

Commonwealth Inter-Religious Graves: Rethinking the Epistemology of the Dead in India

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Abstract

This research paper is part of the research project on “Burying the Dead” of the Centre for the Study of Religion and Politics (CSRP) of the University of St. Andrews. It outlines the theoretical and historical basis for this project while outlining sites of burial and memory in India. The paper outlines sites of burial and remembrance in the Indian Commonwealth Cemeteries and includes Indians from British India who joined the British Armed Forces during World War I (WWI) and World War II (WWII) before the Partition of India in 1947. Eleven epistemes are described in this paper that point to a system of topological significance related to variety, hierarchy and historiographical immersion within a wider Indian universe. Thus, Commonwealth sites and those buried in them provide a different landscape and symbolic existence within a colonial and post-colonial India. Within such landscapes, the dead are Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs and Jains with their signs and symbols on their graves. Thus, they challenge the ethnic and religious divisions of Partition, and remain apart and sometimes forgotten by current unified discourses and epistemologies of nationalism. This paper argues that cemeteries provide diverse epistemologies rather than unified discourses.

Keywords

India, Commonwealth Cemeteries, Interfaith Burials, Epistemologies of the Dead, British Cemeteries

1. Introduction

It might be argued that the keeping of the dead by the living is a central occupation that theologically unifies the community of the dead and the living, as well

as the cremation of those to be reincarnated (Arnold, 2021). However, epistemologically diverse ways of knowing operate in a shared moment, common and crucial to all humanity: the moment of death and the aftermath (Sumegi, 2024). Those who believe in an after-biological life and those who don't share the same predicament undertake the same human process: biological death, funeral and burial (Streb & Kolnberger, 2021). The living faces a moment of grief, discontinuity and social anxiety while the dead in the case of India face a physical change and metaphysical continuity according to their beliefs, social organisation and ritual practices (Singh, 2022). Thus, this first research paper within the research project on "Burying the Dead" of the Centre for the Study of Religion and Politics (CSRP) of the University of St. Andrews, outlines the theoretical basis for this project as well as the symbolic parameters of burial and memory dictated by the existence of burial places, memorials and cemeteries for those who fought in war for the Commonwealth and are buried or remembered in India.

For this paper, the dead buried or remembered in the Indian Commonwealth Cemeteries comprise those Indians in British India who joined the British Armed Forces during World War I (WWI) and World War II (WWII) before the Partition of India in 1947. Figures of those who joined will never be exact, but there is a consensus of ca. 2.5 million recruits from India serving in the Indian Army during WWII (Gupta, 2023: p. 237, note 4) while Khan notes that there were 2 million Indian men demobilised at the end of the war (Khan, 2015: xi). While this paper focuses on the world wars and the Commonwealth, other future papers will focus on other cemeteries in India whose Hindu majority does not lie on a cemetery but on a memorial of their cremation, as it is the case of the Mahatma Gandhi (Raj Ghat, New Delhi), and Nehru, Indian first Prime Minister (Santi Van, north of Raj Ghat, New Delhi).

Other forms of burial within this project will be organised by the different religious belonging of the dead (see below) but within an extraordinary diversity of burials, memorials and gravestones associated with historical periods within India. Indeed, when looking at British India and the general centrality of the East India Company (1600-1874), its company realities in life and death seem peripheral to most of the local history of India and the history of religion in India (Ride, Ride, & Mellor, 1996). However, the East India Company was not only a financial enterprise but also an epistemological project on which the politics of knowledge between the British Empire and India were fought and negotiated (Ehrlich, 2023). After the Mutiny of 1857, the Company represented an imperial arm for trade with India and Asia with 20,000 or so employees, and as employees of the Company died in service in India, they needed a place for burial. Thus, the first British cemetery was established in Calcutta, the main trading centre for the East India Company, inside Fort William in today's Kolkata. As land was exhausted, a new extension was established in South Park Street, Mullick Bazaar, in 1769. South Park Street Cemetery with an impressive diversity in architecture became one of the largest non-Church cemeteries in the world.

One must remember that the British, in their majority Christians, needed

cemeteries following the Christian doctrines of burial within the rites of the established Anglican Church that outlined the rising of the dead during the second coming of Christ. Hindus cremated their bodies and therefore while ash funerary pyres were plentiful, cemeteries as such were present where Christians, Muslims or Jews lived. Cemeteries were also signs of power and British presence within the landscape with memorials to the dead being built everywhere. By 1947, the British left 700 - 1000 cemeteries on the sub-Indian continent (e.g. Krieger, 2013). Most of them remain unkept and with no records or historical archives attached to them with a few exceptions such as Raaja Bhasin's work on memorials located in Christ Church, Shimla (Bhasin, 2021). Thus, in 1977, the British Association for Cemeteries in South Asia (BACSA) was founded to record and maintain cemeteries and graves of British personnel who fought outside the realm of WWI & WWII, and most importantly of hundreds of thousands of civilians who died in South Asia from the 17th century to 1947¹. It was in 1949 that the British Government decided not to look after those civilian graves in India and Pakistan and to leave the task of caring for the graveyards to those then independent countries' Christian congregations. The governments of India and Pakistan gave assurances that they would protect cemeteries from destruction and desecration. Thus, in India some of those monuments and graveyards are under the protection of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) and of state authorities. Indeed, a successful series of publications on information related to cemeteries in India and Pakistan have been published (Davies & British Association for Cemeteries in South Asia, 1989; Farrington & British Association for Cemeteries in South Asia, 1991; Farrington & British Association for Cemeteries in South Asia, 1992; Galsworthy & British Association for Cemeteries in South Asia, 1993).

