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Silence, invisibility, and the violence of the *Logos*: Appalachian resonances in Kashmir

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Along the twisted contours of statecraft, not only do sound and fury not signify nothing, but nothing also signifies something. What are the ways in which the state activates frameworks of silence and noise, and of visibility and invisibility, to exert authority over specific cultures? This paper looks at two specific mountain cultures, separated by a hundred years and thousands of miles, to interrogate these questions of power and violence. It attempts to trace a trajectory of power-resistance by paying attention to silence, noise, visibility and invisibility – from the Battle of Blair Mountain in West Virginia to the trauma to Kashmiri identity wrought by the recent abrogation of Article 370 of the Indian Constitution. It notes how disciplinary power seeks to legitimize itself by transforming space into infrastructure, and how this tendency plays out in West Virginia in the 1920s and in Kashmir today, to articulate the uneasy relationship between violence, power and identity that suffuses our world.

Key-words: *space, infrastructure, silence, invisibility, violence*

1. Prologos

In late modernity, time and space tend to bleed into one another. History cares little for territorial borders, and mountains run on glacial, geological time. So it is that often, mountain cultures separated by world and time exist along the same continuum of historical trauma.

In the 19th century, in the mountain region of Kashmir – in what is now the northern tip of India (or the northeastern part of Pakistan, depending on whom one asks) – "the shawl industry was conducted through the *shagird* or weaver bound in conditions of 'near-serfdom' to his *karkhanadar* or 'master of

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manufactory.'"[2] The predatory taxation policies imposed on Kashmiris by the first Dogra (Hindu) *maharajah* Gulab Singh led to several isolated instances of protest – by shopkeepers and 'industrial workers' – in the Kashmir valley in the middle of the 19th century. These tended to be suppressed with ruthless efficiency.

However, in 1865, the Muslim weavers of Kashmir's famous *pashmina* shawls revolted, protesting the unjust tax system that was predicated upon systemic economic and identitarian abuse[3] In *Cashmere Misgovernment,* a classic account of the early years of Dogra rule in Kashmir, Robert Thorp, an officer in the British Indian army, describes the agony of these weavers or 'shawl-bafs' in telling detail:

> In bitter and despairing mood they made a wooden bier, such as Mussulmen use to carry their dead to the place of internment, and placing a cloth over it, carried it to and fro in procession, exclaiming, "Rajkark [the Hindu overseer of the Shawl Department] is dead, who will give him a grave?"[4]

Thorp's account of this revolt ends by noting the arrival of the Governor's army that opens fire on the protesting weavers, who "fled at the approach of an armed force, and in the crowding and hurry of their flight some five or six were drowned in the waters of the canal."[5] Recent reappraisals have revised this figure to as many as twenty-eight drowned or trampled shawl-bafs.[6]

In many ways, this organised uprising of workers was the true precursor, separated by oceanic space and 21 years of human time, to what happened in Chicago in May, 1886 – the Haymarket Massacre, that led to the adoption in labour history of May 1 as May Day or International Workers Day. Sadly, it is memorialised today only in local narratives, in small Kashmiri newspapers and isolated blogposts.

[2] Mridu Rai, *Hindu Rulers, Muslim Subjects: Islam, Rights, and the History of Kashmir* (London: Hurst & Co., 2004), 62.

[3] For more details on the tax system at the time, see Rai, 61-65, and Chapter 2 ("The Shawl System") in Robert Thorp, *Cashmere Misgovernment* (Calcutta: Wyman Bros., 1868).

[4] Robert Thorp, *Cashmere Misgovernment* (Calcutta: Wyman Bros., 1868), 26.

[5] Ibid.

[6] See, for instance, Muhammad Yusuf Saraf, *Kashmiris Fight for Freedom* Vol 1 (Lahore: Ferozsons, 1977).

