The Politics of Mute Speech in the Urdu Short Story

Sana Riaz

PhD

University of York

English & Related Literature

November 2020

Abstract

The Partition of the newly decolonised India in 1947 was an apocalyptic time for the nation and for the Urdu *afsāna*. The richly evocative and largely unknown rhetorical cosmology of the Partition short story is imbued with the problem of unspeakability. Yet no critic has ventured into that twilight zone of abandoned voices. The present study critically examines the short stories of three authors—namely Naiyer Masud, Sa'adat Hasan Manto, and Ismat Chughtai—through the lens of muteness, trauma, and sensory studies in order to recover the afterlife of such voices. The quiet narrative art of these writers adumbrates a politics of mute speech that lends itself to current postcolonial debates on historical memory, the language of witnessing, and fragmented bodies.

In the Introduction I set out my methodology, framing my argument about the urgency for a critical engagement with the Urdu *afsāna*; tracing Jacques Rancière's conceptualisation of a mute poetics of language; arriving at the insight that the Urdu short story is replete with the deafening clamour of 'mute speech'. The Introduction then turns to a discussion of the key factors that resulted in Partition. Finally, the Introduction delineates selected writings of Masud, Manto, and Chughtai and sets out the rationale behind the stories.

I have structured my discussion in an arc that sketches Masud's phantasmal figures in Chapter 1, leading to Manto's poetics of the body's materiality in Chapter 2, and arriving at Chughtai's (post)colonial metaphor of the monstrous birthing body in Chapter 3. I argue that the regime of silences in the Urdu *afsāna* transforms somatic pain and vulnerability into an artistic cathexis that constitutes a language of the unsayable. My argument concludes with a summary of the thesis's main concerns and a brief discussion of further avenues for research.

Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Table of Contents	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Declaration	v
Introduction	6
Chapter 1: Masud's Fiction and the Unsayable	37
Chapter 2: Manto's Necrotic Fragments	85
Chapter 3: Ismat Chughtai and the Nation as Foetus	154
Conclusion: Mute Truths	192
Works Cited	198
Appendix	214

Acknowledgements

I could not have written this thesis without the fierce intellectual and emotional support of many people. Intellectually, my primary debt is to my mentor and supervisor, Dr. Claire Chambers. Her guidance has been thoughtful, challenging, and humbling. Her meticulous counsel, generous spirit, and tough love have helped to sustain me over the last three years.

My deepest thanks go to Dr. Emilie Morin for her impeccable advice and rigorous discussions. Her profound wisdom has left a lasting impression on my intellect, and I doubt I would have been able to cope with the demands and high expectations of this PhD without her endless support.

I am indebted to Shahzad Chaudhry, my greatest confidant and my most ardent critic, for his unwavering faith in my every pursuit. His sense of humour, generosity, and beautiful mind have carried me through many storms during our journey together.

To my beloved Musa, my infinite gratitude to you for your unconditional love during my darkest times. Someday, I hope you will understand the force of your little voice repeating these five words: "You can do it, *ami*." It is these words that kept me going onward and upward. Even when I almost gave up on myself.

This thesis is dedicated to Menaab Zaheer Khan, my safehouse, who made the time and space to help me take on this battle of a lifetime. For all those overwhelming times when I needed affirmation and assurance that I'm not in this by myself. And most of all, for your constant encouragement, fearless loyalty, and genuine devotion. Thank you.

For all the unsung heroes and innumerable ghosts who continue to be by my side: I hope I've done you proud.

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University. All sources are acknowledged as Works Cited.

Introduction

"Our task is [thus] to read the past for its differences from, as well as its similarities to, the present; to locate our ghostly forefathers within their own ideological moment, and to discern in them the skeleton of a method that might visit us again in the uncanny form of something at once old and new, familiar and strange."

—Vilashini Cooppan, "Ghosts in the Disciplinary Machine: The Uncanny Life of World Literature"

"Representing its own silence, the colonised body speaks; uttering its wounds, it strives to negate its muted condition."

Elleke Boehmer, *Stories of Women: Gender and Narrative in the Postcolonial Nation*

"I have not sworn an oath of silence. It's just that I do not need to speak."

Naiyer Masud, "Obscure Domains of Fear and Desire"

Making sense of silence is a risky enterprise. We are in an age in which postcolonial discourse is dominated by what it cannot see, and what it cannot say.[1] The twenty-first century abounds in new and radical currents of thinking about silence, speakability, and the limits of language.[2] The pace of such thinking has especially accelerated in recent years, particularly in the intellectual milieux pertinent to this thesis. Current critical reflections on colonial violence, political states of

[1] See Anna Bernard and Ziad Elmarsafy's in-depth discussion of postcolonial theory and unspeakability in *What Postcolonial Theory Doesn't Say* (New York, London: Routledge, 2016), 1-9.

[2] A very important figure in that body of work is Jacques Rancière, whose *Mute Speech: Literature, Critical Theory, and Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011) has inspired this research project. Rancière concerns himself with questions of social identity and the "relation of people who are supposed to be outside of art to the world of art" (see "Farewell to Artistic and Political Impotence" (Interview with Gabriel Rockhill and Alexi Kukuljevic), *Machete* 1, No. 3 (December 2009): http://www.marginalutility.org/publications/zines/2009/machete-zines-december-2009/). Following Rancière's lead, I try to extricate another way of representing the unrepresentable from the works of Partition artists, introducing my own shift by producing a different aesthetic experience of silence.

exception, postwar trauma, and wartime rape are perpetually preoccupied with the complex problem of the unsayable. However, it is remarkable that the vast majority of critics and theorists who have dealt with the accents and thematics of silence and muteness have focused almost exclusively on the Western intellectual tradition.[3] Few writers, if any, have examined the complex rhetoric and logic of the unsayable beyond the limited scope of Western thought. Indeed, the expressiveness and clamour of silence has been a leading theme in Western writings, ranging from the works of Franz Kafka, Jean-Paul Sartre, James Joyce, and Samuel Beckett to the poetry of Paul Celan, Primo Levi, Edmond Jabès, and Carolyn Forsché, in tandem with the deconstructive critique of Jacques Derrida, Theodor Adorno, and Maurice Blanchot. Of the writings on the varieties and valences of unspeakability in non-Western cultures, though, while we come across occasional conversations on South African apartheid, the 1971 Bangladesh war, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the mass rape and hidden genocide in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, and Rwanda, very little has been said on silence as a symptom, language, event, and manifestation of thought and experience in the context of the colonial history of South Asia. The aim of this thesis is to begin to address this gap through an investigation of the literature of Partition and the short stories it has inspired. Indeed the representation of the muted condition in Partition fiction has not received as much scholarly attention as it merits: the cataclysmic Partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947 remains a neglected aspect of the global postcolonial debate.

[3] Apophasis is a leading theme in the Western tradition of unspeakability, particularly the important works by William Franke including *On What Cannot Be Said: Apophatic Discourses in Philosophy, Religion, Literature, and the Arts*, Volumes 1 & 2 (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), and *A Philosophy of the Unsayable* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2014). Other key works include Hent de Vries' *Minimal Theologies: Critiques of Secular Reason in Adorno and Levinas* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019), and H. Porter Abbott's *Real Mysteries: Narrative and the Unknowable* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2013).

The present study sketches a distinctive outlook on Partition fiction that emerges from the well-charted yet underexplored predicament of a hitherto neglected realm in the Urdu short story—that of the muted, unspeakable, and unheard. It examines the ways in which the locutionary force of mute and mutilated figures gives voice to the history of Partition in Urdu short fiction. For this project, I focus on the minor genre [4] of the *afsāna*, or short story form, described by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari as a "minor literature".[5] Deleuze and Guattari outline three characteristics of minor literature: first, that it is marked by deterritorialisation; second, that it is always political; and third, it reflects a collective consciousness.[6] The Urdu *afsāna* is precisely such a minor literature, with its history of linguistic diaspora, political unease, and the collective consciousness that emerges from the Partition short story. For Deleuze and Guattari, the essence of language is in its intensities, and to write minor literature in any language is to:

> …oppose the oppressed quality of this language to its oppressive quality, to find points of nonculture or underdevelopment, linguistic Third World zones by which a language can escape, an animal enters into things, an assemblage comes into play…to create a becoming-minor[7]

[4] In *Minor Genres in Postcolonial Literatures* (New York, London: Routledge, 2019), Delphine Munos and Bénédicte Ledent argue that the short story is a minor genre in context of the postcolonial mainstream. Here, I categorise the Partition aesthetic in the Urdu short story as a minor genre because of its near invisibility in the West. Even though the short story, or the *afsāna*, was repeatedly called on by Partition writers to supply the language of Partition violence, and became the primary medium of Partition literature, postcolonial literature has systematically promoted the Partition novel, particularly the English novel. These include Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*, Attia Hossain's *Sunlight on a Broken Column*, Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India* or *Ice-Candy Man*, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* and Qurratulain Hyder's *River of Fire* (this was first published in Urdu as *Aag Ka Darya* in 1959, but received far more critical attention from scholars and critics after Hyder translated it into English in 1998).
[5] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*. Trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 16.
[6] Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka*, 16-18.
[7] Deleuze and Gutattari, 27.

The Urdu short story is just such a linguistic mélange of Third World intensities and assemblages, a zone where ill-formed and illegitimate voices play off against each other, and a genre that interiorises revolutionary political force and hypercultural identity. Specifically, there is a blurring of what can be said and what cannot be said in the *afsāna* that is integral to its political currency in the present day and age of extreme violence and post-war trauma.

Far too often, we find the short story being dismissed as an inferior form, or as an apprenticeship style, with the promise of ultimately leading up to the grand finale—the novel. I take up issue with this deeply erroneous characterisation of the short story form, and devote my research project to the darker, schizophrenic fragmentary realm of the short story. Contrary to popular belief, the short story is neither an inferior form nor a means to an end, but rather a complex site whereby disturbing physiological, political, and psychological tensions can be played out. While the post-Partition novel has certainly played a key role in exploring Partition's legacy of silence—Amrita Sen's *Pinjar*, Krishan Chander's *Gaddar* (غدار, translated into English as *Rebel*), Intizar Hussain's Urdu novel *Basti* (بستی) along with its sequel, *The Sea Lies Ahead*, and Qurratulain Hyder's *Aag ka Darya* (translated into English as *River of Fire*), to name a few that engage with the subject of silence—the current scholarship on Partition literature is oversaturated with studies of the novel, whereas the short story remains a minoritised form. Moreover, the Partition novel often places emphasis on wholeness, whereas Partition short stories, being a series of fragmentary images, drive home more powerfully the feelings of fragmentation, dislocation, and aphasia experienced by their characters. The Partition short story collection is rather like a mosaic of photographs, offering fleeting yet sensitive glimpses into silenced lives, ultimately having the effect of a photomontage.

The medium of the short story, hence, becomes an enabling and performative genre for Partition authors, where borders are open, and boundaries ruptured. The style and form of the short story offers a cross-section of mute experience—pulsating moments delving into the complexities of trauma and unspeakability within and without liminal figures. The short story's formal qualities like compression and concentration heighten this intensity of effect, in which respect the novel, though longer, could at times be an inadequate medium. As Valerie Shaw notes, the structural features of the short story enable a convergence of brevity and intensity, richness and concision, suggestiveness and hard outline.[8] For this reason, the Partition short story occupies a particularly important nexus within the literary field for the purposes of capturing the psychological dislocation and complexity of dis/replaced language.

Moreover, the limited space of the short story within which language can operate constitutes a finite but eclectic, messy terrain where memory, language, and bodily identity become political acts. The short story is a total oeuvre based on the force of fragments. Each text is a fragment, the fragments forming pathways, rapid segments and expressions leaving gaps that may never be filled in. But there is something deeper at work within each gap. The insurmountable discontinuity in these gaps and black holes tends to, in fact, result in a hidden unity rarely found in the novel, transforming the fragmentary work into an unlimited text. With my thesis, I aim to foreground this interminable, sonorous power of the Urdu *afsāna*, and assert that the short story form is by no means separate from society, but instead emerges as an expression of society.

The Urdu short story remains largely unknown in the West, and the few effective translations available for the discerning reader concentrate only on the writings of the old

[8] See Valerie Shaw's *The Short Story: A Critical Introduction* (London: Longman, 1983).

masters, seldom venturing into the intricate rhetorical world of noncanonical writers, for example Naiyer Masud, Ibrahim Jalees, Intizar Hussain, and Khalida Asghar, or even contemporary short story writers like Asif Farrukhi, Muhammad Umar Memon, and Julien Columeau. Owing to time and space constraints, I have decided to focus on the works of three Urdu authors and their short fictions in my research project: Naiyer Masud, Sa'adat Hasan Manto, and Ismat Chughtai. I concede that Manto and Chughtai are two of the most renowned, well-researched short story writers in South Asia with an extensive body of scholarship on their writings. However, there is a particular rhetorical feature of their work that has been grossly overlooked by readers and critics alike—the condition of mutedness. It is my willful engagement with this historical problem of mute bodies that makes my project an urgent and timely contribution to the fields of sensory studies, trauma theory, and Partition literature.

I have chosen the short story genre for this exciting critical opportunity to foreground these constellations of muteness in the Partition short story, which are rarely dealt with in the vast domain of the novel. In the chapters that follow, I explore the aesthetic of muteness in the Urdu short story, which signifies differently in the third-world context as opposed to its theological construction as a language of absence in the first-world.[9] In the Urdu *afsānas* that I explore, the mute bricolage of pauses, hesitancies, gibberish, and fragments provides a new experience of the living speech of Partition rather than signifying an absence. If, at times, it does signify absence, it is an absent 'presence' of a living history and its remains, of a fragmented and dislocated narrative that can only be experienced through what French philosopher Jacques Rancière calls "mute speech".[10] Rancière defines mute speech as a contradictory principle of

[9] See Kumkum Sangari's "The Politics of the Possible" in *Theory of the Novel: A Historical Approach*, edited by Michael McKeon (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 900-922.
[10] See Rancière's *Mute Speech: Literature, Critical Theory, and Politics*, translated by James Swenson (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

expressivity, calling it a new poetics that draws on the inherent silence of words. Rancière endorses a literary regime that calls on the testimony of silent things rather than an excess of words, a mutedness that "come[s] to bear witness to identifiable truths".[11] I re-work Rancière's novel concept of mute speech toward uncovering a rhetoric of silence that emerges from trauma in the Partition short story. In an era of terror, an oxymoron such as 'mute speech' is not only made possible but is prevalent. It is the catalyst of the desire to materialise more and more of the invisible horror experienced at the periphery, the margin, the point of rupture. I consider it a literary and cultural responsibility to foreground this mute bricolage[12] in the Urdu short story. In doing so, I hope to bring this literary and cultural bricolage to the attention of the present world-wide scholarship on fragmentation theory and silence theory, which currently excludes Urdu short fiction from the debate.