2. Material Epistemologies of the Dead

The epistemologies of the dead have become ever more complex within the 21st century because of the role of artificial technology on legalising a non-ever ending parameter of life and existence whereby electronic information does not differentiate between the living and the dead within a system (Trabsky, 2024). Indeed, law becomes crucial to legally declare the living as different from the dead so that Marc Trabsky has argued that "legal theorists and social scientists need to rethink doctrinal perspectives of law when theorising how law defines the moment of death, shapes what kind of deaths counts, and recycles the debris of the dead" (Trabsky, 2024: p. 4).

In the case of India ways of knowing about the dead are various and disputed by the major religious traditions, namely Hinduism, Islam, Sikhism, Christianity and Jainism within a secular constitution that secures the co-existence of different traditions. However, constitutionally and demographically the Indian state has favoured the Hindu majority since Partition in 1947 while the Indian

¹About BACSA - BACSA.

Constitution “at article 26 vests in every religious denomination in India certain rights, including that of establishing and maintaining institutions for religious and charitable purposes; managing its own affairs in matters of religion; and owning, acquiring and administering movable and immovable property” (Thiruvengadam, 2017: pp. 170-171). However, Ramahandra Guha has argued that there are five areas of contestation in the Indian Constitution, i.e. religion, caste, language, class and gender (Guha, 2007). This research projects dwells in the contestation of identity within religion and politics after death and within the provisions for the dead understood within article 26 of the Constitution of India.

Indeed, national discussions on death have overemphasised the power of demography in India so that from discussions on the death penalty to the location of the dead India has operated a strong state policy. Thus, any possibility of burial places representing the Commonwealth remain positively subversive and global within a country in which Hindus and Muslims fought hard as to separate their purity laws and their burial sites (Aguilar, 2018).

Discussions on modernity and religion presented a European challenge to diversity whereby since the times of Constantine, Europe was united in a single understanding of life and death through Christianity. Thus, until the Protestant Reformation Europe under Roman Catholicism relied on a single unity of daily prayer, ritual and rites of burial and death. Death marked the end of the biological existence followed by the continuation of the soul and the immediate personal judgement, the soul journey to heaven or hell and the awaiting of the Resurrection of the Dead in which all bodies would arise and recognise a single reality, that of the Second Coming of the Risen Christ.

India underwent the challenges of modernity at different times when the Muslim conquest encountered the Indus civilisation and different religions challenged their own developments and future. The arrival of the British brought Anglicanism and a sense of Christian unity under empire and the sovereign, particularly during the long reign of Queen Victoria, Empress of India. When Partition took place in 1947, the Gandhi dream of a unified India was shattered by the extreme and well-spread violence between Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs, recipients of a political dream that affected their purity, their lives, and their burial places. Therefore, an epistemology of the dead that had been orderly constructed and imperially imposed was shattered. The living were ordered by the creation of the states of India and Pakistan, while the ordering of the dead and how we know about them after death (metaphysical realities) remained diverse, opposed, contradictory and divisive.

3. Metaphysical Epistemologies of the Dead

How do we know (about the dead) as an epistemology (of the dead) remains diverse in India and within a larger project on the epistemology of the dead can be organised within the following models of religious diversification’ as outlined in my initial work on African and Muslim burials (Aguilar, 1998):

1) **Epistemologies of the state** suggesting a unified law and legal tenants within the state, in this case of British India (Curl, 2000).

2) **Epistemologies of topology** that refer to the significance of place rather religion or politics and that is associated with localised or indigenous religions at a very localised level (Batt, 2001).

3) **Epistemologies of the global**, including the legal tenants of international bodies that dispose their dead in relation to a foreign body, e.g. the Commonwealth Cemeteries, in which the community of the dead belong to a symbolically constructed community of those who died in war for King and country or cemeteries in large cities where those who have died come from an international community (Legacey, 2019).

4) **Epistemologies of the Hindu community** in which burial is not the norm but cremation and reincarnation. The ultimate metaphysics of the transformation of matter into a metaphysical reencounter through Brahma (Singh, 2022).

5) **Epistemologies of the Muslim Community** in which burial is the norm and whereby Muslims share the notion of Heaven and paradise with Allah (Muslim Burial Council of Leicestershire, 2000).

