

The Terrorist and his Jailor: The Conundrum of Friendship and Intimacy

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Through the framework of “friendship” defined by Judith Butler, Leela Gandhi, and Vanessa Smith, this essay tracks the relationship between Trailokya Nath Chakrabarty, a Bengali revolutionary terrorist who spent three decades in British jails in colonial India and Francis Lowman, a police officer who was responsible for his imprisonment. Informed by Chakrabarty’s autobiography, the essay shows that terrorism and intimacy were closely linked. Even though the revolutionary terrorist and jailor opposed one another in violent ways, these relationships were grounded in mutual recognition and built on what (following Butler) is called the “fundamental sociality of colonialism.”

Keywords: Britain, India, terrorism, intimacy, friendship.

Introduction

In 1944–45, during his final stint as a political prisoner in Dum-Dum, a British jail in Bengal, Trailokya Nath Chakrabarty drafted his autobiography about his career as a revolutionary terrorist. He had long been a member of the Anushilan Samiti, a secret society that planned to overthrow British rule in India. Arrested and found guilty of a conspiracy to bring down the government by planning acts of political violence, he had spent nearly a decade in the Cellular Jail on the Andaman Islands and subsequently two decades in a series of local prisons and detention camps. Trailokya’s own private life of empire, which had long been lived underground, became public with the publication of his autobiography, *Jele Tris Bachar*, or *Thirty Years in Jail*.¹ He revealed how he and his group participated in an anticolonial movement that had planned acts of political violence against the colonial government from the 1910s through the 1930s. These acts included assassinating colonial officials, bombing colonial sites and institutions, and committing armed robberies to raise funds for the group’s activities.

The autobiography, which was written in Bengali, appeared in print in 1946, just as India was in the process of gaining independence from Britain. Produced at a

historical moment that Bill Sewell might call “eventful,” India entered the postcolonial age and hundreds of revolutionary terrorists who had been held for their political activities were released from jails and detention camps.² Trailokya’s autobiography was one among many accounts written by ex-detainees and political prisoners between the 1920s and late 1940s.³ These accounts used the vehicle of the life story in order to explain the birth of a new nation. As Javed Majeed has argued, the autobiographies of South Asian nationalist thinkers were more than a text of selfhood; they animated a collective identity, one in which the moral choices of particular individuals were intended to serve as a form of aspiration for the nation.⁴ There was a surge of autobiographies and memoirs by well-known Indian leaders such as Jawaharlal Nehru, Mohandas Gandhi, Subhas Chandra Bose, and even a figure identified only as “unknown” as India transitioned from colonialism to self-governance.⁵ For radicals and militants in India, autobiographies made sense of the violence that had earlier been directed against the state and now had to be directed toward building a new political formation. A relative unknown internationally, the autobiography by Trailokya showed how individuals were generating new forms of affect and attachment to the postcolonial legacy of terrorism and the emergent nation.

In contrast to the autobiographies written by well-known leaders and less famous revolutionary terrorists who had been living underground, Trailokya’s autobiography is unusual because he describes one of his British jailors in the text, a jailor who was eventually assassinated for his part in policing the revolutionary terrorist movement in Bengal. This essay follows Trailokya’s relationship with Francis J. Lowman, a member of the Indian Police Service who eventually became the inspector general of police in Dacca, which was the largest city of eastern Bengal and the city where many revolutionary terrorists were radicalized and recruited. Frank Lowman, as he was known, was one of the first young men to be hired by the newly expanded Indian Police Service of the 1910s that aided the government’s intelligence collection as they combatted the group of men who had been identified as terrorists. Between the 1910s and 1930, Trailokya came into repeated contact with Lowman in detention camps, jails, and prisons across British India, places that were highly structured by the hierarchies of colonial racial logics yet strangely intimate in their homosociality. The two men developed a relationship fraught with risk as well as intimacy; Lowman’s official position gave him oversight over the conditions of Trailokya’s imprisonment as revolutionary groups targeted Lowman for assassination. These brief encounters between a terrorist and a jailor appear unremarkable in a larger text about the career of a revolutionary terrorist, but I want to draw close attention to these moments as a way of thinking about intimacy, affect, and emotion in studies of political violence.⁶ This frame allows us to imagine how acts of political violence—often known as terrorism—depend on many levels of intimate knowledge. While the terrorist and the jailor are often seen as being on opposing sides of the colonial divide, defined by a mutual antagonism against each other, this essay argues that terrorists and jailors frequently came together in the spaces of detention in late colonial India to achieve an uneasy state of sociality, not quite friendship but a form of mutual

recognition based on the danger one could cause the other. In conjugating colonial studies with scholarship on the history of emotions, I rely on what William Reddy has called an “emotional regime” to show how emotions and feelings were managed and expressed, regulated by particular emotional norms that were particular to a historical moment and context in which colonial governance gave way to post-colonial nationhood.⁷ Writing about violence—in this case, violent acts committed by state actors such as jailors as well as by terrorists—was a structured act, one shaped by the exigencies of a long colonial occupation and its sudden end in the 1940s, when Trailokya found himself out of jail for the first time in several decades and facing a government made up of Indians.

The self-authored text enabled Trailokya to gain some measure of control over his life narrative, one that mapped the last decades of the British empire in India. Until then, most revolutionary terrorists were known through police reports and newspaper accounts generated by the colonial government; once they became autobiographers, they could speak more openly, but they were still constrained by a new set of norms in which talking about acts of political violence had to be carefully managed as a newly decolonized civic space took shape. As Trailokya navigated the violent and emotional events that had transpired as he traversed British India in a tour of its jails, his necessarily selective autobiography revealed details about his career as a revolutionary terrorist while remaining silent on acts of violence that he committed or even knew about.

