

What Cost Abjection for the Sake of the Nation? Conceptualizing Normativity in the Works of William Saroyan and Ruskin Bond

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Having lost his father at the age of three and being pitchforked into an Oakland orphanage, away from his mother, for the next five years, the Armenian American author, William Saroyan (1908–81), appears never to have quite outgrown a trace of psychological abjection that scarred his mind in childhood. The uniqueness of his authorial vocation lies in the way he negotiates with this abjection. To the coterie of world writers influenced by Saroyan, belongs the Anglo-Indian author, Ruskin Bond (1934–), who, too, has been through a similar bout of trauma—witnessing in early childhood a separation between his parents and at the age of ten suffering a lonely bereavement, when in a boarding school in Shimla (India) he received news of his father’s death. This article seeks to demonstrate how both authors employ abjection to critique the socio-political cluttering of the notion of normativity. I have selected texts whose interpretations cast light on the implications of psycho-social abjection in a world roiled by war and terrorism.

In Saroyan’s “Cowards” (*Fresno Stories* 62–72), a short story based on the psychological effect of drafting among the able-bodied young men of Fresno, California, during World War I, the protagonist prefers infantilism to state-controlled coercive fatalism. When the Selective Service Act reached Fresno in 1917, eligible sons of various families were supposed to throw down their lots and present themselves to the draft board. A twenty-four-year-old man, Kristofor Agbadashian, who had lost his father at three, lived with mother and three unmarried sisters and worked at the menswear department in Cooper’s, suddenly disappeared. His mother, Aylizabet, told her friend, Arshaluce Ganjakian, that she was upset over her son’s disappearance. From the war officials and the sheriff who had come in search of Kristofor she had learnt that

her son was not in the Army. As the war came to an end and fear of conscription melted away, Aylizabet confided to Arshaluce that it was she who made her son evade the draft by stowing him in her place: "He has been home all this time. It is my fault. I told him I would die if he went away. His father died when he was still a small boy. I could not bear to lose the only man remaining in the family" (*Fresno Stories* 69).

Kristofor emerged from his hideout, went to San Francisco in search of better prospects, married and had children. When the military inquest caught up with him ten years later, he explained, without mincing words, that he was a coward. However, the sympathetic investigator put down "Father" as the cause of Kristofor's failure to present himself for the draft.

In 1997, the fiftieth year of India's Independence, the BBC chose to broadcast a short but significant biographical sketch, "The Playing Fields of Shimla" (*Memoir* 51–59), by Ruskin Bond. The author narrates the nostalgic experience of his adolescent friendship with a Muslim friend, Omar, in Bishop Cotton School at Shimla in India during the days of the Raj; how they came close to considering each other alter-egos and in one of their joint intrigues found a tunnel in a defunct drainage pipe in the school's third flat to escape into a no-man's land. These idyllic excitements ceased with the 1947 Partition of the Indian subcontinent, forcing Omar to migrate to an unknown land called Pakistan. The feeling of estrangement comes to a head during the 1965 Indo-Pakistan War, when Ruskin Bond finds out that one of the pilots of the Pakistan bomber which is shot down by Indian flak near the playing field of his Shimla school is Omar.

Bond's apparently innocuous manner of narrating his childhood memories hides a deep sense of identity-seeking concerns. Given the kind of hatred and socio-political rejection that the young author himself encountered during the Nationalist movement in India, it was quite natural for him to feel concerned about fostering, like Omar, a sense of ambivalence towards the place with which he otherwise identified. It is important for the reader to know that on the eve of India's Independence the identity crisis of the Anglo-Indians turned into a nightmare as they were jettisoned by the British government as flotsam of the Empire and

spurned by the Nationalist Indians for their English bearing and alleged associations with the colonists. Omar's fear of territorial belonging is shared by Bond, albeit not due to his religious credo, but for his physical aspects which are more like that of a white "sahib" than of a native. Central to both their crises, however, was a fear of displacement. For both Omar and Bond, the school's third flat provides the site for a symbolic escape from institutionalized space, the political implication of which is to escape territorial boundaries into a no-man's land for two persons, a Muslim and an Anglo-Indian, whose identities were under Nationalist scrutiny.

Omar's desire for a no-man's land becomes a prescient foreboding for the kind of forced disjunction his adult personality will suffer from childhood impressions. Had Omar been able to make a tunnel to escape the politically enforced geographical and later ideological dislocations in the wake of the Partition, he could have been saved from the psychic schism of his adult life. His is a case of schizoid anti-normativity because unlike Bond his adult sensibilities underwent recursive disorientation from the formative influences of childhood experiences. In fact, the reversal of the normative in Omar is governed by a perspective that in itself is rendered highly fickle by the psychopathology of nationalism. Omar's alleged neurosis is, in Jacques Lacan's schema, a position taken up with respect to the Other.

I will problematize the concept of normativity by exploring how the socio-political structures of power underwrite the change of content in Omar's psychoanalytic component of abjection and validate the author's adolescent fear about his own subjectivity. Can Omar's aggressivity from an integrationist point of view be treated as having been born from a culturally complicit enforcement of abjection, that nations force on each other in order to allay their own fears of abnormality? When the Saroyanesque Kristofor sought infantilism to save himself from the fatal consequences of a "death drive," the authorial narrator in Bond's memoir dissociates himself from his abjected "double," who ends up an exiled warrior trying to kill his own people.