6) **Epistemologies of the Christian community** in which burial and the belief in the Resurrection is common between the traditional Churches that constitute the majority of Christians in India, and a minority demographical group in India. It must be noted here that the Portuguese and the Jesuits brought the Christian Gospel to India and therefore their presence preceded the later presence and colonisation of the East India Company and the British Empire (Farrington, 1999).

7) **Epistemologies of the Sikh community** in which cremation is preferred while topographical burial is allowed due to the belief of the importance of the journey of the soul rather than the body. No monument of head stone is allowed giving an important contrast with the Sikhs who died within wars of the Commonwealth and who have a headstone and a place of burial allocated to them (Webster, 2024).

8) **Epistemologies of the Jain community** in which cremation is the norm within 24 hours of death and the spreading of ashes within a sacred place such as a river or a Jain crematorium. Souls go on countless journeys and therefore the materiality of the body is not very central (Bilimoria, Bohanec, & Sherma, 2023). Jainism has seventeen different kinds of deaths: Avici-marana, Avadhimarana, Atyantika-marana, Vasaharta-marana, Valana-marana, Antahsalya-marana, Tadhava-marana, Bala-marana or Akama marana, Pandita-marana or Sakama marana, Balpandita-marana, Chadmastha-marana, Kevali-marana, Vaihayasa-marana, Guddhapristha-marana, Bhaktapratyakhyana-marana, Inginta-marana, and Padopagamana-marana.

9) **Epistemologies of the Buddhist community** in which cremation seems to be the norm but whereby embalming and burial is possible, particularly when it comes to religious figures and community members who are communally considered to have achieved samsara or the end of suffering.

10) Epistemologies of Parsis (Zoroastrianism), a religion that originated in India and became an Iranian religion with disputed polytheism transformed into a monotheistic religion. In India, Parsis are ethnically the descendants of a group that arrived in Mediaeval India escaping from the expansion of the Persian Empire. They arrived in Mumbai 1000 years ago and settled into villages north of Mumbai, in Karachi (Pakistan) and Bengaluru (Karnataka, India). Parsi burials follow the custom of excarnation known also as sky burials, practiced in the Himalayas and Tibetan Buddhism. Human bodies are left exposed to the elements for decomposition. The idea is to avoid contamination of the soil. In this process, carrion birds consume the flesh of the deceased. The remains left are collected within “the tower of silence” used for such burials and further weathering and breakdown occur. The sky burial is considered an act of charity towards the birds. As it has been the case in India, a shortage of vultures has introduced the practice of Parsi burials and cremations.

11) Epistemologies of Adivasi which embraces the indigenous populations of India. Adivasi is a term that before India’s independence became an identity flag for groups that had been discriminated by Hindus, and that continued to be discriminated regardless of the independence of India.

12) Epistemologies, topologies and mapping which methodology associates socio-cultural identities with localities and places. Thus, Commonwealth Cemeteries fall within such categories as the dead are classified and culturally identified with their previous life within service to King and country, and with the armed forces rather than their birth, ethnic group or language of socio-cultural identity.

These terms of epistemological classification will aid the plausibility of difference and diversity in terms of Michel Foucault’s “archaeology of knowledge” in which the methodology and historiography of epistemes and discursive formations follow rules that operate individually within the consciousness of the subject individuals (Foucault, 2002). However, those conceptual systems are bound by language and thought used in each time and domain. Thus, the history of ideas is linked to periods of discontinuity, to perceptions of historical domains and limitations that concern plausibility and historiography rather than causation and ideal conceptions of ideas, norms and customs. Epistemes as described in this paper are therefore changeable and cannot be associated solely with systems of colonialism but with systems of topological significance related variety, hierarchy and historiographical immersion within a wider Indian universe. Colonialism becomes a cyclical level of existence for a country like India in which the sheer number of citizens is as diverse as possible, but they are epistemologically understood as unified by the state and by exclusivist narratives of nationalism within Hinduism.

Within such discourse of unification cemeteries become a heaven of diversity within the exclusion experimented by the living. For classificatory aims, epistemes will not only embrace the epistemological procedure of norm-change but the diversity of the colonial experience in a postcolonial setting. Such experience

in relation to cemeteries articulates an action by the dead that take over space and time and reproduce diversity in a single topology, providing order and aesthetics while keeping a symbolic community dead (and alive) in systemic interactions of memory reconstruction and artificial intelligence. Indeed, the experience of Egyptian mummies in European museums as richly analysed by Angela Stienne is as valid during Victorian times as today (Stienne, 2022). Mummification and the exhibition of a mummy within a particular place require a diachronic journey in which questions are not asked because mummies become part of our visual and intellectual landscape. Thus, Commonwealth graves, only lately, have stressed the story of a human being and his related family, a human being that was raised not out of the Commonwealth but was born of a woman in India. I note the auto-self-reflexive comment of Angela Stienne when in 2019 she visited Blythe House, at that time store and archive of the Victoria & Albert Museum, the British Museum and the Science Museum:

But I had read the 213-page list of the human remains in the care of the museum, and I knew: this was a museum graveyard, the result of the obsessive collecting of one man, and also of the collecting craze of a type of institution, *the museum* (Stienne, 2022: p. 22).