Another reason for my interest in the short story genre is what Alex Padamsee calls the 'undecidability' of Partition, arguing that the short story form favours the narration of uncertainty as it is a fragment in itself.[13] Indeed, the uncertain, ambiguous existence of the short story attests to its political potential. But what is most intriguing about the Partition short story is neither its minimalism, nor its lyrical intensity. It is the fragment *within* the fragment, the inner life of the shreds, slivers, and stubs of the human body so reverently interred in the short story. Hence, it is both form and matter of the Partition *afsāna* that privilege the life of the fragment, particularly in the writings of Masud, Manto, and Chughtai. I delve into this bleak world of "fragment within fragment" in the Urdu short story to emphasise the historical and political

[11] Rancière, *Mute Speech*, 14.
[12] Claude Lévi-Strauss defines "bricolage" in an artistic and architectural sense as "a heterogenous repertoire" constructed by a "bricoleur" using odds and ends (*The Savage Mind*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1972), 17. While Lévi-Strauss originally formulated the term as an analogy for mythical thought, I apply it in my research as a metaphor for the mélange of fragments, residue, and traces of mute bodies found in Urdu literature.
[13] Alex Padamsee, "Uncertain Partitions: Undecidability and the Urdu Short Story", *Wasafiri* 53, no.1 (2008): 1–5.

importance of mute figures and fragments within postcolonial literature. Padamsee writes, "Undecidability [here] offers itself both as a mirror of the experience of Partition and as the grounds for holding open a space for resistance against the apparently closed formal systems of the narratives of Independence".[14] In the writings that I inspect, this undecidability takes the form of an uncanny language, a rhetoric that emphasises the fragmented yet hyperaware nature of the wounded body. Each fragment and fragmented figure in these texts acts as spectator to narrate the horror that nationalist discourse places in brackets and makes invisible in a way that the horror itself is not considered worth looking at.

The short stories of Masud, Manto, and Chughtai that I have chosen for my study of mute speech, trauma, and unspeakability interilluminate each other in a unique way, each author's work embodying its own distinct form of unspeakability. The conversation begins with Masud, whose fiction deals with muteness as something immaterial, hidden, and historic. In Masud's figurations of silence, muteness resides within an object, body, or structure. The specific history of this muteness, however, remains unknown in the Masudian narrative. My research conceptualises this muteness as a language and rhetoric of the unsayable, emerging from Partition trauma. Contrary to Masud's poetics, Manto's realm of the uneasy converges on the material and palpable nature of mutedness, particularly the inner organs of the mute body. Manto not only frames the history of mute figures as a legacy of Partition but also articulates the logic of their muteness in his fictions. While Masud conjures a hazy world where we perceive only shadows and hear only wistful echoes of an unnamable past, Manto conceives, configures, and composes the politics of the body in pieces. In contrast to Masud's emphasis on muteness as gesture, energy, and sensation, thus, Manto makes space for the materiality of silence, writing

[14] Padamsee, "Uncertain Partitions," 2.

skin, flesh, and fluid of the inside-out body in pain. Chughtai excavates even deeper, heeding the inner life of the fragmented female body during and after Partition. In fits and starts, spurts of memory propel the bodies of her characters to chronicle their unspeakable pain. In Chughtai's corpus, muteness breaches the boundaries of the female body, extending, reaching, and flowing outward.

Existing scholarship on these Partition writings merely traces the overarching themes of communalism, linguistic nationalism, and religious violence rather than excavating the inventive, heterogenous discursive space of the Urdu *afsāna* which calls on the testimony of mute, disfigured witnesses of the commonplace that have been otherwise ignored in the past. The Urdu short story hasn't yet infiltrated the immense sea of discourse on unspeakability and the ways in which discourse doubts and denies itself, and the moments when language runs into the limits of what it is able to say. These literary and political angles are the driving motivation for my research project, which turns to the creative nature of the Urdu short story to elucidate the historical value and rhetorical condition of that which remains unsayable, unheard, and unseen. My central concern in this research project is not the mere condition of silence, but rather the sounds, visions, and symbols that prefigure such a condition. In this sense, I imagine silence not as an absence, but rather as an imperceptible—yet irrefutable—presence. We may even say that, for this reason, silence comes to represent the emergence or intent of sound itself. Here, I use the word 'sound' to refer to the voices, vibrations, echoes, and sensations that open up the audible world to sound events beyond meaningful speech. I focus my attention on the points at which there seems to be a prolonged suspension, straining, or complication of speakability. In other words, my thesis is concerned less with what silence is than with our willful inattention towards that which is muffled, inarticulate, or incoherent. This is not a work drawing on the codes and

doctrines of linguistics or phonetics, but rather an examination of the deeper politics of the marks, traces, and residues of silence that remain recalcitrant to any formula or definition, and must be discerned through a more refined, indefinable sensibility. These permutations of silence are by no means limited to the ever-fleeting and evasive world of sound, but extend into the limitless realm of the material and visible. In the forthcoming chapters, we encounter bodies, organs, emissions, and fluids that signify the unspeakable and unspoken in particular ways. My mission is to demonstrate that these material and immaterial domains of silence structure social, political, and moral systems, which are themselves ordered in ways that are historically specific, and that it behooves social and political theory to be attuned to these sights, sounds, and sensations.

The Partition of the Indian subcontinent was a hotly contested moment that has been remembered, narrated, transmitted, and rationalised in two far-flung, widely disparate arcs: history and memory. The political and cultural meanings of Partition that have emerged since 1947 are deeply convoluted and insidious, owing to the many incongruous tellings of the event by generations of writers, historians, and academics. A mindful understanding of Partition demands meticulous historical research and a tenacious, deliberate enquiry into this achingly complex phenomenon. My principal interest in this thesis centres around books, articles, and scholarly writings on Partition mostly published in the 1990s and onwards, when South Asian academia was seized by a sudden surge of interest in the politics of Partition.[15] It is not my

[15] See, among others, Veena Das' *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019), Mushirul Hasan's "Memories of a Fragmented Nation: Rewriting the Histories of India's Partition" *Economic and Political Weekly* Vol. 33 No. 41 (October 1998): 2662-2668, *Legacy of a Divided Nation: India's Muslims Since Independence* (London, 1997), and *India Partitioned: The Other Face of Freedom* 2nd rev. ed. (Delhi, Roli Books, 1997), Urvashi Butalia's *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), Gyanendra Pandey's *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism, and History in India* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), Ayesha Jalal's *The Struggle for Pakistan: A Muslim Homeland and Global Politics* (Harvard University Press, 2014), *The Pity of Partition: Manto's Life, Times, and Work Across the India-Pakistan Divide* (New Jersey: Princeton University

purpose here to revive the grand narrative of Partition, with its many ambivalences, nor is it the intention of this project to peruse the high politics that took place in British India during the 1940s. Rather, I aim to excavate the politics of Partition from below, focusing on the figure of the commonplace individual, as he or she is represented in the Urdu short story. However, in order to be attuned to the intricacies and subtleties of individual experience, it is important at this juncture to offer a brief overview of the key competing factors responsible for the simultaneous Partition of India and creation of Pakistan, and explore some of those aspects which directly or indirectly impinged on the life of the most radically affected figures during and after Partition—the marginalised.

The demand for a sovereign state was first put forward by the All India Muslim League (AIML) in the Lahore Resolution of March 1940. This proposal called for the establishment of one independent state, with its separate Muslim majority regions in the eastern and western wings: "The Muslim-majority provinces of north-western and north-eastern India would be constituted into separate blocks, with minor adjustments, if necessary, in existing provincial boundaries."[16] This demand for statehood was then disseminated more widely, reinterpreted, and sentimentalised by AIML and Muslims of the subcontinent for the seven years that followed. In early 1947, certain factions of the Sikh, Hindu, and Congress leadership called for a vengeful splitting up of the Muslim-majority provinces of Punjab and Bengal. The AIML leader Muhammad Ali Jinnah disputed this vehemently in his talks with Gandhi and the British Viceroy Louis Mountbatten, insisting on Hindu-Muslim unity before eventually losing faith in the

---

Press, 2013), "Secularists, Subalterns and the Stigma of 'Communalism': Partition Historiography Revisited," *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 33.1 (1996): 93-103, and *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, The Muslim League, and the Demand for Pakistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), Alok Bhalla, "Memory, History, and Fictional Representations of the Partition," *Economic and Political Weekly* Vol. 34 No. 44 (Oct/Nov 1999), 3119-3128, and Gyanendra Pandey, "The Prose of Otherness," in *Subaltern Studies VIII: Essays in Honour of Ranajit Guha*, ed. David Arnold and David Hardiman (Delhi, 1994), 194.

[16] Pandey, *Remembering Partition*, 26.

Congress Party and its apparently secular claims. Ultimately, in June 1947, the Partition and arbitrary demarcation of the subcontinent was decided in callous haste by Cyril Radcliffe, "a British jurist who had neither been to India nor shown interest in Indian affairs".[17] The fate of each individual of the approximately 390 million-strong nation was decided by Mountbatten in three days, the frontiers of the territorial abstractions "India" and "Pakistan" determined by Cyril Radcliffe in seven weeks. The moment of India's decolonisation was thus also a moment of astounding political error, which transformed what was supposed to be the long-awaited independence of the nation into a monstrous denouement of lynching, rape, and forcible conversion. The migration and displacement of millions that followed gave way to fratricidal violence and massacre as hundreds of thousands of refugees came out into the roads in what is now remembered as fratricide by some, holocaust by others.[18]

The abundance of nationalist, communalist, and culturalist political histories on Partition is matched in magnitude, exceeded even, by the paucity of social writings on the experience of the individual. The Urdu short story tradition that I examine here provides an important corrective to this lacuna. The absence of scholarly enquiry into the effects of Partition on marginal figures such as women, children, and the displaced is uncanny. The large volume of

[17] Hasan, "Memories", 266.

[18] Gyanendra Pandey describes Partition as a 'fratricide' and 'civil war' in *Remembering Partition*, 14. Kavita Daiya, too, calls Partition a 'civil war' in her chapter "Re-Gendering the Nation: Masculinity, Romance, and Citizenship" in *Violent Belongings: Partition, Gender, and National Culture in Postcolonial India* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008), 44. Other critics have described the 1947 Partition as 'holocaust', including Tapan Raychaudhuri in "Re-reading Divide and Quit" in Penderel Moon's *Divide and Quit: An Eyewitness Account of the Partition of India*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 297-306, Dorothy Barenscott in "'This is Our Holocaust': Deepa Mehta's Earth and the Question of Partition Trauma," *UCLA Historical Journal* 21 (2006): 60-79, Lopamudra Basu in "The Repetition of Silence: Partition, Rape, and Female Labor in Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India,*" *South Asian Review* 28, no. 2 (2007): 5-26, and Rituparna Roy in her *South Asian Partition Fiction in English: From Khushwant Singh to Amitav Ghosh* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), 33, 44, 100, and 148. However, these are key studies I have consulted, and by no means an exhaustive overview.

recent historiography on Partition seems to be pursuing its own political aims, concerned more with reputation than with fact. Mushirul Hasan astutely articulates this problem as follows:

> Young and upcoming social scientists, many of whom have not even written their doctoral dissertations, are engaged in polemical writings. Many regard this as a shortcut to establishing their "scholarly" reputation in the West. Many have developed the lazy habit of writing "critiques" without any archival research.[19]

As Hasan notes, there is a tendency among contemporary scholars and academics to generalise the grand narrative of Partition to accommodate their own intellectual or methodological ends, exaggerating inherited perspectives and engaging in ideological wars rather than approaching the history, politics, and memory of Partition with a thoughtful, perceptive eye. Traditionally, Indian nationalist accounts emphasise secularism and propose that Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs had been coexisting harmoniously for centuries, and that the cultural assimilation of these groups would create unity in diversity. The proponents of the Pakistani 'two-nation theory' claim that the Partition of the subcontinent was a logical, inevitable outcome due to the fundamental religious differences between the two majorities. Others reject the essential-differences perspective in favour of the view that it was a complex power play between the British, Congress, and Muslim League that led to the crystallisation of the demand for Partition. Still others blame Jinnah as the evil, Machiavellian figure responsible for disturbing their idyll and splitting up the nation.[20] None of these accounts gives us any insight, however, into the condition of the ordinary individual during one of the most profoundly ambiguous states-of-exception in the twentieth century.

[19] Hasan, "Memories", 268.
[20] For a critique of this perspective, see Ayesha Jalal's *The Sole Spokesman*.

As the traditional timeframe of Partition history has been derived from political history, it has excluded considerations of life at the bottom, specifically the mundane, the testimonial, and the artistic. The absence of marginal figures from this time-frame is extraordinary, since representations of everyday life and the excess of individual experiences as portrayed in neglected Partition literature haven't been factored in. Routine tellings of Partition often exclude the figures of the woman, the child, the refugee, the insane, the untouchable, the menial, and the criminal. It was the artists and creative writers of Partition such as Sa'adat Hasan Manto, Ismat Chughtai, and Intizar Hussain who gave a voice to the untold experiences of the marginal. However, the absence of critical excursions into these texts is surprising, considering the increasing global concern with the task of historical restoration and reconstruction from the ground up. As the border continues to be wrought with conflict in the present moment, this work of memory is particularly crucial in order to embark on a nuanced reading of Partition literature while questioning the inadequacy of our conceptual and methodological apparati. In this project, I begin this long, arduous historical enquiry to reread and reinterpret the condition of marginalised figures in Partition literature with the aim of raising critical questions about the retelling and rewriting of history in a wider sense.

Although there is already an established body of scholarship defining the historiography of Partition, it is important to examine literary representations of the event, as I do here, with an emphasis on the present context of mute speech and sensory experiences of trauma. On the one hand, 'Partition' signifies the birth of two independent nation-states, namely India and Pakistan. On the other hand, 'Partition' also alludes to the tempestuous events set off by the British when they rent asunder the Indian subcontinent at the very moment of its decolonisation. The end of modern colonial empires in the twentieth century, including not only India but also Bangladesh,

Ireland, and Palestine, has often been followed by paroxysmal events of partition, civil war, or balkanization. The liquidation of British rule in India brought an end to European colonial imperialism, but scholarly inquiry has almost exclusively concentrated on Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Russia, casting the administrative massacres of a forgotten British India into the shadowy half-light of imperial memory. While Hannah Arendt brings up the decolonisation of India in her visionary work *The Origins of Totalitarianism*,[21] she is, for the most part, preoccupied with the ways in which the loss of India impacted the British imperialists rather than the effects of extreme violence on the refugee, the dislocated, and the migrant. Although Arendt is known for her interest in the plight of the refugee and the stateless, her inattention toward those who became refugees and stateless following the division of British India comes as an unpleasant surprise. Considering the acute empathy with which Arendt writes about the Jewish experience—the shame of the camps, the extermination of the Jews, the absence of the "right to have rights",[22] and the aftermath of Nazi rule—her lack of interest in the debased figure of the Partition refugee leaves the modern academic with a sense of unease.

In recent years, there has been a proliferation of writings on and translations of Partition literature by notable academics, activists, and writers in South Asia, some prominent scholars including Muhammad Umar Memon, Urvashi Butalia, Ayesha Jalal, Ritu Menon, Kamla Bhasin, Alok Bhalla, Veena Das, Devika Chawla, Gyanendra Pandey, Deepti Misri, Rini Bhattacharya Mehta, Ravinder Kaur, and other equally distinguished figures. These authors have done a great service to Partition discourse by recovering previously unheard testimonies, memories, and stories of Partition survivors and their families, and by articulating the manifold deplorable

[21] Hannah Arendt, "Part Two: Imperialism" in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1951), 125-255.
[22] Arendt, *Totalitarianism*, 250-252.

realities of Partition. There has also been a considerable amount of work published recently on the 1971 Bangladesh war and the figure of the birangona or "war heroine".[23] The separation of Bangladesh from Pakistan was another one of the brutal 'partitions' that further dismembered an already maimed subcontinent following the decolonisation and Partition of India. Some noteworthy writings on the 1971 war include the important reflections of Jahanara Imam, Nayanika Mookherjee, Sarmila Bose, Srinath Raghavan and Yasmin Saikia. My concern, however, is the utter lack of scholarly inquiry into those literary figurations of silence and mute things in Partition fiction and war writings that evoke the sensory experiences of trauma, and which are key to decoding and understanding the precarious imperial-colonial and patriarchal legacy of the Indian subcontinent.