According to Lacan, a person's relation to the Other determines his psychic or clinical structure. This structure develops during childhood

and adolescence and remains fixed thereafter, regardless of any obvious symptoms. The child's mirror image is an anticipation of the Other that structures his subjectivity. The mirror image in its specular completeness becomes invested with a fantastic idealism that the child wishes to achieve in order to allay the fear of its fragmented Self. But s/he does not experience this imaginary ideal in an actual mirror. The mother as caregiver acts as an ideal image for the child. The child's desire for the mother gets repressed in the Oedipal stage under the superegoic prohibition of the father. The incestuous libido resides as a residual potential in the child to inspire an identification with the father.

The concept of repressive normativity operates under a sacrificial logic of abjection. "The subject must abject, that is, define and exclude those things which threaten it" culturally (Coats 8). Adolescence is a time when the Oedipal work accomplished in early childhood is revisited. This is a genetic phase when the subject suffers from a double bind between desire for and fear of the mother's body. Julia Kristeva calls this uncomfortable period "abjection": a state that "does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (4). This is when the imaginary father intervenes lovingly in rescuing the child from merging back into non-identity. In the absence of the father or/and in the presence of a social threat of corporeal fragmentation, the libidinal desire of the adolescent, revolving around the specular image of completeness (in strategic relation to the threat of fragmentation), gets excited. This expresses itself in symptoms of the "death drive" which needs to be repressed again through symbolic exercises of mastery lest it becomes a full-blown disease. The appearance of the symbolic father to the adolescent child in his critical moment takes place in different sublimational forms. These multiple constituents of identity formation (in contrast to any reductively singulative norm) are examples of such forms I deploy in my discussion of Kristofor Agbadashian and the Anglo-Indian/Muslim friendship further on in this article.

In "Cowards," Kristofor Agbadashian is a fatherless orphan living with his mother, a situation inflammatory enough to push him towards the anti-normative pole of the double bind. His libidinal proclivities are intensified further by the threat of fragmentation that emerged in

the form of war conscription in 1917. So, he is subjected to a state of double abjection—absence of the father and institutional fatalism. Throughout social history, the exclusions of peoples based on race, sexuality, disabilities and religion have established and bolstered both personal and national identities. Kristeva's primary insight is that what we have expelled as abject does not simply and finally disappear. Identities, communities and nations are brittle constructs because they are built on abjection, which haunts their borders. In Bond's memoir, both the author and Omar are primarily abjects, like Kristofor and his creator William Saroyan, in having lost their fathers in childhood. This brought them together in contradistinction to the other "horde of rowdy, pea-shooting fourth formers" (Bond 51). The cause of Bond's abject distinction lies "in sharing my father's loneliness after his separation from my mother" (51–52). That his desire to assume the father's role stemmed from a libidinal economy becomes clear in the psychological revival of the Oedipal feelings that endangered the narrated time of the persona's life portrayed in "The Playing Fields":

It had been a lonely winter for a twelve-year-old boy.

I hadn't really got over my father's untimely death two years previously; nor had I as yet reconciled myself to my mother's marriage to the Punjabi gentleman who dealt in second-hand cars (51).

He was still obsessed with the images overwhelmingly invested with his father's presence: his father's rare visits on brief leaves from RAF duties, sharing a tent or Air Force hutment with him outside Delhi or Karachi, visiting Lawrence Royal Military School, his father's *alma mater*, and discovering his name on the school's honour roll board. In such a state of loneliness, when he yearned for identification from the social rim of the fourth form of his school, he discovered his prototype in a quiet, "taciturn" new boy, Omar, who showed a complete indifference to the form's "prevailing anarchy" (52). Bond's identification with Omar is based on the sympathetic principle of abject grouping. "Omar, too, had lost his father—had I sensed that before?" (52) says the author in a retrospective reflection on the etiology of a unique camaraderie.

A shared objective of fighting libidinal urges and abject vulnerability establishes a communicable reciprocity between them: "Even before we began talking to each other, Omar and I developed an understanding of sorts, and we'd nod almost respectfully to each other when we met in the classroom corridors or the environs of dining hall or dormitory" (52).

At hockey and football, Bond and Omar, as goalkeeper and full-back respectively, communicated on the same wavelength. When the school hockey team visited Sanawar to play out their rivals, the Lawrence Royal Military School, both of them "thrown together a great deal" (52), "exchanged life histories and other confidences" (53). On the eve of the Indian Independence when word spread that the British are going to divide the country, Omar evinced apprehensive fear of a breach of communication. The fear was realized in the form of abject schism when Partition forced exile on him. Although Bond tried to assuage Omar's anxieties saying, "Oh, it won't happen ... How can [sic] they cut up such a big country?" (53), he too reeled under the fearful memory of a nationalist rejection he had suffered earlier. Like Kristofor, Omar suffered a second bout of abjection when his identity was redefined on the basis of religious Nationalism, snapping the communicative chords discreetly tautened by multivalent ties and fragmenting his sense of integrity. Omar's paranoid aggressivity that subsequently blows him up in the 1965 War springs from what Lacan calls the "delusion of the misanthropic 'belle ame'" (*Ecrits* 20), seeing into the world the disorder of his own fragmentary self. The dissection of the country energizes the infantile trace of his unconscious lack of coordination of motility. His abject desire for the mother, who is invested with the imago of the fulfilling supplementer of the lack, inspires him to desire the object of the Other's desire in the form of a spatial Gestalt of a place Bond continues to enjoy. Deprivation of the Indian Other that he identified with becomes the cause of his resentment.