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2. Parodos

Why are mountain cultures so often under threat of being rendered invisible, of being obscured by the veil of what Paolo Freire called a "culture of silence?" A paper published fifteen years ago in the journal *Mountain Research and Development* points to the glaring gaps in South Africa's "sustainable development" policy with respect to accounting for mountains in its schema – "However, while there are now a number of special initiatives for sustainable development… there is virtually no mention of mountain regions in these policies. It is as if the mountains of the region were invisible."[7] Five years ago, Chip Brown wrote of the 'Sherpas: The Invisible Men of Everest' in *National Geographic*, which notes how the deaths of sherpas, "if mentioned at all… are briefly noted in the Western media."[8] And the 2015 documentary *K2 and the Invisible Footmen* chronicles the anonymous efforts of Pakistani porters who have facilitated the ascent of the second-highest mountain peak in the world.

3. Episode: The battle of Blair Mountain

A similar attempt (?/historical happenstance?/infrastructural operation?) to hush the rustle of Appalachian culture can be seen in what the independent filmmaker John Sayles called, in 2011, "the second Battle of Blair Mountain."[9] The (first) Battle of Blair Mountain took place in Logan County, West Virginia, in August-September 1921, when striking coal miners confronted agents of the Baldwin-Felts Detective Agency – Pinkerton's, the other major detective agency of the time, was also involved in severe strikebreaking actions in many other places in the United States – the Logan County Sheriff's Office, the West Virginia State Police, and, ultimately, the US Army. The "second largest civil insurrection in U.S. history,"[10] it remains the

[7] Thomas Browne, Roddy Fox, and Donald Funnell, 'The "Invisible" Mountains: Using GIS to Examine the Extent of Mountain Terrain in South Africa,' *Mountain Research and Development* 24, No 1 (Feb 2004): 28.

[8] Chip Brown, 'Sherpas: The Invisible Men of Everest,' *National Geographic,* April 26, 2014, https://www.nationalgeographic.com/news/special-features/2014/04/140426-sherpa-culture-everest-disaster/.

[9] John Sayles, '"A Moment in the Sun": An Extended Interview with Independent Filmmaker, Author John Sayles,' interview by Amy Goodman, *Democracy Now!,* November 24, 2011, video, https://www.democracynow.org/2011/11/24/a_moment_in_the_sun_an.

[10] Heather Pringle, 'Coal Firms to Strip-Mine Historic Battlefield?,' *National Geographic*, June 4, 2010, https://www.nationalgeographic.com/news/2010/6/100520-science-environment-blair-mountain-coal-massey-energy-nation/.

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only instance of the use of American military aircraft in a domestic civil disturbance.[11]

While the military aircraft were only ever used for aerial reconnaissance, three private biplanes, chartered by the Logan County Sheriff, dropped gas and makeshift bombs on miners' positions on Blair Mountain. The *Charleston Gazette* of September 11 captioned a photograph thus:

> Officers of District 17, United Mine Workers, say the bomb shown here was dropped from a plane which flew over their camps, coming from the direction of Logan. It was picked up by the miners during the march on Logan. The bomb is now on display at the offices of District 17 on Summers Street, Charleston.[12]

4. Stasimon #1

Aerial bombardment brings noise. It causes a ruckus "and leaves behind a deafening silence."[13] It blinds – with dust, debris and the flailing of limbs – and it flattens, neutralises, makes invisible what was once visible and alive. Bombs are instruments of excess, containers of both silence and noise, of invisibility and the far-too-visible. They cannot be encapsulated in language, because they are always supersaturated with metaphor and physiological doom. "Budger of history Brake of time," Gregory Corso called the Platonic Ideal of the Bomb – the atomic bomb – in his poem 'BOMB.' This is why, in the early 20th century's imperial logic of colonialism – a logic adhered to by the United States within its own borders when it came to various diverse populations, such as Indians and hill folk, wherein some lands were antagonised, seen as demanding dominion over, requiring taming and exploitation, drilling and mining – "Bombs were a means of civilization. Those of us who were already civilized would not be bombed."[14]

For the expansionist American robber-baron soul, dropping bombs on the miners on Blair Mountain was a ritualistic act of collective improvement. Warren Harding's order sending an air fleet to the West Virginia battlefield and the

[11] Clayton D. Laurie, 'The United States Army and the Return to Normalcy in Labor Dispute Interventions: The Case of the West Virginia Coal Mine Wars, 1920–1921,' *West Virginia History* 50 (1991): 1–24.

