

Empire's H(a)unting Grounds:
Theorising violence and resistance in Egypt and Afghanistan

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Abstract

This article thinks theory otherwise by searching for what is missing, silent and yet highly productive and constitutive of present realities'. Looking at Afghanistan and Egypt, we show how imperial legacies and capitalist futurities are rendered invisible by dominant social theories, and why it matters that we think beyond an empiricist sociology in the Middle East. In Afghanistan, we explore the ways in which portrayals of the country as retrogressive elide the colonial violence that that have ensured the very backwardness that is now considered Afghanistan's enduring characteristic. Specifically using the example of the institutionalisation of the Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR), we ask what alternative narratives might emerge if we take empire's ghosts seriously on their own terms? In Egypt, we look at the ways in which Gamal Abdel Nasser's anticolonial project continues to haunt present-day Egyptian political, social and economic life. In particular, we ask how anticolonial nationalism and its promises produced lingering after-effects, and how we can understand these through the figure of the 'spectre.' The article asks what it would mean to produce social theory through (re)visiting sites of resistance, violence and contestation, proposing haunting as a means through which to understand and analyse political, social and economic change in the Middle East.

Introduction

Thinking theory otherwise through a re-historicisation and de-mystification of the present, is increasingly necessary in the wider 'Middle East,'¹ where imperial legacies, capitalist futurities and geopolitical interventions consistently render the region a place of conflict and contestation, but also a space for resistance and hope for a different world. The 'Middle East,' broadly conceived, is both a central node within global racial and imperial structural formations, as well as a region in which anticolonial movements were extremely powerful and widespread throughout the twentieth century; indeed, these two points are not unconnected. In this article, we explore questions of resistance through haunting, ghosts, and spectres. This is not a critique of empirical work but the sort of empiricism that privileges 'backwardness' in Afghanistan and authoritarianism in Egypt, but ignores the constitutive/productive spectres of

¹ We are aware of the Orientalism inherent in labelling the region between Pakistan and Morocco the 'Middle East', but for the purposes of clarity and consistency we have chosen to deploy the term throughout this article. In some ways the appellation itself haunts: for instance, Afghanistan remains at the margins of this geographical and cultural entity, a marginalisation that persists in the ways in which imperial powers (past and present) have interacted with the country. And yet both Egypt and Afghanistan are drawn into a space labelled the 'Middle East' without much attention to what this flattens. We are thus conscious that both countries belong to multiple geographical imaginaries at the same time, which is why we use the term Middle East with caution.

colonial administration and anticolonial nationalism respectively. Through haunting, we aim to instead foreground these spectres in order to show how rich empirical work that is sensitive to questions of power and resistance can centre very different narratives in the Middle East. Focusing on the two very distinct contexts of Afghanistan and Egypt², and drawing on the works of scholars, including Avery Gordon and Omnia el Shakry who have engaged ‘haunting’ and absence conceptually by linking these to empire, we ask what it would mean to think about social theory through (re)visiting sites of resistance, violence and contestation.

Specifically, we are interested in how ‘presentist’ approaches to explaining political developments plague both the study of Afghanistan and Egypt, and how haunting provides an alternative that blurs time and space. As Jasbir Puar has argued “haunting defuses the binary between the past and the present” and is also a methodological approach that “keeps an eye out for shadows, ephemera, energies, ethereal forces, textures, spirit, sensations” (Puar, 2017: xx). Haunting enables us to go beyond the tendencies present in much scholarship within political sociology on the Middle East – that continues to underscore ‘institutions’, ‘authoritarianism’, and linear narratives of ‘progress’ – and offers instead a diagnostic of power and empire that takes what Derek Gregory (2004) calls the “colonial present” seriously.³ Moreover, haunting—given its less finite nature—also allows us to suggest an alternative place for empiricism within research on the region, and instead explore alternative ways of reading and knowing. We do this by privileging a “vulnerable reading” rather than presumed hard facts, resisting disciplinary enclosure, and refusing to restrict in advance our knowledge to vaunted sources and acclaimed schools of thought. Haunting demands that we listen to that which has been neglected and proclaimed useless or unimportant.

We begin this article in colonial Afghanistan, where we explore the ways in which portrayals of the country as regressive elide the colonial violence that that has ensured the very backwardness that is now considered Afghanistan’s enduring characteristic. Analysing the Federal Crimes Regulation (FCR) and probing the construal of Afghanistan as ‘the graveyard of empires’ we ask what alternative narratives might emerge if we take empire’s ghosts seriously on their own terms? That is, not as some incidental after-effect of colonial violence, but as constitutive of that very violence. To highlight this, we first unpack the FCR by understanding it as a colonial construct that continues to (re)make the subjects it claims to govern. We engage the ghosts that the FCR spawned and show how these colonial era laws continue to define present day Afghanistan. Haunting, then, is both a way of making sense of colonial afterlives and the ways in which colonialism continues to structure the world, as well as a theoretical means of accounting for absences and silences in dominant paradigms of sociological thought.

² These two contexts are quite central to the politics of colonialism and anti-colonialism in the broader ‘Middle East’, and the aspects of these cases that we look at unpack the particularities of European colonialism in Afghanistan, long understood as the ‘graveyard of empire,’ and of anticolonialism in Egypt, a central locus of Third Worldism and global anticolonial resistance.

³ There are important exceptions to this and over the past two decades there has been a surge of critical scholarship drawing attention towards the complexity of political sociological work on the region. See, *inter alia*, Chalcraft 2016, 2012; Povey 2016; Khalili 2007; Rasheed 2010, 2013.

We then move to postcolonial Egypt, where we look at the ways in which Gamal Abdel Nasser's anticolonial project continues to haunt present-day Egyptian political, social and economic life. Anti-colonial moments are equally implicated in haunting: they produce their own spectres, shaping the present in ways that continue to over-emphasise the colonial moment, serving in effect to recentre rather than decentre the colonisers. In this section, we ask how anticolonial nationalism and its promises produced lingering after-effects, and how we can understand these through the figure of the 'spectre.' By focusing on two 'Suez Canal moments' in modern Egypt, we unpack the question of haunting and its effects on nationalism in Egypt today. What can the spectre of anticolonial nationalism, to which the nationalisation of the Suez Canal was so central, reveal about our current contemporary ultra-nationalist juncture, which also had its 'Suez Canal moment'? We show how Nasser's nationalisation of the Suez Canal in important ways prefigures Sisi's similar attempt post-2011, and that these events must be understood as mutually implicated in resistance to colonial violence. We show, in contradistinction to Stoler who focuses primarily on the afterlife of empire, that colonial and postcolonial haunting are two sides of the same coin. The postcolonial afterlives emerge out of colonial artefacts and instantiations, and in turn leave indelible imprints on the ways in which colonialism is apprehended. In the final section, we further illuminate the concept of 'haunting' by drawing on an established theoretical apparatus as explicated by Gordon, in order to better understand and analyse political, social and economic change in the Middle East. We flesh out more fully what is at stake in grappling with 'haunting' as a concept, and how it may shed light on other moments and spaces.