The connection between libidinal normativity and cultural normativity appears all the more obscure in analyses of aggressive symptoms. Kristofor in "Cowards" and Harry Cook and Wesley Jackson in *The Adventures of Wesley Jackson* by William Saroyan have something of the author in them. It is not only metaphoric of Saroyan's libido-paternal

angst that he chose to write *The Adventures* in military conscription in London in August 1944 in a promised exchange for a furlough to New York to see his wife and baby son. Although he was denied a furlough on the grounds that the novel levelled a treasonous tirade against the US government, the fictive retelling of his Army experience was for Saroyan a mode of refracting and heaving his psychic pressure through projection. The Saroyanesque resentment at war and conscription is played out in intriguing ways in the portrayal of each of these characters. As “Cowards” and *The Adventures* are works on identical themes, it is imperative to read them intertextually for a better understanding of the paranoid delusions that the characters try to negotiate during war-time coercive fatalism. Inherent in both the choices of infantilism and fatalism is a psychoanalytic “death drive.” The difference between the two expressions of the instinct operates in the former being purely fantasmatic and the latter social symbolic: the former works at the symptomatic level while the latter teeters on the verge of terminal malignancy. This is why Slavoj Žižek explains, “the forced actualization in social reality of the fantasmatic kernel of my being is the worst and most humiliating type of violence because it undermines the very basis of my identity—my ‘self-image’” (161). In reaction to the egotistic state-craft of legitimizing fatalism through war and conscription, Saroyan employs fantasmatic means to simulate libido-cultural economy and resist discernment of the deviant process of tackling aggravated symptoms.

A clever tongue in cheek enactment of such a veiled retaliation takes place early in *The Adventures*. Wesley Jackson and Harry Cook, privates drafted into the US Army during World War II, are relaxing outdoors on a pile of reclining timbers in an Army camp when the colonel comes up with a phalanx of soldiers and a newspaperman. Harry’s resentment at the entire business of war and drafting is so intense that his symptomatic hostility to and infringement of Army codes of conduct smack of bland distaste. He has already made derogatory comments against the Army at the risk of being court-martialled. When the colonel and his team approach him, he evinces discourteous apathy in not acknowledging their presence and singing “If I had my way, dear, you’d never grow old” (*The Adventures* 33) sufficiently loudly to register his aggres-

sive disavowal of militarism and rankle the colonel. When the scribe accosts him for an interview, he dismounts from the pile and walks away, bearing himself in a manner that might have attracted obvious disrepute for the Army had not Wesley volunteered to offer plausible explanation for his friend's behaviour and save the colonel from embarrassment. Wesley invents an impromptu story about Harry's mother being fatally ill and that he is upset crying over it through the afternoon. The explanation appears to relieve the colonel who immediately swings into damage reparation, demonstrating to the newspaperman how humanely disposed the Army is towards its soldiers by ordering the Major to make arrangements for Harry's speedy transportation to his sick mother. In fact, Wesley attributes Harry's intransigence and passive belligerence to enforced abjection. The stimulation of the "death drive" under conditions of real threat of castration, dismemberment and mutilation in time of war leads individuals to revive delusional infantile imagoes of narcissistic wholeness of the Other. Concerns of the fragmentary Self seek alleviation in the unity of the Other that the infant in its state of physical disability attributes to the supplementary succour of its mother. Harry is obsessed with the song whose theme sheds ironical light upon the threats inherent in growing out of infancy into an adult being. What is symptomatic in the mirror stage becomes perceptibly real when a twenty-four year-old adult is conscripted for war. So for Harry, if he had his way he would have never grown old; infantile symptoms are preferable to adult eviscerations. In keeping with the motif of Harry's obsession, Wesley acts like a psychoanalyst to ascribe his abject aggressivity to neurotic tendencies of infantilism. Harry has been crying for his mother through the afternoon, says Wesley, because the apprehensions of the supplementer's death incite fear of losing the buttress that buoys up courage during social threats of fragmentation. It occurs to Wesley that the symptoms of forced abjection can find remedy in the invocation of subjacent urges of Oedipality. It is Harry's father, according to Wesley, who asks Harry to join his ailing mother. If the notion of war seeks to normalize libidinal instincts by drafting civilians into regimental systems engendered by real threat of self-annihilation, it needs to camouflage its asocial defilement of superegoic strictures by evoking utopian

images of altruistic submissions. The presence of the newspaperman inquiring into the lives of soldiers in an army camp is a sort of metaphoric implement reflectively introjected into the Army's psyche probably to buttress its weak libido-cultural economy. The colonel's satisfaction at Wesley's explanation is ironically self-defeating in that it is a symbolic approval of the treatment of the symptoms that the Army has chosen to aggravate. The difference between the deviant and the normal is all the more fudged. The militarist subterfuge intended to cover up its inherent contradiction requires a civilian critic in the form of a newspaperman for its excoriation and dialectic validation. The war program itself being based on a schizoid pattern of psychic economy, it finds greater efficacy in conscripting those deviant beings from civil society who are already suffering from delusional paranoia and are conveniently hewed to the doctrines of war. A capitalist system would maximize profit through such deployments; it reduces the cost of attitudinal denormalizing of patients who are already in the midst of hysterical trigger-happiness.

