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Irish Studies Review 2016, 24(4), 430-440.

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This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in *Irish Studies Review* on 02/09/16, available online: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09670882.2016.1226679>

DOI link to article:

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09670882.2016.1226679>

Date deposited:

28/10/2016

Embargo release date:

02 March 2018

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Connolly, Gandhi and Anticolonial (non)Violence

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This article examines the contrasting role of violence in the anticolonial struggles of India and Ireland. It turns to the early writing of Mohandas K. Gandhi to explicate how violence for Indian nationalists shaped by the writings of Gandhi, was configured as a European methodology and antithetical to Indian culture. In contrast, James Connolly anticipates the work of Frantz Fanon in advocating violence as a necessary means to purge the ideological influence of British Colonial Rule from the minds of colonised subjects. It concludes by looking at the legacy of the two approaches to suggest that, rather paradoxically, Gandhi's utilisation of nonviolence as a strategy of resistance proved to be more disruptive to the workings of the British State.

Keywords: violence; nonviolence; passive resistance; colonialism; Ireland; India; James Connolly; Mohandas K. Gandhi; *satyagrah*; *Hind Swaraj*.

In the early hours of June 24 2016, Nigel Farage, leader of the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), took to the airwaves to declare that the people of Britain had voted to leave the European Union. Encouraging his supporters to “dare to dream,” Farage celebrated what he referred to as “Britain’s Independence Day,” a feat all the more remarkable, he bellowed, as it had been accomplished “without having to fight, without a single bullet being fired”.¹ A controversial and divisive figure in British politics, Farage’s rhetoric evidences a conscious attempt to elevate the Brexit campaign to the ranks of hard-won conflicts that had similarly adopted passive resistance, while simultaneously articulating a deluded desire to refashion himself as belonging to a genealogy of nonconformist leaders. In this very British revolution, Farage conjured up the spectral legacy of both Martin Luther King and Mahatma Gandhi when testifying to the campaign’s non-violent credentials; yet he also evoked the words of Daniel O’Connell, who famously declared, “liberty is too dearly

purchased at a price of a single drop of blood”.² Not known for either humility or sensitivity, his claim that Brexit had been achieved “without a single bullet being fired” recalls another tradition of revolutionary struggle of a more violent complexion. While crassly eliding the execution of the sitting MP Jo Cox only a few weeks prior, the phrase “without a single bullet being fired” conjures up a tradition of British parliamentarians murdered by political insurgents locked in emancipatory struggles from colonial rule; most notably, Irish Republican violence against British establishment politicians that began with the execution of Lord Frederick Cavendish at the hands of the Irish National Invincibles in 1882, to the deaths of Airey Neave (1979) and Ian Gow (1990) in the twentieth century. Violence as an expression of political frustration, in a European context, has a long and bloody history. In both the writing and actions of James Connolly, a general theory of revolutionary violence begins to form that stands against the philosophy of Gandhi, and which anticipates the revolutionary postcolonial work of Martinique-born Frantz Fanon. Connolly’s writing schematises the various mechanisms of control at the disposal of the modern state as part of its Ideological and Repressive State Apparatuses, and provides a portrait of colonial control that situates violence at the very heart of its operations. In doing so, Connolly’s political theory proposes that the oppressive violence of the state requires a radical socialist response which is equally as violent, in a manner that intellectually pre-empts Fanon’s famous maxim that “decolonisation is always a violent phenomenon”.³

This article interrogates the anticolonial struggles staged in both India and Ireland in the early twentieth century. This is not an attempt to trespass into historical territory that has been already comprehensively mapped elsewhere by historians of both conflicts. Nevertheless, by exploring the output of Gandhi and his philosophy of

satyagraha against Connolly's writing on both the socialist struggle in Ireland and his discussion of the machinations of British rule in India, two competing visions of resistance emerge. I will argue that for Gandhi, violence was a European importation into India, an alien tradition that not only betrays an ancient cultural history of passive resistance, but which transforms the colonised subject into a tragic and traumatised figure. Connolly, as a Scot and European, adopted a different theoretical position on the redemptive value of violence when speculating as to how it could be mobilised against the strength of the British State. I will also discuss how the raiders of the Chittagong Armoury who, under the leadership of Surya Sen, took inspiration from the events of the 1916 Easter Revolution, rejected Gandhi's *satyagraha* when embarking on a movement that, ultimately, met a similarly bloody end to the one pursued by Pearse and Connolly. The article concludes by deploying Chittagong as an historical case study through which the efficacy of armed struggle within a non-European context can be charted against Gandhi's non-violent alternative.

