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“Clocks and Empire: An Indian Case Study”

E.P. Thompson’s seminal research on the development of a new time-discipline in industrializing England argued convincingly that the clock can be a technology of discipline and control, a material embodiment of abstract ideas of authority and ownership, and a tool for the alleged moral reformation of the working class.¹ Here, the destruction of a British public clock in 1898 Bombay will be historically contextualized and examined with the goal of demonstrating that such an event has hitherto unrecognized significance historiographically, and possibly historically. Three separate narratives of British clock culture, Indian time politics, and late-19th century Bombay rioting will be brought into conversation with each other by the shooting of the Crawford Market clock in Bombay. This paper primarily challenges the framing of existing histories and, hopefully, also offers a new narrative of a specific subaltern response to the colonial experience.

Scholars such as Thomas Metcalf and Sanjay Srivastava have argued that the public clock in British India established imperial authority and allowed the British to present a self-definition of ‘Britishness’ for the benefit of the native Indian onlookers.² Metcalf has suggested that the massive and centrally located public clock towers installed by the British following the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 were deliberately intended to stamp the landscape with reminders of the “supremacy of the Raj” while simultaneously forcing the Victorian-era virtue of punctuality onto an India supposedly marked by

² See Thomas Metcalf, “Architecture and the Representation of Empire,” Representations, no. 6 (1984); Sanjay Srivastava, Constructing Post-Colonial India: National Character and the Doon School (New York: Routledge, 1998); See also Judith Kenney, “Climate, Race, and Imperial Authority: The Symbolic Landscape of the British Hill Station in India,” Annals of the Association of American Geographers 85, no. 4 (1995): 702, where she argues that Hill Stations—British settlements safely removed from natives (at least in appearance)—did not make use of monumental architecture due to the lack of an appropriate audience for such a display. This seems to confirm the authority-establishing function of public monuments, of which the clock tower is a type.
“laziness and lethargy.”

Srivastava extends Metcalf’s argument, writing that the clock tower, a spectacle made to be ever visible above the irrational and anarchic jumble of the Eastern city, was a “reverse Panopticon”—asserting authority by pulling inwards the gaze of others. These scholars provide the foundation for modern historical analyses of these clocks but, unfortunately, they do not integrate subaltern reactions into their works, ignoring anti-colonial struggles and their possible engagement with, say, architecture.

Scholars Prashant Kidambi, Ian Catanach, and Rajnarayan Chandavarkar have looked at the violent struggles in Bombay in the 1890s and framed those conflicts in terms of clashes between natives and the colonial regime over the latter’s extremely aggressive and culturally insensitive plague prevention policies. It will become apparent that their reading ignores the potential interconnectedness of contemporaneous struggles over time control and market society and the political crises of the 1890s.

Finally, the compelling history of Indian time politics that has very recently been told by Vanessa Ogle treats clocks as indicators of the outcome of political battles over time, but fails to spatially locate the contestations themselves in the physical clocks that occupied the landscape.

What all three research agendas have in common is an overly narrow view of their subject matter, resulting in separate and disassociated narratives being created when, in fact, these three

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4 Srivastava, Constructing Post-Colonial India, 55.
6 Ogle takes pains to note which clocks kept which of the various time standards, but does not view those clocks as active in the determination of those time standards. Vanessa Ogle, “‘Whose Time Is It?’ The Pluralization of Time and the Global Condition, 1870s–1940s,” American Historical Review 118, no. 5 (2013): 1377, 1384, 1386, 1389.
histories ought to be placed into conversation with each other. A partial exception is Jim Masselos, who properly foregrounds the material dimension of time politics in his excellent review of the situation in Bombay.⁷ But his focus is still on legislative politics and ignores political battles fought outside of meeting rooms. This paper’s historiographical argument will be demonstrated by the Crawford Market clock shooting, which serves as one case study in the holistic interpretation of an event in the context of inseparable discussions of time and technology, imperial identity and anti-colonial resistance. Given the dearth of available material, the endeavor is speculative by nature, but hopefully indicates the potential for a new and richer understanding of the public clock and its historical role.