Psychiatric case files of two female suicide bombers who killed nearly one-hundred people in Baghdad in February 2008 show that they suffered from depression and schizophrenia. Al Qaeda insurgents in Mesopotamia deployed mentally disabled persons as suicide bombers. Once inducted into the war and deployed in combat zones, civilians formerly of normal mental health develop stress disorders making them convenient and more effective weapons for repeated deployments, not to speak of those who are already suffering from paranoia in civil life; they are always already tailor-made for war. Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* cites the example of an Algerian police officer whose colonial task of inflicting physical torture on natives had such a toll on his mental health that he ended up battering his own wife and children. Examples of such stressful neurosis and its exploitation as reinvestible capital are numerous in the US Army. A few months after Sergeant William Edwards returned to a Texas Army base from a mission in Iraq in 2004, shot his wife Erin Edwards point-blank in the head before turning the gun on himself. Sergeant Jarred Terrassas, who was suffering from symptoms of aggressivity and convicted of domestic violence, was knowingly deployed into an Iraqi combat zone

to exacerbate his frenzy further. He returned from the war to kill his seven-month-old son by inflicting severe head injury. In one instance, the US Air Force repeatedly deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan Sergeant Jon Trevino, a medic with a history of psychological problems including post-traumatic stress disorder. Multiple deployments eroded Sergeant Trevino's marriage and worsened his mental health problems until, in 2006, he killed his wife, Carol, and then himself. In 2003, Jose Aguilar, 24, a sufferer of child-abuse trauma, returned from the Iraq War to his North Carolina home to kill his infant son, Damien. Christine Hansen, executive director of the Miles Foundation, which provides domestic violence assistance mostly to the wives of officers and senior enlisted men, said to *The New York Times* (Alvarez A6) that the organization's caseload had tripled since the war in Iraq began. Ironically enough, the court trials of combat-trauma induced perpetrators of domestic violence are indicative of the obfuscations of the deviant-normal divide when the irreducible inertia of pretences and méconnaissance is systematized into an institutional project.

In each of these cases of traumatic violence, one witnesses aggressivity as an introjective effect in abnormal condition of "turning round of the Oedipal conflict upon the subject's own self" (*Ecrits* 25). War is a psychologically anti-normative function that tends to thwart the typical development of the human subject in a manner which contributes to propping up of the narcissistic moment that lies subjacent in all the genetic phases of the individual, even in a stage where normative sublimation of the instinct is to be expected. The sustenance of the motif of this capitalist form of utilizing human aggressivity despite its suicidal nature is probably received from a misdirected "quest for ever more neutral subjects in an aggressivity where feeling is undesirable" (*Ecrits* 28) or only feeling of detestation is necessary. According to Lacan, war has advanced its demands for dehumanizing or demonizing subjectivity to a preposterous extent "after teaching us a great deal about the genesis of the neurosis" (*Ecrits* 28).

Wesley's masked psychoanalysis of Harry's strange behaviour refers to symptomatic infantilism that will also act as an apt clarification for Kristofor's behaviour in "Cowards." An example of human resistance

to the unconscionable demands of war to spur aggressivity by divesting humanity of feeling, Kristofor's tactic of hiding himself in his mother's boudoir to hoodwink the government and evade the draft is based on the psycho-social morality of pitting natural Oedipality against the artifice of organized, state-controlled, coercive abjection. Wesley's desire to escape the draft by hiding in the Coast Range Mountains off San Francisco is like a primordial desire to reverse the genetic course into an embryo and is collateral with Kristofor's strategy. When Battaglia, the man from the government, catches up with Kristofor on an inquest ten years after the war, Kristofor has lived his life satisfactorily. He has evaded death by war; Americanized himself by changing his name to Charles Abbot; prospered in business; moved from Fresno to San Francisco; worked in a menswear department and finally opened his own store in Post Street. He has married a Scottish-Irish girl and has four children. To Battaglia's suggestion that he should offer amnesia as an escape from the dragnet of the war inquest, Kristofor does not accede. He wishes Battaglia to record cowardice as the cause of his failure to present himself for the draft. Finally, Battaglia resolves the crisis by putting down "Father" as the reason for Kristofor's absence from war. It demonstrates his Oedipal instinct to assume the role of his own father, whom he has lost at the age of three, and stay with his mother, who claims to have threatened Kristofor with alternative abjection by choosing to die if her son—the only male person in the family—goes to war. The author makes a significantly open-ended jibe at the mother-son relationship when he says: "Only Kristofor and his mother knew what they had done and why they had done it" (*Fresno Stories* 69). Simultaneously, it is a constative expression for the man's human-specific desire to sire his own children.

It is possible to explain Kristofor's symptoms as an authorial attempt to come to terms with his own concerns of paternity. When Saroyan could not avoid conscription into the US Army as a buck private in December 1942, his insidious worries of fatality, which were till then fed by the unconscious imago of his father's untimely demise, were aggravated to such fretful proportions that he wanted to have Carol Matthau bear his child without delay, even out of wedlock, before he was sent off to war. The specific desire inherent in human sexuality appeared overwhelming

to the man threatened by fatalism. Quite significantly, when his son Aram was born on September 25, 1943, he gained a furlough from the psychiatric ward of the New York Army Hospital where he was being examined for insanity. Carol observed that he was becoming a “bitter and touchy man” (Lee and Gifford, 111) much in the likeness of the enlisted cases of paranoia in US soldiers referred to before:

Carol Matthau: It was all like a nervous breakdown. It was all—very, very hard to explain. He lived by his own gut. If he had the slightest discomfort, he felt like killing someone. (Lee and Gifford, 111)

The natural comity that lies between the Oedipal and paternal elements of human sexuality lends energy to deflect death drives towards forces of alterity. The longest wait for a soldier in the war is either waiting to be killed or spared. But there are saner things worth waiting for according to Joe Foxhall, who accompanies Wesley Jackson on Guard Duty one day. It is better to get killed without going mad, says Joe.

