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## Everyday Suffocations, Smells and Sounds of *Jung*: Ethnography of Tear Gas in Downtown Srinagar

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# Everyday Suffocations, Smells and Sounds of *Jung*: Ethnography of Tear Gas in Downtown Srinagar

Bhavneet Kaur

This paper traces the insidious movement of tear gas shells from the site of *jung* (Kashmiri reference for stone-pelting, more directly referred to as *Kanni Jung*) to intimate spaces of homes, interrogating the world of unabated military violence in Downtown Srinagar. It delineates the sensate world of political conflict through the precarious social life of people and their multi-layered relationship with forms of military control, particularly tear gas shells<sup>1</sup>. In trying to capture the in-between-ness of toxic tear gas—between striking protestors on the road and permeating inside homes, between explosion and diffusion— I ask: how does this “non-lethal” (Graham 2010: 244) chemical weapon affect the social world of people in Downtown? Can this gas, claiming to function specifically as a resistance-quelling weapon, differentiate neatly between ‘dangerous’ rioting bodies and bodies of civilians or between an *azaadi-pasand*<sup>2</sup> (Kashmiri for pro-freedom) home and

a *non-azaadi*<sup>3</sup> *pasand* home? Borrowing from Bourdieu’s idea of the habitus (1990), the paper explicates that certain lived realities become embodiments and train the human body to preemptively act and respond in particular ways to everyday unfolding military violence. During the ethnographic fieldwork between 2015 and 2017 in Downtown Srinagar, I attempted to un-layer this sensory landscape of tear gas by exploring narratives of *daem* (Kashmiri for suffocation) that have acquired a routine texture in this toxic geography.

**Keywords:** tear gas; embodiment of violence; Kashmir; habitus; memory

## Introduction

In 2012, when I met Suhail<sup>4</sup> around the time of Diwali in Delhi, I saw him viscerally shudder at the sound of bursting crackers. He did not become startled or frightened by the sound of the crackers like many people do, but his body shuddered and heaved, suggesting that this sound carried a memory. This somatic reaction of the body to a cracker *taas* (Kashmiri, Km; explosive sounds), underlies the complex history of how individual bodies in conflict zones record and embody histories of violence witnessed in their everyday lives. An embodied reaction like this to explosive sounds awakens deep-seated memories of blasts and tear gas explosions that are recurrently experienced in Kashmir. Memory associations between these sounds and the terror they unleash traverses the spatial limits of Kashmir and remains embedded in people's bodies to such an extent that the sound of a bursting cracker anywhere in the world can instinctively jolt the body of a person from Kashmir. In his work on embodiment and the role of senses, Bergson argues that "pure memory does not exist in the body, but it is in the body that memory is activated, calling up sensations associated with the remembered event" (Marks 2000: 73). Building on the work of Bergson, Marks suggests that "where more symbolic languages tend to strip private memory away, the proximal senses are where memory remains in the body" (ibid: 206). The sound of a cracker, therefore, is an echo that activates memories of the violent past and the lived present. This embodied and somatic reaction to a perceived threat emanates from the experience of living amidst actual sounds of explosions in the form of bombs, bullets, or tear gas shells, as well as by a diverse range of stimuli that mimic sounds of explosions such as tyre bursts, popping Frooti<sup>5</sup> packs, and Diwali/Eid crackers. In one of the interviews during my doctoral fieldwork<sup>6</sup> in Srinagar, this frenzy of sounds was explicated upon:

I don't remember which year this was, in the early or mid 90's. An auto-rickshaw ran over an empty pack of Frooti in Nowatta Chowk.<sup>7</sup> This emitted a *taas* (Km; burst)—the sound of an empty bottle being crushed. The Border Security Force (BSF) deployed in the bunker at that time opened fire at the auto which led to the death of passengers and the driver. Why I am telling you this is because it captures the paranoia, the fear that people lived with, particularly during the time of '*tehreek*'<sup>8</sup> (Km; political movement for self-determination in Kashmir) (Hamid, theatre artist, 28 May 2016)

