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The 'Righteous Anger' of the Powerless Investigating Dalit Outrage over Caste Violence

Nicolas Jaoul

Introduction¹

- ¹ In November 2006, the Maharashtrian Buddhist community² revolted against the massacre of four members of a family by the dominant castes in Khairlanji village of the Vidarbha region (Eastern Maharashtra), more exactly against the inaction or alleged compliance of the local administration. The massacre highlighted the enormous difference between the notion of a democratic society and the actual suppression of poor and marginalised Dalits ('untouchables'). Official neglect of Dalits, as well as the routine failure to apply the specific law meant to prevent Dalit atrocities, makes possible the occurrence of such atrocities in broad daylight. As is generally the case with violent attacks on rural Dalits, the murderers not only wanted to teach assertive Dalits a lesson, but also to flaunt how openly they could afford to do it. In other words, this was a public statement by dominant castes that their caste rule was above and beyond the law, a public demonstration that a conspicuous violation of the law on such a scale could indeed be protected by putative law enforcers. The astonishing level of cruelty displayed in the collective attack against helpless victims, as well as local authorities' disturbing apathy, which revealed the depth of the institutionalisation of caste prejudice, generated anguish and distress in the assertive Buddhist community, nourishing fears of practical disenfranchisement and further victimisation. This paper will analyse the way the discrepancy between the law and its enactment was challenged by them, through the public staging of anger and moral outrage.
- ² In the violent protests that followed about a month after the massacre, the protestors braved interdictions and confronted the Police. They most consistently assumed the

stance of the 'outraged community' standing up dramatically, shunning 'compromise' and 'politics', conspicuously resorting to violence, and lyrically claiming the values of heroic resistance in the face of state repression. Although Dalit protests have been regularly held in the aftermath of caste atrocities, it was the first time in history that Dalits gave voice to their feelings of injustice on such a scale.

- 3 A year and a half after the uprising that shook the Vidarbha region (and that spread even more violently to the rest of Maharashtra in the immediate aftermath), I visited Nagpur city and the neighbouring Bhandara district, where Khairlanji is situated. I gathered documentation from the movement (pamphlets and leaflets circulated during protests, as well as a sympathetic documentary movie that was shot during the protests) and collected some local organisers and ordinary protestors' oral testimonies. Drawing on this material, my paper analyses the popular language of outrage that unfolded in this collective act of human rights vigilance, and questions the popular understandings of what was at stake in this passionate reaction.
- 4 The workings of this moral crusade of the oppressed provide an interesting case of E.P. Thompson's reflection on the subaltern uses of moral precepts during the English eighteenth century's food riots. Moral economy, a morally sanctioned and consensual economy of subsistence, was invoked by plebeians in their opposition to emerging rural capitalism. Thompson shows that the defence of established morality by the very people whose social and political subjection it also entailed in normal times, suddenly became connoted by rebellion and the insurgents' emotional fervour. The defence of morality was thus intimately linked to the crystallisation and public expression of a subaltern agency that invoked:

(...) passionately held notions of the common weal – notions which, indeed, found some support in the paternalist tradition of the authorities; notions which the people re-echoed so loudly in their turn that the authorities were, in some measure, the prisoners of the people (Thompson 1991: 188-9).
- 5 By examining the discourse of moral outrage that the post-Khairlanji movement produced, I would like to trace in detail the complexity involved in reclaiming officially held moral precepts by those at the margins of Indian society. This brings us to another important aspect of my study, namely the social meaning attached to the display of anger by a powerless group.
- 6 As noted by Helena Flam (2005), the public display of anger by powerless groups entails expressing a conflictual emotion, one that such groups are inclined to avoid in order to facilitate social integration and prevent repression and further hardships. As was emphasised earlier by Hochschild (1979), emotions have gender and class connotations. Gender studies have shown that open manifestations of anger are generally a prerogative of dominant males, and are used by them in a coercive manner. Flam thus suggests that 'We must map out emotions which uphold social structures and relations of domination to then show how social movements work to counter them' (2005: 19). When inciting the powerless to publicly express their sense of injustice, social movements work on emotions in an attempt to disturb such social mappings of authorised emotion, a process Flam characterises as 'the emotional re-framing of reality' (2005: 19). By displacing them from their authorised social location as attributes of the powerful, movements working for social change can thus derive 'subversive counter emotions' out of formerly 'cementing emotions'.³

- 7 In the present paper, I will focus on the issue of moral outrage and anger, a corresponding judgmental emotion, as a way for despised and marginal groups to occupy the 'moral high ground'. As James Jasper remarked, 'It is their ability to provide a moral voice that makes protest activities so satisfying,' (1997: 5). The Dalits' endeavour in this regard is especially interesting, since although they were defined as Hindus (even if marginal ones) by the Indian state, they were traditionally excluded from the dominant Brahminical religion and thus denied any form of moral legitimacy. I will thus try to show how, by expressing their anger and sense of moral outrage, they contested this denial of their human worth.

From 'meek Harijans' to 'angry Dalits': the Dalit movement and the making of emancipated subjects

- 8 Before going into the Khairlanji case, I will revisit a few historical events that Maharashtrian Buddhist Dalits (and Ambedkarite Dalits in other parts of India as well) consider to be important landmarks in their social 'awakening' (*jagran*). These events have already been well described historically (Zelliot 1992) but they deserve to be looked at again through the innovative lens of the emotional work theories. This preliminary section will thus lay out the historical background of the post-Khairlanji protests so that they may be understood as continuous with previous Dalit assertions.
- 9 In the Brahminical view, and to a large extent in the officially adopted Gandhian approach of the untouchable question, Dalits have been defined as lacking culture, knowledge and morality. Since the late nineteenth century, such conceptions were publicised by those very Hindu reformist organisations whose struggles against untouchability promoted Dalits' social, religious and political integration within a reformed 'Hindu community' in the making. The Arya Samaj (founded in 1875) thus invented rituals of 'purification' (*shuddhi*), a symbolic act supposed to render them more acceptable to orthodox caste Hindus. In the 1930's, Gandhi's charitable organisation, the Harijan Sevak Sangh, defined social work towards Dalits as a prerogative of upper caste citizens. It excluded Dalits themselves from its membership and encouraged 'respectable Hindu citizens' to show their repentance and benevolence through moralistic propaganda and hygienist programmes in the slums (Jaoul 2004).
- 10 The Dalit emancipation movement developed among the Dalit intelligentsia. It struggled for a separate communal identity and political representation in the colonial setup, and contested such reformist views as patronising. It launched social awareness (*samajik chetna*) events aimed at an autonomous communal consciousness. One such event was the public burning of the *Manusmṛti* by Ambedkar (1891-1956) in 1927, a conservative Hindu code dating from 1st century in which rigid practises of untouchability (as well as segregation of women) are codified. By such an act of defiance to the Brahminical orthodoxy, Dalits not only contested the justification of caste discrimination, but also publicly expressed a moral judgment that found Hinduism lacking in morality. In this way, they profoundly upset the upper caste monopoly on knowledge, religion and morality, whom Christian missionaries had already challenged. Access to 'religious' knowledge (in Hindi the term *dharmik* has a larger meaning than just 'religious', also including one's sense of duty and a general idea of morality) had been traditionally denied to Dalits by the Brahminical tradition, only to be dispensed in a charitable manner

by the reformists once Dalits had been suitably 'purified'. Militant Dalits thus took a radical option that rejected Hinduism as a religion whose fundamental core was hierarchical, and could not be reformed; reformism, in this view, was thus unfit to be a project of a modernizing society based on principles of equality.

- 11 The mass conversion to Buddhism led by Ambedkar in October 1956, a few weeks before he died, was a major step in this history of public and religious dissent. On this occasion, the Mahars, the most important Dalit community of Maharashtra, and the one to which Ambedkar belonged, collectively converted to the new emancipatory religion as it was purposely redefined by him.
- 12 After two decades of unsuccessful electoral politics by the Republican Party of India (RPI), the posthumous Ambedkarite party, a new generation of educated Dalits, inspired by Afro-American radicalism, formed the Dalit Panthers in 1972. While identifying with Ambedkar, they opposed the Dalit middle class for its lack of commitment, and decried the Gandhian agenda of 'Harijan uplift'⁴ that the nation had endorsed, and which had not produced any significant improvements in Dalits' condition. Rejecting the word 'Harijan' for its paternalism, they went back to an older word, 'Dalit' that had already been used by the Arya Samaj at the beginning of the century in order to denounce untouchability as a blot on Hinduism. Literally meaning 'the crushed ones', and often translated as 'the oppressed', this word was given a class connotation by the radicalised Dalit Panthers, who wished to define Dalits as the community of the oppressed, without restricting themselves to 'untouchables'.⁵ This new militant terminology, which gradually replaced the Gandhian word 'harijan', carried a new meaning: rejecting the safe and patronising view of 'untouchables' as the objects of reform from above (whether by the state or by Gandhian social workers), the term 'Dalit' called instead for an autonomous and revolutionary agency. Influenced by the Marxist idea of the proletariat as a revolutionary agent of history, such a redefinition of Dalit identity valorised anger as the expression of a legitimate moral stand taken by the oppressed. The autonomous redefinition of the self along militant lines demanded public manifestations able to both capture general attention, and to provide a new exemplar for the Dalit population. As with the burning of the *Manusmṛiti* by Ambedkar decades earlier, one of the founding gestures of the Panthers was to highlight publicly the political autonomy of Dalits by assaulting the national flag during the silver jubilee of Independence. As the following extract from J. Gokhale shows, they developed a command of the language of outrage, not only by publicising their anger, but also by inspiring adverse reactions from nationalists at their outrageous acts of defiance. To the new radical Dalit ideologues, being outraged was thus not enough; they also felt the urge to display their rightful and daring ability to shock the conservative sections of society, thus radically replacing the condition of victimhood by a threatening image of Dalits as revolutionaries. The politics of outrage was thus designed to instil anger at the heart of the new militant Dalit identity, but also as a strategic device in order to create controversy, mobilise opponents and catch the media's attention. In a word the repertoire of outrage was used strategically to gain publicity.