[12] Photo Caption, *Charleston Gazette*, September 11, 1921, West Virginia Archives and History, http://www.wvculture.org/history/labor/mwnews.html.

[13] Sven Lindqvist, *A History of Bombing*, trans. Linda Haverty Rugg (London: Granta, 2001), 301.

[14] Ibid., 82.

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subsequent bombardment of miners operated on two affective and physiological registers – silence/noise and sight/blindness. The flying machines allowed unimpeded sight, a Benthamite dream of geophysical surveillance, entire landscapes turned into panopticons.

A function of this panoptic procedure was also expressed in the complete control exerted by the mining company over every aspect of the miner's existence, from the payment in company currency to the compulsory custom demanded at company stores. Often, miners were brought in as strikebreakers, categorised and separated so they wouldn't organise against the mine owner, and housed in discrete accommodations – immigrant Italians and Slavs in one place, black miners elsewhere, and still other lodgings for white miners brought in from defunct mines.[15] This way, the mine owners held total visual dominion over the very subjectivities of their employees, replicating the prison-industrial enterprise in the everyday functioning of mines and miners' lives.

5. Episode – The second battle of Blair Mountain

The "second battle" of Blair Mountain that Sayles refers to in the *Democracy Now!* interview mentioned above unfolded earlier this century, almost a hundred years after the first. In March 2009, Blair Mountain was added to the list of protected places on the National Register of Historic Places, the US government's list of places deemed worthy of preservation for their historic significance. However, in June 2010, this site of the largest labour rights conflict in American history was once again the locus of a fierce clash, this time between conservationists, historians and local groups on one side, and coal companies on the other. Arch Coal, Inc. and Massey Energy Company – subsidiaries of two of the largest fossil fuel producers in the U.S. – held permits for blasting and strip-mining chunks of the mountaintop, and lobbied hard for the site to be delisted, which it was just months after it had been included in the first place. For the next few years, numerous appeals were filed in federal courts challenging the decision to delist. Finally, in June 2018, the Keeper of the Register put the historic site back on the list.[16]

[15] See John Sayles, dir., *Matewan* (New York City: Cinecom Pictures, 1987).

[16] Kate Mishkin, 'Blair Mountain Battlefield back on National Register of Historic Places,' *Charleston Gazette-Mail*, June 29, 2018, https://www.wvgazettemail.com/news/blair-mountain-battlefield-back-on-national-register-of-historic-places/article_98d954c4-4ea6-5881-b3e7-efb42ee8c1ff.html.

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6. Stasimon #2

While the mining companies, who held permits, after all, primarily lobbied to get the site delisted to open it up to mountaintop removal mining, they never actually began the strip-mining process. It is, therefore, quite likely that there was another dimension to this petition – an attempt at "perhaps obscuring the brutal history that played out" on the site, as the historian Ron Soodalter noted soon after the relisting.[17]

A hundred years after the Battle of Blair Mountain, the discursive act of delisting, of allowing a mountaintop to become vulnerable to a permanent state of existential threat, becomes a strange complement to its original bombardment. The "deafening silence" after the bomb and the striking off from a register are thus conflated, across a century of calendar time and between two ontic registers – one in the world, the other in word. Just as military action against the miners resulted in silencing and invisibility – but also in the noise of the bomb and the visibility of panoptic space – the linguistic act (or its removal, rather) of delisting space in order to transform it into infrastructure animates the forces of silence and invisibility.