It is this social and political precariousness of life in Kashmir that compels me to ask: how do individuals prepare their bodies to live with unabated violence? In the context

of Kashmir, where myriad ways of military control and domination work together to create spirals of fear, loss, and death, it becomes crucial to look at the sensory, embodied and affective ways in which the human body in the centre of the political conflict becomes a locus for affecting and being affected by the social. While my doctoral work focuses on the remembrances and remnants of the 1990s (*namath tehreek*, Km; political movement of 1990s in Kashmir) in Downtown Srinagar, in this paper I specifically tie together ethnographic accounts of tear gas shelling that were documented during my field-work between 2015 and 2017. An exploration of these sounds/*taas* forms a background to the central problem that this paper poses: what structures the everyday experiences of people in Kashmir and what leads to a bodily embodiment of violence and fear? In an attempt to answer this question I trace the most persistent sound of explosions, i.e. of tear gas shells<sup>9</sup>, in the sensory landscape of Downtown Srinagar and chart its trajectory from the site of *jung* (Km; stone pelting between Indian state forces and young boys in Kashmir) on the streets to its diffusion into the intimate spaces of homes. Delineating this movement or in-betweenness of tear gas allows us to understand that in Kashmir, loud explosive sounds are associated with a history of violence, of feeling choked, of not being able to breathe, and of being burnt and killed. It affects the lives of those who live between these explosions and diffusions on an everyday basis.

This paper, therefore, engages with the embodiment of violence and fear in Downtown Srinagar by asking the fundamental question: how does tear gas, a 'non-lethal' chemical weapon, affect and alter the social world of people? What vulnerabilities does the excessive usage of tear gas produce in the everyday, and how do people learn to live in this mesh of extraordinary violence? This paper is structured around understanding and exploring an answer to these questions. The targeting of the quotidian spaces and circulations of everyday life through the use of tear gas shells allows us to un-layer the everyday incapacities embodied by the people of Kashmir as they breathe, smell, watch, and hear these explosions. The diffusion of the tear gas smell inside the homes and hospitals incapacitates the movement of people living in these spaces, choking them routinely. I argue that this can be envisaged as the *habitus* (Bourdieu 1990) of Downtown in which the extra-ordinary social realities in Kashmir constitute the fundamental internalized core from where experiences of people emanate in the everyday.

Although the use of tear gas has primarily been reserved for riot-control situations where it targets 'dangerous' bodies, in the context of Kashmir, the disproportionate use of tear gas

shells implies that each human body in a political conflict is dispensable, threatening, and needs to be targeted even before it can target the state (Feldman 2015<sup>10</sup>). To explicate this insidious nature of tear gas, I offer two ethnographic case studies in this paper. First, I delineate funerals in Kashmir as the site of *jung* around which the sensory world of political conflict is tethered where both mourners and protesters are targeted with tear gas. The unrestricted usage of tear gas on the people in the funeral is not a miscalculation, but is rather *intended*, and I call this the dehumanizing nature of gas. Second, I explore the narratives of *daem* (Km; suffocation) when toxic tear gas infiltrates inside the homes and leads to immediate and sometimes lasting breathing difficulties for the people therein. I argue that an aberrant condition of feeling suffocated has acquired a routine texture in the social lives of people in Downtown. I ask: what vulnerabilities are manifested, and how do bodies react to this gas when it enters their homes?

Before I delve into this, there is a need to explicate why I choose to locate Downtown Srinagar as my primary site of fieldwork, and through that I attempt to provide a brief history of the political context of Kashmir. In the summer uprising of 2016, the topographical limits of Downtown Srinagar were completely sealed for the four-month-long curfew, like in other parts of Kashmir, but with an unprecedented watertight surveillance and military control that made movement into or from Downtown an act of inconceivable trespass. Downtown was locked, sealed, and geographically isolated. An auto rickshaw driver from the centre of the city, Lal Chowk, commented on my insistence to go to Downtown during the curfew, said, “*Agar hum aapko andar le bhi gaye, guarantee nahi hai ki aap bahar aa paoge*” (Urdu, Ud; Even if I take you inside Downtown, there is no guarantee that you can come back). In popular imagination, Downtown Srinagar has historically been conceived of as the site of a continuous state of emergency, a singularity of siege, with its intermittent yet relentless cycles of curfews, *jung*, pellet injuries, and tear gas shellings in the everyday. This mystification of Downtown as an extraordinary site of everyday violence, or as the heart of darkness from where return cannot be guaranteed, emanates from two sources: first, the historical legacy of Downtown Srinagar as the axiomatic precipitator of the movement for self-determination (*tehreek*) from 1931<sup>11</sup> onwards and particularly during the armed movement in 1990s, and second, an imposition of complete military domination and control of the lanes of Downtown that continues to the present day. It acquired a doubly precarious and dangerous imagination within the contours of an already escalating uprising of 2016, after the killing of the militant

commander of Hizbul Mujahideen<sup>12</sup>, Burhan Wani. By saying so, I do not frame these complex forms of control and violence as particular to only Downtown. Rather, I argue that these forms of tear gas shelling, of curfews, and of an omnipresent military gaze are recurrent all across the Kashmir Valley but the intensity and repetitiveness with which control is exerted over Downtown in the everyday (irrespective of any uprising), imbues it with an extraordinariness. This results in the saturation of social space of Downtown with both: unprecedented fear as well as resistance.