Raja Dhale published a vitriolic critique of the incident and policies of independent India towards the dalits in the August, 1972, issue of *Sadhana*, a Marathi monthly. He characterized the 25th anniversary of Indian independence as a black day. His criticism of Indian independence brought swift reaction from the Jan Sangh and the Shiv Sena; they led marches to the office of *Sadhana* and threatened to burn down the magazine as well as the offending article. Those parties also urged the Indian Government to punish Dhale for his lack of respect to the national flag. Throughout

1972 and 1973 the Marathi press gave interviews of Dhale and other future Panther leaders such as Namdeo Dhasal. Thus by 1973 members of this young, somewhat militant, stream within the Dalit movement had gained a measure of publicity for themselves and for their ideas and had also succeeded to some extent in establishing a political identity separate and distinct from the RPI. (Gokhale 1993: 267-8)

- 13 The growing caste/class tensions in the countryside between the Dalit rural poor and the dominant castes was emphasised in a Dalit Panther manifesto (Murugkar, 1991). In a context of rising unemployment among educated young males in all sections of society, the educated Dalit youth's aspirations and frustrations provided a breeding ground for such radicalisation. In villages, these educated and assertive young men openly defied the caste order. Casteist crimes against Dalits—legally labelled 'atrocities' by the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Prevention of Atrocities Act, 1955—were on the rise, intended to 'teach lessons' to assertive Dalit villagers through public humiliation rituals, arsons, rapes and massacres. In this context of growing insecurity and distress, the Dalit Panthers gave a voice to the popular disapproval of electoral politics in general and of the divided leadership of the RPI in particular. The factionalism of the Ambedkarite party was resented as a form of political impotency leading to powerlessness, and was morally condemned as motivated by the selfishness and careerism of the Dalit bourgeoisie (Gokhale 1993).
- 14 The Dalit Panthers' politics of anger was thus pitted against regular politics, pictured as the realm of self-interested politicking, compromises and deals. The Dalit Panthers defined themselves as the outcry of a genuine and irrepressible emotion, an expression of moral disapproval that gave birth to the revolutionary agency of the Dalits.
- 15 The growing tension in the Maharashtrian countryside crystallised into anti-Dalit riots that stormed the Marathwada region in August 1978, where 19 people died and thousands of Dalits fled their villages (Gokhale 1993). Although there was a class dimension to the violence against Dalit villagers (who are mostly employed as agricultural labourers and whom the dominant castes thus wished to coerce violently), the upper castes' growing resentment towards Dalit militancy was focused mainly on the educated sections' social mobility thanks to job quotas in the administration. The Ambedkarite emphasis on social and political activism by educated Dalits was perceived as potentially disruptive for the social order of the villages. The riot was significantly triggered by a symbolic measure: in June 1978 the Maharashtra government accepted the Dalit demand of renaming the Aurangabad University after Ambedkar. This gave official recognition to the Dalit community's great man, whose biography was turned into a role model of the Dalit intelligentsia's commitment to their community. As I have argued regarding the installation of Ambedkar statues in Uttar Pradesh, Dalit activists' struggles for the public recognition of their great man was also an attempt to highlight their own moral authority within the Dalit community (Jaoul 2006).
- 16 The decision to rename the university was perceived as an official boost to Dalits among upper caste students in the Aurangabad region (Marathwada), who expressed their fury and struck back at Dalit villagers. Apart from the material reasons that motivated such staunch opposition (like the fear that the making of a Dalit stronghold would allow Dalits to advance in terms of jobs and social position), Lata Murugkar also explains how, at a more symbolic level, such a renaming meant the outrageous intrusion of a 'defiling' Dalit symbol into the private space of the upper castes, since people routinely hang their university diplomas on the walls of their residences (Murugkar 1991).

- 17 In the face of a massive anti-Dalit pogrom in which Dalit lives were lost—including five Dalit protestors who died during police repression—and public property worth 300 million rupees was destroyed, the government eventually backed off from renaming the university. To protest against this setback, the Dalit Panthers launched the *Namantar* ('name change') movement. It culminated in a 'Long March' (inspired by the prestigious Chinese event) throughout Maharashtra that converged on Aurangabad on 6 December 1979, Ambedkar's death anniversary, thus giving an additional emotional charge to the event (Murugkar 1991).
- 18 Through their March, Dalit activists sought to highlight the discrepancy between official values claimed by the Indian nation and the still prevailing caste prejudices. Since Ambedkar drafted the Indian Constitution, Dalits always insisted on the conformity of their movement to the ideals of Indian nationalism, whose official modern values Ambedkar had espoused. Hence, Dalits could conveniently argue that by opposing Ambedkar's official recognition for the sake of preserving their caste hegemony, the upper castes in fact opposed the very constitutional values of the Indian nation.
- 19 The emphasis on the Constitution (as is emphasised in Dalit iconography; see Jaoul 2006) always helped Ambedkarite activists to frame their struggle as a defence of official values, in opposition to unofficial caste practises. In this sense, the Dalit movement has always claimed to embody the true implementation of Indian democratic principles, those enshrined in a constitution that they somehow regard as 'sacred'.
- 20 While playing with the idea of breaking with the Indian state, the Dalit Panthers' revolutionary commitment was short-lived (Murugkar, 1991) and remained purely rhetorical. Dalit mobilisation against caste oppression has, in general, remained ambiguous in its relationship to the state, criticising the hidden caste prejudices of the ruling class while at the same time making use of democratic laws and constitutional means committed to the legal struggle against caste. Hence the Dalit movement has combined the three levels of moral contestation identified by Barrington Moore (1978),⁶ which are: 1/ the criticism of one part of the ruling class for violating their own moral norms (this corresponds to Dalit criticism of the upper caste nationalist elite); 2/ the criticism of all of the ruling class (an option that corresponds to the Dalit Panthers' inclusion of the RPI politicians and the Dalit bourgeoisie in their critique of the ruling class); 3/ the revolutionary step of moral repudiation of all the norms that are used by the dominant strata to justify its domination. (This corresponds to the rejection of the reformist elites' approach to the untouchable question that informed Independent India's social welfare programmes. It also illustrates the fact that the pro-marxist faction of the Dalit Panthers became tempted to ally with the Maoist option of armed struggle against the post-colonial, bourgeois state, before being marginalised by the more orthodox Ambedkarite Buddhists).⁷ Moore asks the following question: 'Put crudely the issue is this: do the lower strata really give a dam about the reigning principles of legitimacy in their society?' (Moore 1978: 89). Obviously, this trivial but essential question cannot be answered so simply without sacrificing the extreme complexity of subaltern consciousness, and the derivative, ambivalent, and even at times ironic and parodic uses of dominant principles and ethics. In order to have a better idea of such a complex issue, first raised by Thompson in his seminal study on moral economy (1991), one needs to examine cases like the Khairlanji issue and protests in details, in order to understand how these different options might in fact articulate with one another, rather than necessarily come into conflict. A short answer to Moore's question would be that the Khairlanji

outrage over constitutional values shows how much Dalits do in fact care about these constitutional values that gave official status to their claim of being equal human beings, and how much democratic ideals have been appropriated by their movement. But the fascinating complexities involved in the subaltern approach to principles officially adopted by the ruling class provide enough of a reason to further inquire into the concrete processes by which democratic principles are entrenched at the margins of Indian society.

The possibility of the massacre: Dalit assertion without political power

- 21 The first thing that struck my mind when I reached Nagpur in the second half of April 2008, was the overwhelming physical presence of the Ambedkarite movement in the landscape, notably posters and banners of the Ambedkar icon as well as the plastic blue flags covering many streets and crossings. These obviously remained from the recent Ambedkar Jayanti (birthday celebrations) held on a large scale by the Buddhist community of Maharashtra every 14th of April. One and a half years after the violent Khairlanji protests, this appropriation of public space seemed to have added meaning, as if to signify that no effort would be spared in the struggle against the marginalisation of the dissident Dalit community.⁸ This marginalization was due not so much to Dalits' economic or social position, since they had an important middle class in the city of Nagpur, but was more political in nature, due to the continuing failure of Ambedkarite politics.
- 22 In the 2004 national elections, the main RPI faction leaders entered into electoral arrangements with the NCP-Congress combine that eventually won the election. While they managed to survive politically by bargaining their share of votes with mainstream parties, the Dalit leaders had scattered the votes of their local communities and failed to provide them the official support that the client-based functioning of the Indian administrative set up requires.
- 23 During my fieldtrip, I heard much popular resentment against these leaders, accused of selling the community's political interests for the sake of their own positions and personal gains, thus reviving the Dalit Panthers' critique of electoral politics. Two of these leaders who hailed from the region had been rewarded through nominated positions by the Congress, which was in power both at the state and central levels.⁹ However, beneficial to the leaders themselves, these positions did not provide their local community with any significant political support in the local setup. The local Buddhist electorate had been increasingly deserting the RPI faction leaders, and shared their votes between new local Ambedkarite formations, the Congress and the BSP.¹⁰ The Sharad Pawar-led NCP had a reputation of being the party of the dominant rural community, the Kunbis, estimated to be about a third of the Vidarbha population and to be the principal landholding community (and thus possessing the requisite criteria by which M. N. Srinivas defined a locally dominant caste: majority landholding, numerical dominance, and ritual status).
- 24 Although Buddhists are only 6.39% of the total Maharashtra population, they represent 13.1% in the Vidarbha region, and their proportion is even higher (25% according to local estimates) in Nagpur city. Their Nagpur strongholds (Indora, Kampti, Sitabuldi...) do not