As Marx and Engels outline in the *Communist Manifesto*, imperialist greed for new resources and markets propelled Britain across the four corners of the globe and established an Empire with an unrivalled territorial reach. Although synonymous with Indian emancipation from colonial rule, it was while working as a newly trained lawyer that Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi witnessed the oppressive repercussions of iniquitous power relations in the South African outpost of British colonial rule. Arriving in South Africa in 1893 at the age of twenty-four, he would remain in the country for the next twenty-one years and his exposure to the injustices experienced by Indian indentured labour would prove to have a radicalising effect.⁴ As Nelson Mandela observed in relation to the formative importance that Gandhi's exposure to the nightmares of indentured labour had upon the developmental history of his work:

“You gave us Mohandas Gandhi; we returned him to you as Mahatma Gandhi”. It was in 1916, a year of profound crisis in the history of the British Imperial State, that Gandhi began developing his project of non-violent civic disobedience. This philosophy of passive resistance was given the name *satyagraha* (*satya*, truth; *agraha*, insistence) and first practised by Gandhi against the proto-Apartheid organisational system in South Africa which was eventually transposed to an Indian context.

Satyagraha has been transformed into a conceptual shorthand that marks a form of passive resistance in opposition to the violence perpetrated by a dominant order. Yet Gandhi conceives of the term as also possessing a spiritual dimension that operates as a corrective to the violent intolerance of colonial logic. For Gandhi, *satyagraha* represents an absolute refusal to legitimise the presence of Europeans in colonial territories. It was in 1909 when, sailing on board the *SS Kildonan Castle* between London and South Africa, he began to compose his book *Hind Swaraj*, otherwise known as *Indian Home Rule*. The composition of *Hind Swaraj* represents a pivotal moment in Gandhi’s intellectual progression from a barrister who was born into the middle class prosperity of the Vaishya caste, to his emergence as the key political figure in the anticolonial struggle for an indentured Indian diaspora and as the talismanic figure of Indian independence. It is in the *Hind Swaraj* that Gandhi offers a radical alternative to violence as a means to undermine colonial authority.

The unusual [hierarchic](#) style of Gandhi’s text – it is presented as a dialogue between the foolhardy “reader” and the paternalistic “editor” – means, at a formal level, that Gandhi’s text can be understood as an attempt to instruct the people of India on an alternative means of resisting the [British](#) colonial administration. Throughout the dialogue the figure of “reader” is delineated as being an entrenched proponent of militaristic violence. When averring that Indian nationalists should “assassinate a few

Englishmen and strike terror,” the “reader” [configures](#) violence as a subversive strategy [crucial to](#) the radical reorganisation of society.⁵

[By](#) contrast, the “editor” emerges throughout the text as a super-ego agent whose sermonising on the self-destructive potential of violence frequently borders on patronising. If the “reader” is symbolic of the Indian everyman, then the “editor” emerges as a figure of theological authority [whose](#) commitment to passive resistance [chimes with that of](#) Gandhi as the author of the text. It is tempting to understand Gandhi’s *satyagraha* movement as a pragmatic response to the obvious imbalance of bureaucratic might and mechanised firepower. This configuration of *satyagraha* as a reaction to asymmetrical power, however, fails to capture the full ethical complexity of Gandhi’s philosophy. By picking up arms against the British, the leaders of the Easter Rising conceived of violence as possessing emancipatory potential for national liberation. *Satyagraha*, on the other hand, refuses to legitimise violence as an outlet for colonial frustration. In response to the “reader’s” desire to bear arms against the colonial aggressor, the “editor” reasons that the subjugated colonised subject should instead militarise the discrepant power relations by effectively transforming their bodies into a weapon against the dominant authority:

