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Critiquing Masculinity: Transcultural Corporeality, Hindu Fundamentalism, Japanese Butoh, and Heiner Müller in Nalini Malani's *Hamletmachine*

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Abstract

This paper explores the transcultural critique of gender and nationality in Contemporary Indian artist Nalini Malani's video and multi-media installation titled *Hamletmachine* (2000). The piece was produced in collaboration with Japanese Butoh dancer Harada Nobuo during a residency in Fukuoka, Japan in 1999. This layered piece involves three video projections depicting Japanese Butoh dancer Harada Nobuo transposed over images of riots and Hindu-led violence in India, and punctuated with audio quotations from German playwright Heiner Müller's (1929-1995) play of the same name in order to provide a transnational critique of the masculine-driven violence of Hindu fundamentalism in India. It is through this dense referentiality of three distinct cultures and historical moments that Nalini Malani reveals that multicultural and transnational collaborations do not have to abandon the specifics of the local in favor of a homogenizing global scope. This paper ultimately demonstrates that Malani's reversal of the gaze onto the male (rather than female) body of the Butoh dancer performs a transcultural critique of the evolution of a nationally dictated violent masculinity that connects postwar Japan, communist Germany, and modern India.

■ **Key words** : Hindu fundamentalism, Butoh, Masculinity, Nationality, Transculturalism

Introduction

Contemporary Indian artist Nalini Malani's installation piece

Hamletmachine (2000) begins when three wall sized screens flicker on to project a field of salt, out of which a body slowly coalesces. The body is that of Japanese Butoh dancer Harada Nobuo, whose strange and grotesque movements are fragmented and divided across the three upright screens. On the floor, a fourth projection is aimed at a saltbox in an explicit reference to Gandhi's famous Salt March of 1930. The resulting twenty-minute video sequence depicts Harada Nobuo's Butoh dance, as images from the 1992 destruction of the sixteenth century Babri Mosque in Ayodhya, India are layered over his body. Fusing textual references to Heiner Müller's eponymous play, Malani explores the rise of Hindu fundamentalism in India through the corporeality of Harada Nobuo's performing body. Destruction and rioting are registered directly on the masculine body of Nobuo; it is only on his body that we see these images. The tense and chaotic world evoked through Butoh dance's extreme bodily contortions heightens the horrific sublime that is inherent to Malani's envisioning of communal violence in modern India throughout the installation. This paper ultimately demonstrates that Malani's reversal of the gaze onto the male (rather than female) body performs a transcultural critique of the evolution of a nationally dictated violent masculinity that connects postwar Japan, communist Germany, and modern India.

Through a complex layering of Japanese Butoh dance, documentary footage of India, and audio quotations from Heiner Müller's (1929-1995) characters of Hamlet and Ophelia from his play *Das Hamletmaschine* (The *Hamletmachine*) from 1977, which utilizes Shakespeare's *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* as a modern critique of socialist Germany, Nalini Malani weaves three distinct cultures into one mixed-media video installation. In this installation, the Japanese Butoh dance is utilized to rebel against the formation of a violent masculine Hindu identity forged since independence in the name of Indian nationhood. The Japanese avant-garde dance form of Butoh, which was considered by its founder to be "the dance of darkness," was created by Hijikata Tatsumi as a rebellious reaction to Japan's postwar society's

intense pressure put on its populace to rebuild and produce (Baird, 2012, p. 3). Central to this bodily rebellion in Malani's installation is a gender-bending re-conceptualization of Japanese society's binary constructions of masculinity and femininity.

Malani's mixed-media video installation *Hamletmachine* presents a troubled and traumatic presentation of national masculinity and its social dictates. The fusion of Müller's critique of German masculinity and femininity that found their ideal in Hamlet and Ophelia in his play *The Hamletmachine* (1977) with Harada Nobuo's angst filled performance and gender transgressing tactics of embodying an *other* bring Malani's pointed critique of Indian nationality and masculinity into a transnational and global context. Malani's installation of the same name situates a complex critique of nationhood and masculinity through Müller's characters of Hamlet and Ophelia, who are presented as two sides of modern India itself during the 1990s—divided and indecisive, caught between Western capitalism and the concurrent nationalist project to re-make India as exclusively Hindu. However, this transnational scope does not obliterate the details of each specific culture; instead, they combine to heighten both their similarities and differences in *Hamletmachine*. Malani's installation utilizes three specific cultural critiques: that of Butoh against societal norms, Müller's East German critique of capitalism, and her own critique of Hindu sponsored violence against Muslims in India. In evoking three intensely specific critiques, Malani's piece demonstrates that the binary between local and global is merely a construction, and that it is possible to maintain diversity and a strategic disunity in a layered and complex installation that presents the formation of gender as a nationalist project.

Historian Karl Toepfer describes the movements of Butoh as projecting an "eerie, grotesque aura in which the nude body achieves expressivity through a repertoire of spasms, convulsions, twichings, sputterings.... The body appears as a strange, alien being, an organism which is far less "familiar" than the audience supposes" (1996, p. 80). Essential to this defamiliarization of the body is an elision of masculinity

and femininity within a single body. This strategy has become a staple of contemporary Butoh performances, including those portrayed by Harada Nobuo and his Butoh group, Seiryukai (Fraleigh, 2003, p. 39).