**British Clock Culture**

For the Crawford Market clock shooting to occur there first needed to be a Crawford Market clock, and that required a British cultural and political logic that allowed for its construction.

19th century British literary sources suggest that the clock was a salient part of British culture, and a vehicle for the expression of normative values such as regularity and punctuality. The poem “To a Clock,” published in 1840, calls the clock the speaker’s “companion,” consoler, teacher, and source of moral admonition. The speaker finds comfort in the regularity of the clock’s tick and implicitly denigrates the irregular rhythm of the human body.⁸ “Look at the Clock!,” an 1841 poem, places the clock as the evidentiary arbiter of a conflict between a married couple. A wife, angry at her husband’s late return from the tavern, uses the clock’s report as if it suffices on its own to prove moral wrongdoing without any reference to the human being necessary.⁹ An 1842 newspaper account of an assault attributed the cause of the situation to the agency of an anthropomorphized and recalcitrant clock. Curiously obscuring

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⁸ *Caledonian Mercury*, “To a Clock,” October 12, 1840, galegroup.com.
⁹ *The Odd Fellow*, “Look at the Clock!,” June 12, 1841, galegroup.com.
the ultimate subject of the reportage, the author mentioned the clock but not the assault in his title.10 *The Old Church Clock*, a short novel written in 1844, tells the story of a shabby middle-aged man recounting his relationship to the “OLD-CHURCH CLOCK,” which he calls “the oldest friend I have in Manchester.”11 Giving the machine human characteristics (and moral authority) the man says, “The old clock seemed to smile at my punctuality (emphasis in original).”12 By 1850, a treatise on clock making waxed philosophical on the clock as the ultimate *memento mori* and model of the ideal worker. Again appeared the implicit capitalist pathologization of human temporal irregularity, which prevented the human from “performing its appointed work by day and by night, with scarcely any interruption…”13 Later decades saw a couple more treatises on clock making, although none those are quite as interesting in terms of content as they are in the mere fact of their existence.14 In 1900 the Bombay Anglo-Indian organ, *The Times of India*—building off decades of literary humanization of clocks and, hitherto implicit, mechanization of humans—published an article boldly equating the human body (called a “seventy-year clock”) and “all other clocks,” meaning mechanical ones.15 One might speculate that this equation was not, by this time, shocking or upsetting to contemporaries. Reflecting on the preceding decades, Virigina Woolf’s 1922 book *Jacob’s Room* offers an ambivalent reflection on the clock as a technology of progress and abstraction.16 Her lack of faith in the clock is perhaps symptomatic of a post-World War I change in zeitgeist and bookends the discussion of 19th century clock culture. These

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12 Ibid., 141–142.
literary sources indicate that the clock was deeply embedded in 19th century British culture.

The erection of clock towers in India expands on the idea of a British clock culture by suggesting the way in which clocks became a self-conscious symbol of British identity. The first clock towers were built in India in the 1860s, after the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857. Metcalf’s claim that they were meant to remind onlookers of the power of Britain as an imperial ruler is bolstered by the fact that, in at least one formerly rebel-controlled city, Aligarh, a 13th century military memorial pillar was pulled down in 1862 and replaced with a clock tower. Clock towers signaled to British and native alike the self-identification of the British as an imperial people.

The clocks also proselyted British values. As has been alluded to, historians have argued that the British installation of clocks was, in part, a process of reifying a cultural kernel of Victorian Britain. The Crawford Market was no exception.

The Crawford Market—named after the Municipal Commissioner at the time, Arthur Crawford—was completed in 1869. It was designed by William Emerson, who later went on to become president of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA). The British authorities favored indoor markets like the Crawford Market because they allowed for easier control and surveillance of

