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Losing Trust

Altaf Tyrewala's *No God in Sight* and Githa Hariharan's *In Times of Siege* as Threat Communication

This article discusses two Indian English novels, Githa Hariharan's *In Times of Siege* and Altaf Tyrewala's *No God in Sight*, first published in 2003 and 2005, respectively, both of which deal with the rise of Hindu nationalism in India at the turn of the millennium. The novels can be described as 'crisis narratives' in the sense that they represent in narrative form what the authors perceive as a serious political crisis in which trust is lost. Since both texts deal with the crisis not in retrospect, but at a moment when it is still unfolding, the texts can be regarded more specifically as instances of 'threat communication,' a communicative act that identifies a threat to an existing order. Although both novels negotiate the same social crisis, they speak from different vantage points and foreground distinctive aspects and perspectives. Thus, trust, its absence, and its contraposition, distrust, are shown to play different roles in the two narratives.

1. Introduction

While narratives of catastrophe typically tell of the unfolding and aftermath of major and highly dramatic events that bring about radical and irreversible change for the worse, crisis narratives tend to follow a different plot pattern. At the moment of crisis, a catastrophic turn of events may seem possible or even likely, but it may also still be averted, so that an event in the narratological sense (according to which events lead to a change of state) may never even occur. In keeping with the term's medical origins, where 'crisis' describes the point in the development of a disease at which the outcome of the disease is about to be decided (Koselleck 2006, 360), the figurative use of the term 'crisis' in other contexts refers, according to the OED, to "a state of affairs in which a decisive change for better or worse is imminent" ("Crisis"). Crisis situations are states of suspension, characterised by the anticipation of some terrible event, rather than its actual occurrence. Thus, in contrast to catastrophes, crises "tend to not only defy direct observation, but also elude attempts at representing them" (Nünning 2012, 67). Crises therefore make for very different stories than do disasters or catastrophes, with their obvious narrativity.[1]

This may be particularly true if the crisis to be depicted is first and foremost a crisis of trust, since trust is not only an internal state or attitude, but unlike other internal states (e.g. emotions such as anger, love or fear), trust has no specific form nor conventionalised expression. In fact, as Baier (1986, 234) points out, trust is hardly ever perceived as long as it is there: "Most of us notice a given

form of trust most easily after its sudden demise or severe injury. We inhabit a climate of trust as we inhabit an atmosphere and notice it as we notice air, only when it becomes scarce or polluted." This article reads two contemporary Indian English novels – Altaf Tyrewala's *No God in Sight* (2005) and Githa Hariharan's *In Times of Siege* (2003) – as studies of such a sudden demise of social trust and its impact on different sections of Indian society. More specifically, the novels, which are both set in the early 2000s, problematise the then relatively recent rise of Hindu nationalism in India as a national crisis, which, though not explicitly named, is clearly presented as a crisis of trust.

Central to my analysis are the concepts of 'threatened order' and 'threat communication' as developed in the context of the interdisciplinary Collaborative Research Center (CRC) 'Threatened Orders – Societies under Stress,' located at the University of Tübingen. For the purposes of the following analysis, the concept of 'threatened order' will serve to specify the concept of crisis as a social (rather than, for example, an individual or natural) phenomenon. Thus 'crisis' is the more general concept, 'threatened order' the more specific: while all threatened orders are in crisis, not all crises are threats to an existing order. The concept of 'threat communication' foregrounds the fact that 'a threat' – like any crisis – is discursively constructed and negotiated.

My main claim in this article is that the two novels *No God in Sight* and *In Times of Siege* can be understood as instances of threat communication and that they actively encourage their readers to see the recent developments in Indian politics as a threat to the nation's social order. In order to clarify and illustrate this point, my analysis will proceed as follows: section 2 elaborates on the idea of literary fiction as a medium of threat communication before section 3 hones in on the immediate context of the novels' publication and the perceived threat – the rise of Hindu nationalism in India – as a crisis of trust. Sections 4 and 5 then turn to the two novels: *No God in Sight*, which foregrounds the Muslim perspective, is read as an attempt to create awareness for what it means to live in a society in which one is habitually the object of suspicion and distrust. The meta-historiographic novel *In Times of Siege*, written from a Hindu perspective, on the other hand, urges its readers to be vigilant and distrustful of Hindu nationalist politics. So while trust is something precious and lost in one novel, it is something that cannot be afforded in the other.

2. Literary Fiction as Medium of Threat Communication

The members of the research centre 'Threatened Orders – Societies under Stress' work with a fairly general definition of order as an

> arrangement of elements related to each other in certain ways, structuring social groups or even societies as a whole. Such arrangements [...] comprise not only networks of human and non-human actors, technologies, and inscriptions but also established patterns of everyday practices and all that is 'taken for granted' within a given social context. (Ossa / Wilde 2021, 2)

Such an order is not given once and for all, but must be enacted. And in its enactments it can be both confirmed and modified (Frie / Meier 2014, 2). It can also be threatened by internal or external forces; or rather, it can be experienced as being threatened by such forces, since Frie and Meier define that an "order is threatened when actors come to the conclusion that options for action are becoming uncertain, that behavioural expectations and routines are in question and that they are unlikely to be able to rely on each other now or in the near future."[2] The shift in focus from an objectively extant threat to the perception of a situation as a threat corresponds to A. Nünning's (2012, 71) description of crisis phenomena as discursively constructed: "Since the identification of a crisis [...] depends greatly on the perspective of the observer, crises and catastrophes can be described as attributions of sense and meaning which are observer- and perspective-dependent."[3]

Understanding the identification of a situation as a crisis or a threat as observer-dependent foregrounds, on the one hand, that divergent assessments of a situation are not only possible but also likely. (The forces behind a threat, if they are human and hence capable of self-reflection, are unlikely to see themselves as a threat.) On the other hand, and this is the more important point here, seeing the identification of a situation as a crisis as observer-dependent also foregrounds the aspect of *experience* and what it feels like to be in a crisis situation. Especially where trust is concerned, such a shift of perspective from the objective to the subjective is highly significant, since trust is based on a subjective assessment of the trustworthiness of people and institutions. When a situation is perceived as a crisis or a threat, habits of trust and reliance (a distinction I will return to in the next section) will inevitably change; and vigilance and distrust are more than likely to increase in crisis mode.

