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South Asia



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This paper was first given as a key-note address *Visual Practices in South Asian Nationalisms* at a conference entitled “Secularism, Religious Nationalism and the State: Visual Practices and Public Subjects” organized at the American University of Beirut in April 2005. I want to thank Dr Maha Yahya for her invitation.

You may not have noticed it yet, but, according to some observers, democracy has arrived in the Middle East. It came as part of the shock and awe of the American invasion in Iraq and resulted in elections there that were declared a success. Now it is spreading all over the Middle East. Some years ago we saw a large anti-Syrian demonstration in Beirut on our television screens. Our commentators said that this was another sign of the coming of democracy, a process of transformation of the Middle East that was started by the American invasion of Iraq. No longer could the voice of the people be suppressed by corrupt elites. When the Shi'ite Hezbollah later organized an even larger pro-Syrian demonstration, our commentators were somewhat at loss whether this should also be interpreted as a sign of the coming of democracy. After the destruction of parts of Beirut by Israeli planes in a conflict with Hezbollah, nobody talked about the coming of democracy anymore.

Much of this representation follows the narrative and imagery of the fall of the Berlin Wall and ultimately of that primal scene, the storming of the Bastille in the French Revolution: the people finally get rid of dictatorship and take power in their own hands. Whether the facts on the ground are the same or even similar is doubtful, but the representation is the same for East Germany, Romania, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Iraq, and Lebanon. These are just a few instances of the worldwide soap opera of democracy we are enjoying daily on our televisions. It is hard to tell whether we are better informed about the world because of the availability of these images, are just better entertained, or are amused to death, as Neil Postman put it. However, there is little doubt that, with an increasing visibility of locales in a world market of images, there is no decrease in invisibility of practices and institutions in those locales. We see more, but we know perhaps not less but just as little. A good example of this is the representation of the Tiananmen demonstrations of 1989 in Beijing, which fits neatly into the narrative of the coming of democracy and its suppression and thus has been widely televised and circulated. Images of demonstrations by tens of thousands of members of Falun Gong in 1999 on the same square against the suppression of their so-called sect have scarcely been televised or circulated, since that story cannot be easily represented as a narrative of democracy. The actions of Falun Gong and the response by the Communist Party escape from this narrative frame, and one needs quite a bit of extra information to be able to interpret why breathing meditation is threatening to Communist rule in China. This dialectic of the seen and the unseen, of the visible and the invisible, occurs in many ways, and I will try in this presentation to make some of it visible. My main suggestion is that a focus on the visual register should involve a strong awareness of both what is made visible in state practices and

what is made invisible, as well as a sense of the counterfactual nature of liberal claims of openness, transparency, and full accountability.

The nation form is a modern social configuration. Its modernity is shown in the emergence of a range of institutions and practices, including visual ones. Modernity is also shown in the disappearance of visual practices that are stigmatized as non-modern or traditional. Foucault gives a famous European example when he speaks about the disappearance of the public execution, the spectacle of the auto-da-fé, the stake, and the gallows. This is such a good example because it connects the disappearance of the public execution to the rise of a number of other modern practices, such as new ideas of the person, of crime and punishment, and of mental health, which are part of new perceptions of the possibilities of the nation-state. It is also such a good example since it implicitly makes one think of the variability of modern arrangements existing today, since, indeed, public executions have not disappeared in China, Saudi-Arabia, while in the United States witnesses are invited. One needs comparative work, as in this volume, to counter claims of a singular, universal modernity. While capital punishment is an ultimate sign of the power of the state to give and take life, it is only one in a repertoire of visual practices – such as flags, public commemorations, tombs of the unknown soldier, uniforms, and so on and so forth – that evoke the power of the state to symbolize the immortality of the nation in relation to the death of individual citizens.