On Haunting

This article is interested, then, in both tracing moments of haunting in modern Egypt and Afghanistan and unpacking what they mean socially and politically on the one hand, and exploring what haunting can provide us with theoretically on the other. We engage with two broad sets of literature: one that has explored the afterlives of European empire in the Middle East, and another that has thought about haunting as a theoretical approach more broadly. In this section we sketch out these sets of literature in order to better highlight our engagement with them. We show that while haunting as an approach to social and political life is by no means new, it has yet to be mobilised extensively in work on the Middle East, a region where the afterlives of European empire are acute.⁴ Looking for ghosts and spectres raises questions around what we understand to be theory, evidence, or 'data.' It moves us beyond the visible and measurable; listening to ghosts means listening to and for what is not always apparent; we probe alternate sites and archives, ways of knowing and understanding. We turn, therefore, to a sociological tradition that looks for the silences, the invisible, the ghostly, and the haunted.

Turning first to the question of absence, we engage with Omnia el Shakry's incisive work on 'absence in the archive' which focuses specifically on the Middle East and archives of decolonisation (2015). Increasing numbers of Middle East scholars have turned to the archives in order to excavate the past. This has produced an extremely rich array of research on Middle

⁴ For work outlining this, see: Said 1978, Mitchell 1991.

Eastern social history, particularly during the colonial era, and has shed light on the complexities of rapid social and political change. More recently, scholars have critically thought through the baggage attached to colonial archives, as well as the silences they contain.⁵ Whose voices come through in the archives? What narratives are present? And what is silenced in this process? Mirroring many of the discussions we touched on previously in the work of Hartman, Smallwood and Lowe, we see careful attention being paid to taking these silences seriously, and thinking of ways to centre them. While this work is central to the claims we make in this article, we are equally invested in understanding these silences as productive. In other words, how can we understand the silences produced by colonialism and anticolonialism as exercising agency—or, as Gordon might put it, as haunting us today?

El Shakry visits some of the tensions embedded within the postcolonial archives. Drawing on Joanna Sassoon's "chasing phantoms in the archives," (2000) she highlights both the difficulty of using archives as well as the creative possibilities that arise when scholars find themselves free to imagine alternative histories away from state and colonial archives and histories.⁶ El Shakry notes that in the Middle East, the problems with accessing state-controlled archives have "led to the resourceful use of oral histories and interviews, family holdings and private collections, published memoirs and letters, press reports, and foreign archives," (2015, 923). Ranajit Guha has problematized colonial archives, arguing that sources are not "springs of real meaning" or fonts of 'truth' but instead grids of intelligibility that enable certain types of meaning whilst excluding others.⁷ Inspired by the idea of tracing history when the archives are full of silences, we want to propose the idea of haunting and searching for ghosts as one way of dealing with these silences. Not only does haunting put forward one way of telling history when the official archives are not present, it also allows us to capture emotive aspects of politics that are not always captured in conventional political research and writing.

Similarly, scholars have addressed the problematic of archival silences by looking at transatlantic slavery and European empire as sites of silencing. Saidiya Hartman, writing of histories of enslavement and emancipation in her *Scenes of Subjection*, notes how much of the archival material we have is replete with silences that conceal the violence of American slavery, 'entangled,' in her words, 'with the politics of domination'. Reading these archives against the grain, Hartman argues, might at once resist and comply with this politics of domination. The aim is less to liberate archival material or to fully reconstruct subaltern experiences, but rather to explore the tactics of withholding, silencing and censorship as political practice. In doing so, we might conduct 'raids' on these historical fragments, 'upon which other narratives can be spun'. Similarly, in her own study of transatlantic slavery, Stephanie Smallwood explains "I do not seek to create out of the remnants of ledgers... etc... the way it really was... I try to interpret from the slave trader's disinterest in the slave's pain [*the slaver trader's silence*] those social conditions within which there was no possible resolution to that pain. I try to imagine *what could have been*." (Lowe, 2015: 40)

⁵ Stoler 2010.

⁶ El Shakry 2015.

⁷ Guha, 1994.

Drawing on Smallwood, Lisa Lowe emphasises the methodological shift elicited by this past conditional temporality. Imagining what could have been prompts us to begin from a different starting point – “a thinking with a twofold attention that seeks to encompass at once the positive objects and methods of history and social science, *and also the matters absent, entangled and unavailable by its methods*” (2015: 40-41)⁸. Through such thinking we might write with a different aim – “To explain the politics of our *lack* of knowledge.” In this paper, our gaze turns to the violence enacted and the concealed ‘over there’. Hartman, Smallwood and Lowe each draw our attention to questions of silence, power, agency and knowledge production. We are interested in both these methodological approaches to silence as well as how we can understand their presence in the present. Shifting context, and taking our cue from Avery Gordon’s magisterial *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, we unpack the ways in which the Middle East has been imagined by looking for what is missing, silent, and spectral.

The concept of hauntology owes its roots to Jacques Derrida, who made ghosts the subject of analysis in his book *Spectres of Marx* (2012). Derrida asks us to listen and speak with the spectre, to resist the disinclination we have towards this because of how we have been academically trained, and to be open to secrets or other forms of knowledge this listening may reveal. In *Ghostly Matters* Avery Gordon asks us why ghosts might matter for sociologists, and for a sociology that takes race and empire seriously (2008). For Gordon, to study social life means to confront the ghostly aspects of it. This poses a critical challenge to knowledge production and the ways in which we legitimise certain forms of knowing over others. “The epistemological, ontological, and otherwise philosophical problem of representation—reality and illusion, certainty and doubt—becomes infinitely more than a ‘merely’ philosophical problem of epistemology, hermeneutics, and deconstruction. It becomes a high-powered medium of domination,” (Gordon, 2008: 80). Similarly, Ann Laura Stoler’s work on haunting reminds us that empire continues to haunt even after imperialism is formally over. She writes: “Haunting occupies the space between what we cannot see and what we know. It wrestles with elusive, nontransparent power and, not least, with attunement to the unexpected sites and lineaments that such knowledge requires,” (2006). Stoler’s conception of haunting has influenced a growing body of work that examines the legacies—both visible and invisible—of colonial rule, and how these legacies continue to reproduce inequalities today (2008, 2016).

