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Intimacy and the Politics of Love

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Abstract

This review provides an overview of the anthropology of love and some of the main bodies of ethnographic work and theoretical debates around studies of love. It surveys specific studies that make the politics of intimacy and love central to their analysis and that seek to make theoretical sense of its meaning and broader significance. This discussion is followed by work that draws together an example of the politicization of love in the shape of a claim around "love jihad," which has dominated recent discussions of love in India and has begun to receive anthropological attention. In conclusion, the review argues that the politics of love will need to account for the meanings, constraints, and everyday vulnerabilities through which intimate lives become entangled with and illuminate political projects of every scale.

INTRODUCTION

This review draws on the growing ethnographic study of love and intimacy in diverse settings, with a strong focus on works that address love and the politics of love in India. In particular, it seeks to illustrate how love has become increasingly a politicized site of contestation in everyday relations of sexuality, marriage, gender, kinship as reflected in the realms of the media, law, policy, electoral politics, and nationalism. While intimacy, love, sexuality, and marriage have been subject to detailed examination in a wide range of *Annual Review of Anthropology* articles and of anthropological studies (see for instance Boellstorff 2007; Borneman 1996, 2001; Brettell 2017; Carsten et al. 2021; Cole & Thomas 2009; Constable 2009; Hirsch & Wardlow 2006), this account—although by no means exhaustive—seeks to focus particular attention on intimate relations and the circuits of governance through which they become visible as political contestations or "love jurisdictions" (Mody 2013a) and to give space to discussions of politicized love that have hitherto been on the margins of anthropological discourse. The perspective focuses on anthropological studies of kinship with politics where love can be seen variously as an intimate and political subjectivity, as an aspect of self-making, as the making of kinship, or as something politically objectified within a nationalist ideology.

Studies of intimacy, love, and politics serve as a prism from which anthropologists have sought to delineate the component forms of relatedness and connectivity. Intimacy inhabits everyday power relations and is entangled with individuality, inequality, kinship groups, and the state (Das 2006, Härkönen 2018). Intimacy and love inscribe value on these relationship processes and vice versa, such that love and regimes of value are mutually (and politically) constituted. Anthropologists seek to identify how love and intimacy inhabit and are subjected to various traditions, conventions, norms, values, and religious and state jurisdictions that shape, manage, and institutionally control desires and passions. Some such studies identify love and intimacy as self-consciously political, as a form of activism (Wright 2016), or as repudiating politicization, seeking to subtly inhabit prescriptive traditions or norms while still sustaining intimacies and love (Das 2010).

A century ago Mahatma Gandhi proposed that if India adopted a "doctrine of love as an active part of her religion and introduce[d] it in her politics, *swaraj* [freedom, literally self-rule] would descend upon India from heaven" (Bharucha 1998, p. 1295). For Gandhi, "self-rule" wrested from the British colonialists was both a literal and figurative state of being, a national goal based on his particular prescription: domestication and management of the self (and its unruly bodily desires and sexuality) through the moral force of nonviolence and love. Alter's reading of Gandhi's semiotics provides a helpful reminder that the body—arguably the very locus of love and desire—is a complex matrix that "incarnates" rather than merely receives or challenges the exercise of power; in Alter's words, "[T]he body incarnates a tension between 'me' as a person, 'we' as a social group, and 'us' as a species" (Alter 2000, p. xvi). Gandhi's politics of love presented political practice and the promise of freedom from colonial rule as necessarily linked to the personal through everyday bodily discipline. This Gandhian notion of a scalable politics of love synthesized within the body provides a provocation for anthropology: What is the framework by which to apprehend intimate choices that are reflexively conditioned and constrained by the relationships in which they are embedded?

This article begins by providing an overview of the anthropology of love and some of the main bodies of ethnographic work and theoretical debates around studies of love. It then surveys specific studies that make the politics of intimacy and love central to their analysis and that seek to make theoretical sense of its meaning and broader significance. The article then draws together an example of the politicization of love in the shape of a claim around "love jihad," which has dominated recent discussions of love in India and has begun to receive anthropological attention.

I conclude by arguing that understanding how love matters for politics is as important an anthropological enterprise as understanding its incarnated aspects of kinship, emotion, personhood, and meaning-making, from gender and sexuality through the register of relations between persons, groups, and nation-states.

ANTHROPOLOGY OF LOVE

Since the 1990s, social scientific interest in love, sexuality, and romance has surged and studies have opened up new avenues and approaches, albeit with a predominant focus on the Euro-American north. These studies have incorporated the effects of globally significant phenomena such as capitalism and consumption, globalization, individualism, transnational migration, gendered relations, intimacy, and ideals of equality (Constable 2009, Giddens 1992, Illouz 1997, Jamieson 1999, Yan 2003). The sociologist Giddens, in particular, provided a case for the evolutionary transformation of intimacy that appeared to resonate for the Euro-American west but that uncomfortably homogenized the particularities and complexities of the non-Western world. He portrayed a global revolution based on the imminent transformation of gendered relations and the emergence of the "pure relationship," i.e., an apolitical, egalitarian union (cf. Nurul Huda 2021, Padilla et al. 2007, Parry 2001). A generation earlier, another sociologist William Goode (1959) pointed out that anthropologists had rather shockingly ignored love as significant for kinship patterns, and using the accumulated anthropological evidence he proposed that the theoretical significance of love was to be found in the structural patterns of a society that developed to keep love from disrupting other arrangements (p. 47). In this schema, love structured but also needed wider social management to control its destructive potential. Despite the functionalist nature of Goode's argument, his proposal summarized the anthropological record quite well, and his contribution lies in him championing an interest in the comparative anthropological project of understanding love in different settings. He rejected the false dichotomy between societies stereotyped by the presence or absence of romantic love since, he argued, love could be related in diverse ways to different social structures.