Malani utilizes the gender transgression inherent to Butoh dance alongside Heiner Müller's characterizations of Hamlet and Ophelia to posit that masculine-driven violence is not confined to men, but rather, it affects both genders. Thus, Malani's utilization of Butoh in this installation expresses the problematic creation of a national identity in India grounded in masculine warriors who defend the nation through violence. In this diverse collaboration, trauma and violence are embedded in the tortured corporeality of Butoh dance.

In order to dissect and investigate each cultural referent that makes up Malani's complex video installation about nationalism and gender, this paper is divided into three sections. After the introduction, the first section describes the evolution of Butoh dance, situating it as a national critique of masculinity and normative genders in the postwar society of Japan. The second section illustrates how Malani utilized the horrific sublime produced in Butoh dance to comment on the violence and destruction of the Babri Mosque in India, as well as the riots that took place directly following these events. Through investigating this historical event through the lens of Japanese Butoh, shared concerns about nationalism, gender, and violent masculinities becomes apparent; as the nude body of the Butoh dancer performs his rigorous and violent contortions and movements, photographs of the destruction of the Babri Mosque and the subsequent riots are projected *onto* the masculine body of Harada Nobuo. The final section explores Malani's use of spoken quotations from Heiner Müller's characters of Ophelia and Hamlet in his eponymous play. In this section, I discuss the way in which Malani utilizes East German critiques of capitalism and nationally dictated masculinities through an auditory means that heightens the collaboration of Malani and Harada Nobuo.

Nalini Malani was born in 1946, in what is now Pakistan; as an infant, she fled with her family from the newly formed Pakistan and

re-settled in Bombay, India. I use Bombay over Mumbai per the artist's own choice, as the decision to change the name of the city and attempt to erase its colonial past is a part of the *Hinduvta* movement that she protests in her work (Malani, 2014). Her highly successful and prolific artistic career has concerned itself with the violence of Partition, especially the mass abductions and rape of women that occurred during it. In many of her video installations, such as *MedeaProjekt* (1996), *Remembering Toba Tek Singh* (1998), and *In Search of Vanished Blood* (2013), she uses the female body as a screen for displaying trauma and bloodshed. Her work evokes a feminine language of healing and recovery to the masculine-driven religious violence that has marked India's history since Independence. However, her work does not take its aim at men, or even at a masculinity that is only realized in men. Malani conceives of the masculine and the feminine as forces within each of us, noting that "masculinity and femininity are abstract ideas, devoid of ideology; what matters is how you activate these tendencies" (Malani, & Vali 2009, p. 85). This is in line with Judith Butler's gendered performance theories in which, "gender is not passively scripted on the body, and neither is it determined by nature, language, the symbolic, or the overwhelming history of patriarchy" (1988, p. 531). If we understand gender as socially constructed, masculinity and femininity are no longer seen as innately residing within a particular sex, but rather, as social constructions that either gender is capable of assuming. It is this conception of gender as a social construction that Malani utilizes in *Hamletmachine* to explore the damaging effects of a masculine national identity forged in violence against the minority Muslim population in India.

Hamletmachine was made during a sixth month residency at the Fukuoka Art Museum in Japan in collaboration with well-known Butoh performer Harada Nobuo. Malani was introduced to Nobuo by a curator at the Fukuoka Art Museum. Malani remarks on her experience of encountering Butoh for the first time during her residency at Fukuoka, and how the intense bodily control of Harada Nobuo's dances gave her the idea to use his body "as a screen." Malani notes that despite the language

barrier between the two, through Müller's text translated into Japanese and English, Harada Nobuo understood precisely the aims Malani had for the piece. She notes in our Skype interview from November 2014 that he was able to be "a receptacle for what I wanted to portray. He was able to experience angst as something separate from his inner feelings, that way, his movements were not cathartic, but rather the trauma and expression remained on the surface of his body." In Butoh, there is an emphasis on the externalization of inner emotions and realities of pain and trauma through performance (Hijikata qtd. in Sanders, 1988, p. 152). Crucial to *Hamletmachine* is a violent masculinity projected onto the surface of the male body. Through maintaining an exterior prescription of masculinity of the male body, Malani's critique of nationhood and masculinity avoids essentialism and instead urges an understanding of gender as a social and national construct.

From their initial conversations with each other, Nalini Malani and Harada Nobuo began to plan their collaboration around English and Japanese translations of the play. As Malani immersed herself in the history of Butoh, she found striking resonances between it and an Indian dance called *Kathakali* from Kerala, which similarly uses intense control of the body to evoke entire stories and emotions through minimal movement. Malani also found the corporeal language of Butoh to have profound resonances with Anton Artaud and her own readings on existentialism. The ties between India and East Germany are not unique to this piece by Malani; the two countries shared a similar ethos towards capitalism in the 1980s that produced rich creative collaborations between the two countries. As Malani remarked in our Skype conversation in November 2014, her participation of this is part of the rich shared history of creative collaboration of these two countries in the 1980s and early 1990s.