A focus on the visual practices of the modern nation-state also brings to the fore the opposite of the visible, namely, the secret, hidden practices of the state. The modern state not only show, it also hides. Spectators see only a part of reality and may say later that they did not know what happened, although it happened under their very eyes. Jews in Germany were not massacred in large-scale public executions but secretly in concentration camps. Prisoners are not flogged in public to be an example to others, but they are secretly tortured in order to find the truth they are hiding or just to humiliate them. When these practices are found out and made public, the discussion often turns to whether they belong to the formal side of the state or the informal one, like the economy.

One of the oldest state institutions dealing with the security of the state is indeed secret. The secret service is a central institution not only in undemocratic societies but also in democratic ones. That fact in itself is already very productive in creating collective fantasies of conspiracy, rumors, metaphysics of invisible presences, the romanticism of adventure in Kipling, Ian Fleming, and all the spy novelists. Intelligence and security deal not only with foreign powers that threaten the sovereignty

of the state but also with internal forces of dissent and disloyalty. The difference between outward appearance and inward truth seems to be crucial here. People may appear to be loyal, law-abiding citizens, but behind their mask may be a loyalty to a foreign power and a secrecy about their true motives. It is striking how much this narrative of loyalty to the nation resembles the domestic narrative of spousal loyalty. In both cases, the indeterminacy of visibility and true motives fuels the drama of betrayal and punishment. Since anxiety about security has been heightened after 9/11, there is a strong sense in Europe that immigrants are loyal not to the nation-state but to foreign powers, such as global terrorism. This question of loyalty is as old as the Protestant Reformation in Western Europe, when it was raised mostly in relation to Catholic loyalty to Rome. It has received a new lease on life, however, with Muslim immigration to the West, so that now people have become anxious about whether there is even a clear Pope or Rome or Church. Visible signs of the difference of these immigrants, such as the famous headscarves in Europe, are interpreted as symbols of disloyalty to the nation-state that receives immigrants. But even in India, where Muslims have been living for a millennium, or, for that matter, in China there is a widespread feeling that Muslims are not loyal to the nation-state but secretly put their religion first. In that sense, they are a security issue for the institutions of the state. To follow out the metaphor of the domestic drama, this may lead to divorce, ethnic cleansing, or elimination.

Christian Europe seems to offer an example of this in early modern Spain's banishment of Jews and Muslims. On the very day in 1492 that Columbus set sail to what turned out to be the New World, he noted in his log the shiploads of Jews leaving their Old World home of a millennium under threat of death. Spain also offers a good example of the modern state's emphasis on making true motives visible, given that the Inquisition developed methods to find out the true loyalty of Spanish Jews and Muslims who were forcibly converted to Catholicism. In the seventeenth century, the Spanish state decided that true loyalty could not be determined, and a law was passed decreeing that the Moriscos be eliminated or deported, since they formed a different *nacion*.¹ One of the most interesting issues for my argument is that both the visibility of outward signs of difference and their invisibility can be interpreted as symbols of disloyalty to the state. One can show oneself to the outside world as a completely assimilated citizen and still be suspected of having a different orientation in one's heart. And, like jealousy, such anxiety can take over bureaucratic rationality

1 Marc Shell, *Children of the earth: literature, politics, and nationhood* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

and lead to genocide, as we have seen over and over again, starting from the time when modern ideas of the nation emerged.

