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E-terror: Computer viruses, class and transnationalism in *Transmission* and *One Night @ the Call Center*

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Abstract

This paper focuses upon the use of the language of terror in Hari Kunzru's *Transmission* and Chetan Bhagat's *One Night @ the Call Center*. It identifies how both these novels apply the language of terror to the actions of exploited Indian workers and considers how this use of the term terror works as a critique of the patterns of contemporary labour within a global economy. It suggests that the proliferating use of terrorism as a discourse of dissent functions to mask the structures of power and privilege. It goes on to propose that both these fictional texts present characters who appear to use terrorist acts as a means of resisting the certainty of such structures. However, by comparing the strategies that are designated as terrorism, this paper indicates a different relationship to such structures in these two texts. It argues that while Kunzru depicts terrorism as a radical rewriting of the implementation of contemporary technology,

Bhagat’s novel conforms to contemporary Indian nationalism by representing terrorism as part of India’s national struggle against US economic dominance. In contrast to Transmission, Bhagat’s novel appears to propose a relocation of power within the structures of international capitalism rather than a revolution in the very structures themselves.

Keywords:

- body-shopping
- communication technologies
- globalization
- labour
- offshoring

Notes

1. Softley’s film has been widely criticized within the hacking community for its misrepresentation of their activities (Taylor, Hackers 11).
2. Bhagat is reportedly the best-selling English-language author in India and One Night @ the Call Center sold over 1 million copies (Sampath).
3. The term cybertariat is coined by Ursula Huws to refer to the standardized conditions of labour for IT workers within an international economy. Interestingly, she speculates that the forms of resistance that such workers may resort to are likely to be “sporadic and anarchic forms, such as the writing of viruses or other forms of sabotage” (Huws 20). Both Transmission and One Night @ the Call Center appear to share this view.

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