Do you not tremble to think of freeing India by assassination? What we need to do is kill ourselves. It is a cowardly thought, that of killing others. Whom do you suppose to free by assassination? The millions of India do not desire it. Those who are intoxicated by the wretched modern civilisation think these things. Those who will rise to power by murder will certainly not make the nation happy.⁶

The “editor,” here, identifies the moral repercussions of armed violence upon the moral character of a liberated people. Gandhi reverses the established logic of war as an abandonment of both morality and ethics, in reimagining victory won by violence as leaving an allegorical mark of Cain upon the new nation. The notion of liberation earned through armed struggle is reversed to demonstrate how violence serves only to further imprison colonised subjects.⁷

Furthermore, Gandhi conceives of violence as a European tradition that is fundamentally alien to indigenous Indian culture. Violence is inherently European, so to react to violence with yet more violence is an act of legitimising the logic and presence of the foreign invader:

The English are splendidly armed; that does not frighten me, but it is clear that, to pit ourselves against them in arms, thousands of Indians must be armed. If such a thing is possible, how many years will it take? Moreover, to arm India on a large scale is to Europeanise it. Then her condition will be just as pitiable as that of Europe.⁸

The act of violence, in its very manifestation, bears testimony to the legacy of European intervention within India. Any attempt to use violence in order to achieve independence is also, therefore, an expression of Indian subjugation. Violence possesses the potential to “Europeanise” those who are most explicitly frustrated by the injustices perpetrated by the custodians of the British regime. It is not just that violence leaves an indelible stain upon the Indian national conscience, but that Indian violence represents a further colonising of the Indian national character by European expansionists.

The editor proceeds to offer a manifesto of passive resistance that serves the dual purpose of undermining the potency of colonial power while simultaneously ennobling the people of India. This strategy of non-conformism whereby the colonised body is reworked as a weapon of resistance is given the name of “soul-force” by the editor figure of the *Hind Swaraj*, and one that demands a “sacrific[ing] of self”.⁹ As the “editor” declares to his intractable interlocutor, personal resistance “is a method of securing rights by personal suffering; it is the reverse of resistance by arms. When I refuse to do a thing that is repugnant to my conscience, I use soul-force”.¹⁰ When the “reader” asserts, in response, that passive resistance is nothing more than a “weapon for the weak,” the “editor” retorts that “[p]assive resistance, that is, soul-force, is matchless. It is superior to the force of arms. How, then, can it be considered only a weapon of the weak”.¹¹ Gandhi depicts the “reader,” emblematic of a sceptical Indian people who have grown accustomed to the violence of diurnal life under colonial rule, as construing passivity as weakness. This, for Gandhi, fails to recognise the latent positivism of passive resistance as a doctrine which negates the physical and spiritual demands required by those practitioners of *satyagraha*:

It is difficult to become a passive resister, unless the body is trained. As a rule, the mind, residing in a body that has become weakened by pampering, is also weak, and, where there is no strength of mind, there can be no strength of soul. We will have to improve our physique by getting rid of infant marriages and luxurious living.¹²

Passive resistance necessitates a symbiosis between mind and body. The “editor” goes on to praise the benefits of vegetarianism and chastity as forms of spiritual training

that prepare the body for the rigours of passive resistance enacted as political resistance. For the “editor” and for Gandhi, passive resistance provides an alternative to the European tradition of violence, one which is innately Indian in its historico-cultural makeup. If violence is a Europeanising force, then passive resistance stands as a reclamation of a lost Indian nobility: “The fact is that, in India, the nation at large has generally used passive resistance in all departments of life. We cease to co-operate with our rulers when they displease us. This is passive resistance”.¹³