In the logic of the fossil fuel economy, and against the wisdom of mountaineers, the mountain is most valuable when it isn't there.[18]

7. Episode: Kashmir, violence and cultures of silence

On August 5, 2019, the Indian government unilaterally declared a revocation – in parliamentary terms, an *abrogation*, with its etymological roots in the Sanskrit, Gaelic, Gothic and Latin word-clusters for *king* and *torture* (*racking*), for *rule* and *authority* – of Article 370 of the Indian Constitution. This constitutional article guaranteed special status to what became the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir, a section of the larger internationally disputed area of Kashmir, as part of the then-sovereign kingdom's conditions of accession to the newly-formed Indian state in 1947. While the granting of special status to states is hardly a remarkable act in the scheme of India's asymmetric federalism, in J&K this was for long the key to a fragile and unstable peace in the face of numerous self-determination movements

[17] Ron Soodalter, 'The Site of the Blair Mountain Rebellion is Safe,' *The Progressive,* July 2, 2018, https://progressive.org/dispatches/blair-mountain-battlefield-re-listed-as-historic-site-180702/.

[18] The great English mountaineer George Mallory, when asked why he wanted to climb Mount Everest, replied, "Because it's there." 'Climbing Mount Everest is work for Supermen,' *The New York Times*, March 18, 1923, http://graphics8.nytimes.com/packages/pdf/arts/mallory1923.pdf.

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(some of them, since the 1990s, armed and militant). In political terms, the striking down of Article 370 has led to the demotion of J&K to the status of a Union Territory, which will result in significantly greater administrative interference from the federal government. In addition, the federal government also dissolves a provision in the Indian Constitution – Section 35a – that effectively allowed Kashmiris to remain custodians of their own lands.

This is in keeping with the decades-long programmatic ambition of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). The socio-cultural wellspring of Hindu fascism in India since the 1920s, the RSS is a right-wing, Hindu ultranationalist paramilitary volunteer organization whose chief political arm is the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the party that has governed India since 2014 with an absolute majority. The RSS's aim with respect to Kashmir has always been to allow the region – India's only Muslim-majority state – to be invaded by Hindu, non-Kashmiri Indians, and to slowly strip away its unique identity, to be replaced by a patriarchal, militant assertion of Hindu supremacy.

As a result of this abrogation, this *racking*, Kashmir has been experiencing a total military clampdown since August 5 – a clampdown that continues to this day, at the date of writing, more than a hundred days since. There has been a complete information blackout in the region, with a continuous internet shutdown, the prohibition of any independent media presence and frequent disconnections of telephone lines and cable television. This, of course, in addition to the thousands of detentions and disappearances – including the unconstitutional arrests of three former Chief Ministers of the state, pro-India politicians all – as well as the importation of enormous numbers of troops, in the hundreds of thousands, to deal with the possible fallout of this unilateral rule by authority. Consequently, Kashmir is today easily the most densely militarized region in the world, almost certainly even more so than the ironically named DMZ in North/South Korea.

But it is eerily silent.

8. Stasimon #3

> *So, the numbers are huge and hidden by the sort of noise and music and sounds of democracy.*
> – *Arundhati Roy,* Democracy Now!, *interview with Amy Goodman and Nermeen Shaikh, November 11, 2019*

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For most of these last hundred-odd days, Kashmir has been under curfew. This has meant that a pall of silence and invisibility hangs over almost 8 million human beings, who are now statistics on the drawing boards of military cartographers. Obscured from the visual domain of the rest of the world, Kashmiris exist in a state of blindness, cut off from most networks of national or global data. Information flows neither in, nor out. This is why the Booker-prizewinning novelist Arundhati Roy's op-ed of August 15 in the *New York Times*, on the 72nd anniversary of India's independence, was titled 'The Silence is the Loudest Sound:'[19]

> That's why I said the silence is the loudest sound. Everyone, whether it's the major politicians, whether it's boys who throw stones on the street, whether it's businessmen, lawyers — everyone is in jail, even now. You know, then they cut off phones. They cut off the internet. I mean, can you imagine? When has it been done before, 7 million people, communication lockdown?[20]

Much like the shawl-bafs' revolt, written out of official labour histories and chronicled in detail only in a half-forgotten text by a long-dead foreigner, Kashmir's present is slowly being erased from the national consciousness through the treacherous operations of state-sanctioned silence. No TV cameras in Kashmir, no phone calls out of Kashmir. Like Blair Mountain before it, in the logic of the New India, Kashmir appears to be most valuable when it isn't there.

