



Revisiting Partition Seventy Years Later: Of Layered Echoes, Voices and Memories

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HISTORY

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On August 14 and 15, 2017, the states of Pakistan and India celebrated their 70th year of Independence from colonial rule, respectively. The date simultaneously marked the 70th anniversary of the gory, violent and tragic experiences of Partition. Notably, the episodes and events of Partition failed to find any mention in the addresses of either Shahid Khaqan Abbasi or Narendra Damodar Modi, the political heads of the two states. No official obituaries for those who were killed in the (religious) riots or the innumerable women who were raped and abducted, nor any moments of silence for the strife of those who were displaced and have led partitioned lives. In numerous ways, the official August moment stands precisely for this—a cyclical, ritualised remembrance of the nationalist movement(s) for independence from colonial rule, whereby each of the two states picks their own selectively deified national heroes, flag hoisting ceremonies and parades aired live on national television channels, lauding speeches by the heads of states, national holidays, new resolves for the nation and loud silences on Partition.

Though the historiography indicates seismic shifts from an emphasis on 'high politics' to oral history and testimonial narratives of those impacted by Partition, these everyday statist silences may have something deeper to suggest about the nature of recurring inter- and intra-



religious strife in all three countries—India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. In this special issue we aim to contribute to the (by now rich) historiography on Partition that gives cognizance to experiences of displacement, relocation, trauma and re-shaping as well as their periodic retelling (Butalia 2000; Menon & Bhasin 1998; Pandey 2003; Chawla 2014; Khan 2008; Roy 2012; Talbot & Singh 2009; Zamindar 2007). Seventy years later, this still remains crucial for two reasons—

Firstly—to rescue the horrific events of Partition from the limiting frameworks of nation-state centred metanarratives. This is in turn important for three specific purposes. First, to avoid statist versions of 'blame displacements' (Brass 2003) that remain shrouded in nationalistic discourses. Second, to avert loud silences in the respective states' 'liturgical calendar' (Mbembe 1992: 9) on the impact of Partition on the lives of millions. And third, because the numerous after-lives of Partition, as embodied in individual memory are not, and cannot, be contained and holistically captured by the circumscribing vocabulary of territorially defined borders (Menon 1999). Even if the fight for separate territorial claims was ironically the root cause of ensuing events, sources based in oral history from all three 'territories' or beyond remind us that for all impacted lives, partitioning the territories has not completely curtailed them from speaking about a past that used to be "elsewhere". Thus, memory itself cannot be territorially quarantined, given it spills over states' boundaries both spatially and temporally.

Secondly—to "re-fresh" memory by re-turning to Partition as a grave reminder of an unfinished business of the past(s), pasts that have not been dealt with holistically and are perhaps crucial for understanding the intricacies of post 1947 communal violence episodes in the subcontinent (Copland 1998; Das 1995; Gilmartin 1998: 1092).

An important dimension of why we re-turn to oral history as a source that informs the writing of Partition, as will be elucidated by almost all contributions to this issue, is to emphasize the multifarious and fragmented nature of remembrance and testimony. The social sciences have been quick and reflexive in showing how the official narratives of the two newly born nation-states of India and Pakistan silenced the episodes of Partition by immersing the moment in celebrations of independence. Scholars have also rightfully pointed out that these official versions have remained busy with conjuring an "Other" both outside and inside the respective territorial domains. Here, depending on the given context, Jinnah, Nehru and Gandhi



become the flag bearers of heroism or the carriers of blame. Some authors have engaged with how both the states have attempted to flatten the narrative of Partition, for instance in school textbooks (Greenberg 2005: 93-8; Giunchi 2007; Guichard 2013).

Whereas state-directed narrations of Partition have been critiqued, and even rejected quite often, there seems to be a limited reflexivity on how the practice of writing on Partition itself often flattens the multifarious, and sometimes contradictory, experiences of witnesses. These contradictions and nuances often only emerge as careful footnotes. The contributions in this issue bring forth and even magnify the absence of singular narratives. Thus, Subhasri Ghosh, Anasua Basu Ray Chaudhury and Udit Sen's contributions graphically show how a multiplicity of divergent experiences are to be traced in life trajectories that are often clubbed under the amorphous category of 'refugees' from Eastern Pakistan to India. Spread across dissimilar and diverse circumstances in squatters' colonies and refugee settlements in West Bengal, Dandakaranya or the Andaman Islands, these lives oscillate between realities of utter deprivation and hopelessness of refugee homes to those of proud achievements and self-making in geographically alien terrains. They thus refuse to be written through the lens of a singular grid. They also resist the flattening ascription of 'refugee', which though a defining element of existence after Partition, often disqualifies other self-ascriptions.