As a researcher working in Downtown, accessibility to the field site was in itself the biggest challenge, as some parts of Downtown Srinagar falling under the jurisdiction of five police stations<sup>13</sup> that were routinely subjected to what the authorities call “restrictions”. On each Friday or a curfew or restriction day, the soundscape and landscape of Downtown Srinagar transforms. It acquires smells, sounds, and sights that are singular to a place which is in a continuous state of war. On these days, people are prepared for ‘trouble’ pre-emptively, their shops are only half open, and stocks only half displayed in anticipation of having to close down at any point in the day, particularly after the *zühr nimaaz* (Arabic, Ar; afternoon prayers). The precariousness of lives in the everyday becomes evident when sounds of tear gas explosions resonate throughout Downtown, saturating certain localities closer to the sites of trouble with a potently pungent smell. The imposition of these recurrent restrictions in Downtown or what I call ‘everyday curfews’ makes it critical to analyze how the everyday social lives of people are marked by extra-ordinariness and how their bodies are prepared in anticipation of violence. In an interview with a local journalist, Inspector General of Police (Kashmir range) Swayam Prakash Pani said,

The quantity (of tear gas shells) to be allotted to each police station is decided according to the area’s history of civil unrest and the current law and order situation. Sources say all police stations in Srinagar’s old city and urban centres elsewhere in the state are always kept well-stocked (Ganai 2019)<sup>14</sup>.

The fact that all police stations of Downtown Srinagar are stacked with this ammunition is indicative of the mystification and the extraordinary precariousness that we were attempting to probe earlier. In this paper, I argue that people in Downtown Srinagar have carved a new form of life around these everyday curfews. It is not a suspension of life as we might understand it. Rather, life acquires a new dimension in which people start manoeuvring and embodying the constantly transforming habitus and becoming familiar with it.

## The site of Jung:<sup>15</sup> A Funeral Procession

On 14 June 2016, I went with a Kashmiri journalist to the funeral of a person claimed to be a militant by some and a civilian by others. In the auto rickshaw, before reaching the site of the funeral, he pre-emptively sensed that something has happened. He became restless as he said to me:

*Shuru hogaya...Smell nahi aarahi tujhe?*

(It has started...can't you smell it?)

(Danish, journalist, 14 June 2016)

The process of reaching the funeral site triggered an anthropological inquiry compelling me to ask: *what is the smell of political conflict?* The smell that he was alluding to was the invisible haze of toxic tear gas shells that were exploding near the funeral site, now the site of *jung*. The sense of smell was in conflict with the sense of sound and sight there because we could not hear or see any explosions, but we could smell them. Even though there was no material and visible trace of *jung* in that spatio-temporal moment of the moving auto, the pervasive spread of the gas became a signifier of what was about to reveal itself, about to become present. Massumi (2010) argues that

there is a common category of entities, known to all, that specializes in making what is not actually present really present nonetheless, in and as its own effect: *signs*. The sign is the vehicle for making presently felt the *potential force* of the objectively absent (Massumi 2010: 63, emphasis in original).

The smell of asphyxiating tear gas in the air, therefore, becomes a not-so-incongruous sign in a conflict space where wars (*jung*) are unfolding in the interstices of the everyday: whether during a funeral, after the Friday prayers, on a curfew day, at a students' protest rally, or on a *Moharram*<sup>16</sup> (Km; sacred first month in Islamic calendar that marks the anniversary of battle of Karbala) procession. As the auto rickshaw moved closer to the funeral site, the sounds began to reveal themselves: small explosions of the tear gas canisters now audible from a distance. This was followed by the appearance of more explicit tangible signs of *jung*: a blue 'riot-control vehicle' (popularly called a *one-tonne* in Kashmiri), a Jammu and Kashmir police gypsy that is ironically called *rakshak* (Hindi, Hd; protector), rocks of various sizes scattered on the inner lanes, shut shops, and a crowd of people looking worriedly in the direction of the *jung* from an eerily quiet street. The smell and sounds of the exploding tear gas shells were now interlaced with each other. Apart from the cluster of people waiting for the dead body, there was presence