While the study of romantic love and companionate marriage has largely been complemented within anthropology by a new and proliferating focus on intimacy (and now, "proximity"; see Obadia 2020b), many anthropologists have been at pains to point out the parlous state of uneven distribution of the intimacy grid. Ethnographic studies of love and companionate marriage have thus sought to systematically destabilize the valorization of love as a largely Euro-American phenomenon or an outcome of modernity and globalization (for studies that directly question such causality, see Maggi 2006, Orsini 2006, Parry 2001). Since the early 2000s, there has been an explosion in the anthropological study of love globally with attention focused more sharply on the gendered and emotional content and meanings of love, intimacy, sexuality, and desire (De Munck 1996, Shaw & Charsley 2006), as well as on how people queer, interpret, refashion, and frame ideologies of love and desire alongside other practices, identities, and beliefs (Cohen 2007, Hendriks 2016, Kulick 2005, Parry 2001). A developing body of ethnographic work is also studying the shape and impact of the dissolution of intimacy, domestic violence and abuse, spousal conflicts, the breakdown of marital unions, marriage counseling, compromise and divorce, and heartbreak and love loss (Alexy 2020, Basu 2015, Baxi 2006, Chaudhry 2021, Gershon 2010, Magee 2021, Papadaki 2021, Qureshi 2016, Simpson 1998). Trawick's (1992) monograph *Notes on Love in a Tamil Family* stands out as one that explores the multivalent meanings of emotion (*anpu*, or love in Tamil) as expressed within an intimate household and that notably included the anthropologist's own uncomfortable and entangled experience of love. There has also been important work on the expression and governance of emotion and the nature of affective intimacies (Ahmed 2003, 2015;

Archambault 2016; Hochschild 1983) and on intimacy, relatedness, and friendship (Dyson 2010, Nisbett 2007, Weston 1997). There continues to be debate as to whether friendship, rather than love, might serve as a basis for politics, instead of being treated as a kind of "light touch intimacy" (Wilkinson 2017, p. 59) compared with the powerful transformations expected of a politics of love (Hardt 2011, Wilkinson 2017). There is also a proliferating interest in the anthropology of intimacy and care, whether in the service of other people, animals, or the planet (Boris & Parreñas 2010, Govindrajan 2018, Świtek 2016, Weston 2017).

Osella (2012) calls for an approach to love that dislodges it from marriage and households, instead examining it through the specificities by which "relatedness, care giving and attachment are being configured in particular locations" (p. 258). Likwise, love is not necessarily grounded in physical locations. Friedner has provided an incisive account of an "anonymous love" (cf. Stevenson 2014) expressed by nondisabled Indians toward disabled deaf people that is generated by the Indian media through "feel-good politics and publicity" (Friedner 2020, p. S39). Quoting Povinelli (2006)—"Love is a political event. It expands humanity by exfoliating its social skin, and this expansion is critical to the liberal enlightenment project" (pp. 175–76)—Friedner (2020) argues that the anonymous love expressed toward deaf people "does not create subjects out of its objects," even though it creates inclusivity and connects nondisabled people who love deaf people and, through this love, the nation. Friedner demonstrates how anonymous love keeps disabled people categorically apart "albeit through love" (p. S39). She shows that this kind of neoliberal love "exfoliates both the political and the social," thus making the social a site of both "recuperation and harm" (p. S39), and for these reasons anonymous love is critiqued by her deaf informants.

Anthropologists have used the prism of intimacy and love to distinguish unhelpful dichotomies between the loving individual and the community (Hirsch & Wardlow 2006, Mody 2008, Obadia 2020a, Wekker 2006), love and money (Day 2010, Faier 2007, Hunter 2002), tradition and modernity (Ahearn 2006, Collier 1997, Fuller & Narasimhan 2008), heterosexual marriage and queer sexuality (Gay 1985, Hussain 2013, Mody 2013b, Osella 2012, Reddy 2006, Spronk 2018), or love and arranged marriage (de Munck 1996, Donner 2002, Twamley 2013). Another characterization of love and intimacy that has received a well-rounded ethnographic reckoning is love's apparently allergic relationship to capitalism, commoditization, and economic exchange. Far from presenting commodification and love or intimacy as hostile protagonists, following Zelizer (2000; see also Illouz 1997), anthropologists have shown these concepts to be productively entangled and mutually constituted (Bernstein 2007, Constable 2009, Heywood 2009, Meiu 2017).