display the poverty usually witnessed in urban India's Dalit areas. Many former slums, like Chota Indora, now have well built houses and large Boddh Vihars that testify to the relative prosperity of the Dalit urban middle class. But in the surrounding rural districts, the Buddhist community remains economically disadvantaged and dependent on the dominant Other Backward Castes (OBCs)—Kunbis or Telis depending on the area—as agricultural labourers. Although specific data on Vidarbha are not available, the 2001 census indicates that in Maharashtra as a whole, 65.5 % of the Mahar (Buddhist) population is rural, while 48.5 per cent work as agricultural labourers.¹¹ It can thus be estimated from these figures that three quarters of the rural Mahars occupy the bottom of the rural class structure.¹² The people whom I met in the Buddhist lanes of Tumser town (the nearest town to Khairlanji, in Bhandara district) acknowledged that the local *bidi* (artisanal cigarettes) manufacture business helped the poor of the region to be less dependent on the exceedingly low rural wages. Rolling *bidi* at home made their lives less miserable than those Dalits of other poor regions of the state (like Marathwada), who depended on such wages alone to make a living (sometimes as low as 30-40 rupees a day, according to them, which is equivalent to less than half the legal minimum wage). Despite this gap between the rural and the urban Dalits, progress in education was universally acknowledged. 'You'll find someone educated in each home', a Buddhist from Tumser said to me with pride, implying achievement and social awareness. Several people I met even boasted that Dalits had reached the same educational level as Brahmins and were intellectually far ahead of the dominant OBC castes, whom they referred to contemptuously as 'other log' ('other people'), a local expression for 'other backward castes'; the spite between OBCs and Dalits was thus not one way, but largely reciprocated. As far as I understood it, the expression that could be translated as 'the remaining ones' seemed to imply contempt in the sense that these middle castes were neither 'pure' or twice-born Hindus, nor opponents of caste hierarchy like them, and thus lacked a clear-cut ideology and social identity. Emphasising their own emancipation, Dalits took pride in their conversion to Buddhism, which implied rebellion, choice and agency.

- 25 Their actual powerlessness contrasted sharply with their daring and outright criticisms of the powerful (as I witnessed in person a few times, when Dalit openly criticised or mocked OBCs to their faces in order to embarrass them in front of me, for example by recalling how they had abandoned anti-Brahmin leaders from their own castes like Phule, the founder of the anti-Brahmin struggle whose social memory now lives on only by dint of Dalits' acts of remembrance). Despite its assertive behaviour, the Buddhist community was in a vulnerable position, and the consequences of this became dramatically clear in Khairlanji, where they were 'taught a lesson' and 'put in their place' by the Kunbis.
- 26 In this small village of a little less than 800 inhabitants, there are 181 households, out of which 157 are OBCs (mostly Kunbis) and 20 are Gonds (scheduled tribes), according to official sources. The Bhotmanges were one of 3 isolated Buddhist families. They had moved in 1986 from another village after inheriting 7 acres of land. Facing harassment and discrimination in the village, the Bhotmange decided to move out and build their house illegally at the outskirts of spare communal land. They lived with constant harassment at the hands of the dominant Kunbi caste. The farmers whose land neighboured their own alleged that they needed a road to access their fields. In 1996, the Panchayat (village council) requested the use of 2 acres of their land for this purpose. The Bhotmange had to abide by this decision, hopeful that this would help them gain acceptance. They began to oppose the municipality, however, when it claimed 2 more

acres under the pretext of carrying on new development works.¹³ The two Bhotmange sons, one of them partially blind and the other a college graduate, assisted their parents economically by doing agricultural labour job; the daughter, who was the most promising in her studies (the year preceding the murder, she came first in the whole Bhandara district's 12th class final exam and was awarded a prize) and who nurtured higher professional ambitions, had plans to join a training center of army officers. One of their relatives, Siddharth Ghajbiye, was a police *patil* (a village representative appointed to the local police) and a Congress activist. He assisted the Bhotmange in their children's studies and advised them about their legal and administrative struggle to retain their land. On September 3, 2006, returning from their house, Ghajbiye was severely beaten up by a mob of villagers who resented his role. Fifteen persons were named in the complaint, who were formally identified at the police station by the two Bhotmange women. The dominant caste took this as a daring act of defiance, which would eventually cost the Bhotmange very dearly. The morning before the massacre, twelve of the accused in the Ghajbiye case were arrested by the police in Khairlanji to be questioned at the local court of Mohadi. The decision to release them on bail was an irresponsible act that was only made possible due to the technical 'omission' of not registering the case under the SC-ST (Prevention of atrocities) Act. Not only does such a law normally apply in casteist crimes against members of Dalit castes, but the local judicial authorities were expected to be all the more alert since the district is listed as prone to Dalit atrocities. This deadly negligence can only be explained by the clout enjoyed by the Kunbis in local power structures as well as the lack of such informal administrative support for Dalits.

- 27 When they were returning to Khairlanji from the court, the twelve accused became drunk and were incited by a local member of the legislative assembly from their community to take due revenge and put Dalits in their place. The released Kunbi men were in the mood for revenge. After stopping their tractor in front of the Bhotmange's hut and threatening to finish off the entire family, they went searching for Siddharth Ghajbiye. Since they couldn't put their hands on him, they eventually went back to the Bhotmange's where they captured the four members of the family (the mother Surekha, 44, the daughter Priyanka, 18 and the two sons, Roshan, 21 and Sudhir, 23); the father Bhayyalal was off working in his field. Dragged to the main village square where a crowd gathered, the four victims were savagely beaten with sticks and bicycle chains. According to the Dalit witnesses' version, the women were paraded naked in the village and finally gang raped and killed. The two boys were sexually mutilated after refusing to rape their mother and sister and died on the spot after being further brutalised and humiliated by the crowd.
- 28 Although Siddharth Ghajbiye called the police at 6:15 p.m. while the avenging mob was on its way back from his village to Khairlanji (just before the killing took place), the police only reached there at 8:30 p.m., observed that everything was calm, made no further enquiry, and even neglected to transmit a report of the visit as normal police procedure would mandate. On the next day, when Bhayyalal tried to lodge a complaint with the police, he was ignored by the police officer for no other obvious reason than being a Dalit. Later in the day the police found the dead bodies in a canal and he was eventually called in to give a First Information Report, in which he named 38 active participants to the massacre, including the village headman, the deputy headman and a police constable on duty in the village.
- 29 The first reports that came out in the local press mention that only 28 persons were arrested, without giving any indication of the mob's gruesome acts.¹⁴ They imputed the

murder to the villagers' attempt to punish Surekha Bhotmange for an alleged liaison with her relative, Siddharth Ghajbiye. The police obviously knew that this allegation (which the accused had already made after they beat up Ghajbiye) was false, since the land dispute between the Bhotmange and the villagers had been called to the local administration's attention several times. By reporting this motive for the crime, the press, astonishingly, seemed to accept wholesale the idea that the mob had acted in order to protect the village's 'moral standards'. By concealing the casteist motives, the authorities for their part had sought to avoid a violent conflagration during the October 2nd national commemoration in Nagpur of the golden jubilee of Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism. The huge mass gathering was attended by the Buddhist community from all over Maharashtra and beyond, and this heavy Buddhist presence created favourable conditions for a major insurrection if the casteist nature of the massacre became known.

- 30 The priority given to maintaining law and order at the cost of the truth, however, carried a deep bias and made common cause with the murderers, for whom this was an implicit sign that the administration would side by them. Indeed, the perpetrators' actions show that they already took this official complicity for granted. It is precisely this self-assurance that encouraged them to teach the assertive and successful Dalit family a macabre lesson in full public view without taking the least precaution, to the extent that they even neglected to properly conceal the corpses, which were simply dumped in the nearest canal in the village itself. It is therefore as if the massacre was not sufficient in itself: what they sought was a specifically *public* demonstration that they could commit the atrocity with impunity, a public statement that their local rule was above and beyond the law.

Beyond 'axiological neutrality' and 'participant observation': what to do with our emotions when studying injustice?

In a sham imitation of the natural sciences, the social sciences have attempted to ignore the fact that, in their domain, the researcher and its object are made of the same stuff.

Alban Bensa¹⁵

- 31 In taking up the issue of emotions, we need to consider how we, as ethnographers, deal with our own emotions in our relationship to our subject of study, and how the people with whom we interact in the field can influence us emotionally, especially when the subject in question has strong moral implications. When dealing with injustice, and even more so with massacres, in which the very value of human dignity is explicitly denied, it becomes morally difficult to maintain academic neutrality. While writing the first version of this paper for our 'outraged communities' workshop, I felt astonished and morally shocked by the level of human cruelty in evidence at Khairlanji. Taking the emotion work of the protestors as an object of study, which implies a form of distancing from or objectification of emotions, did not prevent me from being affected myself, as I initially believed such a reflexive methodological stand would do. In order to continue the work without letting the emotions become too overwhelming, I had to build some resistance against the profound disgust and sympathy I felt towards the perpetrators of the massacre and the victims respectively. The need that I felt to control my emotions was an

endeavour on my part to conform to the academic ethos, which strongly believes in the Weberian notion of axiological neutrality.¹⁶ Himself both politically involved as a citizen, and distanced when working academically or teaching his students, Weber however insisted that the social scientist needs to leave behind all her/his political preferences and value judgements when practicing her/his profession. However, serious doubts have recently been raised about the way this notion has been used in the academic world. First, the concept of axiological neutrality itself is a mistranslation of Weber's expression of 'wehrfreiheit', meaning literally, 'detachment from values'. In her recent French translation of Weber, Isabelle Kalinowski has noted that the first French translation by Julien Freund and the foreword by Raymond Aron was itself not free from polemical intentions. In fact, Aron, who had right leanings, used the French publication of Weber's two conferences to discredit the French leftist intellectual's political involvement (Kalinowski 2005).