This paper has three parts. In the first, I want to think through the terrorist and the jailor as a problematic in the larger relationship between colonizers and colonized. I begin by drawing from some models in contemporary scholarship in colonial studies, particularly rethinking intimacy through the frame of friendship. In the second part, I address the ways in which planning acts of political violence depended on intimate knowledge between the revolutionary terrorists and their targets. Finally, I end with a close reading of Trailokya’s autobiography through his encounters with Lowman.

Frameworks: colonial studies and the idea of “friendship”

The encounters between Trailokya and Lowman set the stage for thinking about what Ann Stoler has called the “tense and tender ties” of empire, intimate relationships between the colonizer and the colonized that generated (via Foucault) “‘dense transfer point [s]’ of power that generate... colonial inequities.”⁸ Stoler defines intimacy as a central fact of colonialism, where knowledge about the domestic habits of colonizers and colonized became crucial to managing the racial distinctions that were central to imperial hierarchies. Colonialism’s effects were intimately experienced in schools, bungalows, poorhouses, orphanages, carceral systems, and archives, where white, black, brown, and Asian bodies had to be carefully disciplined and educated out of desires that could harm normalizing bourgeois colonial state projects.⁹

Stoler’s engagements with postcolonial studies have been at the heart of colonial studies for several decades; while Edward Said imagined Manichean opposites

between the West and the Orient, Stoler (along with her collaborator, Fred Cooper) has seen a more mutually constitutive relationship between metropole and colony. In Stoler's work, colonial regimes generated racial, gender, and class hierarchies. Leela Gandhi and Vanessa Smith, on the other hand, have recast the idea of intimacy to argue that some colonial encounters produced radical possibilities that destabilized imperial hierarchies. Both Gandhi and Smith have relied on the rubric of "friendship" in order to reframe colonial encounters and show the ways in which friendship enabled exchange and even solidarity. Gandhi's historical example rests on encounters at the turn of the nineteenth century in British India; Smith's focus is on late eighteenth-century encounters in the Pacific.¹⁰

Gandhi's analysis draws from a "politics of friendship," (via Derrida), as she focuses on the "narrative and historical scaffolding of multiple, secret, unacknowledged friendships," that troubled the bounded categories of oppressors and oppressed.¹¹ Gandhi presses for "minor narratives" that enable us to think of subjectivities beyond the binary of colonizers and colonized. Through a range of examples, she poses friendship as enabling a form of anti-colonial politics that allowed the emergence of decolonized subjectivities to unsettle the claims of power on which empires, nations, and governments rest. Vanessa Smith analyses the Pacific genealogy of the idea of friendship that emerges from eighteenth-century colonial contact between European explorers and Pacific Islanders. The word, *tayo*, which was used to greet Europeans when they landed on the shores of Tahiti, Palau, the Marquesas, and Hawaii marked friendship, an invitation to exchange gifts and engage in commerce. Through close analysis of crowds, performance, and the exchange of gifts, Smith shows that cultivating friendship became a way of mediating the unequal relations between Europeans and Pacific inhabitants.¹² For both Gandhi and Smith, friendship entailed risks: one subject will certainly transform the subjectivity of the other, but one subject may also erase the other's being.¹³ The idea of risk constituted a key site of engagement for terrorists and jailors, giving rise to particular structures for this emotional regime under colonialism.

The idea of friendship offers a way to move beyond the intractable nature of colonial subjectivity, where one is defined as either the colonizer or the colonized. To propose friendship as a way to study colonialism may seem counterintuitive, and particularly so in studying an encounter that was brought about by an underground campaign to bring down the colonial state through acts of violence. This type of reading departs from that offered by Frantz Fanon in his understanding of Algeria's war against France, because the rubric of friendship and the risks it required allows us to rethink how we can understand the experience of the colonized, and in particular, what kinds of emotions we permit colonized subjects to feel.¹⁴ If we agree that colonized subjects experienced the possibility of emotions, affect, and even friendship with Europeans, we can start to think of how to decolonize the mind of the revolutionary terrorist, a figure who is almost always defined in opposition to the state and to civil norms. An analysis of a figure who lived under a colonial regime that he violently resisted is one way to make this encounter legible. To begin to make sense of

the relationship between the writer of an autobiography and his or her reader, I turn to an essay by Judith Butler titled, “Giving an Account of Oneself,” which analyses how the self is constituted when writing an autobiography.¹⁵