THEORETICAL FORMULATIONS OF A POLITICS OF LOVE

Gell [2011 (1996)] provided an early and original steer for thinking anthropologically about romantic love. He argued that in the "western" characterization of love, two ostensible "strangers" begin to exchange intimacies, which takes the form of a transfer of knowledge about each other, shared and intensified through processes of courting (for him, love is informational, a frantic exchange of knowledge that a couple communicate to each other but promise to keep secret from everyone else; to reveal this knowledge is to betray the trust of the union and to release lethal and toxic information into the public realm). This aspect of love also reveals a "disciplinary taboo": While anthropologists have taken up love as a subject of study, Wynn (2015) points out that nevertheless there are only a few accounts of love "as affect, as lived and embodied" (p. 225). Methodologically, anthropologists struggle to gather data on experiences of informants' desires, and sharing accounts of one's own embodied sexual experiences risks being "vulgar and polluting" (Wynn 2015, p. 235). By way of solution, Wynn (2015) proposes a phenomenological account of "love and desire within kinship structures" that might make visible what is revealed only through "traces"

(p. 236). Writing about the emotion of love requires "experience-near" or "interior perception" (p. 239), but as Gell warns, the very enterprise of describing intimate secrets runs the peril of dissipating love through banal analysis or dissolving exposure. In a moving piece about studying (and writing about) intimacy and love and the fieldworker's positionality, kinship and ethical commitments, and the pragmatics of fieldwork, Smith (2016) concludes that "intimacy and emotional connection is politically and practically slippery" (p. 143). She urges academics to "struggle more with the when, how and why of intimacy" (p. 143) so as to allow ourselves to attend to emotions and angst, disrupting the boundaries that pretend neat separations of fieldwork and academic worlds.

Dalley (2015) has argued that much of what transpires between informants are emotions that are "enciphered" (p. 50), making it difficult for the anthropologist to unearth or interpret. Social and political theorists do not fare much better with most of the discussion about what love "is," taking on a distinctly "propositional" tone, i.e., what love should be rather than what it is (Berlant 2011, p. 683; see also Rapport 2017, p. 128). This emphasis on what love should be is mirrored in the exhortations toward a politics of love (girded by practices of sexual self-control and celibacy) by ideologues such as Mahatma Gandhi. As Meiu (2015) has argued, the "language of sexuality" (in the form of knowledge about intimate practices and desires of non-European peoples) had a central place in the creation and sustenance of Empire (p. 239; Stoler 1992) and also, we might add, following the logics of a Gandhian politics of love, in its occasional destruction (Alter 2000, p. ix). Conversely, for Arendt, love was both "apolitical" and "antipolitical" (cited in Hardt 2011, p. 678). The love that Gandhi valorized as constituting a viable politics of emancipation from colonial rule—its ability to discipline sexual desire in order to (nonviolently) embrace the other—was viewed by Arendt as essentially incompatible with politics because the fundamental purpose of love was unification, a narcissistic love of "becoming the same" rather than a truly "transformative" political love (cited in Hardt 2011, p. 678).

With regard to change and becoming, Boellstorff (2005) has argued in the context of his study of lesbi and gay Indonesians that we tend to treat "politicisation" as "doing for the community what 'coming out' does for the individual: assert a claim to rights, achieve a continuity between domains of life, secure an on-going sense of self" (p. 223). In my own ethnographic work with love marriage informants in Delhi, the aspect of "securing of an on-going sense of self" (Boellstorff 2005, p. 223) was described as being able to marry the one they loved through one of the many forms of marriage available to them, including civil marriage in the courts (Mody 2008). Inevitably, where the union was deemed by others to be socially transgressive, this marriage could incur an unwelcome politicization producing exposure, publicity, shame, dishonor, and the mobilization of those keen to dissuade or even prevent such unions because of the challenge they posed to the authority of kinship elders, the wider community, or the polis.

These discourses on the political meanings of love and the contestations around them are not academic niceties. The definition of love has its life outside of academic knowledge production as the state deploys anxieties around otherness (for example, Westernization) and insurgent forms of love to justify discrimination, vigilantism, surveillance, securitization, and the governance of intimate lives (Baxi 2006, Malji & Raza 2021, Nurul Huda 2020, Tyagi & Sen 2020). As Boellstorff (2016) has argued in the context of a rise of anti-LGBT statements by Indonesian government officials, such "State Straightism" that targets citizens on the basis of whom they love or their gender identification "builds on (and links to) other forms of discrimination."

The racial frontiers of colonial rule also impressed themselves on anthropological study, with love being the characteristic privilege of colonizers and the colonized presented as sexualized bodies rather than tender intimate loving ones (see Thomas 2009). This intersection of "epistemological and political issues" has given rise to critiques of ideological perspectives such as colonial depictions of lust as ubiquitous and love as notably absent in Africa (Thomas & Cole 2009,

pp. 8–9; Spronk & Hendriks 2020) or of the customary marriage in India based on caste considerations, recognizable rituals, and rules of endogamy that controlled women (see Mitra 2021 for a forceful critique).