My chapters focus on three Urdu writers—Naiyer Masud, Sa'adat Hasan Manto, and Ismat Chughtai—and their hauntingly powerful Partition stories that elicit the many contours, torques, and folds in the figurations of silence. These chapters interlock and fit into an architecture that adumbrates a profound regime of silences. In the thesis, I emphasise the complex paradox of muteness both as a rhetorical sign and as a mode of expression, in the wake of not one but multiple 'partitions' in and of the nation. These partitions involve not only the carving up of the geo-body of the nation, but also the simultaneous dismembering of the human body—its voice, its language, and its memory. Contemporary scholarship on silence and the unspeakable tends to be focused on Judeo-Christian theology[24], or on the apophatic discourse surrounding Holocaust literature. My core concern in this project, however, is the culture of

[23] "Birangona" was the term given by the Bangladeshi state to the women raped in the 1971 war. See Nayanika Mookherjee's *The Spectral Wound: Sexual Violence, Public Memories, and the Bangladesh War of 1971* (London: Duke University Press, 2015), xv-xx.
[24] See William Franke's *A Philosophy of the Unsayable* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2014) and *On What Cannot Be Said: Apophatic Discourses in Philosophy, Religion, Literature, and the Arts*, edited with theoretical and critical essays by William Franke (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), vol. 1, *Classical Formulations*, vol. 2, *Modern and Contemporary Transformations*.

muteness that emerges irrepressibly from an aesthetic of silent and silenced things in Urdu fiction. I turn to Rancière's work on muteness,[25] which first provoked my interest in the idea of mute speech as historical expression: "The labor of style is [then] to separate the mute-loquacious letter from itself, to silence its chatter so that the music of its muteness may resonate".[26] In my readings of the exemplary writings by Masud, Manto, and Chughtai, I draw inspiration from this philosophy and distance the text from historical judgment to discover the sonority of unheard silences beneath and beyond it. This does not mean that I reject historical analyses of these writings, nor do I deprecate the historical perspectives on language, rhetoric, and style of these writers. Rather than thinking of history as a continuous trajectory, I employ horizontal contextualization[27] instead, which takes the form of detailed critical analyses of the aesthetics of muteness, regularly interrupted by the horizontal and diagonal dimensions of history. Thus, my reflections on muteness and 'mute things' in Partition writings cut across the traditional timeframe of Partition history to intertwine with various historical contexts, reconfiguring the current understandings of past silences and having them come to bear on the present.

This project, however, is not about Partition silence but rather the literary and historical value of silence. I decided to materialise the mute language inscribed in the inner life of fragments, symbols, hieroglyphs, and bodies in the Urdu short story, and to reconstruct it as exhaustively as possible. In other words, I aim to break the silence about silence. The key factor affecting my decision was the scope of the horror of Partition symbolised by mute speech in these works, and the length of time that has passed since the event took place with little to no

[25] See note 9 of this thesis.
[26] Rancière, *Mute Speech*, 125.
[27] Rancière, 7-8.

discussion of this muteness and its politics. I work through the details of literary and cultural particulars rather than simply projecting onto these texts a preestablished historical or philosophic system. To that end, my methodology involves close textual analyses of Masud, Manto, and Chughtai's *afsānas* to give form to the ineffable experience of muteness in their writings, and to disseminate this experience further with the aid of historical framing and a rigorous theoretical investigation. The result is a thoughtful engagement with the past, reconfiguring our understanding of it and challenging the verdicts founded on *a priori* assumptions.

Muteness in these texts operates not as a unified trope but as an expressive regime, or representative order, in which social and historical phenomena are understood as signs of a deeper, hidden reality. I approach muteness as a multi-stranded concept densely interwoven with the imperial-colonial and patriarchal history of the subcontinent, with myriad gradations of silence that complicate the current emphasis on silencing in critical theory. My main interest is in hearing the obscure, melancholy sounds of those liminal figures who have forever remained out of historical earshot. Furthermore, my representation of these many silences and sounds is of crucial significance as it navigates a wide interdisciplinary terrain of sensory studies, embodiment theory, disability studies, trauma theory, and subaltern theory. I bring in the voices of Ariella Azoulay, Giorgio Agamben, Sara Ahmed, Albert Memmi, Cathy Caruth, Clare Barker, Steven Connor, and Pheng Cheah to develop my argument about the historicist paradox of mute speech. The case studies that I have chosen in my chapters are based on the daunting lack of critical writing on the centrality and complexity of muteness in the rich, dark writings of Masud, Manto, and Chughtai about situations characterized by an untold, unknown, or unfamiliar trauma. It will become clear that I have tried to cover much—for some, no doubt, too much—in

an effort to provide insight into the varieties of muteness in the Urdu *afsāna*. I, however, maintain that this project merely marks the beginning of the research on mute speech and silences in Urdu literature. Further research is key to introducing the regenerative historical power of the Urdu language to postcolonial literature, so that Urdu literature may take its place alongside other world languages to cure literary parochialism and worldlessness.

My project initially started as a quiet meditation on Naiyer Masud's evocative writings. Of the more complex and experimental noncanonical Urdu writers, Masud (1963-2017) may be the most understudied contemporary Urdu writer in South Asia, and has received little to no attention in the West. Born and raised in Lucknow, India, Masud wrote short stories in Urdu during the 1970s, a time when the novel dominated the canon of prose literature. As an Urdu writer in post-Partition India, Masud engages with the politics of muteness to articulate the subaltern consciousness. His short stories open up a new area of literary experience for readers, as well as opening up fresh intellectual realms for comparative studies. In Masud's prose, the experience—or consciousness—of the voice is rendered mute, gesture fails to compensate for lack of speech, and the written word is either indecipherable or meaningless. Chapter 1 explores Masud's fictive world of violent stutters, petrified gestures, and mystifying hieroglyphs, where narrators strain to produce articulate speech or writing. Unable to grasp the coherence of these stutters, gestures, and hieroglyphs in Masud's stories, readers find themselves suspended in a literary domain that is entirely unclear on specifics. Temporal and geographical boundaries dissolve as Masud sets himself the task of representing the subaltern who eludes representation. His mute narrators emblematize varying degrees of subalternity, loss, and forgetting, not only among oppressed minorities but also among oppressed languages of South Asia.

Since the serial publication of the acclaimed scholar Muhammad Umar Memon's English translations of Masud's stories surfaced in a special issue of the *Annual for Urdu Studies* in 1997, no study of language and sound in Masud's writings has been undertaken. My project endeavours to fill this urgent gap. While notable scholars such as Jane A. Shum, Sikandar Ahmad, Carlo Coppola, and John Kenneth Muse have published various writings on Masud's oeuvre, these critics are entirely preoccupied with the overarching thematic concerns of genre and intention in Masud's writing. By contrast, my research focuses on the expressiveness of silence and aphasia that permeates Masud's prose at the cellular level. "Sheesha Ghat" figures the silence of the colonised as a stuttering, knotted tongue. In this story, an orphaned, forlorn child-narrator in the care of his foster father takes the reader on a hazy, dream-like journey into his surreal world of glass-blowers, mimes, and death. The child has as his sole mode of expression a stricken tongue, unable to articulate what he sees and hears. His stuttering signals the symbolic conversion of silence as the not-yet-articulated self-representation of his scars and his history. The next story, "Lamentation", is utterly preoccupied with gesture as self-expression. It tells the tale of an aimless wanderer passing through "wasteland communities",[28] observing their rituals of mourning. The narrative underlines the difficulty and futility of the experience of meaning-making altogether and turns the idea of coherence upside down. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of "The Fifth Saasaan", a story about architecture, stone, and an unnamed narrator who discovers drawing and symbols etched upon the walls—marks of an ancient language that nobody can read. The most striking element of this story is not the mute history written on the stone walls, but rather the ruins of a grand architecture that bear witness to the chaos and confusion of a dark past. The chapter pays homage to Masud's radical poetics of

[28] See "Lamentation" in Naiyer Masud's *Essence of Camphor* (New Delhi: Katha, 1998).

fiction that resist the traditional notions of meaning and inherited form, its shimmering, Kafkaesque arbitrariness espousing a continual engagement with the unsayable.

In Chapter 2, I focus on the works of Manto, who is regarded as the greatest Urdu short story writer in the twentieth century, and can be considered Masud's opposite, with an intimidatingly large body of scholarship devoted to his life and work. His most notable Partition stories include "ٹوبہ ٹیک سنگھ" ("Toba Tek Singh"), "کھول دو" ("Khol Do", translated as "Open It"), and "ٹھنڈا گوشت" ("Thanda Gosht", translated as "Cold Meat"). It is critical to note that Khalid Hasan, Manto's renowned and esteemed translator, has often monopolised these translations with reductions, and often omissions, of sexual metaphors and imagery critical in understanding the rhetorical legacy of Partition. I will, therefore, draw on these translations while simultaneously "rewriting" particular selections of these translations for accuracy and effect. Manto devoted his writings to the marginalised, peripheral body to represent the lived history of Partition, and reimagined the place and meaning of the body within his sociopolitical sphere in highly innovative ways. Contrary to his counterparts in the All India Progressive Writers' Association, Manto abandoned sentimentalism and lyricism in favour of a more hard-bitten, unabashedly modern "anti-artistic" aesthetic that would define his work for years to come. His oeuvre distills the human form to a cluster of fragments that—at a first glance—respect the contours of tradition and the weight of gravity. At the same time, his texts undermine any semantic coherence or intellectual sense, exposing a European modernist propulsion. This chapter explores how Manto gave a voice and form to the bodily aesthetic of Partition, putting a spotlight on that which is bruised, swollen, torn, slit, muted, or severed. I have chosen to look at four of Manto's short stories, each offering a meditation on the divergent workings of the mute body. "Toba Tek Singh" presents Bishan Singh, a spectre and ghost who has lost his language.

His voice hovers over and glances across the text at the reader, yet remains forever out of earshot. "Open It!" invites an appraisal of the severed and wounded female body in light of Julia Kristeva's reflections on the human head as symbol, metaphor, religious artefact, and physical fact.[29] "Black Margins" examines the motif of the fragment, the crux of Manto's artistic vision. With a kind of synechdochic fury, the body is captured and contemplated through its disfigured limbs, its ashen eyes, its lost meshes of vocal cords. In my reading, "Black Margins" is equally a meditation on sound as it is on silence and absence. This literary mosaic of texts reads like an outpouring of interruptions, the stories emerging abruptly and aborting just as rapidly, the narrative voice seizing, jerking, convulsing. In order to examine this fragmentary soundscape, I turn to Steven Connor's unusual work on the nature of the voice, *Beyond Words: Sobs, Hums, Stutters, and Other Vocalizations*.[30] Finally, I conclude the chapter with a close reading of Manto's "Pompoms", scrutinising the voice of an anonymous, ghastly madwoman who tells her story in disjointed, incoherent sentences, bereft of any logic or sense. There's a hysteria characterising the narrative voice of "Pompoms" that emblematises the experiences of women during and after Partition, and their failed attempts at narrating that unspeakable horror.

Chapter 3 turns to an equally important author, Ismat Chughtai, who wrote fiercely about women's intellect, desires, bodies, and psyches. She was tried in British Lahore for obscenity for her short story "لہاف" ("Lihaaf", translated as "The Quilt") along with Manto, who was on trial for "بو" ("Bu", or "Odour"), and was also prosecuted for "ٹھنڈا گوشت" ("Thanda Gosht", or "Cold Meat"), "کالی شلوار" ("Kali Shalwar", translated as "The Black Shalwar"), and "دھواں" ("Dhuan", or "Smoke"). Chughtai was notorious for her frank writings on sensuality, sex, and same-sex

[29] See Julia Kristeva's *The Severed Head: Capital Visions*. Translated by Jody Gladding (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).
[30] See Steven Connor's *Beyond Words: Sobs, Hums, Stutters, and Other Vocalizations* (London: Reaktion Books, 2014).

desire at a time when women were caught in the throes of patriarchal India. Orthodox critics and fundamentalists made ad hominem attacks on Chughtai, calling her "a very dirty person, coming from a very dirty family".[31] In my analysis, I will turn a historical lens onto Chughtai's feminist writings to examine how she engages with silences and the unsayable in her prose, comparing her treatment of mute speech with that of Masud and Manto. This feminist perspective enables me to examine the treatment of the voice by a female writer, and to examine how the gendered tellings of Partition present us with different kinds of silences, absences, and gaps. Chughtai is one of the most acclaimed and controversial Urdu writers in India, and her stories "Lihaaf" ("The Quilt") and "Gharwali" ("The Homemaker") have garnered substantial scholarly attention. However, most critical reflections on Chughtai's work focus on the sexual nature of her writings and neglect the underlying linguistic Arcadia in her fiction, the silences from which Chughtai's pragmatic language issues forth. I also bring in Chughtai's autobiography[32] in the chapter in order to look closely at her personal acquaintances and experiences, who bear a striking resemblance to the characters in her stories and, therefore, crucially inform the text's ethical and political implications.

It is important to give Chughtai's poignant, nuanced, powerful writings a privileged space in the literary theorisation of mutedness that I offer here. This may be accounted for by the density of muteness in her representations, which raises complicated questions of figuration. Chughtai wrote boldly on pregnancy, childbirth, and abortion at a time when the female body was inscribed within a violent patriarchal order that determined its life trajectory, and to speak of these issues, particularly by a woman, was considered dirty, shameless, and dishonourable. The

[31] Ismat Chughtai, "Mahfil Interviews Ismat Chughtai", *Mahfil*, Vol. 8, No. 2/3 (Summer-Fall 1972): 169-188.
[32] See M. Asaduddin's *Ismat Chughtai: A Life in Words* (India: Penguin Books India, 2012). Translated from Chughtai's Urdu original *Kaghazi Hai Pairahan*.

nation focused on the home as women's appropriate arena for fostering national identity through their child-rearing and domestic responsibilities, and there was no place for a woman in the public political arena. Wounded, violated, and intruded upon by these patriarchal codes of shame and honour, women's bodies and their everyday personal negotiations with the deplorable violence of Partition were appropriated into narratives of nationalism, martyrdom, and heroism. As a result, the complex experiences of these women were consigned to oblivion and silence. Chughtai was one of the few writers of her time who articulated these voices and their untold stories, giving a voice to their repressed condition in her short fiction.

For the purposes of my analysis, I have selected three stories by Chughtai that grapple with these ostensibly forbidding and unapproachable topics. There is no simple, linear logic or rationale behind these narratives—each short story presents varying images of wounds that epitomize a language of muteness, mutilated to the point of erasure. There is a complex weaving and meshing of unsayability in each narrative, lying out of reach beyond language, from the very midst of language. I begin the chapter on Chughtai with a discussion of "Quit India", focusing on the decaying figure of the coloniser. Much has been written about this particular work, but the figure of the Saheb and the colonial gaze has been almost completely neglected in critical works on Chughtai's renowned story. "Quit India" centres on a one-eyed Englishman, William Eric Jackson. Unlike most Partition stories that focus on the fate of those who have been silenced, this story harks back to the fate of the one who silences: the Saheb. Next, I turn the lens to "Roots", an uncanny rendering of the womb and its interconnectedness to place, specifically the nation. The story introduces the readers to Amma, a protagonist with a striking likeness to Chughtai's mother. The women in Chughtai's narratives can be read as complex avatars of uttered and unuttered sounds and, as I will show, these sounds do not always manifest as speech but also as

exerted echoes that emanate from an abject womb. The conversation then segues to "Of Fists and Rubs", a dark, chilling tale unveiling the bestial experiences of birth and death. Here, Chughtai conceives of Partition as a mangled birth, a disfiguration and a falling apart, the female body emerging as a parallel reading of the abject geo-body of the nation.