The history of Butoh dance, as it was chiefly executed by its founder Hijikata Tatsumi, echoes Butler's theory of the performative construction of gender. While few in-depth studies of Butoh address gender specifically, it is clear that at the heart of Butoh is a deep investment in destabi-

lizing and transgressing gender norms. Hijikata Tatsumi's own relationship to gender was fraught: on the one hand he adamantly argued for Butoh as a masculinization of the predominantly female dancers in contemporaneous Japanese dance forms, but he also embodied feminine roles of giggling school girls, virtuous brides, and scorned and enraged rape victims in his numerous Butoh performances. His legacy of Butoh has come to be practiced by both male and female performers, and contemporary manifestations of Butoh continue this desire to transgress social norms of the body (Baird, 2012, p. 10). In Butoh dance, the performing body, whether it is female or male, performs an elision of gender, crossing over the social binaries of masculine and feminine in order to evoke a reality in-between and of both. This rebellion against gender binaries is also central to Malani's use of Butoh in *Hamletmachine*.

Becoming Other: Gender Transgression, Violence, and Rebellion in Butoh

Malani's transgressive critique of Hindu nationalism in *Hamletmachine* parallels with the aims and origins of Butoh in postwar Japan. Butoh founder Hijikata created Butoh in order to articulate an aesthetic of becoming-other. Much of his writing on Butoh points to his desire to portray and embody the position of marginalized people, especially women, who were victims of rape and domestic abuse (Baird, 2012, pp. 111-115). Judith Butler's designation of gender as a social fabrication can be applied within the context of Butoh dance, which also seeks to reveal the underlying mechanisms of society. If gender identity, as Butler states, is a "performative accomplishment compelled by social sanction and taboo" (1988, p. 520), Butoh, then, is a transgression through taboo of socially sanctioned and dictated identity. Malani utilizes this transgression within an Indian context to explicitly explore the idea of nationalist sponsored masculine-driven violence.

Just as Malani's practice seeks to unveil the violent and racist under-

pinnings of Hindu nationalism, Hijikata's Butoh seeks to reveal the modes in which the body is subjected to social constrictions and pain. In his comprehensive study on Butoh, Bruce Baird contextualizes Hijikata's search for an art form to achieve an actuality of the body. Hijikata and his colleagues wanted to create an art form that evaded the goal of intense productivity through a performance that would disavow the utility of the body through "attacking, changing, expanding, and supplementing the current sign systems" (Baird, 2012, pp. 3-7). Crucial to this was a transgression of gendered identities that confined the body to behave as either masculine or feminine.

Hijikata's most famous performance in 1968 called *Hijikata Tatsumi and Japanese People: Rebellion of the Body* exemplifies his use of gender to rebel against social and state sanctions on the body. Baird notes that even the title calls attention to Hijikata's use of Butoh to perform a "corporeal resistance to authority and established convention" (Ibid., p. 2). The performance began with Hijikata wearing a white bridal kimono backwards, a visual evocation of his desire to upend social constructs of gender and propriety. Through the course of the performance, Hijikata disrobes his bridal kimono to reveal his nude masculine body adorned only with a large golden phallus covering his groin. Informed by the 1965 translation of Artaud's *The Theatre and its Double*, Hijikata adopted Artaud's conception of the Roman emperor Heliogabalus as a "cross-dressing, self-prostituting, bisexual ruler who tries to undermine the very institutions that supported him in his rise to power" (Ibid., p. 208). This has a profound parallel in Malani's gender transgressing presentation of Hamlet and Ophelia through Harada Nobuo's Butoh dance in *Hamletmachine*, as will be explored further on. Baird states that one must read Hijikata's appropriation of Artaud in this performance as:

...indicating a rebellion against a similarly wide range of targets, including gender roles, social mores, political structures, national identity, and nation-state relations, and as threatening all of them with fundamental transformation or even destruction. In short, the rebellion

of the body should be thought of as directed toward the conventions of any part of Japanese or Western culture that binds the body (2012, p. 124).

As this quote makes apparent, a desire to articulate a transcultural mode of performance is evident in the heart of Butoh practice and in its contemporary global reach beyond Asia in Europe, the United States, Mexico, and South America (Sas, 1999, pp. 166-167 & 215-216). While Baird does not perform a thorough analysis of the gender-bending dynamics in Butoh, he does illustrate that upending gender conventions was of fundamental importance to Hijikata.

In *Hijikata Tatsumi and Japanese People: Rebellion of the Body*, the multiple and fluid movements of Hijikata's tortured body assumes a transgressive stance that embodies Japanese brides, giggling and skipping young school girls, and leering and decrepit old men. This seminal performance must also be read in the background of Japan's reconstruction, following their defeat in World War II with the horrific nuclear bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In a Skype interview with Nalini Malani in November 2014, she states that she found an immediate connection with Harada Nobuo as they began their collaboration; they were born in the same year and had experienced parallel histories of political upheaval, social protest, and a heightened emphasis on projecting a nationalist identity grounded in the majority and distinct from Western culture. This mode of corporeal rebellion is utilized in Malani's installation in order to present a truly transcultural exploration into the damaging binary social conscriptions that presents masculinity and femininity as incompatible realities.