Moving beyond conventional empiricist and teleological understandings of social change in the region, we instead think of empire and its afterlives as having haunting effects that continue to condition contexts such as Egypt and Afghanistan. This is not an attempt to abandon all empirically grounded research, but rather to ask what we consider ‘empirical’ to mean, for as Gordon asks: couldn’t a ghost be understood as empirical data as well? Searching for ghosts allows us to move beyond Eurocentric searches for grand narratives and conventional empirical evidence in places like Egypt and Afghanistan. It enables us to subvert and resist problematic ways of thinking about presence and absence in empiricism more widely, and to centre the many silences inflicted upon the Middle East—so long understood as a peripheral Other and a

⁸ Emphasis ours.

site of imperial aggression. Haunting helps to displace the hegemonic narrative of the Middle East as a space of despotism and ‘backwards’ cultures, focusing instead on imperial and racial capitalist processes and their afterlives. Take, for example, the excessive focus on questions of veiling or Islamism, which reduce complex social practices to soundbites needing intervention and ultimately negation. What does it mean when politics are read through these pre-defined categories? What is erased or obfuscated in the process, including the ways in the veil was in some places institutionalized through colonialism or how Islamism replaces stories about labour organizing as a key mode of alternative politics. We are therefore interested in what is present and what that makes absent.

In particular, we address two key tendencies in the literature on the Middle East⁹ that haunting can help to problematise. First, there has been a tendency to understand the Middle East as isolated from global processes, thus displacing problems internally and removing responsibility from transnational forces, both past and present. What would it mean to instead connect the Middle East to histories of empire and the neo-colonial present? The move to understand the Middle East through internal realities is linked to a second and connected tendency: to erase capitalism and imperialism as global structures that condition Middle Eastern politics. Instead, we often hear stories that reify culture or that rely on the ‘Arab despot’ thesis that assumes the problems of the Middle East are either cultural or historical, or both.¹⁰ However, this article proposes that only by centring imperialism and its continual re-inscription can we think of alternative stories and historical trajectories.

This article works against many of these tendencies by proposing haunting as a means through which to understand and analyse political, social and economic change in the Middle East. Haunting allows us to do several things. First, it centres empire and its structural effects in understanding the current moment. Second, it understands empire and its aftermath through the ghosts, invisibilities and intangible effects it has left behind. Third, it destabilises empiricist approaches, such as the transition paradigm, and instead calls for a more radical approach to theory-making.

The Federal Crimes Regulation and Afghanistan

If, as Avery Gordon contends, “haunting raises specters, and it alters the experience of being in time, the way we separate the past, the present, and the future,” (2008: xvi), then these rising spectres and time-space parcelisation and alteration can be experienced most palpably in the ‘nefarious’ border region of present-day Afghanistan and Pakistan, which are understood as stuck in the past, relics of a crueller time. Here, haunting serves as a critique of the metaphysics of the present. Even as Afghanistan’s ‘difficult’ past is held up as the key to understanding its ‘barbaric’ present, Afghanistan’s history is narrated with a shocking level of abstraction,

⁹ See: Hanieh 2013, Introduction, for an excellent overview.

¹⁰ As Adam Hanieh notes: “An entire academic industry has developed around attempting to explain the apparent persistence and durability of Middle East authoritarianism. Much of this has been heavily Eurocentric, seeking some kind of intrinsic “obedience to authority” inherent to the “Arab mind,” (2013, 23). See also: Cavatorta 2010.

disinterest and resort to Orientalism (cf. Hanifi, 2015). This section zeroes in on one instance of this tendency by analysing how these regulations produced the border area between Afghanistan and Pakistan as a site of lawlessness by planting and instilling the very lawlessness that is now considered its defining characteristic. It shows how contemporary imaginaries of Afghanistan are haunted by a colonial practice that disavows its complicity in creating the very problem it claims to solve.

The Afghan-Pakistan Frontier is regularly depicted as the foremost site of brutality and criminality, as “an incubator of chaos and radicalism which threatens the stability of all who come into contract with it,” (Hopkins and Marsden 2011: 1). In December 2018, the International Observatory of Human Rights declared Afghanistan to be “the worst place in the world to be born” based on a UNICEF report (IOHR, 2018). According to the report this is owed in no small part to “the terrorist groups” operating in Afghanistan, “decades of intra-state conflicts” and “droughts”; what goes unmentioned is imperial intervention, past and present. The pervasive image of Afghanistan as a failed state overrun by terrorists finds its most passionate expression in representations of the frontier as a space of savagery, chaos, and violence. This sempiternal portrayal of Afghanistan has played some role in earning Afghanistan the title of ‘the graveyard of empires.’ An inquiry into this unique space (or the “lawless badlands” in the words of *The Washington Post*, 2019) and its concomitant construal as a space of ‘exception’ directs us to a legal anomaly – the Frontier Crimes Regulation – and its institutionalisation in Afghanistan.

The Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR) was a set of laws formally introduced by the British in 1901 as a way of dealing with the populations of the ‘border regions’ between India (now Pakistan) and Afghanistan. Faced with an ‘unruly tribal population’, subtending the ‘crown jewel’ of their vast empire, the colonial authorities devised a series of ad-hoc rules to keep these border populations at bay and under control. These ad-hoc rules became institutionalised virtually overnight and thus the FCR was born as an expedient way to deal with “the territorially bounded tract of land that traverses what today constitutes the Afghan-Pakistan border or as a region that is distinct because of its... tribal composition,” (Hopkins and Marsden, 2012: 17). The very rendering of Afghanistan as ‘tribal’ is one way to construe the country, and the broader frontier region, as retrogressive and therefore as fundamentally ungovernable (Manchanda 2018). In this section, we explore the ways in which the British -- through the pliable mechanisms of the FCR -- embedded colonial violence, and quite literally legalised it, in a space they deemed unworthy of ‘proper’ governance.