- 32 As noted by Kalinowski, the concept of axiological neutrality differs from Weber's German expression ('wehrfreiheit') whose right translation could also be 'non imposition of values', if we take into account the situation that Weber discussed. Weber mainly addressed his criticism to university professors using their position's authority in the classrooms for the sake of nationalistic propaganda. Kalinowski also notes that Weber's original expression differs from 'axiological neutrality' from the point of view of the translation's evocation of a natural sciences model of scientificity. The misinterpreted Weberian concept was subsequently used purposely by sociologists in their attempt to present their academic discipline as conforming to the model of the natural sciences (Kalinowski 2005). I would like to add from my own experience, as a young researcher whose extensive fieldwork in the Dalit movement has at times been criticised by some colleagues as lacking neutrality, that many social scientists who do not practise fieldwork or practise it in a limited or superficial manner without getting personally involved with the milieus they study also seem to have found in such a concept a convenient justification for the safe distance they have maintained in the field.
- 33 In *Involvement and Detachment*, Elias takes note of the way such a distanced approach by social scientists has reached the status of an academic ethos, with:
- (...) institutionalised procedures of control, that exercise a strong pressure on each scientist taken individually, and that aim at subordinating subjective tendencies to an interest 'in the thing in itself', as we are accustomed saying, and therefore to a more distanced conception of his or her task' (1993 [1983] :13).¹⁷
- 34 As far as I can observe concerning my own case, when studying the Khairlanji events, although I tried to impose the academic norm of neutrality on myself, I realised that what I could achieve was at best a cynical attitude, which by the way is nothing short of an emotional state of mind, in spite of its conduciveness to economic rationality and apparent mastery. Such an attitude was also uncomfortable because it did not match my own personal sensitivity to issues of social injustice and moreover because the Khairlanji events are truly and deeply shocking. After having two nightmares related to/adapted from, the Khairlanji events, I realised that the emotions that Khairlanji had created inside me could not be wished away so easily and that they had manifested themselves through the 'back door' of my subconscious. I came to the conclusion - similar to that described by J. Favret-Saada (1990) in her ethnographic account of her emotional involvement with practitioners of witchcraft in rural France (1990), that experiencing, if not sharing in, the emotional texture of a social movement, can be a legitimate and valuable part of

ethnographic work. From this perspective, the moral dilemmas that I experienced, torn as I was in between a professional ethos of axiological neutrality and my own feelings, could be pragmatically dealt with as part of my study. Personal involvement in the field requires dealing subsequently with the emotions that this can elicit, thus implying a deeper and more difficult process of objectification, and a more critical examination of the ethnographer's relationship to the field. And insofar as it leads to important methodological questions regarding the social conditions of the production of ethnographic knowledge, it is also valuable. This implies a departure not only from the dogma of axiological neutrality, but also from the naïve ethnographic method of participant-observation, in preference for what Bourdieu has called 'participant objectification'. In his critique of participant-observation, Bourdieu insists the ethnographer must think critically of his own presence as part of the situation he observes, and must analyse the social meanings and conditions of possibility of the very situation of ethnographic inquiry (2003). From this perspective, the moral dilemmas I experienced need to be pragmatically dealt with as inherent to my study. Following Bourdieu's suggestions, and based on my own fieldwork experience, I would like to reintroduce the issue of the ethnographer's emotions in the reflection on the ethnographic situation. Weber and Elias both situate the tension between involvement and detachment at the level of personal values, but do not analyse the way emotions intervene at a far more concrete psychological level.

- 35 Being a specialist on the Dalit movement—a movement denied legitimacy and stigmatised in Indian society—my presence as a foreign academic and therefore a prestigious potential sympathiser meant something to the local activists, who have historically sought from foreign academics the recognition that Indian intellectuals have refused to give them. During my PhD fieldwork on the Ambedkarite movement in Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh, I was warmly welcomed by the local Dalit Panthers organisation, and considerable trust was put in me: all doors were open to me, I was given free access to the organisation's archives, and I was never stopped from asking even very probing and insistent questions regarding contradictions within the movement. All this was certainly part of an affective 'strategy' in order to gain a supporter from a foreign university of the 'first world' (if we accept that such a sense of purpose does not preclude sincerity or authentic friendship, but even creates a fertile ground for such sincere feelings to develop). In its usual meaning, 'strategy' is a term that implies conscious calculation, and yet strategies can also operate at a much more subtle, unconscious and intricate level, and indeed, can be all the more effective when they are only partly conscious, less visible and rooted in sincere intentions and beliefs. The result of this 'strategic' generosity on the part of the people on whom I depended for my research was that I felt a moral debt towards those who had not only given me the knowledge that I valued, but who had also become hosts—I ended up living at the Dalit Panthers' headquarters—and friends. While writing my dissertation I realised how much I had become emotionally bound to the movement, which made objectification at times morally and affectively difficult to maintain (as, for example, when it came to shedding critical light on the actions of a personal friend). However, once I managed to deal with these dilemmas (by prioritising the academic value of producing critical knowledge, and by reasoning that my constructive criticism was the best service I could render to a movement which suffered, no doubt as every social movement does, from several contradictions), I realised the scientific value of this more arduous process of detachment. For my emotional

involvement in fieldwork generated some scientific findings that a more distanced approach would not have permitted. I realised, for example, that Dalit activists used techniques for generating emotional attachment in order to create support among elite Dalit bureaucrats, such as treating them as gods on earth in their meetings. My own lived experience as an ethnographer thus gave me clues to understanding, and reinforced one of the main findings of my thesis. My aim was to question instrumentalist theories, whose utilitarian interpretation of ethnic identities as imposed from above fails to ask how practices of identity formation are reciprocally used from below. Thanks to my experience with the emotional techniques employed by the movement, I could see that the movement was a form of instrumentalism from below, an endeavour by poor people to build social and political capital so as to compensate for their marginality and powerlessness. The sometimes flattering way in which I was treated as a French PhD scholar (by taking me to the station and garlanding me with flowers at the end of fieldtrips, for instance) was an adaptation of some already well-tried, partly flattering and partly affectionate techniques of emotional cooption of the elite by people seeking their loyalty.

- 36 My visit to Khairlanji with a local organiser of the Dalit protests (a successful Buddhist hailing from Tumser, who had become economically well off thanks to his flourishing private schools network) once more shows the value of such a methodological stand when dealing with the emotion work of social movements. Arguing that I had decided to focus my fieldwork exclusively on the protests and not on the victims or the massacre itself, I refused my host's and another local prominent Ambedkarite activist's offers to pay a visit to the only survivor of the family, Bhayyalal Bhotmange, who was also the mute witness of the murder of his family. His photograph and statements had been printed many times in the press. I felt uncomfortable approaching this suffering man and reviving his pain when he had already been harassed by the media in the aftermath of the massacre. I felt the media had been unconscionably voyeuristic and I wished to avoid that. However, I now recognise that while taking this moral stand, at a more unconscious level, I also wanted to avoid exposing myself to Bhayyalal Bhotmange whose helplessness and terrible fate would have been a cause of psychological discomfort.
- 37 After staying at Tumser, the closest town to Khairlanji, where I enquired about the local protests, my host took me back to Nagpur in his car. Arguing that the main road would be of less interest from a scenic point of view, he took a bypass. After a few kilometres he stopped the car and showed me the 'Khairlanji' sign on the bus stop, where the link road that led to the village started. Although I had previously refused his offer to take me to see the victims' house, he asked me again to let him, arguing that I should see it with my own eyes, and also that I should have a 'feel' (*bhavna*) for Khairlanji. In other words, he meant that if I wanted to understand the issue properly, emotions had to come into the picture. I now realise how fine and perceptive an adviser he was, since the Khairlanji movement on which I wanted to focus, was principally about raising emotions. Sometimes, the best approach to fieldwork is to let people take you where they want or feel you should go; the difficulty in this is accepting a temporary loss of control over the course of the enquiry, but it allows you to understand how people perceive your scientific intentions and try to respond to or change them. We passed the main square of the village, where the administrative premises (the school and the *Panchayat*) stood, and where the rape and massacre had taken place 18 months earlier. A police picket had been installed in the *Panchayat* premises to protect the village from retaliation. The police

stopped us, asked our identities and phoned their superiors. I began to regret having accepted my host's offer because of the time wasted and the stress caused by the police check, but the authorisation eventually came as a relief. It was interesting in itself that we were allowed to go and see the house, but forbidden to take any photographs. This official reaction was the first clue given to me of the importance and sensitivity of this image. Accompanied by two constables, we walked to the outskirts of the village where the precarious and decaying Bhotmange hutment, made of uncemented bricks and a thatched roof, stood. The barriers put around the house by the judicial authorities, and the police tent beside it, were the only reminders that a crime had taken place. The banality of village life that we witnessed while walking there and back at sunset contrasted awkwardly with the narratives of the heinous crime. I toyed with the thought that villagers whose path I crossed may have been among the crowd who assisted the murderers, but a judgmental attitude felt inappropriate on my part. Taking a moralistic stand towards them was a statement of superiority, since judging morally always amounts to assuming a superior subject-position. Moreover, because I am a French academic, and therefore perceived as a person of status, publicly taking a moral stand was to flaunt the edge I had over them; in more personal terms, this meant acting against my moral and political standards, playing the white European invoking superiority among Indian villagers. While we were walking with the police constables and were being observed by the villagers, my host openly acknowledged that he was using my presence in the village to assuage the Dalits' moral outrage, and give the caste villagers the feeling of being judged by the outside world. Although I generally do not mind being 'used' by my informants—since I also 'use' them, the economy of the ethnographic situation thus becomes less awkwardly one-sided—this particular situation paradoxically put me at odds with my personal ethics as an anthropologist, whose job is to understand people rather than to judge them. I came to realise that my own dominant social status and Dalits' subaltern position gave a very different social meaning to our socially situated expression of moral outrage. Favret-Saada notes that 'While experiencing the intensities linked to a particular place, one can further grasp that each one presents a particular sort of objectivity' (1990: 7).¹⁸ Although the idea of empathy on which participant-observation is founded seems methodologically dubious, it is always possible to take advantage of one's own socially situated perceptions as an indication of how subjectivities interact in the ethnographic situation. In his 'Remarks on the politics of intersubjectivity', Alban Bensa notes that:

The intimate confrontation between moral consciousness and the scientific project is never as strong as the decision to put the enquiry's underlying power relations on the table, or when we risk speaking in the first person in a scholarly universe that often turns the silence with respect to oneself into a guise of objectivity (Bensa 2008: 326).¹⁹

- 38 While writing my paper, the experience of my visit to Khairlanji and the psychological discomfort I felt afterwards induced me to rethink my reticence about confronting the victim and his house, as well as my host's insistence on taking me there. It gave me a clue to the kind of emotional work that a movement trying to influence the public opinion in its favour might pursue, and the way social scientists can be exposed and react to this emotional work. Taking me to Khairlanji was part of the work that the activist wished to perform on me, and it reiterated what the movement had itself done to sensitise its audience to the unjust and terrible fate of an innocent family. In Nagpur, where I continued my enquiry on the post-Khairlanji protests, the respondents to whom I

introduced myself repeatedly asked me if I had met Bhaiyalal and seen the house. These questions made me realise the importance of both in the Khairlanji narrative. According to them, having been personally exposed to these signifiers of the outrage was part of reporting adequately on the matter, somewhat like the situation with Favret Saada's witchcraft participants, who were of the opinion that only those having experienced witchcraft could talk about it or be told of it (1990). In other words, agreeing to expose oneself to the contagious and potentially powerful emotional matrix of a moral community (be it witchcraft or Dalit activist circles), can be part of the ethnographer's work, allowing her/him to gain acceptance in the milieu she/he wants to study, even as she/he is faced with the 'danger' of 'being affected', to use the title of Favret Saada's article.