As Stienne, my intellectual curiosity has focused on the dead who represent Otherness in colonial times but who became part of a world that was silenced because these were the ones who belonged to king and country and fought for king and country in the times of the British Empire.

4. Epistemes of the Dead and Topologies of the Living

The necessary episteme of national identity of the dead as different from the living in India might be concentrated within topologies of knowledge whereby space becomes the central marker of identity rather than the use of time. Thus, the topologies of the living are constituted by spaces built for the living's memory of the dead. For the dead do not move from the physical place in which they exist while the spirits of the dead, *atmans* and *jinnns* have already occupied other bodies, other places and other histories. The central tenant for research becomes the history of context whereby the realms of space and time are not mixed in their own existence, pre-existence and post-existence classified under this research project as an epistemical classification. Such classification reaffirms the diversity of topology and in the case of the Commonwealth Cemeteries represents a land occupied by a family that provides adherence to diversity in symbols, signs and architectural representations.

In doing so, the living become part of a socio-identical marker: the city of the dead (Zappaterra, 2022). Many works have outlined the localised unification of the dead under unified social customs, but few have dwelt on the diversification of graveyards and cemeteries despite their growth within the diversification of globalised societies. Despite ethnic, national, and confessional differences the material unification of the dead among the living mobilises an enormous number of resources, time, prayers, and community gatherings. Within such reality,

the dead and their cities, this paper and indeed the wider project of “burying the dead,” take over part of the landscape of the living, and as this paper suggests, need to be researched as communities rather than as health divisions for the sake of the living.

Despite diverse understandings of the only common reality of humans, i.e. death, the division of graves, cemeteries and locations for the dead has always divided social groups with the single purpose of honouring the dead and keeping their memory close to the living. Tombs and graveyards are signifiers of identity, power, gender, and most importantly belonging to a community of faith that doctrinally has intimated what would happen to the dead at the time of death as much later. Thus, the monotheistic religions such as Christianity, Islam and Judaism share the conditions of an individual judgement after death and a rising of the dead communally in a time to come. Therefore, the materiality of the dead fills our cities making cities of the dead in which social hierarchies, ranks and hierarchical structures continue even if bodies are not present, through memorials, monuments, and shrines where the living can still visit the dead in a location.

Different cemeteries become cities of the dead in which the living mirror their own social realities, and their own expectations for the future. For health, kinship, and memory reasons the dead must be kept apart from the living but not far apart so that those who have departed become the guardians of tradition, of sentiment and of the future. Thus, the cities of the dead as communities require the same attention in research than the cities of the living, for the ones who have passed away reside in the cities of the dead that separate them but also create activities of inter-faith dialogue, through material, visual and ritual diversity, a diversity in cemeteries and graves that we are still to discover. As the world of the living changes so does the world of the dead with the development of memorials to the dead in Nagasaki, Japan, the burials of refugees on the beaches of Lampedusa, Italy, or the rose garden for the disappeared at the Parque de la Paz Villa Grimaldi in Santiago, Chile. Cemeteries evolve as ring of cemeteries, challenging past conceptions and providing new aesthetics, social history and beauty, as it was the case of the London cemeteries known as “the Magnificent Seven”, designed and built in the decade from 1832 (Turpin & Knight, 2011).

This paper opens the first line of questioning about the interaction of different religious traditions through their places of burial, and through their ways of burial within contexts. Within a research project on “Burying the dead” of which this paper is part of, we must assume the contextual construction of such a universal reality. Thus, the finding of the dead among the living in particular countries and locations becomes the methodological approach to communities of the dead, and their enormous diversity within a particular locality.

5. Genesis and Eschatology of a Typology

This first paper on “Burying the dead” started in New Delhi, India in January 2017 when together with my daughter Sara, I visited the Delhi Cantonment War Cemetery where for the first time I noticed how gravestones were at first sight

similar but in fact they had different designs. A walk at the War Cemetery with the Asian director of archives who happened to be visiting and a close look at the graveyards, revealed that there were gravestones of slightly different shapes and different inscriptions for soldiers who had died within British India and who were Christian, Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs. The Delhi War Cemetery, a difficult place to find and located within military spaces in Delhi, is a witness of India's memory that continued after India's independence in 1947 simply because more than a million Indians from the Indian regiments had fought together with the British regiments and indeed the Allies during the two world wars and their memory was preserved for their families within the Commonwealth of nations. Thus, in November 2018, a hundred years after the end of World War I, Britain and India were still united in remembrance at the Commonwealth War Cemetery in Delhi cantonment ([Eastern Eye, 2018](#)).