A major challenge in the writing of this thesis has been the lack of critical scholarship and translation of Urdu literature. While American, African, and Asian scholarship have paid sufficient attention to certain peripheral languages such as Swahili, Hindi, and Bengali, Urdu still remains largely left out. In an insightful study of neglected Urdu literature, Karen Thornber[33] points out how there's an overemphasis on English-language Pakistani literature with a complete lack of local and global attention to the country's Urdu-language writers. I entirely agree with Thornber's assessment, and would further add that unacclaimed Urdu-language writers from Pakistan *and* India are nearly excluded from the discourse in Europe and the Americas. The translations that are available usually circulate those texts and writers who, for the most part, have already been acclaimed on the global stage. These tend to include the major Urdu poets, such as Mirza Ghalib, Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Muhammad Husain Azad, Miraji, Altaf Hussain Hali, and a handful of canonical prose writers like Manto and Qurratulain Hyder. In addition, modern translation theory has barely ever ventured into the rich world of the Urdu language with its many aesthetics, textures, and cadences, particularly in the works of Masud, Chughtai, and Intizar Hussain. Yet such a literature has so much to offer when it comes to understanding political suffering and historical pain. To address these problems, I have sometimes used my own

[33] See Karen Thornber's "Mashal Books as Cultural Mediator: Translating East Asian, Middle Eastern, and African Literatures into Urdu in Lahore" in *Literary Translation and Cultural Mediators in 'Peripheral' Cultures: Customs Officers or Smugglers?* Edited by Diana Roig-Sanz and Reine Meylaerts (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 157-182.

translations to write this thesis, particularly in the case of texts that have been censored in their translations. I have encountered translation problems mostly with Manto's English translations, which are replete with inaccuracies, omissions, and distortions. Of the rare writings that are free of such faults and errors, such as Tahira Naqvi's translations of Manto and Chughtai, any reader familiar with the Urdu language will at once identify that the translations are neither very distinguished, nor do they capture the angularities and contours of the original texts. They lack the eloquent lyricism and elegance of prose that intoxicates the reader in, for example, Memon's translations of Masud's stories.

I respond to this problem by leaning on my own original translations alongside the existing translations of these authors. My decision to translate and discuss these texts in the English language is not only based on the ineffectuality of existing translations, but also on the disturbing exclusion of the Urdu language from the fields of comparative literature and literary theory in general. I take up issue with the hierarchical ordering of languages as we know it and the marginalisation of Urdu within the cultural and linguistic realm of literary studies, iterating the need to disrupt this cultural hegemony. The subordination of all minority languages of the globe to the Eurocentric trans-Atlantic fraternity of English, German, and French is a synecdoche for European colonial domination of the rest of the world. While David Damrosch's famous notion of 'world literature'[34] calls for negotiation, translation, and circulation of literary texts, Urdu literature today remains still confined within the spatial and temporal national-territorial borders of the Urdu-speaking world. As Damrosch claims, "A work only has an effective life as world literature whenever, and wherever, it is actively present within a literary system beyond that of its original culture".[35] On the contrary, the Urdu oeuvre and its novelty have yet to enter

[34] David Damrosch, *What is World Literature?* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003).
[35] Damrosch, *World Literature*, 4.

this transnational space of world literature, or *Weltliteratur*.[36] As a native speaker of Urdu, this cultural hegemony is the impetus behind my decision to translate and rewrite selected Urdu texts and bring them into jarring proximity with the ongoing discourse on world literature, postcolonial literature, and comparative literary studies.

My approach to reading, translating, and investigating the ensemble of postcolonial writings by Masud, Manto, and Chughtai calls on three major translators and their meditations on translation. Firstly, I look at Lawrence Venuti's conception of "domesticating" and "foreignizing"[37] in my readings of translated Partition fiction in English. Typically, English translations of Manto and Chughtai's short stories are dominated by domesticated readings that either minimise or neglect the rhetorical nuances and implications inherent in the Urdu language. I resist this urge to domesticate, which invites the reader to understand the historic moment of Partition through the frame of the English literary canon, but at the same time also creates a distance between the narrators and the linguistic community of the source culture. It is this very distance that informs my translations and rewritings of these authors' works. I deploy the strategy of foreignising to evoke the source culture without neutralising its linguistic and cultural differences in a monolingual style. To that end, I adopt code-switching in my translations to create a 'hybrid' English that reflects the linguistic experience of the Urdu vernacular and brings the narrators closer to the linguistic communities unique to South Asia.

Next, I turn to Carol Maier's meditations on translating the body[38] that have deeply informed my thinking. Maier's belief that "the body offers an organic, somatic model" [39] for

[36] German term coined by Goethe in the 1820s, relating world literature to world history.
[37] For a thorough discussion of "domesticating" and "foreignizing" translations, see the introduction and first chapter of Lawrence Venuti's *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation* (London: Routledge, 2017).
[38] See Carol Maier's "Translating as a Body: Meditations on Mediation (Excerpts 1994-2004)" in *The Translator as Writer*, edited by Susan Bassnett and Peter Bush (London: Continuum, 2006), 137-148.
[39] Maier, "Translating as a Body," 143.

translation practice has been remarkably instructive in both its literal and metaphorical applications. Heeding Maier's conviction that the body is "something inseparable" from the text, either as translator or as site of translation, I privilege the experience of the body and its sounds and silences in my translations. My objective is to explicate the historically silent body, particularly the female body, and to translate the body itself as language. Owing to its historical condition of being long-silent and long-silenced, I consider the fragmented, disjointed body as language, calling to the attention of the reader the text's nature both as body and body-driven narrative. Taking my cue from Maier, I engage the literary world of physical as well as verbal flesh, grappling with the cutaneous and linguistic texture[40] of and in the Urdu short story, laying bare the vast life of the dismembered body and opening up its silences, movements, and sensations to translation.

Finally, I look to Vilashini Cooppan's notion of "uncanny translation", which she describes as the spectral, haunting quality of world literature that makes the text both unlike and like us.[41] Cooppan's formulation of literature as a "ghostly return" of the past reflects in my English translations, where I take on the task of constructing the wounded, severed body through a language of the uncanny. For this difficult task, I endeavour to regenerate the physical, linguistic, and political dismemberments in the texts so crucial to capturing the historical pain of Partition. This could only be achieved by reproducing the Urdu language and restoring the hoard of rhetoric which usually goes underground in its English iterations. The outcome is a two-fold return: a witnessing of the past through a new lens, and a rejuvenation of a lost language. As Cooppan notes:

[40] Maier, "Translating as a Body," 144.
[41] See Vilashini Cooppan's "Ghosts in the Disciplinary Machine: The Uncanny Life of World Literature," *Comparative Literature Studies* 41, no. 1 (2004): 24.

> Because the time line of the uncanny is not chronological, it invites us to resist the impulse to read only some texts—usually modern, postcolonial, emergent, or otherwise belated texts—in the shadow of greater others, and to recognize instead a ghostly alienness animating *every* text.[42]

As a translator, I am interested in regenerating and revealing that unsettling quality of Urdu *afsānas* which, so distant in space and time, are brought closer to both monolingual and bilingual readers through the uncanny goal of one's own recognition through the other's misrecognition.

The arrangement of the chapters to follow does not adhere to historical chronology. Rather, the rationale behind the structure of my thesis lies in the very content of each individual short story. I begin with Masud, since it was his elusive, haunting world that evoked in me a lasting and enduring obsession with the ineffable. I have carefully selected three of his dazzling short stories for the purposes of my project, namely "Sheesha Ghat", "Lamentation", and "The Fifth Saasaan". The stories are ordered as such so as to trace, in a way, a trajectory of muteness. "Sheesha Ghat" focuses on the tongue, followed by "Lamentation", which places emphasis on gestures, and finally, the chapter concludes with "The Fifth Saasaan", which presents the reader with an architectural metaphor for collective trauma and its forgetting. In "The Fifth Saasaan", the reader is presented with a magnificent stone structure engraved with an indecipherable language, which I read as the mute letters of an unspeakable history. The chapter is thus a microcosm of the Masudian universe, a fragmentary glimpse into a mute poetics of revelation whereby speech, gesture, letter, and hieroglyph are suspended in a stillness that endeavours to articulate the profound totality of human experience.

[42] Cooppan, "Ghosts," 24.

From Masud's poetics, the thesis transitions to Manto's material world, signalling a shift to the necrotic form. Manto's literature is as palpable as Masud's is ephemeral. While Masud puts the very essence of realism into question, Manto revels in what Bill Brown calls the 'thingness'[43] of material reality. For Brown, things are opaque and irreducible, and they have the potential to give rise to new forms of expression, granted we look closely at the exhaustive meanings things have in their utilitarian function. Manto's work complies solidly with Brown's rhetoric of 'thingness'. In Manto's fiction, the politicisation of the body is inverted into the materialisation of politics, using everyday objects such as clothing, rice, *mithai*,[44] razors, tea tables, and milk to emphasise how inanimate objects "constitute human subjects".[45] Manto fuses the national and physical form, particularly in the stories I have selected: "Toba Tek Singh", "Khol Do!", "Black Margins", and "Pompoms". The first story, "Toba Tek Singh", has been widely discussed and lauded by critics and scholars. It presents Bishan Singh, a lunatic who, following the division of the nation, has lost his mind and his language. Manto posits Bishan Singh's trauma not only as the protagonist's inner disintegration but also in his exterior deformity, emphasising the totalising experience of violence. Next, "Khol Do!" is a much more complicated, politically engaged, and analytically subversive rape narrative that alerts us to the lived catastrophe of sexual violence in the wake of Partition. "Black Margins" is a collection of aphoristic short tales about the chaotic, senseless violence during and after Partition. These tales, written in an incomparable and often fragmentary form, capture the sanguine onset of modernity in Manto's fiction. Finally, "Pompoms" is an active witnessing of a woman's internal exile from

[43] I borrow this term from Bill Brown's "Thing Theory" in *Things* (Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 4-7.
[44] A delicacy of South Asia, *mithai* is a confection made from milk, sugar, nuts, and spices. It is particularly popular in Pakistan and India.
[45] Brown, *Things*, 7.

her own body through a jagged, ruptured memory. In “Pompoms”, the author defies traditional elegiac oeuvres of Partition to depict the terrible bodily dilemma of remembering, belonging, and telling. Manto employs the metaphor of a monstrous, inverted birth to capture the impact of the South Asian Partition. In Manto’s texts, the reader comes face-to-face with the sinuous contours of the body and its organs, captivating us with its excesses, dregs, and emissions.

Finally, the thesis segues to Chughtai’s feminist concerns, who at once recognises and acknowledges women’s precarious silence, and takes it as a point of departure for countering women’s oppression through the contestatory women in her writings. While Masud prefers a dream-like atmosphere and Manto favors writing flesh and blood, Chughtai privileges the inner life of the body. For my close reading of her works, I look at “Quit India”, “Roots” and “Of Fists and Rubs”: three of Chughtai’s most provocative stories that contain some of her most disturbing, shimmering characters. The women in these narratives lack any artifice, deliberation, or rational planning. Instead, we encounter in their bodies a restless, throbbing urgency to express, each body a collection of living fragments that pulse and palpitate and speak a history long past and long forgotten. The oppressor’s body, too, exhibits inexplicable maladies: the mind disoriented, the face gaping open, the body in terror. Each chapter, thus, works its way into the blood and becomes an integral element of the reader’s own embodiment, introducing us to the historical pain of an entire world that has yet to find its way into ‘world literature’.

Chapter 1: Masud's Fiction and the Unsayable

"Still, to talk about language is even worse than to write about silence."

—Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*

I've worked very hard on that language, especially so that it not have a set identity, so no one would be able to recognize who was writing, and of which place and time the story was written.

—Masud, An Interview with Sagaree Sengupta, 2-3 April 1996

My analysis of Masud's fiction takes as its point of departure the idea that his stories should be read not as abstract parables, but should rather be placed alongside historical, political, and personal accounts of India's Partition. It is key to note that Masud's narratives never speak about Hindus, Muslims, or Sikhs, or about India and Pakistan. Far removed as they are from rape, murder, and religion, his short stories deliberately avoid the themes typically associated with Partition fiction. Instead, Masud's fiction gives human form to the difficulty and reluctance of articulating the unspeakable experiences of trauma. My close textual analysis emphasizes the ways in which his characters provoke meditations on the politics of muteness, testifying to the heightened resonance of the depoliticizing and perhaps even disabling effects of Partition, as I demonstrate in my discussions of "Sheesha Ghat", "Lamentation", and "The Fifth Saasaan". His characters enable us to think about how ordinary voices are either stilled or eliminated within both Indian and Pakistani state discourses on Partition and its aftermath. I advocate reading these figures for the light they shed on what may have been Masud's own postcolonial concerns regarding memory, dislocation, and voice.

In interviews about his writing, he vividly recalls certain incidents from his childhood during the early years of Partition. One such incident is a story about a family in Masud's

neighbourhood of Lucknow, India that was forced to sell all its belongings in an auction and move to Pakistan in 1947-1948. Among their belongings was a cupboard full of children's books that Masud wanted his father to buy for him. Despite his begging and crying, his father did not agree: "Of all the major sorrows in my life, that must have been the very first one, that something slipped out of my hands".[1] The author speaks of climbing up a guava tree to look over a low wall at the auction going on, his chin resting on top of the wall. Within the pages of Masud's curious fictions, readers encounter similar moments of loss, as if something is simultaneously slipping out of the characters' and the readers' grasp. Rooms, houses, and streets are constantly in flux, and often we happen upon scenes that evoke an ephemeral vision of a child climbing up a guava tree to look over a neighbour's wall, witnessing the loss of his friends' belongings. Motifs of both the wall and the guava tree from Masud's past figure in various forms in his prose, such as roads, "گھاٹ"—ghats,[2] lanes, hedges, and fields, symbolizing continuously shifting boundaries. In his introduction to *Essence of Camphor*—a collection of Masud's translated short stories—Muhammad Umar Memon[3] states, "one experiences things in dynamic movement, not as objects with fixed perimeters, in a state of repose or quiescence"[4]. Like the narrator in "Obscure Domains of Fear and Desire" or the wastelanders in "Lamentation", Masud's characters repeatedly question our perception of topographies and national boundaries. The author's fictional habitat sets up alternative orchestrations of time and space, either compressing the rate

[1] See Sagaree Sengupta's "An Interview with Naiyer Masud" in *The Annual of Urdu Studies* (1998): 123-160, https://minds.wisconsin.edu/handle/1793/12039 .
[2] A *ghat* is a wide flight of steps descending to a river or lake, or an extension of such a space. It is also used to indicate a level space where Hindus cremate their dead.
[3] Muhammad Umar Memon (1939-2018) was Professor Emeritus of Urdu Literature and Arabic Studies at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. He was an accomplished scholar, writer, editor, and translator. His translations of Masud's short stories appear in his online literary journal *The Annual of Urdu Studies*.
[4] See Memon's "Naiyer Masud: A Prefatory Note" in *The Annual of Urdu Studies* (1997): 3, https://minds.wisconsin.edu/handle/1793/11983.

at which time passes or keeping the boundaries of his spaces open. Masud's stories consequently disrupt what Ana Maria Alonso, in her discussion of nationalism's universalist and de-particularizing tendency, calls the "spatialization of being".[5] Masud thus poses an implicit question around how to mediate narrative through bodies incapable of speech, suspended as they are in the liminal space between citizenship and exile.