- 39 The images of an ordinary poor villager and of an ordinary poor people's hut had been printed again and again in the NGO reports and press articles. They were central to the framing of the massacre in terms of an outrage to commonly held family and domestic values. I therefore realise that I had simply been exposed by the activist to a re-enactment of his movement's emotional work, this time for the sake of emotionally converting the foreign observer to its cause. The two nightmares I had—in the first, I was in hiding from a bunch of peasants whom I witnessed massacring my own family, and in the second my deceased father's body was exhumed by medical order for a post-mortem cancer 'treatment'—show that the emotion work done on me had worked wonders: despite having struggled to maintain some emotional distance and remain within the academic boundaries of axiological neutrality, these emotions operated on me at a deeper, unconscious level.

The movement's narrative of outrage: intermingled themes and audiences

- 40 The Khairlanji outrage was framed at two distinct yet intertwined levels, for two different sets of audience: the general public and the local Buddhist community. While specific themes were more or less emphasised for these different audiences, they could be synthesised into a single, yet adaptable, narrative. Before analysing in details the specificities of these different discourses, I would like to show how they were actually combined and how they supported one another. These different narrative versions were not purposively tailored to their audiences, but rather resulted from a collective and multifarious framing process, in which the narrators' own cultural background and their more or less strategic anticipations of the audiences determined the style and content of the narratives. When directed at the wider media audience, I noted that it was often the destruction of a family that was emphasised, and through it the breaching of the shared domestic values that are a central and deep rooted feature of Indian popular ethics. An Ambedkarite NGO report available on the internet that related the visit of a fact finding team one week after the massacre thus printed the picture of the house of the victims on its cover page (Figure 1). On the second page, a picture of the interior with cooking utensils and food strewn on the ground was accompanied by the following caption: 'Inside the hut Mrs. Surekha was cooking and children studying when caste Hindu mob attacked family' (Figure 2).²⁰ Although the report came from a Buddhist NGO, it was published on the internet to serve as material for mainstream journalists writing on the issue, and thus intended to anticipate their search for themes that could touch the general Indian public.

Interestingly the pictures of the house were reproduced on a large scale by the media who sent their photographers to Khairlanji, and these pictures of the hutment became the visual signifiers of the assault on domestic values.

Figure 1. Cover of a Buddhist NGO (Manuski advocacy center) report: 'home of the Bhotmange family'

Manuski Advocacy Center
'Manuski'
Deccan College Road, Yervada, Pune
Ph. No. +91-20-26696812
info@jambudvipa.org

Figure 2. Page 2 of the Manuski report: interior of the Bhotmange home and identity photograph of Priyanka Bhotmange

50 years of Peaceful Revolution of Dr. Ambedkar and Violent Caste Hindu Society

How to slap those who, during Durban Conference¹ confidently said that there is no casteism in India? How many people have to be killed in the name of caste to 'prove' that casteism and brutal violence still exists in India? How many mothers and sisters will be raped and murdered in order to wake up against such atrocious act committed in the name of Caste? Don't you think that the limit is over now?

Dalits in Khirlanji village, in Bhandara district, State of Maharashtra, India, are under great shock and the event is sending shockwaves all over the Dalit community in India. A fact-finding team has sent following news from Bhandara:

"Even after Golden Jubilee of Dhammachakra Pravartan (It was started after

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar converted into Buddhism in 1956), the atrocities on dalits have not yet stopped. It has been once more clear during the atrocity of Khairlanji village of Mohali Tahsil of Bhandara district of Maharashtra state of India.

This incidence has taken place between 5-00 pm and 7-00 pm where Mrs. Surekha Bhotmange (45), daughter- Ms. Priyanka (19), son - Mr. Roshan (17) and another son - Mr. Sudheer (18) have been brutally murdered before inhuman torture and gang rape.

Six year ago, Mr. Doma Bhimte sold his 0.60 hector land to Bhotmange family. When villagers asked 0.40 hector land for a pathway, Bhotmange family happily gave it. But caste Hindu villagers also asked remaining land, but Mr. Bhayyalal Bhotmange, the head of the fam-

Priyanka Bhotmange

Inside the hut Mrs. Surekha was cooking and children were studying when caste Hindu mob attacked family

- 41 Stressing even further the intensity of the moral outrage to Indian values, the NGO report highlights the conformity of the massacred family to widely praised values and consensual goals of Indian society, like hardwork (mehnet) and social 'uplift' of the Dalits (Harijanuddhar or Dalituddhar, an old Hindu reformist theme) through education and self-restraint. The poor but successful Dalit family was depicted as exemplary and abiding by the nation's ideals, thus heightening the injustice that had been their fate. The message that was conveyed to the Buddhist community by the movement organisers also relied on these images of a poor and law-abiding Buddhist family that incarnated the nation's official values despite the hardships inflicted on them by the dominant caste. The images of Bhayyalal and the house were equally central in conveying these ideas of injustice (Figure 3 illustrates how Bhayyalal is depicted as a living symbol of injustice).

Figure 3. Page 6 (last page) of Manuski report: denouncing the media's biased reports and evoking the struggle for truth and justice

False news by Lokmat Times... See rectangle

WAITING FOR JUSTICE...

Mutilated bodies of son and mother.

Only living person of Bhojwade family - Mr. Bhishupal Bhojwade - husband of Mrs. Surekha and Father of three innocent children.

- 42 The 'Khairlanji' documentary movie that circulated on copied CDs in Nagpur and that was given to me by a Buddhist shop keeper as containing the 'truth' about Khairlanji, provides a good illustration of the movement's narration of outrage. Despite the fact that it was not made by a Buddhist but by a sympathiser of the movement who shot the film during the protests, its acceptance as genuine testimony on the events and protest was confirmed to me several times by members of the Buddhist community. It is in fact interesting to note that even while it could be appropriated by the communal discourse by the Buddhist community, whose narrative emphasised the communal nature of the outrage, this outside contribution to the narrative of outrage placed the offence at a secular, non-communal level, as an assault on Indian values. This film in fact played a special function in certifying the outrage, by showing that not only one community had been hurt, but that the very basic values on which the Indian nation was built had been assaulted. This shows that the expression of communal outrage is more complex than the 'communal' label can induce us to think, since it also relies on collective values and idioms shared across communal boundaries. For example, in one sequence, the film passes from a gloomy military parade in New Delhi in front of monuments like Raj Bhavan and India Gate, with a military fanfare as soundtrack, to the unearthing of the women victims' dead bodies, for a second post mortem (since the first one had been done partially in order to conceal the rape). The music itself turns to a melancholic classical piece of *sarangi*. The film therefore powerfully (through aesthetic means that are conducive to emotions) conveys the contrast between an image of a 'shining India' proud of its military power, monumental grandeur and modernity, and the distressing 'underground' reality of its interior, represented by the macabre image of a crime concealed by the local representatives of official authorities.²¹

Manufacturing communal anger: the Buddhist networks

- 43 The Ambedkarite activists of Bhandara district learned about the murder through the local press. When they realised that the report concealed a major case of atrocity, they decided to make their own inquiry and carry on their own information campaign. They managed to buy the pictures of the dead bodies from the local photographer who had been hired by the police when the bodies were recovered from the canal. These images played a major part in the protests and became the main incentive for producing collective anger (Figures 3 & 4). In Bhandara, Asit Bagde, an Ambedkarite activist who was among the first to take up the issue, explained me:

We were able to use the pictures to speak about the murder (...) the same way that the photograph affected me, I could explain it to the next brother and he could explain to the next one; this way publicity spread orally in the first ten days. In the first ten days, it was only oral, and it went like this: this happened and it happened like this, and then they were murdered in this manner.²²