This paper outlines the development of a unified community of the dead within India as part of the Commonwealth, known within British India as the Imperial War Graves Commission of which India was one of the founders, and a central player before and after the Partition of India (1947). Such arrangement created the possibility of an eternal communion in a common cemetery for those who in their lifetime showed an enormous religious diversity. Thus, one of the first questions at the end of World War I was the possibility of cremation for Hindu soldiers who had died in the battlefields in France, a country where cremation was not legally possible. For the dead in war, particularly those who died in World War I & II, continue being part of a unified material community of warriors as they were within their biological life. The dead's theological diversity is celebrated in graves that materially looked the same as a unified and globalised family of the dead within the unity of a historical path of war that was not interrupted after the independence of India from Britain in 1947. For the nationality of the dead and the belonging to the Commonwealth is restored beyond biological death by their belonging to the Commonwealth city of the dead, an eternal belonging, timeless and immanent to the point of going beyond a localised kinship family to the theological construction of an eternal family based on a military oath rather than a biological birth. And within the diversity of faiths, confessions and beliefs, the ultimate interfaith takes place: a diverse community of belief united, a theological reproduction of a socio-ethnic diverse community above religion and politics, one in the many, an eternal memorial marking the "ultimate sacrifice".

In this paper, and within the "Burying the Dead" larger project, I argue with Peter Stanford that graveyards offer a refreshing look at death in a 21st century in which talking about death has become a taboo subject ([Stanford, 2014](#))². I would argue that Stanford's illuminating work was published before the COVID world pandemic, in which death became a daily topic of conversation for every family and nation/state. Thus, and in the context of Artificial Intelli-

²However, see Stanford's chapter on 'The Commonwealth War Graves, northern France' ([Stanford, 2014](#)).

gence and the extension of biological life through medical care and different lifestyles, social groups had public conversations about death more often than what we care to admit (Reeves, 2023). Indeed, Reeves had a clear perspective to start conversations about death as a motivation for life because “the pandemic arrived, and I saw how it became a global theme by force and not for a desire to talk about it” (Reeves, 2023: p. 250). New wars and international conflicts have reminded us of our frail humanity and of our certainty that one day we will die as every other human being will. Thus, during the 21st Century, wars have also brought concerns about cemeteries and their graveyards within conflicts such as Iraq, Syria, and particularly Gaza in 2014 and 2023 (Catron, 2014)³.

6. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC)

The two World Wars (1914-1918, 1939-1945) that mobilised millions of troops, men and women throughout the world left an extraordinary number of graves all over Europe, Africa, Asia, and Oceania, and certainly within UK and those countries under the British Empire. Thus, the patriotism involved in every country and certainly within the UK expressed their national wish to honour those who had offered the supreme sacrifice for King and country. War cemeteries sprang already after World War I, understood as “a burial ground for service personnel who died during a war” (Summers, 2010: p. 5). Such definition was detailed and precise, and it was different than “a cantonment or garrison cemetery, which might also contain the remains of the families of servicemen and of those who died of disease, accident or natural causes as a result of their service in places such as India, North America, the Caribbean or south-east Asia” (Summers, 2010: p. 5).

During World War I, the Imperial War Graves Commission was founded, later to become the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, to offer each fallen serviceman a named grave or a named memorial (Wallace, 2018: vii). Those involved were its founder Major General Fabian Ware (1869-1949), and a dedicated group of committee members, including Frederic Kenyon, Edwin Lutyens, Herbert Baker, Reginald Blomfield, Macdonald Gill and Rudyard Kipling (Wallace, 2018: vii). Thus, on 21 May 1917 the Imperial War Graves Commission (IWGC) was established by Royal Charter⁴.

7. India and the CWGC

British India was one of the original founding members of the CWGC and a million soldiers of the British Indian Army fought within World War I. Of those 60,000 were killed in action. Thus, from the beginning of the CWGC the question about the burial of Indian military personnel was asked. CWGC archival correspondence 1916-1917 settled the question of Indian personnel who died in France so that an alteration was made to “Instructions to Officers” regarding

³Joe Catron outlined particularly the difficulties of keeping the Gaza War Cemetery under the 2014 campaign by Israel in the Gaza strip by its long-term gardener Ibrahim Jeradeh (Catron, 2014).

⁴Our story: The creation of the CWGC.

burials to make them applicable to Indian soldiers (Archive CWGC 1/1/1/34/11 Directory of Graves Registration and Enquiries File 11 Indian Graves 9/8/16-21/4/17 SDC 4).