Since Partition is ineluctably characterized by problems of nationalism, citizenship, and displacement, my analysis considers it a state of exception, as defined by Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben. Taking his cue from German legal theorist Carl Schmitt, Agamben uses the term "state of exception" to describe the violence that the state exercises over its people.[6] He defines the state of exception as a "suspension of juridical order […, as] law's threshold or limit concept".[7] In Agamben's thought, the state of exception presents itself as a forceful and willful omission, whereby the law is suspended in order to be preserved. It is "a zone of indifference, where inside and outside do not exclude each other but rather blur with each other".[8] Even though most of Agamben's account of the state of exception centres on examples taken from the history of European nation-states,[9] I propose that Agamben's analysis nevertheless has value for addressing the manifold complexities of the violence and dislocation that ensued in South Asia in the wake of Partition. In his essay "Violence, Gender and Partition in the South Asian Nation", Stephen Morton notes that Agamben's "universalizing use of the masculine form *homo sacer*"[10] may not be appropriate for an analysis of the experiences of South Asian women. While I whole-

[5] See Ana Maria Alonso's "The Politics of Space, Time and Substance: State Formation, Nationalism, and Ethnicity," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 23, no. 1 (1994): 379-405.
[6] See Giorgio Agamben's *State of Exception* (Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 1.
[7] Ibid., 4.
[8] Ibid., 23.
[9] See Achille Mbembe's "Necropolitics," *Public Culture* 15, no.1 (2003): 11-40.
[10] See Stephen Morton's "Violence, Gender and Partition in the Narration of the South Asian Nation," in *The Other India: Narratives of Terror, Communalism, and Violence*, edited by Om Prakash Dwivedi (Newcastle Upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012), 43.

heartedly agree with Morton's view of the limitations of Agamben's analysis, the Italian theorist's argument that the modern nation-state is founded on a state of exception, where people can be killed without being sacrificed, remains central to my analysis of the violence that roiled South Asia in 1947. I will further discuss and develop the relation between Agamben and Partition in my close textual analysis of South Asian literatures, beginning with Masud.

Born in 1936 in Lucknow, India, Masud first began writing short stories as a child in 1947-1948, when he was about twelve years of age, but finding himself dissatisfied with his writing, he threw them away. He started writing again in 1971 and sent his first short story, "Nusrat",[11] for publication under a false name, claiming it was the translation of a Persian short story he had found. Only after the story had been published did Masud reveal that he had written it himself.[12] He had first penned this story in 1948, one year after the Partition. The holocaust that followed the formation of the two new nations during that time surfaces in Masud's fiction twenty-three years later in the form of mute, stuttering, coughing, and gesturing characters who inevitably fail to articulate their thoughts or experiences. Since Masud's earliest writings materialized in the early years following Partition, my study proposes that the dynamics and implications of state formation following those years be considered while reading Masud's disquieting stories. Critics should pay especially close attention to those whom Masud portrayed as being left at the margins, as denizens who belonged to neither a clearly demarcated inside nor outside.

[11] "Nusrat" was translated by Muhammad Umar Memon as "The Color of Nothingness", and published by Urdu writer, critic, and theorist Shamsur Rehman Faruqi in his literary journal *Shab-Khun*.
[12] Sengupta, "An Interview with Naiyer Masud," 138.

These are the voices that Gyanendra Pandey, in his analysis of communal riots following the Partition, collectively calls the "subaltern stutter".[13] Pandey argues that Indian state discourse elevates the triumphant campaign for Independence and demotes the stories of violence, bloodshed, and atrocities in the primary narrative of Partition, so that the voices of those situated at the margins appear in historiography "only as traces, fragments, the suggestion of a voice—an echo".[14] Recent scholarship on Partition, such as Pandey's *Routine Violence*, responds to this historiographical blind spot, exploring previously uncharted literary and critical territory by engaging with the lived experiences of marginalized voices. Another incisive investigation of voices overlooked by state discourse on Partition is Urvashi Butalia's *The Other Side of Silence*, in which she relates the individual stories of victims—women, children, ordinary people—through interviews conducted with them over a period of ten years. Butalia situates their stories alongside the history of her own family of Partition refugees in order to ask urgent questions about stilled voices in the margins of history.[15] Even though contemporary writings on Partition are exploring new territory by foregrounding previously marginalized voices, rarely have fictional texts concerned with India's partition engaged with muted subjects and objects as judiciously as Masud's fictions. His stories foreground characters who are caught between "not-being-able-to-speak" and "ought-not-to-speak" in what E. Valentine Daniel calls "the drone of silence".[16] The author's unspeaking characters warrant the possibility of considering that political states of exception, such as the Partition, may engender states of linguistic collapse

[13] See Gyanendra Pandey's *Routine Violence: Nations, Fragments, Histories* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2006), 50.
[14] Pandey, *Routine Violence*, 59.
[15] See also *The Long Partition* by Vazira Fazila-Yacoobali Zamindar, *The Politics of Dialogue* by Ranabir Samaddar, *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1998) by Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, and *Citizenship and Its Discontents: An Indian History* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2013) by Niraja Gopal Jayal.
[16] See E. Valentine Daniel's "Embodied Terror" in *Charred Lullabies: Chapters in an Anthropography of Violence* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996), 150.

where the voice and organs of speech experience a complex disruption—including, but not limited to conditions of muteness, stuttering, and gesturing—allowing readers to experience the suffering of a silent and silenced nation during the darkest years of its history.

The years succeeding Partition, when Masud turned to writing, saw immense political, social, and religious upheaval in India, and before we look at Masud's stories it is crucial to scrutinize the period when they were written. It is impossible to recount here all the circumstances leading up to and following the Partition; in any case, there is no dearth of material dealing with this subject.[17] I will, however, briefly summarize some of the developments that resulted in Partition. In Pakistani state discourse, Pakistan's *raison d'être* was the 'two-nation theory', according to which the underlying impetus for the division of British India was primarily the fact that Indian Muslims were a separate, distinctive community. According to Swedish scholar Ted Svensson: "In the end game of colonialism, the leadership of the Muslim League had portrayed Pakistan as a necessary entity to counter the future dominance of the Hindu majority in an undivided India and as a logical realization of the shared nationhood of the region's Muslims".[18] In particular, the Indian National Congress and the All-India Muslim League played significant roles in the independence movement leading to decolonization. Founded in 1885, the Congress was one of the oldest and most well-organized political parties in the world.[19] Even though the Muslim League lacked the grassroot reach of the Congress and only

[17] See *The Aftermath of Partition in South Asia* by Tai Yong Tan and Gyanesh Kudaisya (London: Routledge, 2000), *Modern South Asia: History, Culture, Political Economy* by Ayesha Jalal and Sugata Bose (New York: Routledge, 1998), *Inventing Boundaries: Gender, Politics, and the Partition of India* by Mushirul Hasan (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000), *The Origins of the Partition of India, 1936-1947* by Anita Inder Singh (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987), and *The Great Partition: The Making of India and Pakistan* by Yasmin Khan (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2007).
[18] See Ted Svensson's "What (Kind of) Independence?" in *Production of Postcolonial India and Pakistan: Meanings of Partition* (London, Routledge, 2006), 22.
[19] See Lloyd I. Rudolph and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph's *In Pursuit of Lakshmi: The Political Economy of the Indian State* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 127.

had weak support in Muslim majority provinces, at the advent of independence it constituted a strong uniting factor. At the intersection between the colonial rule of the British Raj and the postcolonial state, thus, the two major political parties had to ascribe their meaning to the terms 'India' and 'Pakistan'.[20] The historians of mainstream Indian nationalism, on the other hand, subscribe to the theory of British 'divide and rule', blaming imperialism for dismembering their homeland and severing the ties between two communities joined by history and tradition.

Some South Asian historians, however, have taken a sceptical position on the two popular yet irreconcilable *raisons d'être* so widely accepted by official historians. In their social, economic, and political appraisal of South Asian history, Indian historian Sugata Bose and Pakistani-American historian Ayesha Jalal argue that even though the two theories have popular currency, it is important to scrutinize the social and political contexts in which they were used. The two South Asian theorists contend:

> There is now overwhelming evidence to suggest that regardless of whether Muslims were in fact a 'nation', let alone one created by British policies of divide and rule, it was the contradictions and structural peculiarities of Indian society and politics in late colonial India which eventually led to the creation of Pakistan.[21]

While Bose and Jalal caution against the dangerous implications of over-centralizing the two official theories in Pakistani and Indian state discourses, they also suggest that rather than historians, it is in fact the Partition writers and poets who have better conveyed the "colossal human tragedy" of Partition.[22] The authors quote Faiz Ahmed Faiz and his acclaimed poem "Freedom's Dawn" to underscore the sensitivity with which the Urdu poet captures the

[20] Svensson, *Meanings of Partition*, 33.
[21] Bose and Jalal, "The Partition of India and the Creation of Pakistan," *Modern South Asia*, 165.
[22] Ibid., "Nineteen Forty-Seven: Memories and Meanings," 198.

disillusionment of the times. Like Bose and Jalal, Indian critic, writer, and professor Alok Bhalla opposes the view that Partition was caused by religious hatred, and argues in his preface to *Stories about the Partition of India* that Partition fiction "refuses to surrender, to any bullying ideology trying to debase a culture and its languages with foul invective, its belief that India was and continues to be an example of a civilizational ethic marked by a tolerant regard for "the other"".[23] Partition writers and artists bear witness, with insistence and courage, to the civilizational history of the South Asian subcontinent in all its intricately mingled religious and ethnic pluralities.

In his eloquent essay "Humiliated and Harassed They Left", poet and journalist Shorish Kashmiri summarizes the bloody baptism of the two successor states as follows:

> Conches were blown in India. Drums were beaten in Pakistan. All India Radio proclaimed Independence by broadcasting Bande Mataram and Pakistan Radio did so with recitation of the Quran. But as day dawned, both sides began to butcher their minorities in the name of religion. […] In India it was the Muslims who were butchered: in Pakistan the Sikhs and Hindus. Now the riots ceased to be communal. On the contrary, it was genocide of the minorities by the majorities.[24]

In the aftermath of the Partition, therefore, all minorities in the subcontinent were reduced completely to what Agamben calls 'nuda vita', or 'naked life'[25]—the simple fact of living common to all living beings. Agamben introduces the term 'form-of-life' to signify "a life that can never be separated from its form, a life in which it is never possible to isolate something

---

[23] See Alok Bhalla's *Stories about the Partition of India* (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers & Distributors, 2012), 10.
[24] See Shorish Kashmiri's "Humiliated and Harassed They Left" in Mushirul Hasan's *India Partitioned: The Other Face of Freedom*, Vols. 1 and 2 (New Delhi: Roli Books, 1997), 146.
[25] 'Naked life' appears in recent scholarship as 'bare life'. Here I use Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino's translation, which prefers the term 'naked' instead of 'bare'.

such as naked life".[26] For Agamben, thought is what makes a form of life inseparable from its context as form-of-life—thought not as the mere exercise of an organ, but rather as an experience that is directed toward the potential character of life and toward the possibility and power of human intelligence.[27] It is only when life is always already capable of thought that it can become a form-of-life. However, in Agamben's analysis, politics is formed through exception, and the rule or norm of a politicized life is only coherent before its exception, the depoliticized bare life. Thus life, in its state of exception, is "the naked life that in every context separates the forms of life from their cohering into a form-of-life".[28]

While at its core Agamben's work on bare life and state of exception seems to ignore colonial contexts and the history of Empire and decolonisation, it is a crucial concept for the present study of the anomic violence during and after Partition. In the years immediately following Partition, the victims—at once homeless and stateless—transformed into Agambenian depoliticized marginal figures with their naked life becoming the norm. As refugees and migrants, they were separated from the social-juridical context of their forms, and their life was therefore no longer a "life of power".[29] Tens of millions of men, women, and children found themselves stripped of all human rights, without protection or representation, their psyches profoundly ruptured. It is critical to bear in mind that Partition was not a single, linear event; rather, there were multiple Partitions affecting multiple social layers, ways and possibilities of being, and hence multiple states of exception that constituted a visible presence in everyday social reality. The impact of the communal violence, displacement, and mass migration that

[26] See Giorgio Agamben's *Means Without End: Notes on Politics*, translated by Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 2-3.
[27] Agamben, *Means Without End*, 9.
[28] Ibid., 5.
[29] Ibid., 9.

convulsed the lives of an estimated eighteen million refugees was tremendous, and the trauma of Partition left an indelible mark not only on the lives of the refugees but on the lives of generations of their descendants.

In her discussion of human rights, Hannah Arendt describes the status of interwar and Second World War refugees as "those who have lost all distinctive political qualities and have become human beings and nothing else".[30] For Arendt, the religious and civil wars which the First Word War ushered in prompted the migrations of countless groups who were neither welcomed nor could be assimilated anywhere; their plight was not that they were deprived of equality before the law, but that no law existed for them. These were the "stateless refugees",[31] at once homeless, stateless, and rightless. Primarily directed against the Nazi and Stalinist movements, Arendt's discourse excludes the precarious colonial history of South Asia, emphasising its exiled and marginalized position in the Western intellectual tradition. However, I assert that Arendt's arguments gain an added significance if we meditate over the general human condition of the countless Hindus, Muslims, Christians, and Sikhs forced to leave their homes, identities, and possessions behind in the wake of Partition, becoming fair game to be abducted, raped, or slaughtered by the majorities. These stateless refugees belonged neither to India nor Pakistan, each nation-state existing in a condition of exodus from the other.

While Masud's stories are conventionally understood as distanced from politics and political agitation, I argue that Masud's characters and their inability to speak, failure to produce meaning, and difficulty of remembering the past function as the most eloquent testaments to the rhetorical inheritance of the Partition. In Masud's fictional habitat, there is no language of politics or vocabulary of theology. He estranges his characters from names, places, and

[30] Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 302.
[31] Ibid., 267-302.

identities. Cities, towns, and people go unnamed, indicating their generic nature—their substitutability, perhaps, by any space or body in the South Asian subcontinent. Prem Kumar Rajaram aptly describes the experience of reading Masud's stories as being "pulled into circularity, into meanings referring to each other unto infinity, evoking a silence and 'the unsayable'".[32] Memon depicts the same experience as follows: "Finishing one of his stories does not bring the expected comprehension and completion. What it does bring is a continual engagement with the unsaid and the ineffable, a blurred image of which may be preserved in memory".[33] My analysis converges on the nature of that which Rajaram and Masud construe as 'the unsayable' and 'the unsaid' and its relation to the complex historiography of Partition. The goal of this chapter is not to reinvent Masud as a postcolonial thinker, but rather to creatively reread the repressed or silenced objects and characters in Masud's stories in order to think more rigorously about the repressions and silences effected violently among exiles, refugees, and migrants in India by the events of 1947. Such a rereading of Masud does not aim to ascribe a genre to Masud's writings, nor to situate his work within a chronology of events in the teleology of historical time. Rather, my purpose here is to question the widely accepted presupposition among critics that Masud's writing is far removed from politics, and to labour a stereoscopic rereading of his work alongside Partition history, so that we may think about the political, juridical, and moral underpinnings of the violence of sounds and silences in a transnational and transcultural context.

[32] See Prem Kumar Rajaram's "Disruptive Writing and a Critique of Territoriality" in *Review of International Studies* 30 (2004): 207.
[33] Memon, "A Prefatory Note", 3.