In order to approach threatened orders from the perspective of the people living in these orders, the Tübingen research centre proposes to work with the concept of 'threat communication,'[4] which refers to the discursive engagement with a threat. Because the perception that an order is threatened tends to lead to attempts to come to terms with the situation and prevent the worst through threat communication,[5] the existence of threat communication can be an indicator of a threatened order (Fechner et al. 2014, 150). According to Fechner et al., threat communication has a number of characteristics: It identifies the status quo of the threatened order and a source of threat, it develops a scenario of an uncertain future, in which the existing order is suspended, and it recommends a course of action.[6] In addition to these content-related criteria, threat communication is characterised as being emotionally charged and conveying a sense of urgency (Frie / Meier 2014, 4).

Although factual representation may be the first choice in a situation of crisis, the threat to an order can also be communicated in fictional forms. Literature in general, and fiction in particular, has always been an instrument for reflecting on reality. Often, and for obvious reasons, such reflections take place retrospectively. Writing fiction takes time and to write a novel that engages with current debates is to run the risk of falling behind in topicality by the time the novel is

published. Moreover, the 'meaning' of an event often changes in retrospect, as narrative sense-making depends on endings, on the outcome of events. The development of events in the real world may therefore overtake the fictional events. However, what Meiner and Veel (2012, 1) call the "cultural life" of crises, their representation in different media, includes not only forms developed from "calm and composed retrospective comprehension," but also more 'muddled' negotiations. Texts, whose authors aim to influence the development of events in the real world and the outcome of a perceived crisis, are instances of crisis communication and can be analysed accordingly.[7]

3. The Rise of Hindu Nationalism in India as a Crisis of Trust

"What makes communities that have lived together for years suddenly discover a latent hatred for each other?" This question not only concerns the protagonist of Githa Hariharan's (2004, 132) novel *In Times of Siege*, but also the many sociologists, political scientists or psychologists who deal with intercommunal conflicts in India. Since as early as the nineteenth century, violent clashes have repeatedly occurred in India between the different religious groups, first and foremost between the religious majority of Hindus, who make up about 79.8 per cent of the population, and the Muslims, who are the largest religious minority in India with a demographic share of 14.2 per cent.[8] However, the incidence of confrontation has increased since India's independence: The atrocities committed in the course of the partition of India and Pakistan were initially followed by a phase of relatively peaceful coexistence. Since the 1960s, however, violent confrontations have occurred at regular intervals. Particularly devastating and politically controversial cases were the riots following the destruction of the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya in 1992 (Bombay Riots) and the 2002 Gujarat Riots, which left more than a thousand people dead.[9]

The theme of communal conflicts has a long tradition in Indo-English fiction. In particular, the traumatic events in the course of the partition of India and Pakistan have often featured centrally in fiction, so that the 'novel of partition' can be considered an important subgenre of post-Independence Indian English novels (Agrawal / Sinha 2003, 130). Among the most prominent examples of the genre are Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956) and the novel *Ice-Candy Man* (1988) by the Pakistani author Bapsi Sidhwa. While these texts are historical novels that seek to shed light on why so much violence occurred in 1947, later texts increasingly focus on more contemporary riots. Novels such as Amit Chaudhuri's *Freedom Song* (1998), Shashi Deshpande's *Small Remedies* (2000), Shashi Tharoor's *Riot* (2001), Raj Kamal Jha's *Fireproof* (2006), M.G. Vassanji's *The Assassin's Song* (2007) or Githa Hariharan's *Fugitive Histories* (2009) seek explanations for the confrontations in Gujarat and Bombay / Mumbai not so much in the past, as in the political developments in India since the 1980s.

This period saw a change in the political climate, reflected in the rise of the right-wing conservative Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the so-called 'Sangh Parivar' (the group of Hindu political organisations, to which the BJP belongs) more generally. The BJP, which currently – since 2014 – forms the Indian government, was founded in 1980 and was first elected as the largest party in the Lok Sabha, India's lower house, in 1996. The BJP then led a right-wing coalition government between 1998 and 2004 – the period in which the two novels under study are set. The BJP is the political representation of the so-called Hindutva movement, which strives for a Hindu-nationalist orientation of India as a counter-design to Gandhi's and Nehru's secular state model. The demographic superiority of the Hindus, as well as the anteriority and historical rootedness of the Hindu religion on the Indian subcontinent, are used by Hindu nationalists as arguments to define India as Hindu in culture, thus undermining India's constitutional conception of itself as a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and religiously diverse nation.[10]

The rise of Hindu nationalism is therefore perceived by many not only as a factor encouraging communal strife, but also, more generally, as a threat to India's secularism and social unity. While the Hindutva movement brings unity to one specific group of Indians, Indian Hindus, it undermines the social cohesion of the larger nation: The "'new Hindu identity' that the *Sangh parivar* wishes to foster is based on a series of binary oppositions between Hindus and others (usually Muslims)" (Basu / Subrahmanyan 1996b, 6) and thus encourages a compartmentalised view of Indian society.[11] If a nation is an "imagined political community," whose cohesion hinges on all members carrying an "image of their communion," characterised by "a deep, horizontal comradeship" (Anderson 2006, 6), Hindu nationalist ideology must be seen as casting some members' legitimacy into doubt and introducing a hierarchy of citizens. Non-Hindus may not be expelled outright, but they are downgraded from full members to merely tolerated associate members. What is at stake is no less than the idea of India, over which – so the editors of a recently published anthology of political non-fiction – a "battle" is currently being fought:

> This nation is an idea [...]. Out of this idea grew a rights-based Constitution that steers the nation so all its people can live as equal citizens. But over the last few years, there has been a battle going on in this country. [...] We can now see two signposts as we enter the Indian nation. One reads: *Battling India*, and it knows only one language, of coercion and plunder. The other says, boldly, [...] *Battling for India* [...]. (Hariharan / Yusufji 2019, xi)

Hindu nationalism is seen by Hariharan (who is also the author of one of the novels discussed below) and Yusufji as a threat to the existing social order, an order which they urge needs defending. Their anthology is a case of threat communication articulating the perceived threat, and an attempt to 'fight back.'

