(Mis)infographic

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(Mis)infographics: investigating tensions and contradictions in 'facts', 'data' and 'information'

'Misinformation' is incomplete knowledge that goes to form wrongly accepted and distributed 'facts', which becomes the basis of the 'history' of humankind.

A '(Mis)infographic' is a or set of graphics, images, or texts that highlights the tension in 'information'. A presence of contrast is crucial in the formation of a (mis)infographic.

'Information', *in my opinion*, is 'facts' attempting to convey a particular arrangement or sequence of things or events.

'Facts', *in my opinion*, is a thing that is indisputably the case according to written down stories approved by lawmakers. Here I would like to clarify something; I am not disputing scientific facts, for example the temperature water boils at. Nor self evident facts, for example a dead body is unquestionably a person who has passed away. I am questioning historical facts. Sociology in specific, 'History' is where the research and application of (mis)infographics is rooted.

'History', *in my opinion*, is a collection of stories written down, which form the lens of how the world is perceived and remembered.

'Tension', *in my opinion*, is an indication that something is not right.

Take these above-mentioned definitions as examples of textual (mis)infographics. They intend to contrast and poke light into the stuffy, and forced understandings of these words by the revered Oxford English Dictionary. As Toni Morrison said, 'Definitions belong to the Definers, not the Defined'. By repeatedly saying '*in my opinion*' I am trying to reclaim these definitions for myself, through the lens of my life that is saturated with my cultural and geographic realities. Personally, every time I start writing something, I always redefine terms I don't resonate with. It allows me, the writer, to ensure as clear a communication as I possibly can and helps me own my story as my whole truth. Therefore trying to eliminate misinformation from the readers end.

The figures appearing throughout this booklet are the detailed characters from the (Mis)infographic on Jallianwala Bagh Massacre. They are painted in the Indian Miniature style.

Ruben Pater in The Politics of Design outlines the seed that gives birth to the weed, named misinformation, which is a privileged assumption that the concept of 'universality' can exist. 'Communication was and is a volatile process, wherein misinterpretations cannot be entirely avoided. At the root of miscommunication lies the assumption that people will understand us because we use 'universal' or 'objective' communication. Assumptions of objectivity and universality in design are closely tied to the modernist design principles as they are taught in Western design education'[1]. 'Universality' is not possible in reality beyond the scope of a willful theory because our cultural, social, economic, geographic, historic and racial heritages differ vastly from each other.

'Universality', *in my opinion*, is the quality of pretending to involve or the willful-hope of being able to be shared by 'all people' or things in the world.

'All people', *in my opinion*, are all the people a person or a community of people/thinkers can envision based on their limited experience of life and the true diversity of the world.

The reason I am interested in misinformation and (mis) infographic comes from my personal experience of growing up in New Delhi, India. Then living in Providence, Rhode Island, and now residing in London, UK. I, as many others, have been told I cannot be Indian because I apparently don't look like the archetype of one. It was pointed out that I was not dark enough, and I didn't have a turban. It baffled me to think where such strange and specific misinformation generated from, and then I stumbled upon Otto Neurath's ISOTYPEs. He used color specific silhouettes to represent populations of the world. Behold the dark brown man with a turban- an Indian[2]. It is fair to remember that 'ISOTYPE was a European invention during the time of European colonialism'[3], but it successfully created stereotypes. Chimamande Ngozi Adiche says 'We create stereotypes because we only have a single story of people in the East. The consequence of the single story is this: it robs people of dignity. It makes our recognition of our equal humanity difficult.

1 Ruben Pater, The Politics of Design: A (Not So) Global Manual for Visual Communication (Amsterdam: BIS Publishers, 2016), p. 3.

2 Otto Neurath, The Transformer: Principles Of Making Isotype Charts (London: Hyphen Press, 2009), p. 40-41.

Völkergruppen der Erde

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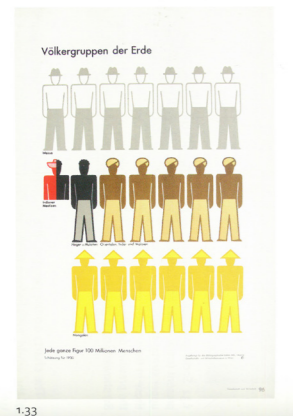
3 Ruben Pater, The Politics of Design: A (Not So) Global Manual for Visual Communication (Amsterdam: BIS Publishers, 2016), p. 130-131.

4 Chimamande Ngozi Adiche, The Danger of a Single Story.

5 Leela Gandhi, Postcolonial Theory A Critical Introduction (Columia University Press), p.13.

It emphasizes how we are different rather than how we are similar'[4]. I agree with Ngozi on the account of the dehumanizing consequence of stereotypes, however I feel instead of agonizing over the battle of differences versus similarity we should stop whitening the differences and celebrate them. It is in those differences where the beauty and untold narratives lie.