What the “editor”/Gandhi figure fails to acknowledge in the espousing of passive resistance as an anticolonial strategy is the absolute violence of non-conformism as a form of anticolonial resistance. In refusing to endorse violence, Gandhi establishes a dynamic of conflict between the colonised and coloniser that completely disrupts the established order of being. In doing so, passive resistance ruptures the logic of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century British imperialism in a way that is significantly more traumatic than the militarism adopted by Pearse and Connolly. It is the subversion of the very logic of British imperial rule that allows Slavoj Žižek to advance the controversial formula that “*Gandhi was more violent than Hitler*”.¹⁴ While recognising that on some empirical level Hitler was, indeed, more violent than Gandhi, Žižek contends that Gandhi’s adoption of passive resistance succeeded in undermining the order of British colonial rule in India: “What Gandhi did, although it was very peaceful but in a way extremely violent, was to boycott customs, etc. He targeted the entire structure of the British Colonial State”.¹⁵ The Indian nationalists, shaped in the image of Gandhi, were successful precisely because they targeted the basic functions of the British Colonial State as opposed to engaging the British in an uneven military conflict.

James Connolly, [by](#) contrast, reasoned that violence was a necessary weapon to be mobilised against the British in Ireland precisely because imperial capitalism was an inherently violent system, both physically and ideologically. Connolly, too, targeted the basic infrastructure upon which the British State was reliant in order to sabotage the capitalist economy. In “Labour, Nationality and Religion” (1910), Connolly remarks that “the socialists anticipate violence only because they know the evil nature of the beast they contend with,” arguing that “we do not need to fear their violence” as the British are reliant upon the railroad, dock and coal worker in a way that leaves them vulnerable.¹⁶ This is why, for Connolly, the “Socialists have weapons that will make this social revolution comparatively bloodless and peaceable despite the tigerish instincts or desires of the capitalist enemy”.¹⁷ If violence is a European phenomenon, then Connolly, as a European, recognises the need for armed struggle against an opponent as muscular as the colonial and capitalist British State.

In “The Coming Revolt in India: Its Political and Social Causes” (1908) published by Connolly in *Harp*, he evokes India as a case study to make manifest the physical and psychological stratagems utilised by the British to establish and then maintain colonial dominion over colonised people. As noted in Donal [Nevin](#)’s biography of Connolly, he retooled his military service in India as a fact-finding mission with which to consider the shared relationship between Irish and Indian experiences of colonial rule.¹⁸ Connolly sets out to puncture an Orientalist mythology that had been constructed and then disseminated through imperial discourse that constructed India as a land of plenty. “The first point to note,” Connolly writes, “is that the reader must in discussing Indian affairs at once rid himself of all the extravagant ideas about the ‘wealth of India’, a spurious myth that was propagated in order to justify the colonialist expansionism of ‘English romancers, avaricious

English adventurers or unscrupulous statesmen”.¹⁹ Connolly’s writing on India functions as a corrective to the popular imperial imagination of India as an exotic landscape of excess. By undercutting the sort of Orientalist *mythos* nourished within colonial discourse, he alerts a contemporary readership to the oppressive reality of the Indian poor living under British command: “India is [...] one of the poorest, if not the poorest, of all countries in the world. Her immense population live from generation to generation in a state of chronic misery that death from actual hunger excites no comment whatever”.²⁰ Connolly debunks the discursive strategies employed by the British in their attempt to reimagine the colonial campaign in terms of a benevolent economy and places the writers of Imperial Romance – a group that included the most famous chronicler of Anglo-Indian experience, Rudyard Kipling, – within his critical crosshairs in his pamphlet on British rule in India. As Connolly observes,

[w]e are constantly informed by all Anglo-Indian writers that the English in India have been mighty instruments of Divine Providence for winning the land, from anarchy and oppression, bringing it within the area of civilisation and order; and, finally, of introducing its people to all the inestimable benefits of modern civilisation.²¹