In the context of work on intimate relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in northern Australia, Dalley (2015) argues that a "properly political" investigation into the nature of intimacy and love as it bears down on those of sometimes vastly different sociocultural backgrounds must be attuned to "localised instantiations of power" (p. 51). By looking at the intersubjective relationships forged by intimacy and love with a particular focus on how the self is configured, love emerges as a site of knowledge as well as a site of contestation, transformation, resistance, or retreat (Baas 2007, Dalley 2015, De Munck 1996, Dyson 2018, Hart 2007). Dalley (2015) confirms Hardt's proposition that a political concept of love in anthropology must traverse comfortably between the personal and political, illuminating both the intimate bonds that are forged and the social effects, including "hierarchies which pervade intimacy" (p. 51) that are so elicited (Hardt 2011, Friedner 2020). From this perspective, love's vocation may actually be "to create and maintain social bonds," which exemplifies love's capacity as a political actor (Hardt 2011, pp. 676–78; cf. Wright 2016).

When states misrecognize the social organization of their subjects as being based on "social status—kinship, religion or economic utility"—and not on the basis of intimacy, we get "dehumanizing practices of modernity" (Povinelli 2002, p. 234). Drawing on Jean Genet, Povinelli argues that to be human is to engage in "practices of intimate recognition," which is an index of our humanity (p. 234). Such practices also draw our attention to the methodological and intersubjective aspects of intimacy for our very discipline: As Appadurai (1997) movingly put it, "[I]ntimacy is what the best ethnography was always about" (p. 115).

Both knowledge and recognition are at play in Gell's much earlier but typically prescient conceptualization of love as a "knowledge system": "a procedure for obtaining, distributing and transforming knowledge of preeminent social value" [Gell 2011 (1996)]. Such a focus on the uneven distribution of intimate relations (and their recognition) draws attention to the ways in which love and intimacy are communicative, conversational, and often controversial (in Gell's terms, "the ultimate indiscretion"), sitting on a delicate precipice between knowledge and secrecy and frequently coded so as to make recognition of such intimate knowledge a feature of cultural competence (Dalley 2015, p. 50) and also of politics. In the context of interracial relationships, Dalley calls for greater acknowledgment of the intersubjective nature of loving relationships as they bear the potential for "transformative personal experience" while remaining attentive to racial categories and racial difference (p. 51). As Bessire (2021) reminds us in a very different context of aquifer loss in the American high plains, "[I]ntimacy is where it begins and ends" (p. 169); depletion is "impossible to chart from surface appearances alone" (p. 10) but needs to be understood through the "intimate registers" of people forced to encounter its effects (p. 169). Far from being a last resort, for anthropologists the intimate register, suffused with affects that matter, is precisely where global and transformational scales of phenomena can be best understood, apprehended, and described.

POLITICIZATION AND LOVE

In her first novel *The God of Small Things*, Roy (1997) coined the term "love laws," arguing that these laws determined "who should be loved. And how. And how much" (p. 33). In so doing, she draws our attention to love's jurisdictions,[1] how love exercises not only its reach on us but also its

[1] "Love jurisdiction" (Mody 2013a) is a colloquial term used by lawyers in Delhi's courts to describe court cases that involve love or romance. I use it to capture the affects and force of love within the law, but also outside of it.

reverberations within state legislation that draws matters of community, kinship, and especially intimacy and marriage within its ambit. The coinage also places love at the heart of identity politics (Maggi 2006) with the possibilities presented by romance and love unequally distributed and marking social boundaries. In India, as elsewhere, both the colonial and postcolonial state played decisive roles in defining the recognition and bounds of intimacy, love, and marriageability, particularly in cases that crossed normative boundaries or that did not have social sanction (Das 2006, Davé 2012).

In a fascinating ethnographic account of the political economy and kinship processes that affect marriage making (and crucially, marriage maintenance) in the village of Barampur in rural western Uttar Pradesh, Chaudhry provides a richly textured analysis of arranged marriages involving "cross-regional brides." Chaudhry (2021) contends that most studies of love in India have focused on urban women, whereas she seeks to understand what love and intimacy look like in rural arrangements after such arranged marriages. She surveys the almost ubiquity of domestic abuse ("*pitna*" used to describe "wife beatings") and inequality but also identifies instances of husbands who proferred support ("*sath dena*"), consulted their wives, trusted them, and stood by them in kinship disputes, illness, or crises, which reveals important and meaningful traces of care and practices of intimacy (Chaudhry 2021, p. 159). Here conjugal love is lived and learned through intimate practices of shared space and valued spousal support.