Butler offers some possibilities for understanding how an individual subject—an endangered figure in postcolonial studies—can come into being by engaging others through the act of autobiography. Butler’s goal is to comprehend how we can imagine a kind of mutual recognition resonant in the master-slave dialectic (in Hegel’s terms) or the friend-enemy distinction (in Carl Schmitt’s terms) that does not result in the dissolution or dominance of one subject over another.¹⁶ Although Butler does not draw from postcolonial theory or cite canonical figures such as Frantz Fanon, Albert Memmi, or Gayatri Spivak on the question of subjectivity, one could draw from their work to think through how mutual recognition and antagonism were constitutive of colonial encounters.¹⁷ Within the framework of writing and reading autobiographies, Butler (drawing from Emmanuel Levinas and Adriana Cavarero) notes that the reader’s recognition of the writer’s subjectivity is central to the project of writing an account of oneself. Through Cavarero, Butler writes, “one can only tell an autobiography, one can only reference an ‘I’ in relation to a ‘you’; without the ‘you,’ my own story becomes impossible.”¹⁸ The revolutionary autobiography is a particular form of individual expression that gives voice to a collective politics.¹⁹ The existence of “I” with “we” creates solidarity, while “they” is the opposition. Butler argues that the autobiography “is an account of myself, and it is an accounting to someone.” She continues, “there can be no account of myself that does not, to some extent, conform to norms that govern the humanly recognizable.”²⁰ By gesturing to the idea of “norms” for expressing one’s interior or emotional condition, Butler offers a possibility for thinking through the kind of emotional regime that emerged in a moment when revolutionary terrorists told the story of their careers.

In thinking through the idea of the autobiography as a form of accounting, my reading of Trailokya’s autobiography depends on how the reader weighs the violence that Trailokya was suspected of committing. In the relationship between the autobiographer and his/her reader, the risk of being misunderstood means that one’s selfhood is effaced or occluded by the Other. Yet, Butler argues, by thinking of autobiography as an account that is both addressed to someone and constitutes the self, it is critical to accept the proposition that “there is no wishing away our fundamental sociality.”²¹

Butler’s analysis suggests how mutual recognition between the Subject and the Other might be translated into the language of colonizer and colonized, particularly in her call to imagine how the existence of one subject does not dissolve the other, which echoes concerns voiced by Leela Gandhi and Vanessa Smith. For the terrorist and the jailor, mutual recognition was a requirement of the terrorist and the jailor, defined in the moment in which they met, which was often in the jail or detention camps, spaces in which the state’s dominance was clear and yet both were always under threat of further violence. While the act of mutual recognition did not entail a meeting of minds about future political formations, both in their multiplicity and in

individual moments, the encounters draw from what one might call the fundamental sociality of colonialism and the ways that the shared experience of colonialism generated many alternative forms of being.

The art of surveillance: from a terrorist's perspective

Terrorist acts depend on intimacy. For the terrorist, knowing the enemy—the state and its officials—was critical to identifying what kind of attack would most jar their security, so it was not so unusual or surprising that revolutionary terrorists in Bengal took to attacking British officials in the spaces that the British felt the most safe: the racecourse, the cricket or football pitch, or the club.²² In each of these cases, revolutionaries dressed up in European dress, showing their intimate knowledge of the more elite classes of India (some had even been schooled in Britain), and in a subversive turn, mimicked those they hoped to unseat as rulers.²³ As Kama Maclean has shown, the image of Bhagat Singh dressed in a suit and black hat became an important and popular symbol of militant nationalism precisely because he was able to blend in with a European crowd and evade police detection.²⁴

Nearly all of the assassinations or attempted assassinations that occurred from the 1920s onward were at close range, depending on intimate knowledge as well as physical proximity. Two young women, aged fifteen and sixteen, fired a shot at C. G. B. Stevens, the district magistrate of Tippera, when he admitted them to his office to discuss a swimming competition at a local school.²⁵ A young man who had just begun medical school walked into the Writers' Building in Calcutta and shot and killed the inspector general of prisons.²⁶ In an era when gun technology was not very sophisticated, and most revolutionary terrorists had little to no experience with revolvers, getting physically close to the target was crucial.

In order to target officials, advance teams worked out officials' habits so that an attack could be planned. Because the targets were Europeans who often travelled in the rarefied circles of the "white" parts of colonial cities and towns, stalking someone in a public place entailed behaving appropriately in the milieu of Europeans. Among the most important problem the revolutionary terrorists faced was the risk of misidentification: Englishmen were often indistinguishable to revolutionary terrorists, and there were frequent reports of mistaken identity. In 1926, a revolutionary group killed a European businessman in Dalhousie Square thinking he was Calcutta's Commissioner of Police Charles Tegart.²⁷

From a jailor's perspective, knowing the terrorist, knowing if and when he might strike, meant saving your own life and perhaps the lives of others. Jailors, in this context, might include a fairly wide swathe of the civil services in India, from those in the Intelligence Branch, the Indian Police Service, and the Jails department. From 1905, when the Intelligence Branch began to track sedition, officials conducted surveillance on a wide range of Indians, from members of political parties such as the Indian National Congress to those identified as radicals or extremists.²⁸ The Intelligence Bureau, which was based in Calcutta, then the capital city, focused its attention

on those they called “*bhadralok* dacoits,” which was roughly translated by the British as “gentlemanly terrorist.”²⁹ *Bhadralok* might be most easily translated into “respectable people,” to classify a group of people who were often higher caste status, university educated, and likely to be the populations from which the British imagined the leaders of Indian society would emerge.

The use of “gentlemanly” fit well with a British belief in a liberal mission to improve Indians so that they could join the enlightened world of civilized society. As Macaulay’s minute on India in 1835 expressed a wish for the future of Bengal, “We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern—a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect.”³⁰ This class of “interpreters” was an aspirational goal, those who could be cultivated and improved through English education and manners in order to help the British govern India. Through the Morley-Minto reforms of 1906, and the Montagu-Chelmsford reforms of 1919, the British opened up positions in the bureaucracy to educated and landed elites, whose facility in British comportment made them figures who could be trained into British norms of civility. When the men who had been chosen for an English education and for positions in the colonial bureaucracy became the “gentlemanly terrorists,” it alarmed British officials who had imagined an elite group who would collaborate with the British in governing India.