of trouble in the form of a police gypsy (*rakshak*) that was attempting to stop people from congregating. In response to this, some young boys were pelting stones at the *rakshak* and, in return, a multi-barrel launcher fixed atop the gypsy aimed tear gas shells indiscriminately at the protestors and at the mourners arriving for the funeral, resulting in chaos as people ran away from these projectiles of exploding shells. The earlier muted explosions now became a visual sight: a loud and bright flame of fire that burns feebly before it transforms into curls of smoke in the air and spreads its toxicity in the entire neighborhood. In his work on the Anthropology of the Senses, Howes and Classen (1991) argue that sensory perception and the relationship between the senses can be a means of ethnographic enquiry, rather than only being an object of study. By drawing an association between the senses, the paper does not focus on the usage of tear gas shell as an object of study. Rather, it explores the question: how does the sensory toxic world created by tear gas shelling re-orient social relationships and everyday embodied experiences in Downtown? The sense of smell, sense of sound, and sense of sight were all collaborating at the site of the funeral, manifesting the shifting relations of senses or what Howes and Classen (1991) call the "sociality of senses" to understand the social world, the habitus, of Downtown Srinagar.

But what happens in the face of an undeniable eventuality when the gas starts permeating inside homes? The house near the funeral site was saturated with pungent gas. It was in this toxic atmosphere of continuous coughing, burning sensation in eyes, heaving and covering of mouths with *dupattas* (Hd; long scarf) that members of this house consumed their *iftaar* (Km; evening meal consumed after fasting during Ramzaan) meal. This is a telling example of how the social is mediated and saturated by political conflict on an everyday basis. Since the Police Control Room (PCR) refused to hand over the dead body till next morning, I decided to leave, but the women in this house gave me some time-tested guidelines on how to get rid of the toxic fumes:

Go home and take a cold water bath. Immediately wash all your clothes in cold water because the gas tends to stick to your clothes and to your body. The breathing will slowly ease itself once you leave from here, so don't be scared (Jhajhi, housewife, 14 June 2016).

On the way back, the site of *jung* looked transformed and contrastingly quiet, with remains of only splintered stones, phallus shaped shells, and empty tear gas canisters lined on the roads.

The reason I give a detailed ethnographic account of this funeral site is to understand and ask: who does the tear gas target? Is it aimed for both the protestors and the mourners? If not, how and where do we draw the thin line? In his lecture at the University of Valencia, Bergen (2018) remarks on the ontology of gas and comments on how it is significantly different from firearms because gas is a “*silent, indiscriminate killer*” (ibid, emphasis mine). He says,

by using gas one did not attack an enemy, but humanity as a whole. It shows that soldiers were not horrified by gas simply because it killed. Bullets and grenades did that too. Gas symbolized the *dehumanizing nature of the war* more than the deafening bombing and shelling they were used to. Silent as an assassin, it killed and wounded insidiously, randomly, never quickly and painlessly (ibid, emphasis mine).

It can be argued through my ethnography that gas is not “a silent... killer” as claimed by Bergen, but that in the trajectory of tear gas shelling or firing of tear gas canisters there are multiple sensory stages: the sound of explosion is the initial stage that can only be heard in the adjoining vicinities of *jung*, followed by somatic interface of the shell or canister with the human body that can cause deaths and injuries, and, lastly, the pervasive smell of gas (without the sound) that insidiously spreads far into the homes where people are often left confused about why they are feeling choked and wonder “what is that burning sensation?” This disproportionate use of tear gas shells as discussed above implies that, in a political conflict, “entire populations are the target of the sovereign” (Mbembe 2003: 30) and can be dehumanized. In the next section I attempt to understand the situated-ness of a person in this historically dense place of surveillance, fear, and violence by navigating it through the category of suffocation.

### **‘Daem’: Living with suffocation**

On 17 October 2018, a video<sup>17</sup> emerged on social media from the locality of Fateh Kadal in Downtown Srinagar. An old woman in a turquoise-colored *pheran* (Km; cloak) was seen slapping her chest and coughing relentlessly as she choked on the fumes of tear gas and pepper gas shells fired near her home during an encounter (Ashiq 2018) between the armed forces and three local militants from Downtown. She spat out occasionally to get rid of the toxic gas that must have stuck to her lungs, asphyxiating and poisoning her in her own home. This physiological response to the smell of toxic gas experienced for a

sustained period of time has become an affliction that has acquired a socially acceptable phrase: *daem goev* (Km; feeling suffocated or choked). While mostly referred to as a phrase which can either literally mean that it’s too hot or used metaphorically to convey sadness or loss, it is now interlaced within the folds of the militarized-social vocabulary in which masses of people inside their homes experience suffocation as an ordinary everyday practice.