Not only the political power of the state but also its economic power is often invisible and deals with the invisible. Money is an ultimate sign of a nation's sovereignty, as the word for the coin itself indicates and as the portraits and symbols and inscriptions on money signify. Moreover, the state's power depends on its tax base. Indeed, the welfare of the nation, as well as the effectiveness of the state, depends upon monetary value. Inflation, devaluation, revaluation, exchange value, the value of one's labor – all are signs of the health of the polity and the trustworthiness of political leaders. The state guarantees the value of its money, and people hold a strong belief in the invisible power of the state when they hold visible coinage in their hands. The state is held accountable for the functioning of the market, and this is, in effect, more important for people's political judgment than most other fields of political action. Nevertheless, the value of money depends on invisible market forces that are not controlled or are only partly controlled by the nation-state. So here again, as in espionage, the foreign hand comes in to explain sudden changes in the fortunes of the nation, and internally that foreign hand is helped by the disloyalty of marginal economic groups like Jews or Lebanese or Indians or Chinese, who connect the local to the global via trade and money lending. Since money signifies exchange and thus the basis of society itself, it attracts moral thought concerning the possibilities and limits of exchange. Money, then, is the source of evil, the province of the devil. And indeed much religious thought is focused on banking and interest. Islamic thought about sharia is only one instance of this. Through its fetishism and circularity, money transcends purity and opens social life up to corruption. Corruption is often considered to be the aspect of economic action that takes place behind the scenes, in the dark, but what about the invisible hand of the market itself? This is, again, a field of great fantasies of conspiracy and great, unfulfilled demands of transparency. And it immediately concerns the central institutions of the modern nation-state.

Not only the practices of the institutions of the state are made visible or invisible in particular ways. It is also interesting to look at the visibility or invisibility of practices that are, as it were, conceived to be outside of the state, in civil society or in a sphere that is called "open" or "public": the public sphere. Not only are communication and "openness" crucial to civil society and the public sphere, as has been most prominently argued by Jürgen Habermas, but their opposite, secrecy, is also key. Reinhart Koselleck has argued that the emergence of the secret societies of Free-

masonry was essential to the development of the Enlightenment critique of the Absolutist state.² The important point here is that in the eighteenth century the Masonic lodges were able to erect a wall protecting their debates and rituals from intrusion both by the state and by the profane world. It is precisely a moving away from state institutions and official politics that enables a fundamental moral critique of power. It should be clear, however, that this critique can take an unpleasant and terrorist form, as it did in the Jacobin theory of the French Revolution. This uncomfortable dialectic between secrecy and critique troubled German theorists like Habermas and Koselleck after the Second World War. Both in civil society and in the state, there is a constant creative tension between what is made visible and what is made invisible.

The changing nature of technologies of publicity and secrecy, such as nowadays the Internet, is of crucial importance in understanding both state power and its critique in the public sphere. It is certainly not true that one gets better informed with the growth of media, such as television, that produce more and more images of the world. Behind that growing visibility is a growing invisibility. However, the development of technologies of communication, including the visual, is important in the transformation of society into the nation form. Benedict Anderson focuses on the print revolution of early capitalism for understanding the rise of the national imaginary.³ In his view, the modern public of the nation is a reading public. I would think, however, that the story of the nation in many areas is also a story of the uneven spread of literacy. The public sphere may, in Habermas's terms, be bourgeois and thus literate, but in the formation of the nation an illiterate mass has to be mobilized not by texts but by images and sounds. In South Asia, as elsewhere, starting in the second half of the nineteenth century, the mass production of images fostered an imagination of the nation. To this was added radio, with all the implications of which language would be chosen for broadcasts, Hindi, Urdu, or the mixed Hindustani. Before Partition, a Hindi poet (S. H. Vatsyayan, or Agyeya) and an Urdu essayist (Chaudhuri Hassan Hazrat) together made a concerted attempt to create a lexicon for Hindustani broadcast, but this effort was immediately aborted after Partition. Yet the language of *Bollywood* films is still Hindustani, showing how far the popular ear extends beyond the limits of the nation.

2 See my discussion of Habermas and Koselleck in "Secrecy and Publicity in the South Asian Public Arena," in *Public Islam and the Common Good*, ed. Armando Salvatore and Dale Eickelman (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 29–53.