Another important gender-bending aspect of Butoh is the use of white face paint, which Malani also utilizes in her film of Harada Nobuo's Butoh performance. White face paint in Butoh begins with its founder Hijikata, who used white face paint in order to mimic Japanese femininity, such as the make-up worn by Geishas (Hijikata's word) as well as the more subversive use of white makeup by transvestites on stage. While

Bruce Baird points to this as a deliberate gender transgressing strategy developed by Hijikata, he fails to make the connection to this as part of Hijikata's bodily rebellion against social mores. This contextualizes Hijikata's desire to rebel against society through gender-bending tactics, as well as Malani's utilization of Butoh to trouble notions of nationally and socially dictated binary of masculinity and femininity—within a single face we see a merging of the two (Kurihara, 1995, p. 215).

Malani's Rebellion of the Body: Against the Masculinization of the Hindu Nation

Malani arrived in Japan with an English translation of Müller's play and an idea to produce a piece exploring the traumatic social upheaval caused by the 1992 destruction of the Babri Mosque, which was built in the 16th century by the first Muslim ruler of India, Babar. As such, it became a symbol of foreign rule to Hindu nationalists in the wake of Partition as India began to define its nationality on Hindu terms. On December 6, 1992, Hindu religious leaders proclaimed a holy day and asked Hindus to gather at the site in protest. The flimsy police barricades set up to avoid protesters from entering the mosque were quickly toppled over, and in a matter of hours, 300,000 people swarmed the mosque and dismantled it by hand. The remarkable corporeality of this event, of physically dismantling an entire building by hand, is evoked through the pained physicality and expressivity of Harada Nobuo's Butoh performance in *Hamletmachine*. Harada Nobuo's body twists and contorts itself throughout the piece, as his facial expressions evoke a horrific sublime.

Ultimately, the ideology of masculine nationalism finds its place on the body, and as the body is made the site of nationalism, and as historian Joseph Alter describes, "the individual is held responsible for embodying" its ideals (2012, p. 45). It is manliness that will lead India to true self-rule and a unified majoritarian front for the rest of the world,

as Hindu nationalist propaganda would have us believe. In this respect, Malani's *Hamletmachine* can be seen as directly implicating the legacy of Gandhi within the contemporary communal violence through the projection of the images of the destruction of the Babri Mosque over the salt box on the floor in the center of the installation. What remains up to the viewer is whether the salt box represents the lost dream of non-violence and acceptance that Gandhi promoted, or if it suggests that Gandhi's sloganeering of the cult of Rama can be seen as responsible for *Hindutva's* (Hindu-ness) violent masculinity.

The video sequences in *Hamletmachine* utilize Butoh to express this anxiety and pain wrought by violence. The viewer sees tightly cropped segments of Harada Nobuo's muscular body writhing and contorting, reacting to the historical memory of destruction and rioting that is made visible on, and contained to, the exterior limits of his body. Physical pain is at the core of Butoh practice and the expression of it is a mode of recuperation.¹⁾ As Harada Nobuo's performance evokes, men are also subjected to the trauma of nationally prescribed masculine violence—his body swells and strains under the historical memory of the Babri destruction, and bows under the weight of both the violence experienced by the Muslim minority as well the weight of the physical demands for violence that Hindu nationalism dictates for the Hindu male body.

The destruction of the mosque is rooted in Hindu political parties' championing of the rule of the god-like king Rama from the Hindu epic the *Ramayana*, who Gandhi first used as a symbol for *swaraj*, or self-rule in 1909. The figure of Rama was taken up after independence and transformed from his historically androgynous appearance to a muscular warrior king (Banerjee, 2005, pp. 96-97). When Hindu leaders began calling for the mosque's destruction in the 1980s, Rama's birthplace was mysteriously discovered to be under the site of the Babri Mosque. While there is no historical or archeological evidence that the Ayodhya site is Rama's birthplace, it has nevertheless become widely believed in contemporary India, particularly during the 1980s when northern Hindu political factions sought to revitalize Muslim-Hindu aggressions that began with the

forcible expulsion of Muslim Indians across the newly formed borders of Pakistan and what is now Bangladesh in 1946. The aggression towards the Muslim minority in India has come to embody India's attempt to forge a national identity free from its history of foreign Muslim and British rule (Van der Veer, 1996, p. 253).

The nationalist-driven call for the destruction of the mosque carried heavy metaphorical weight as India struggled to define itself as it opened its economy to global capital in the early 1990s. To destroy the mosque would be to destroy an icon of foreign Muslim rule, and with it, the evidence of the weakness and effeminacy of the Indian nation's long history of foreign occupation and colonization. Sikata Banerjee describes this project of "national identity" within the leading Hindu political factions as deeply entrenched in the ideals of masculine Hinduism found in the figures of the Hindu soldier and the warrior-monk. Sikata Banerjee traces the evolution of masculine Hinduism as a reaction to their British colonizer's categorization of India as an "effeminate other" in need of direction and British colonialization (2005, p. 3).