*Daem*, or the inability to breathe (even if for a stipulated period of time every week), is an aberration that has now acquired a routine texture and is enmeshed into the social life in Kashmir. Sitting inside their homes in Downtown, people with asthma and other respiratory and cardiac conditions pre-emptively wear face masks on ‘restriction’ days before the gas penetrates the capillaries of everyday life. In localities where there is a strong resistance movement such as Nowatta, Malaratta, Saraf Kadal, Razez Kadal, and Fateh Kadal, people breathe tear gas fumes routinely, like a weekly (or sometimes daily) diet prescription. The people of Downtown have now incorporated this exceptional experience of *daem* in their everyday lives as an affliction that they have to live with, as a phenomenological sign of political conflict. It becomes an affliction not only with regard to the public health scare that it generates or immediate loss of life due to toxic gas inhalation, but also at the level of embodied affects associated with these violent memories, such as shuddering at the sound of crackers (as discussed in the beginning of this article). During a research interview with a man who worked in the local Gousia Hospital in Khanyar, he informed me that,

In the hospital we burn tyres and sacks to negate the effect of pepper or tear gas fumes on the patients who are already in fragile conditions. Sometimes we get old people who have developed respiratory<sup>18</sup> complexities after years of inhaling toxic tear gas fumes (Asif, 05 June 2016).

This proliferation of the toxic gas from the site of explosion into random homes of Downtown captures an inherent aporia in the functioning of this weapon (like many other chemical weapons): that even though it is claimed to be a ‘safe’ riot-control mechanism, it cannot identify or target specific rioting and dissenting protestors on the streets. There will always be an *excess* created by this weapon, because after the explosion of a tear gas shell, the gas expands into the space and is used as paraphernalia of modern warfare for en masse control of the civilian population. By not defining who the enemy is, it targets humanity as a whole, sometimes killing directly through

its canisters and sometimes killing slowly through its sheer toxicity. The Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), in 1993, prohibited the use of such chemicals as a method of warfare, but Crowley (2016) states that “the convention permits the use of such chemicals for “law enforcement including domestic riot control purposes,” provided they are used in “types and quantities consistent with such purposes” (ibid: 25). But how does one determine the appropriate usage of riot-control agents? Feigenbaum (2017), in her dense compilation on the history and politics of tear gas, captures this aporia or paradox<sup>19</sup> in tear gas usage that can never neatly tread the precarious line between proportionate and disproportionate, controlled and excessive, non-lethal and lethal. She critiques the framework of tear gas as a “less lethal” chemical and says that: “Less Lethal’ is no longer a technical term but a vision of how much torment a body can take, of how close someone can come to death without dying” (ibid: 129). This paradox has echoed in the voices of other scholars primarily because the military strategy to “restrict, intimidate or punish those involved in non-violent dissent the world over” (Crowley 2016: 25) has led to repetitive scenarios wherein civilians are killed through what Graham (2010) calls “non-lethal lethalties” (ibid: 244). While Feigenbaum focuses on tear gas as the object of her analysis, I attempt to locate the body at the centre of the tear gas shelling as the primary line of investigation.

Foregrounding this paradox was one of the central concerns of this paper, because it exposes the fact that what is considered to be excess (the collateral damage of a chemical weapon) is in fact innate design through which populations can be controlled not only by “non-lethal” lethalties but also by subjugation to routine dehumanization and vulnerability. In Kashmir, the use of tear gas does not only cause long-term vulnerabilities of lung and respiratory diseases, but also leads to more lethal scenarios. This has happened when a tear gas shell hits the brain, the chest, or any other body part of a civilian. The tear-gas-induced killings of Tufail Ahmed Mattoo<sup>20</sup> and Wamiq Farooq<sup>21</sup> in the summer of 2010, of Gowhar Nazir in 2014 (Parvaiz: 2019), of Irfan Ahmed in 2016 (Yousuf: 2016), and of Israr Khan, Fehmeeda, and Mohammad Ayoub Khan (Parvaiz 2019), (Youuf 2016), and (Rehbar 2020) in 2019 set a precedent and necessitate a deeper probe into the texture of social life in Kashmir, wherein innocent civilians can be killed through the usage of “non-lethal” weapons. I argue that these killings were not an aberration, a misfired exception, an unfortunate accident; rather, what is being posited is that the potential for such death is routine and inscribed in the very social life of Downtown. They are a part of the complex structures of surveillance that are designed to kill, injure, maim, burn,

and choke. The attempt here is not to enumerate killings by “non-lethal” weapons but to go back to the original inquiry: can we navigate a conflict space through smells, sounds, and suffocations created by a tear gas shell?