3 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

Liberal theorists often understand the modern nation-state to be secular. That is somewhat strange, since religious movements have played such an important role in the rise of nationalism everywhere. Nevertheless, there is a widespread ideal among liberals and socialists alike that religion should be a private matter and not a public affair. We can only conclude that this ideal has not been realized in many nation-states that appear to be modern, such as the United States, Poland, and Ireland. For me, religion is one of the most important fields of social practice and is constitutive of the modern nation-state. In my view, Anderson downplays the importance of religion in the emergence of the modern national consciousness, although he shows an awareness of the connection between print capitalism and the Protestant Reformation. It is, however, not primarily the novel but the printed Bible and religious tracts that were crucial in the rise of a modern consciousness. Religion was nationalized in the various discourses of modernity throughout the nineteenth-century world and had a productive and necessary dialectic with secular nationalism. During this period, religious movements all over the world make ample use of new visual technologies to produce a visual culture for the masses that became crucial for their understanding not only of their religious beliefs but also of the connection between religion and nation. In the United States, already in the nineteenth century the evangelical movement for a Christian America was built on that. And there is nothing nonmodern about it, although it is not secular.

Religious ritual is certainly a spectacle and a theater productive of strongly held beliefs. It is also a source of secular rituals of the nation-state and of its ideology, or, as Carl Schmitt puts it, its political theology. Many authors have pointed out that secular nationalism has a religious origin. I would, rather, argue that what we understand as the religious and the secular are mutually dependent. Moreover, the structural opposition of the secular and the religious is transformed in the rise of the nation-state. Secular nationalism must find its legitimacy in the culture, the language, and the history of a people, and religion is always part of that. Religious nationalism always has to come to terms with the secularization of the law, the market, and science. Under colonial conditions modern education arrives under the flag of missionary Christianity, as it does in the Syrian Protestant College, renamed the American University of Beirut, where the plaque on the main gate bears the biblical words "That they may have life, and have it more abundantly." "This College is for all conditions and classes of men without regard to color, nationality, race or religion," its founder Daniel Bliss argued in 1871: "A man, white, black or yellow: Christian, Jew, Mohammedan or heathen, may enter and enjoy all the advantages of this insti-

tution for three, four or eight years; and go out believing in one God, in many Gods, or in no God. But it will be impossible for any one to continue with us long without knowing what we believe to be the truth and our reasons for that belief.” The dialectic of the secular and the religious is so deeply intertwined in defining social life that it is hard to disentangle, and perhaps it is not always useful to do so.

Religious practices and institutions, such as rituals, processions, churches, temples, and images, have an abundance of visual richness, so much so that secularists often deplore the visual poverty of secular rituals of marriage and death. Nevertheless, religion seems to be primarily concerned with the invisible, with the afterlife, with God, with the soul, with spirits. According to William James, religion is founded on the subjective experience of an invisible presence. This may be true, but we only have access to that subjective experience through the mediation of concrete, visible practices, such as speaking, writing, and acts of worship. At the same time, these acts may be considered to produce an experience of the invisible. There is a whole range of activities that induce religious dispositions and concern the relation between human subjects and the invisible. Crucial in that mediation is, precisely, invisibility or virtuality. There is always uncertainty and indeterminacy about the addressee and the success of communication. I would suggest that this is also true for the relation between subject and state, and I do not find it surprising that interpreters of that brilliant novel about modernity, Kafka’s *The Trial*, hesitate between the state and religion when discussing invisible power. There seems to be a secularity to the spiritual and a spirituality to the secular that are totally neglected by liberal theorists of the state.

Given the fragmentary nature of nationalism, allow me to give you now a few snapshots of the visual imagery that is part of the wide array of practices involved in producing the nation-as-space. First of all, let us enter a country. One has to cross a border, which is often not very visible. The arbitrary nature of the border is made clear in border conflicts. In South Asia, the border between Pakistan and India is particularly a site of dispute and ultimately armed conflict. A good example of this is the Kargil conflict in 1999. India and Pakistan share a 740-kilometer line of control along the Jammu-Srinagar and Srinagar-Leh roads. We are talking here about an uninhabitable area of ice and snow. There are a number of outposts that get snow-bound and must be “abandoned” by both sides until the snow melts. This leads to a game in which both parties try to seize “unoccupied” posts. In 1999, Pakistan infiltrated across a frontier of 100 kilometers or so in the Kargil area. In reply, the Indian army conducted what it called “one of the biggest anti-militancy operations in recent years.” Highly successful air strikes by India were followed by the shooting down of

two Indian jet fighters and an armed helicopter. An open war seemed unavoidable, but Pakistan decided, after a number of skirmishes, to withdraw.