19 William Emerson, President of the Royal Institute of British Architects, argues in his 1899 presidential address that public buildings must tell the story of British empire. He called for “a distinctive national architecture, stately, dignified, and picturesque; an architecture enhancing the glory of this empire.” The Times (London), “Royal Institute Of British Architects,” November 7, 1899. On this topic see also George Walter Macgeorge, Ways and Works in India (Westminster: Archibald Constable and Company, 1894), 1.
20 See Metcalf, “Architecture and the Representation of Empire,” 56: “the clock helped to remind… passersby not only of the supremacy of the Raj but of the virtues of punctuality. The modern world in India…was to be marked by discipline and orderliness.”; See Strivastava, Post-Colonial India, where he calls clocks “a sentinels of British self-perception (46)” and, elsewhere, “a part of the mythology and folklore of Britishness. (47)”; See also Jan Morris, Stones of Empire: The Buildings of the Raj (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1983), 143, where, in describing a clock tower standing above the souk of Hyderabad, she writes, “one passed out of that ancient market-place of the East beneath a petrification of Victorianism itself.”
21 Morris, Stones of Empire, 142.
the economic activity of the natives than the sprawling open-air souks and bazaars. Monuments to capitalism, they were the pride of municipal authorities and were decorated accordingly. The Crawford Market was in four ways decked out in signifiers of importance: it was named after a senior Bombay official of the day; it dominated a major intersection, opposite the police station and separating the official quarter and the “native city”; its facade sported granite friezes designed by John Lockwood Kipling of “ideal market-people and their clients… presenting a paradigm of what a market ought to look like”; and it had a clock tower, staring down at the intersection below. Just as the placement of the clock alongside such obvious glorifications of British authority and capitalism implies a continuity of symbolic meaning between these elements, so too does the placement of the clock on a house of market exchange intimately tie together the clock and the time-disciplined world of 19th-century capitalism.

The missionary function of the public clock endured even when they outwardly appeared to be adaptive to local culture. Anglo-Indian architect Major Charles Mant—self-consciously attempting to unite Western science and Indian aesthetics—designed, in 1877, a tower with the exterior form of a minaret and a clock as its heart. This uncanny replacement of an Islamic time-regulating technology with a British one took on a new, darker meaning in 1881 when the RIBA chairman quoted correspondence observing that Indian natives could be more easily coaxed into a Christian church if it had a familiar outward appearance. The architecture, the correspondent wrote, may conform to local norms “so long as we yield no principles.” So it was for Mant’s clock tower. But people were not easily fooled. On the tower Strivastava writes: “This Britshness was perceived in a like manner by both

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22 Ibid.
23 The Imperial Gazetteer of India, vol. 8, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1908), 400.
24 Morris, Stones of Empire, 141–142.
the colonisers [sic] and a large number of Indians who interacted with them.”

In terms of the scope of clock building post–1857: In 1908, the new edition of *The Imperial Gazetteer of India* recorded at least thirteen free standing clock towers in India, not including the many, many more attached to churches, libraries, schools, government offices, and municipal markets.28

**Time Politics in fin de siècle Bombay**

Clocks are not monuments in the way that a statue is; they are also functional and utilitarian objects. Therefore, inferring the symbolism behind the shooting of the Crawford Market clock requires an understanding of the temporal politics for which clocks served as physical manifestations.

The proliferation of clocks in India—as railroads were also being installed to facilitate economic exchange—inevitably led to struggles over time standardization.29 For the British, time standardization was conducive to administrative control as well as the economic exploitation of India’s resources.30 It also was bound up in ideologies of rationality and progress, as well as of Britain’s civilizing mission.31 For the native Indians, standardized time (as opposed to local or deregulated time) was rightly identified as “British time.” Protest against standard time took on anti-colonial overtones and became a means of

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27 Strivastava, *Post-Colonial India*, 47.
28 *The Imperial Gazetteer of India*, vol. 5, 202, 218; vol. 7, 82; vol. 8, 398; vol. 10, 344; vol. 11, 238; vol. 15, 12; vol. 20, 144, 162; vol. 24, 47, 347 (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1908).
30 Ogle, “Whose Time?” 1385; Masselos, “Bombay Time,” 173. The railroad was critically important for the extension of the global market system of the 19th century into India. Kerr, “Introduction,” 9–10, 15–16. Time standardization was demanded in the service of “coordinating railway transport.” Prasad, “Time Sense,” 1257. Therefore, by virtue of the needs of the railroad, time standardization was integral to market creation.
channeling dissatisfaction with British colonial rule generally.\textsuperscript{32} Resistance to time standardization also reflected metropolitan pride.\textsuperscript{33}