During the course of field-work in Downtown Srinagar, I have seen many homes where tear gas would seep in insidiously and unbeknownst to people. During one such research interview in the same Fateh Kadal locality on 16 October 2015, the small kitchen room where we were sitting became filled with invisible toxic fumes to such an extent that there was a burning sensation in the throat and eyes as we spoke. Before we could figure out that it was due to tear gas, we heard coughing voices from the adjoining houses, and soon the entire neighbourhood started choking on the gas. Since this house was situated far away from the main streets where *jung* usually took place, there were no associated sounds of shelling. Therefore, the sudden overpowering sense of suffocation or *daem* connects us back with the idea of the paradox of tear gas usage that can never neatly tread the precarious line between protestor and non-protestor, proportionate and disproportionate, controlled and excessive. It can never so effectively differentiate between the dissenter on the street and the non-dissenter in the home, the *azaadi-pasand* home and the non *azaadi-pasand* home. The woman who I was interviewing commented on this bizarre experience of inhaling gas by saying that “for this reason one window of our room is always covered with a thick blanket so that gas cannot permeate inside completely but it still enters through the air vent in the kitchen and space between the doors” (Manshah, 16 October 2015). But the gas always enters. While most of the scholarship on chemical gases as riot control weapons attempts to reckon with the danger and injury that such weapons perform on the streets and on the protestors’ bodies, in her work on riot control mechanisms of the militarized police in Zimbabwe, Mudiwa writes,

Sometimes you don’t even smell the tear gas, you just feel your throat getting tight and your eyes stinging. Then you know that the tear gas truck, the vehicle that links your police to militarized forces across the globe in circuits of violence, has preceded you, pre-emptively choking the life out of anyone who enters the streets (2017: 84).

However, in this movement of tear gas from the streets towards intimate spaces I have made an enquiry into the transforming habitus that is constantly affecting the circuits of power in the social. The production, dispersion and circulation of toxic gas from the site of the

explosion to infiltrating the homes of people is a recurring modality of warfare in Kashmir. I am trying to explore those moments of suspension of time when suddenly the gas overtakes and saturates an intimate space. It is this moment of precarity that I have delineated through the above ethnographic accounts. The lived category of *daem* allows us to explore the precariousness of space through the embodiment of violence that these bodies are habituated to expect in the everyday. It generates what Bourdieu (1991) calls the habitus,

a set of dispositions that which incline agents to act and react in certain ways. The dispositions generate practices, perceptions and attitudes... (that) literally mould the body and become second nature...and unavoidably reflect the social conditions within which they were acquired (Bourdieu 1991: 12).

The disposition to pre-emptively prepare oneself each Friday morning for explosions and toxic gas, to prepare all the meals of the day in advance, to leave the house before day break to reach the office, to keep masks at home and to sit normally in the house even as the gas starts filling up an enclosed space, are all manifestations of the idea of a 'paradigm of embodiment' (Csordas 1994). The paradigm of embodiment<sup>22</sup> implies that embodied experience is the starting point for analyzing human participation in a cultural world. Therefore, to understand the political conflict in Kashmir it is critical to consider the experiences of the human body at the center of the conflict as the starting point for analysis. The idea of the habitus as embodiment "looks at the way in which dispositions are not only reflected through words, thoughts and feelings but also through the body or what Bourdieu calls "bodily hexis"<sup>23</sup> which is how our conditioning comes to be reflected in us through how we act and carry ourselves" (Ngarachu 2014). These signs or dispositions orient bodies, their mobilities, and movements in the old city of Downtown.

## Conclusion

*Tear gas must also be considered in its material form—as an object designed to torment people, to break their spirits, to cause physical and psychological damage.*

(Feigenbaum 2017: 137)

On 21 August 2016, the summer uprising had entered its forty-fourth day in Kashmir when a young boy, Irfan Ahmed, died in my fieldsite in Malaratta, Downtown Srinagar after he was hit by a tear gas shell fired by the Jammu and Kashmir Police. In the dense and narrow lanes

of Downtown Srinagar where the precarious line between protestors and non-protestors is hard to draw, the ubiquitous and everyday usage of tear gas shell creates "death worlds" (Mbembe 2003: 40) where people are forced to inhale excess gas and continue to live within these toxic spaces. In any political conflict, while the focus remains on spectacular events and accords, it becomes crucial to locate the human body that is compelled to live in this toxic geography where violence has been normalized and becomes a disposition of life, a new habitus, a new affliction. In this paper, I work towards foregrounding that there are no thresholds of violence in Kashmir, that there is always an excess that cannot be rationalized and justified. I use the ethnographic case of the funeral as a site of *jung* to explicate how individuals live with unabated violence in the most militarized place in the world. To anthropologically understand this locally performed *jung*, I borrow the idea of the 'battlefield' as used by Mahlke (2014) wherein he talks about the expansion and reduction of the 'battlefield' to transnational spaces as well as to the microcosm of the individual in his or her private environment. He says,