The FCR, best thought of as a sort of ‘customary law’, was introduced by the British to mitigate the conflict between “British laws and the Pathan code of honour.”¹¹ They were enacted in the

¹¹ Chief Secretary to Government, Punjab, W.R.H Merk, IOR, Correspondence Image 11.JPG No. 58, dated Peshawar, 25th January 1898

area around the now notorious Durand Line – a 1200 mile ‘scientific frontier’ delineated by the British in 1893 – originally home to three million pastoralists (Cullather 2002: 516). The official Durand boundary treaties were signed in Persian for Abdur Rahman, then the Emir of Afghanistan and in English for the British and applied on the ground in six distinct stages by British and Afghan officials in collaboration (Hanifi, 2011: 3). The asymmetrical power relations between the British and the Afghans were never in question; the Durand Line deliberately followed a topographic ridgeline that could be held at strong-points blocking mountain passes that the British ascertained as crucial to the defence of their empire (Cullather 2002: 517).¹² The Durand Line noticeably altered market relations to the detriment of the Afghans by politically isolating and diverting capital away from Afghanistan and towards British India (Hanifi, 2011: 4-6). But for our purposes, it is the legacy and the hauntology – in this case, the remnants of a future foretold – of the haphazardly ordained and installed FCR in lieu of standardised civil and criminal codes, that is most pertinent here.

The FCR were formally repealed in 2018¹³. The reason for this repeal is stated in no uncertain terms by the leaders of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA)¹⁴ as the necessary dismantling of a “draconian” set of laws that “violate the fundamental rights of the citizens of this area,” (Hussein, 2017). Under the archaic FCR, an innocent individual can be imprisoned for the crimes of their kin, the government can displace entire villages without compensation, explanation, or warning, and individuals can languish behind bars for up to three years without any charges being filed (Akins, 2017). The law states that three basic rights will be denied to those under its jurisdiction – appeal, wakeel and daleel (the right to request a change to a conviction in any court, the right to legal representation and the right to present reasoned evidence, respectively). As mentioned above, the FCR was galvanised by the Raj’s decision to exclude the frontier and its denizens from the empire proper whilst simultaneously staking out its claim on the territory and citizens. The people of this region – that includes the areas of Bajaur, Mohmand, Khyber, Orakzai, Kurram, Waziristan – were transformed into imperial vassals through this regulation, which denied them access to colonial courts and other governance institutions. Under the disingenuous guise of ‘respecting independence,’ railway construction and irrigation projects were excluded from the areas that came under the FCR. Simultaneously, the recruitment of ‘tribal militias’, who served on outposts and the border between British India and Afghanistan, converted Pashtun farmers and herders into wage labourers, further deepening their dependence on the colonial economic system at almost no cost to the colonial state. Most damagingly, the FCR enshrined the ability to arrest without warrant in certain cases.¹⁵

In its utilisation of indigenous labour for the advancement of empire, FCR is an ingenious colonial artifice, In 1921 one of its proponents described as: “Not the least wonderful of the many marvellous methods employed in keeping our fickle and excitable neighbours [North of

¹² See: George McMunn, *Afghanistan from Darius to Amanbullah* (London: G. Bells and Sons Ltd., 1929).

¹³ The full legal text of the FCR is available at the British Library at: IOR/L/PJ/6/579, dated 1901, India Office Records, Asian & African Collections, British Library.

¹⁴ A semi-autonomous tribal region in Afghanistan/Pakistan.

¹⁵ Ibid.

the Durand Line] in order is the use made of the Pathans themselves to protect our marches.” The FCR recognised the existence of the Council of Elders, commonly known as the *jirga* but made the British Deputy Commissioner in charge of nominating and overseeing these Elders, with the constitutional right to override any decision he did not agree with. The Deputy-Commissioner was the ultimate arbiter – he could question, overturn and veto any of the *jirga*’s decisions. Another major hindrance in making the *jirga* an effective part of the FCR was its variation in use of tribal code (Pashtunwali), *riwaj* (broadly understood as customary law), or Sharia (Islamic law), depending on the tribes and their geographic location.

The “excitable and revengeful temperament of the Pathan and Pathanized population” was used as the justification for many amendments in the FCR that directly prosecute groups of people, ‘families’ and ‘tribes’ rather than the individual committing the crime. The archives – mostly located in the India Office Records at the British Library – reveal a deep-seated colonial anxiety: the frontier represented a space that needed to be ‘managed’ but always from a distance. Afghanistan was mostly a buffer, a place in between two meaningful entities (India and Russia) and so, rather than committing to a system of legal justice, the British installed a quick-fix set of punitive measures that held entire populations at ransom. At the crux of the many changes to the FCR was a desire to make groups of people, rather than just individuals culpable for petty and not-so-petty crime. These ‘tribal’ groups were mostly considered a nuisance to empire, excess populations subject to (often lackadaisical and abortive) attempts to ‘contain’, ‘silence’, and consigned to a space of indifference.

Hence, in the spirit of this conjuring up of mass criminality and with imperial expedience at the forefront, we see significant changes made to the already harsh and swingeing legal apparatus of the FCR in the early 20th century. We expand with a few poignant instances of how the colonial legal apparatus produced spectral figures for its own legitimation. First, section 35 of the FCR is amended from “when any person is known or believed to have a blood feud, or has occasioned cause of quarrel likely to lead to bloodshed, the Deputy ‘Commissioner may require that person to reside beyond the territory to which this Regulation or any part of it extends, or at such place within that territory as the Deputy Commissioner may deem desirable” to “when any family is known to have a blood feud, or has occasioned cause of quarrel likely to lead to bloodshed, the Deputy Commissioner may require that family or any member of it to reside, &c.”¹⁶ Likewise, the section on ‘preventive crimes’ is revisited to raise the maximum sentence of imprisonment, and sanctions the raising of “entire buildings” used by robbers as well as the “blockade of hostile or unfriendly tribes,” based on suspicion of wrongdoing by an individual. Tellingly, sections of the FCR applied only to the ‘Pathans’ and the ‘Baluch.’ “Urban residents and the Hindus” as well as British subjects and their servants, Europeans, and Americans were also all exempt from the FCR.

It is in the interstices of the text of the FCR and the exceptions and erasures that are implicit in this text, that colonial ghosts dwell. By granting ‘protection’ from the law to the lawful non-

¹⁶ IOR/L/PJ/6/579, dated 1901, India Office Records, Asian & African Collections, British Library.