It is striking that a number of recent studies of romance and intimacy in South Asia are exploring the development of love within and through the realm of normative values; in some instances, these studies attempt to navigate "matchmaking and (pre)-marital bonding" (Walter 2021, p. 448) between arranged-marriage spouses or investigate relations during the period between engagement and marital consummation. Like Chaudhry's rural Indian informants, these relations take place within the contexts of multigenerational or joint family households, gender segregation, and strict forms of surveillance around modesty and family respectability. The determinative function of social norms and economic ambitions among the middle class in Pakistan allows Maqsood (2021) to argue that her informants openly disparaged individualized notions of romance as "dating," "going-out," or "affairs," all of which were characterized as sitting in opposition to the world of the family and obligation and "the relations that constitute the person within it" (p. 97). Conversely, her informants created "*understandings*" between socially equal others that maintained the normative structures of class, kinship, and gender but still allowed a tentative space for romantic exploration and love between homogamous and marriageable (heterosexual) others. Maqsood's (2021) *understandings* allow intimacies to be generated "without saying" and "tether" love to ideas of suitable forms of kinship responsibility and obligation (p. 98). *Understandings* thus constitute an important response to the low status of romantic love characterized by scandal and loss of honor for individuals and families in Pakistan. By building *understandings*, Lahoris manage and contain desire within appropriate gendered relations that do not "directly challenge the overall modes of comportment" (Maqsood 2021, p. 102), creating new avenues of aspiration and becoming that do not entail a loss of values (see also Shaw & Charsley 2006).

Abeyasekera's work in the context of Sinhalese marriages also details how self-choice can be distinguished from agency. She formulates "choice marriage" rather than love marriage, arguing that choices are always constrained by the whole range of relationships in which they are embedded, especially those of kin. The Sinhalese marriages she studied were shaped not just by love or desire but crucially by the affects and expectations of others, thus allowing her to more appropriately describe the relational Sinhalese self (Abeyasekera 2016, pp. 5–9). She found a double emphasis on indissolubility in romantic liaisons (and, similar to Maqsood, a rejection of dating) because reputation and status mattered a great deal and young people wanted to be publicly acknowledged as good and decent rather than irresponsible or immoral (see also Walter 2021). Abeyasekera's

(2016) Sinhalese informants almost always conducted their relationships in secret so that they could "make decisions about partners without social sanction" (p. 12). They were also concerned not just with the stability of any ensuing marriage but equally with the stability of the premarital liaison because to "choose well" was the potential to turn a courtship into a marriage.

The importance of postmarital kin support to fulfill the growing aspirations for economic mobility strongly conditions young people's sense of caution regarding the allure of love marriages in South Asia (De Neve 2016). This finding is confirmed by recent research conducted with 6,000 millennial Indians, which reported that 84% of respondents had had an arranged marriage and reported that they "couldn't afford to fall in love" lest they risk being cut off by their families and networks (Marwaha 2021). While this acknowledgment presents love as a pleasure that young people can ill afford, both Maqsood's and Abeyaskera's ethnographic work tells a subtle tale of informants making moral virtue of carefully navigating between private intimacies and the more public task of building the self and kinship through marriage.

Ethnographic studies increasingly present mobile phones and especially text communication as facilitating a constant stream of connectivity between young people, for instance, spouses intensifying their knowledge of each other through a continuous sequence of hundreds of vibrating text messages per day (Walter 2021, p. 451; see also Maqsood 2021, pp. 100–1). Walter (2021) argues that the depth of the relationship is reckoned not by the content of texts (one female informant reports of her husband's entreaties, "'Drink milk' he sometimes says") but by the frequency of messages and calls generating an "intimate complicity" that stretches normative rules laid down by elders (p. 452). And as Marsden (2007) reminds us, despite heavy politicization and Islamization in Chitral in Pakistan, discussions about premarital relations and elopements can also provide striking opportunities for self-conscious displays of "tolerant" attitudes towards love (p. 105).

As some intimate collectivities get gathered up through anthropological work on the politics of love (Benson 2008, Bodenhorn 2013), others can be found to be abjuring politicization and finding ways to secure the self through moral and social means (Sadana 2018). Many couples who had love marriages have been keen to minimize or even erase their acts of agentive loving in favor of familial compromise, representing their actions within a repertoire of kinship values, gendered conformity, and obedience to elders (Mody 2008, pp. 156–86). As Sadana (2018) says of one of her informants who had courted and married a higher-caste college friend, "Talk of love quickly becomes an explanation of caste" (p. 45). For many eloping Indian couples, their discussions of love tend to focus on their friendships, on the finances needed to stay afloat without kin shelter or support, and on the objections raised on the basis of status and concerns with acceptance (p. 44). Osella (2012) also points out that whereas the norm in rural Kerala, as in many parts of India, is an expectation for love to flourish after a conventional arranged marriage, her female informants pointedly regarded the renunciation of youthful love and romance (where it had happened) in favor of parentally arranged marriage as part of a normal life course, condemning adulterous relationships that sought to carry on after marriage (p. 257).