Two things about this conflict have made a lasting impression on me. The first is the visual imagery of soldiers in a landscape that may have seemed attractive from the 50-degrees-centigrade heat of Delhi and Lahore but that is, in fact, completely uninhabitable, impenetrable and forbidding. This kind of military effort to control such an unattractive area shows the importance of the idea of the nation as space. Long before the Kargil conflict, in 1962 the Indians had suffered defeat in another forbidding part of the Himalaya Mountains in a conflict with China. This continued to be a major source of national humiliation, as if one had not been able to protect one's house against intruders. Second, I had seldom seen Indians in such a frenzy of patriotic emotions as during the Kargil crisis. Let us listen to the language of patriotism:

With unrelenting courage and fierce determination, our brave soldiers are guarding the country from the enemy's clutches. Facing danger at every step and hostile weather conditions, they put their lives at risk. Forsaking the comforts of home and family life for a life of hardship and danger, it's their unwavering love for their motherland that spurs them on. This is dedicated to the brave men of our soil who embrace danger and even death willingly for the sake of the country. This is the tribute to their indomitable will, their stoic courage, and their intense love for nation.

The impenetrable mountain range is an excellent backdrop for this narrative of masculine heroism and hero-worship. In the end it is not territory as such that counts but the way the landscape as a background for heroism functions to represent the honor and sovereignty of the nation. Nation as space is made real by the representational theater of the Kargil conflict. This is a secular space, although the roots of the conflict between India and Pakistan are communal or religious. Much of that spatial imagination of the nation is based on imperial mapping, and one of the nationalists projects is to provide a precolonial mapping that can offer deeper roots for the nation as space. For Savarkar, the ideologue of Hindutva, the basis of a Hindu nation is the sacred geography of India. *Pitrabhumi*, or Fatherland, is *punyabhumi*, sacred land. Modern discourse on the nation as a territorially based community is connected to religious discourse on sacred space. Sacred space is constructed through ritual. In the classical Durkheimian formulation, the crucial ritual act divides space into sacred and profane, but anyone who has tried to use this opposition gets into empirical trouble. I think that ritual as a spatial performance provides an arena of several mapping strategies that make some spaces visible and others invisible. In India pil-

grimage has always been a major ritual of trans-locality. In the nineteenth century, pilgrimage networks greatly benefited from improvement in communications, such as the railways, and they have become increasingly important for growing parts of the population up to the present day. It is, then, not surprising that Savarkar's ideology of a sacred fatherland of Hindus was made visible in the 1980s in rituals derived from pilgrimage.