- 44 The news thus spread from activist to activist, at the pace of a rumour, creating distress and building the tension in the local Buddhist community. The matter was eventually taken over by some Nagpur activists who came to Asit Bagde. They were government servants, who had more means and a wide network of activists at their disposal and were therefore better equipped to organise an agitation from the Buddhist strongholds of the city. 'They went door to door to explain to people how (the Bhotmange) had been murdered, and after that some meetings began to take place in Nagpur',²³ Bagde recalls.
- 45 Milind Mane, a key actor in the ensuing mobilisation, acknowledges that he came to know about the atrocity by seeing the photographs. Along with a delegation of the Buddhist community from Nagpur, comprising the local elected member of the legislative assembly, Nitin Raut (Congress), they made a visit to Khairlanji and to Bhandara hospital, where they met Bhayyalal, the traumatised father.
- 46 Milind Pakhile, a class 1 officer and social activist from the Buddhist community who was among them, wrote to me that meeting him at the hospital 'was a benumbing experience, it was not rage or anger, just suddenly fridging the senses'.²⁴ Being a government officer (and thus forbidden by law to take part in political activities), Pakhile could not openly participate in the agitation.²⁵ Therefore, it was a local grassroots political activist, Dr Milind Mane (the city president of the Prakash Ambedkar faction of the RPI), who took the lead of the *Khairlanji Dalit Hatyakand Kruti Samiti* ('Khairlanji Dalit Massacre Action Committee', thereafter KDHS). It was conceived as a non-political and neutral platform disconnected from existing organisations in order to protect it from political factionalism and organisational rivalries. In order to respond to the atrocity in a dignified manner, social unity was the order of the day. Milind Pakhile emphasises that the committee had been formed with the sole purpose of providing medical support and legal aid to Bhayyalal Bhotmange, thus shunning any link with political purposes and emphasising its respectability. The community needed to forget its political divisions and stand up as one publicly, so as to display publicly its unity and its ability to react vigorously to the threat. While such unanimity was made possible thanks to the committee's apolitical stand, it was implicitly but conspicuously opposed to the different RPI faction leaders' inability to unite which in many ways was resented as having created the conditions that made the massacre possible. It was often the different factions' grassroots activists themselves who

created this unity between themselves without any consideration for their political bosses' divisions, as Milind Pakhile's role testifies.²⁶

- 47 The emotional 'outburst' thus did not arise by itself, but was manufactured through a multiplicity of individual initiatives by activists and ordinary people who publicly displayed the photos of the dead and tortured bodies of the victims in different forms. Without obeying any specific order, these pictures were duplicated on leaflets, posters and plastic banners by activists acting on their own, and distributed, pasted or hung in the main Buddhist strongholds of Nagpur city and Vidarbha towns; rather than the larger public, these images addressed the Buddhist community, whose passions were aroused in order to propel it into action. Once given a public character, the atrocity called for a public reaction. Framing the atrocity as communal outrage was the most efficient of available thematic repertoires with which to generate the desired passionate expression of revolt. The communal language of honour and disgrace was the most fit to arouse passions: a language shunning compromise that everyone could articulate and understand, whose potential for urban riots played on deeply entrenched fears and fantasies in the Indian collective imaginary. The KDHS issued an unsigned Hindi leaflet titled 'Is casteism over in India? For how long will we go on bearing these atrocities?', and called for a demonstration of unity on 6 November to 'wash away the disgrace to Dalits'.²⁷

Sensitizing the mainstream public: Dalit and non Dalit initiatives, from citizen responsibility to staging anger

- 48 It is interesting to follow the genuine but relatively unsuccessful efforts that were made to publicise the events in the national press by local activists sympathetic to the Dalits but neither part of the Buddhist community or the Ambedkarite movement. The latter, a politicised caste network of the Mahars/Buddhists, is a multifarious network of local and regional organisations. It is thus autonomous and relatively separated from other, non-caste based, social movements. Its main connections outside of the Mahar caste are with the other regional Dalit based Ambedkarite movements. However, the massacre was brought to public attention outside these Dalit circles and rated as a major human rights issue thanks to the involvement of non-Dalit progressive activists like Ashu Saxena, a Nagpur based feminist close to the CPI(Marxist).²⁸ Local activists of the Vidarbha Jan Andolan Samiti (mobilising on the issue of indebted farmers' suicides) also lost no time in reacting to the first biased press reports by sending a fact finding team to Khairlanji on 6 October, writing reports, and sending them by internet to different national and regional newspapers and organisations. The national media, however, failed to respond to the alarm raised, seemingly due to a lack of interest in what seemed to New Delhi-based journalists the unclear goings on in remote areas considered feudal and backward. The independent internet press such as Tehelka and DNA India gave equally late but more sensitive coverage to the events, while also lamenting their own late reactions and blaming the more established news agencies for their indifference.²⁹ In addition to their urban bias, the national media's absence of reaction can be explained by the upper caste and class origin of journalists. It is not purely by chance that the first article to break the silence in the mainstream national media was written in the *Times of India* by an American female reporter (Sabrina Buckwalter) who happened to work for the Indian press.³⁰ A report by Shivam Vij, a Dalit journalist³¹ at Tehelka.com, drew a comparison between the indifference to the casteist atrocity and the high degree of publicity accorded to other

criminal issues like the Jessica Lal rape in Delhi.³² In comparison to Dalit massacres in Bihar in the late 1990s by landlord militias or to casualties of the Naxalite conflict in the neighbouring tribal state of Chattisgarh, the number of victims was also less impressive. Khairlanji might have appeared less deserving of national coverage due to the comparatively small number of casualties. Indeed, such massacres have become usual features of the local news in certain states (not in Maharashtra, however, which boasts of being exceptionally 'liberal'), and therefore do not make headlines, unless the casualties are exceptionally high or unless they have political consequences. When Dalit massacres became frequent in the late 1970's (due to the growing politicisation and assertion of Dalit villagers), they became of some use to the central government, which attempted to oust their political rivals in several states through the imposition of president's rule (Brass 1998; Mendelsohn and Vicziani, 1998). The Khairlanji case obviously lacked such political salience, insofar as the Congress was part of the government both at the centre and in Maharashtra, the latter thus being supported by the former. The massacre therefore did not have any 'political value' for the media either obsessed as it is by the 'news value' of events. Different opposition parties in Maharashtra did make noise on the issue during the opening of the winter assembly session in early December with the sole aim of destabilising the coalition government. But the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, gave a clean chit to the Maharashtra government, notwithstanding the protestors' allegations of official complicity in concealing the massacre. Despite its support to the central government, the CPI(M) was the only national party to support the agitation by sending its feminist leader and politburo member, Brinda Karat, in Vidarbha. On 10 November, while the protests were reaching their height, she condemned the concealment of the rape by the local authorities during a press conference of the KDHKS and expressed her indignation, thus providing legitimacy to the issue and to the protestors' outraged reaction, whose violent protest on Nagpur streets was at its peak.

- 49 The media only elevated the Khairlanji massacre to the status of an 'event' because of the violent protests that rocked the state, a 'spectacle' of insurgency whose aim precisely intended to prevent the banalisation (or the growing invisibility) of such massacres by catching the media's attention. In this regard, one may think of the community's public manifestation of outrage as a partly organised and partly spontaneous act of public communication addressed to the state and the media. It meant making sufficient noise and creating enough of a nuisance that the administration would reconsider its indifferent attitude, and the media would start reporting Dalit atrocities as critical issues. The Dalit activists' ability to stage publicly such an insurgency, their communal discourse and networks thus proved to be the more efficient to raise an alarm, compared to other progressive networks and discourses that called on the responsibility of Indian citizens. But it must be acknowledged that the strong presence of such progressive activists in Vidarbha played a significant part in giving wider legitimacy to the cause.

The popular language of communal outrage

- 50 Thomas Hansen's insights regarding the issue of sovereignty in communal discourse (2005) provide a heuristic frame with which to analyse the popular discourse of outrage. As noted by Hansen, by claiming their autonomy, communities compete with the overarching public authority of the state. The communal discourse thus claims communities to be 'the natural repositories of morality and ethical life in India, separated

from, and conceptually opposed to, the state.' (2005: 124). I would like to add that in such rivalries with the state's overarching authority, communal mobilisations' self-claimed opposition to the state should not be taken for granted, since they also seek to assert their own sovereignty *within* the state, in competition with other communities that seek to appropriate its power or maintain their influence from within. The present case study clearly illustrates how a powerless community seeks to contest what Hansen characterises as the '*de facto* sovereign power—the right to kill, punish and discipline with impunity' (2005: 111). While Dalits do not hold a position within the state that could guarantee the application of the law that is supposed to protect them,⁵³ their struggle is to ensure the state functions according to its official conception as a neutral and benevolent government that guarantees security and rights equally to all citizens. However, in addition to this public claim posed in the language of rights and justice, I would like to show how the popular idea of communal outrage was also constructed at another, more passionate and bodily level by the protestors. This discourse focused on religious insult and on the assault of the community's metaphoric body through the women's rape. The communal discourse is thus highly abstract in nature, to the extent that it tends to leave the notion of 'human rights', in the background, as if the injustice and suffering met by these four particular dalits came second to more abstract yet passionate notions of community honour.

- 51 The women's rape, which was attested by the Dalit witnesses, but contested by the two successive post mortems (and eventually denied by the final court judgement for lack of technical evidence), was specifically highlighted in the discourse directed at the local Buddhist community audience in a bid to engineer a strong emotional response to the official neglect that was revealed by the way these post mortems were conducted. While the first post mortem deliberately omitted the rape test so as to avoid a major conflagration during the Buddhist gathering in Nagpur, the second one was conducted in a superficial manner one week later after the exhumation of the bodies⁵⁴. It concluded that there was a lack of proof because of the putrefaction of the female victims' vaginas. By denying the rape, the administration tried to neutralise what could have provided strong emotional incentive for communal riots. However, they also contributed to the protestors' sense of administrative injustice, thereby providing them incentives to revolt by invoking 'their truth,' based on the Buddhist witnesses' testimony (Bhayyalal Bhotmange, his relative Siddharth Ghajbiye and his nephew, Rashtrapal).
- 52 The picture of Priyanka's bruised and scratched dead body (Figure 4)—her genitals covered by a scarf (placed there by someone before taking the photograph, probably in a last and symbolic attempt to protect her modesty)—was printed among the pictures of the other victims' corpses on the leaflets that were distributed by the protest organisers and the posters that were pasted in the Buddhist neighbourhoods. These images had a particularly strong effect on the minds of Buddhists.

Figure 4. Negative print of Priyanka's dead body, suggesting the rape, on page 4 of the Manuski report. The photo negative effect can be interpreted as another attempt (like the scarf that was placed on her genitalia when the picture was taken) by the report authors, to protect her modesty, despite the necessity to expose publicly her nudity in order to publicise the outrage.

The body of Priyanka is mutilated on chest and private parts.