This category of the gentlemanly terrorist was productive for both sides: the term produced a particular kind of recognition between those charged with restraining terrorists and those busy plotting terrorist acts. For British officials tasked with containing the terrorist threat, there was a widespread recognition that these men had fallen astray of liberal political norms because, in spite of their educational attainments, they embraced political violence. As Edwin Montagu, secretary of state for India during the World War I, asked when discussing the prolonged detention without charge of those who were suspected of terrorist plots and conspiracies, “sooner or later there must be peace restored between the Government of India and these men.... Could they not be treated with courtesy and dignity as the honourable but dangerous enemies of Government?”³¹ The colonial government hatched various schemes to reform revolutionary terrorists when they entered the custody of the state. Among other things, they offered vocational training to make pottery, they allowed detainees of the elite classes to borrow unlimited numbers of books, magazines, and periodicals from the Imperial Library in Calcutta, and, finally, they introduced games.³² Based on the very British belief that physical exercise and team play could inculcate the right sorts of values, prison officials such as Frank Lowman promoted sports—cricket and football primarily—as a way of bringing prison wardens into friendlier contact with the inmates. When the British enacted legislation to constrain *bhadralok dacoits*, they targeted behaviours associated with this particular group. For instance, one district magistrate reported a crackdown on “young Hindus, between the ages of 12 and 25 or 30 reading in Government schools and colleges and sons of those Hindus who by virtue of sufficient education find themselves employed”

in government or European businesses. Such laws required this particular population of young men to carry identification cards, stay indoors between sunset and sunrise, keep away from “European areas,” and they also prohibited them from dressing like women or Muslims to evade police detection.³³ These schemes were based on a certain kind of mutual recognition, one in which behaviours of gentlemanly terrorists were targeted for the government’s reform and intervention. Revolutionary terrorist groups, meanwhile, developed skills that enabled them to recognize and imitate colonial officials so that they could achieve the level of intimacy necessary to enable acts of political violence.

Trailokya Nath Chakrabarty is in some ways a quintessential example of a gentlemanly terrorist. A Brahman born into a landed family in the area around Dacca in east Bengal, he descended from several generations of men who had served as clerks of officials in the lower rungs of the British administration in India. Trailokya’s family was considered *bhadralok*, yet he rebelled.

Thirty Years in Prison

With this long preamble, I want to turn to Trailokya’s autobiography, which was originally published in 1946 with the title, *Jele Triśa Bachara O Pāka Bhāratera Svādhīnatā Saṃgrāma* (*Thirty Years in Prison: India and Pakistan’s Freedom Campaign*). Significantly revised in 1963 when it was translated into English, it was given the subtitle *Sensational Confessions of a Revolutionary*. Given the moniker, *Maharaj*, which we could translate as Big Leader, or Big Boss, Trailokya was an important role model within the movement, although he had said very little publicly while he was underground or in jail.

Trailokya’s memoir is one of about a dozen autobiographies that appeared in the late 1940s, as India neared independence. The text follows the format of many autobiographies, beginning with where he was born, his early education, and the moment of his realization of a revolutionary consciousness. Many of the men and women who wrote these accounts had spent much of the 1930s and 1940s in colonial detention camps or jails. For all intents and purposes politically inactive during the final phases of the freedom struggle, when they wrote about themselves as “freedom fighters” and identified themselves as members of revolutionary groups, they revealed details that could not have been spoken of earlier.

Trailokya’s account focused largely on the networks within which he operated for much of his career. Writing on the cusp of a “free India,” he explained his involvement with some of the best-known figures of Anushilan Samiti, the revolutionary group to which he was attached. His underground network was largely a male group and he described social activities among the men in the movement: dining, debating, training for physical combat, learning how to handle bombs and guns. Another autobiographer, Nirad Chaudhuri, whose account appeared several years later, wrote about this movement as well, although he never joined any groups: he recalled that the revolutionary terrorist movement was quite active when he was in school in

the 1910s. He claimed it as a “queer world of revolutionary activities and police persecution.”³⁴ Invited to attend a banquet of about forty “schoolboys,” in which there was an “evident air of great cordiality,” Chaudhuri acknowledged that he later understood that he had attended an event to recruit young men to the revolutionary terrorist movement.³⁵

As in Chaudhuri’s account, male friendship was an important feature of the autobiographer’s subjectivity. In Trailokya’s account, he recounted befriending two of the most famous revolutionaries of Bengal. On a boat trip to Rangoon, Trailokya’s friendship with Subhas Chandra Bose, one of the most well-known nationalists of Bengal was consolidated. Even though Subhas was from a “well to do family,” by Trailokya’s account, he was a humble man, “suffering all miseries with a smiling face.”³⁶ When Trailokya sprained his knee playing tennis, Subhas washed the knee daily and applied poultices to keep the swelling down. These kinds of interactions, some quite physically intimate, are a recurring feature of Trailokya’s memoir. In another passage, Trailokya revealed that he met the famed leader of the Chittagong Armoury Raid, Surja Sen, when they stayed in a safe house for a night. They shared a cot, and Surja Sen slipped away before dawn to escape arrest. There is something suggestive here about the connections between male friendship and political solidarity, particularly given that many of these connections were forged when these men were either political prisoners or in hiding from the police. In an account that blends adventure with political purpose, we learn how Trailokya linked his life to the project of “an ideal society where everyone would have equal facilities of emancipating the human qualities ... but we understood that without political independence the full expression of humanity could not be possible.”³⁷

Trailokya had various run-ins with the law that he used to narrate his own cunning. These anecdotes focus on informers who were sent to find him or information about him, or local Indian police officials who were unable to arrest him. In one, he tells of sitting next to an informer on a park bench and persuading him that he was very sick and would leave behind two wives. The informer, a Bengali, chastised him for having two wives. In another, several policemen came to the dock in search of a well-known revolutionary who was known to be in hiding somewhere along the river; Trailokya, dressed as a boatman, saluted the police, who went away. These adventures are often told with a sense of humour, a joke between Trailokya and the reader about the absurdity of a high-born Brahman being taken for a boatman.