Or almost. While the news media and ordinary citizens have no access, the ever-watchful eye of the government has intensified its sight by turning the whole region into a gigantic open-air prison. The carceral state has flattened the rhythms of everyday life in Kashmir, rendering it into a pure surface that is monitored eternally, every moving speck on the ground modulated, stopped and started by a system of checkpoints and barricades, and always in military gunsights. What the airmen flying over Blair Mountain in their De Havilland-4Bs and Martin MB-2 bombers could only have flailed at has been achieved by the Indian state in the Himalayan mountains and valleys of Kashmir – geography as panopticon, and the state as all-seeing eye.

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[19] Arundhati Roy, 'The Silence is the Loudest Sound,' *The New York Times,* August 15, 2019, video, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/15/opinion/sunday/kashmir-siege-modi.html.

[20] Arundhati Roy, 'The Silence Is the Loudest Sound: Arundhati Roy Condemns Indian Crackdown in Kashmir,' interview by Amy Goodman and Nermeen Shaikh, *Democracy Now!,* November 11, 2019, video, https://www.democracynow.org/2019/11/11/arundhati_roy_india_kashmir_assam.

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9. Episode: Space vs. Infrastructure

To contemplate the surveillance state and the violence it wreaks in all its glory, one need only consider old maps of West Virginia that used to be published by mining companies. There are maps from a hundred years ago of entire counties divided up on the basis of their coal mines. Figure 1, for example, is a map of Logan County – the site of Blair Mountain – draughted along the lines of its coal fields. By delineating an area entirely on the basis of which company mines where, the map transforms space into infrastructure, and gestures towards an aesthetic of totalitarianism.