The first of the two fin de siècle time standardization battles in Bombay began in 1881 when Bombay Governor James Fergusson unilaterally resolved to extend Madras Time into Bombay government offices, affecting the work schedules of government employees and all those who did business with them.\textsuperscript{34} This change, unlike earlier ones applied to telegraphs and railways, disrupted the daily rhythm of city life and was much despised by residents of all social classes.\textsuperscript{35} The city’s clocks, some observing Madras Time and others refusing, further confused the situation and became battlegrounds in the struggle between different municipal institutions. When the University of Bombay asked for funding to illuminate the imposing Rajabai Clock Tower’s faces, the anti-Fergusson Municipal Corporation and Fergusson each offered money—with former stipulating the condition that the clock must keep Bombay Time and the latter insisting on Madras Time.\textsuperscript{36} Eventually, in May 1883, the government folded under persistent popular pressure and rescinded its resolution on Madras Time. In June it announced it would bear the cost of lighting the Rajabai Tower on Bombay Time after all.\textsuperscript{37} Throughout the controversy, the Crawford Market clock, owned by the uncooperative Municipal Corporation, stubbornly remained on Bombay Time.\textsuperscript{38} Clearly, clocks’ role as symbols of empire and


\textsuperscript{34} Masselos, “Bombay Time,” 165. Time standardization using Madras Time had already been in place since 1870 for the Telegraph Department and railways. The former standardization was at the request of the business community and the latter at the request of the government. Masselos, “Bombay Time,” 163–164. Neither was particularly contentious as they only affected Bombay’s interactions with the outside world. In terms of the connection between capitalism and time standardization, it is worth noting these two early standardization efforts—what they pertained to and who advocated for them.

\textsuperscript{35} Much of the disgruntlement was a result of the reduction in daylight hours to be had between sunrise and the start of the new workday. Traditional patterns of time use were (seemingly needless) disrupted. See Masselos, “Bombay Time,” 166–169; and Oldham, “On Time in India,” 50.

\textsuperscript{36} Masselos, “Bombay Time,” 171.


\textsuperscript{38} Masselos, “Bombay Time,” 170.
material representations of culture can be very literally activated in a political context to serve as markers for other victories and struggles than the conquest of India.

The second political battle over time standardization was heralded by Superintendent of the Geological Survey of India R.D. Oldham in 1899, when he read a paper before the Asiatic Society of Bengal calling for the standardization of time across India in line with the international Greenwich Mean Time system.\(^{39}\) The society voted to have the paper sent, along with a letter, to the Viceroy.\(^{40}\) But it was only in 1903 that the British government decided to create a Standard Time for all of India, 5\(^\prime\)30\(^\prime\) ahead of Greenwich Mean Time. Standard Time, which was not required for use by local governments, was voluntarily adopted in 1906 by the British government in Bombay (and endorsed by the Municipal Corporation).\(^{41}\) Massive labor strikes ensued, sparked by concerns that the new time regime would allow employers to extend working hours and disrupt solar-time-based religious observances.\(^{42}\) Employers had to promise a return to Bombay Time to end the strikes, and fears of further such disruptions prevented the full adoption of Standard Time from being achieved until 1950.\(^{43}\) Clocks, therefore, can be seen not just as tools of symbolic, moral, or political control, but also as tools and symbols of economic domination.\(^{44}\) The relationships between time and clocks, clocks and work, and work and autonomy are highly instructive.

**The Plague, The Colonial State, and The Riots of March 1898**\(^{45}\)

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\(^{40}\) Proceedings of the Asiatic Society of Bengal (Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1900), 62–66.


\(^{43}\) Ogle, “Whose Time?” 1387, 1389.

\(^{44}\) On the “new rigorous discipline of work regulated by clock time” in Bengal see Sarkar, Writing Social History, 307–309. For a study of the American case, see Mark Michael Smith, Mastered by the Clock: Time, Slavery, and Freedom in the American South (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 93ff., 95. Again, Thompson is instructive here; see “Time, Work-Discipline,” 85–86.