Connolly’s schematising of the moral alibi mobilised by the British in order to legitimise the plunder of the Indian Sub-Continent demonstrates a logic that has become known as proto-Fanonian within postcolonial studies, in its awareness of the “civilising mission” as a physical and psychological strategy. Christianity, for Connolly, primarily fulfils a pacifying function contravening the doctrinal messages of its foundational text, to be imposed upon an Indian population for ideological

reasons. Connolly establishes a transnational solidarity between the Irish and Indian peasantry when he writes that the “Irish are [...] well enough acquainted with the ways of English officialdom to be able to discount [...] the brightly coloured reports of progress emanating from such sources”.²² Furthermore, in disputing the spurious ethnography and Orientalism of colonial discourse, he presents pre-colonial India as a society in possession of a rich cultural, philosophical and intellectual history. While not denying that “progress has been made in India under British rule,” Connolly disputes the logic that this “progress” – a term that carries a very problematic weight in the lexicon of colonial history and one which Connolly was no doubt attuned to – was instigated as a result of European Imperial expansionism:

The only question is, in what degree is that progress due to British rule, and in what degree is it that progress which, under any circumstances, would have been made by an intellectual people with a continuity of literary and philosophic activity stretching back for two thousand years and more?²³

Connolly strengthens the historical and social bonds that unite Ireland and India as nations that have toiled under the imperial dominance of Britain when discussing how colonialism introduced periods of devastating famine in both countries. “India,” he writes, “is regarded by its alien rulers as a huge human cattle farm to be worked solely in the interest of the dominant class of another nation,” a geographical space from which to plunder materials and goods to bolster the coffers of the British Imperial State.²⁴ Connolly outlines the devastating implications of a regime which privileges capital over human suffering, a feature he recognises as a hallmark of British colonial

involvement in both India and Ireland. In order to conceal the sheer brutality of colonialism, Connolly analyses how charity is utilised as a means to assuage a form of colonial guilt that aids colonial greed:

Charity, however, though utterly useless for the purpose of staying the ravages of famine among a population of thirty-six millions perishing beneath it, yet fulfills the purpose of those who desire to hear their own trumpet blowing and see their names advertised side by side with the elite of society and in company with royalty.²⁵

Connolly exposes charity as possessing an ideological dimension in that it ensures that the starving Indian poor remain dependent upon British colonial rule for charitable handouts. For Connolly, charity, once politicised in such a way, becomes bereft of any altruistic merit. Instead, charity functions as yet another form of colonial abuse against colonised subjects: a perverse gesture that transforms the perpetrators of colonial violence into figures of benevolence. Colonised subjects require the charity of the hegemonic order as a means to alleviate the strife they endure as a result of colonialism. Connolly thus lays bare the systemic violence of colonialism in attempting to mask the horrors it creates.

Connolly's critique of charity recalls that other great Irish socialist, Oscar Wilde. In "The Soul of Man Under Socialism" (1891), Wilde turns his diagnostic eye to a prominent subsection of nineteenth-century British life: the bourgeois do-gooder. While Wilde acknowledges that it is an innate reaction of those who "spoil their lives by an unhealthy and exaggerated altruism" to want to alleviate the suffering with which they are confronted he yet insists that such altruistic tendencies become part of

the problem.²⁶ For Wilde, the “emotions of man are stirred more quickly than man’s intelligence” and it is this emotional response that inhibits the charitable individual from thinking critically; if they were to do so, they would see that “their remedies do not cure the disease: they merely prolong it [...] their remedies are part of the disease”.²⁷ Wilde creates a direct symbolic association between the poor of London’s East End who are made to endure the patronising interventions of bourgeois capitalists and colonial subjects whose bodies were turned into capital by the representatives of colonial capitalism:

Just as the worst slave-owners were those who were kind to their slaves, and so prevented the horror of the system being realised by those who suffered from it, and understood by those who contemplated it, so, in the present state of things in England, the people who do most harm are the people who try to do most good [...] charity degrades and demoralises. [...] Charity creates a multitude of sins.²⁸

In both Connolly and Wilde’s configuration of altruism, charity is to be resisted for two reasons: firstly, it provides the bourgeois individual with a moral alibi in which culpability is negated by way of acquiring a narcissistic belief of having acted in the interest of the *socius*. Charity, in both instances, is imagined in terms of an economy of violence, whereby the bourgeois do-gooder requires poverty in order to achieve a sense of purpose, or, in the case of charity in India, to participate in the preservation of the Empire. Secondly, charity inculcates and encourages passivity among a subjugated population. This lack of agency coheres with Fanon’s schematising of colonialism as desiring a totalising form of control, whereby the exploited population

consumes the myth that the only way to escape the poverty imposed upon them by colonialism, is to follow the logic and etiquette of the dominant colonial order as a means, via charity, of alleviating suffering.