Hindu nationalist politics have an impact on inter-communal trust relationships within society. Indeed, 'communalism,' as the South Asian variant of religious factionalism is called, has been defined as the "*breakdown of ties of trust* and civil interaction between people of different religious denominations" (Kaur 2009, 61, emphasis added). Many theories of trust distinguish between 'trust' and

'reliance,' with trust being the more specific category. Annette Baier, for example, argues that trust is a specific form of reliance, a "reliance on another's good will" (Baier 1986, 234). Other forms of reliance, in contrast, do not presuppose goodwill, but only predictability. They are therefore related to Luhmann's concept of 'familiarity,' which he describes as a state in which the world is perceived as "indisputably self-evident" (2017, 22).[12] This state "makes it possible to entertain relatively reliable expectations," be they positive or negative, but does not require any particular "trust in one's fellow human being" (Luhmann 2017, 22, 21).[13] Both trust and reliance can be affected by movements such as Hindutva: One's trust in the goodwill of other people towards oneself can be shaken, as can one's reliance on forms of behaviour previously taken for granted. Where trust is shaken and reliance seems unwise, distrust (or mistrust) takes their place.[14]

Distrust is not simply lack of trust, but goes along with suspicion (Kramer 2004, 136) and is of "an emotionally tense and often frantic character which distinguishes it from trust" (Luhmann 2017, 79). Studies have shown that a "categorization of individuals into distinct groups," which is what communalism in general and Hindu nationalism in particular do, "can lead individuals to perceive out-group members as less trustworthy, less honest, and less cooperative than other members of their own group" (Kramer 2004, 138) and thus creates distrust. Such distrust can operate at different levels: It can affect relationships between people who know each other personally, for example neighbours or colleagues. *Train to Pakistan* and *Ice-Candy Man*, the two novels of partition already mentioned above, focus particularly on this interpersonal aspect by showing their readers the gradual erosion of trust in long-standing, close-knit interfaith communities. But, as the analysis of *In Times of Siege* and *No God in Sight* will illustrate, the emergence of distrust can be more anonymous, so that distrust is directed at people we do not know well or even at all.

Eric M. Uslaner's distinction between three different forms of trust in societies is particularly helpful in describing both the impact of Hindu nationalism in India and, more specifically, the depiction of (dis)trust relationships in the two novels. Uslaner (2018, 4) distinguishes between 1) social or generalised trust, 2) particularised trust and 3) political trust:

> Social trust stem[s] from socialization through one's parents, not from group membership or from government policies. Social trust, or generalized trust as it is also known in the literature, is distinguished from both particularized trust and political trust. Particularized trust is faith *only* in people like yourself. And political trust is confidence in institutions such as the executive, the legislature, the judiciary, the bureaucracy, and the police.

While generalised trust "involves the feeling that most people can be trusted," particularised trust is much more selective and exclusive in the sense that it depends "upon distinctions between in-groups and out-groups" (Zmerli / Newton 2017, 105). If particularised trust is "based upon ties to one's own in-group" (Uslaner 2018, 4), the key question is that of whom people consider to be part of their 'in-group' and 'like themselves.' Most commonly, particularised trust is thought of as trust in one's family and friends, but "it is often also the term used

to refer to the trust that extends between members of ethnic groups" (Lenard / Miller 2018, 58). The term can thus also be applied to the trust relationships between members of the same ethno-religious community. I would like to suggest that a further application is possible: If particularised trust is defined as in-group trust which one has towards people one perceives to be like oneself, its reach could extend even further. Following Anderson's definition of the nation as a community to which its members feel connected, particularised trust should also potentially be effective towards the members of a nation with which one identifies, – regardless of their religious and ethnic background. When particularised trust is conceived of in this way, the two competing models of Indian nationhood – Indian secularism on the one hand and Hindu nationalism on the other – can be understood as encouraging different ranges of particularised trust. The scope of particularised trust is strategically narrowed down in the Hindu nationalist framework. While particularised trust is always restricted to a specific group, such a restriction can become problematic when trust not only ends at the group boundary but is replaced by "particularised distrust towards 'the other'" (Bilgic 2019, 1293) in the interactions with the world beyond (cf. Kramer 2004, 138).

4. Lack of Trust in *No God in Sight*

No God in Sight is not a novel *about* sectarian conflict, but, more generally, about life in Mumbai at the turn of the millennium, in which, however, sectarian conflict is one recurring feature.[15] The novel has no protagonist nor a progressive plot, but consists of a series of 46 loosely connected chapters, the shortest of which is only one and a half lines long. Almost every chapter presents the perspective of a new character, mostly in their own voice, with only a few chapters resorting to a heterodiegetic narrator. The character whose voice is presented in each chapter usually features in the previous one, so that the word is passed from one character on to the next, much as the baton in a relay race. The form thus allows for narrative coherence while depicting a radically disjointed society in correspondingly fragmented form. As Egbert (2008, 38) points out, coherence is additionally created by Mumbai as the common setting for most of the vignettes and by a temporally and thematically circular structure: While time generally moves forward from chapter to chapter, the narrative jumps back in time after chapter seven, allowing the narrative to end where and when it began. In line with Meiner and Veel's (2012, 2) observation that "established patterns of representations" fail to meet "the anomaly of […] crises," so that new forms are sought, the fragmentation of *No God in Sight* can be regarded as an expression of a perceived crisis.

Although some of the characters who are given a voice in the novel are Hindu or Sikh, the vast majority are Muslim. The novel therefore privileges and foregrounds the Muslim perspective, and, with regard to communal tensions, the

question of what it means to live in a society in which one is habitually the object of suspicion and distrust. In the year 2000, in which the novel is set,[16] Hindu nationalism is rife following the election victory of the BJP. Anti-Muslim sentiment is on the rise and will lead to the Gujarat riots two years later. The Bombay riots of 1992 are in the past, but their lasting impact in creating a polarised society is stressed with the reference to the first night of the Bombay riots as the "night people stopped being neighbors, cobblers, tailors, bakers, vendors, or drivers, and everyone turned Hindu or Muslim, Hindu against Muslim" (Tyrewala 2006, 156). The Bombay riots thus still haunt the city in 2000, as they do the character of Mushtaq, whose small shop was turned into "fifteen square feet of ashen heap" and who "has been searching [the shop] ever since, refusing to believe it" (Tyrewala 2006, 156–157). The characters' memory of the Bombay riots is both an expression of their fears for the future and a portent to the reader that the next wave of violence is indeed imminent.