Within the early discussions on Indian graves there was already a sensitivity by the Indian Graves Committee towards the commemoration of Hindus and Muslims dead in the Great War and who had died as members of the Armed Forces. As a result, a proposal for headstones and central memorials for Hindus and Muslims was discussed at the meeting of the Indian Graves Committee already before the end of the Great War (Archive CWGC/1/1/5/29 Indian Graves Committee 18/2/1917-20/3/1918 SDC 86). After the end of World War I, the Indian Graves Committee met again and elected members to the Committee requesting the Indian army units to suggest designs for headstones, and proposal for designs of memorial buildings to Muslim and Hindu dead by E. Lutyens and H. Baker. The Indian Grave Committee also proposed consultations on religious aspects of the proposed designs with Indian experts, and a choice of site for a Hindu memorial (Archive CWGC/1/1/5/30 Indian Graves Committee 26/2/1918-22/8/1922 WG 909/9). The Committee for Indian Graves of France and Belgium discussed after World War I the headstones and memorials for Indian troops in those countries and the proposals for a Sikh Gurdwara beside proposals for Hindu and Muslim memorials and a central monument in each cemetery. The Committee for Indian Graves of France and Belgium also expressed dissatisfaction for the inadequate registration of Indian graves in France and Belgium by DGRE. Further, there were discussions on suitable plants for Indian cemeteries, inscriptions for Indian graves, French regulations restricting cremation of bodies, and the use of religious symbols on graves. Reports were written after inspection visits to Indian cemeteries and graves, and the horticultural treatment of Indian World War I graves and plots after World War II (Archive CWGC/1/1/7/B/37 Indian Graves - France and Belgium 16/2/1918-10/6/1952 WG 909/7).

8. The Inter-Religious Graves in India

The agreements of the CWGC at the end of World War I were implemented throughout the Commonwealth Cemeteries of the British Empire, and certainly within India. India, as a founding member of the CWGC, was central on implementing the necessary measures for burials and funerals of military personnel according to their religion and symbols related to each one of those religions were used on the gravestones within cemeteries. It is important to remember that the families of those killed in war were at the centre of the Commission's concerns. However, those who signed the Armistice of November 1918 never imagined that a similar World War was to take place from 1939-1945. Therefore, cemeteries and memorials that seemed to be adequate for a post Great War climate continued to be developed at national level over the past one hundred years, incorporating all those killed in military campaigns such as those in the

Falkland Islands, Iraq, and Afghanistan. The construction of a National Memorial Arboretum at Staffordshire was also developed to remember those who served King and country with the development of over 400 different memorials to the fallen of different regiments as well as civilian and charity organisations and the public services. For example, the Burma Railway Memorial at Arboretum remembers those who were prisoners of the Japanese Imperial Forces and were made to work in the building of the Burma Railway during War World II.

9. India Gate (Delhi)

In British India, the most important memorial to Indian troops killed in action during World War I was opened by Lord Irwin on 12 February 1931 in Delhi as the All-India War Memorial. Designed by the British Architect Sir Edwin Lutyens, the monument serves as a national memorial to all the 74,187 soldiers of undivided India who died during the years 1914-1921 in France, Flanders, Mesopotamia, Persia, East Africa, and Gallipoli, the majority of whom are commemorated in other places in the world. The memorial commemorates 13,300 Commonwealth servicemen by name, 1000 of which lie in cemeteries to the west of the river Indus because maintenance was not possible. The rest died in campaigns on or beyond the Northwest Frontier during the Third Afghan War (May-August 1919) and their graves are not known.

After independence the memorial was renamed as India Gate, and India as a founding member and member of the Commonwealth continued expanding the original monument with further additions. The main one was added after the Bangladesh Liberation War in 1972, a structure consisting of a black marble plinth with a reversed rifle, capped with a war helmet and bounded by four eternal flames, built beneath the archway. This structure acts as India's monument to the unknown soldier known as *Amar Jawan Jyoti* (Flame of the Immortal Soldier). Every year, the Indian Prime Minister pays its tribute to the *Amar Jawan Jyoti* before the start of the Republic Day Parade.

India Gate remains a national place of encounter being visited by Indian families and tourists alike. Thus, it became a central memorial after independence for a national sentiment of India's unity, memory, and history. However, works on India Gate have outlined the difficulties of memorial re-appropriation of a memorial that was very much part of British India into the new memories of an independent India. Thus, David A. Johnson has talked about colonial and post-colonial histories of India Gate arguing that "while the memorial became a site of national cohesion for many, it also perpetuated a colonial politics of division along communal (religious) and inter-communal (caste) lines that has eroded a sense of well-being and security for significant sections of the Indian community" (Johnson, 2018: p. 345). Thus, Johnson concludes that "India Gate serves as a symbol of both national renewal and national fragmentation" (Johnson, 2018: p. 345). Indeed, Johnson's work provides a multi-semantic post-reflection on the

different meanings attached to India Gate, including protests about rights and challenges to nationalism and the figure of the Mahatma. I would argue, contra Johnson, that within such poli-semantic analysis, India Gate remains within the spirit of the CWGC as a national cemetery aiding families of the dead to connect with them, their own grief, and their own pride. This cannot be forgotten, and it is probably less contested in less prominent cemeteries and memorials throughout India. However, I realise that Johnson is probably correct on a multi-semantic analysis and my own work then becomes not a contestation of others' perceptions but an addition to the many layers of a gigantic multi-semantic nation of many histories, dreams, and aspirations.