The VHP (Vishva Hindu Parishad; The World Hindu Organization) experimented on a large scale with ritual in what is called "a sacrifice for unity" (*ekatmatayajna*) in 1983.⁴ Sacrifice, in this case, referred to an extremely complex and well-organized cluster of processions that reached, according to the VHP's estimate, some sixty million people. Three large processions (*yatra*) traversed India in November and December 1993. The first started in Hardwar in the North and reached Kanyakumari (India's southernmost point). The second, inaugurated by the King of Nepal (a Hindu kingdom that is not part of India), started in Katmandu and reached Rameshwaram in Tamil Nadu. The third started in Gangasagar in the east and reached Somanatha in the west. Significantly, the three processions crossed in the middle of the country in Nagpur, which is not a pilgrimage center but the headquarters of the RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, National Volunteer Organization). At least forty-seven small processions (*upayatra*) traversed other parts of the country, connecting up at appointed meeting places with one of the three larger processions. The processions followed well-known pilgrimage routes that link major religious centers, suggesting the geographical unity of India as a sacred space (*kshetra*) of Hindus. In this sense, pilgrimage was transformed into a ritual of national integration for Hindus. Processions of temple chariots (*rathas*) are an important part of temple rituals in India. An image of the god is taken for a ride in his domain, during which he confirms his territorial sovereignty and extends his blessings. The processions of the VHP made use of *rathas* in the form of brand-new trucks – some critics called this Toyota-Hinduism. Each of the three main processions was named after its "chariot": Mahadevaratha, Pashupatiratha, and Kapilaratha, names that refer to gods and saints worshiped in the places from which the processions started out. The chariots carried an image of Bharat Mata. The political use of the mother goddess in India is also known from regional parties, such as Telugu Desam, but Mother India was here projected onto the map of India. The chariots also carried waterpots (*kalasha*) filled with local

4 See my discussion in *Religious Nationalism. Hindus and Muslims in India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

sacred water mixed with Ganges water, the most sacred of all. Waterpots are among the most potent symbols in Hindu ritual, signifying power and auspiciousness.

This nationalist ritual is thus an assemblage of several important elements in Hindu ritual, and one has to be an anthropologist to say that this is just an invention of tradition. What is made invisible by this ritual of unity is that through its mappings it makes invisible other possible mappings, in which Christians and Muslims would have a place. Christians and Muslims are shown to be outside the fold. Being a pilgrimage, it makes invisible all the other ways to understand the sacred geography of India – in terms of non-Brahmanic sites, Sufi shrines in which Hindus and Muslims come together, Christian shrines in which everyone appears, etc. Indeed, the reason for putting this ritual together was to launch a protest against a much-publicized mass conversion of Untouchables to Islam in Meenakshipuram in South India.

This particular ritual was later followed by a number of similar rituals, of which the campaign to liberate the birthplace of Ram in Ayodhya has been the most important. One element in this campaign was particularly successful, namely, the making of special bricks, inscribed with the words *Shri Rama*, for building the Ram Janmabhumi temple on Ram's birthplace after the destruction of the mosque that had been erected on that birthplace in the sixteenth century by a general of the Mughal Emperor Babar. These bricks were consecrated in a ceremony called Ram Shilan Puja, then collected and transported to Ayodhya. The processions that brought these bricks to Ayodhya often went through Muslim areas and created communal violence according to an age-old pattern in which rituals create riots. These bricks came not only from India but also from abroad, wherever persons of Indian origins lived. Rama was pictured on some posters as a warlike hero but on others as a baby, like baby Krishna, addressing the wide spectrum of national sentiments and devotional emotions. This campaign contributed to the electoral victory of the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) in India and the destruction of the Babar mosque in Ayodhya, as well as to communal carnage in many places in India, such as Gujarat and Bombay. Since the issue can never be solved (*sub iudice aeternitatis*), it continues to be a wonderful political tool for Hindu nationalists.

One often hears that such Hindu nationalist rituals show the politicization of ritual and are a travesty of true religion. Hindutva is viewed as a fake religion, a simple sleight of hand to gain political power. There is no doubt that the rituals I have described are to be understood as nationalist, but does that make them fake? I would not know how observers and interpreters who stand outside of a tradition could justify such a claim about true and fake religion, although clearly those who

stand within a tradition may argue that some rituals are heterodox or a travesty. The question ultimately seems to boil down to who has the authority to interpret rituals and decide what their symbolic meaning is. One therefore has to examine the power of an institution such as a church or the state, of a movement like the VHP, or of discourses such as that of nationalism. If we go back to the example of Falun Gong with which we began, the Chinese government decided to interpret this movement's breathing techniques and meditations not as genuine but as a political threat to the state. According to the *People's Daily* of June 15, 2000, the government has never forbidden the practice of normal exercises: "people have the freedom to believe in and practice any method of qigong, except when they ... use the banner of exercises ... to spread superstition, create chaos, and organize large-scale gatherings that disturb social order and influence social stability." Whatever people say they are doing, their practices are interpreted in a political arena. Similarly, women wearing headscarves in Holland or France may think that such a practice is part of virtuous conduct, but the state and liberal opinion may decide that it signifies disloyalty and extremism and/or the unjustifiable subjection of woman to man.