- 53 Rape is a basic element in the language of communal offence as well as a feature of communal violence. It is meant to humiliate the community of the victims and understood as such, thus calling for a collective reaction to defend the community's honour. Depicted as mother and sister, the woman's body stands as an abstraction for the community's vulnerability. This abstraction is however not devoid of intimate and affective connotations in reference to concrete, affectionate and intimate family ties. As, for example, with the Hindu nationalist narratives of *Bharat Mata*, the goddess of the Indian nation, a community's honour is figured as depending on the manly protection of the physical integrity of the female body (Assayag 2001).³⁵
- 54 However, it is interesting to note that among the Buddhists of Bhandara district with whom I spoke, the women themselves were the most vocal about the rape and proudly highlighted their massive participation in the protests. This reaction of solidarity towards the victims took on a language of *self-defence*, therefore upsetting the usual chauvinistic vision of feminine vulnerability protected by the male. This striking redefinition of the sexual division of communal labour has a long history in the Ambedkarite movement (Rege 2006). It will be dealt with more at length in my forthcoming article on the post-Khairlanji Buddhist protests, where an imaginary of insurgency and upheaval was activated through images of women's public expression of anger.
- 55 There is also a second salient feature of the language of communal outrage that I would like to highlight. My talks with Buddhist people indicated that they often defined the outrage as an insult on 'Babasahab', (the popular name given to Ambedkar). The front cover of a whole issue devoted to Khairlanji at the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the

Buddhist conversion in Nagpur (6 December 2006, an event that was banned by the government due to the tension) shows how Ambedkar was literally brought into the picture of the Khairlanji issue (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Cover of a Marathi publication of the Khairlanji Dalit Hatyakand Kruti Samiti, advertising a protest on 6 December 2006, on the date of Ambedkar's death anniversary

- 56 Interestingly, Ambedkar himself had not been insulted in the Khairlanji massacre, whereas it has often been the case in the repeated 'Ambedkar statue related incidents', in which statues are defiled and desecrated and frequently generate street violence. This aspect of outrage as assault on a communal symbol is more congruent with the legal definition of communal insult in India in the article n°295A of the Indian Penal Code, established in the late 19th century by the colonial authorities and based on the outrage to 'religious symbols'. It must be noted that the law was not a pure invention, but reflected long existing popular practises of violent popular reactions to ritualised provocations (Gaboriau 1985, Bayly 1986). There is, however, little doubt that the official approval of the notion of religious outrage encouraged its popular uses for different purposes, like strategies to retain urban land in the face of eviction threats (Jaoul 2007), thus diverting the colonial law into what James Scott called a 'weapon of the weak' (1985). This explains how religious outrage became part of a popular *repertoire* of communal incentives for collective action. For Ambedkarite Dalits, it was thus convenient to turn Ambedkar into a religious symbol. Such a framing of the popular icon into a religious symbol became facilitated by his role in the mass conversion to Buddhism (Jaoul 2007).
- 57 Notwithstanding the absence of any apparent link between the Khairlanji issue and the honour of Ambedkar, the protestors with whom I talked emphasised the continuity between their emotional involvement with the Khairlanji atrocities and their faith in Ambedkar's ideals.³⁶ Revolt was justified by them not just by the atrocity in itself but because it meant insulting those ideals associated with their great man. An artisan in

Nagpur explained me that Ambedkarites were so devoted to their 'saviour' (Ambedkar) that they could bear starvation without complaint, but would not tolerate any insult to him. A Buddhist professor of Nagpur University described poor villagers as the most genuine Ambedkarites who, despite their illiteracy and poverty, would purchase a portrait of Ambedkar to place inside their homes, even if they could not afford to buy their next meal. Statements such as these, that proudly recounted the strength of popular devotion, were often repeated to me, the main point being that dignity came before material welfare for 'true Ambedkarites'. In Tumser, a student in mechanical training claimed that if he opened his chest, Ambedkar would come out of it (he thus adapted the popular image of Hindu god Hanuman extracting his heart from his chest as a sign of devotion to Ram). According to such a view, Ambedkar inheres in the Dalit body. Any insult, therefore, to an image of Ambedkar was tantamount to attacking one's physical integrity. But the popular perception of the Khairlanji massacre as an insult to Ambedkar shows that the relation of condensation between the image and the Dalit body can also be reversed: the rape and murder were depicted by the movement as an onslaught on the whole Dalit community, and by extension as an offence to Dalit dignity that called for the same type of violent and passionate reaction as in cases where Ambedkar statues are insulted.³⁷

- 58 A Buddhist autorickshaw driver, who took time during his working hours to take me all over Tumser for free to meet protestors, emphasised the political relevance of the image of Ambedkar's presence in the Dalit heart. According to him, such intense devotion could be turned into communal unity and psychological strength, which he seemed to value more than economic or political power.

They (the OBCs) have strength, but we have the strength of Baba (Ambedkar), and we are therefore not weaker than them. So we do not need any organisation. If Babasahab is insulted, we become united; these other log (OBCs) have now realised this.³⁸

- 59 The Buddhist protestors with whom I talked also valorised their devotional commitment and dismissed any kind of economic or political rationality to the movement. They presented their emotional response as a sincere, immediate and spontaneous reaction of commitment to their 'saviour', thus pitting the realm of emotions against the domain of organised politics, where calculations, instrumentalism and self-interest prevailed.
- 60 As shown in the previous quotation, the Buddhist protestors of Vidarbha, however, did not rule out the existence of another type of rationale, that of recreating the psychological unity of the Buddhist community whose political divisions at the hands of 'selfish politicians' they sought to overcome through emotional unity generated at the grassroots. Raising the threshold of their communal sensitivity was therefore a central concern whose rationale lied in the regeneration of the community, from which every benefit would unquestionably flow. These conscious goals of the 'outraged community' thus point to a partly conscious, partly instinctive, form of 'subaltern politics' of communal outrage, that Owen Lynch's study of the Jatav (Buddhist Dalits) riots of 1978 in Agra also highlights.³⁹ Likewise, Asit Bagde, the main organiser of the Bhandara protests, said to me:

Now when the people from other communities see our reaction (to Khairlanji), how we've become united, how we've gathered our community to protest this incident, the thought that they'd better not create any tension comes to their mind (...). Now before doing anything like this they will have to think ten times. A pressure group is born.⁴⁰

- 61 Milind Mane, the founder of the KDHKS, for his part emphasised that lowering the threshold of Dalits' communal sensitivity would act as protective ramparts: 'High class people understand that we're united and fight. This gives our community protection for coming years'.⁴¹ Considering the relevance of political support in the local setup, this vision seems naïve and relatively mistaken. It is a desperate position that indicates the erosion of Dalits' trust in the Indian democracy's ability to guarantee their interests or even provide them basic protection in a caste-conscious society. But even if this vision seems naïve, its romanticism and popular appeal proved efficient in terms of mobilisation.

Conclusion: remembering 'Khairlanji'

- 62 In September 2008, the fast track court set up in Bhandara in order to judge the 38 accused found 8 guilty, among whom 2 were sentenced to life imprisonment and 6 to death by hanging. Although many guilty persons have been released for lack of evidence, such an effective sentence is quite rare in cases of atrocities, principally because the only witnesses willing to speak out are generally Dalits, and thus considered biased (Galanter 1989). The result is clearly the outcome of the pressure put on the authorities by the post-Khairlanji protests that stormed the state for several weeks and started mounting once again at the end of the trial, causing apprehension among the authorities. Although the Khairlanji movement's naïve claim that a large scale uprising would make such an atrocity impossible in the future is contradicted by the continuing victimisation of the Buddhist community,⁴² it is possible (although difficult to prove) that the threshold of tolerance to caste discrimination has been lowered.
- 63 At a symbolic level, one of the movement's noticeable outcomes has been to make 'Khairlanji' a household word. The word has become a signifier of continuing caste oppression and connotes outrage. It also stands for an urgent incentive to struggle against continuing caste injustices as the title of an internet article by Jaideep Hardikar's (a freelance journalist and activist of the campaign against peasant suicides) suggests: 'Here every village is a Khairlanji today'.⁴³ Similarly, in order to explain that his involvement in the movement generated professional harassment that led him to resign from his job, Milind Pakhile, a class 1 officer in the administration, used in an email communication with me the word 'Khairlanji' as a metaphor of caste discrimination: 'Khairlanji does not happen in Khairlanji only, it happens everywhere in some form or other. In cities it happens in a more sophisticated way, in a subtle way. I also faced it in my office: this is what is the backdrop of the resignation'.⁴⁴ Thus, the word 'Khairlanji' is now being commonly used by local activists to denounce any case of exploitation or discrimination against Dalits, whether in the urban middle-class residential areas and professional milieus, or in the villages, where the oppression of poor Dalit villagers is much more pervasive and brutal. World history sadly abounds with words that evoke the place of a massacre, and the memory of historical outrages against the very values of human dignity (like Auschwitz, Oradour sur Glane, Timisoara, and in the Indian case, Jhallianwallabagh or more recently Laxmanpur-Bathe). Such words, however, do not enter common parlance by virtue of the inherent nature of the outrage itself, but need to be rendered common through a work on memory that is often emotional in nature. For a marginal group like Dalit Buddhists in India, who lack access to power and symbolic resources, making such a word part of mainstream vocabulary is a challenge that can

only be met through struggle. It is not just 'symbolic' struggle, since the latter may need to be fought physically on the streets, as with the case of the post-Khairlanji movement.