10. Commonwealth Cemeteries and Memorials in India

While India Gate remains an important memorial for the nation, there are Commonwealth burials, cemeteries, and memorials in 122 locations in India as well as Indian personnel buried and parts of memorials in Europe, especially in France. It is beyond the scope of this paper 1 to outline Indian burials and memorials in Europe, but as an example, Indian paper 2 will explore the Indian Memorial at Neuve Chapelle, five kilometres north of La Bassee and twenty kilometres west-south-west of Lille. The Memorial is located 800 metres south-west of the village on the east side of the road from La Bassee to Estaires.

The Memorial at Neuve Chapelle commemorates 4700 soldiers and labourers who lost their lives in the Western Front during World War I and who have no known graves. The location was chosen because it was at Neuve Chapelle that the Indian Corps as a single unit fought their first battle on 11-13 March 1915. The Memorial is made of a sanctuary surrounded by a circular wall in the shape of the enclosing railings of early Indian shrines. The column in the foreground of the enclosure stands almost 15 feet high and was inspired by the inscribed columns built by the Emperor Ashoka throughout India in the third century B.C. The column is surmounted with a Lotus Capital, the Imperial British Crown, and the Star of India. Two tigers are carved on each side of the column guarding the temple of the dead. On the lower part of the column there is an inscription with the words "God is One, He is the Victory", inscribed in English, Arabic, Hindi, and Gurmukhi.

Those burials, cemeteries, and memorials in India today are the following:

Ranchi War Cemetery, Ranchi (S.P.G.) War Cemetery, Madras War Cemetery (Chennai), Madras (St. Patrick's) Cemetery (Chennai), Imphal India Army War Cemetery, Imphal Cremation Memorial, New Delhi Jewish Cemetery, Kirkee War Cemetery, Kirkee 1939-1954 Memorial, Bombay (Sewri) Cemetery (Mumbai), Calcutta (Entally) Cemetery (Kolkata), Calcutta (Lower Circular Road) Cemetery (Kolkata), Barrackpore New Cemetery, Darjeeling Old Cemetery, Digboi War Cemetery, Gauhati War Cemetery, Delhi/Karachi 1939-1945 War Memorials, Nicholson Cemetery, Kashmir Gate (Delhi), Alibag Cemetery, Bakloh Cemetery, Bangalore Cantonment (Kulpully) St. John Cemetery, Barkacha Mili-

tary Grave, Benares Cantonment Cemetery, Bettiah Cemetery, Cannanore General Cemetery, Cuddapah European Cemetery, Jhaja Cemetery, Kharagpur Cemetery, Malappuram (Christ Church Cemetery), Palampur Churchyard, Puri Cemetery, Raichur Railway Cemetery, Ramandrung Cemetery, Tirurangadi (Taluk) Isolated Graves,

Bombay 1914-1918 Memorial Mumbai, Bangalore (Hosur Road) New Protestant Cemetery, Bombay (St. Thomas) Cathedral Memorial Mumbai, Kohima Cremation Memorial, Baramula Convent Grave Kashmir, Calcutta (Bhowanipore) Cemetery Kolkata, Madras (St. Mary's) Cemetery Chennai, Madras 1914-1918 War Memorial Chennai, Kirkee 1914-1918 Memorial, Delhi War Cemetery, Delhi 1914-1919 War Memorial, Delhi Memorial (India Gate), Shillong Memorial, Imphal War Cemetery, Meerut Cantonment Cemetery, Deolali Government Cemetery, Agra Cantonment Cemetery, Ahmednagar Government Cemetery, Allahabad New Cantonment Cemetery, Ambala Cantonment Cemetery, Bangalore (Hosur Road) Cemetery, Belgaum Government Cemetery, Bolarum Cavalry Barracks Cemetery, Cawnpore Cantonment New Cemetery, Dagshai Cemetery, Dalhousie Civil Cemetery, Dalhousie Military Cemetery, Dinapore No. 3 Cemetery, Ferozepore Military Cemetery, Kamptee Roman Catholic Cemetery, Poona (St. Sepulchre's) Cemetery, Simla Old Cemetery, Agra (Havelock) Cemetery, Amritsar Cantonment Cemetery, Bareilly Cemetery, Dehra Dun Cemetery, Dum Dum New Cemetery, Fyzabad Cantonment Cemetery, Hoshiarpur (Christ Church) Churchyard, Igatpuri Cemetery, Jutogh New Cemetery, Kala Khan Cemetery Nainital, Kasauli Cemetery, Kydganj New Cemetery Allahabad, Landour General Cemetery.