The problem with analyzing rituals as symbolic texts that can be read by anthropologists or by the state is that such an analysis makes a symbol the vehicle of a meaning that can be decoded. However, as Talal Asad has argued, one may define a symbol not as an object or an event that serves to carry a meaning but as a set of relationships between objects or events uniquely brought together as complexes or as concepts, having an at once intellectual, instrumental, and emotional significance.⁵ This allows us to raise questions about the conditions under which such complexes or concepts are formed and how their formation is related to varieties of practice. The conditions (discursive and nondiscursive) that explain how symbols come to be constructed and become natural and authoritative then become the object of inquiry. Of course, Hindu nationalism reconceptualizes tradition as part of a Hindu modernity and, indeed, history writing is a major element in this conceptualization. Certainly this has been going on for more than a century, and it cannot explain the rise of the Sangh Parivar (the allied forces of Hindu nationalism) in the 1980s. That must be related to the decline of the Congress patronage system. These are major long-term and short-term conditions for the naturalness and authority of the Hindutva ritual campaigns. Another major condition, however, is a shift in the Indian mediascape: the rise of television and the success of the televised *Ramayana*.

5 Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: discipline and reasons of power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

A major element in Hindu ritual is visuality. Central to worship is the concept of *darshan*, which means “seeing.” Seeing a divine image brings one into the presence of the supernatural. Certainly some images are more powerful than others, so Hindus go on pilgrimage to see them. They do so at certain moments in the calendar, since some moments are more auspicious than others. The mechanical reproduction of images – in calendar art, for example – has increased the reach and the mobility of images but has not really damaged the authentic power of the original image. Actually, more people participate in pilgrimages to more distant destinations, and the popularity of divine images is enhanced by reproduction. It is important to see that these sacred journeys are completely intertwined with secular consumption patterns, especially the development of tourism. The popularity of a particular cult is further enhanced by itinerant preachers, who spread the story and embellish it as storytellers, drawing huge crowds and making it into a contemporary moral tale. Devotional theater has also for a long time played a role in spreading the popularity of a cult. All these elements were in place in the story of the god Rama, which was well known all over India in different regional versions, including a classical Sanskrit text and a hugely popular Hindu rendition, *Tulsidas’s Ramcaritmanas*.

Mass communication via television (seeing from afar, *durdarshan*) is a part of the ongoing transformation of this mediascape, but a major part. It does not replace the elements I have just mentioned, but it changes them. It is hard to underestimate the influence of the televising of the *Ramayan*, the story of Rama, on Indian television in 1987. It drew record audiences, which were surpassed only by the subsequent televising of the other major religious story of India, the *Mahabharata*. Part of its success lay in promoting a moral utopia of sacrifice for the community and a rejection of the shallowness of secular individualism. At least that was what the Hindutva ideologues capitalized on. More concretely, the televised *Ramayan* transformed the birthplace of Rama from a mythical place in a sacred text into a site in Ayodhya that was simultaneously superreal, decontextualized, and dehistoricized. Certainly, pilgrims to Ayodhya had been doing something like that for centuries, but pilgrimage to Ayodhya had always been a regional, limited affair. Central to this pilgrimage is *darshan*, sacred seeing, and this raises the crucial question of mediation between the viewer and the sacred. To transform the streets of Ayodhya into the sacred streets of heavenly Ayodhya (or Saket) depends on a deliberate, meditative effort by the viewer, assisted by a priest or a monk who takes him around to see, among other things, the birthplace of Rama. On television, however, viewing is not guided by theologically inspired meditative practice. Its melodramatic conventions may derive from the older