[EH]very man born into the body of a human being is waiting for that body to wear out and go back to the mud. He’s waiting to die. But since he knows he’s apt to have the use of the body for thirty or forty years more, he goes to work and waits for other things. When he’s a boy, he waits to be a man. Then he waits for a wife. Then he waits for a son. Then he waits to talk to his son.... (Saroyan *The Adventures* 31)

The seemingly stoic rhetoric of Joe’s declamation is invested with a positive desire for procreative alterity that characterizes the human species. The effect of destabilizing the Oedipal-paternal entropy by real combat-zone threats of castration can be realized in the case histories that I have offered of soldiers who returned from war to kill their wives and children. The forces of alterity are so expended in absorbing tactile imagoes of the fragmented body that the subject is left with no residual energy for sublimational activity.

In “Cowards,” Aylizabet’s friend Arshaluce refers to *The Evening Herald’s* report of the German boy who drowns himself in the Kings

River to escape conscription, because war to him not only means self-annihilation but also the homicide of his own German 'brothers.' The sense of fraternity stemming from the instinct of alterity leads him to prefer the Oedipal drive to the more gruesome abjection of the death instinct. In a state of regressive infantilism he drowns in the water which is like the sea of the mother's womb. He retraces his journey into the oceanic oneness of what Jessica Benjamin calls "the engulfing mother" (50). The economy of the Imaginary phase that sustains itself in the Self-Other dynamics acts as a psycho-religious bulwark against committing a Christian sin by hating the Other. In *The Adventures*, Joe Foxhall's conscientious objection to army duty is based on his disavowal of the principle of hating the enemy so that "we could kill him when we met him in combat" (32). For Joe and the Fresno German, hating others means hating one's own self. However, the German has acted upon a dogmatic notion of alterity, killing himself before killing the other. The potential of the procreative other should have mediated between forced abjection and death: his psycho-religious concerns are inflected more towards the Oedipal direction than the paternal. The necessity of striking a centre of gravity in the intersection of the lines of Oedipal and paternal forces is felt by Kristofor: under all circumstances self-annihilation needs to be resisted; self preservation is preferable to even minor breach of religious law.

"Germans," Arshaluce said. "Enemies. All of a sudden they are enemies, but after the war will they still be enemies? The boy will still be drowned. Even a life of sin in a big city is better than to be drowned, because after the war the sinner will still be alive, at any rate. There is always such a thing as redemption. He can start all over again. He can speak to the Holy Father at the Holy Church and be born again. He can take a nice Armenian girl for his wife and start a family of his own."
(*Fresno Stories* 65)

It is a stable sense of alterity that saved the life of Hovsep Lucinian in "Cowards" when the Assyrian fellow soldier of his company, whom he considered an enemy all along, dragged him to safety after he was hit by shrapnel and left for dead in an area under bombardment. Back home

from war, they became friends, married American wives and had large families who spoke neither Armenian nor Assyrian. Kristofor, for that matter, married a Scottish-Irish girl and had four children whose identity consisted of not less than four different cultural affiliations: Armenian, Scottish, Irish, and American. If the Oedipal-paternal dynamics of Kristofor's psychological make-up is underwritten by a specific desire, his notion of the human species is broadly inclusivist insofar as his sense of alterity is energetic enough not only to enable him to brave the odds associated with a deviant form of conscientious objection, in the stark absence of such rights during World War I, but also to help him scotch memories of communal differences that his Armenian past might have anthropologically excited. There is an ironically pregnant allusion to the absurdity of sustaining communal hatred in the face of forced abjection in a multiethnic army that is metaphorically homogenized by the singular threat of castration:

Gissag Jamanakian was killed at Verdun, Vaharam Vaharamian at Chateau-Thierry, and the Kasabian twins, Krikor and Karekin, at Bellau Wood. All under twenty-five years of age, all brought to Fresno from Armenia when they were still babies in arms or small boys. (*Fresno Stories* 66)

If the existence of the Armenian diaspora in America is the result of an ethnic-cleansing pogrom perpetrated by their malefactors in the Caucasus, their quest to escape symbolic castration even in the new land remains abortive when they are drafted into the army. The sense of alterity in superegoic conditions of normalcy should work independent of space and time for the human species. But politics of space and predatory concerns that generate abnormal conditions of war and enforce culturally complicit form of mutual abjection on subjectivity serve to distend sense of alterity neurotically. Those who have escaped persecution once are least likely to avoid it again because ethnic-cleansing is now replaced by a form of terrorist eradication of alterity and difference in war-time skewed normativity.