Afghans, the Afghans are always already felonious criminals. The (in)justice system glimpsed at here, continues to reverberate in the organisation of the Afghan/Pakistan border regions in the 21st century. Not only do ghosts of the FCR continue to haunt us today in the form of exceptionally repressive and disproportionate penalties, the FCR's institutionalisation of injustice will reverberate in the years to come. Two scholars analysing the workings of the FCR on the Pakistani side bemoan the injustice of the system thus: "the jurisdiction of the higher courts i.e., High Court and Supreme Court, have not been extended and judicial powers still are centered in the office of Presiding Officer, defying justice and fair trial. This legal vacuum has drastically jeopardized peace and the socio-political development of the tribal belt" (Khan and Khan, 2012: 1).

Ironically, the FCR is often presented as evidence of British flexibility in the face of "lawless tribal customs" – and this also legitimises the exclusion of other 'non-tribal' residents from it. And yet, communication between those enacting these legislations suggests cleavages between the British and the indigenous people that can too easily be disregarded as "cultural differences." In a letter to the Chief Secretary to Government, Punjab, W.R.H Merk, Esquire, C.S.I commissioner and superintendent, Peshawar division confesses his bewilderment:

The conflict between our laws and the Pathan code of honour must continue till such time as the Pathan changes his nature (and that will not be soon) for we cannot possibly mould our system to fit barbarous and blood-thirsty customs. It is curious that where we do endeavour, to some degree, to meet Pathan ideas on the subject of the misconduct of women, in making adultery by women severely punishable, aggrieved husbands very rarely avail themselves of this provision of the regulation.¹⁷

One can be forgiven for reading the FCR as a system of punitive rules that not only subjected those under its remit to the mercy of one man: the (British, or British agent) Deputy High-Commissioner, but also as a colonial project that was directly implicated in systematising exceptionally harsh punishments for women, for what most people would agree are relatively minor crimes like adultery, and these punitive measures were not seen to be massively popular with the local populace. That the FCR was unwelcome by those subject to it was attested to when hundreds of Pashtuns protested against the FCR and other discriminatory regulations introduced by the colonial government in Peshawar on April 23, 1930. In what became a major incident, the British army's response was the murder of hundreds of these unarmed Pashtun protesters at the Qissa Khwani Bazaar (ibid).

The FCR changed the face of what was to become the North-West frontier. State power on the southern side of the NWF was bureaucratised and standardised, whereas the Pashtuns in Afghanistan experienced a highly personalised and autocratic form of state power because of the British and the FCR, but also because of the personality of Abdur Rahman himself.

¹⁷ IOR/L/PJ/6/579 File 1815 "The Frontier Crimes Regulation 1901" India Office Records, Asian and Africa Collections, British Library

Moreover, a far greater number of Pashtuns in British India had access to a broad set of commercial resources and could participate in networks of economic trade and military-labour migrations in mainland South Asia as well as in the Middle East. The legacy of the FCR, as an ad-hoc system of penalties and incarceration, has been the institutionalisation of unwarranted punishment, arbitrary curfews, and a continued maltreatment of the people living in these ‘frontier regions’. Without wishing to romanticise or standardise the experience of the Indian colonial subject(s), those on the “right” side of the Durand Line certainly found themselves in a more privileged position, especially with regard to the ability to tap into the global circulations of colonial capital vis-à-vis their Afghan counterparts as well as to be relatively shielded from the worst excesses of the colonial legal infrastructure.

The systematic policing and the invasive powers of the FCR continues to haunt, and can tell us a lot about the carceral state today. Whilst critical carceral studies is largely focused on the US and its neoliberal architecture of policing (LeBron, 2019; Vitale, 2017), Afghanistan was a laboratory *par excellence* for the British empire’s finessing of the powers of surveillance, preventive crime and punitive governance. This is all the more remarkable given that Afghanistan always unyoked from ‘empire proper’, it was designed to be only colonised in the most disengaged and disarticulated of manners. If “haunting is one way in which abusive systems of power make themselves known and their impacts felt in everyday life” (Gordon, 2012: 8) it is no surprise that Afghanistan continues to be referred as ‘the graveyard of empires’. This Orientalist trope interpellates Afghanistan as a land shrouded in mystery, drawing attention to its ghostly and deathly character. Whilst we recognise the danger of what appears to be reproducing, or even giving more currency to this image of Afghanistan as a spectral site, it is in this now ‘common-sense’ rendering of Afghanistan as a graveyard that we see an acknowledgement of colonial ghosts: ghosts that continue to structure all imperial knowledges and narratives about Afghanistan, but also crucially ghosts that forever deter the exhumation of colonial violence.

Paradoxically, by claiming exclusive knowledge of Afghanistan through this graveyard canard and by rendering Afghanistan legible to its imperial audience in this simplistic way, we are denied the possibility of mistakes and unlearning that haunting requires of us. For us, as for Gordon, haunting is a “very particular way of knowing what has happened or is happening”, it “draws us affectively, sometimes against our will and always a bit magically, into the structure of feeling of a reality that we come to experience, not as cold knowledge, but as a transformative recognition” (2012: 8). Haunting unsettles the relationship between the past and the present, between knowledge and feeling, and recentres social justice when confronted with systems of knowledge production and cultivation that exalt colonial scientific paradigms above all others. Afghanistan is presented as a graveyard, a space of haunting from ‘time immemorial’, but the ghosts produced by colonial discourses and knowledges in the form of laws, and those both subject to and exempt from those laws, are swept under the rug. The analytics of haunting complicates the straightforward historiographies of Afghanistan as *terra nullius* before the British ‘discovered’ it, and at the same time, populated with incorrigible ‘tribes’ who continue to resist modernisation and benevolent imperialism. Haunting is more than just a reminder to look at the past to understand the present, rather it troubles the very

notion that the past and the present are necessarily and always distinct categories. The fact it was the British who sought to increase penalties for women for ‘wrongdoing’ and not Afghans, can be read the contemporary tendency to view misogynistic practices as an inherent product of Afghan culture and religion which obscures the emergence of these practices – as at least in part stemming from colonially imposed systems and values, that continue to haunt. To see how this haunting plays out in a different context, we now turn our gaze towards contemporary Egypt.

Contemporary Egypt and the spectre of anticolonial nationalism

If Afghanistan and the FCR has much to tell us about the ghosts of colonial violence, the focus of this section—Egypt and anticolonial nationalism—looks instead at the ghosts of postcolonial violence. Where the previous section focused on the FCR as a pivotal moment in nation-making in colonial and postcolonial Afghanistan, this section similarly takes a monumental moment that traces the movement between colonial and postcolonial Egypt through the lens of nationalism: the nationalisation of the Suez Canal.¹⁸ We show how this moment can be unpacked as a site of haunting, and why this matters in understanding postcolonial Egypt and its discontents.