Three characters who serve to illustrate what it means to constantly be the object of suspicion are the Muslim men Amin Bootwala and Sohail Tambawala and the Hindu woman Avantika (who happens to have the same surname as Sohail because she is incidentally married to a different Muslim, also called Tambawala). Amin, the owner of a shoe shop, has decided to apply with his family for a tourist visa to the US in order to start a new life there, even though he has a comfortable income in Mumbai and will have to remain illegally in the US. In a passage in which Amin imagines what it will be like to sit in the plane that will carry him and his family away, the decision to leave India is explicitly linked to the rise of Hindu nationalism:

> Below the howl of takeoff, the city of our birth – the nation of our ancestors – will fade into a twinkling sprawl of lights and then into a distant flicker and then it will be gone, gobbled and blackened by distance. *It wasn't worth it*, I will tell myself. And I will repeat, like a mantra, like a dua, *it wasn't worth it, it wasn't worth it*. And even then, if my idiot nostalgia refuses to die, I will remember the protection money demanded, the covert and blatant religious slurs, the riots, the aftermaths, the newborn niece named Nidhi, the rewritten history books, the harassment at the passport office. Wasn't it enough, wasn't it enough that we lived in our ghettos and worked in our holes and paid our taxes and demanded nothing in return?
> The aircraft's projection screen will show a blue India, with our plane's route so far outlined in white like an anemic tapeworm in the belly of a diseased nation.
> I will sit back in my seat and pretend to breathe easy. *Forget it*, I will tell myself, *let go*. Let them have it, let them have what they have killed clergymen for, razed mosques for, driven out fellow Indians for.
> Let them have their Hindustan for Hindus. (Tyrewala 2006, 32)[17]

In this short passage, the tensions between Muslims and Hindus are addressed in an extremely condensed form by referring to several events and debates topical at the time. Thus, incidents of violence in the then recent past ('riots,' 'killed clergymen,' 'razed mosques') and the Hindu nationalists' revision of history – which is the main topic of the novel *In Times of Siege* discussed below – are recalled. In the same breath, however, the everyday humiliations such as insults or harassment by authorities are also pointed out. Despite the various forms of discrimination, however, the passage makes clear that Amin does not want to

leave his mother country which he has strong personal and historical ties to ("city of our birth," "nation of our ancestors"). Rather, he feels driven out, forced to leave.

Sohail wants to escape the discrimination that comes with being a Muslim in India by changing his name rather than leaving the country, so that he will no longer be immediately recognised as a Muslim whenever he reveals his name. With a Hindu-sounding name, he hopes, "[h]e will not see eyebrows rising (at police stations) or lips pursing (at railway counters) at the mention of his name" (Tyrewala 2006, 148). Sohail does not take the decision lightly, but believes that changing his name will "alter something fundamental, something untouchable" (Tyrewala 2006, 147). Nevertheless, he decides to go through with it because he can no longer accept the injustice of being habitually distrusted and having his "existence [reduced] to a political statement" (Tyrewala 2006, 149).

The chapter in Avantika's voice shows her after she made the decision to go to the police to enquire after her missing husband. She expects to be harassed by the police because she will have to disclose that she, as a Hindu, is married to a Muslim: "No matter what, people like us don't go to the police. We suffer, we tolerate, we mediate, we pay antisocial men to settle sticky deadlocks, but we don't go to the police. Not unless we wish to be harassed instead of assisted." (Tyrewala 2006, 117) Avantika therefore prepares for her visit to the police by dressing in a way that emphasises her Hindu-ness: she borrows a bindi and a mangalsutra, and applies sindoor to the parting line of her hair until she looks "somewhat like the perfect patni [Hindu wife]" (Tyrewala 2006, 119). Because the characters feel that who they are does not correspond to how they are seen, and that how they are seen works to their disadvantage, they develop escape strategies: Sohail and Avantika resort to camouflage, while Amin chooses to leave for good the country he perceives as antagonistic.[18]

All three cases also demonstrate that the awareness of being looked at with suspicion, in turn breeds distrust on the part of the distrusted: Where before the three characters might have relied on being treated respectfully and fairly, they now see only potential discrimination. This mechanism of distrust evoking counter-distrust is also staged in an episode which is of particular significance in the novel. After the reader learns (in the passage quoted above) that the rise of Hindu nationalism and anti-Muslim sentiment are the reasons for Amin Bootwala's emigration, the chronological progression of the narrative is interrupted by the jump back in time that allows for the novel's cyclical structure. The scene shifts to a village and the unfolding events resemble a condensed version of the plot of the classic partition novel *Train to Pakistan*: Muslims and Hindus live peacefully together in the village until a charismatic agitator and his Hindu nationalist followers arrive, who re-define the Muslim villagers as outsiders and try to spread distrust towards them (Tyrewala 2006, 41–42).[19] Though only one insecure young Hindu villager jumps at what he perceives to be a chance to prove himself,[20] and though he makes a fool of himself in the process, the Muslims are shown to have lost trust in their fellow villagers and respond by withdrawing from the community:

> The sudden reticence of these few [the Muslim villagers] went unobserved. No one noticed that their businesses were opening late and closing early. That the stocks in their shops and workshops weren't being replenished. That the men amongst these few went on mysterious trips with their wives and children, carrying trunks and cartons, and that these men returned next day empty-handed and alone. The withdrawal of these few was like the invisible dwindling of an invalid. (Tyrewala 2006, 46-47)

In order to describe intergroup relationships of distrust, social psychologist Roderick M. Kramer has introduced the concept of 'collective paranoia,' which in many ways seems applicable to the social situation presented in *No God in Sight*. Kramer (2004, 141) defines collective paranoia as a reaction to "collectively held beliefs […] that cluster around ideas of being harassed, threatened, harmed, subjugated, persecuted, accused, mistreated, wronged, tormented, disparaged, or vilified by a malevolent out-group." In the case of *collective* paranoia the "perceived source of threat" and the threatened entity are "defined at the social group or category level" (Kramer 2004, 141). This means that the two groups are treated as units, so that the actions of any member of each group are linked to the whole group and any member of each group might be held responsible for the actions of any other member of the same group. According to Kramer, collective paranoia often occurs in asymmetrical constellations, where one group has some power over the other group. If the relationship is hierarchical, each group experiences specific forms of distrust: for the group in power "fear that those below them seek to displace them and cannot be trusted unless they are watched closely" is common, while for the members of the group in the lower position "fear of exploitation" and of "being treated unfairly" are frequent (Kramer 2004, 142). Many aspects of this form of collective distrust can be found in Tyrewala's novel.