the conventional vocabulary of war (war, battlefield, enemy, ally, attack, defence, frontline) is not abandoned but henceforth used in a metonymic sense. Unlimited metonymization enables 'battlefields' to be concentrated semantically into single bodies and at the same time expanded transnationally to a vaguely defined territory: "*the battlefield today is no longer restricted. It is limitless; it can encompass entire nations. The inhabitant in his home is the centre of the conflict*" (Mahlke 2014: 109, emphasis added).

In this paper, I have foregrounded exactly this: "*The inhabitant in his home is the centre of the conflict.*" I have explored it through the concept of embodiment and suffocation where violence does not remain an external force to witness, to mourn, and to withdraw from; instead, violence becomes the memory of body and is tied to memories of other associated senses (of sound and smell). However, the somatic and embodied relationship of individuals with this toxic gas does not only temporarily suffocate and make the body shudder, it also kills. While some tear gas related deaths are denied the cause in their death certificates, there are others whose relationship with this toxic gas attains a permanence when the cause of death is clearly mentioned. In Fehmeeda's case, the death certificate reads: "*Patient is suspected to have inhaled some toxic gas (alleged tear gas)*" (Rehbar 2020, emphasis added).

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## Endnotes

1. In the Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) report on tear gas, "Tear gas is a term used to refer to a group of toxic chemical agents that disable people exposed to them by irritating the lungs, skin, or eyes. These agents are also called lachrymatory agents, peripheral chemosensory irritants (PCSI), riot control agents and harassing agents, and qualify as "less-lethal" weapons. Toxic lachrymatory chemical agents are among the most commonly used types of riot control agents. PHR uses the term "toxic chemical agents" instead of tear gas in this report to underscore the toxicity of these chemicals. "Tear gas," implying that these chemical agents merely cause tearing, is a misnomer" (Atkinson and Sollom 2012: 8-9).
2. The phrase *azaadi pasand* home roughly translates as freedom-loving home, implying homes of those people in Downtown Srinagar that are supportive of the right to self-determination in Kashmir. I argue that in a place like Downtown Srinagar where tear gas shelling routinely paralyzes people, their movement, and even their breathing, how do we discern who is a political protestor and who is not? The diffusion of the toxic gas into air cannot distinguish between the two and this contradicts the claim that tear gas is only used for riot-control in Kashmir.
3. *Non-azaadi pasand* are those who do not claim the right to self-determination. (By saying so I am not implying either of these homes should be attacked by tear gas, on the contrary I am deflating the claim that chemical and other weapons are used specifically for rioters in Kashmir)
4. This is a research informant from Kashmir whose name has been changed for the purpose of confidentiality.
5. Frooti is a popular mango-flavoured drink in India that is sold in small Tetra Pak that could emit an explosion like sound if the empty carton is crushed.
6. This doctoral fieldwork was discontinuously conducted from 2015 to 2017, primarily in certain pockets of Downtown Srinagar from Khanqah to Nowatta.
7. Nowatta is the business and political centre of Downtown Srinagar which has the largest mosque of Kashmir, Jama Masjid. It is considered to be the most vociferous and active in the resistance movement against the Indian state.
8. The political movement for self-determination in Kashmir is referred to as *tehrrek*, an Urdu word for movement. It is popularly referred to as the time period of the 1990s when the armed movement began in Kashmir but it can encapsulate the entire temporal frame of the movement from the 1931 uprising against the Dogra Maharaja to 2019 when the Indian state revoked article 370 and stripped Kashmir of its autonomy.
9. While an array of non/less lethal chemical weapons have entered the domain of military and paramilitary techniques of policing, tear gas shell has been used as an "ideal-type" of "non-lethal" weapons (NLW); a benign and a humane "non-lethal" chemical weapon. The widespread usage of this gas in quelling civilian protests as well as in military warfare is not new or unique. The Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) of 1993 defines riot-control agent, such as tear gas, as "any chemical not listed in a schedule which can produce sensory irritation or disabling physical effects rapidly in humans and which disappear within a short period of time following termination and exposure" (Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons 2020).
10. Feldman in his work on modern warfare and political visibility argues that the war on terror, post 9/11, was fought as a preventive defence because somebody could potentially hurt you as opposed to somebody is hurting you (Feldman 2015).