practices of the Ramlila performances, but television's virtuality relates in new ways to religion's virtuality by making *darshan* surreal but theologically undisciplined. Traveling to Ayodhya in an actual pilgrimage transforms a person into a pilgrim, but traveling to it by way of television transforms a person into someone who may have an opinion. In the end, these transformations of the mediascape, both religious and secular, enable the political projects that we have witnessed in India over the last two decades.

Coming to my conclusion, I want to suggest that to look at the visual implies a simultaneous concern with the invisible, the unseen, the secret, as well as with the conditions of seeing. The assumptions of liberal theorists that the modern democratic state is open, transparent, and accountable must be criticized, since it is a utopia that legitimates imperial politics. We have to confront the magic of the state and its occult powers to represent itself as stable, as controlled by rationality, bureaucratic or otherwise. And we have to confront its pomposity, its excess of uniforms, military drill, weapon shows, and statues and portraits of the great leaders. This is an area of mimicry, of illusions of grandeur, of the violence of fantasy in state terror, as in Saddam Hussain's Iraq, the Shah's Iran, Mussolini's Italy. We also should examine the ways in which this is ridiculed and criticized in cartoons, such as those of Laxman in India, in rumors, in exposures as part of a complex public sphere – but we also need to look for radical moral critiques of the state that are hidden and secret.

A comparative exercise allows one to see, beyond images that have been made natural and unquestionable, not so much reality or truth as the conditions under which certain images are produced as authoritative. Comparison allows one to see that similar elements, like the capitalist market, state bureaucracy, and religious movements, make up different configurations and trajectories. This is always very clear in discussions about the religious and the secular. The interdependence of the religious and the secular develops differently in different contexts. The argument that secular modernity comes from the West and/or from Christianity is based on the historical fact that some major Enlightenment arguments for secularity have indeed originated in Dutch, French, and American societies. In all these societies, these arguments have been taken up, discussed, and, to a greater or lesser extent, accepted. Nevertheless, none of these societies is a simple instance of a universal, secular modernity. Indeed, there are great differences between French *laïcité*, the American wall of separation, and Dutch pillarization. This makes comparative work on the interdependence of the religious and the secular of great importance for political theory.

If there is one political leader who truly exemplifies this interdependence, it is Gandhi. Gandhi found himself confronted with two major problems. First of, Hindu-Muslim antagonism was a major threat to the creation of an Indian nation. This problem became more and more crucial in the struggle for Independence. Second, Indian society was marked by one of the most pervasive systems of inequality in the world, which was religiously sanctioned by Hindu tradition. Gandhi made a major argument for developing Indian secularism when he pleaded for nonviolence and tolerance. Gandhi's argument was based on a moral reasoning quite different from Western Enlightenment arguments. His notions of nonviolence and tolerance did not emerge from a perspective like that of John Stuart Mill, according to which one must be tolerant because one can never be sure one has attained a singular truth.

In Gandhi's view, one does attain at truth through one's experiments with truth (*satyagraha*), but this truth is a moral truth, which must be experienced and indeed shown to others through one's own example. One should not criticize those who have not realized such truth and, given that criticism is already a kind of violence, one should in general avoid violently imposing truth upon others who are not convinced by one's example. Truth, then, is moral, though cognitive truth is important in helping us to realize our moral goals rather than being destroyed by materialism. This kind of religious reasoning makes tolerance possible and thus can be the basis of nonviolent coexistence in a multicultural and multireligious society with a secular state. The visual image of the Hindu ascetic was used by Gandhi to fight imperialism and construct a vision not of a Hindu India but of a multicultural India. Our methodologies and theories should enable us to make such practices visible.