- 64 This work on collective memory, however, does not stop with the movement, but can only succeed if it is continuously reiterated through activist networks, literature and events. Buddhists have not spared any effort in this direction. Apart from several pamphlets and articles in Marathi, an English book on Khairlanji has been published by an Ambedkarite publisher (Teltumbde 2008). Internet sites have been launched, such as 'stopatrocity', an internet site and telephone service to help victims register their complaints. Another interesting internet site, 'atrocitynews', is more specifically devoted to the memory of the Khairlanji events, the movement and judicial developments, as well as the publicisation of other cases of caste injustice. In a brief evocation of the second anniversary of the massacre, where a Buddhist ritual was organised by Buddhist activists at the site of the Bhotmange house in Khairlanji, one can read: 'Khairlanji massacre has become a WATERSHED that sensitised media, civil society and politics by producing a realistic perspective on caste violence very deeply'.⁴⁵ Through these alternative media, the Khairlanji massacre has thus become incorporated in a series of events and struggles that make up the Ambedkarite movement's rich historiography of Dalit struggles.
- 65 As noted by Sharmila Rege, these former events and movement have left a strong mark on the Dalit consciousness of Maharashtra, where 'The riots and the violence which they displayed were also incorporated into the literature of the dalit movement and became a symbol of the continuing Dalit passion' (Rege 2006: 293). During my fieldwork, people often referred to the *Namantar* movement as a historical precedent of the post-Khairlanji protests. The young generation, which was suspected by the elders of being less militant than previous generations, now felt that it had left its generational imprint on history. There was obvious pride in having confronted the authorities and become the heroic defenders of humanistic values and democratic ideals, ideals that are routinely trashed in the everyday lives of Dalits and other marginal groups in contemporary India.

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NOTES

1. The expression 'righteous anger' is taken from Gamson (1992). I would like to thank Rupa Viswanathan for helping me editing this article in proper english and also for her perceptive comments on its content, as well as Mariam Mufti for her kind help at the last moment. I also thank Joel Cabalion for sharing his knowledge of the Vidharba region's social movements as well as Owen Lynch and Alban Bensa for their insightful suggestions that helped me sharpen several arguments. My gratitude also goes to Pr. Pralhad Jogdand, from Mumbai University for putting me in touch with Vidarbha activists, and to Pr. Govardhan Wankhede, Tata Institute, for his kind help on Marathi translations. I overall express my gratitude to the many people from the Buddhist community of Tumser, Bhandara and Nagpur, whose wholehearted assistance and support facilitated my fieldwork. Since the matter remains sensitive in the region, I have preferred not to name them.

2. The Mahars, Maharashtra's most important caste of Dalits, who converted to Buddhism in 1956, following their leader Ambedkar's own conversion for the sake of emancipation.

3. One could also add to these heuristic insights of the emotional work approach that by seeking to replace submissive attitudes by assertive ones, the theatrical public display of anger is an important pedagogic tool that movements of the oppressed use in order to transform the collective ethos of dominated and stigmatised groups. The way Dalit anger was publicly staged by the Vidarbha Dalit protestors and the echo it found in the media will be the subject of a separate forthcoming paper.

4. Harijan, meaning 'people of god', is the Gandhian word for 'untouchable'. Although it was coined to make them more acceptable to orthodox Hindus, it was denounced by Dalit since it carried charitable and miserabilist overtones.

5. Despite their intention to enlarge the category to include all oppressed Indians, however, the word 'Dalit' has remained a synonym of 'Untouchables'.

6. As summarized by James Scott (1990).

7. See Murugkar (1991).

8. Regarding the passionate emphasis on the symbolic conquest of urban space in the Ambedkarite movement in Uttar Pradesh, see Jaoul (2007).

9. While Jogendra Kawade, an ex-Dalit Panther leader, had been nominated as a member of the Legislative Council of Maharashtra (the upper house of the assembly), R.S. Gavai, from Amraoti, had been nominated as governor in the distant state of Bihar.

10. The Bahujan Samaj Party is a Dalit led party whose stronghold is in Uttar Pradesh. Its recent political offensive to conquer other Indian states has been relatively encouraging in the Vidarbha region, where it has managed to attract a good share of the tribal vote.

11. 'Maharashtra. Data highlights: the scheduled castes', *Census of India 2001*. http://www.censusindia.gov.in/Tables_Published/SCST/dh_sc_maha.pdf

12. 48,5% of the total Mahar population belongs to the agricultural labourer category (an exclusively rural category), and 65,5% of them are rural. The rural Mahars belonging to the

agricultural labourers category can therefore be estimated by the following arithmetic operation:
 $48,5 \times (100/65,5 = 1,53) = 74,04\%$.

13. Indian people's tribunal on untouchability. Jury kit. Case briefs vol.1; *Tehelka*. 2007. 'This Unending Disgrace', 22 September.

http://www.tehelka.com/story_main34.asp?Filename=Ne220907THISUNENDING.asp

14. *Hitavada* (Nagpur). 2006. 'Four of a family done to death by villagers', 3 October.

<http://news.hitavadaonline.com/news/index.php?Mode=single&page=13&n=10426>

15. Bensa (2008: 323). My translation from French.

16. This position does not take into account Weber's more subtle approach to emotion as an integral part of the academic ethos, which values intellectual passion.

17. My translation from the French edition.

18. My translation from French.

19. My translation from French.

20. 'Caste Atrocity in Khairlanji. Buddhists killed and raped by caste Hindus'. <http://www.manuski.net/wp-content/uploads/2007/04/khairlanji.pdf>

21. Patil, Pratap. 'Khairlanji', documentary movie. Vivid Vision Production, 43 minutes. Timing of the sequence: 0:08:07 to 0:08:42.

22. Translated from Hindi.

23. Translated from Hindi.

24. Personal email communication, August 2008.

25. He would eventually pay for his role in the protests, by being forced to resign from his job because of the professional pressures from above he had to go through as a punishment.

26. This making of grassroots unity by the second rung local leadership of the RPI factions has also been noted by Teltumbde (2007).

27. 'Kya Bharat mein Jativad Khetm hua?' (undated leaflet, translated from Hindi).

28. *Frontline*. 2006. 'Enforcing silence', 2 December.

<http://www.hinduonnet.com/fline/fl2324/stories/20061215002809800.htm>.

29. Sankarshan Thakur (2006), 'Editorial', *Tehelka*, 11 November.

http://www.tehelka.com/story_main22.asp?filename=op111106The_tehelka_view.asp.

30. *Times of India* (New Delhi). 2006. 'Just another rape story', 29 October.

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/msid-222682,flstry-1.cms>.

31. There are very few Dalit journalists in the Indian mainstream English-language media, although there has been a recent tendency to give Dalit intellectuals weekly columns as Dalit editorialists expressing 'Dalit opinions'.

32. *Tehelka*. 2006. 'India outraged. Dalits, like fleas to feudal lords', 11 November 2006.

http://www.tehelka.com/story_main22.asp?filename=Ne111106Dalits_like.asp.

33. Except in Uttar Pradesh, where the BSP governments have posted Dalit administrators in key positions and thereby considerably improved the Dalits' relationship to the local administrations (for further details on this transformation, see Jaoul 2007-b).

34. 'Organised killings of Dalits in Khairlanji Village, Tal. Mohadi, Dist. Bhandara. A Report Under SC-ST (PoA) Act, 1989 by Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Research & Training Institute, Department of Social Justice, Government of Maharashtra & Centre for Equity & Social Justice, YASHADA, Commissioned by Nodal Officer, SC-ST (PoA) Act, 1989, November, 2006'. <http://atrocitynews.wordpress.com/manuski-centre-khairlanje-report/>

35. It must be noted that even if prominent in the Dalit mobilisation, the rape issue also did much to mobilise the Indian feminist leader of the CPI(M), Brinda Karat (leader of the All India Progressive Women's Association).

36. Eleanor Zelliott has noted that Ambedkar represented 'a belief that somehow or someday the Government of India, the democracy in which Ambedkar never lost faith, will protect their rights' (Zelliott 2001).

37. It is by the way striking that it was only once the protests were over in Vidarbha that the rest of the Maharashtra Buddhist community started rioting to protest the Khairlanji issue, and that too in reaction to the insult to an Ambedkar statue in the distant city of Kanpur, in Uttar Pradesh.

38. Translated from Hindi.

39. Owen Lynch highlighted the stakes behind the violent protests by the Buddhist Dalit community of Agra (Uttar Pradesh), where after the attack of their yearly Ambedkar procession, Dalits confronted the police and 9 of them lost their lives. 'Upper castes felt that Jatavs needed to be taught a lesson and put in place. Jatavs felt dishonoured and in danger of losing their rights, because in such a situation when untouchables back down they accept not merely defeat but also oppression and disenfranchisement' (Lynch 1981: 1955).

40. Translated from Hindi.

41. Translated from Hindi.

42. Since Khairlanji, new cases of atrocities against tribals and Dalits have taken place in the Vidarbha and Marathwada regions of Maharashtra.

43. Jaideep Hardikar (2007) 'Here, every village is a 'khairlanji' today', [http://www.beyondmargins.blogspot.com/saturday,friday, September 28, 2007](http://www.beyondmargins.blogspot.com/saturday,friday,September28,2007).

44. Personal email communication, August 2008.

45. 'Today : Khairlanji Second Anniversary, 11a.m. 29 September 2008.' <http://atrocitiesnews.wordpress.com/>

ABSTRACTS

This contribution brings to our attention a Dalit ('untouchable') protest movement against caste violence (the 2006 Khairlanji massacre). Although anger is supposedly an emotion used in an open and demonstrative manner by the powerful as a means to enact their domination, the Dalit movement engaged in acts of 'emotion work' that upset such a social mapping of emotions. The paper engages critically with the sterile and biased concept of 'axiological neutrality' and advocates instead the heuristic possibilities enabled by the ethnographers' personal exposure to the emotion work performed by social movements. The protest's ideological stance illustrates the politically marginalised Dalits' appropriation of democratic conceptions through the language of injustice and outrage. Two different sets of actors involved in the protest are distinguished: human rights and progressive activists of the peasant NGO movement on the one hand, and the local anti-caste movement of Dalits on the other. The distinct kinds of emotion work each set of actors performed, and the framing of the massacre as an outrage to moral values, highlights how, in the mobilisation for Dalit rights, the popular language of communal outrage and the language of democratic rights articulate with and support one another.

INDEX

Keywords: Khairlanji massacre (2006), Ambedkar, axiological neutrality, caste violence, constitutional values, Dalit assertion, Dalit movement, emotion work, ethnographer's emotions, moral economy, powerlessness

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