\(^{45}\) The rest of this paper will make heavy use of the *Times of India*. For a variety of possible reasons, it was the only newspaper to report meaningfully on the strikes and business closures, as can be observed in India Office reports on
On Friday, March 11, 1898, the day the Crawford Market clock’s face was partially destroyed by rifle fire, Bombay was incredibly tense. Riots had broken out on the preceding Monday, a general strike was in effect, and heavily armed soldiers were patrolling the streets in extraordinary numbers. While there is a lack of evidence sufficient to prove definitively that the clock shooting was related to the riot and labor unrest, it seems more plausible to suggest it was than to argue that it was not. We now turn to the riot and the shooting that occurred during it.

Traditionally, historians have contextualized the riots of March 1898 in terms of the government’s harsh, invasive, and culturally insensitive plague-prevention measures. After, the bubonic plague struck Bombay in 1896, the government took drastic measures, creating military search parties that were sent door-to-door to find potential plague victims, physically inspect them, and remove afflicted individuals to a hospital while sending their relatives to segregation camps. Travel-restricting plague checkpoints were created on all entry/exit points to the city with accompanying detention camps. Detention camps were not well liked, but it was the inspection of Muslim and Hindu women by men that was most troubling to natives.

The riots arguably began on Monday, March 7 when an armed search party was confronted by

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native papers. On the limitations of this source see Rangaswami Parthasarathy, *Journalism in India: From Earliest Times to the Present Day* (New Delhi: Sterling, 1989), 46, 272–274. On March 9 rioters burned down a “screen” near the jail that was readied for an execution the following morning. Catanach, “Who are your leaders?” 215. Given the clock’s similar ties to discipline, control, and empire, similar motivations might have inspired both events. More broadly, contemporaries were clearly expecting attacks on property. *Times of India*, “The Scene Near the Juma Musjid,” March 12, 1898, www.proquest.com. If nothing else the shooting can be incorporated into the story of the riot as a form of property destruction.

47 See Chandavarkar *Imperial Power*, 385; Chandavarkar, “Plague panic”; Kidambi, “Masters of the City,” sec. 8; Catanach, “Who are your leaders?”

48 Chandavarkar, “Plague Panic,” 204, 207, 221.

49 Chandavarkar, “Plague Panic,” 208. The *Times of India* offers the following chilling description: “Operations for preventing plague are in full force. One hundred and eleven persons were detained, washed, and their clothes disinfected, and placed in the detention camp today. A large shed for the accommodation of arrivals is being built at the Railway station. All trains are watched.” *Times of India*, “Plague in Poona,” March 2, 1898, www.proquest.com.

a crowd and pelted with stones, causing light injuries.\textsuperscript{51} Early on Wednesday March 9 a male medical student accompanied by armed escort attempted to inspect a young Muslim girl in Madanpura (a Muslim-Indian area of the city) and was refused entry to the house by the girl’s parents. Soon a crowd gathered and the search party retreated under a volley of stones. Two hours after the initial encounter at the house, police arrived at the scene and were faced by a massive crowd throwing stones and waving sticks in the air. A Parsi magistrate called in to quell the crowd was hit by a stone. He ordered the police to shoot into the assembly—killing five.\textsuperscript{52}

The situation thusly escalated, rioting quickly spread throughout the Indian part of the city in the early afternoon and the original Muslim protesters were joined by Hindu mill workers who were absent from work in observance of the Hindu festival of Holi.\textsuperscript{53} The mobs attacked the local jail and fire station, and the rioting spread all the way south to Crawford Market—the dividing line between the Indian and European areas of Bombay. According to a report in the \textit{Times of India}, “A crowd of about four hundred Mahomedans collected before the Arthur Crawford Market on Wednesday and threatened to rush the stalls.” They were dispersed by the military.\textsuperscript{54} By the next morning 108 Indians (including at least 25 Hindu Indians) had been arrested. Demonstrating incredible speed, at 1pm the British convened a special court and began mass trials.\textsuperscript{55}