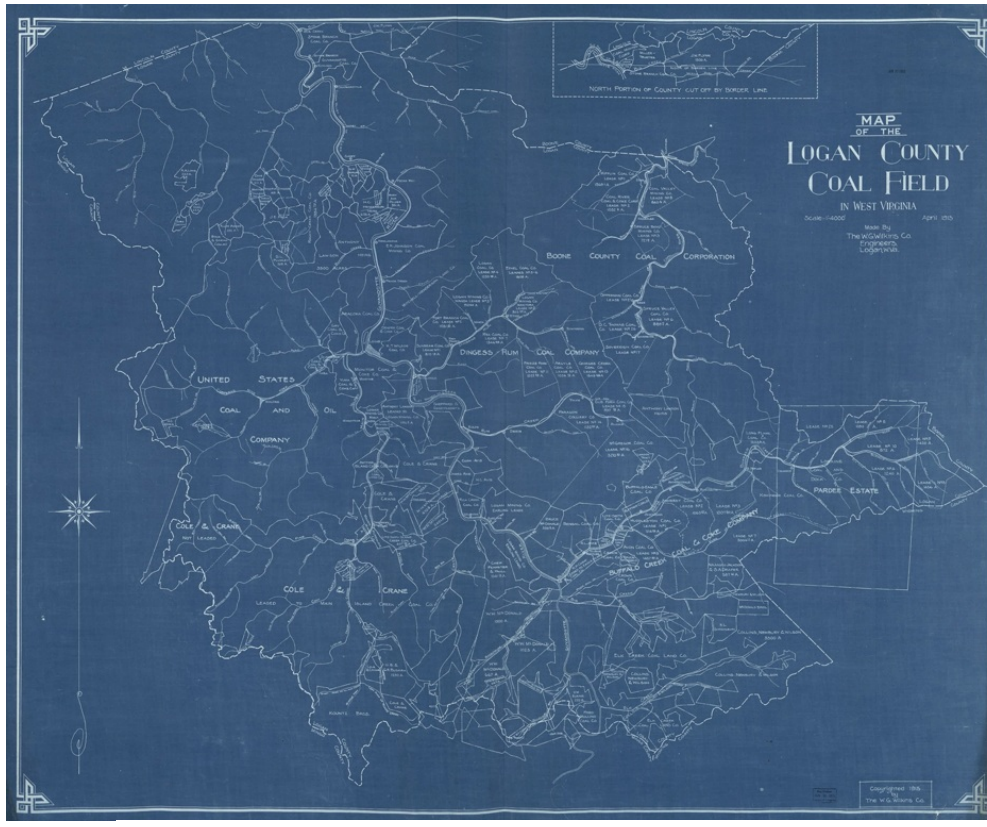


Figure 1. *Map of the Logan County coal field in West Virginia* (Logan, W.Va.: The W.G. Wilkins Co.,1915), Library of Congress Geography and Map Division Washington, D.C. 20540-4650 USA dcu.

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Totalitarianism, wrote Hannah Arendt, "destroys the one essential prerequisite of all freedom which is simply the capacity of motion which cannot exist without space."[21] By perpetrating this erasure of space, the coal mining maps of the Appalachian mountains operate along an axis of totalitarianism. The imposition of infrastructure on the mountain – mining and the control exerted by the mining company over all aspects of its employees' lives –is mirrored in the visual domain by this transformation of physical space into an economic geography. The birth of infrastructure signals the death of space. Arendt's "space of appearance" – those Kantian "conditions of possibility" that create the potential for freedom that Foucault underlined when discussing the productive and fruitful emanations of power ("if there are relations of power throughout every social field it is because there is freedom everywhere"[22]) – is made to shrink into an infrastructure of control, until all that remains is all that is shown. If it says so on the map, it must be so in real life. Sometimes, the map becomes the territory.[23]

This is made all the more stark when one looks at the exertion of cartographic power over Kashmir in the symbolic realm. Only certain kinds of maps of the country are allowed by the Indian state: the draft measure of the Geospatial Information Regulation Bill, introduced in Parliament in 2016 (but gestating in cold storage since), proposed "to punish any person in India or any Indian abroad for publishing or distributing maps, online or in physical form, with 'wrong or false topographic information' – in other words, maps with boundaries that don't match the government's."[24]

Figure 2 is an image produced by the CIA that maps India's continuing territorial conflicts with China and Pakistan onto a geophysical rendering of the area of Kashmir. The proposed bill, however, intends to heavily fine mapmakers (to the tune of up to $15 million) who acknowledge these disputes; the state mandates that these representations be expressed "as if all of [India's] ongoing territorial disputes with China and Pakistan were already settled in India's favor."[25]

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[21] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (San Diego, New York and London: Harvest Books, 1951), 466.

[22] Michel Foucault, 'The Ethic of Care for the Self as a Practice of Freedom: An Interview with Michel Foucault on January 20, 1984,' interview by Raúl Fornet-Betancourt, Helmut Becker and Alfredo Gomez-Müller, trans. J. D. Gauthier, *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 12, nos. 2-3 (July 1987): 123.

[23] The Polish-American scientist and philosopher Alfred Korzybski noted that, "A map *is not* the territory it represents…." Alfred Korzybski, *Science and Sanity: An Introduction to Non-Aristotelian Systems and General Semantics* (New York: International Non-Aristotelian Library, 1933), 58.

[24] David Yanofsky, 'India is Considering Fines and Prison Time for People Who Make Maps with the "Wrong" Borders,' *Quartz India,* May 6, 2016, https://qz.com/india/677177/india-is-considering-fines-and-prison-time-for-people-who-make-maps-with-the-wrong-borders/.

[25] Ibid.

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Figure 2. *The disputed area of Kashmir* (Washington: Central Intelligence Agency, 2002), Library of Congress Geography and Map Division Washington, D.C. 20540-4650 USA dcu.

Today, Google Maps will only show the state-mandated borders when accessed from within the country; its maps of India accessed from outside the country represent the conflicted areas in dotted lines.