In this context, Trailokya’s sporadic references to Lowman stand out. Trailokya’s first meeting with Lowman occurred early in his career when he was just a teenager and was captured for being involved in the Dacca Conspiracy Case. The police could not find anyone to identify him and so he was released, though he remained under suspicion and police surveillance. He managed to evade arrest for several years as he actively recruited other revolutionary terrorists in north and west Bengal, but he knew that the police were seeking him. Eventually, while under treatment for his asthma at an ashram near Calcutta, he noticed a young man of his acquaintance, a Mr. Biswas. Because Biswas was a *kayasth*—a man of lower caste—and Trailokya a

Brahman, Biswas knelt down to show respect and touched his feet. Then Biswas announced that Trailokya was being arrested and took him to jail in Alipore, where Trailokya met Charles Tegart, later the commissioner of police in Calcutta, and a young Frank Lowman, who was Tegart's assistant.

Trailokya described his first encounter Lowman as follows: "He was overjoyed at my capture," and thanked Biswas profusely.³⁸ By Trailokya's account, Lowman subsequently grilled Trailokya about the key that he carried, in a question-and-answer period that left Lowman frustrated. As Trailokya recounted, "he roared in anger."³⁹ Nonetheless, Lowman noticed that Trailokya had few clothes, having been arrested wearing only a dhoti at the bathing ghat, so Lowman ordered that a shirt be purchased for him. The next day, an Indian officer in the jail told Trailokya that Lowman had spent money out of his own pocket. Trailokya's narration of this act of kindness recalls Derrida's words (via Leela Gandhi) about hospitality: "Such 'unconditional hospitality' Derrida suggests, rehearses an affective code, and on behalf of the master's household/host culture, a fantasy of surrender."⁴⁰ This vignette and several that follow gesture to Trailokya's impressions of Lowman's emotional availability, suggesting an emotional surrender that enabled Lowman to recognise those jailed under his supervision.

While in jail, Trailokya heard a story that Lowman had been on a nighttime raid several days before and had been confronted by Biren Chatterjee, another revolutionary. Trailokya noted that "Mr. Lowman's physical strength would be about eight times that of Biren," but because of Biren's training in the martial arts, something all members of Anushilan Samiti were known for, he had managed to break Lowman's wrist. Trailokya asked Lowman directly whether Biren's attack had any police repercussions once Biren was brought into the jail, to which Lowman replied that it was a "fair fight." A classic retelling of an encounter between a skinny revolutionary skilled in martial arts and a manly Englishman played out in this way: Trailokya reports that "Lowman spoke highly about Biren to me ... and of his courage and physical strength." Lowman noted that in England, fights were resolved with direct physical contact and then each party moved forward; in India, Lowman noted that "opponents try to hit each others' heads from behind." In other words, from Lowman's perspective (as told by Trailokya), Indians did not play fair. Trailokya retorted that Indians lacked trust in the idea of fair play because they did not have an independent government. In this illustrative anecdote, Trailokya's encounter with Lowman resituated the contest about "fair play" as a question of sovereignty and independence.⁴¹

Given the many years that figures such as Trailokya spent in jails and detention camps, matched by the many years in which figures such as Lowman became expert in managing populations under detention, Lowman's frustration, followed by acts of kindness might have emerged from a strategy to persuade Trailokya to be more forthcoming with information. In Chakrabarty's account, one can evince a grudging sense of respect, informality, and, at times, admiration. After this first meeting in 1914, Trailokya writes "Mr. Lowman had the capacity to mix with all shades of

people. Very frequently he used to come to have a chat with me. Of course he would always try to grasp any secret news from me that might come out during the conversation.”⁴² Lowman was proficient in Bengali, able to converse with the prisoners on their own terms, willing to play cards with the prisoners, or smoke cigarettes in the long and indeterminate hours of incarceration. Trailokya was eventually convicted for his involvement in the Barisal Conspiracy and sent to the Andaman jails for nearly a decade. Released as part of a general amnesty in 1919, he returned to revolutionary work.

Lowman’s and Chakrabarty’s next extended encounter came over a decade after their first meeting. Around 1925, Chakrabarty was arrested on suspicion of planning a conspiracy and sent from jail in Calcutta to Mandalay Jail in Burma. Lowman was part of the police escort accompanying the detainees for several days, and Chakrabarty recalled the journey was quite enjoyable. Joining him were other well-known political prisoners, including Subhas Chandra Bose, Satyendra Chandra Mitra, Surendra Mohan Ghosh, and Madan Mohan Bhowmick. This time, they were not convicts but rather state prisoners being held on suspicion of political crime. Thus, they were treated according to the protocols that had been set up by the government. They were not handcuffed, they were allowed to bring personal materials with them, and they were allowed to wear their own clothes. The party sailed from Diamond Harbour in Bengal to Rangoon. The men spent three days together, discussing politics, singing songs, walking on the deck of the ship. In what might have seemed like descriptions of a cruise, Trailokya wrote, “We were on ship for three days and had spent our time in great enjoyment.”⁴³ After depositing their charges in Mandalay, Lowman and the other police inspectors returned to Dacca.

