, Deepak Mehta and Roma Chatterji were forced to negotiate various strategies of evasion and self-censorship: "circumlocutions and slips, the shift from first person to third person, an inability to name perpetrators". These strategies were particularly evident in the so-called "walking stories" – interviews that were conducted while walking through the streets of the district. "Public spaces, especially roads, make one visible to the other. The danger of being overheard, of having words misinterpreted and returning as accusations, all contribute to a sense

of foreboding” (225). What is significant here is that as a result of communal violence the world beyond the boundaries of the home takes on an atmosphere of pervasive malevolence – what Rai refers to as “a special aura of terror” (*Curfew* 20). For one informant, a Muslim woman living in a district dominated by Hindus, “the spatial order of her neighbourhood organizes a series of prohibitions [ … ] and she is afraid to share the same public space” (Mehta and Chatterji 224).

A similar kind of agoraphobic fear resonates throughout *Curfew in the City*, and it is particularly pronounced among the Muslim characters.[3] At the beginning of the novel, when the curfew is first announced, Sayeeda is out buying medicine for her daughter. Suddenly “[s]tore shutters were being pulled down helter-skelter, and their noise filled the air with a fear that was palpable [ … ] clusters of people were fleeing and pushing others toward the Chowk from the Nakkhas” (32–33). Feeling “the terror rise in her” (34), she plunges into the “labyrinthine lanes” (33) of Allahabad’s red-light district, Mirganj. In contrast to the main street, however, Mirganj is “deathly silent”; the “spectators and pleasure-seekers who used to crowd the lanes” (33) have disappeared, leaving her to wander through the empty passages and unsettling perspectives of a de Chirico painting. This sudden silence and emptiness is far more terrifying than the chaos of the main street, for it inspires in her a fear of conspicuousness, a fear of being, as Mehta and Chatterji put it, “visible to the other” (225). Elsewhere in the city, an unnamed girl experiences a similar “terror of desolate lanes” (Rai, *Curfew* 36) as she is returning home from school. “At first she was part of a crowd, then suddenly, as if by magic, the crowd vanished, and the girl found herself in a lane that looked utterly desolate and strange. [ … ] She began to shiver in terror” (65). Here, too, the cause of her fear is the sudden conspicuousness of being alone in an empty street – but in this case, tragically, the “eyes peering out” (65) at her belong to a group of men who are about to transform her life into “an inescapable labyrinth of nightmares” (66).

So far I have been exploring the impact of communal violence on urban space, and on the status and disposition of the minorities inhabiting that space. Because of the “aura of terror” which attaches to public space at such times, the members of minority communities are forced to retreat indoors, to seek refuge within the confines of the home. But what is the purpose of instilling this fear in the other? What is the point of keeping them off the streets? In what follows, I shall argue that violence of this sort is designed to impose an overwhelming sense of estrangement on minorities, to alienate them from their surroundings and thus induce in them a sense of displacement or “unbelonging”. And through the same process of symbolic inflation that sees wire fences representing the Line of Control between the two Kashmirs, this localized form of estrangement ultimately translates into an estrangement from the nation itself. In short, as a consequence of sectarian violence, entire communities are transformed into symbolic foreigners or “virtual” refugees, with little or no claim to the (national) space they occupy.

## IV

Walking through the streets of Dharavi, Mehta and Chatterji see “a bustle of activity, people engaged in daily chores, populated dwellings, shops selling their wares: everything points to the absence of violence”. But for their informants, those who experienced the 1992–93 riots, these scenes represent “an ensemble of past events and future possibilities”. Certain street corners, public squares or alleyways become coded signifiers of past massacres – marking those places “where people fought, killed, or sought refuge” (207) – as well as ominous auguries of future violence. “It is almost as if walking is an act of remembrance”

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(208), Mehta and Chatterji comment at one point, but it is also an act that reinforces the anxieties of the present and the insecurities of the future. Put simply, as a result of communal violence public space becomes a hostile and unfamiliar terrain for minorities. It disarranges what Anthony Vidler has described as "the complex mental map of significance by which the city might be recognized as 'home', as something not foreign, and as constituting a [ … ] moral and protected environment for actual daily life" (177). Even familiar structures and sites are invested with a range of "unfamiliar" meanings. An empty building becomes a place where a Sikh and his three sons were doused in kerosene and set alight, while a particular cul-de-sac is forever associated with the gang-rape of a Muslim woman by a group of her neighbours.[4] Such "markers", I would like to suggest, serve to transform the familiar into the foreign, the benign into the threatening, and thus bring about a deleterious form of displacement-in-dwelling. As James Clifford points out, displacement does not always require movement; it can also "involve forces that pass powerfully *through* – television, radio, tourists, commodities, armies" ("Traveling Cultures" 28).[5] And to this list I would add that most powerful of displacing forces, the communal riot.