Connolly posits a redemptive strategy in his writing on India to counteract the asymmetrical power relations of the British colonial regime that are partly concealed through charity: justice. The various apparatuses of the state – the legislative, the judiciary, the bureaucratic, etc. – operate in grotesque harmony to enact violence upon the Indian subject. It is, for Connolly, an obscene reminder of the absolute authority of colonial power in the everyday life of the colonised subject and of the state's ideological reach. By way of a closed-circuit logic, colonialism instigates famine through the unsustainable plundering of Indian resources in order to broadcast, via various communicative outlets, the charitable measures undertaken to relieve starvation. This is the true horror of the iniquitous power relations established under colonial rule; the hegemonic authority can deny justice to the victims by means of its quasi-theological power. Justice is perverted by colonial rule so that it becomes perpetually skewed in favour of the dominant binary. By masking the reality of colonial rule, charity perpetuates the injustice of colonialism in so far as the colonised subject has no recourse open to them – legislative, communicative, cultural – by which to express their sense of injustice. Connolly's Indian writings configure the acquisition of justice as a means to empower those who toil within such a landscape of injustice. As Connolly writes "[t]he people in India require justice, but justice is exactly what they must not expect"; instead, charity will be offered as a weapon that will remove all agency from a population toiling under iniquity and violence: "justice India must not expect, but charity she will have".²⁹

Enraged by this sense of injustice and inspired by the events and writings of Easter 1916, a band of armed raiders descended upon the Chittagong Police armoury on Good Friday 1930, in the Bengal province of British India. Michael Silvestri charts the points of politico-cultural intersection between the Irish and Indian abolition of colonial rule, his work focusing primarily on Bengal as the locality most under the sway of the Easter 1916 narrative. For Silvestri:

Although the rise of the revolutionary terrorist movement in Bengal preceded the Easter Rising by more than a decade, after the First World War Ireland became the most important model for physical-force nationalists in the province. Both Bengali nationalists and British administrators drew comparisons between Irish resistance to the British Empire and contemporary terrorist activity in Bengal. For the former group, the Irish experience provided a heroic model of anticolonial resistance, as well as what seemed to be a blueprint for national liberation. For the British officers involved in countering terrorism in Bengal, however, the British experience in Ireland offered a wealth of strategies to apply – or avoid – as well as understanding the “terrorist mentality”.³⁰

Gandhi became highly critical of the figures involved with, and the broader events surrounding, Easter 1916. He criticised the leaders of the uprising for not considering the moral implications to the violence that they had unleashed in the name of their struggle. It represented, for Gandhi, an admission of desperation from the ranks of the rebel organisers, one that, in contravening the logic of *satyagraha*,

would undermine the legitimacy of their cause and which would inevitably seed an intensification of violence:

Ireland gained absolutely nothing through the policy of harassment and obstruction and remember, it had an able leader like Parnell to fight for it. In despair, it has now taken to the method of violence. This also, I believe, is a mistake. I have cited the instance of Ireland only to show that obstruction leads nowhere.³¹

Gandhi remained critical of the course of action that was adopted in the wake of Easter 1916 and, in particular, with the intellectual and political wing of Irish rebels, believing that Sinn Féin demonstrated a commitment to violence that aligned them with the worst criminals of the British colonial era. By way of comparison, Gandhi evokes the figure of Colonel Reginald Dyer, who commanded troops serving in the British Indian Army to open fire on a congregation of nonviolent protestors who had gathered in Jallianwala Bagh in what became known as the Amritsar massacre of 1919.³² The comparison between the Irish rebels and Dyer testifies to Gandhi's belief in the detrimental effects of violence upon oppressed people and its ability to transform the colonised into a simulacra of the coloniser:

The Sinn Féiners resort to violence in every shape and form. Theirs is a frightfulness not unlike General Dyer's. We may pardon it if we choose, because we sympathise with their cause. But it does not on that account differ from General Dyer's act [...] We must therefore seek to guard English life as our own. We must constitute ourselves as self-appointed

volunteers guarding English life from violent hands. And our success depends upon our ability to control all the violent and fanatical forces in our midst.³³

Gandhi believed that England “yielded” when its ruling elites were unable to “bear the sight of blood pouring out of thousands of Irish arteries”;³⁴ and here there is yet another point of similarity between the two respective struggles: that, although employing radically different strategies, both approaches relied upon the imparting of, what Žižek refers to as, a “minimal dignity” to the British colonisers.³⁵ When confronted with the “gallons of blood” that had been shed by the Irish in their struggle, the untold deaths amidst their ranks and among civilians, and the losses that had occurred on the British side, Gandhi claims that it was the coloniser who, ultimately, lost their appetite for all of the bloodshed resulting in their conceding political defeat in a manner which assigns them a quota of dignity. Yet, this logic was also applicable to a British Indian Army who had grown squeamish at the sight of the massacres committed under the banner of British progress in India and who had grown wary of an emerging Indian nationalism shaped in the image of Gandhi’s writing. In bestowing dignity to the British – who eventually retreated when confronted with the casualties of armed resistance and relented in the face of passive resistance – Gandhi redraws the ethical dynamic extant in the coloniser/colonised dyad, with the effect that the oppressor then emerges to reclaim the sort of moral superiority that originally legitimised the entire colonial campaign. “It’s very sad,” writes Žižek when analysing the efficacy of passive resistance but “this procedure, where you play on human dignity, only works [...] up to the point where your opponent is minimally dignified *with a certain ethics*”.³⁶ Although Gandhi explicitly states that the violence extolled

by the Irish rebels in 1916 besmirches the morality of their cause while simultaneously he is remodeling the British as possessing a quota of moral decency, Žižek's analysis of non-violence as a radical anticolonial strategy, which is in practice *more* violent, leads to the same ethical zero point:

This is the reason Gandhi's way worked but why you can't universalize it. It worked because the British colonizers, in spite of all the horror, had a certain minimal dignity. Is not the ultimate limitation of Gandhi's strategy, however, that it works only against a liberal democratic regime which abides by certain minimal ethico-political standards – in which, to put it in emotive terms, those in power still “have a conscience”? When Gandhi was asked what the Jews in Germany should do against Hitler in the late 1930s, he said they should commit mass suicide and thus arouse the conscience of the world. But it wouldn't work with the Nazis. We can easily imagine the Nazi reaction to this: “Fine, we'll help you – where do you want the poison delivered to?”³⁷

The moral complexities of Gandhi's adoption of passive resistance, his critique of Irish Nationalist violence and his reimagining of the British as acquiring a minimal moral dignity, is demonstrative of an ambiguous ethical position that is not reciprocated in Connolly's writing on violence. Marx's historical dialecticism carves up society along crisply codified binary lines which elide the sort of ethical binds that Gandhi creates for himself. For Connolly, the violence of the ruling bourgeoisie in Ireland necessitates a violent response in order to reorganise Irish society in accordance with socialist principles. The bourgeoisie in Europe, according to

Connolly, are “evil” and do not recoil from using violence to “perpetuate their robber rule”; therefore, the only appropriate response from an oppressed population is to engage the dominant order in such terms as to make the ruling classes tremble at the prospect of Irish Revolution. Connolly’s violence is justified in the face of Gandhi’s critique of Irish armed struggle on account of his portrayal of the British as a cruel and unjust oppressor whose colonial capitalist greed is so rapacious that it trumps all ethical concerns.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my colleagues within the School of English at Newcastle University who introduced me to Gandhi’s *Hind Swaraj* as one of our set texts in our weekly [Theory Reading Group](#). They are Neelam Srivastava and Sadek Kessouas, and Tom Langley who is now based at Kings College London.