Several years later, in 1927, the government began to discuss releasing political prisoners in advance of constitutional reforms. The continued incarceration of these political prisoners was proving to be costly and controversial, so government officials were sent to interview those who had been incarcerated for more than a year and might be eligible for release. Lowman returned to Rangoon, this time to ask Trailokya if he would be willing to publicly recant his commitments to political violence. In the passage that summarized this conversation, Trailokya demanded to know why he was still in detention, to which Lowman responded that Trailokya was suspected of planning violent activities. Trailokya denied the accusation and insisted that planning to commit violence was not a crime. He asked provocatively, “Do you think that if we had wished, could we not commit a few dacoities [acts of violent robbery] or murders?” Lowman informed Trailokya that his detention was meant to be “a precautionary measure.”⁴⁴

Lowman then asked Trailokya what he would recommend that the government do in order to quell the violence. Trailokya responded that if India were given its independence, anticolonial terrorist violence would stop. Lowman, in a logic that had long been used by colonial officials, responded that he was not confident that Indians would not turn on each other if the British left. In response, Trailokya insisted that the government issue him a formal apology for detaining him without a trial, pay him

financial compensation for his lost wages, and agree that unless there was a formal charge, he would not be detained again.⁴⁵ He was released from the jail in Mandalay and transferred to Calcutta, where he was put in village domicile, a form of detention that involved putting suspected terrorists in villages far from their networks but under a police inspector's surveillance. While there, Trailokya wrote a series of petitions to the government and he was eventually released from government detention at the end of 1928. By the end of 1929, Trailokya returned to Rangoon to follow the Burmese insurrection against the British; this visit raised police suspicions again, though he evaded the police and found his way to Chittagong in February 1930.⁴⁶

The next month, in March 1930, Mohandas K. Gandhi began the civil disobedience movement and people in the salt plains of Bengal became active in making salt to protest the government's tax on domestic salt. Several weeks later, on 18 April 1930, the Chittagong Armoury Raid, involving sixty revolutionary terrorists led by Surja Sen, put the city of Chittagong under a four-day siege.⁴⁷ Revolutionary terrorists who identified themselves as the Indian Republican Army managed to occupy major colonial sites: the European club, police armoury, and telephone and telegraph office. The raiders cut off all communications with officials in other parts of India, gathered arms, and attempted to terrorize the British while they enjoyed a Friday evening at their club. They had failed to take into account that it was Good Friday, and most Europeans had stayed at home so there were few present when the attack at the club began.⁴⁸ Protected by local villagers in the hills around Chittagong, Surja Sen was not arrested for almost a year.⁴⁹

Shortly after the raid, Trailokya and his friends were incarcerated under the Bengal Criminal Law Ordinance, which had been hastily passed by the government; as he recalled later, "the jails were filled up," with protestors who included those who had committed political crimes as well as followers of Gandhi's nonviolent movement.

That year—1930—was an unusually dramatic moment in anticolonial protests in India. In Bengal alone, the numbers of those imprisoned for political crimes soared to nearly 20,000. At this point in the memoir, Trailokya changes his narrative voice to the third person and notes in the passive voice, "Members of all revolutionary parties became very active ... the military were called into Bengal ... everybody was passing his days in anxiety and terror."⁵⁰ In Trailokya's list of political actions that occurred that year and the next was the assassination of N. S. Simpson, inspector general of prisons in Calcutta, as well as three successive district magistrates of Midnapore. At the end of this fairly impersonal and quick list of five deaths by assassination, Trailokya notes briefly that Lowman, then inspector general of the police, had been killed in Dacca by a medical student.

When I first encountered the moment in which Trailokya revealed his awareness about Lowman's death, I was struck by the juxtaposition between Trailokya's repeated and detailed recollections of his conversations with Lowman and the very brief mention of his assassination about two-thirds of the way through the autobiography. Lowman's death was part of a list. In this narrative form, Trailokya avoided any expression of how he felt about the death of someone with whom he

appeared to have developed some kind of grudging mutual respect and relationship, however fraught the latter was by the presumed divide between terrorists and jailors, colonized and colonizer. Moreover, Trailokya evaded how we (as readers) should feel about Lowman's death at the hands of a revolutionary terrorist. In trying to comprehend the kinds of violence that terrorists were accused of—alongside the moments of personal recognition that were produced by colonial encounters of terrorism—Lowman's death comes as a surprise in the text, one that is not anticipated in any of the vignettes that Trailokya reconstructed for the reader.