In this section, we show that colonial and postcolonial haunting are two sides of the same coin; in other words, the postcolonial moment similarly creates afterlives and legacies that haunt the present in complex ways (Salem 2019). While we see similar tales of colonial violence in Egypt, we instead interrogate what came after decolonisation, and how the shift from the colonial to the postcolonial—however tenuous it may have been—produced its own ghosts. We further ask what it means to think of these ghosts as haunting in ways that both provoke social violence as well as prevent it. Where much work on haunting has looked at the ways in which haunting is a destructive or limiting force that produces violence, in this section we show that haunting equally has the ability to limit violence. In particular, we are interested in two ‘Suez Canal moments’ that highlight the ways in which haunting both produces violence while also setting limits to regressive political projects. To do this, we focus on nationalism and nation-making during the anticolonial period (1952-1967) and the post-revolutionary period (2011 onwards), attempting to draw out the ‘spectre’ of anticolonial nationalism that continues to haunt Egypt.

It has been a common refrain to understand contemporary Egyptian politics through the narrative of revolution (2011) and counter-revolution (2013 onwards). Nationalism played a starring role in both moments, although it was mobilised very differently by different groups of people.¹⁹ Throughout the revolutionary events of 2011, Egyptians mobilised nationalism to critique, contest and disrupt the decay that had overtaken the country, materially, politically and socially. There was a questioning of what had happened to Egypt, the nation, and whether

¹⁸ For a recent history of the Canal, see Searight 2016 and for an article connecting the Canal to nationalism and dignity, see El Bernoussi 2015.

¹⁹ For a history of nationalism in the Middle East, see: Kedourie 1960; Hourani 1991; Jankowski and Gershoni 1997; Khalidi 1991; Massad 2012; *inter alii*.

it belonged to Egyptians or to the state and its corrupt elite. In particular, the idea of who Egypt *belongs to* raises interesting questions about the nation and how it is organised, and how this can be understood politically by asking who benefits from national wealth, understood broadly (Massad 2012). At the same time, however, nationalism was being mobilised by the state and Egyptian elites to limit, restrict and demobilise revolutionary currents. This iteration, often referred to as hyper or ultra-nationalism, mobilises ideas of the nation and who belongs in it to instead push forward a counter-revolution. At various moments since 2013, when the counter-revolution was solidified in the form of a new military-led government, nationalism has been invoked to defend rising coercion and violence against Egyptians, both those who engage in political contestation and those who are mere bystanders.

These mobilisations of the nation reveal the complex ways in which belonging and responsibility form part of any revolutionary moment. They are also connected to historical formations of the nation and nationalism in Egypt, in ways that complicate the prospect of understanding 2011 and its aftermath as a purely contemporary event (Khalidi 1991). In what follows, we trace the ‘spectre’ of anticolonial nationalism and its afterlives. We use this spectre not to ask whether or not it still haunts contemporary Egyptian politics, but rather to explore how we can understand the invocations of nationalism today by paying attention to its mere presence in the past. How did the promises and changes put forward by anticolonial nationalism in Egypt set the contours of what politics means for decades to come? How did this particular historical moment, and its understanding of nationalism, produce effects that influence how ‘nationalism’ can—or cannot—be invoked by the Egyptian state and elite today? Using the particular infrastructure of the Suez Canal, we explore two moments during which Egyptian nationalism was recast around the Canal and what it represented within Egypt. The first moment is the nationalisation of the Suez Canal by Gamal Abdel Nasser in 1956; the second moment is the building of a ‘new Suez Canal’ by Abdelfattah al Sisi in 2014. We show that the spectre of the first Suez Canal moment could not help but haunt the second moment, producing an instance of failure²⁰ in Egypt’s counter-revolutionary trajectory post-2013. By reading these two moments alongside one another, we can glimpse the spectre of anticolonial nationalism and how it continues to haunt Egypt today.

Soon after coming to power via a military coup in 2013, Abdelfattah al-Sisi announced the building of a new Suez Canal. It was difficult to miss the connection he was trying to invoke between himself and Gamal Abdel Nasser, who in 1956 famously nationalised the Suez Canal in a moment of postcolonial resistance. As El Bernoussi notes, Nasser’s nationalisation can be read as his “attempt to materialize the Egyptian people’s dignity in their right to control the canal,” invoking claims to postcolonial sovereignty (2015: 369). Although initially appearing to gain Sisi widespread support, the new Canal quickly became the target of criticism, jokes, and overall condemnation. The dominant rhetoric that was used around the new Canal very much echoed older ideas around nationalism, the state, and major infrastructural projects that

²⁰ By failure we mean a failure to invoke what Sisi and Egypt’s elite were trying to invoke: a repeat of the Suez victory that had taken place under Nasser. However, this did not mean, or lead to, the failure of Sisi’s regime more broadly, which continued to consolidate power over time. It rather represented a moment during which the regime attempted to invoke a memory that did not quite fit.

were ‘for the good of the nation.’ Egypt needed to expand the Canal because it was both good for national morale and Egypt’s global standing, and because it would bring in much needed economic income. The Suez Canal was expanded, with millions of Egyptian pounds poured into it—largely by private companies despite the rhetoric around it being a state-led project—and amidst the displacement of communities around the Canal and massive fears about environmental destruction. These last two effects, did, at least, echo the effects of the first Suez Canal moment.

Sisi had clearly hoped that the expansion would help him build a project of national legitimacy, as by that point—2014—his popularity was somewhat on the decline after the high levels of support the military enjoyed in 2013. And yet the project did not do the political work he had expected it to, an expectation not wholly unwarranted given that Nasser had been extremely successful in gaining political support through his political mobilisation of the Canal, which, as noted, mobilised a material politics of national dignity (El Bernoussi 2015). Where Nasser was able to mobilise the Suez Canal—and a second infrastructural project, the High Dam in Aswan—to produce a powerful hegemonic project that ensured his control over Egypt’s ruling elite (*ibid*), Sisi largely failed to employ the Canal in a similar way. There are numerous ways this difference can be explained, not least the radically different historical context that produced Nasserism. We argue that the spectre of the first Suez moment—and its successful invocation of anticolonial nationalism—was partly what led to the failure of the second Suez moment. In other words, to understand the failure of this second moment, we need to return to the first.