LOVE JIHAD

Up to now, I have reviewed ethnographies that illustrate the purposeful navigation of sociopolitical boundaries that enable intimacies. These negotiations take place in a way that is subtle, coded, and often not explicitly public. In stark contrast, the politicization of love by state actors is explicitly prescriptive and inevitably overbearing. "Love jihad" is one such politicization, an unsubstantiated conspiracy theory that combines the idea of love with a religious war waged by Muslims against Hindus, exploiting Indian anxiety about the youth (in this instance, Hindu women) choosing to have love marriages to inappropriate and ineligible (here, Muslim) men. These anxieties around the mixing of blood through sexual intimacies, inter-religious marriage, or intercaste marriages

have a very long history and a consistent interface with politics in the colonial period (Gupta 2009), at the time of Partition (Menon & Bhasin 1998), and in the public debates surrounding the enactment of civil marriage legislation that enabled love marriage as far back as the 1870s (Mody 2008). The term love jihad has become an increasingly audible feature of political rhetoric against interreligious marriage in India (Das 2010) and abroad (Anderson 2015, p. 58) that presents Hindu–Muslim unions as a war waged by apparently "proselytising, predatory and lascivious Muslims" roaming the political landscape on their motorbikes to seduce Hindu girls (Anderson 2015, p. 58; see also Strohl 2019, p. 30). What is defining about love jihad is how it has been systematically worked into a political campaign of "outrage and offense" (Anderson 2015, p. 45) by ideologues of Hindutva, a term used to identify Hindu religious nationalism (Hansen 1999). This rhetoric is amplified considerably by the labors of countless digital foot soldiers and WhatsApp warriors who have flooded social networks and the Internet with views expressing deathly opposition to such marriages and who seek to gain wider legal, political, and moral support in actively preventing them (Frøystad 2021; Ghassem-Fachandi 2012, pp. 8–13). The propaganda of an ongoing love jihad powerfully invokes the conceptual field of "agonistic intimacy," a term coined by Singh (2011) to describe the simultaneous copresence of conflict and intimacy among neighbors.

Take the well-publicized case of Akhila Ashokan (later known as "Hadiya"), an adult Hindu woman in Kerala who converted to Islam and married a Muslim man (Bhatia 2017; Chacko 2020, pp. 213–17; Jenkins 2019).[2] She had moved away from home while attending college and lived with Muslim housemates who became close friends. Over the next few years, she found herself drawn to Islam and began to pray from the Koran. She changed her name and started wearing a hijab, much to the unease of her Hindu parents. At the age of 24, she met a Malayali Muslim man Shafin Jahan, and they married each other in December 2016. Prior to the marriage, her parents filed a case in the Kerala High Court, arguing that their daughter had been forcibly converted to Islam. Her parents alleged that Jahan was a terrorist linked to the so-called Islamic State and that he planned to abduct their daughter.

In May 2017, the High Court of Kerala ruled in favor of the parents, finding that "it is not normal for a young girl in her early 20s, pursuing a professional course, to abandon her studies and to set out in pursuit of learning an alien faith and religion" (Bhatia 2017). They declared the marriage to Jahan to have been a sham and, specifically, an example of love jihad and annulled it on the basis that Hadiya had been brainwashed; she was returned to the custody of her father against her wishes. The case required a further legal challenge by Jahan in the Supreme Court of India before Hadiya was able to assert her wishes before the law and to state unequivocally that she had converted to Islam of her own free will and had married her husband without any coercion. When asked for her views, she declared in Malayalam that she wanted freedom and that she should not be kept against her wishes (Bhatia 2017). On March 8, 2018, the Supreme Court stated that Hadiya should be "permitted to pursue her future endeavours" and overturned the High Court of Kerala's decision to annul her marriage on the basis that she had given her own credible testimony (Jenkins 2019, pp. 209–12; see also Chacko 2020, pp. 215–16).

Nevertheless, the publicity received by this marriage and the way that Hadiya's desires were so systematically occluded through the High Court's ruling outlived the corrective of the Supreme Court and fueled the notoriety of the love jihad bogey (see Gupta 2016 for details of the political rhetoric and visual imagery of the love jihad campaign). As political scientist Laura Jenkins (2019) concludes,

[2]The famous Hadiya case and other instances of love jihad propaganda can be found across a range of Indian news sites. Here I draw some of the details of this case from a journalistic account in *The New Yorker* by Bhatia (2017).

> Hysteria over mythical mass conversions allows persecutors of interfaith couples to claim the banner of religious freedom. But the love jihad rumor is a case of religious freedom being used not to protect people's rights but to persecute nondominant groups, especially religious minorities and female converts. (p. 215)

Tyagi & Sen (2020) have provided an important ethnographic account that draws on fieldwork with two right-wing Hindu womens' organizations who address love jihad through campaigns on young Hindu women's safety, sexuality, and mobility within the urban space and protection against the threat from undesirable Muslim males. While Hadiya's success in the Supreme Court allowed her to return to her husband, political noise around the case has succeeded in reinforcing notions of male guardians of Indian females and casting self-chosen love marriages (especially inter-religious unions concerning a Muslim male spouse) as part of an antinational conspiracy. Chacko (2020) provides a detailed account of the electoral calculus at play in targeting gender through Hindu women and female security, especially in Uttar Pradesh state where the government initiative of so-called "Anti-Romeo Squads" has been set up by the state government to conduct moral policing of couples.