The leading Hindu political party, the RSS, or Rashtryia Swayamsevak Sangh, created *shakhas* throughout the country to celebrate the Hindu brotherhood. The shakhas provide a public arena where boys and men are taught the proper ideals of masculinity necessary to being a true patriot. Most importantly, as Banerjee notes, the shakha's ideal national masculinity in men comes out of a "resolve to overcome internal effeminacy that remains the greatest threat [to India] and never allow an external aggressor to subjugate its people" (Ibid., p. 79). This doctrine of ideal national masculinity is echoed in the other prominent Hindu political parties, the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) and the VHP (Vishwa Hindu Parishad), which are primarily held responsible for the mobilization against the Babri Mosque. This Hindu majority-based nationalism came not from one political party, but instead was echoed and fashioned throughout the dominant Hindu political groups of the RSS, VHP and BJP, which all explicitly described the Ayodhya site as matters of "national identity" (Basu, 1996, p. 77). The language of the Hindu lead-

ers' mobilization against the mosque evokes a strong desire to assert a virile and violent Hindu masculinity through the destruction of the mosque. As this event was being theorized in terms of nationalist dictates of masculinity, Malani produced her own piece that evokes exactly this reality that scholars such as Sikata Bankerjee and Arjun Appadurai, among others, address.

The same idea that Malani explored visually in *Hamletmachine* about the violence of nationally prescribed masculinities is confirmed in cultural theorists' accounts of the rise of the Hinduvta movement following Partition. Banerjee states that nationalism is gendered "in that it draws on socially constructed ideals of masculinity and femininity to shape the female and male participation in nation-building, as well as in the manner in which the nation is embodied in the imagination of self-professed nationalists."

This quote aligns with Malani's own thinking about the nature of nationalism and identity. However, as Banerjee makes clear, this project of gendering the nation belongs exclusively to the domain of men, where "masculine imaginations construct the dominant view of a nation; indeed, it may be feasible to envision the nation as a male fantasy" (Banerjee, 2005, p. 6). In the case of India, masculine imagination envisioned a martial hero in the figure of Rama as the exemplary of masculine national identity that inevitably valorized violence and militarism as appropriate articulations of a masculine nation, especially at the site of Rama's birthplace and the location of the Babri Mosque (Banerjee, 2005, pp. 6-11). As Joseph Alter explains, Hindu nationalism "has produced a form of militant masculinity wherein violence and virility have become virtually synonymous" (2012, p. 16). These discourses on gender and Indian nationalism fortify Malani's claim that the construction of a violent masculine national identity has engendered the most virulent forms of aggression against the Muslim minority in India (Appadurai, 2012a).

Even Gandhi's treatises on nonviolence can be traced to a desire to articulate an Indian masculinity that proved itself capable of self-rule. The rise of the cult of Rama has its origins in Gandhi's famous manifes-

to-like *Hind Swaraj*, published in 1909. In it, Gandhi advocates for a utopic vision of India as *Ram Rajya*, or under the rule of Rama. This has become synonymous with Hindu nationalist calls for violence against the Muslim minority in India, since Ram is a warrior prince who expelled enemies from his kingdom. Arafat Valiani suggests that even though Gandhi was adamant about the moral virtue of deploying ‘love’ over bodily force to gain Indian independence through nonviolence, there still remains an explicit connection of his nonviolent practices to ancient military practices and war of ascetic warrior monks. Valiani notes that “Gandhi was convinced that the emergence of a cowardly, physically weak and an emasculated Hindu male subject significantly enabled British colonization of India.” Further, Valiani states that the creation of a masculine male who practiced nonviolent protest would demonstrate “to both the Indian nation and the British that Indian men could indeed face death with unwavering courage” (2014, pp. 505-506). The rapid proliferation of media images from Gandhi’s Salt March of 1930 showed nonviolent protesters being brutally beaten and dragged through the streets by British soldiers. It is these images that are utilized in Malani’s *Hamletmachine* to also bring Gandhi and the perversion of his ideals into the conversation about nationality and masculinity.

The nonviolence of Gandhi has direct violent repercussions: bodily harm must be incurred on the body of the nonviolent protester in order to elicit sympathy, outrage, and then, political change. This doctrine of *ahimsa*, or nonviolence, has been adopted by Hindu nationalists and perverted into a form of direct violence against the assumed Muslim aggressors, thus implicating Gandhi’s nonviolence with the violence in contemporary India. In a conversation with Arjun Appadurai about his essay “The Morality of Refusal,” which traces the lineage of Gandhi’s nonviolence to the ancient ascetic warrior monk, Malani remarks on Appadurai’s conception of Gandhi’s legacy of “masculine abstention,” which continues to be used as a sign of political and organized force by Hindu nationalists. Malani states that this conception:

...doesn't take in the feminine... In fact it denigrates it... [as] the pure phallocentric nature takes over in a virulent form... that is one of the malaises of our society, the denigration of women, the denigration of the female, and the denigration of femininity *in oneself*. And I always believe that it doesn't have to do with the woman or the man, as genders, but that these are two abstract ideas, masculinity and femininity, that take place in each one of us, it depends on the balance at that moment (2012, p. 38).