A fundamental difference between collective paranoia and the characters' attitudes in *No God in Sight*, however, makes the application of the concept highly problematic. Paranoia is unreasonable, it is "either false or exaggerated" (Kramer 2004, 141), while the fictional narrative demonstrates that the Muslim characters' distrust is warranted: Thus, the villagers' precaution of leaving their village proves to be justified when the agitator returns shortly afterwards with a trident-wielding mob who break into the Muslims' former homes.[21] Avantika's distrust turns out to have also been warranted: As soon as the policeman realises that she is married to a Muslim, he refuses to even file her report and asks her to leave (Tyrewala 2006, 130). The distrust shown by the novel is therefore hardly paranoia, but rather warranted particularised distrust.

One form of distrust seems to be especially justified in the world of *No God in Sight* and that is the distrust of institutions. Avantika's story is, of course, a case in point, but it is not the only story in which the police are shown to be untrustworthy. In an unrelated plotline a corrupt police officer stages a "police-terrorist encounter" (Tyrewala 2006, 135) in order to sell a story of police heroism in the face of Muslim terrorism to the press and thus to further his career. Representatives of other institutions are also portrayed as being career-driven and highly untrustworthy: "the news world [is] run" by a "manic, sensualist

population of bedfellows" (Tyrewala 2006, 133) and politicians are happy to exploit any rumour to win votes (Tyrewala 2006, 140). Given that political trust in institutions depends on performance (Uslaner 2018, 4), it is not surprising that it has fallen to a very low level in the India of *No God in Sight*.

The fact that distrust is shown to be warranted is particularly significant when discussing the novel as an instance of threat communication. The threat to social cohesion posed by Hindu nationalism, the novel argues, is real – not just an imagined fear. And this is the threat the novel warns of even after the Hindu nationalist government lost the 2004 general election. Other aspects that seem relevant when describing *No God in Sight* as threat communication are the author's decision to situate the events of his narrative in the year 2000 rather than in the immediate present at the time of publication, and his choice of narrative form. *No God in Sight* was published in 2005, three years after the Gujarat riots, but Tyrewala decided to set his narrative not only at a time when the BJP was still in power (thus suggesting a link between the government and the general political climate), but also in the period before the riots. This allows him to focus on subtle changes in society in the wake of the rise of Hindu nationalism. In the grand scheme of things, many of these changes are inconsequential, but they are shown in the novel to have a significant impact on the lives of Muslims in India, causing them to lose trust in the Hindu majority and, more importantly, in the impartiality of political and public institutions. The fact that this shift in attitude is presented in short sketches rather than fully developed stories, makes the characters appear as types rather than individuals, which gives the impression that their experiences – despite the exaggeration that occasionally veers into satire – are to some extent representative. This implicit claim to speak for a broader experience gives additional weight to *No God in Sight* as an instance of threat communication.

5. Making a Case for Distrust in *In Times of Siege*

Githa Hariharan's *In Times of Siege* was first published in February 2003, two years before *No God in Sight*. At the time, the BJP-coalition government of 1998–2004 was still in office and the novel is unmistakably a direct critical response to government policies. Critics have repeatedly emphasised the novel's status as threat communication (albeit using different terminology), which is already foregrounded by the title's military metaphor. Mitra (2009, 137) notes that the novel's "polemical agenda is overt" and that the author's fourth novel "represents a new direction in Hariharan's career as a writer[,] wading as it does into the choppy waters of contemporary Indian politics." Similarly, Kaur (2009, 49) argues that the novel is "marked deeply by an ethical and political consciousness that is shaped by righteous outrage against the unprecedented level of state[-] sponsored, rather than the hitherto state[-]tolerated, violence against minority communities in India"; and Tickell (2015, 244) cites *In Times of Siege* as one of

"those instances in India's recent past in which the Indian novel has tackled, directly, issues of governmental repression." During the promotional tour for the novel Hariharan herself said in an interview that "the context of *In Times of Siege* is the contemporary India I live in. I feel proprietorial about it, and if I can see there is something wrong with it, I am going to shout as loud as I can" (Navarro-Tejero 2004, 204–205). The threat is identified explicitly within the novel as well as contextually as "the growing fundamentalism in India," which is by Hariharan regarded as "tearing apart the multicultural fabric of Indian society" (Navarro-Tejero 2004, 207).

As with Tyrewala's novel, it can be assumed that the Gujarat riots had a significant impact on the writing of *In Times of Siege*, although Hariharan's story, like Tyrewala's, is set in the year 2000.[22] In contrast to Tyrewala, Hariharan does not offer a panoramic view of the situation at the turn of the millennium, but focuses instead on one specific and particularly controversial issue: After its election in 1998 the BJP-led coalition government initiated several reforms, the most notorious of which aimed at the "rewriting of India's history" to promote Hindutva's conception of India as "essentially a 'Hindu civilization'" in schools and higher education (Sen 2006a, 63, 62). The Indian Council of Historical Research was subjected to restructuring, whereby historians who conformed to the ideology were hired, and the National Council of Education and Training commissioned new textbooks. To bridge the time until their completion in 2002 those materials already in use were censored (Nussbaum 2008, 266; Flåten 2017, 3).[23] "Many Indians felt greatly alarmed […] that the Hindutva movement would stop at nothing short of alienating India from its […] past through their control over schools and textbooks" (Sen 2006a, 64). Hariharan is one of them, expressing her concerns in literary form through her novel *In Times of Siege*, thus taking a stand in the "textbook wars" (Nussbaum 2008, 265).

