WORKING TITLE: Violent images and parasitic memories

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

This article, while discussing two of the many forms of witnessing and documenting conflicts through mobile photography, delved deeper into the chasm between human and machinic memory to exhume the parasitic nature of "violent" images. Can images be violent? As the article progresses to its central argument, it also lays the framework that images can often be as violent as the event or the time they represent. In saying so, I also argue that images or photographs can carry an inherent quality of timeless violence within themselves. An aesthetically pleasing image of the conflict between Palestinians and Israeli occupation in the Gaza Strip may somewhat sanitize the otherwise festering site of war. A hazy, grainy, low-light image of legs in motion, of people fleeing tear gas shelling, may convey tension and uneasiness. Images are contingent on temporal registers; they change meanings with time and space, but even as they shift shape from one context to another, the most innocuous and ordinary ones may hide between bits and bytes to transport trauma from one subject to another. This article is a work in progress, and I am trying to make sense of these images and their effect on the witnesses of communal violence between majority Hindus and minority Muslims in India's capital, New Delhi, that claimed over 60 lives in the year 2020. It should also be mentioned that India is on the verge of Muslim genocide (Genocide Watch Assessment, 2023), where divisions between Hindus and Muslims are widening with state-supported digital statecraft. Along with traditional ethnography, I also collected sensory data – conducting sensory ethnography (Pink 2009).

In this article, I discuss the images of the violence preserved, with or without the purpose of documentation, by my interlocutors. Attached to these images are sticky memories and mobile traumas. Unlike personal memories that may or may not bear the duress of time and stay, these memories are preserved in the gigabyte-heavy mobile devices that stick on. And in their being, in partial permanency, they move with the host they stick on. Also, the experiences tell a poignant tale of loss, memorialization, and the exigency to not forget because of specific

distinct reasons: First, not acknowledging that it's there but it's there to creep up on you; second, a remembering device for an intimate purpose; and third, remembering with a purpose – witnessing and recording human right violation. Social media users inhabit the "consensually hallucinated cyberspace" (Chun 2008). As Paul Virilio ((Virilio 2005) has said, cyberspace has implemented a real-time that is eradicating local spaces and times. This global one-time threatens "a total loss of the bearings of the individual" and "a loss of control over reason" as the interval between image and subject disappears. Chun argues that everyday usage and parlance arrest memory and its degenerative possibilities to support dreams of superhuman digital programmability. New media aspires for "regenerative memory". "The longevity of this digital memory depends on the 'refresh', on how many times it can be 'accessed', remembering is not operational, not natural, but a compulsion," she writes.

Images and text, old and new, keep circulating on social media networks. They demand action. They either want you to delete them or share them. Old videos of beheading from Syria is shared now and then with different context and so does other images and videos of violence and propaganda. In this way, the messages are intertextual – a text message could be superimposed on an image or a video – and also intermedial – clips from the mainstream media that conform to the ideological standpoint of the group are shared in the WhatsApp groups. Savarna (upper caste), middle-class Hindus have a significant online presence, the purpose of which is to archive and create hegemonic Hindu historiography demanding primordialism or a cultural claim to the origin of the tremendous human interventions in world history (Sinha, 2017; (Udupa, 2015); Chopra, 2006; (Nayar, 2014). Udupa (2017) wrote about a "new geography of affect" where viral videos and images float from cities to villages and beyond national boundaries to create trans-local political communities.

Social media can be seen as the contemporary equivalent of what the newspaper, the poster, the leaflet, or direct mail was for the labor movement. They are meant not simply to convey abstract opinions but also to give shape to how people come together and act together or to […] choreograph collective action (Gerbaudo 2017). Knapp (1989) had called this disposition to act in an ethically appropriate way a disposition to act in the way some designated person or group acted, whatever that may have been. Most scholars studying mis and disinformation also point to the creation of false memories and distortion of the 'real' authoritative history. Marita Sturken (1998) challenges this paranoia. She calls for an inquiry into the recovered memory not to ascribe their falsehood but to examine the duress they bear, the latent fears they reveal, and the desires they effectuate. The data collected from my fieldwork where a pogrom was carried out leads me to the discussion on how digital memories

and mobile images are amenable in particular ecosystems and sensorium, but even in their amenability, they are stoic – they live on.

KEYWORDS: violent images, mobile traumas, sticky memories, affect, cyberspace

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