10. Stasimon #4

The abrogation of Article 370 and the subsequent ongoing lockdown of Kashmir are now being justified in terms of helping Kashmir "develop" through better infrastructure. For instance:

> Kashmiris now have an opportunity to turn this moment to their advantage and build a solid economy and ***infrastructure***, but to do so will require a significant change in mindset. This will be challenging. *There is, however, no reason why a place of such natural beauty and rich heritage should*

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> *continue to be left behind in a connected digital world*, where trade and investment are the keys to development.
>
> (*The Hindustan Times*, September 4, 2019)[26]

> The revocation bifurcated the region into two union territories – Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh. This will make the two union territories come under the Central government, which in turn is expected to give better focus on roads and ***infrastructure*** in that region, that has been lagging behind due to violence in Jammu and Kashmir. [*sic*]
>
> (*Live Mint,* August 6, 2019)[27]

> Modi government prepares for massive ***infrastructure*** push in Jammu and Kashmir
>
> PM Modi is expected to announce some big projects in August 15 [*sic*]
>
> (Headlines of *Daily News and Analysis,* August 6, 2019)[28]

> Meanwhile, diversion of 663 hectares of forest land for state projects, including roads, drinking water, irrigation, education, railways, telecom, civil aviation and defence sectors have been approved [*sic*]… *These* ***infrastructure*** *projects would improve connectivity and improve basic conditions of life.*
>
> (*The New Indian Express*, October 27, 2019)[29]

[All emphases mine]

In article after article, nightly televised debate after nightly televised debate, infrastructure is held up as being oppositional to space. In the articles above, "place" is the antithesis of "a connected digital world;" "forest land" is inimical to

[26] Vasant Dhar, 'Beyond Article 370: A Road Map for Kashmir's Economic Development,' *The Hindustan Times*, September 4, 2019, https://www.hindustantimes.com/analysis/beyond-article-370-a-road-map-for-kashmir-s-economic-development/story-kUHYD3P8oUntbGuwqXG7KI.html.

[27] Shreya Nandi, 'Road Projects Likely to Get a Renewed Push,' *Live Mint,* August 6, 2019, https://www.livemint.com/news/india/j-k-to-get-better-road-connectivity-post-scrapping-article-370-provisions-1565103693151.html.

[28] Sameer Dixit, 'Modi Government Prepares for Massive Infrastructure Push in Jammu and Kashmir,' *DNA,* August 6, 2019, https://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-modi-government-prepares-for-massive-infrastructure-push-in-jammu-and-kashmir-2779460.

[29] Fayaz Wani, 'Infrastructure Projects Galore in Jammu and Kashmir,' *The New Indian Express,* October 27, 2019, https://www.newindianexpress.com/thesundaystandard/2019/oct/27/infrastructure-projects-galore-in-jammu-and-kashmir-2053421.html.

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"infrastructure projects;" *bifurcating regions* is the key to *roads and infrastructure.* Never mind that for all its ambitions of creating a "connected digital world," the Indian state has to keep Kashmir in suspended animation, disconnected from the very digital utopia it seeks to manufacture for the rest of the country. For the state – mired as it is in what John Agnew termed "the territorial trap"[30] – space is deadweight, and must be alchemized, through the operations of *infrastructure,* into its politico-teleological ideal: territory.

> The production of a space, the national territory, a physical space, mapped, modified, transformed by the networks, circuits and flows that are established within it – roads, canals, railroads, commercial and financial circuits, motorways and air routes, etc. Thus this space is a material – natural – space in which the actions of human generations, of classes and of political forces have left their mark, as producers of durable objects and realities (rather than only of isolated things and products, of tools and of goods destined for consumption).[31]

The dream of a territory strewn with "durable realities" – coal mining infrastructure in Appalachia, potential infrastructure in Kashmir – inflicts violence on the space of living. The violence of *logos* that the old Appalachian coal maps impose in the visual domain and the violence of the state that military actions thrust onto space and people in both West Virginia and Kashmir culminate terrifyingly in the state-mandated cartography of Kashmir, which attempts nothing less than a transformation of the symbolic order itself by threatening state violence (exorbitant fines and prosecution) in the social field. The consequences of Blair Mountain a hundred years ago float through the ether of history to graft themselves on to the carceral disciplining of Kashmir today.