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In particular, Sen rightfully points out how overlooking differences in class and caste backgrounds among the refugees—which in turn also quantifies their differential experiences—can lead to ahistorical and homogenising accounts. Nonica Datta's contribution emphasizes how one of her three interlocutors' (Subhashini) testimonies oscillates between narratives of being a victim and simultaneously a supporter of perpetrators, who avenged her father's death by inflicting violence on Muslims from the village. A part of Subhashini's narrative reconstructs her story as one of proud revenge that vigorously supported violence against Muslims whereas the other stands at unease and reflects sorrow and suffering in the pain of Muslim women, their mutilated bodies, their rape and abduction. Thus, the contributions show the impossibility of cloaking the incommensurate nature of experiences into linear and uniform accounts.

Another discussion that we wish to contribute to is how to bring diverse experiences of spatially partitioned lives, that in turn also reflect the "regional expertise" of engaging scholars on either Punjab



or Bengal, under the same analytical framework. There is no doubt that the term "Partition" signifies differential experiences for those who witnessed it first hand, their future generations, those who have led bifurcated lives in Punjab or in Bengal (Talbot 2006; Chattha 2011; Chatterji 2007; Sengupta 2016). Divergences emerge not only in terms of the time span over which displacement continued and the degrees of porosity or im-permeability of borders, but also in the nature of how the states concerned attempted to 'deal' with the displaced persons (Iob 2017; Chakravarty 2014; Talbot 2011; Chatterji 2001).

Whereas we do acknowledge the necessity for micro-histories, which require regional expertise to engage with the complex experiences of Partition in the two geographically distant parts of erstwhile British India, we wish to move beyond simplistic comparisons that inevitably locate either Punjab or Bengal as the "more" tragic theatre of violence. Such comparisons of equivalence, in our opinion, do not serve the larger purpose at stake here. Social histories of Partition should not give precedence to one region's experiences over those of the other, therein distracting academic attention from the larger purpose of writing such histories, which would profit more if these different experiences were brought together under one comprehensive framework. Thus, rather than engaging with linear differences, it can be more fruitful to look at the nuances of myriad experiences through the same theoretical and methodological lens. It is in this direction that we hope that engaging with the interface of history, memory and testimony as an oral and aural informer of both, can be a productive means to understand Partition.

Historiography on Partition has more recently also contributed to understanding its impacts on regions like Sindh and Kashmir, a hitherto relatively understudied subject (Copland 1998; Khan 2003; Ansari 2005; Debergh Robinson 2010; Balasubrahmanyam 2011; Ankit 2016). Given that of those affected by the events, not all did or could remain within the geographical confines of either Punjab or Bengal, the after-experiences of Partition have spilled over to other terrains and should not be spatially quarantined in academic engagements to either of these two regions solely. As some of the contributions will show, whereas the episodes of Partition acquired other local lives in states like Haryana (see Datta's contribution), refugee lives that were directly impacted have sometimes moved to far off regions in Madhya Pradesh and the Andaman Islands (see contributions by Ghosh and Sen). The issue consists of six contributions, paying equal heed to experiences whereby Punjab and Bengal were the place where the violence



culminated but wherein the impacted lives were sometimes lived far away from the two partitioned areas, now belonging to three nation-states. Thus, we do not wish to claim that our concerns are only limited to, and sanitized into, three contributions on Bengal and three on Punjab. Neither do we wish to prioritize any region so as to reconfirm pre-existing spatial hierarchies that preferentiate Punjab or Bengal, and more so, Delhi, Lahore or Calcutta. As Sen aptly points out, these cannot be seen as 'representative of the "national" experience' of Partition (see Sens's article).

It is in this light that some of the contributions bring forth narratives from Haryana, Dandakaranya (territory in erstwhile Madhya Pradesh and present day Chattisgarh and Orissa) and the Andaman Islands while also paying heed to those in Calcutta, Delhi, Amritsar and Lahore. In doing so, we simultaneously wish to challenge the academic discourse(s) on 'remoteness' which also reproduce the idea of a centre that is far away from these 'distant' places of relocation. 'Remote' and 'distant' become informative categories only when they are used by the interlocutors to explain their own perception(s) of places that they came from and those where they finally went to. When used as ascriptions by scholars in writing histories of Partition, these terms become misleading as they re-emphasize geographical hierarchies. Hence in the contributions in this issue, Bengal (particularly East Bengal) and Punjab emerge as strong centres only when they have remained the focal point of nostalgia, personal loss, and ideas of an "original" home in some of the voices that the articles emphasize. They thus emerge as strong epicentres because of the weight they carry in emic accounts.