This provides an intriguing analysis not only to the rise of masculine Hindu nationalism, but also to the historical legacy of Gandhi and the modes in which his theories on nonviolence have been undermined and dismissed as effeminate, directly pointing out the truth of Malani's conception that this form of masculine abstention is further evidence of the "denigration of femininity" (2012, p. 38).²⁾

The national project of enacting a powerful masculine Hindu identity is precisely what Malani undermines through her collaboration with Harada Nobuo. Through a global perspective of transcultural articulations of nationhood and masculinity that are presented in *Hamletmachine*, Malani's work stands, as Appadurai describes it, as "a bold answer to the conundrum of the global and the local. Her biggest insight is that the global is not the universal, nor the local necessarily an archive of authenticity or comfort. Her pivot for exploring the global in the local is the nation, as a site of memory, violence, and affect" (Appadurai, 2012b, p. 6). Through Malani's repetitive presentation of Indian violence, Malani posits a global answer to local problems, specifically, the problematic association of masculinity with violence, which ultimately fragments and divides that nation it purportedly protects. Over the course of the twenty-minute video in *Hamletmachine*, the viewer is presented with multiple angles and a fractured representation of Harada Nobuo's body divided across the four screens of the installation. His masculine body is fragmented and physically divided, it is incapable of becoming a unified whole. As Arjun Appadurai explains, the recurrent tropes in Malani's practice are violence, femininity, the body, and the nation.

This intentional mode of display evokes the fragmentation of India during the 1990s. When the Indian state went bankrupt in the 1980s, it abandoned its closed economic policy first established in the socialist policies of its first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru and instead created a capitalist structure that opened the Indian economy and currency to foreign investors. Concurrent with this state-sponsored capitalism was a growing call for a Hindu-based nationalism. Like Appadurai, historian David Ludden sees the rise of communalism, defined as the antagonistic mobilization of one religious community against another, in India as a symptom of the new world order emerging from the end of the Cold War (1996, p. 3). In *Fear of Small Numbers: Essays on the Geography of Anger*, which Malani describes as one of the most influential books to her artistic practice, Appadurai states that the production of nationalism in the face of global capital and exchange enacts a deep anxiety and a resulting need to present a unified majority-led national identity to the rest of the world. Appadurai explains:

Given the systemic compromise of national economic sovereignty that is built into the logic of globalization, and given the increasing strain that this puts on states to behave as trustees of the interests of a territorially defined and confined “people,” minorities are the major site for displacing the anxieties of many states about their own minority [status] or marginality (real or imagined) (2006, p. 43).

The divided body upon which images of rioting and destruction are projected in *Hamletmachine* must be read through Malani’s understanding of Appadurai’s formulation of national anxiety in which “minorities are metaphors and reminders of the betrayal of the classical national project” (Ibid.). There is no cohesion, no unified voice or representation in *Hamletmachine*; rather, there is only a seemingly endless proliferation of voices and images that point to disunity and violence. In this installation, the national project, which enacts its desire for majority rule through violence against minorities, has clearly failed: India is more divided than ever.

Malani's video play progresses from the corporeally fragmented and divided representation of Harada Nobuo's performance to a frenetic pace of Japanese drums, to an image of a man dressed in his upper half in a Western business suit and in his lower half, a traditional Indian *dhoti*. This full-length figure becomes silhouetted against the dark background and transforms itself into a curvy glass bottle that is synonymous with Coca Cola. This is a double reference to both Heiner Müller's play *Hamletmachine*, where the Coca-Cola logo is a distinct critique of capitalism and a reference to the opening up of the Indian economy in the early 1990s to multinational corporations. Malani notes that the Coca-Cola bottle in *Hamletmachine*:

...stands for the economic strategies of the Hindu right wing parties who extol the goodness of their religion and at the same time vow to help build multinational enterprises. The self-destructive potential of this dangerous game is thus addressed directly. I am questioning the position of multinational companies and in this work, I am more specifically interested in denouncing the middle class who collaborate with multinational companies out of private interest. I accuse our own people of being our own enemies in a comparable move to Hamlet (2004, p. 71).

One can then understand that Malani's spinning Coca-Cola logo that becomes indistinguishable from the male figure dressed in half Western, half Indian clothes, stands as a powerful critique of India's two-pronged policies of capitalism and religious nationalism.

The salt box on the floor of the installation and its explicit referencing to Gandhi's Salt March of 1930 is not rescued from the violence evoked in the rest of the piece—it too becomes a site for corporeal violence and upheaval. Projected over the salt is a fragment of the tortured and pained Butoh performance, which is further codified as an expression of trauma and pain through the projection of documentary images of the riots and destruction of the Babri Mosque. Malani's installation begins a scene focused on a salt box and in this opening scene, the Butoh dancer

emerges from the salt box; it is also a screen upon which violence is projected. At one point in the installation, the entire room is bathed in red crackling flames. The source of these flames is the projection aimed at the salt box on the floor. The basis of nonviolent revolution epitomized by Gandhi's Salt March physically becomes the site of the most violent forms of Hindu nationalism. Thus, redemption and recovery does not lie in Gandhi's lost promise of nonviolent revolution, but rather in the Butoh performance itself—it is through this that strategies of recuperation and healing in the midst of Hindu violence become actualized.

