

## *Medicine for a Nightmare (they called, we responded)* Bibliography

It matters what happens when an exhibition encounters its publics.

An exhibition I curated, *Nep Sidhu: Medicine for a Nightmare (they called, we responded)*, opened at Mercer Union on February 9, 2019. Since then, I have engaged in conversations with Sikh community members concerned with the way that I represented a charged history within the exhibition's frame, and how this framing simplifies and obfuscates the breadth of violences that characterize events that unfolded in India in 1984. Their concerns touch on the need to historically situate and contextualize this exhibition as an expression of the artist's relationship to the events that it references. The impact of this framing was, in part, that experiences of violence were minimized, fraught histories simplified and the heterogeneity of Sikh identities obscured. I have listened to these criticisms and reflected deeply about how the exhibition was framed through the accompanying essay. I take responsibility for the ways my language needs to be reconsidered to make space for multiple relationships to these events and accounts of these histories that exceed the artist's own and, in so doing, to resist summarizing relationships to these histories in ways that rendered invisible those with differing lived (and inherited) experiences.

The following bibliography gathers together texts that address the broader historical context of the events of 1984, their ongoing repercussions, and the machinations of memory, memorialization and memory loss that might be at play in how the events of 1984 persist in the present day. My hope is that these sources can begin to provide additional context for the exhibition's concerns through a plurality of voices. As a curator working cross culturally—I am not Sikh—I recognize that, undoubtedly, more conversations are to be had and more learning is to be undertaken. I am committed to a continued dialogue.

This work will continue through an accompanying publication set to be released in the fall of 2019. Conceived as an integral part of the larger exhibition project from its beginnings, this publication will document a range of contemporary practices of *seva*, or what is often referred to as selfless service (such as the work of human rights activists like Jaswant Singh Khalra and the work of non-profits such as Ensaaf who work to end crimes against humanity in the Punjab), offer expanded reflections on Sidhu's works from multiple perspectives and further consider how artistic practice can couple with other forms of making worlds otherwise.

These texts have been assembled through conversations with others and I am grateful to them for their generousities in sharing their knowledges with me.

—cheyanne turions

**Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. "The danger of a single story," *TED*, 19:16, published October 07, 2009, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D9Ihs241zeg>.**

Our lives, our cultures, are composed of many overlapping stories. Novelist Chimamanda Adichie tells the story of how she found her authentic cultural voice—and warns that if we hear only a single story about another person or country, we risk a critical misunderstanding.

**Arora, Kamal. "The 'Widow Colony' in Delhi: Female Bodies as Vessels of Remembrance," on *The Funambulist*. Podcast audio. 10 May 2014. <https://thefunambulist.net/podcast/kamal-arora-the-widow-colony-in-delhi-female-bodies-as-vessels-of-remembrance>.**

This podcast focuses on one space in Delhi known as "the widow colony." The widows who live in this colony in Tilak Vihar are women who saw their husbands killed during the 1984 massacre against the Sikh population consequently from the assassination of then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. The discussion examines how the physicality of this urban village partially determine the politics of its daily organization and its spatiality, and how the female bodies of the widows are perceived and instrumentalized as vessels of performative remembrance in India and abroad.

**Axel, Brian Keith. *The Nation's Tortured Body: Violence, Representation, and the Formation of a Sikh "Diaspora."* United States of America: Duke University Press, 2001.**

Here, Brian Keith Axel explores the formation of the Sikh diaspora and, in so doing, offers a powerful inquiry into conditions of peoplehood, colonialism and postcoloniality. Demonstrating a new direction for historical anthropology, he focuses on the position of violence between 1849 and 1998 in the emergence of a transnational fight for Khalistan (an independent Sikh state). Axel argues that, rather than the homeland creating the diaspora, it has been the diaspora, or histories of displacement, that have created particular kinds of places—homelands.