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The long-lasting repercussions of Partition demand that the traumatic history of individual episodes, the often-expressed longing for, and impossibility of, closure and the remembrance of violence, which continues to impinge upon the present-day lives of survivors, are not forgotten (Mohanram 2011). That they are kept alive in public memory and debates and are not frozen into the past as "history". However, we also wish to emphasize that there are nonetheless accounts of selfhood, reconstruction, newfound achievements, trajectories of remodelled existence and rehabilitation which also need to be rescued from the predominant ascription of victimhood and exile. These accounts, though few in numbers, and although never quite capable of undoing the ongoing emotional/psychological horrors of Partition, are equally important voices in writing more holistic histories.



If one of the primary aims of oral history is to give due cognizance to human agency vis-à-vis larger metanarratives and its self-expression in the voices of the interlocutors, then depictions of proud rehabilitation and the recovery of agency become as important as portrayals of being victimised. Thus, we see in Sen's article how not all stories of those who went to the Andaman Islands can be or should be dubbed as "exiled" lives and that not all were forced to leave for the Islands. Ghosh's article shows how, even if sparse and scattered in numbers, for some of the interlocutors at least, new terrains of residence have also borne new lives which are not only bleak. In a similar vein, Basu Ray Chaudhury's article shows how survivors reclaim their agency through vocabularies of struggle and agitation.

Crucial material coordinates of the memory of most survivors are the modes of transportation that became the enablers of dis- and replacement. They appear as strong actors and aesthetically inform the speakers' narratives. The train is a visual, material marker of the journey of the survivors. It also becomes a means to capitulate the horrors of violence in the case of most accounts related to Punjab. It is no surprise then that Khushwant Singh's powerful rendition of Partition, in the by now cult novel *Train to Pakistan*, finds its climax around the train. The articles revisit these physical mobile carriers in one way or another. In the English language, partition stands for '[mass noun] (especially with reference to a country with separate areas of government) the action or state of dividing or being divided into parts' (The Oxford English Dictionary). The term thus hints at a break, a caesura from a pre-existing state or condition. As a vehicle of mobility, the train, the steam ship or the boat does not just stand iconic of the spatial caesura in the lives of those travelling to new terrains, but the journey on the vehicle also becomes the mediator of a temporal caesura.

This in our opinion can offer a creative lens to read and engage with oral narratives of Partition. The journey stands awkwardly at the cusp of the new and the old, of movement and the inability to move, of change and the resistance to transformation. Thus, the accounts of those who moved or had to move are entwined in the mention of the 'three nights and four days' long journey on the Steam Ship Maharaja to the Andaman Islands or the boat rides through the interconnected canals and rivers of Bengal to the closest railhead (Sen), the train and truck rides from East Pakistan to West Bengal (Basu Ray Chaudhury), the trains from Sealdah's cluttered pavements and railway platforms to Mana, 150 kilometres away from Dandakaranya (Ghosh), the caravan



from Lahore to Amritsar or in Amrita Pritam's impactful recapitulation 'Then the train started [...]' (Datta). Not just a sensory vehicle of flow that would produce new forms of instability or stability for those who became refugees overnight, the train is also an iconic presence for some who witnessed its coming and the violence it 'whistled' into an otherwise undisturbed village life (Pippa Virdee & Arafat Safdar). Here, previously an agent of trade, the narrowing and coming together of worlds, an indicator of time itself, the train now becomes etched in popular memory as a carrier of people who were stopped from going to India and killed overnight in villages like Faqiranwalla. This allusion to movement and transformation, even if not towards something positive but tainted in violence, posited in a material means of transportation, is thus an iconic indicator of how memory is also partitioned along spatial and temporal axes even as it persistently tries to connect the two through narration.¹