11. Exodos, or the End of Tragedy

For centuries – perhaps millennia – mountains and the cultures they foster have been seen in infrastructural terms. Since at least the Paleolithic Age,

[30] John Agnew, 'The Territorial Trap: The Geographical Assumptions of International Relations Theory,' *Review of International Political Economy* 1, no. 1 (1994): 53–80.

[31] Henri Lefebvre, *State, Space, World: Selected Essays,* eds. Neil Brenner and Stuart Elden, trans. Gerald Moore, Neil Brenner, and Stuart Elden (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 224.

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> …indigenous people and outsiders [have] tapped mountain areas for tool and building materials, ornaments, pigments, and salt…. Alkaline lakes north of the Himalayas and in the Atacama desert of the Andes have long been sources of evaporite salt. Industrial-scale silver and gold mining, supported by the forced labor or *mita* system, dates from at least Inca times… in the Andes, continued through the Spanish colonial period, remains active in various places in Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia… and has expanded under multinational corporations for the extraction and processing of industrial minerals…. Starting earlier, coal mining in Appalachia helped shape and support the unique mountain people there.[32]

These infrastructural terms have, more often than not, tended to benefit "large transnational… corporations and their shareholders living far from the mountains," and they have eventually become imbricated, by violence and confrontation, within the territorial ambitions of state apparatus.[33]

But "every strategy of confrontation," wrote Michel Foucault, "dreams of becoming a relationship of power."[34] In its attempt to project 'normality' – and, surely, Foucault would say, normalisation (those sets of norms and practices and codes of conduct that disciplinary power activates to exert control over bodies and discourses) – the Indian state has on occasion tried to lift the curfew in Kashmir. Every time, it has been met with self-imposed 'civil curfews,' wherein Kashmiris have decided to destabilize the government's "narrative of normalcy"[35] by refusing to return to 'normal.'

> Although the government has reopened schools and colleges, students have been staying away while shopkeepers have kept their shops shut. Public transport has also stayed off the roads and petrol pumps open only for half the day as people refuse to step out of

[32] James S. Gardner, Robert E. Rhoades and Christoph Stadel, 'People in the Mountains,' in *Mountain Geography: Physical and Human Dimensions,* eds. Martin F. Price, Alton C. Byers, Donald A. Friend, Thomas Kohler and Larry W. Price (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2013), 286.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Michel Foucault, 'The Subject and Power,' in *The Essential Foucault,* eds. Paul Rabinow and Nikolas Rose (New York and London: The New Press, 2003), 143.

[35] Ajaz Ashraf, 'Civil Curfew as Civil Disobedience: Kashmiris Undermine the Indian State,' *The Caravan,* August 28, 2019, https://caravanmagazine.in/politics/civil-disobedience-curfew-kashmir.

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> their homes in popular response to the recent change in the state's constitutional status.[36]

By not stepping out of their homes, Kashmiris appear to be rendering visible the state's strategies of confrontation. Power begets the possibilities of its resistance; in Kashmir, the objectivizing of the Kashmiri into a willing subject – a Foucauldian "docile body" – is frustrated at every turn by their refusal to let the illusion of normality return to the valley. The government encourages markets, so the markets stay shut all day, opening only in the dead of night.[37]The state's attempts to cover up the deafening silence in the aftermath of bombings and lockdowns – promises of infrastructure and amnesty, in Appalachia, Kashmir and beyond! – are subverted when the fact of silence itself becomes resistance. The state's desire for complete visibility is circumvented by night markets and the willing obliteration of movement. After all, "it would not be possible for power relations to exist without points of insubordination that, by definition, are means of escape."[38] In a strange irony, silence and invisibility seem to be resisting the fever dreams of infrastructure. When you get right down to it, maybe there really is freedom everywhere.

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[37] M. Saleem Pandit, 'Shut by Day, Srinagar's Veggie Market Buzzes All Night Long,' *The Times of India*, September 3, 2019, https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/shut-by-day-srinagars-veggie-market-buzzes-all-night-long/articleshow/70952932.cms.

[38] Foucault, 'The Subject and Power,' 143.

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