The Masudian Short Story

The two epigraphs of this chapter, by Heidegger and Masud, accurately frame the question that agitates this section: namely, why write about silence, and in what language? The word "silence" here implies the deliberate and inescapable muting of voice, gesture, and writing that haunts Masud's stories. He is a storyteller who tells stories about those who cannot and will not tell their story, in a language so subtle it confounds the mind. Heidegger's chagrin as regards writing about silence, thus, is Masud's métier for designing silences. I am indebted to Jacques Rancière's thinking about mute speech, which provides the opportunity to explore some of the most important aspects of the rhetoric of muteness in Masud's work. The Urdu author does more than just talk about language or write about silence; he creates a new language that transforms silence into mute speech, granting his characters an inexplicable power that warrants their survival in his fictions. However, Masud's linguistic genius is not without its complexities. Language strains in Masud's fiction, and his characters are often mute, either not speaking at all, or suffering when they do speak. This suffering takes on many forms in the lives of Masud's protagonists: deformed speech, forgetfulness, madness—even death. Whether this linguistic trauma is a symptom or a consequence is never clear. Curiously, Masud's fictions also feature disabled child characters, like the stuttering child narrator in "Sheesha Ghat" and the child without hands in "Seemiya". These exceptional children, as Clare Barker suggests, represent and embody the postcolonial nation-state's potential for radical difference and its supposed fragility: "the physically, cognitively or emotionally 'damaged' child acts as a straightforward symbol for the nation or culture emerging from a 'damaging' colonial experience".[34] Masud's adult characters likewise struggle with damaged memory, often proving unable to remember certain events from

[34] See Clare Barker's *Postcolonial Fiction and Disability: Exceptional Children, Metaphor and Materiality* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 3.

their past, or incapable of constructing coherent thoughts, sometimes losing their minds altogether. The disquieting muteness and disability in Masud's prose assumes a political hue when contextualized alongside the terror-stricken history of India during and after the Partition of South Asia. The macabre history of Partition, with its unbelievable, unexplainable, and inexpressible violence, leads us back to the linguistic crisis that lies at the heart of Masud's fictive labyrinth and petrifies the bodies of his characters.

This thesis looks at the history of India as the underlying force that shapes Masud's fiction, examining the trope of muteness in Masud's stories and tracing its origins to the history of psychological and linguistic traumas in the subcontinent—a history both well-charted and underexplored. The events of 1947 have been recorded in sensitive detail by Partition fiction and by historians and will not be recounted in detail here. My purpose is to offer a comprehensive analysis of voice, gesture, and writing in Masud's fiction, and to study these themes alongside the history of the Partition. Following Rancière's lead, I will term the muted voices, gestures, and writings in Masud's fictions 'mute signs' so as to recognize the influence of semiotic theory on my methodology and analysis. Masud not only calls into question the necessity of speech and gesture in the experience of consciousness but also the unity of the sign itself. The logic of expression[35] collapses in his stories, and meaning can no longer be guessed from a spoken or written signifier. Masud challenges the binary concept of the sign as he puts the very unity of signifier and signified itself under erasure, or "sous rature".[36] The thing signified, Masud's literary truth, manifests only as noise of mute signifiers. In *Mute Speech: Literature, Critical Theory, and Politics*, Rancière describes this form of literary expression as the "mute-loquacious

[35] I use the term "expression" to indicate the structural relationship between signifier and signified, which presupposes that the linguistic sign is at once a unity of signifier and signified.
[36] See Jacques Derrida's *Of Grammatology.* Translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins UP, 1976), xviii.

letter".[37] For Rancière, as for Masud, silent things take on a language of their own, and meaninglessness becomes a system of signs. In *Mute Speech*, Rancière depicts muteness as a resistive loquacious medium in and of itself. He turns to muteness as a critical characteristic of literary expression, and his argument elevates muteness as a desirable feature not only of literature but speech in general. In contrast, the experience of the voice is central to the Cartesian experience of logos, as Derrida recalls in *Of Grammatology*:

> The logos can be infinite and self-present, it can be produced as auto-affection, only through the voice: an order of the signifier by which the subject takes from itself into itself, does not borrow outside of itself the signifier that it emits and that affects it at the same time. Such is at least the experience—or consciousness—of the voice: of hearing (understanding)-oneself-speak.[38]

Masud, however, radically alters the experience of subaltern consciousness—the subject never "emits" the signifier completely, and therefore, never hears him- or herself speak. For Masud, it is not voice but the violent act of suppressing the voice that speaks more eloquently than any speech. In Masud's literary domain, logos, while infinite, is not always "self-present"—what the subject takes *from* and *into* is never made visible or accessible to the reader, and while the speaking/non-speaking subject is often muted or incapable of emitting a signifier in the actual event, the speaking/non-speaking subject maintains agency by controlling the narrative and recounting the past. Masud's narratives thus enact the difficulty of recovering the subaltern voice as they repeatedly challenge the ability of speech to become an instrument of agency while at the same time—as I have argued—granting narrative power to the silent/silenced subaltern. I will discuss this 'empowered' subaltern voice in more detail as we encounter it in the individual

[37] Rancière, *Mute Speech*, 99.
[38] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 98.

stories. This oddly empowering muting of voice, gesture, and writing in Masud's stories becomes the form through which truth is revealed to the reader, so that the reader becomes conscious of the insurmountable silences that pervade the literatures of the South Asian subcontinent.

In the sections that follow, I offer a comprehensive reading of these mute signs in Masud's stories. Paying heed to Rancière's theory of mute speech, my analysis demonstrates how Masud replaces spoken and written language with various forms of muteness to reappropriate the manifestation of agency, thus exposing the difficulty of fully "recovering"[39] that which has been silenced or articulated out of earshot. The chapter then highlights linked themes of muteness, speech, and witnessing in Masud's stories and proposes that these themes must be considered in relation to major historical and political events of the South Asian subcontinent's turbulent history. Since the focus of my study will be the muting of speech, gesture, and writing, I restrict myself to stories that directly encounter my central research questions: why write about silence, and in what language?

The Stuttering Child in "Sheesha Ghat"[40]

Perhaps Masud's most haunting story of all, "Sheesha Ghat" opens with an eight-year-old child narrator's account of what is the central theme of this story—his stuttering. The child renders his bodily convulsions brought about by the stutters in a way that compels the reader to speculate on the violence Masud ascribes to the rhetoric of speaking:

[39] See Gayatari Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Can the Subaltern Speak? Reflections on the History of an Idea*, edited by Rosalind Morris (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 21-78.
[40] Literally translated as "The Glass Wharf".

> the words *collided* with my teeth and lips and palate and bounced back the way waves retreat on touching shore. I would get so tongue-tied that the veins in my neck would swell and a terrible pressure would *invade* my throat and chest, leaving me breathless and threatening to suffocate me. Beginning to pant I would be forced to leave my sentence incomplete, and then start all over again.[41] (emphasis added)

Let us take a look at the above passage in its original Urdu form:

> بول میرے ہونٹوں سے اور میرے دانتوں سے اور میرے تالو سے ٹکرا ٹکرا کر واپس چلے جاتے، جیسے پانی کی لہریں کنارے کو چُھو کر پلٹتی ہیں۔ آخر میری زبان میں گر ہیں سی پڑ جاتیں، گردن کی رگیں پھولنے لگتیں، گلے اور سینے پر اتنا زور پڑتا کہ دم گھٹنے لگتا اور ایسا معلوم ہوتا کہ سانس اُکھڑ جائے گی۔

(Bol mere honton se aur mere daanton se aur mere taalu se takra takra ker wapis chale jate, jaise pani ki lehrein kinare ko chhoo ker palatti hain. Akhir meri zuban mein girhain si pard jateen, gardan ki ragain phhoolne lagteen, gale aur seene per itna zor pardta ke dum ghhutne lagta aur aise maloom hota ke saans ukhard jaye gi.)

In this passage, Memon has poignantly translated the Urdu words "سانس اُکھڑ جائے گی" (*saans ukhard jaye gi*) into English as "leaving me breathless". However, his treatment of the word "اُکھڑ" (*ukhard*) as "breathless" does not quite convey the weight of the original. The word *ukhard* signifies the condition of being "uprooted" or "ripped out"; essentially, the meaning conveyed is that the child feels as if his breath is going to be ripped out. Moreover, while Memon's translation of "گر ہیں " (*girhain*) as "tongue-tied" is accurate, it would be relevant to take a look at the literal meaning of this seemingly ordinary Urdu word. *Girhain* literally translates into "knots", implying a knotting or twisting of the tongue. While "tongue-tied"

[41] Masud, *Essence of Camphor*, 106.

appropriately conveys the condition of being at a loss for words, it may be an error of level in that it does not communicate the physiological pain of the child's stutter.

The physiology of the stutter occupies a critical space in modern scholarship on sound and voice. In his seminal work *Beyond Words: Sobs, Hums, Stutters, and Other Vocalizations*, Steven Connor devotes the first chapter to the history of the philosophy and treatment of stuttering, where he discusses the importance of the tongue in the experience of the stutter. As Connor puts it, "It is not just the tongue that is twisted for the stammerer. The voice of the stammerer is imagined as twisted, tangled, contorted, a body closed in or folded over on itself".[42] What I find most instructive about Connor's analysis is that he calls the voice of the stammerer a "knotted voice",[43] echoing the heightened resonance of the word "*girhain*" in Masud's portrayal of the stutter. This physiological pain is not contained in the body's interior but extends outward: the story suggests that it is not only the child's body that is at stake, but that his stutter may affect the bodies of those around him. When his foster father informs the child that he must leave home and live elsewhere due to the arrival of his "new mother" in two days, he says: "She'll go crazy if she hears you speak. She'll die".[44] Further into the story, the child suggests that if someone were to hear him stuttering, they'd think him "insane"[45]. Here, there is a palpable madness associated with the child's act of speaking that recalls the theme of insanity found in many of Manto's Partition narratives, including "Toba Tek Singh" and "Open It". Three features of "Sheesha Ghat" are particularly provocative: the telling of the story by a child narrator, the child's separation from his father, and the rhetoric around violence and oppression.

[42] Connor, *Beyond Words*, 24.
[43] Ibid., 24.
[44] Masud, *Essence of Camphor*, 107.
[45] Ibid.

The plot of the story builds when the child is taken to Sheesha Ghat, "the most widely known and least inhabited"[46] ghat of glass-workers by a big lake. The ghat is owned by Bibi, the widow of a notorious dacoit who died on the ghat at the hands of the government, betrayed as he was by informers. Bibi lives on a big boat on the lake with her daughter, the fantastical Parya, who was born underwater and whose feet have "never touched the earth".[47] It is on this ghat that the child is to be adopted by Jahaz,[48] a clown with a pink sail tied to his back who performs mime routines in bazaars and fairs. When the child learns that he is to live on Sheesha Ghat with Jahaaz, he is gripped by fear: "Would I have to live with a smoke-belching bazaari clown like Jahaaz, in this settlement where a dark barbarity seemed to pour over everything?".[49] At this point in the story, as the child describes the ghat, the rhetoric around oppression and invasion begins to evolve. The reader quickly learns that over the years Jahaz has "almost lost his voice" and acquired a "severe" cough—yet another character with a speech impediment and an illness—breathlessness. The child narrator draws a parallel between himself and Jahaz, explaining that "now if he opened his mouth a coughing fit would seize him, and at times it took him nearly as long to finish his sentence as it would have taken me".[50] As the narrative progresses, the two main characters and storytellers thus come to mirror each other's disabling inability to speak. The violence encompassing the child's incapacitating stammer allows for the possibility of reading this story as a disability narrative, considering Barker's reading of 'damaged' children in literatures from New Zealand, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, India, and Pakistan as symbols of the postcolonial nation-state's inherent physical, intellectual, and political

[46] Ibid., 110.
[47] Ibid., 115.
[48] "Jahaz" is the Urdu translation of "ship".
[49] Masud, *Essence of Camphor*, 109.
[50] Ibid., 108.

debilitations. The child in "Sheesha Ghat" is certainly damaged, separated as he is from home, forcibly taken to a strange, barbarous ghat to live with a decrepit, mute mime artist, his voice impaired by the ravages of his stutter.

The mirrored muteness between Jahaz and the narrator is particularly compelling in view of Jahaz's vocation as travelling pantomime and street performer, a "bazaari clown" who has been earning his livelihood by entertaining in village fairs. Masud's construction of Jahaz as a village clown-mime provokes readerly attention towards the figure of the mime itself, the mime as migrant, and most importantly, the mime's political and ideological relevance in India. In her article "The Urban Poor and Militant Hinduism in Early Twentieth-Century Uttar Pradesh",[51] social historian Nandini Gooptu looks at the figure of the mime along with other "bazaar poor" such as acrobats, jesters, and clowns in north India—particularly Kanpur, Allahabad, Lucknow, and Benares—who began to feature extensively in the Indian religious festival of Ramlila[52] during the years between the two world wars.[53] Gooptu points out that the interwar period between 1920 and 1931 in late colonial India was a time when urban poverty and migration saw major growth, and the poor classes like the shudra,[54] untouchables, and Muslim poor collectively emerged as an important social force. During these years, as the underclass of the poor increased in number and faced great economic and social pressures, the traditionally illiterate shudra migrants sought unskilled manual labour jobs in bazaar industries, working for example as carpenters and bricklayers.[55] As supply of labourers exceeded demand and unemployment increased, these shudra workers "flitted from job to job and often found themselves out of work

[51] See Nandini Gooptu's "The Urban Poor and Militant Hinduism in Early Twentieth-Century Uttar Pradesh" in *Modern Asian Studies* 31, no. 4 (1997): 879-918.
[52] *Ramlila* is a Hindu folk festival that enacts and celebrates the life of the deity Rama.
[53] Gooptu, "The Urban Poor," 891.
[54] *Shudra* is the lowest caste and social class in Hinduism of the four castes: Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras.
[55] Gooptu, "The Urban Poor," 885.

[…]. Many sought temporary or permanent economic opportunity in petty trading and hawking, mainly as vendors of fruits, vegetables, other food-stuffs and cheap clothing".[56] The high migration of rural workers brought the shudra poor into direct competition with other poor classes, such as the untouchables and the Muslim poor, further marginalizing the shudra and consequently eroding their status and respectability. Urban improvement policies eventually led to the dispossession and homelessness of these outcasts, and they were forced to form ghettoized communities in underdeveloped outlying areas.[57] These ghetto outcasts and bazaar poor—powerless and homeless—were nonetheless critical in the political landscape of north India at the time.

The rising numbers of shudra poor played a pivotal role in the development of Hindu religious militancy and Hindu assertion by their active participation in religious festivals, evoking counter Muslim reactions and intensifying communal conflict. At the forefront of this Hindu revival movement was the festival of Ramlila, led by shudra participants, who stepped forward as "militant champions of Hinduism", claiming ancestral ties to the mythical Kshatriya[58] warriors and rulers.[59] It is amongst these so-called "guardians" of the Hindu ideology that we encounter the socially and politically complex figure of the mime. In her analysis of folk performances in West Bengal and their relationship to global sociopolitical conditions, Priyanka Basu similarly locates the figure of the village mime in the progressive movement of West Bengal in the 1940s, arguing that the progressive cultural activism of the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA) "relied on age-old indigenous institutions, including religious and

[56] Ibid., 886.
[57] Ibid., 888-890.
[58] *Kshatriya* is the warrior caste, or military caste. Traditionally, they were the ruling elite, and their role was to protect society.
[59] Gooptu, "The Urban Poor," 899.

mythological plays, wandering bards, folk dances, and village mimes and clowns" to further the cause of anti-fascist ideology and world democracy.[60] The clown-mime's colonial history as bazaari outcast, religious militant, and political and cultural activist captures the sociopolitical dimension of Masud's writing, and gestures toward his intricate treatment of the relation between the aesthetic and the political.