After the report of Lowman's death, he reappears several pages later, clearly much on the mind of this autobiographer. In a moment marked by emotional displacement, Trailokya does not talk about Lowman's death, but rather alludes to a sense of injustice that he shared with Lowman. Trailokya ended up spending the better part of the 1930s in and out of British detention camps, often incarcerated in the places that meted out the worst punishment to political prisoners. He spent time in Hijli, where there was a riot in which prisoners were injured, in Buxa, in Madras, and in Dacca. Throughout these episodes, Trailokya petitioned the government for recognition of the fact that, as someone under detention, he had particular rights. He went on hunger strike, he refused to ride the train in third class, he refused to sit when told. At some time around 1932, he recalled that jailors had been more fair-minded in the past. He took a break from the chronology and returned to a conversation he had with Lowman in 1914 in which Lowman admitted that Trailokya had been falsely accused by police officials. Trailokya reported that Lowman wrote, "I am on the lookout of reforming my department but good men are not available."⁵¹

This anecdote appears at a strange moment. Only a few pages before we have learned that Lowman was killed by a member of a revolutionary party and then we learn that Lowman had previously validated Trailokya's sense that police corruption was a common feature of colonial officials in India. Trailokya retrieved a memory about Lowman in which Lowman acknowledged that the British approach toward revolutionary terrorists required reform. This memory enacts the "fantasy of surrender" that Leela Gandhi describes in her account of friendship and colonialism. Lowman's concession to Trailokya about the nature of British rule, as told by Trailokya, suggests that Lowman's death had an impact on Trailokya, who mentioned him more than any other Englishman in his memoir.

One of Lowman's fellow police officers later recalled that "Lowman was well known for his liberal opinions and his sympathy with Indian aspirations, and his murder well illustrates the fact that these qualities were no protection against the terrorists."⁵² The police investigation later showed that Lowman, a career police officer, was killed by Benoy Bose, a medical student, who had been a member of Sree Sangha, a party that was organized from Dacca. The assassination occurred on August 29, 1930, as Lowman was leaving Dacca Hospital with his deputy, Hodson, who was wounded. The investigation reported that the target had been Hodson, not Lowman, in another case of misidentification.⁵³ Bose, the man involved in Lowman's assassination, escaped after the attack and committed another political

assassination several months later, on 8 December 1930, when he marched into the Writers' Building in central Calcutta and assassinated Inspector General of Police N. G. Simpson, before committing suicide at the scene.

In the original Bengali version of his autobiography, which Trailokya composed while in jail in Dum Dum in 1946, there is no admission that Trailokya participated in any revolutionary action. But in the English translation published in 1963, he added several chapters on *dacoities*, the procurement of bomb-making materials, plans for a new currency, and assassinations. In these chapters, he acknowledges his part in murders, bomb attacks, and armed robberies. He writes, "In India under alien rule I had to commit many dacoities, assassinations, thefts ... but all these were done as my duty with the object of achieving salvation of the motherland." He admitted that he had "committed assassinations but the departed souls along with their family members always had my good wishes and sympathy."⁵⁴ These admissions—the "sensational confessions of a revolutionary" as the subtitle advertised—were carefully structured by the exigencies of postcolonial nationhood, in which the narrative of committing violence to defend the putative nation had to be carefully presented as a compulsion for the "motherland."

Shaped by an emotional regime that was particular to India's independence and transition to postcoloniality, Trailokya's autobiography carefully navigated particular emotional norms in order to explain the violence that had brought about the end of colonial occupation. Even though autobiographies made revolutionary terrorists into modern individuated subjects, one of the recurring gaps in these accounts is how little they spoke of the violent acts they committed. In order for the nation to be reconstituted in the aftermath of colonial rule, political violence had to be explained away as a necessary sacrifice. By admitting his part in the political violence a decade and a half after India's independence, Trailokya reckoned with the postcolonial legacies of revolutionary terrorism, one in which his revelations about his secret life were important for the new nation. The memoir ends inconclusively, largely because, in Trailokya's view, the revolution that he was a part of had not materialized in the shape that he had hoped.

Conclusion

The relationship between Trailokya Nath Chakrabarty and Frank Lowman could have hardly been considered a friendship, in Leela Gandhi's terms, nor particularly intimate in Stoler's terms. But as a recurring feature of Trailokya's self-authored account, the relationship was built on the fundamental sociality of colonialism, which, in turn, was built on colonial violence. When revolutionary terrorists protested the state's violent occupation of India, British prison officials came into contact with those considered the most dangerous political prisoners. The recurring encounters between Trailokya, who was defined as a terrorist by the state, and his jailor, Frank Lowman, suggest the ways that a kind of mutual recognition, in Judith Butler's sense, emerged out of an antagonistic and violent relationship borne of

colonialism. In these encounters, moments of kindness (Lowman purchasing a shirt for Trailokya) are narrated in a series of conversations, or jailhouse interviews, in which Lowman seeks greater understanding of Trailokya's position. If we recall that Trailokya published his memoir in 1946, fifteen years after Lowman's assassination, Lowman's periodic appearances in Trailokya's memoir suggests one way in which Trailokya came to terms with the violence that undergirded the anticolonial movement of which he was a part. The only European to make a prominent appearance in this autobiography, Lowman is a surprisingly sympathetic (and oddly benign) figure for an agent of the state. Through the framework offered by Leela Gandhi and Vanessa Smith, he and Trailokya became friends as both reckoned with the risks generated by this encounter. By giving this account of himself through his encounters with his jailor, Trailokya reckoned with the double violence of colonial occupation and revolutionary terrorism, a position that Fanon, writing at the same time, would have recognized.⁵⁵ When Trailokya recounted that Lowman admitted the limits of colonial governance and expressed some understanding of the aims of revolutionary terrorists, Trailokya recast the spectre of colonial rule into something less stable and hegemonic than readers might have imagined. At an eventful moment, in which new emotions and affects were generated and produced by the possibility of a new nation, the revolutionary autobiography allowed readers to put violence in the past and to visualize how India might begin to decolonize itself of the violence wrought by colonialism.