Hadiya's case parallels another love jurisdiction challenge by Indian human rights lawyers and queer activists in India against the infamous Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code, which outlawed same-sex relations, itself based on a colonial law of 1861 that criminalized acts "against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal." Section 377 was struck down in the Supreme Court in September 2018, six months after Hadiya's victory. While there was widespread jubilation at the decriminalization of homosexuality with claims that India was decolonizing, other activists expressed concerns with the possibility that rights meant very little without substantial implementation (Davé 2012, p. 201). Others have argued that in India the family is an important element in arbitrating queer relationality (Singh 2017).

By 2022, an ever-increasing number of Indian state governments (nine at last count; Poddar 2022) have enacted urgent legislation against love jihad (or amended existing anticonversion laws)[3] targeting what are described as "forced" religious conversions, including intermarriage (Nielsen & Nilsen 2021), and addressing the electorate's inflamed concerns through a range of securitized legislative means (Malji & Raza 2021). The political campaigns claim with no substantive evidence that there are thousands of cases in which young Hindu women have been tricked into falling in love with Muslim men who seek to convert them. Drawing on anthropological work that demonstrates the ambivalence of the colonial law permitting love marriages for Indians in the 1870s (Mody 2008), Nielsen & Nilsen (2021) show the resonance of that law with the 2020 Uttar Pradesh ordinance on religious conversion. This ordinance lists "marriage" as one of many possible pretexts for "unlawful conversion" and replicates the process of mandatory judicial publication of notice of the intention to convert, providing perilous (and advanced) notice for anyone intending to oppose such a conversion/marriage; this notice enables vigilante Hindutva groups, while also offering information that supports legal challenges to any such conversions (Nielsen & Nilsen 2021, pp. 8–10).

In a now famous and highly quoted rejoinder to being vilified as a Muslim man who had committed a love jihad by marrying a Hindu woman, the Bollywood film star Saif Ali Khan responded, "Intermarriage is not jihad. Intermarriage is India" (Khan 2014), referring to the long history of such Hindu–Muslim marriages within the nation (Frøystad 2021). Setting history aside, the

[3] For a summary of the provisions of the law in one state (Uttar Pradesh), see Rathod & Barot (2020).

socially coercive changes brought about by the democratically mandated Hindutva ideology have wide-ranging consequences in the present. Those who oppose the campaign rhetoric of love jihad in public, who materially support, or who are benignly accepting of loving intermarried couples are branded as antinational (Nielsen & Nilsen 2021).

One such group seeking to make a stand in support of an inclusive counter-politics calls themselves Love Commandos, an underground collective of Indians with a web presence who advise and rescue love marriage couples in distress. In recent years, they have faced campaigns of allegations and imprisonment. The Commandos maintain a helpline telephone number and, with little more resources than a few mobile phones, scooters, and safe shelters, they respond to numerous couples on a daily basis to guide them toward temporary accommodation and conjugal security through assistance with religious or legal forms of marriage. The Love Commandos contend that they are at the vanguard of a youth revolution in India based on love and self-choosing in marriage (Sadana 2018). While on the face of it, this effort represents a fairly conventional "liberal" narrative of progress, with love escaping the shackles of tradition, in the politicized realm of love jihad, the Commandos' vision of a love revolution provides a counter to an increasingly dominant geopolitical campaign against transgressive love.

Dyson (2018) provides fascinating and valuable insight on love activism in a different sociopolitical context in which village youth constitute themselves as "advisors" in an Uttarakhand community in Bemni, north India. Dyson notes that her informants do not support intercaste or inter-religious love marriages, which are seen as more disruptive than those between roughly homologous members of the village. They nevertheless advocate a pragmatism about love that insists that it is a locally salient fact; they call these unions *actual mein* (literally, in actual fact) love relationships. Dyson's informants serve as brokers in cases of premarital love affairs and adulterous liaisons, providing a surprisingly respectable version of "community service" through youth brokerage and local intermediation, most of which appears to consist of dissuading families from calling the police at the first sign of trouble and instead recognizing the *actual* facts of love before them (Dyson 2018). A different online public initiative (@IndiaLoveProject) set up by three Indians invites user-generated content, with couples posting three photos of themselves and a brief narrative about their relationship and love. This project has created an online photo documentary archive that publicizes and celebrates loving unions and homo- and hetero-desire on Instagram using the tag line, "Love and marriage outside the shackles of faith, caste, ethnicity and gender,"[4] presenting a counter-politics of love.

Just as neologisms like love jihad create real effects in the world (Frøystad 2021), so too do those who publicly challenge the love jihad trope by recognizing intimacy (in Povinelli's terms) and valorizing desires that run counter to dominant and dehumanizing discourses. The focus on love jihad draws attention to the underlying politics of publicity and recognition in which intimate love acts can serve as fodder for hate-fueled politics and can also serve to generate an "affective politics" (Davé 2012, p. 4) in reply.

Contrary to the assumption in the metanarratives of modernity presented by Henry Maine or Giddens that modernization makes intimacy or love less political as it becomes more individual, the ethnographies that I have surveyed show that, if anything, love becomes more political in post-traditional settings. This review suggests that there are no clear modalities of a politics of love (the component elements being inextricable), but we can no doubt formulate two poles exerting

[4]See **https://www.instagram.com/indialoveproject**, founded by Priya Ramani, Samar Halarnkar, and Niloufer Venkatraman.

an influence on its various manifestations: the navigation of love in a political context as distinct from the exercise of politics in the realm of loving relationships.