It is unclear when precisely the strike was initiated or by who. On Thursday morning grain, seed, and other export markets were closed, as were the piece goods markets and the docks.\textsuperscript{56} By Friday, March 11 the situation had worsened. The butchers were on strike and early that morning the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textit{Times of India}, “Attacking a Search Party,” March 8, 1898, www.proquest.com. Note that the previously cited historians date the start and end of the riot to March 9.
\item Catanach, “Who are your leaders?” 213–214.
\item Kidambi, “Masters of the City,” sec. 8.
\end{itemize}
dock laborers and cart drivers struck work as well. Work in the railway yards was suspended. The cloth markets were closed. Large numbers of Hindu-owned and Muslim-owned shops alike were shuttered, the factions making common cause against the Europeans. An estimated 20,000 Indians were on strike, and the Anglo-Indian mouthpiece, the *Times of India*, suspected “a systematic design” behind it all. The logic attributed to the strike was that if the Indians “deprived Europeans of their food supply” they could force the government’s hand on the matter of plague measures.\(^{57}\)

Over at the Crawford Market, the Indian stallholders whose spice and other stalls filled the market were trying to leave work as well. According to the building’s superintendent, Douglas Bennett, some organizers of the general closure of business in the outdoor bazaars were leaning on the stallholders to participate in the strike. But the stallholders remained, seemingly under pressure from Bennett, and thus the Crawford Market (along with the other seven tightly controlled municipal markets), remained open that day, undermining the strike.\(^{59}\)

Simultaneously, the military and police were bracing themselves in anticipation of fresh violence after Friday midday prayers at the mosque. Starting around 11am, a couple hundreds of armed men were sent to secure both the mosque and the Crawford Market. The Crawford Market, in part because of its strategic location, was guarded by a large contingent of over 100 soldiers, seamen, police, and special forces. At the main entrance stood about 20 members of the Governor’s Body Guard. It seems reasonable to suppose their presence might have aided Bennett in his appeal to the stallholders to remain in business. Mass violence never materialized that day, but military and police forces remained deployed throughout the city for the rest of the day and night.\(^{60}\)


\(^{58}\) *Times of India*, “The Municipal Markets”; see also Catanach, “Who are your leaders?” 216.

\(^{59}\) *Times of India*, “The Municipal Markets”.

\(^{60}\) *Times of India*, “The Scene near the Juma Musjid”.
That same night, around 7:30pm, Bennett’s wife heard multiple gunshots while standing on the balcony of the Crawford Market. The next morning it was discovered that one of the clock faces had been partially destroyed by a rifle bullet. The only known newspaper report of the incident, in the Times of India, reads:

It is believed that some Mahomedans and Hindoos who have been, since the breaking out of the Wednesday’s riots, going about Bombay urging people to close their places of business, and have been unsuccessful in their attempts with the market people, have fired at the clock with a view to causing alarm, and thus closing the markets.  

“Shooting at the Market Clock”

Labor historian Peter Way, in his analysis of Irish unskilled laborers in the United States, examines an incident in which Irish quarry laborers threw rocks at a steamship full of upper class figures. He suggests that, while a traditional labor history might see powerful symbolic self-expression, the incident was probably motivated by reckless mischief and irritation, not intentionally political engagement with power structures. Way presents a challenge that puts a heavy burden of proof on the historian attempting to extract meaning from obscure historical events. This paper argues that extreme risk attending an act is suggestive of motivation and deliberate intent, and shooting the market clock was undoubtedly incredibly risky.

The risks associated with shooting the market clock were extreme and many fold. First, recall the market’s placement at the border of the European and Indian areas of Bombay. Given its strategic location, it was a center of attention for rioter and government alike. Recall that hundreds of rioters had approached the market on the ninth and the massive armed presence—second only to that near the mosque—on the very day of the shooting. Note also that the market is next to the police station, which

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was probably busy given that the police were active in large numbers that day and night. Moreover, the Indian Arms Act of 1878 had criminalized the possession of firearms except by those who held a government license, which effectively amounted to a ban on gun ownership by non-Europeans.⁶³ Whoever shot the Crawford Market clock is unlikely to have been a license-holder and, even if they were, was still probably subject to arrest for carrying arms under suspicious circumstances.⁶⁴ In carrying the rifle(s)—a difficult object to conceal, no doubt—they were exposing themselves to a significant risk. Furthermore, the witness reported hearing multiple shots. This indicates that either there were multiple weapons (compounding the aforementioned legal dangers), or else a single rifle was fired multiple times. The latter scenario suggests that the perpetrator(s) had to stand in place for at least several seconds in the middle of a central city junction and just a stone’s throw from the amply reinforced police station. In all possible cases, shooting the market clock was an act that exposed its perpetrator(s) to legal and mortal danger and, therefore, it is highly unlikely that it was undertaken lightly or for excitement. It seems justified to infer motivation behind the act.