Kristofor's choice of an apparently deviant form of abjection in the face of a totalitarian norm is more constructive and curative in the

sense that he chooses to master the symptom of the disease by enacting it in the form of infantilism before the disease grows malignant and terminal. The energy needed to pursue such a course is greater because the degree of isolationist abjection in his case far exceeds that of the draftees who form a compliant group under a delusional heroism. It is a normative formation classifiable as society as much as the bodies of the dead by epidemic constitute a community. When Kristofor bravely describes his conduct as cowardice he is commenting euphemistically on the corrupt variant of normalcy in the same spirit Falstaff in Shakespeare's *Henry IV* plays explodes the myth of posthumous honour, and Wesley Jackson in *The Adventures* proclaims his pacifist conviction:

Military men and politicians like to refer to the dead as the *brave* dead or the *heroic* dead or some other kind of dead. I guess I don't understand the dead, because the only dead I can imagine are the dead dead, and that's going too far. I can understand the brave *alive*, though. [original italics] (*The Adventures* 70)

Between the signs composed of signifiers "coward" and its signified (puns included) and "father" and its signified work the dynamics of Kristofor's and, for that matter, Saroyan's libido-cultural identity as the ego works in the liminal space between id and superego in psychic economy. The split of the ego, referred to as "decomposition" (105) by Ernest Jones in the 1910 version of his famous study of *Hamlet*, takes place when "various attributes of a given person are disunited and several individuals are invented, each endowed with one group of the original attributes" (105). The fantasmatic act of creating the double, whether through fission ("decomposition") of the Self or through autoscopia, is governed more or less by the same libidinal economy that underlies the Self-Other framework in the mirror stage. Saroyan's self undergoes decomposition in the representative likenesses of Kristofor, Wesley and Harry Cook. Wesley, in turn, becomes Kristofor's double like all the other documented cases of combat-trauma induced neuroses in the US Army, in whom Kristofor lives his identity crisis of a variant psycholiterary kind before sloughing him off as a scapegoat. While others, like

Wesley, are drafted into the war, Kristofor evades military service by a symbolic mastery of his Oedipal symptoms.

Such a therapeutic performance is resorted to by Bond and Omar in Bishop Cotton School's third flat one day when they discover a dark, defunct drainage pipe and creep through its musty orifice out of the school's boundary on to a grass knoll:

After crawling on our bellies for some twenty feet, we found ourselves in complete darkness. Omar had brought along a small pencil torch, and with its help he continued writhing forward (moving backwards would have been quite impossible) until we saw a glimmer of light at the end of the tunnel. Dusty, musty, very scruffy, we emerged at last on to a grass knoll, a little way outside the school boundary.

It's always a great thrill to escape beyond the boundaries that adults have devised. Here we were in unknown territory. To travel without passports—that would be the ultimate in freedom! (Bond 55–56)

The symbolic action and the signifiers demonstrating the action replicate, like Wesley's yearned-for descent into the Coast Range Mountains and Kristofor's war-time amniotic hiding place, a libidinal quest for incestuous union consistent with Bond's desire to assume the role of his absent father. They *crawl* on *bellies* like infants (or pre-natal embryos) in *darkness* of a cavity that evokes the image of a genital passage during childbirth or copulation. They *writhe* forward in a *musty* and *scruffy* tunnel where moving backward was impossible. A sado-masochistic orgasm is reached when both emerge in a state of "jouissance" on to a blissful pine knoll. In an attempt to master the fear of fragmentation that loomed large on the eve of Partition, Omar and Ruskin enact a sexually loaded incursion of the mother's body. The nature of the prohibitive act—"to escape beyond the boundaries that adults have devised"—is ambivalent in terms of the dream-like condensation it attains by combining Oedipal reflexes with spatial imagoes. They travel without "passports," as though in disregard of territorial boundaries, under nationalistic threat of forcible dislocation in a condition al-

ready hobbled by fatherless abjection. In a symptomatic reversal of the Imaginary phase of psychic development, Omar projects his autoscopic self on Bond and Bond lives his decomposed identity in Omar. In a joint project of achieving their specular completeness through an inverted birth, they lose their objective realities into mutually subjective doubling. In a retrospective musing on his schooldays, Bond makes his relationship with Omar explicit: "Years later, when I read Conrad's *The Secret Sharer*, I thought of Omar" (53). Like the captain-narrator who discovers his double in Leggatt, the criminal first mate of the jinxed ship, the *Sephora*, in Conrad's novel, Bond projects in Omar his own identity crisis. If Conrad's captain harboured Leggatt to secure confidence in his ability to be "faithful to that ideal conception of one's own personality every man sets up for himself secretly" (Conrad 26), Bond shares with Omar an insecurity of belonging at the face of a territorial politics of nation formation. As a fair complexioned Anglo-Indian with blue eyes, he had suffered Nationalist Indian anger in form of scornful invectives and physical assault. His faith in his identity as an Indian is threatened as much as Omar's credentials of being an Indian are challenged by Partition. An outline of the genesis and development of such a spatial politics in the Indian subcontinent becomes imperative at this point to make intelligible the neurotically charged trajectory of the relationship between the decomposed selves.

Among the factors that contributed to the build-up of the Indian Partition in 1947, the most malevolent was the historical tradition of reductionism the European administrators, travellers and scholars embraced, most often unwittingly, in their assessment of the country's socio-cultural scene. In their ignorance as to what value should be placed on the subtle differences that exist among Indian communities, they reduced the pluralistic syntagm of Indian diversity to an abysmally simplified matrix based solely on religious ethnicity. Reducing the plural dimensions of identity to a singular parameter for making differences among people is an exclusionary practice that instills a sense of abjection in the masses where there was none before and intensifies feelings of discrimination into a major conflagration. The genesis of the contemporary fear of world terrorism can be connected to such a reductionist

attitude of governance during the colonial days. Internecine wars in the Indian subcontinent during the pre-European days were often fought on religious lines, but the bone of contention was always localized and did not take as behemoth a shape as to encompass all imagined subscribers to a faith into anything of the nature of Pakistan. There are examples of Hindu kings willingly playing into the hands of Mughal conquerors to defeat their Hindu adversaries, but those diplomatic equations seldom turned out to be egregiously fundamentalist: tactical reason did not give way to passion.