**Comay, Rebecca. "Material Remains: Doris Salcedo." *The Oxford Literary Review* 39, no. 1 (2017): 42–64.**

Doris Salcedo's artworks seem to confront the challenge that Adorno expressed so brutally: how to commemorate a traumatic event which both demands and refuses commemoration; where all available cultural forms threaten to trivialize, sentimentalize, mystify, embellish, instrumentalize, or otherwise betray the memory of the dead; and where every attempt to acknowledge injury seems only to compound it. On the one hand, it is the task of art to commemorate suffering. On the other hand, art, by its very existence—its status as a thing among things—is complicitous in this suffering. This essay reflects on the antinomies of mourning and politics in Salcedo's work.

**Das, Veena. *Life and Words: Violence and Descent into the Ordinary*. United States of America: University of California Press, 2006.**

Veena Das examines case studies including the extreme violence of the Partition of India in 1947 and the massacre of Sikhs in 1984 after the assassination of then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. In a major departure from much anthropological inquiry, Das asks how this violence has entered "the recesses of the ordinary" instead of viewing it as an interruption of life to which we simply bear witness. Das engages with anthropological work on collective violence, rumour, sectarian conflict, new kinship, and state and bureaucracy exploring the relations among violence, gender and subjectivity.

**Gill, Gauri, "1984," *Gauri Gill*, accessed 17 February 2019,**  
<http://www.gaurigill.com/works.html>.

This notebook about the anti-Sikh pogrom that occurred in New Delhi in 1984 contains photographs taken by Gill in 2005, 2009 and 2014 alongside captions from the Indian print media in which they first appeared and text responses by thirty-five artists—including writers, poets and film makers.

**Hirsch, Marianne. "The Generation of Postmemory." *Poetics Today* 29, no. 1 (2008), 103-128.**

Postmemory describes the relationship of the second generation to powerful, often traumatic, experiences that preceded their births but that were nevertheless transmitted to them so deeply as to seem to constitute memories in their own right. Focusing on the remembrance of the Holocaust, this essay elucidates the generation of postmemory and its reliance on photography as a primary medium of transgenerational transmission of trauma. Identifying tropes that most potently mobilize the work of postmemory, it examines the role of the family as a space of transmission and the function of gender as an idiom of remembrance.

**Kaur, Rupi, "Rooh," *Rupi Kaur*, accessed 17 February 2019,**  
<https://rupikaur.com/rooh/>.

With photographs by Baljit Singh, this prose poem considers the traumatic inheritance of the 1984 Sikh genocide from a range of personal perspectives.

**Mandair, Arvind-Pal S., ed. *Sikh Formations: After 1984: Reflections on Violence, Politics and Survivor Memories*, 11:3 (2015).**

The title of this issue *After 1984?* is suggestive of the fact that "1984" is not a past event but an event per se. As an event it is not beholden to a past that has now gone, but rather a past that is in some sense very much alive and continues to diffuse into the present to keep the future uncertain. In other words, the conditions that gave birth to the actual events of 1984 continue to

seep into our present and haunt the future. Thus “1984” exceeds the actual event that happened on a certain date in the sense that it will continue to be a topic of future reflection ten years from now, twenty years from now.

**Nijhawan, Michael. *The Precarious Diasporas of Sikh and Ahmadiyya Generations : Violence, Memory, and Agency*. United States of America: Palgrave, 2016.**

This book examines the long-term effects of violence on the everyday cultural and religious practices of a younger generation of Ahmadis and Sikhs in Frankfurt, Germany and Toronto, Canada. It reads Ahmadi and Sikh subjectivities in the current climate of anti-immigrant movements and suspicion against religious others. Nijhawan also offers perspectives into what animates emerging movements of diasporic youth and their attempts to reclaim forms of the spiritual and political.

**Pettigrew, Joyce J. M. *The Sikhs of the Punjab: Unheard Voices of State and Guerilla Violence*. London: Zed Books, 1995.**

People in the Punjab have lived with the terror of the conflict between Sikh militants and Indian security forces since the attack on the Sikh Golden Temple in 1984. Through the use of interviews, Pettigrew presents the worlds of Punjabi farmers, Sikh militants, and the police commanders responsible for containing a vicious conflict whose ramifications have spilled beyond the Punjab into wider Indian politics.