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Notes

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- 1 Cakrabarti, *Jele Triśa Bachara*, and idem, *Thirty Years in Prison*.
- 2 Sewell, *Logics of History*, 225–70.
- 3 Ghosh, *Gentlemanly Terrorists*, chs. 2 and 6; Arnold, “The Self and the Cell: Indian Prison Narratives as Life Histories”; and Wolfers, “Born Like Krishna in the Prison-House.”

- 4 Majeed, *Autobiography, Travel and Postnational Identity*, 2–3; and Boehmer, *Stories of Women*, ch. 4.
- 5 Bose, *Indian Struggle, 1920–1942*; Nehru, *Toward Freedom*; Gandhi, *My Experiments with Truth*; and Chaudhuri, *Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*.
- 6 Following Fanon's understanding of the policeman or soldier with the colonized, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 38.
- 7 Plamper, "The History of Emotions," 243.
- 8 Stoler, ed., *Haunted by Empire*, 24.
- 9 Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*, and idem, *Along the Archival Grain*.
- 10 Gandhi, *Affective Communities*; and Vanessa Smith, *Intimate Strangers*.
- 11 Gandhi, *Affective Communities*, 10.
- 12 Smith, *Intimate Strangers*, 62.
- 13 Gandhi, *Affective Communities*, 29.
- 14 Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*
- 15 Butler, "Giving an Account of Oneself."
- 16 Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), first published in 1927.
- 17 Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*; Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*; and Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?"
- 18 Butler, "Giving an Account," 24.
- 19 Boehmer, *Stories of Women*, ch. 4.
- 20 Butler, "Giving an Account," 26.
- 21 *Ibid.*, 25.
- 22 National Archives of India (hereafter NAI), Home Political, File 45/XI of 1934, "Attack on cricket match at Chittagong on 7 January 1934 and special tribunal convened to convict the accused, Harendra Lal Chakrabarty and Krishna Kumar Choudhury"; NAI, Home Political File 45/26 of 1934, "Report regarding the attempt on the life of Governor of Bengal at the Lebong Races, Darjeeling on 8 May 1934 and special tribunal to try the accused"; and Africa, Pacific, and Asian Collections, British Library (hereafter APAC), L/PJ/7/557, "Assassination of B.E.J. Burge, District Magistrate, Midnapore," P&J 3361/1931 and P&J 1250/1935.
- 23 Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man."
- 24 Maclean, *A Revolutionary History*, ch. 2.
- 25 West Bengal State Archives (hereafter WBSA), Intelligence Branch (hereafter IB) File 850/31, "Assassination of CGB Stevens, ICS, District Magistrate, Tippera, 14 December 1931."
- 26 APAC, L/P&J/12/390, "Reports on revolutionary activities in India 1931," 3: P&J (S) 37/1931, dated New Delhi, 11th December 1930, no. 49.
- 27 APAC, L/PJ/6/1870, "Murder of Mr. Day in Calcutta by a revolutionary," J&P 206/1924.
- 28 Popplewell, *Intelligence and Imperial Defence*.
- 29 Ghosh, *Gentlemanly Terrorists*.
- 30 Minute by T. B. Macaulay, dated 2 February 1835, paragraph 34.
- 31 APAC, L/P&J/6/1611, "Treatment of prisoners convicted of political offences," J&P 1634/1922, "Telegram from Edwin Montagu, Secretary of State, India Office, London to Governor-general of India in Council, dated 16 December 1921."
- 32 WBSA, IB File no. 145/26, "Revisions of rules for the treatment of detainees"; NAI, Home Political File 43/XVII of 1934, "Bengal government's instructions for the treatment of detenus under the BCLA in the Berhampur, Buxa and Hijli camp jails"; NAI, Home Poll., 43/1/40 & KW, "Settlement of conditions for detention of persons who are detained."
- 33 APAC, L/P&J/7/242, "Terrorism in Bengal, measures to suppress, Promulgation of Bengal Emergency Powers ordinances, 1931–32."
- 34 Chaudhuri, *Autobiography*, 330. The word "queer" is used about a dozen other times in references that have to do with male sociality.
- 35 *Ibid.*, 317.
- 36 Cakrabarti, *Thirty Years*, 180.
- 37 *Ibid.*, 21.
- 38 *Ibid.*, 104.
- 39 *Ibid.*, 105–106.
- 40 Gandhi, *Affective Communities*, 70.
- 41 Cakrabarti, *Thirty Years*, 106–108.

- 42 Ibid., 106.
- 43 Cakrabartī, *Thirty Years*, 178–89.
- 44 Ibid., 181.
- 45 Ibid., 181–82.
- 46 Ibid., 194–97.
- 47 Manini Chatterjee, *Do and Die: the Chittagong Uprising, 1930–34* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1999).
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- 50 Cakrabartī, *Thirty Years*, 202.
- 51 Ibid., 214.
- 52 Griffiths, *To Guard the People*, 266.
- 53 NAI, Home Political File 497/30, “Attempt on the life of Charles Tegart; murder of Mr. Lowman, Inspector-General, Dacca and prosecution of Dinesh Majumdar”; and WBSA, Intelligence Branch, File 218/1930, “Assassination of Lowman,” in which it was reported that the attack was intended for Hodson, who had authorized the beating of another medical student, Ajit Banerjee, who died as a result of his injuries.
- 54 Cakrabartī, *Thirty Years*, 317.
- 55 Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 75.