At the same time, the metaphor of motion also informs people's intuitive lexicon when narrating Partition. In her testimony, Amrita Pritam states— and we find it a telling illustration worthy of repetition here—'Amrita Pritam is the name of a *yatra* (journey). From a small journey to a big journey. From an alphabet to meaning. From limits to limitlessness of journey' (see Datta). Pritam uses this metaphor of motion to perhaps narrate her entire life trajectory. This trajectory entails the physical, painful journeys undertaken on trains during Partition ('small journey') but also the journey of life ('big journey'), it is demarcated by newly etched borders and the pain of having to move ('from limits') but is also a reference to the work-in-progress and the endlessness of making a life ('the limitlessness of journey'). Beyond others, it is a trope for the endless process of seeking ('from an alphabet to meaning'). This reference to life as an endless 'journey' certainly does not only appear in the reminiscences of a poet. It also becomes an informing trope for how the past and the present are narrated by numerous partitioned lives and calls for further exploration in its diverse metaphoric usages.

In research that brings together two public initiatives of remembering Partition (*1947 Partition Archive* and the anthology of graphic narratives titled *This Side, that Side—Restorying Partition*), Ritika Singh (2015) makes a strong argument for the intergenerational dimension of remembrance. Whereas erasure and silences, to a large extent, quantify the immediate decade after 1947, they have now come to the forefront of discussions (though still peripherally in official memory) in numerous public debates. Remembrance and memory



cannot be frozen temporally but need to be seen as fluid and prone to re-casting. This especially so in a context whereby numerous survivors of harsh violence and displacement sometimes chose not to, and on other occasions were incapable of, speaking. In many a case it is the next generation that has taken the onus of revisiting the past.

The passing down of unanswered questions and gnawing grief leaves the second generation with their own burden of indirect witnessing. They remain haunted by the traumatic stories of the first generation and attempt to revisit the past to try to answer the questions that they have imbibed during the "listening of another". This, mingled with their own personal interactions with continuing impact of the Partition, leads them to narrate their stories and negotiations for the next generation. The echoes continue for years, across generations. (ibid.: 180)

Such 'echoes' point to how narratives around the Partition are inevitably fraught with a sense of incompleteness. They point to the unfinished nature of the past that prevents complete closure not just for those who lived the events, but also their future generations who often continue to delve into that past (see also Sharma 2009). Memory, embedded in testimony and oral history, often surfaces in the articles in this issue through a doubly-sifted process. It emerges as a telling of what one experienced directly or the unfolding occurrences that one witnessed and also as a "retelling" of how one was told about what another individual witnessed or experienced. Partition thus stands for '[...] a set of interrelated historical events that remain fraught with intense emotional significance for millions who lived through them, and their children and grandchildren' (Greenberg 2005: 93).

It comes to be an iconic 'code word evoking layers of psychologically heightened, politically resonant meaning' (ibid.). Thus, for instance, we find in Datta's contribution a revisiting of Partition that is interspersed with three generational accounts— those that aim at some sort of closure by finally speaking (Vash), those that linger on in the silence of death and are revisited indirectly (Nirmal), those that narrate these stories as indirect witnesses in the family to the next generation (the author's mother and the author's mother's aunt) and those who attempt to retell the stories years later (the author). It is this layered dimension of intergenerational recounting and re-chronicling that we hope will become lucidly graphic through the contributions.

These re-told accounts become crucial for understanding the trauma that has haunted families and left its echoes over generations and also



as a source for revisiting nostalgia. Numerous and diverse witness accounts in the articles show how the memory of interlocutors is often laden with narrations of a time before the violence, which is sometimes idealized and even romanticized against the shadow of the devastating events of Partition. Though individual memory is never a final and finished product to be accessed in the present but a constant making and re-making, and although it is prone to forgetting and alteration, testimonies can nonetheless shed instructive light on the "beforeness" and preconditions of Partition (see Christina Oesterheld's contribution). This can be informative for reconstructing the historical everyday of cities like Lahore Amritsar, Delhi etc. (Talbot 2006; Pandey 2003: Ch. 6) or for understanding the complexities of relationships between Hindus and Muslims of diverse classes. Singh aptly sums this up as follows

However, on another level, going back is an attempt to understand the pre-Partition state of things in India. Summoning nostalgia before the drawing of borders, the "past" is beckoned to understand not just the event, but also the everyday before the event. The creation of the other side leads to a curiosity about "those times" when there was no such distinction. Therefore, oral histories that recount life before the Partition are a channel to get information about the time that can never return. (Singh 2015: 183)