The metahistoriographic novel's protagonist and focaliser is 52-year-old historian Shiv Murthy, who is in charge of the B.A. history programme at a fictitious open university in Delhi.[24] The events take place over a period of two months and are precisely dated to unfold between 23 August and 22 October 2000. A course book written by Shiv has been scrutinised for its ideological leanings by a Hindu nationalist group, which now accuses the medievalist of distorting historical events. The Hindu nationalists take offence at Shiv's complex portrayal of the philosopher and social reformer Basava because they want to claim Basava as a superhuman icon of Hindu culture for their political purposes. Only as an idealised, god-like "sanitized Basava" (Hariharan 2004, 89) can he unfold his full potential as a figurehead of the Hindu nationalist movement. That the criticism of the teaching module is not rooted in any faults of Shiv's scholarly integrity, but is exclusively politically motivated, is clear from the outset to all involved. However, reactions to the interference of the fictitious Hindu nationalist group "Itihas Suraksha Manch" ('history protection group'), diverge strongly (Hariharan 2004, 57). Shiv himself does not take the Hindu nationalist grouping seriously at first, calling them a "crazy group," a "mad group" or "some lunatic fringe flexing their muscles" (Hariharan 2004, 57, 83, 76). While he wants to

ignore their demand to withdraw his textbook, his superiors very quickly bow to the pressure built up in a political media campaign. The apolitical Shiv then suddenly finds himself at the centre of a high-profile confrontation between right-wing Hindu nationalists on the one hand and left-wing secular activist groups on the other, which soon no longer revolves around his book but around more general issues, first and foremost the autonomy of historical scholarship (Hariharan 2004, 172). In several passages of the book, the representatives of both sides have their say in dialogues, inserted newspaper reports or quoted letters, so that the novel can be seen as a multi-perspective collage of contrary political positions. At the end of the novel, the conflict remains unresolved, with a sense of closure only nominally achieved: The novel begins with Shiv picking up his ward Meena, a politically-minded student who has broken her leg and for several weeks needs looking after while the leg heals, and ends with Meena's return to the student hall after her cast has been removed. While Meena's departure on a superficial level provides closure at the end of the novel, Shiv is still awaiting the final decision on his textbook, and the Hindu nationalists remain undefeated. The choice of an open ending befits the novel's political impetus, suggesting that the struggle that Shiv and his supporters have been waging will continue for some time to come.

Loss of trust in the relationship between Muslims and Hindus, which is so central to Tyrewala's novel, is also registered in *In Times of Siege*, though only in relation to two minor characters: Mrs Khan, the department Head's secretary, and Suban, a car driver. Mrs Khan is the only Muslim member of staff at the university's history department. When the department's historians discuss Shiv's textbook and Arya, the Hindu fundamentalist among them, repeatedly insists that Muslims are foreigners in India, it is Mrs Khan who is most affected, "pushed back to square one, to the old diminishing religious identity" (Hariharan 2004, 22). In later scenes, her relationship with her colleagues has visibly changed because of a loss of trust. The focaliser Shiv believes he discerns "infinitesimal islands of wariness" in her eyes and feels that in their interactions they are only "playing at normalcy" (Hariharan 2004, 74). A similar awkwardness also characterises a conversation Shiv remembers having had a few years earlier with the driver Suban in Hampi, the archaeological site containing the remains of the last great Hindu empire of medieval India. Suban, a Muslim, offered Shiv an apology for the deeds of "his ancestors," the "foreign invaders" (Hariharan 2004, 161), who in the 16th century defeated the Hindu rulers and raided the city. When Shiv tried to explain to the driver that he and Suban "did not belong to different sides," the driver "who had been friendly and chatty all day, withdrew into suspicious, uncomfortable silence" (Hariharan 2004, 162). In both cases the Muslim characters occupy the lower place in a hierarchical relationship, so that their anxiety and the uncomfortable position they are in are likely to create empathy not only on the part of Shiv but also that of the reader. The Muslim characters' anxiety has a counterpart in the rhetoric of Hindu nationalism which explicitly encourages distrust of non-Hindus. Spoken comments, newspaper articles and hate letters are inserted 'verbatim' into the narrative to document a highly

manipulative and (particularised) distrust-fostering language. The Muslims' distrust is thus shown to be secondary, a response to being habitually distrusted.

However, it is not the tensions between Hindus and Muslims which are the focus of the novel, but those between Hindu nationalists and secular Hindus who are politically opposed to Hindu nationalism. The boundary between in-group and out-group is here not constituted by ethnic or religious identity, but rather by political position. The relationship between the two groups is one of mutual particularised distrust: The Hindu nationalists do not trust the secular historians and media to represent the past and the political debate surrounding it in a manner they consider adequate; conversely, the secular characters do not trust the Hindu nationalists not to abuse their political power for their controversial political purposes. Since the novel represents the division through the secular protagonist's eyes, the two directions of distrust are not treated equally in the novel. For Shiv's circle, the cultural climate has decidedly changed for the worse, producing an atmosphere of suspicion and "paranoia" (Hariharan 2004, 71, 152). After the allegations against Shiv have been made, he has the impulse to trust no one, not even his colleagues and friends (Hariharan 2004, 75–76); he sees himself as "a full-time fugitive" (Hariharan 2004, 134) and feels "the fear of an endangered species whose natural habitat has been taken over" (Hariharan 2004, 153). When the ideological threat posed by Hindu nationalism finds expression in vandalism, even his ever practical and in-control wife becomes fearful und vulnerable (Hariharan 2004, 156–157) and Shiv is plagued by nightmares (Hariharan 2004, 166–167). Through the narration of these and similar incidents, the gnawing effect of the cultural climate on the opponents of Hindu nationalism is emphasised throughout the novel, while in their position of power the Hindu nationalists seem immune to any anxiety.

Although the secular characters explicitly describe the social atmosphere as one of general paranoia, it is again important to note that Shiv and his supporters are not mistaken in their fear. The threat they perceive is shown to be only too real. Not only is Shiv's office broken into and ransacked and he physically attacked by Arya (Hariharan 2004, 129–130), throughout the novel the reader is also reminded of real world acts of violence and censorship connected to Hindu nationalism. These reminders include, among others, mention of the "anti-Sikh riots after Indira Gandhi's assassination in 1984" (Hariharan 2004, 30), "the 1993 riots in Mumbai" (Hariharan 2004, 152), "the murder of Australian missionary Graham Staines and his two children" (Hariharan 2004, 103), the "attacks on artist M. F. Husain for painting Hindu goddesses in the nude," "[t]eachers in Goa having their faces blackened for setting 'politically incorrect' exams," "the recall of a volume on the freedom struggle" and, referring to the production of Deepa Mehta's feature film *Water*, the "disruption of the shooting of a film on the plight of Hindu widows in Banaras" (Hariharan 2004, 104). This anchoring of the fictional narrative in the real world is extremely important for the narrative's function as threat communication. The fictional world is presented as an only ever so slightly fictionalised version of the real world, so that the readers are invited to relate their response to the novel directly back to the real world.