As mirror-image of the mime, then, the child narrator in "Sheesha Ghat" becomes a similarly hybrid and hybridized figure, a clown and a migrant, ridiculed and laughed at.[61] The deployment of child narrators as a narrative device in specifically postcolonial fiction has been explored by Sujala Singh, who proposes that the privileging of children's points of view "negotiate[s] the relationship between the national and the global".[62] Singh takes Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India*, and Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy* as her primary examples, arguing that the children in these novels "function as bridges, as interpretive filters informing and educating the reader about violence 'out there'".[63] While Singh's analysis is limited to novels, I borrow her argument that postcolonial children provide commentary on regional and national violence for the purposes of examining the child narrator in "Sheesha Ghat". Even though the short story does not refer directly to any political event, the child's stuttering, "invaded" body seems to provide a critique of the collective subaltern stutter of the nation in the prolonged aftermath of Partition in India. It is through the child's stutter that Masud's text bespeaks its full historical relevance—the stuttering struggle of the child reminds

[60] See Priyanka Basu's "Becoming 'folk': religion, protest and cultural communism in the Kabigāna of Ramesh Sil and Gumani Dewan" in *South Asian History and Culture* 8, No. 3 (2017): 329.
[61] Masud, *Essence of Camphor*, 106.
[62] See Sujala Singh's "Postcolonial Children Representing the Nation in Arundhati Roy, Bapsi Sidhwa and Shyam Selvadurai" in *Wasafiri* 41 (2004): 14.
[63] Ibid.

us of the necessity of witnessing the corporeal effects of trauma in an age of unprecedented violence.

Cathy Caruth introduces this figure of the stammering child in her *Literature in the Ashes of History*, a captivating analysis of psychoanalytic, political, and literary texts by Sigmund Freud, Hannah Arendt, Honoré de Balzac, and Ariel Dorfman. Caruth focuses her analysis on the "traumatic struggles of characters attempting to reappear in the legal and political realms from which they have been banished".[64] Beginning with Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Caruth calls attention to Freud's encounter with a one-and-a-half-year-old child who is enacting the departure and return of his mother, symbolizing his inner word repetitively in a kind of stammer.[65] Caruth argues that the child's stammer represents Freud's own stammer in his encounter with the veterans of the First World War, whose dreams of the battlefield keep bringing them back to the scenes of death they have witnessed.[66] Taking my cue from Caruth's remarkable insights, I argue that the stuttering child in "Sheesha Ghat" can be read as an extension of the collective subaltern stutter of a nation witnessing the horrors on the battlefield of Partition. Employing the device of a child narrator, Masud encourages the reader to register how a nationless and stateless body is subjected to particular forms of trauma during a state of exception.

Patrick Muller examines stuttering in the context of trauma studies, describing the stutter as a "perpetuated trauma".[67] Referencing accounts of stuttering in novels by David Mitchell and John Updike, Muller looks at the recurring theme of psychosocial issues involved in all literature on stuttering. Updike characterizes his stuttering as "disarming", foregrounding the military

[64] See Cathy Caruth's *Literature in the Ashes of History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2013), x.
[65] Caruth, *Literature in the Ashes*, 2.
[66] Ibid., 3.
[67] See Patrick Muller's "The Impediment That Cannot Say Its Name" in *Anglia* 130, no. 1 (2012): 59.

nature of the stutter. The military metaphor—often favoured by authors who stutter— is most pronounced in Mitchell's portrayal of his stutter, who describes his speech impediment as "an anti-matter Gollum […] who lives at the base of my tongue", claiming that he and this "shady homunculus" are "pitted in an endless war, like NATO and the Warsaw Pact".[68] Updike and Mitchell's use of martial imagery to describe stuttering connects with the child's rhetoric of invasion in "Sheesha Ghat", who seems to be on a similar warpath, battling the "shady homunculus" living on his maimed, knotted tongue.

The warlike characterization of the stutter brings a crucial nuance into play when we pursue it in relation to the history of the Urdu language itself. The term 'Urdu' derives etymologically from the Persian *urdu*, signifying camp, and the Turkish *ordu* (also the source for the English word horde), signifying a military garrison.[69] Widely regarded as an offshoot of the Persian language, Urdu was ushered into existence as the language of the regiment in the courts and military camps of Muslim invaders in northern India during the Sultanate period.[70] While Urdu became the language of the educated Hindu and Muslim elite with the expansion of Muslim rule in the northern provinces of India, it was never a language of power.[71] The language of power and the official language of the court was Persian, replaced by English as the official court language by the middle of the nineteenth century. As it interacted with other local dialects, Urdu developed into a more Persianized form of the vernacular language in the north. Tariq Rahman argues that while Persian and English were popular languages, Urdu was little

[68] Ibid., 57.
[69] See also "Muslim Separatism in the United Provinces: The Social Context and Political Strategy of the Muslim Minority Before Partition" in *Language, Religion and Politics in North India* by Paul R. Brass (London, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1974), and *A History of Urdu Literature* by Ram Babu Saksena (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1990).
[70] See S. Maqbul Ahmad, "The Position of Urdu in India Today" in *Language and Society in India* (Lucknow: Prem Printing Press, 1969), 147.
[71] Tariq Rahman, "The Teaching of Urdu in British India," *The Annual of Urdu Studies* 15 (2000): 41-42.

valorized, often looked down upon, and even found offensive by learned Arab subjects. In "Sheesha Ghat", then, the stuttering child's body operates as a double invasion, seized by tongue and mother tongue alike.

This doubly invaded body of the child stands out as exceptional in its failure to testify, unlike the children narrators commonly discussed in postcolonial fiction studies. His forced separation from his "منھ بولا باپ" (*moohbola baap*)[72]—his foster father—echoes the fate of the countless children of Partition who were abducted, abandoned, or left behind, not unlike the children discovered by Butalia in her search for Partition survivors. With the help of record collectors and social workers, Butalia calls upon the testimony of those who witnessed the gruesome spectacles of Partition as children. In doing so, she recovers the voices of those silent and silenced witnesses of the commonplace that had been ignored in the past. However, there is no recovering the voice of the child in "Sheesha Ghat", who fails to provide a testimony in the final pages of the story. He watches as the marvellous Parya attempts to walk on the water of the Big Lake, whereupon she drowns. When he witnesses Parya's drowning, the child tries to describe to Jahaz what he has seen as his "tongue [begins] to knot":[73]

> I knew I wouldn't be able to say anything with my tongue so I tried to communicate through hand gestures that she had been trying to walk on the water. Yet my hands halted again and again. I felt that even my signals were beginning to stutter, and that they too were incomprehensible.[74]

[72] Memon translates the term *moohbola baap* literally as "by-word-of-mouth-father", and he rightly explains that neither "foster father" nor "adoptive father" conveys the level and texture of the original accurately. However, for the purposes of my analysis, I have chosen to use "foster father" to denote the concept; even though this term doesn't quite capture the sense of *moohbola baap*, it comes closest to operating as companion words.
[73]Masud, *Essence of Camphor*, 56.
[74]Ibid., 123

These lines provoke reflection on the organs involved in the speech act, first the tongue, and then the hands. Unable to tell his story with the tongue, the child compensates by speaking through gestures. However, neither the subject's tongue nor hand can actually "emit" the signifier. At this point in the narrative, the symbol of the mute sign extends outward from the child narrator's voice to include the child narrator's hand gestures, further developing the metaphor of invasion the child introduces earlier in the story. The mute sign becomes starker as it assails the organs of the child narrator's body, and the story concludes with the child leaving the ghat. As the only witness of Parya's drowning vanishes from the pages of his own story, his organs of speech debilitated, the particular circumstances of Parya's death remain unknown to Jahaz, Parya's mother Bibi, and the reader. The unclaimed, invaded, impotent body of the child narrator in "Sheesha Ghat" plays out the implicit risks involved in the act of witnessing a traumatic event.

In *The Long Partition*, Vazira Zamindar relates the harrowing experiences of Partition witnesses that rendered their tongues and memories similarly impotent. One of Zamindar's interviewees, Aziz Saheb, served as a special police officer during the Muslim exodus from Delhi in September 1947. When questioned about whether he was on duty during the violence that engulfed Delhi at the time, he states: "*Hanh. Sara Dilli dekha. Chhorde, main is ka zikr nahin karna chahta. Main apna dimagh kharab nahin karna chahta*" [Yes. I saw all of Delhi. Just leave it! I don't want to talk about it. I don't want to disturb my mind].[75] His daughter-in-law adds: "*Log yaad nahin karna chahte. Itne taklif-deh halaat the. Zehn mein bhi nahin lana chahte*" [People don't want to remember. Those times were so painful. They don't even want to bring it to mind].[76] During this interview, Zamindar transcribes two of Aziz Saheb's responses in

[75] Zamindar, *The Long Partition*, 23.
[76] Ibid., 23-24.

square brackets: "[Silence.]" "[Turns away towards the wall.]".[77] His memory of the unspeakable violence he witnessed in September 1947 manifests as the turning away of a mute body. The only image Aziz Saheb can bring himself to vocalize for the author is that of a four-year-old being cut into four pieces: "*char baras ka aur char tukre. Yaad ati hai*" ["four-year-old cut into four pieces. I remember"].[78] It is illuminating to note that in his testimony, Aziz Saheb repeats the violence he has seen in "all of Delhi" through the sign of a child. Zamindar also brings up the testimony of one Anis Apa, whose memory of violence is similarly situated in and retold through the sign of a mute child:

> ek bachcha laya gaya tha. Woh bolta nahin tha . . . kais eek admi to khatam kiya gaya. Yahan tak ke sheerkhwan bachche ko bhi neze par liya gaya . . . bachcha itna khofzada ho gaya tha ke woh bolta nahin tha [a child was brought, who wouldn't speak . . . how each person was finished off, that even an unweaned baby was knifed . . . the child was so terrorized that he wouldn't speak][79]

Writing about torture and voice, Elaine Scarry argues that physical pain is language-destroying. Partition testimonies and fiction reveal, however, that witnessing physical pain can be equally language-destroying. Aziz Saheb and Anis Apa, like hundreds of thousands of others, repeat Partition memory through silence and silenced children. Like Masud's stuttering child narrator, these witnesses and victims represent how psychological trauma robs one of voice and language, and as Scarry frames it, "the content of one's language disintegrates; as the self disintegrates, so that which would express and project the self is robbed of its source and its subject".[80] In "Sheesha Ghat", thus, the invasion of the child's stuttering tongue and halting hands can be read

[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid., 26.
[80]Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, 35.

as an internalization of the violence that had strangled the voices of millions across the South Asian subcontinent during the late 1940s, when Masud first started writing his stories.

The Gesturing Wastelanders in "Lamentation"

In *Potentialities*, Agamben describes gesture as "the other side of language, the muteness inherent in humankind's very capacity for language, its speechless dwelling in language"; gesture is "always the gesture of being at a loss in language".[81] Gesture has traditionally been examined for its literary and performative aspects in cinema and theatre, and its relation to the political sphere has been relatively neglected until the recent revival of its political affiliation in Agamben's philosophy. In the story "Lamentation", the bodies of Masud's gesturing wastelanders play out this complex dialectic between gesture and language, where gesture endeavours to stand in for the failed speech-act, and speech fails to compensate for failed gesture. The wastelanders' bodies represent the unfinished, indeterminate relation between gesture and speech, both consistently deferring to the other's function in an endless mediality that resists completion or ending. In this section, I propose to read the gestures of Masud's wastelanders in the context of their ethical and political dimensions and in view of Agamben's premise that "[p]olitics is the sphere of pure means, that is, of the absolute and complete gesturality of human beings".[82]

"Lamentation" is, first and foremost, a story about tongues. The narrator takes the reader on a journey through vast stretches of uninhabited geographies and desolate habitats to meet small communities of people, occasionally wastelanders. One day the local "crazy boy" knocks

[81] See Agamben's *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*. Edited and translated by Daniel-Heller Roazen (California: Stanford UP, 1999), 80.
[82] Agamben, *Means Without End*, 60.

on the narrator's door, and gives him a scrap of paper. When the narrator questions him about it, the crazy boy tells him that "the piece-of-paper people" had come, and that they were calling for him.[83] The narrator identifies his own handwriting on the scrap of paper and recalls it as one from amongst various slips inscribed with his name and address, which he had distributed to all the communities so that they could call on him if needed. He makes his way toward the piece-of-paper people and finds them waiting for him, crouching in a dirt track behind an overflowing garbage dump. According to the narrator, "though they could understand my language a little, I could not understand their variety of tongues. Our communication was mostly through gestures".[84] As the story progresses and the wastelanders attempt to communicate with the narrator, we come across—for the first time—Masud's critique of language itself:

> I heard the voices of the wastelanders, all at once, and turned around. They were touching my knees over and over again, saying something. Their speech sounded like a *corrupted form of my own language*—or its primitive form before corruption had set in […] a few words to them and I was convinced that they didn't understand my tongue either. (emphasis added)[85]

These lines introduce Masud's idea of 'pure' language. For Masud, a pure language is one that is not tagged by identity: "I don't use language tagged with straightforward [cultural] identity to the extent that one could […] I've worked very hard on that language, especially so that it does not have a set identity, so no one would be able to recognize who was writing, and of which place and time the story was written".[86] In Masud's thought, 'pure' language is a language that is not set against an order of identity with expected acts and coded expressions. It is a language insofar

[83] Masud, *Essence of Camphor*, 169-170.
[84] Ibid., 167.
[85] Ibid., 173
[86] Sengupta, "An Interview with Naiyer Masud," 141.

as it is the deficiency of language, a language that cannot say what it says properly, being the product of an unsayable that weighs it down. Masud's concept of a 'pure' as opposed to a 'corrupted' language occupies a complex and critical space in Partition history as well as in his own personal philosophy. Here I revisit Masud's observation in the epigraph of this chapter, and the discussion preceding it in his interview with Sagaree Sengupta.

When asked why his stories seem as if they have been translated from another language, Masud explains that his stories are without idiomatic language, and written in "*correct language*, you won't find mistakes in it, but you won't find an identifying Lucknow temperament in it, or the language of a critic, or the language of a very emotional man" (emphasis added).[87] Masud's sensibilities toward the correctness and purity of language would be better understood if set against the backdrop of the history of Urdu in India, and more specifically the fate of the language in Masud's natal city of Lucknow.

While the geological Partition of India was effected after 14 August 1947, its linguistic partitions were manifold and far predate the formation of the two successor states. Competing for the loyalties of hundreds of thousands of communities, language has been one of the major symbols of group identity in India, along with religion, caste, and locality. The Hindi-Urdu controversy has been one of the most divisive issues between Muslims and Hindus since as long ago as 1837, when Urdu alone was the court language in the North-Western Provinces and Awadh. Paul Brass undertakes a keen investigation of this controversy in his book *Language, Religion, and Politics in North India*. According to Brass, three factors have contributed to the "increasing divergence between Urdu and Hindi both linguistically and emotionally".[88] First, Muslim rulers chose to write in the Persian *nasta'liq* script rather than the indigenous Devanagari

[87] Ibid.
[88] Brass, *Language, Religion,and Politics in North India*, 129.

script. Second, the Hindi movement in the late nineteenth century promoted the Devanagari script as well as the Sanskritization of Hindi by drawing on the Sanskrit language rather than Persian. Lastly, the response of the leaders of the Urdu movement further fostered linguistic and cultural divergence between the educated Hindus and Muslims.[89] Ultimately, the controversy culminated in the educated elites of both communities leading the movements, with Hindi being claimed as the culture language of the Hindus, and Urdu as that of the Muslims. The Hindi-Urdu controversy played out differently in different states, however, with Delhi and Lucknow at the heart of the Urdu movement.