Madras Kilpauk Cemetery Chennai, Madras St. Andrews' Cemetery Chennai, Madras St. George's Cathedral Cemetery Chennai, Madras Wesleyan Cemetery Chennai, Mussoorie General Cemetery, Nagpur (Takli) Cemetery, Ootacamund (St. Thomas) Cemetery, Port Blair Cemetery, Purandhar Cemetery, Ranikhet New Cemetery, Sabathu Cemetery, Secunderabad European Roman Catholic Graveyard, Wellington Garrison Cemetery, Secunderabad Cemetery, Ajmer New Cemetery, Arogyavaram Pothapole Union Mission Sanatorium, Saharanpur Cemetery, Bombay/Chittagong 1939-1945 War Memorials, Kohima War Cemetery, Jhansi Cantonment Cemetery, Jubbulpore Cantonment Cemetery, Kirkee New Cemetery, Lucknow Cantonment Military Cemetery, Mhow New Cemetery, Muttra Cemetery, Nasirabad Government Cemetery, Trimulgherry Cantonment Cemetery, Kamptee Cemetery, Ahmadabad Cantonment Cemetery.

The abundance of Commonwealth graves in India outlines the reality of a diversity of the dead's experience and of the living preoccupation for the dead. And while further details on burial places in India will be developed throughout the project, the diversity of the fate of the dead needs to be outlined within their epistemologies as well as their materiality. Therefore, a memorial to Hindu soldiers would immediately indicate that the body was cremated elsewhere and never buried following the Hindu custom because of the theological under-

standing of re-incarnation whereby the name on a memorial indicates a person who died and who after reincarnation or full exit of the human system (moksha) appears elsewhere as a material continuation of the person declared dead. While in the case of a burial indicated as Christian, the deceased lies on the ground awaiting the Resurrection of the bodies, as understood by Christianity.

11. Conclusion

In this paper, I have set out the foundations, typologies and challenges of “the city of the dead” in which our experiences have been for the most part limited by our social and family experience of one symbolic belonging within one tradition, and one episteme. We claim a wider experience and we claim to be globalised but our experience even with global movements is of one topology, and one universe simply because at that moment of death and burial we return to one experience, one topology and one truth, that of ourselves and our families. I recall here the wishes of Prime Minister Nehru who didn’t want to have a Hindu burial because he was the father of all India, or of the Mahatma who experienced the unity in diversity of India and was killed because of such a dream. Both were cremated close to each other and lie as a triumph of unity while they didn’t want the sole association of an independent India with Hinduism alone. Neither Raimon Panikkar nor Abhishiktananda (Henri Le Saux) as Christian theologians of interfaith dialogue wanted to be singled out within one religion (Christianity) only, that of their parents or their mothers, because they considered themselves Christians and Hindus (on Abhishiktanda see [Aguilar, 2016: pp. 43-82](#), on Panikkar see [Aguilar, 2016: pp. 143-158](#)). However, when Henri Le Saux died, he was buried in a Christian ashram and Panikkar’s funeral Mass was celebrated at the Cathedral in Barcelona.

This paper has articulated the plausibility of the existence of the dead side by side in their cemeteries, their memorials and their stupas. However, there must a clear division between the materiality and the metaphysics of the dead whereby the challenge of diverse epistemes and diverse universes can be assumed not as a problem but as a carnival of a diverse humanity. Thus, the Commonwealth cemeteries in India and elsewhere have made possible the post-burial common belonging without the violence and differences that existed among the living. We are born to journey and to learn that kinship disappears because the materiality of the dead provides a different existence. “Burying the dead” is the moment of crisis and of personal challenge in which not only do tears appear, but anger and frustration follow. It is a moment in which we remember that regardless of the passing of time, space will prevail and the space for the dead will show the end of the beginning.

Robert Laurence Binyon “For the Fallen” (The Times, 21 September 1914), opened the diversity of the dead with poetry, because poetry becomes the only possible genre that allows us to comprehend a moment in which we cannot share such experience because we are alive, and the dead have gone. He wrote:

They went with songs to the battle, they were young,
 Straight of limb, true of eye, steady and aglow.
 They were staunch to the end against odds uncounted,
 They fell with their faces to the foe.
 They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:
 Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
 At the going down of the sun and in the morning
 We will remember them.
 As the stars that shall be bright when we are dust,
 Moving in marches upon the heavenly plain,
 As the stars that are starry in the time of our darkness,
 To the end, to the end, they remain⁵.

And together with the British forces, the Indian dead heard the similar message through Rabindranath Tagore and his poem “Death”:

Death, my death, come and whisper to me! Day after day I have kept watch for thee; for thee have I borne the joys and pangs of life. All that I am, that I have, that I hope, and all my love have ever flowed towards thee in depth of secrecy⁶.

The research agenda outlined in this paper proposes the historical mapping of cemeteries in India and other countries, their inter-religious nature, the places where the living honour their dead (topologies of the living), and the locations and voices of the dead (topologies of the dead). Its methodology makes a clear distinction between diverse epistemologies of the dead, the materiality of the dead and the metaphysics of those who have died, if either they lie buried in the soil or have reincarnated in other corporeal realities of daily presence in India (Aguilar, 2021: pp. 96-124). The papers to be researched in India and other countries will be bound by their diversity in topology and epistemology but always with a research question on the nature of the material and metaphysical relation between the living and the dead.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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⁵For the Fallen Poem by Laurence Binyon (greatwar.co.uk).

⁶Death—poem by Rabindranath Tagore|PoetryVerse.

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