At various junctures throughout *Curfew in the City* the Muslim characters experience just this kind of displacement-in-dwelling. As Sayeeda flees home on the first day of the riot, for instance, the familiar streets are transformed into something entirely foreign to her. The main street is so full of "ekkas, rickshas, bicycles and cars" that it comes to resemble "a narrow lane"; the fruit market is deserted ("the pushcarts that usually crowded [it] were all gone [ … ] mangos, apples and oranges [ … ] lay scattered in the dirt"); and even Mirganj, the red-light district, is "deathly silent" (33). Disorientated by these transformations, she finds herself lost in Mirganj, and only after some time spent wandering through its "unfamiliar alleys" does she locate her own. "It, too, was totally deserted. [ … ] The doors were tightly shut; so were all the windows. Such silence. Such desolation. Sayeeda had never experienced anything like it. *She was scared she may not recognise her home*" (35, my emphasis). Later in the novel, her father-in-law feels a similar sense of estrangement when he ventures outside:

> Other nights, that lane rattled with noises; tonight it was dead silent. The endless line of charpoys was nowhere to be seen. It was the same narrow lane where on other nights you couldn't walk without bumping into something or someone; but now it felt like an open street.

Although "it was the old man's familiar world", that night for some reason "it was different" (72). And then, of course, there is the unnamed girl who, "confused and frightened" by the chaos of the main street, stumbles into a lane that looks "utterly desolate and strange". She had "in fact passed through that lane endless times", the narrator tells us, but in the context of the riot it suddenly appears "totally unfamiliar" (65).

As a result of communal conflict, Allahabad's topography invokes in these characters a sensation that Anthony Vidler has referred to as the architectural uncanny – the "disquieting slippage" that occurs in a modern city "between what seems homely and what is definitively unhomely" (ix–x). According to Vidler, the architectural uncanny emerges as a "frame of reference that confronts the desire for a home and the struggle for domestic security with its apparent opposite, intellectual and actual homelessness" (12).[6] At the formal or physical level, to offer just three examples, this unsettling effect may be achieved by creating "an aesthetic of calculated disequilibrium" (xii), by offering a "screened trompe l'oeil of simulated space" (3), or by disrupting the "anthropomorphic analogy" (70) of classical architecture. However, Vidler is also careful to stress the fact that the architectural uncanny involves a "mingling" of the physical and the psychological:

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> If actual buildings or spaces are interpreted through this lens, it is not because they themselves possess uncanny properties, but rather because they act, historically or culturally, as representations of estrangement. If there is a single premise to be derived from the study of the uncanny in modern culture, it is that there is no such thing as an uncanny architecture, but simply architecture that, from time to time, is invested with uncanny qualities. (11–12)

And it is here, at the intersection of "the psyche and the dwelling, the body and the house, the individual and the metropolis" (x), that the concept of the architectural uncanny becomes particularly useful for our purposes.

Confronted by the unfamiliar aspects of hitherto familiar places, the Muslim characters in *Curfew in the City* struggle to recognize an urban landscape that has been divested of all the features they have come to associate with "home" and belonging. They too experience the "disquieting slippage" of the familiar turned foreign, of the secure invested with danger, as the "sudden silence and [their] own fear [fill] the lanes with some uncanny mystery" (34). The deserted fruit market, the "unfamiliar alleys" of the red-light district, the by-lane that appears "utterly desolate and strange" – all of these give rise to a feeling of the uncanny. However, as Vidler observes, the uncanny is not simply a response to external physical stimuli but also involves a complex psychological process by which a certain structure or site is invested with uncanny qualities. The uncanny is not "a property of the space itself" (11), in other words, but a way of seeing or relating to that space. In Rai's novel, it is communal violence (itself a project of "calculated disequilibrium") that initiates this process, forcing the minority characters to read their defamiliarized surroundings as threatening or dangerous. And it is the recognition of this threat to the self, encoded within the "unfamiliar" alleys and empty squares, that ultimately generates the sense of the uncanny in the narrative. As Yolanda Gampel writes with reference to the Holocaust:

> This sensation of the *unheimlich* or uncanny corresponds to an emotional state in which an individual experiences terror when facing an object or a situation that turns what is known and familiar upside down. [ … ] An object becomes *unheimlich* when it contains some characteristics of the familiar object, but with a twist that is threatening. Feeling uncanny is a special form of anxiety, a warning sent by the ego facing a situation that threatens it. (50–51)[7]