In an article on Sisi’s ‘new Suez Canal,’ Amira Salah-Ahmed notes: “The project was lauded as a national achievement, on par with the construction of Aswan’s High Dam,” (2014). This sentiment was repeated in both the media and official statements, constantly drawing people’s attention to a supposed connection between these two moments. The nationalisation of the Suez Canal under Nasser was not only a central tenet of the anticolonial nationalist project that had emerged, but was also an event of global significance (Tignor 2015). Debates around the financing of the High Dam in Aswan—Nasser’s major infrastructural project—set the scene for the nationalization of the canal. The High Dam was seen as part of Egypt’s industrialisation project, as controlling floods would provide water for irrigation and generate electricity as well as benefit Egypt’s farmland. The Egyptians preferred European private capital to American or World Bank financing. However English Electric—the main firm involved—threatened to back out of the deal if the World Bank was not included (Louis and Owen 1989: 105). An arms deal with the Czechs that year, as well as Egypt’s increasingly warm overtures to the Soviets, added more tension to already-fraught negotiations. The eventual decision by the British and US governments not to finance the dam was a culmination of growing tensions over the politicised nature of conditionalities attached to loans from the World Bank as well as Nasser’s emerging non-aligned position.²¹

Nevertheless, the decision to withdraw foreign funding still came as a shock to Nasser (Heikal, 1986: 74). Nasser’s response was swift, and shocked the world: on July 26 1956, in a speech

²¹ Ultimately Egypt was to turn to local capital to finance the dam.

he gave to the Egyptian public, he announced the full nationalisation of the Suez Canal Company.²² The local response was ecstatic:

There was a moment of silent incredulity, as the significance of what they had just heard sank into the quarter of a million people crowded into Menshiyeh Square (Alexandria). Then pandemonium erupted and scenes of wild excitement broke out in towns and villages through the length and breadth of the land where millions had been clustered round their radios to listen to the President's speech. Nobody in Egypt slept much that night (Heikal, 1986: 127).

The response from the SCC was to push for total warfare, while calling for an international organisation that would take over the assets of the SCC and manage the canal (Heikal, 1986: 122). Following a build-up of tension that predated Nasser's announcement, Britain, France and Israel attacked Egypt in what became known as the tripartite aggression. This soon came to an abrupt halt following a global outcry as well as the refusal of the US to support the invasion. Although the aim of the attack had been to discredit and remove Nasser, he not only emerged as the major figure of Arab and postcolonial politics, but it largely discredited the French and the British. Writing on the Suez crisis, Nasser later recalled:

The battle of Suez, which was one of the major landmarks in the Egyptian revolutionary experiment, was not merely a moment in which the Egyptian people discovered themselves or the Arab nation discovered its potentialities but was a moment of international significance and helped all oppressed people discover infinite latent powers in themselves (Nasser, 1954: 12).

These major infrastructural projects, we argue, should be seen as central to the politics of decolonisation. The nationalisation of the Suez Canal, referred to as the "lifeline of the British Empire," (Tignor 2015: 171) remains a pivotal moment of decolonisation, symbolising both the end of Britain's global influence as well as the emergence of Nasser as the leader of Arab nationalism. As Ali Hillal Dessouki notes, Suez reflected a conflict between a dying world order and a new order waiting to be born (Louis and Owen 1989: 31). Nationalising the Canal was symbolic of the new direction Egypt was to move in. Debates around nationalising the Canal make visible both the racialised assumptions held by colonial officers (Egyptians cannot run the Canal, thus it must be under international control) as well as the nationalist ones held by Nasser and the Officers (full sovereignty includes full ownership over Egyptian land and control over all sources of revenue). The nationalisation of the Canal was very much the moment during which Nasser cemented his hegemony, underlining the importance of anticolonial nationalism. Moving beyond concerns about the revenue of the Canal (although this may have been the initial rationale), the nationalisation came to symbolise an attempt by a postcolonial nation to assert its full sovereignty, economically and politically—with all of the traps this entailed.

²² For British responses to this series of events, see: Chou 2018.

The ‘new Suez Canal’ deployed very similar rhetoric vis-à-vis nationalism and nation-building. In particular, Sisi made it clear that the project was one that belonged to the Egyptian people, largely because they directly paid for it. In an interview three years after the ‘new Suez Canal’ was completed, it was stated that ‘the Egyptian people’ paid for the project, given that over LE64 billion was donated by Egyptians (Mohamed 2018). Earlier, when the project was announced, it was said that both the Tahya Masr fund and ‘public contributions’ would finance the project (Salah-Ahmed 2014). A complex range of financing certificates were available, specifically targeted at different income groups to allow “every segment of society to contribute to the project,” (ibid). This connection between the Egyptian people, Egyptian resources, and independence brings back the spectre of a distant past, during which these very ideas were mobilised to seemingly similar nationalist ends. The new Canal, just like the old one, was as Egyptian as could be, a result of national pride and an Egyptian drive for development.

And yet this focus on public financing served to hide the return of other ghosts, ghosts from a not-so-distant past. The inauguration of the ‘new Suez Canal’ was a lavish and global affair; but particularly haunting was the sudden reappearance of Mubarak-era businessmen and companies, the very targets of 2011 revolutionary anger. Ahmed ‘Ezz, steel tycoon, was first on the list of sponsors, despite that fact that he was commonly understood as one of the most corrupt businessmen of the Mubarak era. Ezz had only recently been released from prison after spending three years behind bars on corruption charges, and was awaiting retrial in another graft case. Also on the list of sponsors was Talaat Moustafa Group, who had also faced charges for corruption under Mubarak. Ceramica Cleopatra—owned by Mohamed Aboul Enein, a Mubarak business associate and member of the National Democratic Party—was also on the list. Along with the old, new sponsors such as Ahmed Abou Hashima signal that while the past is back to haunt the present, the present is not the past. Abou Hashima is very much a newcomer, fully supporting and supported by the new military government.

The juxtaposition of these two aspects of the ‘new Suez Canal’ highlight the power of the spectre of anticolonial nationalism: where the first instance succeeded in connecting nation-building, the Egyptian people, and economic development, the second instance failed and was instead mired in controversy and failure. The first moment was produced through and in turn produced the anticolonial nationalism of Nasserism; the second moment—although attempting to replicate this form of anticolonial nationalism—instead ended up collapsing in on itself. This second moment was read as an instance of hyper/ultra-nationalism, and an attempt by Egypt’s elite to profit from, rather than develop, the country. This further sheds light on the different historical junctures during which these two moments occur. Nasser’s anticolonial nationalism was complicated by its presumed necessity at that point in time, despite the damage it was to cause in both the short and long term, not least the form of anti-democratic politics it centred. Sisi’s mobilisation of anticolonial nationalism, however, was not seen as necessary, largely because of the way it was mobilised and the historical juncture during which it emerged. Instead, its failures were centred.