With regard to navigation, Ahmed (2003) fleshes out the significance of tracing love's shifting course through an inevitably politicized field: "A politics of love is necessary in the sense that how one loves matters; it has effects on the texture of everyday life and on the intimate 'withness' of social relations" (paragraph 45). The dual influence of the individual or social navigation of a politics of love and the state's intervention is clearly illuminated in the feminist political geographer Sara Smith's extraordinary account of love and marriage in Leh, in the far north of the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir in India. Lest it appear that it is only Hindu nationalists who seek to legislate the politicization of love, Smith details a 1989 ban on inter-religious love marriage between Buddhists and Muslims (alongside a social and economic boycott) spearheaded by a social welfare organization called the Ladakh Buddhist Association (LBA). What is striking though is the ethnographic context in which this ban arose. In this region, inter-religious love marriage was so common in previous decades that more than 80% of Smith's (2011) Shia and Sunni Muslim and Buddhist informants had immediate relatives (e.g., mother, father, aunt, uncle, grandfather, or grandmother) who were born as a member of the other religion (p. 461). Inter-religious marriage made personal religious identity and everyday worship a local version of both traditions.

Villagers claimed that these love marriages created an extensive web of "blood relations" so that "Buddhists" and "Muslims" could not be clearly distinguished on the basis of religious identity, thus protecting the whole community and also serving as a protective political mechanism, for instance preventing communal tensions from erupting (p. 470). In the past, if a Muslim woman married a Buddhist man, their children would be Buddhist and vice versa (Smith 2009, p. 207). The ban against inter-religious love marriages used the language of forced conversion of Buddhist girls to Islam, leading van Beek (2004) to argue that the LBA has been "saffronised" (after the color identified with Hindutva or Hindu religious nationalism). Smith says that her informants described the earlier prevalance of intermarriage and the present as one in which people's hearts had changed against such unions, and nowadays these inter-religious marriages were shunned by both Buddhists and Muslims. Smith provides a geopolitical reading of the erosion of inter-religious marriage over time to argue that, following the ban, inter-religious love marriage served a fragmentary purpose amid whispers and fears rather than performing the previous work of cohesion as described by her informants. Smith's work shows love as a significant feature not just of individual action or even of intrafamilial social bonds but rather of the entire geopolitics of the region, shaped and reshaped through time. The absence of young people born of Buddhist–Muslim unions after the intermarriage ban of 1989 (largely because any so-marrying couple would be forced to leave the area and live elsewhere) sharpens religious distinctions and reduces interactions—and in so doing reshapes the territory itself.

CONCLUSION

We have seen that the exercise of politics in shaping what can be loved and how is a potentially transformative field, but one which, in the context of authoritarian social or political movements, can have terrible and deadly repercussions. As Govindrajan (2021) found, right-wing Indian Hindu cow protectors insist that they are also "moved by love" or *prem* (for the cow, for the Hindu nation). Their internal belief system is that love is validated as meaningful when it is transformed into action and labor. The anthropologist's conceptual difficulty is that the spectrum of work motivated by "love" in this context includes the production of uplifting images, videos, and digital messages from a rural cow refuge for mass edification as well as the violent labors of Hindu vigilantes patrolling highways to intercept and rescue cows being transported, lest they be destined for

slaughter, and punishing those who dare to insult the *gau mata* or cow mother, synonymous with the Hindu nation. Govindrajan juxtaposes the expressions of "*moh-maya*" (love tinged with affective illusion) expressed by her female village informants who also love their cows and attend daily to their every need. They express a powerful intimacy with their animals, but their reflections of love express devotion alongside resentment for the oppressive male kinship relations that extract labor from both women and their overmilked cows. This ethnography of love as labor generates a powerful anthropological register capable of accounting for the extremism of the local nationalists and the illusory devotions of rural women.

The developing field of anthropological studies of the politics of love will need to account for these polarities and the differentiating forces, meanings, constraints, and everyday vulnerabilities through which intimate lives become entangled with political projects of every scale. In the context of her paper on cow protection, Govindrajan reminds us of Ahmed's (2016) somber reflection that "fascism as a politics of hate" is nevertheless "written in the language of love" (Govindrajan 2021, p. 196; see Ahmed 2016). Despite the systematically organized trouble-making unleashed by the love jihad bogey upon love-marrying couples in many states in India today, such marriages nevertheless continue to take place. The new anthropologies of our time will need to bear clear-eyed ethnographic witness to the antagonistic intimacies of both love and hate and the multiple ways in which they orbit and elicit each other.

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I dedicate this review (for any positive aspect it may have and, of course, none of its flaws) to my PhD cohort colleague and dear friend Maya Warrier (Reader at the Department of Theology, University of Winchester). I learned of Maya's demise during the course of writing this piece, in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. She would undoubtedly have been embarrassed by such sentimentality, but also, I am sure, would recognize the love.

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