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Assmann and Czaplika (1995) categorize memory work, which re-evokes those aspects of collective memory that help concretize an identity or 'store it', as *kulturelles Gedächtnis* (cultural memory). This memory is socially formative in nature in the sense that it is 'educative, civilizing, humanizing' (127), and normative in that it serves the function of 'providing rules of conduct' (132). Cultural memory becomes an essential tool for the construal of nationalising imagination(s), as it comprises of 'that body of reusable texts, images and rituals specific to each society in each epoch whose cultivation serves to stabilize and convey society's self-image' (ibid.). Here heritage becomes an important tool in the concretization of cultural memory. François Hartog reflects on how memory and heritage have become 'symptoms of our relation to time [...]'. Preceding from memory, heritage becomes the memory of history, and as such, a symbol of identity' (2005: 9).

Heritage, or national heritages, in that sense are essentially iconic sites of pride. They usually help materialize a group's self-portrayals for itself and the putative outside through a lexicon of achievements



and not necessarily through the lens of those at the fringes of stories of loss, humiliation or failures. Here post Second World War Germany is an exception, whereby the commemoration of the war has primarily occurred through the lens of the victimized Jews, Sintis, Romas or persecuted communists. In most national and nationalizing crystallizations of cultural memory, even if the site of heritage marks a sense of loss (for example the India Gate in New Delhi that commemorates the Indian soldiers who fought and died for the English army during World War One or Raj Ghat that commemorates the site of Gandhi's cremation), it is embedded in a larger discourse of peculiarity and a greater achievement (the martyrdom of Indian soldiers for the empire or the iconic greatness of a self-sacrificing Gandhi) that helps constitute a sense of unity for a society. It is no wonder then that there are usually contesting truth claims to national heritage, which becomes a site of tension(s) between whose achievements count and whose not.

This largely explains why memories of Partition have largely not been recovered and shifted into collective memory in the South Asian subcontinent. Whereas the trope of independence stands for a victory, newness and the laborious work behind achievements, accounts of synchronous and simultaneous trauma, pain and humiliation form the trope of Partition. Individual memory—to be recovered and recalled through silences in archives, reading along the archival grain (Stoler 2010), oral history, its prominence in the novel—often scrapes open and rubs against the trope of independence as achievement and a unifying "official" (state-directed) national collective memory. In this sense, the past three decades have especially witnessed a persistent attempt to challenge such collective memory and insert Partition in it through the novel, cinema, oral history projects as well as other civil society initiatives.

It is only recently, however, that certain "large scale and public" initiatives have started attempting to salvage the memories of Partition from the fringes and insert them into collective memory through newer means. *The 1947 Partition Archive* may be seen as part of this larger aim. A noteworthy aspect of the archival project is that its conceptualisation and realization has largely occurred outside the territorial confines of the subcontinent. The founder Guneeta Singh Bhalla, whose own family has a migration history from Lahore to Amritsar, has been a physicist based at the University of California, Berkeley. The archive is one of the first few attempts that aims to record, retell and therein publicly 're-map' (the website literally shows a map with a



visual presentation of movement trajectories)² experiences of ordinary people, who are based in one of the three countries or have migrated from the subcontinent.

This is not to undo the importance of the diverse oral history projects which have successfully chronicled individual narratives of Partition,³ especially over the past three decades, but rather to point to, and therein initiate a discussion on, how large-scale digitization projects can have an impact on the material longevity of oral sources. *The 1947 Partition Archive* provides a space to chronicle narrations from diverse places and brings them together under one comprehensive framework, besides ensuring that it is people's stories collected by interested citizens and enthusiastic scholars/students that are given precedence. The archive tellingly calls its volunteers 'citizen historians' (ibid.). In her analysis, Singh also addresses the survivors who have narrated their lives as 'citizen historiographers' (Singh 2015: 175). An aspect, which remains outside the scope of this issue, but calls for further exploration is how the liberalization of mass media and the emergence of new social media, of which the archival project is also part, informs the politics of remembrance on Partition.