Showing that the distrust of the Hindu nationalists is justified is an important step towards what is arguably the novel's main communicative intention: To warn of a perceived threat to Indian democracy and social coherence, and to reinforce the readers' distrust of Hindu nationalism. Distrust therefore plays a dual role in the narrative, with the two forms of distrust having contrasting connotations and receiving contrasting evaluations: The distrust towards Muslims and secular Hindus encouraged by Hindu nationalism, on the one hand, is shown to be corrosive; the distrust towards Hindu nationalists, on the other hand, is presented as a necessity to protect the idea of India as a secular and heterogenous country. In the latter case, the usual assessment of trust and distrust is turned upside down, which highlights that the evaluation of trust and distrust is highly context-sensitive. While trust is often intuitively seen as a positive attitude, and one that stabilises the political institutions of democracy, such an assessment hinges on the trustworthiness of the political institutions and those in power. As Baier points out:

> By and large, *trust is a virtue only when it is not trust in authoritative commanders*. Where such positions of command are deemed unavoidable, then vigilance and non-paralyzing distrust will displace judicious trust as the functional virtues of that sort of highly asymmetrical cooperative scheme. (Baier 1992, 144)

Accordingly, not only trust, but also distrust can constitute "a democratic value" (D'Cruz 2020, 46)[25] and in democracies it is therefore commonly channelled and institutionalised in various forms (Warren 2018, 78–79). The freedom of research is one such institutionalisation. If it is infringed, as in the storyworld of Hariharan's novel, alternative forms of holding and articulating distrust are called for. Distrust and vigilance, in this case towards the government and associated institutions, become prerequisites for resistance to the perceived threat.[26]

6. Conclusion

The two novels, each in its own way, shed light on the social impact of the rise of Hindu nationalism at the turn of the millennium. Both narratives identify the developments as a crisis that is already having detrimental effects at the time of action, and likely to have more severe ones in the future. This prognosis operates on two levels: On the story level, as the reader will know, the disaster of the 2002 Gujarat riots looms large. On the extratextual level, Hindu nationalism is a persisting threat in both contexts of publication, though these are different: While *In Times of Siege* was written and published in the immediate aftermath of the Gujarat violence and while the BJP government was still in office, Tyrewala's novel was written after the 2004 general election, which saw the Indian National Congress return to power. This difference may in part account for the greater urgency and vehemence of Hariharan's threat communication and for its stronger focus on the role of state institutions and policy. In 2005, when Tyrewala published *No God in Sight*, Hindu nationalism was no longer the official

government policy but its ideology was of course still widespread, a phenomenon foregrounded in Tyrewala's depiction. A second aspect that is likely to have contributed to the difference in tone pertains to the authors' own cultural positions as Hindu and Muslim, respectively. It makes a difference, after all, whether the position spoken from is one of indisputable legitimacy or that of a suspected minority.

Both novels find narrative forms that support the communication of the perceived crisis. *No God in Sight* uses a radically fragmented form, offering sketches of a large number of mainly Muslim characters, none of whom the reader gets to know in depth. The panoramic view of Muslim life in crisis mode conveys a pessimistic mood, focussing on feelings of disillusionment, rootlessness, isolation and distrust. The narrative's circular structure, significantly beginning and endling with an abortion, suggests that not only is there no God in sight, but also no solution to the problem. The jump back in time not only creates this circular structure, but also allows for an (equally sketchy) exploration of the origins of the communal tensions in allegorical form. *In Times of Siege* represents a specific crisis situation with a particular focus on the communications from both sides. The different arguments are juxtaposed in a way that discredits the Hindu nationalist attacks and gives legitimacy to the secular threat communication within the story. In a manner characteristic of metahistoriographic fiction, a historical storyline is used to reflect on the contemporary situation. The world of the twelfth-century social reformer Basava serves to present a model of "a community that [seeks] to exclude no one" (Hariharan 2004, 62), but also to show how easily such model societies can be brought down by antagonistic forces. The story of the destruction of Basava's social project thus functions as a warning of the fragility of the situation in India. Like *No God in Sight*, *In Times of Siege* forgoes an ending in which the conflict is resolved, suggesting that the crisis is ongoing.

Looking at the novels through the lens of trust – rather than, say, cultural identity, gender or class, all of which are also relevant topics of the novels – brings to the fore an aspect which is central to the novels' status as threat communication and opens up a view of the complex network of trust relationships at work in sectarian societies. Thus both novels show particularised distrust, which is characteristic of sectarianism, to be imbedded in hierarchical relationships. The withdrawal of trust is revealed to have group-specific effects because of the groups' different position in the hierarchy. Hariharan's novel in particular also highlights that the question of which group a person belongs to is not always easily answered. Although her secular Hindu protagonists distrust and oppose the Hindu nationalists, they are themselves not fully trusted by the Muslim characters who feel targeted by the Hindu nationalists. Both narratives suggest that there is a significant overlap between the forms of trust distinguished in trust theory. Depending on the specific constellation, particularised and political trust can work in tandem, and both can affect generalised trust. The contrastive analysis of the novels has additionally demonstrated that the evaluation of trust and distrust can vary: while loss of trust is a deplorable development in *No God in*

Sight, distrust towards the government is emphatically encouraged in Hariharan's novel. In the latter case, distrust is no value in itself, though, but a defensive weapon 'in times of siege.'

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[1] Narrativity is here used in the structuralist sense, which describes texts as having narrativity if "they contain a temporal structure and represent changes of state" (Schmid 2003, 18). Other features not central to my argument but frequently used to distinguish between crises and catastrophes are the aspects of temporality and responsibility: While catastrophes are conceived of as sudden events, crises develop over a longer period of time (Frie / Meier 2014, 14–15; Meiner / Veel 2012, 1; Nünning / Nünning 2020, 251); while catastrophes are regarded as accidents beyond human control, the term crisis suggests that the situations described are "results of human agency" (Holm 2012, 16).

[2] "Eine Ordnung ist dann bedroht, wenn Akteure zu der Überzeugung gelangen, dass Handlungsoptionen unsicher werden, Verhaltenserwartungen und Routinen in Frage stehen und sie sich jetzt oder in naher Zukunft wahrscheinlich nicht mehr aufeinander verlassen können." (Frie / Meier 2014, 4)

[3] The constructive nature of crisis ascriptions is stressed even more in a later German journal article on crisis narratives by Ansgar and Vera Nünning (2020).