Ruskin Bond's nostalgic reflection on his friendship with Omar prior to their Partition-induced separation is a critical account of imperial practices. He reverses the notion of identity into an inclusivist project. If Omar and Bond are Muslim and non-Muslim respectively, they are also pupils of the same grade and same school, both communicate in the same language, are players of the school's hockey team, and if they belong to different houses according to the rules of the public school system, they share a bonding in both having lost their respective fathers and are attracted to each other by virtue of their sense of unbelonging to the general brood of feverish, Marx Brothers-imitating fourth formers. The sense of psychological abjection suffered by two twelve-year-old boys is transformed into a sense of fraternity. The difference in their religious bearings during their public school days is occluded by the availability of multiple other choices of dispensation.

In the concept of identity inhere the notions of both similarity and difference: similar to someone or something and different from another person or thing. Similarity is posited in terms of relational differences from others where others act as "traces" within the affiliative choice, thus divesting the point of similarity of any essentialist substance. Similarity becomes a peculiar absence diffused among the constituents of the trace which can be categorized in terms of religion, class, profession, caste, ethnicity, country and so on. The possibility of a singular choice—until forced into making by historical circumstances like the infant makes of his delusive "Ideal I" in the mirror stage—becomes always a possibility of infinitely deferred realizability. Until circumstances culminated into dissection of the country by a handful of "people who mattered,"

who presumed having in the Imaginary ideal a better orientation for the infant nation, identity exclusively in terms of a singular dispensation independent of its traces was a metonymic absence. The following description by Yasmin Khan of the sociological makeup of the country at the end of World War II and on the eve of Partition is a well researched observation testifying to the irreducible nature of the relativity of identity:

On the eve of Partition, even in the places where there was a heightened sense of difference, there were many countervailing forces. Mercantile and manufacturing communities from sari weavers to tea planters depended on pragmatic cooperation for their livelihoods, while festivals and holidays were flamboyantly celebrated across the board. Class, as ever, acted as a social gel and rich Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims of the same social standing partied together in gilded hotels, irrespective of religion; university friends of various backgrounds attended the same classes; and poor agriculturalists relaxed together on *charpois* at the end of a day's work. Above all, it was a very long jump from a sense of difference, or lack of social cohesion, to mass slaughter and rape. There was nothing 'inevitable' about Partition and nobody could have predicted, at the end of the Second World War, that half a million people or more were going to die because of these differences. (22)

The Indian politicians who tinkered with the issue of Partition in the run-up for the 1946 election of provincial and interim central governments found it expedient to ensure quick support for a cause which preferred emotive investment to rational thought. At the end of World War II, the imperial interest of the British in India began to flag. Displays of anti-colonial feelings were so intense that the war-ravaged British government envisaged a process of hasty decolonization. The democratic means of electing an Indian party to whom power could be transferred was resorted to with such breakneck speed that neither the Congress nor the Muslim League—the two major players in the power game—had time to map out a rational and constructive agenda of self-governance. Both parties took recourse to playing the religious card that would yield

instantaneous harvest by exciting sentiments that the colonial rule had exploited for a considerable time. In other words, the inconvenient pace in which an uncertain state of modernity with its accompanying apprehensions of material inequality was ushered in made communities fall back on pre-modern instincts of religiosity for defensive energy. The Muslim League, under the leadership of Jinnah, staked claim to a separate Islamic state for the Muslims, which induced a quick-fire effect on the imagination of a sizable chunk of the community's electorate, if not on its entire adult populace. Although the 1946 election is referred to as a democratic process, only ten percent of the total adult populace enjoyed franchise. So, when I mention the Muslim community's choice at the hustings, I take care to ascribe the choice to its electorate, of which many voted for the League, but the electorate itself constituted only a sliver of the community's and also the country's adult populace. In order to counter the League's campaigning strategies, the Congress wielded both Hindu and Muslim communal cards, to attract voters to the cause of an undivided, sovereign Indian nationhood. The fairness of the election is questionable not only for its numerically undemocratic representation but also for the rigged nature of its conduct:

At the polling booths, people long dead were frequently registered, boxes of ballot papers went missing and women electors wearing veils impersonated other women in order to vote multiple times, in at least one case by changing saris on every occasion. (Khan 37)

The *sine qua non* of communication is undistorted transparency. Defined by Jürgen Habermas in *The Theory of Communicative Action*, this sort of communication is pivotal for benign human relationships. The entire democratic process that seemingly galvanized fission in the Indian subcontinent, however, is based on a communicative pathology that infected the pre-modern defensive mechanism into a septic sore. Those who voted for a separate Pakistan had hardly any inkling of what freedom it would secure. Because Pakistan was still then an imaginary construct with its territorial expanse undecided, the electors were lured into invoking their own disaster insofar as they did not foresee that the

creation of a separate state might mean exile and dislocation for large numbers of people.