One of the issues, which brings the impossibility of closure at a larger level to the fore, is how to "deal with" such pasts in the advent that all sides—with Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs—were simultaneously the perpetrators as well as the victims of extreme violence. Drawing from Veena Das's informative research on violence, Greenberg points out how '[...] neither India nor Pakistan established tribunals where the guilty were tried' (96). Das states 'nor were there any court cases in which a theatrical space could have been created for the acknowledgement of the suffering imposed' (1995: 188). This has sparked discussion on the necessity for memorial sites that could become markers of commemoration (Greenberg 2005: 96). Seven decades later it is indeed revealing to see how nationalistic difference continues to be aesthetically performed at the Wagah Border where every evening the two states flag their respective homelands (and lower the flags at sunset) after pompous shows of parades, hoisting and "handshakes" during the 'Beating Retreat', as the ceremony is called. The same border fails to commemorate any of the thousands who crossed it decades ago. It is perhaps this larger discussion which has recently led to the opening of the very first Partition Museum in Amritsar, located on the new Heritage Street, that aims to be a 'people's museum'.⁴



As we introduce these newer strands of "doing" remembrance, that certainly call for deeper academic probing in the future, it is nonetheless important to also revisit the common threads that have sustained the process of puncturing silent official and state memory(s) since Partition. An entire generation of literary figures that directly or indirectly witnessed, was impacted by, the events of Partition and wrote about them from various perspectives of everyday life seems to gradually dwindle. This is not the least because their body of work loses significance. However, we know that Sadat Hasan Manto (1912-55), Qurratulain Hyder (1927-2007), Amrita Pritam (1919-2005), Ismat Chughtai (1911-91), Bhisham Sahni (1915-2003), Khushwant Singh (1915-2014) and Faiz Ahmad Faiz (1911-84) will not continue writing as they did for several years. Numerous such literary figures were key actors in presenting the human dimension of Partition in the midst of collective amnesia. Their works have provided the resources to speak the unspeakable and present realities that did not necessitate naming individuals (and yet placed them on the map).

As the next generation of authors, popular cinema (actor director Nandita Das's upcoming film on Sadat Hasan Manto in 2018 is the latest example) and oral histories continue to creatively speak of Partition, we find it a welcoming move to refresh our own memory with works that have impacted the making of Partition's memory. Thus, Oosterheld's contribution is a reading of three novels by Qurratulain Hyder whereas Amrita Pritam becomes the interlocutor in Datta's article. Virdee and Safdar's contribution presents an innovative conversation between history writing through oral sources and literary work. Kumar rightfully points to 'the relationship between texts and their historical, political and intellectual contexts not as one of mimesis or reflection, but as one that often radically reworks, re-inscribes, rethinks and works over the lived realities of their contextualizing circumstances' (1999: 202). Both—the literary contributions from Hyder, Pritam and Singh's generation that have aimed to curtail forgetting as well as those from newer voices, which innovatively refresh remembrance—are essential agents for morphing, re-inscribing and re-working memory work on Partition.

Chronicling remembrance also necessitates recounting silences, gaps and erasures. Much like remembering through the act of speaking, forgetting is also an ingredient of individual and collective memory. Connerton aptly sums up 'Much of the debate on cultural memory has been shaped by the view, commonly held if not universal, that remembering and commemorating is usually a virtue and that



forgetting is necessarily a failing. We generally regard forgetting as a failure' (2008: 59). In agreement with Connerton's point, the oral histories brought forth by this issue present a bricolage of forgetting. The loudest of these is the 'repressive erasure' (ibid.: 60) by the newly founded states that has been, over and again, challenged by attempts that disallow Partition from being buried in "the past" and which re-voke it through literature, oral history and cinema. But forgetting is also a constituent of individual memory. On some occasions, individuals wish to, or have to, forget the turn of events. Thus, Subhashini (see Datta's contribution), in her deep lament over the fate of those who died and those who suffered, states 'Bhool jao uss itihās ko' (forget that history). On other instances, we also encounter a sense of oblivion in the future generations on the events that deeply impacted their parents' lives, which either stems from an indifferent distancing or an incapacity to know due to the unflinching silence of the previous generation of witnesses (see Virdee & Safdar's contribution).

In numerous cases, trauma fails to find the appropriate vocabulary even decades after Partition, leaving loud silences behind which become the only means to quantify the episodes. These gaps in narration ought not to be seen as a 'missing', a 'failure' to narrate but rather as the only available language that can in any way complete the cycle of narration. '[...] silencings, while they are a type of repression, can at the same time be a form of survival, and the desire to forget may be an essential ingredient in that process of survival' (Connerton 2008: 68). The 'recovered' women of Partition, who had faced abduction, rapes resulting in pregnancies, physical and emotional violence have also lived lives marked by silence and forgetting—a collective amnesia rather. Their "voices" can only be holistically recovered by also giving cognizance to forgetting and erasure as an inalienable constitutive reality of their existence (Basu Ray Chaudhury 2006). Forgetting and silence thus share the space of the caesura that the Partition iconizes, the vacuum between the beforeness of events and their dislocated/relocated afterlives.