[4] The concept of 'threat communication' (*Bedrohungskommunikation*) is taken from Werner Schirmer's sociological study of the same name (Fechner et al. 2014, 151).

[5] Cf. Nünning (2012, 67), who claims that "crises tend to generate an inflationary discourse and rhetoric of metaphors."

[6] Fechner et al. 2014, 161–171. The combination of a diagnosis of the present, the development of future scenarios and recommendations for action points to the inherent narrativity of the concept of 'threatened order,' which Nünning and Nünning (2020, 250) have highlighted for the more general category of 'crisis.'

[7] Frie and Meier (2014, 21) also explicitly identify fiction as a potential medium of threat communication.

[8] The population figures are the results of the last census in 2011 published on the website of the Indian Ministry of Home Affairs (https://censusindia.gov.in/) and correspond to the absolute numbers 966,257,353 (Hindus) and 172,245,158 (Muslims).

[9] As might be expected, the figures vary widely. In 2005 the Indian "government told parliament that 790 Muslims and 254 Hindus were killed, 223 more people reported missing and another 2,500 injured" ("Gujarat Riot" 2005). Jaffrelot (2021, 41) mentions a slightly higher official death toll of 1,169, but suggests that 2,000 is a more realistic estimate. Patil (2017, 28) reckons that the "violence claimed the lives of approximately 2,500 Muslim men, women and children." Communal violence is an ongoing problem. More recent outbreaks of violence occurred in 2013 (Muzaffarnagar), 2014 (Assam), 2018 (Bihar) or 2020 (Delhi).

[10] On the rise of Hindutva and its ideology see Sen (2006a, 45–72), Nussbaum (2008, 152–185) and Flåten (2017, 4–8); on the tension between Hindu nationalist ideology and India's constitutional secularism see Nussbaum (2008, 152–210) and Sen (2006b, 294–316). For a discussion of other aspects of the rise of Hindu nationalism (including theories about the reasons for its emergence and success) see also the contribution in Basu / Subrahmanyam (1996a). All these texts are themselves part of the threat communication produced by the rise of Hindu nationalism.

[11] On the relationship between social trust and ethnically defined national identities see also Lenard and Miller's observation: "Where people identify more strongly with their nation, they tend to be more trusting of others, but strong identifiers are also more likely to hold an ethnic conception of the nation. This means that their trust is particularized, that is, that they are less willing to trust those who do not 'belong,' whether new immigrants or settled minorities." (70)

[12] The German word for familiarity is "Vertrautheit," derivationally from "Vertrauen" (trust). This etymological connection is lost in the English translation.

[13] Conversely, familiarity is seen as "the precondition for trust as well as distrust" (Luhmann 2017, 22).

[14] While some scholars have distinguished between mistrust and distrust (see e.g. Lenard 2012, 54–74; Mühlfried 2018, 15–16), the terms are also often treated as synonymous. I use the more commonly used term 'distrust.'

[15] The novel stages individualisation processes across society, which, however, do not produce autonomous and self-confident individuals, but primarily result in feelings of loss. The thematisation of communalist conflicts is embedded in this more general, critical diagnosis of society.

[16] The year is never explicitly mentioned, but we learn that the Bombay riots took place eight years earlier (Tyrewala 2006, 156).

[17] 'Hindustan' is the name for India favoured by Hindu nationalists.

[18] Another form of camouflage is the naming of the niece mentioned by Amin Bootwala in the quoted passage: 'Nidhi' is a name derived from Hindu mythology and therefore implicitly identifies its bearer as Hindu. If a niece of Amin's, who is a Muslim, is given this name, it is because the girl's parents want to conceal her Muslim identity in order to protect the child from anti-Muslim hostilities.

[19] Tyrewala underlines the arbitrariness of Othering through the character of Babua, who is unable to identify the supposed outsiders, and by revealing that one of the Muslims in the village is the descendent of a convert (see Tyrewala 2006, 43–46 and 49–56).

[20] Tyrewala's conception of Babua, the only Hindu character in the novel who is prepared to use violence against Muslims, seems to be inspired by psychological studies on the origins of communal conflict, which suggest that among the driving internal forces are "feelings of humiliation and radically lowered self-worth" (Kakar 1996, 208).

[21] The Hindu villagers themselves are never shown attacking their Muslim neighbours, but they are not particularly concerned about the Muslims either, partly because they do not take the agitator seriously but rather regard him as an amusing entertainment, and partly because they do not really care, which is underlined by the fact that "no one in the village even noticed" the Muslims' disappearance (Tyrewala 2006, 47).

[22] See, for example, Kaur (2009, 49), who mentions *In Times of Siege* as one of several "post-Godhra / Gujarat texts" written in response to the riots and describes it as being "passionately antagonistic to reactionary religious politics in the wake of the carnage of the Gujarat riots."

[23] Sen (2006a, 67–68) also reports on an archaeological research project that presented falsified historical sources in order to antedate the origins of Hindu culture in India by a millennium and thus be able to declare Hinduism the oldest culture on the subcontinent. For a detailed analysis of the BJP's education policy after the 1998 election see Nussbaum (2008, 211–301) and Flåten (2017), who specifically examines the history textbooks published by the National Council of Educational Research and Training in 2002, which were withdrawn by the new government after the general election in 2004.

[24] The genre of historiographic metafiction allows for general reflections on the role of history and historiographical method, as well as for the introduction of additional historical storylines that reflect the themes of the main plot. As the metahistoriographic aspects of *In Times of Siege* have already been analysed succinctly by Tickell (2015, 245–250) and more extensively by Mitra (2009) and Senft (2016, 40–58), I will not discuss them in detail here, but instead focus on issues of trust.

[25] On this point see also Warren, who holds that people "should be distrustful of state powers and the political elites who wield the power" (2018, 91), and Lenard, who distinguishes between mistrust (a variable, context-sensitive attitude of doubt) and distrust (a stable attitude of suspicion and cynicism). While she argues that "mistrust can be good for democracy," she regards distrust to be "inimical to democracy" (2012, 59, 55).

[26] The need for distrust, vigilance and resistance is most forcefully articulated in several passages which link the situation in India to that in Nazi Germany, among them the reproduction of a version of the German pastor Martin Niemöller's famous anecdote, expressing regret at having been a bystander (Hariharan 2004, 29). Paratextually, the call to resistance is furthermore marked as the author's own position by the dedication "*For all those who speak up in times of siege.*"