When the deliberations of the Cabinet Mission failed to produce a viable solution to the tangle of power transfer, visceral killings and rapes were organized between Hindus and Muslims across the country, even in places like Calcutta, Bihar and Central Provinces which had no likelihood of being apportioned to a separate Pakistani territory. The intention was to demonstrate to the British government, who were responsible for the crisis to a great extent, that Hindus and Muslims are inimical to each other and are unable to coexist at the same time and space. People tried to force abjection on each other in the absence of any superegoic police or sublimational channels to defuse death instincts. Identity was reduced to a singular motif: Hindu (also Sikh in the Punjab) or Muslim. When Pakistan was finally carved out, most of those who desired it either had to suffer exile or stay put in the face of bitter sectarian violence. The arbitrary dividing line between India and Pakistan was mapped roughly in terms of number—numerical strength of communal populations based on a dated census—irrespective of human relationships, historical and cultural heritages associated with geographical spaces and not the least, memories of growing up.

The “death drive” in a state of enforced abjection is a revival of the Oedipal urge that deprives the abject of the normative order of psycho-social independence. The multiple identity-marking factorials offer a sublimational post-Oedipal dynamic to socio-cultural beings whose normal development is towards freedom. But when a reductionist ideology hopes to achieve freedom by conceptualizing subjectivity in terms of a unitary dispensation, it suppresses the Self-Other dynamic to a state of static oppositionality. The fragmented nature of the Self in opposition to its mirror-image intensifies aggressivity and destructive urges (sexual content of the drives became perceptible in the gruesome nature of the riot killings and rapes). Freedom was a metonymic absence: the democratic means (the 1946 election) adopted to usher in freedom became a suicidal project. National identities of Indians and Pakistanis tended to lose their multivalence into a singularly oppositional reality:

There was no simple blueprint for becoming an Indian or a Pakistani. One thing people could agree on, though, was that the 'other' state was rapidly looking like an adversary, or even an enemy. Nationalist politics had collapsed into two national tragedies. (Khan 166)

A perceived threat of the "other" gave birth to unconscionable defense spending in the budgetary allocations of both states. Rapid militarization ensued and the Pakistani government and politicians engaged in activities that instilled a sense of fear among their countrymen that the Indian "other," who were not well disposed to Pakistan's separation, might use military power to annex lost territory. When the disputed princely province of Kashmir acceded to India, the fear intensified and an immediate armed skirmish in the Kashmir border between the two states became a reality in 1948–49. The spate of recruitment in the Pakistani Army reached its nadir when a coup under the Sandhurst-trained military general, Ayub Khan, based apparently on the motif of cleansing the Pakistan's polity of corruption, wrested power from an elected government. Pakistan became a military state in terms of both internal administration and foreign affairs. With Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, an India-bashing foreign minister, most of the state's energy and time were directed against India. The relation between the two countries was further exacerbated by US arms supply to India in the wake of the latter's defeat in the Sino-Indian War of 1962. It was quite likely that Omar in "The Playing Fields" would be motivated towards a Pakistani Army career in such a context. Ayub Khan's clandestine plan to annex Kashmir through a terrorist attack, code named Operation Gibraltar, culminated into a full-fledged India-Pakistan War in 1965.

Omar piloted a bomber into Indian territory and was shot down over Ambala. Unlike the drainage pipe in his school flat, there was no tunnel in the air where he could practice symptomatic management of his death instinct. The reductive ideology of identity-formation that had forced political abjection on the subjectivity of a young boy during Partition worked at an invidious clip under a nationalistic authoritarian regime. If coercive drafting during war in a cosmopolitan society

is a totalitarian aberration or, according to Derrida, an expression of democracy's "autoimmune" (*Rogues* 37) tendencies, that inflame aggressivity in otherwise subliminal psyches, aggressivity in an authoritarian regime stemming from an exclusivist notion of religious identity is a normative phenomenon. The correspondences between the inhuman mode of capitalist production of warfare and the reductive principle of nation formation are so obvious that distortion of communicative systems and reification of social relations instantiated in Saroyan and Bond find common ground for analysis. The etiological principle of the autoscopic self in Omar works in terms of communicative reciprocity. When communication flounders in a pathological sense of betrayal and mistrust death instincts are first instigated towards annihilating the autoscopic self because a tremendous amount of energy now scars the psychic object of narcissistic jealousy.

The Kashmir issue becomes a spatial metonymy for a broader sense of belonging that had suffered a severe psychological blow at the time of the territorial dissection. If Omar is Bond's double, Bond is Omar's autoscopic decomposition who also becomes the object of his envy for being able to persist in the course of the libido-cultural economy when he is unjustly disbanded from it. From Bond's point of view, Omar's death instinct leads him to unite with the maternal object symbolized in the space his pre-schizoid normative self affiliated with, the place where he and Bond once tried to master their Oedipal drives in symptomatic attempts at achieving superegoic independence. Unfortunately, there is no scope for mastery now; Omar's double abjection has led him to self-annihilation in a pursuit of murdering his incestuous double. Like the paranoid soldiers of the US Army who returned home to kill themselves and their wives and children, Omar kills himself in the act of killing his decomposed self/selves (his Indian kin). For Bond, however, the death of his double appears to be a symbolic release from his own death instinct that remained repressed in the memories of abjection and Nationalist rejection. Like Conrad's captain who sloughs off his double by letting Leggatt take his punishment at the end of *The Secret Sharer* and Kristofor who disclaims any truck with his Wesleyan alter-ego through an infantile gesture, Bond confirms his emergence from identity crisis

by recounting the death of Omar. It is absurd for a German/Armenian-American to fight a German or an Armenian and an Indian-Pakistani to fight an Indian. Through extrapolation or by dint of the logic of exemplarity a bilateral case study becomes a trope for cosmopolitan dystopia.

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