Each contribution in the issue, directly or implicitly, engages with what the word "independence" stands for for the millions whose lives dramatically ended, as their bodies became the site of brutal violence, and those who were displaced. Just as it becomes important to unravel the meanings of Partition for collective public memory in the event of celebrating independence each year, engaging with the multiple tropes of independence in the vocabularies of those affected may help shar-



pen our gaze on understanding the embedded historical simultaneity of the two terms in the South Asian context.

For some interlocutors, like Vash (see Datta), independence (*azadi*) is a moment of destruction, an unsettling experience that has left no more desires to connect with any new group or place. For others like Amrita Pritam in the same article, it has left embitterment and the wish not to reminisce ('The house which did not give me shelter, the land which did not give me refuge, why should I remember it?' (Datta)). For the lower caste Namasudras in the Andaman Islands (Sen), it has meant the beginning of a new life that did uproot, but eventually brought them into new terrains where they have become the authors of their own lives. For some who left East Bengal for Calcutta, independence ironically implies the lack of freedom to return to their original *desh* (Basu Ray Chaudhury). For the villagers of Faqiranwalla it meant becoming participants of a larger political decision (the formation of a sovereign Pakistani state) which was taken elsewhere in distant centres and which transformed the train as the icon of mobility into a witness and carrier of death and violence (Virdee and Safdar). For the author Qurratulain Hyder it meant a cultural tragedy that has not borne any relevant positive consequences, especially for the Muslims of erstwhile British India, but only produced an emotional caesura (Oesterheld). Author Amrita Pritam is tellingly shown saying 'What kind of *azadi* and at what cost are we gaining?' whereas Vash asks 'Independence? whose Independence? *Azadi kya hui barbadi hui?*' (you call this independence? It spelt our ruin.) (Datta).

The metaphor of the synchronous and simultaneous trope of independence and partition is physically embodied in all its paradoxes by Ashalota Das (see Basu Ray Chaudhury). For her the violence to win more space and territory has shrunk into the little periphery that she is used to marking with stones and pebbles in her refugee home. In her living space in a dormitory, overflowing with people, with not enough space for all to sleep at the same time, refugees would often use pebbles to mark their territories and sleep in turns. Years later, even as her refugee home does have more place to offer, she continues to restrain herself to the same corner with similar pebbles. Her corner is indeed iconic of how the battle for more territorial grounds has ironically shrunk the physical and emotional space for millions of ordinary lives. For her, independence has meant dependence on the Indian state in order to stay alive.



Preview of contributions

Uditi Sen's article delineates the diverse experiences of refugees from East Bengal (East Pakistan), who were sent or chose to resettle in the Andaman Islands after arriving in West Bengal. She aims to bring forth voices that have so far been neglected in Partition discourses through oral history interviews; voices that neither belong to the statist and party domain, nor to the category of affluent refugees. Taking class and caste as categories that produce multiple experiences seriously, Sen's article engages with the life stories of Dalit and scheduled caste refugees, primarily Namasudras. The article shows that any simplistic representation of their rehabilitation in the Andamans, either as exile or a pioneering venture, does not correspond with the refugees' own complex understanding of their experiences. By doing so, it speaks up against the marginalisation of histories and the nationalisation of certain experiences. A spatial focus on the Andaman Islands supports this ambition as it allows Sen to persuasively question the hierarchical ordering of partition narratives which tend to prioritise certain regions over others.

The same is true for **Subhasri Ghosh's** article on Dandakaranya as a rehabilitation site for refugees from East Bengal/East Pakistan. Dandakaranya—situated in present day Chattisgarh and Orissa—has either been ignored by historical research, or depicted as an unqualified failure. Ghosh's contribution aims to complicate this perspective and asks whether there are different narratives to be told about Dandakaranya. To answer this question, she analyses a wide range of sources, such as government documents, newspaper reports and oral history sources that allow her to understand the refugees' experiences in Dandakaranya from multiple perspectives. Her examination of official, media and refugee discourses and practices do not only help to trace past and present experiences of the refugees, but also provide insights to their political and material struggles.