Communal violence thus strips minorities of the condition of belonging, turning them into strangers in their own places of origin and/or residence. By inspiring what Clifford describes as "the 'outsider's' exposed terror [ … ] of police, lynch mob, and pogrom" ("Diasporas" 263), it serves to alienate them from the urban space they occupy. The ultimate purpose of such violence, then, is to transform the members of specific communities into refugees, surrogate or otherwise. In some cases minorities are quite literally displaced, while in others they are condemned to a kind of static estrangement, becoming "virtual" refugees in their own homes and cities. This latter state, one I have referred to as displacement-in-dwelling, deprives minorities of a stable sense of belonging – undermining their attachment to place, defamiliarizing their habitual surroundings, and forcing them to inhabit, psychologically, "the perilous territory of not-belonging" (Said 177). As I have suggested, this state of estrangement is perpetuated through daily encounters with topographical signifiers of past violence, the mnemonic presence of structures and sites that testify to the "foreignness" and vulnerability of minority communities: street corners, public squares, alleyways, all surrounded by an invisible "aura of terror" (Rai, *Curfew* 20).

Given this enduring legacy, it is perhaps significant that Rai should refrain from narrating the aftermath of the riot he describes, for the recursive nature of post-1947 communal

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violence, its cyclic trajectory, its constant reiteration, forecloses the possibility of a "satisfactory" narrative resolution.[8] In fact, everything about the narrative suggests a state of eternal recurrence and déjà vu: "The curfew came as no surprise. At least that part of the city where a curfew was declared every other year or so had been readying itself [ … ] the entire preceding week" (17). Or: "This riot, which occurred in the last week of August, had already been rehearsed in June; consequently people didn't need to be told what to do" (17). Or elsewhere: "A couple of times every year, the people of the rest of the city were bound to declare the people of [the Muslim] part to be 'Pakistanis'. [ … ] It happened this time too" (31). In short, nothing changes; the novel draws to a close with the curfew still in place, the PAC still patrolling the streets, and Sayeeda's family preparing to bury her infant daughter. By withholding a sense of adequate closure, Rai seems to be suggesting that there is simply no closure to be had. The family will go on living in their "thirteen by eight feet" (49) house with its nauseating latrine; they will remain confined to the "Pakistani" quarter of Allahabad, subject to "comparative curfews" and invasive police searches; and they will continue to suffer a sense of displacement-in-dwelling, surrounded on all sides by traumatic *lieux de mémoire* – by those places "where people fought, killed, or sought refuge" (Mehta and Chatterji 207). In this way, communal violence on the Indian subcontinent reshapes cities and rearranges lives, transforming wire fences into the Line of Control and innocuous street corners into places of perpetual mourning.

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## Notes

1. One of the most important festivals in the Islamic calendar, Eid el Fitr marks the end of Ramadan, the holy month of fasting.
2. Of course, depending on the demographics, such partiality can cut both ways. During the 1947 riots in Lahore, G.D. Khosla tells us, the "curfew was seen to work solely for the benefit of the Muslims", who were able to "move about [the city] freely" (115).
3. It is worth noting that the term "agoraphobia" was first used in 1872 to describe "the impossibility of walking through certain streets or squares, or [the] possibility of doing so only with resultant dread or anxiety" – an anxiety that was "much increased at those hours where the particular streets dreaded were deserted and the shops closed" (C. Westphal, "Die Agoraphobie", qtd. in Snaith 673).
4. The first example is taken from Veena Das's account of the 1984 anti-Sikh pogrom in Delhi (347); the second comes from a Citizens' Initiative report on the 2002 Gujarat massacres (Naqvi et al. 225).
5. I have adapted the term "displacement-in-dwelling" from a phrase Clifford employs in this essay to describe "specific histories, tactics, everyday practices of dwelling *and* traveling: traveling-in-dwelling, dwelling-in-traveling" (36).
6. Vidler's formulation is, of course, informed by Freud's seminal essay "The Uncanny" (1919), in which he writes that the "uncanny element is actually nothing new or strange, but something that was long familiar to the psyche and was estranged from it only through being repressed" (148). In the original German, Freud uses the term *unheimlich*, his translator notes, "of which the nearest semantic equivalents in English are 'uncanny' and 'eerie', but which etymologically corresponds to 'unhomely'" (124).
7. For more on the uncanny as an affective response to social violence and disorder, see Ato Quayson's *Aesthetic Nervousness*. Here, Quayson employs the term "systemic uncanny" to describe "the process by which the chaos of fraught sociopolitical processes are translated into the negative affects of anxiety, fear, and even horror in the consciousness of individuals" (117).
8. Significantly, Freud also identifies involuntary repetition – "the dominance of a *compulsion to repeat*" (145) – as a characteristic feature of the uncanny experience.

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