Notes

¹ Farage, cited in Zoe Williams “Nigel Farage’s Victory Speech was a Triumph of Poor Taste and Ugliness”, in *The Guardian Newspaper*, 24th June 2016.

² O’Connell, *Portrait of a Radical*, 27.

³ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 99.

⁴ Gandhi was famously thrown off a train at Pietermaritzburg for refusing to move from the first-class compartment. For a more detailed study on the formative importance of South Africa on Gandhi’s political activism, see Eric Itzkin, *Gandhi’s Johannesburg: Birthplace of Satyagraha*.

⁵ Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj and Other Writings*, 72.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁷ The weaponising of the fragile human form against the technological might of mechanised military weaponry continues to be seen in areas of the globe, such as in contemporary Palestine, where obvious discrepancies of power force individuals to use their bodies as weapons of resistance.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 90.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 90.

¹¹ Ibid., 93.

¹² Ibid., 96.

¹³ Ibid., 95.

¹⁴ Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes*, 475.

¹⁵ Žižek, *Demanding the Impossible*, 177.

¹⁶ Connolly, “Labour, Nationality and Religion”, 112.

¹⁷ Ibid., 112.

¹⁸ As always with Connolly, definitive biographical detail of his time in India is scant. For a more detailed discussion of the mystery that continues to surround Connolly’s time in India, see Donal Niven, *James Connolly: ‘A Full Life’*, [18-19](#).

¹⁹ Connolly, “The Coming Revolt in India: Its Political and Social Causes”, *James Connolly: Selected Political Writings*, 231. From the very inception of the British intervention in India, cartography was deployed as a mechanism by which Britain could extricate the substantial natural resources of India. Detailed cartographic maps of India were ordered which would allow ruthless colonial speculators to swiftly locate, remove and then ship Indian resources. Contemporary cartographic representations testify to the European belief that India was a territorial site of immense natural wealth. In contrast, maps of the African interior were characterised by a lack of topographic definition and forensic rigour. A popular misconception gained traction in the imperial imagination of the nineteenth century, that Africa was devoid of the same sort of natural and mineral wealth that was to be found in Africa. Indeed, the Scottish evangelical explorer David Livingstone was a canny operator who included in his fundraising patter to wealthy benefactors lines that referenced the concealed natural riches hidden within the continental interiority of Africa. For more on the importance of imperial cartography on the nineteenth-century experiment to “open up” Africa, see Robbie McLaughlan. *Re-Imagining “The Dark Continent” in fin de siècle Literature*.

²⁰ Connolly, “The Coming Revolt in India: Its Political and Social Causes”, 231.

²¹ Ibid., 233.

²² Ibid., 233.

²³ Ibid., 233.

²⁴ Ibid., 235.

²⁵ Ibid., 240.

²⁶ Wilde, *The Soul of Man Under Socialism*, 3.

²⁷ Ibid., 3.

²⁸ Ibid., 3.

²⁹ Connolly, “The Coming Revolt in India: Its Political and Social Causes”, 235.

³⁰ Silvestri, ““The Sinn Fein of India”: Irish Nationalism and the Policing of Revolutionary Terrorism in Bengal”, 455. In his book *Ireland and India: Nationalism, Empire and Memory*, Silvestri comprehensively documents the shared lineage, and the deviations, between the two nationalist struggles.

³¹ Gandhi, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. XVIII, 56.

³² Dyer had instructed his forces to block the main exits of Jallianwala Bagh (a public garden in Amritsar in the Punjab) where an estimated 25,000 protestors and Baisakhi pilgrims, among them Sikhs, Muslims and Hindus, had congregated in the garden among with traders for the Baisakhi annual fair. Dyer issued the command for his troops to open fire on the densest parts of the gathered crowd in retaliation for what he perceived to be Indian disobedience. Although official numbers are disputed, it is estimated that approximately 1500 people lost their lives that day.

³³ Gandhi, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. XVIII, 220.

³⁴ Gandhi, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. XV, 18.

³⁵ Žižek, *Demanding the Impossible*, 178.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 178.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 178.

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