One possible motivation might have been practical—to disrupt business at the Crawford Market. As has been said, the market remained open during the strike, undermining the efforts of the bazaar merchants to exert pressure on the government. Perhaps, as the Times of India suggested, the goal was to intimidate stallholders and frighten away customers. This interpretation locates the act in a narrative of anti-colonial resistance, class struggle, and mass economic activism. It ties together British imperialism and commercial capitalism (viz. the disruption of the latter destabilizes the power of the

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⁶⁴ “The Indian Arms Act, 1878” §12. Note that at least two arrests for possession of weapons were made that very day—one involving two canes and another regarding two bamboo sticks—showing that possession of even relatively pedestrian weapons was not tolerated. Times of India, “The Riots”.

former), and offers a powerful image of violence against property, against markets, and against a capitalist institution as means towards the end of relieving the repression of the plague measures. But this interpretation is unsatisfying in that its instrumental treatment of the clock as a vehicle for achieving other ends does not seem to necessarily require any meaningful engagement with what clocks are as unique machines that transmit values, establish authority, allow for cultural and economic domination, reflect something understood to be eminently “British” at the time, and play a dialogical role in the creation of frameworks of temporal perception.65 One wishes to take seriously what a clock is—the modern machine of human alienation par excellence.

A speculative alternative is to consider the shooting of the clock as a symbolic event that engages with the clock and all its peculiarities in the colonial Indian context. This is not mutually exclusive with the theory that the clock shooters’ motivations were related to the practical disruption of the market because the symbolic weight of the event can be detached from the self-understood motivations of the perpetrators, whatever those might actually have been. There is simply insufficient evidence, however, to argue definitively that the destruction of the clock was immediately motivated by a desire to resist British culture or alien temporal frameworks. We have considered the nature of the clock as a material representation of a British cultural fixation, as an agent of capitalism, and as a physical reminder of past moral and political conquests that also holds out hope for future conquests. We have contextualized it in a Bombay in the throes of political contestations over time standards that are both embedded in anti-colonial movements and materialized in public clock towers. And we have seen anti-colonial resistance taking, among its many forms, the form of violence against a clock. Circumstantially, there is every reason to suggest the plausibility of the claim that the Crawford Market

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clock was a symbolically rich target, perhaps uniquely so in all of Bombay. The clock itself sat at the intersection of several historical narratives, and the shooting of the clock raises the question of whether or not the riots of March 1898 cannot also be woven in to a holistic narrative of the history of clocks. Placed in context, it appears relatively unimportant what motives the shooters were aware of—the act has a historical existence of its own that can be analyzed in and of itself.

But the more significant conclusion to be made is that the event has not only a plausible, but an undeniable, historiographical significance. As a historical event it can be easily marginalized in any of the narratives that have been considered here. But its ability to cross between the narratives and to bring them into conversation is an important consideration. It raises questions—perhaps unanswerable—about the connections between the various contemporaneous events outlined here. It challenges Ogle’s and Masselos’s periodization of time politics that skips ahead from 1883 to 1899, ignoring events in between that might have a bearing on a rich understanding of those time politics. It challenges Chandavarkar and others who, in narrating 1898 look back only to the start of the plague in 1896, or perhaps the rioting of 1893, but ignore the potential relevance of the time battle of 1881–1883. And, finally, it asks a scholar like Srivastava, who claims that Indians were aware of the “Britishness” of clocks to address, or attempt to address, what those Indians might have done in response to the clock. In large part, this paper has tried to accomplish this last task via a case study. More generally, it questions the framing of existing histories of late-19th century Bombay.
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