In order to disintegrate misunderstanding and miscommunications, we must be taught, or teach ourselves, how to learn, not what to learn. The concept of what to learn supposes that there is one correct answer. But there is no such thing. Instead we should focus on how to receive information and make sense of it for ourselves. Therefore removing the supposition that one person is right, and the other wrong. We are just left with different perceptions. The forefathers of Western Humanism, such as Thomas Babington Macaulay[5], who prided themselves on their humanity as more human than others, based on certain fixed knowledge would be deeply upset, but the future deserves better than the past.

I was inspired by W.E.B Du Bois's 'Data Portraits Visualising Black America' to approach this questioning of history from a slightly Infographic point of view. Infographics are one of the few main uses of design to try to display 'knowledge', 'facts', and 'statistics' neutrally. Where Neurath failed, Du Bois succeeded. It was in his consideration of the unique human narrative that allowed his Infographics to reclaim humanity for previously enslaved Black Americans. There is tension in all information, the probability that there was error, or information being left out due to political pressure, or personal bias, etc is omnipresent. The reasons for why the holistic truth cannot be built into diagrams are unlimited, so why should we try for the 'truth', when we can simply refer to it with bounds around it. A (mis)infographic is opposite to an infographic in the sense that is does not represent 'information' or 'data', but questions the validity of it.

Case Study One: Jallianwala Bagh Massacre Amritsar 1919

2019 was the centennial of the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre. It took place on 13th April 1919 on the day of a religious holiday Vaisakhi, with 50 fully armed infantry commanded by Brigadier-General Reginald Dyer, who were ordered to open fire 1650 bullets in a crowd of around 20,000 people, killing children, women and men going about their daily lives, in under 10 minutes. There was furious debate in the news where Britain was contemplating formally apologizing for the latter event, but decided not to. My interest in this event/case study/ patient zero was not due to the atrocious spectacle of colonial violence nor the continued negligence of the British to take any responsibility 100 years later, but because it is the perfect allegory to how history is rooted in misinformation. The tension in statistics accumulated by the Indian Congress, the party that got India freedom in 1947, and the British official report reflects this analogy.

6 Kim A.Wagner, Amritsar 1919 (Yale University Press, 2019), p. 217–222.

As researched by Kim Wagner in 'Amritsar 1919'[6], the reports of the two parties are hugely disproportionate. The British official numbers say that there was a crowd of 6000 people, where the causality was around 1200, in which 379 died and three times that were injured. However, the Indian Congress reported there were 20,000 people in the crowd, where the causality was over 2500, in which 1000 died and more than 1500 were injured. The only 'fact' seems to be the 10 minutes that the firing happened in where based on that, 1650 rounds were fired.

It is obvious that the Indian numbers are fleshy, whilst the British shy. Thus to graphically represent this information as a historical record would clearly be a challenge. By choosing one statistic over the other, is to make a political statement by giving weight to a single perspective of history over the other. This kind of duality, or dichotomy of information is something that is permanently present in every event, historical or present. The question comes down to how to filter this information to find the 'truth'? Here in applies my argument: in this age of post-truth, and fake news, there is no such thing as the ultimate 'truth'. 'Truth' specially in terms of history