The centrality of Suez to Egypt's most powerful political project – Nasserism – goes some way in highlighting why its spectre remains. The spectre of both Suez and the anticolonial nationalist project it was produced by and in turn produced, then, continues to haunt contemporary Egypt in ways that destabilise the current ruling elite. Can we understand the 'new Suez Canal'—both in its material creation as well as in its failure to create political capital for Sisi and the Egypt's broader elite—without reading it against the 'old' Suez Canal? By reading these two moments alongside one another—or against one another—we have shown that haunting can help in understanding their connectedness in ways that other methodological approaches might not. Haunting allows us to capture the energy, hope and aspirations of the first moment, and how these have been mobilised since, without ever quite succeeding.

This reading of the Suez Canal in turn suggests that while empire produced its afterlives, resistance to empire equally produced debris, afterlives, and spectres (Grovogui 2011). It is the spectre of anticolonial nationalism, after all, that we focus on here. These postcolonial afterlives, however, do a different type of political work: they destabilise contemporary attempts at political violence. By its mere presence it delegitimises attempts at hegemony by Egypt's ruling elite today; it shows that this happened before—but differently (Salem 2019). This does not signify a moment during which there was less political violence; the building of the Aswan Dam, for instance, was heavily paid for by workers, displaced communities, and nature. It is rather to say that what was different was the presence of a political project that resonated across many sections of Egypt; an articulation of nationalism that spoke to many (Grovogui 2011). Where Nasser was able to represent the nationalisation of the Suez Canal as being for the good of the nation, the "new Suez Canal" was instead understood as for the good of the military and capital. In an attempt to grasp political legitimacy through an appeal to the first moment of nationalisation, Sisi instead made clear just how different these two moments were. The spectre of success was neatly brought to the present to reside alongside the chaos, violence and counter-revolution of post-revolutionary Egypt. So, whereas, haunting discloses a continuity in the case of Afghanistan, in Egypt haunting discloses a rupture and a difference, and in both cases changes our understanding of these two moments in history, by emphasising the many avatars of colonial violence.

Conclusion: searching for ghosts

This article has explored the possibility of recognising ghosts, haunting and spectres as ways of producing theory and searching for what is invisible or intangible, yet constitutive, in Afghanistan and Egypt. This not only destabilises common-sense empiricist approaches to sociology that have long dominated analyses of the Middle East, it also centres empire and its afterlives in the understanding of Middle East politics. Here we probe alternative archives and interpret 'empirics' differently. Rather than view these two contexts as cases through which to 'test' or 'apply' social theory, we have asked how revisiting particular moments in these contexts is generative of social theory itself. Looking for ghosts and spectres also raises questions around what we understand to be theory, evidence, or 'data.' Searching for ghosts is a productive way of 'doing theory' that moves us beyond Eurocentric searches for grand narratives and empirical evidence in places like Egypt and Afghanistan. By interrogating what

is said and unsaid in contemporary discourses on Afghanistan and Egypt, we have asked what it means to centre a region like the Middle East, which has for so long concomitantly served as a peripheral Other and a key site of imperial aggression. Looking at the generative force of haunting also displaces the hegemonic narrative about the Middle East as a land of despotic rulers disconnected from imperial and racial capitalist processes and modes of production. Crucially, haunting also allows for a way of capturing the unspoken and the emotive; difficult modes of knowing that are difficult to capture and yet which so often drive politics. We argue that in this article, haunting allows us to capture the social violence of colonial rule in Afghanistan on the one hand, and the hope and optimism of anticolonial nationalism in Egypt on the other. The juxtaposing of these cases, then, allows us to show why colonial and postcolonial haunting are two sides of the same coin.

Following this special issue's call to explore global structural formations and their links to an intensification of authoritarianism, this article has proposed two answers. In relation to Afghanistan, we have shown that European empire as a global structural formation is directly linked to contemporary political crisis in both Afghanistan and the wider the Middle East. Punitive governance in the form of the FCR in Afghanistan was deemed justified, even necessary, to deal with the wild and lawless peoples of the frontier. Yet, the minutiae of the legalese show that this lawlessness was installed and reproduced *through* the official mechanisms of the FCR itself. The "barbarous and bloodthirsty customs" of the Pathans lamented by the British are not merely racialised tropes, they are the material and recursive effects of empire that continue to haunt Afghanistan today.

In relation to Egypt, we focused on the afterlives of the postcolonial project that emerged under Nasser, a very specific afterlife of European empire. This postcolonial project continues to haunt the Egyptian present, in expected and unexpected ways. In particular, it sets some of the contours around which Egypt's current ruling elite must work within. The 'second Suez Canal moment' highlights that Sisi was not simply addressing the present political context, but also had to contend with the past, in the form of the original Suez Canal moment. Because of the significant differences between these two moments, it seems almost inevitable that the second was bound to fail. This failure, and the intense social and political violence surrounding Egypt's post-revolutionary context in general, cannot be read separately from the spectre of anticolonial nationalism. Given Sisi's purposeful attempts at drawing parallels between his project and that of Nasser's, it seems pertinent that we think through how elements of Egypt's postcolonial past seep into the present.

This article thus builds on work that decentres Eurocentric forms of knowledge production by calling for more intuitive methods of research that take seriously the possibility of invisible and intangible presences. This is especially relevant to the Middle East, which has long been disciplined into Eurocentric and empiricist theoretical frameworks. By paying attention to ghosts and the processes of haunting they engender in their wake, we have partaken in what Julietta Singh calls a "vulnerable reading" (Singh, 2016: 98-108), a counter-hegemonic strategy that resists masterful narratives and disciplinary enclosures. By listening to ghosts, being sensitive to their lingering effects, we have advocated for a more open-ended reading of

two moments in Afghanistan and Egypt, but we hope that this creates the space for thinking otherwise our postcolonial present, more generally. Haunting is a (methodological) tool that helps us acknowledge our own complicity in asymmetrical power relations as well as offering a way of envisioning a radically different future. It offers us a way of peaceably co-existing with ghosts rather than forcefully, and ultimately unsuccessfully, banishing them.

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