11. 1931 marks an exceptional rupture in the history of Kashmir because it saw the first organised uprising against the atrocities of the Dogra Maharajas. This uprising mobilized around the Shah-e-Hamdan shrine in Khanqah locality of Downtown Srinagar where speeches against the oppressive Dogra rule were made and led to the arrest of Abdul Qadeer. Subsequently on 13 July 1931, the Dogra forces killed 22 Kashmiris and it is since then marked as Martyrs' Day (*Youm-e-Shahadat*) in Kashmir.

12. A militant organization, Hizbul Mujahideen, was formed in early 1990s to join the armed movement for self-determination in Kashmir.

13. These five police stations of Maharajganj, Safa Kadal, Rainawari, Nowatta and Khanyar, also referred to as "interior city" have been primary areas of Downtown Srinagar where strict restrictions or curfews are imposed routinely.

14. In the same interview it was also informed by the CRPF Inspector General that "approximately one lakh-plus tear-gas shells were used in 2016 and since then around 70,000 have been used on an average every year. We must be the biggest users of munitions in the country" (Ganai 2019).

15. The everyday contestation or combat between the stone pelters and the paramilitary/Jammu & Kashmir Police is popularly referred to as *jung* (war).

16. Moharram is one of the four sacred months of the Islamic Calendar. The 10<sup>th</sup> day of Moharram is a period of mourning for the Shia Muslim community that commemorates the death of Imam Hussain and his family (the grandson of Prophet Mohammad). In Kashmir, Moharram processions have been banned since 1990 when the armed movement began because the state government considers it not only a religious assembly but also a political one that can lead to pro-freedom rallies. Since then curfew like restrictions are imposed during Moharram, however areas in Srinagar such as Rainawari, Saida Kadal, Hassanabad, Hawal and Alamgiri Bazaar where there is a Shia majority are allowed to take processions within these routes, without entering the main roads.

17. Bilal Ahmad, "An elderly Kashmiri woman breathing her lungs out as she got affected by the pepper gas fired by Indian policemen near the gun battle site at Fateh Kadal area of Downtown Srinagar, the summer capital of Indian administered Kashmir on 17 October 2018. One civilian, 2 militants and a policeman has been killed in an encounter. Dozens of journalists were also beaten by Government forces while performing their professional services near the gunfight spot" Facebook, 17 October 2018. <<https://www.facebook.com/bilal.ah.005/videos/2182268445356170/>>

18. The IndiaSpend report published on Non-Lethal Crowd Control Methods, provides some statistics about injuries, deaths and health hazards caused by these weapons. It says, "among our interviewees, 16 developed exacerbation of their underlying respiratory disorders and one patient with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) developed a severe exacerbation of COPD immediately following exposure (She died in the hospital, three days later)," the SKIMS study said. "Symptoms lasted for one day to a week (median 24 hours), and in 94 percent of re-exposed individuals, symptoms recurred with similar severity on re-exposure" (Parvaiz 2019).

19. Feigenbaum (2017) mentions that the Himsworth Inquiry report (recently declassified), "justifies tear gas by treating it as a drug. Using studies done between the 1940s and 1980s, they came up with a dosage level at which tear gas becomes toxic. As long as the amount used falls under that standardized dosage level, it is considered not to be harmful or lethal. The problem with this model is it assumes that a dosage of tear gas can be somehow perfectly administered. This is deeply problematic in a real life setting" (Yildiz 2018).

20. In the summer of 2010, a civilian uprising against the Indian state started when a tear gas shell fired by Jammu and Kashmir police killed 17 year old Tufail Ahmed Mattoo near Gani Memorial Stadium, Rajouri Kadal when he was on his way back home from the tuition on 11 June 2010. A tear gas canister hit his head, fractured his skull and the bone fragments pierced his brain causing an immediate death.

21. Wamiq Farooq, a resident of Rainawari area of Downtown Srinagar and a class seven student, was killed by Jammu and Kashmir Police near the Gani Memorial Stadium after a tear gas shell was fired at him on 31 January 2010.

22. Csordas explicates embodiment as "an indeterminate methodological field defined by perceptual experience and the mode of presence and engagement in the world" (Csordas 1994: 12).

23. "Bodily hexis is political mythology realized, *embodied*, turned into a permanent disposition, a durable way of standing, speaking, walking and thereby of feeling and thinking" (Bourdieu 1991: 13).

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