can be considered as a one-sided story by a single person or group of people on-looking an event. There is no way for there to be one 'truth' for everybody since our cultural, social, economic, geographic, historic and racial heritages differ vastly from each other. Attempting to a) find the 'truth' b) graphically represent the 'truth' is similar to believing in and acting upon 'neutrality' and 'universality', idealistic concepts that cannot exist in reality. So why try? Instead accept that all data/information/facts/truths are humanly flawed and design accordingly.
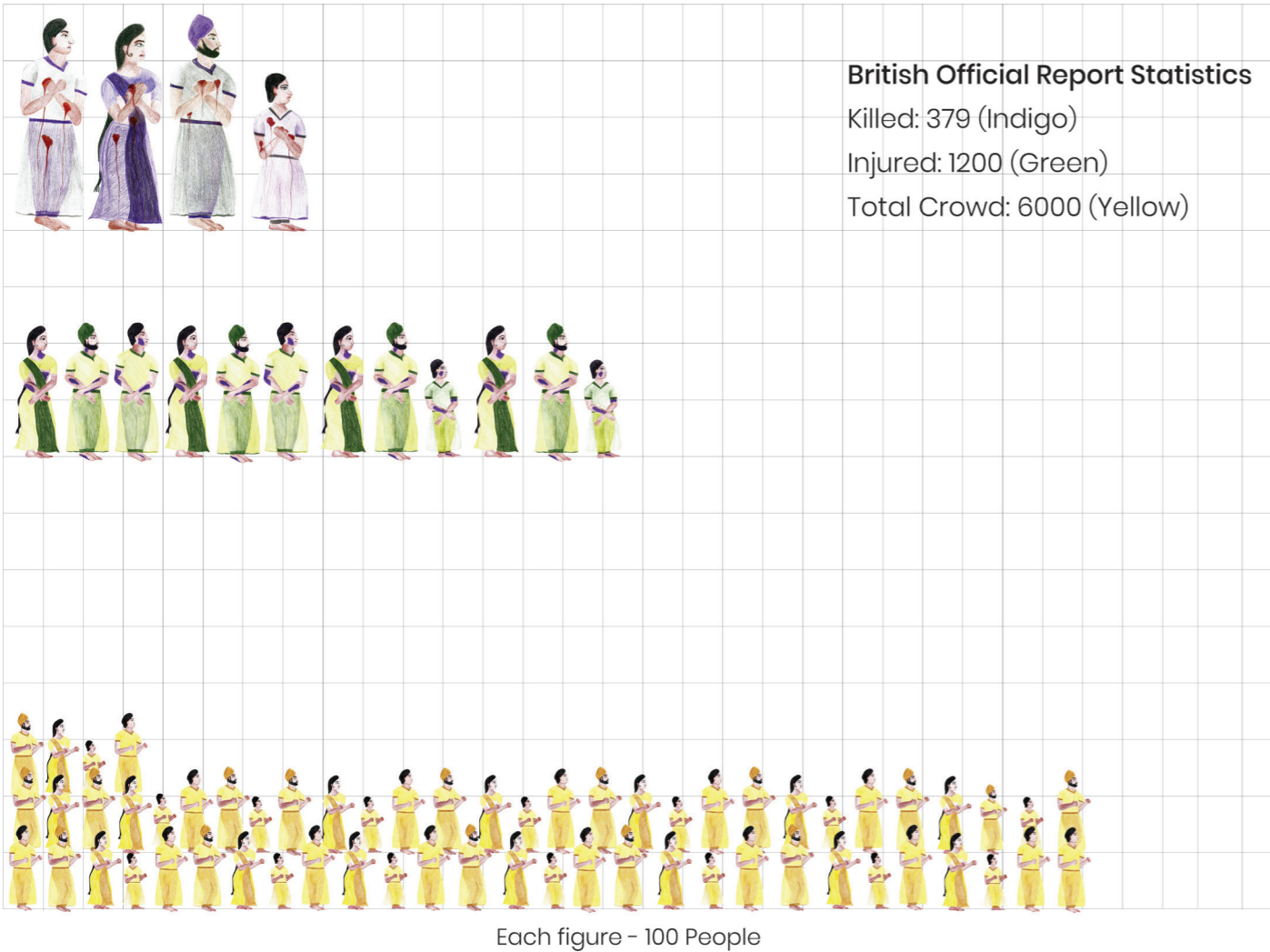
What a (mis)infographic suggests is to take all the various sources of information, in this case the two separate statistics, and design by keeping them both plainly in front of the audience's eye. In this way you are showing the tension, but you are also teaching the audience to gage into all kinds of information on their own. To question what they are receiving. The visual or text should teach them how to think, not what to think.