Transcultural Masculinity in *Hamletmachine*: Intersections of Müller and Butoh

The refusal of cohesion and unity is not only a fundamental characteristic of Butoh itself, but is also the basis for Müller's play *Hamletmachine*. Müller's narrative in the play is primarily formed through monologues by Hamlet and Ophelia, however, in a postmodernist bent that also acknowledges Shakespeare's play within the play, Müller has multiple protagonists; not only is there the character of Hamlet, but there is also the character who is labeled "The Actor Playing Hamlet." The play is divided into five short sections, which consist of mostly long monologues by speakers who have neither a stable nor singular identity (Müller, 2001). Müller's narrative device, and the corporeal envisioning of it, in Malani's installation through Harada Nobuo's Butoh performance points to the literal fragmentation of the figure of Hamlet across time and nationality. Hamlet, as a myth, is no longer singular, but rather exists as a simulacra, a false copy of a copy.

Heiner Müller stated that *Hamletmachine* represented "the intellectual in conflict with history" (Walsh, 2001, p. 27). Magda Romanska describes that when Müller wrote the play, he was reacting to the "reality of a divided Germany, to its postwar attempt at 'remasculinization,' as well as to the gendered history of German nationalism as it became bound

and defined by the myth of Hamlet” (Romanska, 2007, p. 62). The German fascination with Hamlet has its root at the turn of the century, where Hamlet was popularly characterized as an “avenging” hero that deeply resonated with war-torn Germany. Romanska notes that parallel to this characterization of an “avenging Hamlet,” ran a “morbid enthrallment with the image of the drowned Ophelia. If Hamlet was a model of national masculinity obliged to die for the Father/land, [Ophelia] was an image of passive femininity obliged to die *for him*” (Ibid., p. 62) Not only was Müller aware of these popular tropes of Hamlet and Ophelia, he utilized them in order to explore the failure of Germany’s nationalist model of gender. In Müller’s adaptation of *Hamlet*, Ophelia is re-presented not as a passive feminine victim, but rather as an enraged and violent woman who destroys her constraints to enact revenge for her rape, while Hamlet is presented as frozen and divided between allegiance to his state and his desire for rebellion. As Romanska posits, in Müller’s play, “Ophelia figures as both Hamlet’s feminine *alter ego* and his unwitting incarnation, ignominy, and meaning, his ‘monstrous double’” (Ibid., pp. 62-63). Thus, already present in Müller’s *Hamletmachine* is a critique of gendered national identities that Malani adapts to the context of contemporary India.

In Malani’s installation, as the three upright screens project an image of a half-Western half-Indian man that transforms into a Coca Cola bottle and logo, the viewer hears Malani’s voice reciting a monologue by Hamlet in Müller’s play. As the Coca-Cola logo rotates on the two outer upright screens, in the middle screen is the body of the Butoh dancer steeped in images of the Babri destruction. We hear Malani’s voice evenly proclaim, “shaking with fear and contempt, I see myself in the crowd pressing forward, foaming at the mouth,” then the installation is enveloped in red flames, and the voice continues, “shaking my fist at myself. I string up my uniformed flesh by my own heels. I am the soldier in the gun turret, my head is empty under the helmet, the stifled scream under the tracks” (Müller, 2001, p. 303). Then, a stop-motion animation of the Hindu political leader Bal Keshav Thackeray appears with his mouth

jerkily opening and shutting. Thackery was the then leader of the Shiv Sena group in Bombay that incited the most violent riots against Muslim communities in 1992, following the destruction of the Babri Mosque, in which entire communities were burned to the ground by Hindu nationals. The riots led to over 100,000 displaced and homeless Muslims in Bombay (Shukla, 2008, p. 141).

The image of Thackery is projected directly onto the Butoh dancer's bare torso, mutating the shape of his face to fit the contours of Harada Nobuo's body, lending Thackery's appearance an even more monstrous corporeality. This layering could suggest that the power of politicians such as Thackery rests in the male body of his followers, who translate his words into violence and destruction. The audio continues, as Malani's voice proclaims: "I am the typewriter. I tie the noose when the ringleaders are strung up. I pull the stool from under their feet, I break my own neck. I am my own prisoner. I feed my own data into the computers" (Müller, 2001, p. 303). These quotes are directly pulled from the monologue of the "Actor Playing Hamlet" in Müller's play. Malani's choice of quotations reveals a figure that is simultaneously the crowd as well as the mindless soldier, whose head is empty under his helmet. The character is part of the rebellion when he ties the ringleaders in a noose, but this ultimately produces his own suicide ("I pull the stool out from under their feet, I break my own neck"), suggesting that he is the very system he seeks to destroy. Hamlet, or the Actor Playing Hamlet, is thus simultaneously a perpetrator of state-sanctioned violence, as a thoughtless soldier in the gun turret, and also part of the rebellion. He is also a victim of this violence who is reduced to a "stifled scream under the tracks." The full monologue from Müller's play describes a scene of intense violence and political upheaval that purportedly describes a dystopic future, but has more resonance with the aftermath of WWII and the ensuing communist rule in East Germany (Rouse, 1993, pp. 65-74). Malani's recitation of fragments of this monologue performs a gender transgression in which her soft feminine voice speaks the part of the male character "The Actor Playing Hamlet."