Both these aspects, multi-layered refugee experiences and their quotidian struggles and protest, also emerge in **Anasua Basu Ray Chaudhury's** contribution, which focuses on displaced Hindus in refugee camps and squatters' colonies in West Bengal. Basu Ray Chaudhury addresses the question of how refugee identities have been shaped by the experiences of partition, displacement and rehabilitation. Among others, she explores refugee identities through the interface of homogenising ascriptions and differential/ heterogeneous self-perceptions. The contribution is based on various published and oral sources and also examines narratives of reconstruction and



refugee agitations. By comparing the trajectories of camp and squatters' colonies' residents, she points to similarities, but also to important dissimilarities in experiences, for instance, the differential treatment meted out by state authorities. In doing so, the author's comparison reminds us of the necessity to avoid homogenising categories like "the refugee" and paying due heed to how the vocabulary of agitation and struggle informs their selfhood.

From early on, South Asian writers and poets have engaged with the 'human dimension' of Partition in novels, short stories, plays, songs etc. in varied languages such as Hindi, Bengali, Punjabi, English and Urdu (Talbot 2008). However, most of these works have mainly received scholarly attention only over the last three decades. Especially historians have taken time to acknowledge the value of literary works as source material. In her contribution, **Christina Oesterheld** analyses three novels by Qurratulain Hyder which address Partition and its aftermaths. Hyder (1927-2007), one of the most important Urdu writers of 20th century South Asia, did not experience any excessive violence during 1947, yet her life was severely impacted by her family's decision to migrate to Pakistan. Oesterheld convincingly argues that her personal experiences influenced Hyder's depiction of Partition not so much as a nightmare of violence, but rather as an emotional caesura, a loss of human ties and a profound cultural tragedy.

The value of literary work as a source for historians is once again recognized by the contribution made by **Pippa Virdee** and **Arafat Safdar**, which innovatively juxtaposes Mano Majra, the village in Khuswant Singh's masterpiece *Train to Pakistan* with Faqiranwalla, a village in present-day Pakistan. The authors aim to understand the link between nationalism and localism by analysing how the perception(s) of borders and boundaries reinforce a contested community's identity(s) and interactions. The interviews that Virdee and Safdar conducted with the inhabitants of Faqiranwalla allow them to gain insights in the everyday lived experiences of partition and independence and its remembrance. Through a comparison of the two villages (fictional and non-fictional) Virdee and Safdar reflect on the 'generations of memory' related to Partition and its persistent effects. One aspect which the authors emphasise is the changing role and meaning of trains before, during and after Partition. Trains are understood in this contribution as a connecting link between the past and present, in both the novel and Faqiranwalla.



The lived experiences of Partition and its remembrance are themes that we also find in **Nonica Datta's** contribution. Datta investigates the interplay and dialogic relationship of memory, testimony and history with the aim to carve out alternative narratives of Partition. To write these parallel histories of Partition and show the multiplicity of its truths, Datta presents us with three cases from oral history sources, which are not based on single one-time interviews, but on long term, regular conversations she has had with the interlocutors. The analysis of these testimonies allows her to reflect upon the idea of the fragment and to therein pay attention to incomplete and unresolved narratives of Partition. By doing so, Datta not only shows that the Partition is very much alive and influential in individual memory, but also how these memories are constantly reworked.

Endnotes

¹ Here recent studies of mobility have emphasised how the term 'transportation' fails to holistically capture the experience of those on the move as it only signals geographic movement from point A to B. Research within the *Mobility Turn* can offer the corrective lens to rethink the role of temporality in experiencing and narrating motion and mobility. At the same time, research on Partition, which is sensitive to both the spatial and temporal dimensions of movement, can also be informative for rethinking mobility. It could be instructive to recover the word from limiting contexts of economic upward mobility solely and engage with nuances of the social aspects of movement, its coerced or wilful origins, its aspirational dimension(s) and its temporalizing coordinates in narrative practice. For developments in the sociology of mobility see Vannini 2010.

² <http://www.1947partitionarchive.org> [retrieved 16.09.2017].

³ See, among others, Butalia 2000; Menon & Bhasin 1998. Also, two of the contributors have actively engaged with such projects—Anasua Basu Ray Chaudhury (as research associate) in the "Reconstruction of lives after partition" project at the Centre for Studies in Developing Societies (CSDS), Delhi and Subhasri Ghosh in "The Trauma and the Triumph: Gender and Partition in Eastern India" project at the Institute of Development Studies, Kolkata.

⁴ <http://www.partitionmuseum.org/about-us/> [02.12.2017].

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