Keeping in mind all these aspects, I designed the (mis) infographic for Jallianwala Bagh massacre. On view on the next page.
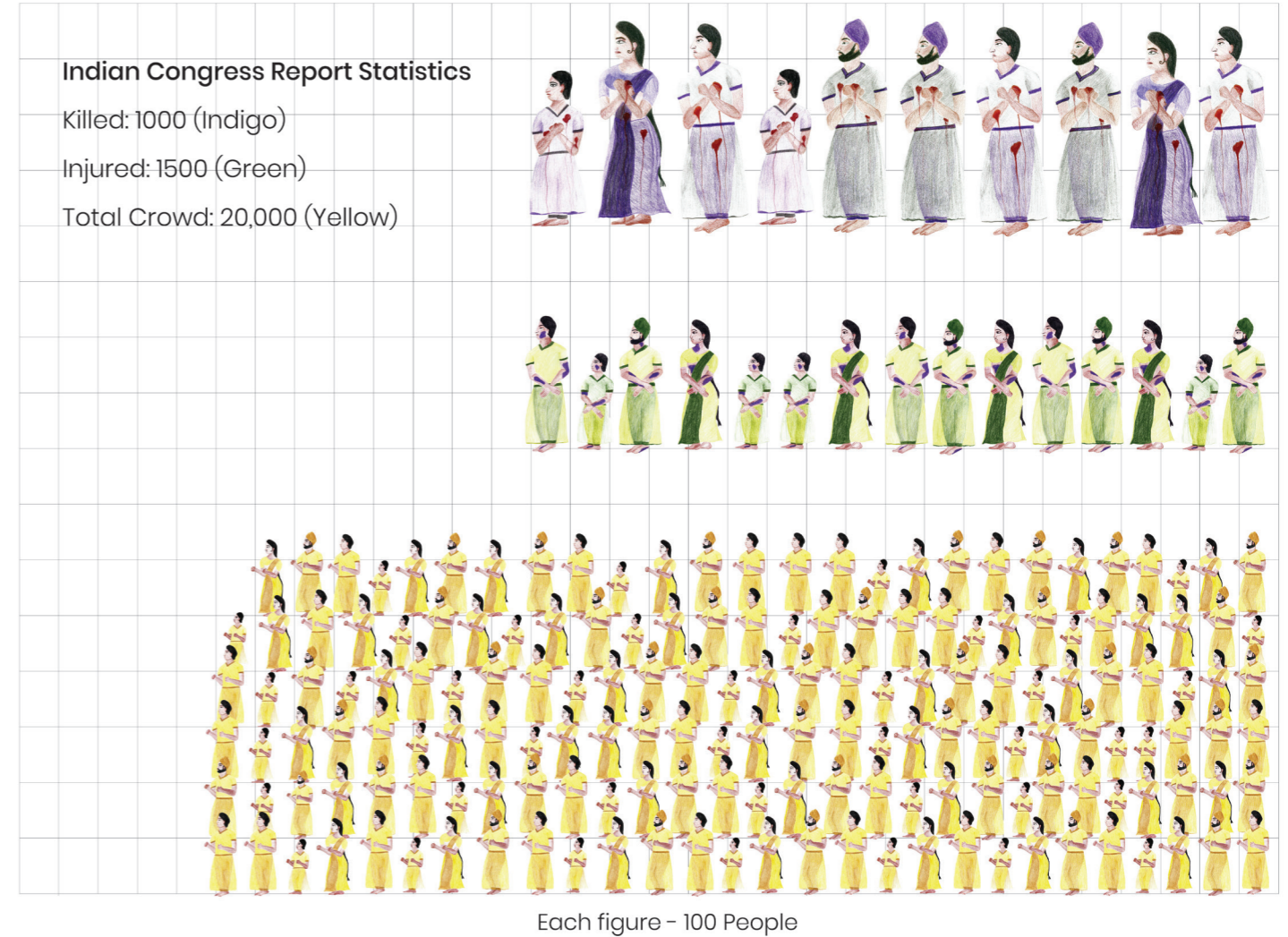
British Official Report Statistics

Killed: 379 (Indigo)

Injured: 1200 (Green)

Total Crowd: 6000 (Yellow)

Each figure - 100 People

Indian Congress Report Statistics

Killed: 1000 (Indigo)

Injured: 1500 (Green)

Total Crowd: 20,000 (Yellow)

Each figure - 100 People

The diagrams house figures in indigo that represent the people that were killed, green for people that were injured and yellow for people that happened to be present in Jallianwala Bagh on 13th April 1919. Each figure represents 100 people. The left diagram is based on the statistics of the British Official Report- Killed: 379, Injured: 1200, Total Crowd Present: 6000. In contrast, on the right there is the Indian Congress Report- Killed: 1000, Injured: 1500, Total Crowd Present: 20,000. The (mis)infographic is trying to show the tension in information without trying to be reductive or conclusive. It is not my place to weigh into either report; I am just trying to illustrate both statistics side by side to allow the audience to gage the discrepancy in historical accounts.

Each category of figures has four variations, almost accurate to the demographic of the crowd present. This

7 Otto Neurath, The Transformer: Principles Of Making Isotype Charts (London: Hyphen Press, 2009), p. 106.

was done in stark contrast to Otto Neurath's depiction of the Great War[7], where the figures were flat and lifeless. The colour indigo represents justice and dignity, something the people who were mercilessly killed that day were not offered. In painting those figures in that colour I hope to honour their souls with the rights their bodies weren't given. Green symbolizes renewal and health, which is what I salute the injured civilians with. The people in the crowd are wearing yellow because 13th April 1919 was Vaisakhi, also known as Punjabi New Year. A religious holiday where Sikhs wear yellow to celebrate. Also one of the main reasons why people were present in the square in large crowds.

As every story is seen from multiple perspectives, in order to record it in history the accumulation of those stories is crucial. The cross between the varying per-

spectives is the exact point in which history actually lies, and the viewer needs to be trained to take all of it in before deciding whose account is more or less valid. By beginning to include all perspectives of an account we will begin to decolonize our history, and when that data is visually represented will we go on to decolonize the way in which it is presented (designed).