Malani's critique of masculine-driven violence in the installation, while contained and defined by the male body of Harada Nobuo, does not limit itself to violence enacted by men. Inherent to Malani's project of undermining a nationalist ethos of a hysterical and violent masculinity is her citation of the sole female character of Ophelia in Müller's play. It is in her citation of Müller's Ophelia that her conception of masculine violence as the product of an imbalance between masculinity and femininity is most evident, as she conceives of Müller's Ophelia as transforming her femininity into a de-gendered mutant. Her auditory citation of Müller's Ophelia strengthens her critique of masculine violence as it illustrates that this mode of violence is also capable of being performed by a female body. As the fragmented and layered Butoh performance of Harada Nobuo spreads across the four screens in the installation, the viewer hears:

I am Ophelia. The one the river didn't keep. The woman dangling from the rope. The woman with her arteries cut open... Yesterday I stopped killing myself. I'm alone with my breasts my thighs my womb. I smash the tools of my captivity... I destroy the battlefield that was my home... With my bleeding hands I tear the photos of the men I loved who used me... I set fire to my prison. I throw my clothes in the fire... I walk into the street clothed in blood (Malani, 2004, p. 71).

This Ophelia is no longer the passive victim, she has moved beyond "killing herself" to enact a violent revenge against the men who raped her in her home. While Hamlet, or *The Actor Playing Hamlet*, is reduced to auditory threats and ultimately inaction, Ophelia performs the revenge that Hamlet cannot. As Magda Romanska attests in her essay, while Müller's *Hamletmachine* focuses on the motive for revenge that "helped awaken Germany's national sentiments and to define its masculine identity...it is Ophelia who adopts the masculine ethics of revenge and who is eventually undone by it" (2007, p. 65). This textual analysis also helps describe Malani's use of Müller's play in the installation; while masculine

aggression that is rooted in a deep national anxiety is responsible for the violence described in the play, it is in the hands of the female character that the most violent actions in the play occur. Ophelia's gender transgression of enacting masculine aggression merely furthers the masculine imbalance of power through her co-opting of it. Ophelia's auditory presence in Malani's *Hamletmachine* perhaps bears the most important message about communal violence: while women are most often victims of it, they, too, can just as easily become reactionary aggressors.

In the following and final video segment, Malani again utilizes the gender-bending props and performances of Butoh. At this point in the twenty-minute video loop, the three upright screens are filled with a tightly cropped shot of Harada Nobuo's face covered in the signature white paint of Butoh. As if caught in a silent scream, the facial contortions of Harada Nobuo coalesce only in their externalization of distress and horror on the surface of the body. His contorted facial expressions silently scream and express pain, and as one image of his face fades, it is superimposed with another resulting in a horrifying layering in which multiple eyes and mouths dominate Nobuo's face. This furthers the tactic of fragmentation and a multiplicity of bodily expression for which Butoh is known.

Conclusion: Beyond the Global

The intensely dense referentiality of Nalini Malani's *Hamletmachine* furthers an interpretation that is also possible through simply experiencing the work. The dark room, which is illuminated only by what is projected across its four screens, envelopes the viewer in a sensory overload that chaotically mingles Western critiques of capitalism through references to Heiner Müller, a performance of the Japanese avant-garde dance form of Butoh, and anthropological interpretations of the events leading up to and following the destruction of the Babri Mosque in 1992. The rich cross-cultural collaborations embedded in this piece ultimately offer a

critique of violence, masculinity, and nationhood that has a global resonance within a local grounding. Ahead of her time, Malani produced this collaborative piece before there was the rich array of anthropological and theoretical texts that confirm her visual conceptualization of the deeply intertwined role of masculinity and nationhood. This installation, *Hamletmachine*, signals a new mode of addressing nationality in a way that incorporates the particulars of cultures, such as the divided communist East Germany of Heiner Müller, the postwar society that produced Butoh, and the rise of Hindu fundamentalism, or Hinduvta, in India. The piece reveals that multicultural and transnational collaborations do not have to abandon the specifics of the local in favor of a homogenizing global scope, but rather, it is possible to maintain diversity and a strategic disunity within a transnational critique of nationhood and gender.

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- 1) Baird states: "Here the important connection between pain and Butoh is not that pain produces Butoh, but rather that a desire to experience pain will produce Butoh" (2012, p. 131).
 - 2) Much has been written about the androgynous views of Gandhi, especially within the context of his dismissal from the leading political party after Independence. For a detailed exploration of this see: Joseph Alter's *Moral Materialism: Sex and Masculinity in Modern India*.

[Appendix 1]



Nalini Malani, *Hamletmachine* (2000), installation view of three projector screens and saltbox on the floor. Image provided with permission of the artist.

[Appendix 2]



Nalini Malani, *Hamletmachine* (2000), installation view of the layered facial expressions of Nobuo on the upright projector screens. Image provided with permission of the artist.

[Appendix 3]



Nalini Malani, *Hamletmachine* (2000), installation view of Nobuo's performance on upright screen as well as on the projector aimed at the saltbox on the floor. Image provided with permission of the artist.

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