In an essay on the migration of Urdu from Delhi to Lucknow, C. M. Naim and Carla Petievich outline the key sociopolitical imperatives behind the formation and rise of Urdu. A result of the "unavoidable interaction between the speakers of Persian and Turkish on the one hand, and the speakers of various Indian vernaculars on the other", there wasn't one but many Urdus that materialized in the various regions of Delhi, Awadh, and Lucknow.[90] Urdu speakers consequently felt both akin to and estranged from the language, prompting the need to 'correct' each other. When Naim and Petievich remark: "No wonder Urdu literati have always been overly concerned with notions of 'purity of language' and 'correctness of idiom' and the concept of *ahl-e zuban*, 'people of the language'", they effectively spell out the nuances of Masud's rhetorical and critical logic. Once it gained political power, Lucknow became the centre for Urdu, and it was then that the Delhi poets began migrating to Lucknow, *Dihlaviyyat*[91] intertwining with

[89] Ibid., 134.
[90] Naim and Petievich, "Urdu in Lucknow/Lucknow in Urdu" in *Lucknow: Memories of a City*, edited by Violette Graff (New Delhi: Oxford UP, 1997), 165.
[91] *Dihlaviyyat* is a critical construct established by the Two School theory as a result of the long-standing cultural rivalry between Delhi and Lucknow, claiming to embody certain qualities of Delhi poetry. Naim and Petievich quote Nurul Hasan Hashimi's definition of 'Dihlaviyyat' from his book *Dilli ka Dabistan-i Sha'iri*, or *The Delhi School of Poetry*: "Dihlaviyyat is the name of a point of view, an outlook, an intellectual simplicity, a poetic temperament . . . in comparison with Dihlaviyyat's spirituality and melancholy, Lucknow's superficial gaiety seems thin and cheap . . ." (qtd. in Naim and Petievich 174).

Lakhnaviyyat[92] and continuing the formation of what is now known as standard Urdu.[93] This political crusade of tongues manifests in "Lamentation" as an enigma of gagged bodies, whose gestures are as impotent as their words. Like the child narrator's stuttering words and gestures in "Sheesha Ghat", the wastelanders' gestures in "Lamentation" fail to articulate a coherent experience.

Reflecting on the centrality of the subject of gesture in the work of Max Kommerell's thought, Agamben calls the gesture a "gag" and an "emptiness of language […] humankind's most proper dwelling".[94] Masud's gagged wastelanders, situated both literally and figuratively on a wasteland[95], entreat the readers to meditate on what constitutes a 'proper' dwelling: "And then I saw it all at once. Everyone and everything in its entirety seemed fragile and decayed and on the road to imminent disintegration".[96] Agamben's study of gesture with reference to Kommerell's writings on the dramatist Heinrich von Kleist allows for a rereading of Masud's wastelanders and the clown-mime Jahaaz as figures on a stage, like the *Commedia dell'arte* figures that Kommerell was particularly fond of: "They are instead the gestures that […] exhibit only a gigantic lack of memory, only a 'gag' destined to hide an incurable speechlessness".[97] Agamben and Kommerell's logic of gesture as historical memory and gag opens further connections between Masud's wastelanders and the postcolonial nation-state's "incurable" subaltern stutter. As the narrator struggles in vain to understand the wastelanders, he notices a

[92] This is the hypothetical opposite of Dihlaviyyat, claiming to evoke the special qualities adopted by Lucknow literati. Naim and Petievich quote Abdul Lais Siddiqui's definition from *Lakhna'u ka Dabistan-i Shairi*, or *The Lucknow School of Poetry*: "What is meant by *Lakhnaviyyat* in poetry and literature is that special quality which early poets of Lucknow adopted and established, and whose special characteristics distinguish it from traditional poetry" (qtd. in Naim and Petievich 172).
[93] Naim and Petievich, "Urdu in Lucknow," 166.
[94] Agamben, "Kommerell, or On Gesture" in *Potentialities*, 78.
[95] While the curious term "wastelanders" brings T. S. Eliot's "The Wasteland" to mind, the interviews with Masud that have been published contain no record of him mentioning Eliot as an influence on his writing.
[96] Masud, *Essence of Camphor*, 175.
[97] Agamben, "Kommerell, or On Gesture," in *Potentialities*, 80.

body buried in the pile of rags in that cart. The narrator is taken aback by the child's face and physical condition. One of his eyes is completely shut, covered in "lime, or some other white substance" with a large iris painted in, and the other eye is "open just a crack", radiating "torment, entreaty, and disgust".[98] When the narrator tries to look at the face more closely, he sets "a series of tremors vibrating through the rags".[99] The depiction of the child's face is uncanny in its representation as a universalist face—there is no telling if the face belongs to a male or a female, or even if the face belongs to a child or an old man. The child in the cart never speaks in the story, his tongue as frozen as his one painted, motionless eye, heightening the political and ethical weight of mute signs in Masud's writing: the invaded tongue, the static eye, the tormented face.

In "Lamentation", then, none of the characters can be trusted to reflect the self, to relay back to the individual his or her identity. While the characters see and are seen by others in the story, the mute language of gestures couches a fear of somatic dissolution, as embodied by the face in the cart. For Judith Butler, the face and body are socially constructed in the public sphere, and thus have their invariably public dimensions. Drawing on the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas in *Precarious Life*, she writes:

> The face, if we are to put words to its meaning, will be that for which no words really work; the face seems to be a kind of sound, the sound of language evacuating its sense, the sonorous substratum of vocalization that precedes and limits the delivery of any semantic sense.[100]

[98] Masud, *Essence of Camphor*, 174.
[99] Ibid.
[100] See Judith Butler's *Precarious Life* (London: Verso, 2004), 134.

Perceived as sound, a disfigured, soundless face becomes, essentially, a faceless face. In "Lamentation", the gruesome face of the 'child' in its absurd disfigurement represents a perplexing surface to be read, or rather, a disturbing sound to be grasped. The defaced figure in the cart appears as a form that is formless, and a face that is faceless. Among the rags lies a mass of trembling skin in lieu of a body—a pile of skin with holes, openings, and wounds. Here, Masud's narrator encounters the Other—an aberrant, strange, misshapen anomaly arousing anxiety and hysteria, the face partially blotted out, the features mutating into 'defeatures'. The body in the cart, constantly threatened by decay, disintegration, and destruction, emerges as the final expression of a suffering and unspeaking body. As the story concludes, the reader learns that the occupant of the cart is the "last" one: "All I had been able to fathom was that he was the last one. The community's last child … or last old man? The last emblem of some person or event? The last testimonial of some thing or some age?".[101] A radical, monstrous 'thing', the child's face epitomises a horrifiying loss of self. I read this mute non-face as the deepest expression of pure pain.

Levinasian and Lacanian notions of otherness intersect in the Masudian representation of the face of the Other. While for Levinas, the face is the very foundation of ethics, the face-to-face encounter in Lacanian theory is more ethically ambivalent. Levinas holds that "From the start, the encounter with the Other is my responsibility for him",[102] and that in relation to the Face, the Other is "above all, the one I am responsible for".[103] In Masud's short story, too, ethical responsibility is of utmost significance. As the narrator encounters the face in the cart, the bazaar wallahs around him repeatedly question him about these people, "as though they thought I was

[101] Masud, *Essence of Camphor*, 176.
[102] See *Entre Nous, On Thinking-of-the-Other* by Emmanuel Levinas, trans. Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 103.
[103] Levinas, *Entre Nous*, 105.

accountable for them".[104] The wastelanders touch the narrator's knees and feet and point at the occupant of the cart, "their tone sounding increasingly like a plea".[105] True to Masudian poetics, it is entirely uncertain what the wastelanders are pleading for and why the figure in the cart is in such a distressed state. The face solicits the narrator's gaze and recognition as it strives to restore its lost sense of wholeness. Without the narrator's confirming gaze, the face succumbs to the threat of total dissolution. The narrator's encounter with the child outlines a radical ethics, "the half opening that a moan, a cry, a groan or a sigh slips through—the original call for aid, for curative help, help from the other me whose alterity, whose exteriority promises salvation"[106].

In order to better seize what's at stake in this ethical encounter, it is important to discern Jacques Lacan's formulation of the ethical encounter. According to Lacan, speech links two subjects into a pact.[107] Whatever the agreement between the speaking subjects, whatever the object about which they speak, all speech is first of all and always a pact between subjects. Presumed to be a link between subjects, speech transforms them.[108] In the complete absence of speech, then, as in the case of "Lamentation", this essential inter-human pact never materialises. The wastelanders gesticulate aimlessly, for nothing, pleading and pointing at the defaced body, but the narrator fails to comprehend the child's grimace of pain, the insurmountable horror lurking beneath the eye covered in lampblack, the face marked with suffering. For the narrator, the Other is foreign to language, a self-enclosed dead end, or rather, a dead end turned inside out. Furthermore, in Lacanian ethics there is always the danger of misrecognition or *meconnaisance*

[104] Masud, *Essence of Camphor*, 172.
[105] Masud, 173.
[106] Levinas, *Entre Nous*, 93.
[107] Jacques Lacan, *The seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book 1, Freud's papers on technique 1953–1954* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 108.
[108] Lacan, 108.

in the encounter between two subjects.[109] "Even in the most proximate of relations, there is something in the other which resists comprehension. The other cannot be totalized".[110] My organising claim here is that this unfathomable, incomprehensible Lacanian ethical subject—what Lacan calls *das Ding* or "the Thing" [111]—has the same structure as the Levinasian ethical subject that I seek to elucidate with the concept of muteness and trauma. I quote at length here Lacan's conception of *das Ding*:

> *Das Ding* is that which I will call the outside-of-the-signified (*le hors signifié*)…
>
> It is as a function of the outside-of-the-signified, and from an emotional relation [*rapport pathétique*] with it that the subject keeps its distance and constitutes itself in a kind of relation, primary affect, anterior to all repression…
>
> Today I only want to insist on this, that the Thing only presents itself to the extent that it becomes word [*qu'elle fait mot*], hits the bull's eye [*fait mouche*] as one says. In Freud's text, the way in which the stranger, the hostile one, appears in the first experience of reality for the human subject is the cry. I would say that we do not have any need of this cry. Here I would like to make reference to something which is more inscribed in the French rather than the German language, each language has its advantages. In German, *das Wort* is at one word [*mot*] and speech [*parole*]. In French, the word *mot* has a particular weight and sense. *Mot* is essentially "no response" [*pas de réponse*]. "Mot," La Fontaine says somewhere, is what remains silent [*se tait*]; it is precisely that in response to

[109] See Marc de Kesel and Sigi Jottkandt's "Misrecognising the Other" in *Eros and Ethics: Reading Jacques Lacan's Seminar VII* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009), 126-127.
[110] Kesel and Jottkandt, 127.
[111] See "Das Ding" in Jacques Lacan's *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959-1960: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book VII*, trans. Dennis Porter (London: Routledge, 1992).

> which no word is spoken. The things in question are things insofar as they are mute—some people might object that these things are placed by Freud at a higher level than the world of signifiers that I have described as the true moving force of the functioning in man of that process designated as primary. And mute things are not exactly the same thing as things which have no relation to words [*paroles*].[112]

Hence, for Lacan, *das Ding* only presents itself insofar as it becomes word. He then adds significantly that we have no need of the scream or the cry. In Masud's ethical encounter with the Other, on the contrary, *das Ding* makes its appearance as a mute thing, an unspoken word that is as 'outside-of-the-signified' as a disfigured, defaced subject could be.

Both "Sheesha Ghat" and "Lamentation" compel the reader to ask four questions: first, is the silence of these children willful or enforced? Second, what do these willful and enforced silences signify? Third, have these children witnessed or experienced a traumatic event that has compromised their bodies? And finally, why are children associated with muteness and deformity?

Historical Amnesia in "The Fifth Saasaan"

> In Egyptian temples we encounter the silence that surrounded the pharaohs, in the silence of the Gothic cathedral we are reminded of the last dying note of a Gregorian chant, and the echo of Roman footsteps has just faded away from the walls of the Pantheon. Old houses take us back to the slow time and silence of the past. The silence of architecture is a responsive, remembering silence.
>
> —Juhani Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*

[112] Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, 54-55.

"The Fifth Saasaan" or "Saasaan the Fifth"[113] begins with a description of huge, ancient cathedral-like stone structures that have fallen into ruin over the centuries. An architectural space opens up. This city of stone stretches across the plains, captivating the eyes of travellers and passersby. But what fascinates these spectators most is not the enormity of the structures, but rather the writings and hieroglyphs inscribed upon its stone walls:

> Most of their attention and interest were focused on the carved drawings visible on the stone slabs there were fastened to the structures, where coronations, wars, slaughters, defeated kings appearing in the courts of conquerors, and scenes commemorating other occasions were depicted. It was quite evident that the drawings were recounting the history of their time.[114]

Masud's lost city invites the eye to touch its surfaces, contours, edges. An archaic structure, its stone slabs and hieroglyphs provide the sensations of materiality, solidity, and gravity. From the very outset, thus, the story effects the awakening of two senses—vision and, by virtue of sight, touch.

In order to experience and engage with Masud's skilfully crafted edifice which presents itself to the appreciation of the eye, I turn to Finnish architect, educator, and critic Juhani Pallasmaa and his sensitive, profound work *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*. Pallasmaa's book provides a living experience for the senses, articulating architecture's intricate relation to our bodies, time, and memory. For Pallasmaa, architecture is best understood through "an analysis of the epistemology of the senses".[115] Pallasmaa conceives of architecture as art, and

---

[113] As translated by Daniel J. Sheffield in "The Language of Paradise in Safavid Iran: Speech and Cosmology in the Thought of Āẕar Kayvān and His Followers." In Alireza Korangy and Daniel Sheffield (eds.) *There's No Tapping around Philology* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz Verlag, 2014), 161-183.
[114] Masud, "The Fifth Saasaan" in *The Annual of Urdu Studies* 22 (2007), 162-165.
[115] See Juhani Pallasmaa's *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses* (Chichester: Wiley Academy, 2012), 21.

asserts that the purpose of architecture should be to invite the experience of sensation and compassion, to produce "a human rootedness in the world".[116] Following Pallasmaa's lead, I approach Masud's lost city of stone in "The Fifth Saasaan" as art and artefact. My endeavour is an immersive engagement with Masud's design—stone slabs, letters, drawings—and to recover the history, memory, and imagination of a lost civilisation.

Writing about architectural space and the dominance of the sense of vision in Western thinking, Pallasmaa expresses a reverence for structural designs that provoke a fusion of vision and touch. He rejects ocularcentrism in favour of a philosophy of osmotic relations between the body and the world; a simultaneity and permeation of all senses; a total intimacy with space and time. Moreover, Pallasmaa not only laments but completely rejects contemporary design and its failings:

> [T]he inhumanity of contemporary architecture and cities can be understood as the consequence of the neglect of the body and the senses, and an imbalance in our sensory system. The growing experiences of alienation, detachment and solitude in the technological world today, for instance, may be related to a certain pathology of the senses […] The dominance of the eye and the suppression of the other senses tend to push us into detachment, isolation and exteriority. [117]

The looming stone structures in Masud's story allude to the story of a time and dynasty vastly different from the alienating creations that Pallasmaa describes. The opening line of Masud's narrative tells us that "it had taken centuries"[118] to build this lost city and the massive stone structures. In contrast to the remote, flattened, disengaging constructs that Pallasmaa despairs,

[116] Pallasmaa, *Eyes of the Skin*, 22.
[117] Pallasmaa, *The Eyes of the Skin*, 22.
[118] Masud, "The Fifth Saasaan", 162.

Masud gives us the image of a timeless architectural wonder that embodies the open, multiple, inclusionary style of a baroque, painterly age centered on a sense of materiality and density, texture and weight, mass and gravity. Reading "The Fifth Saasaan" itself becomes a sensory experience, and the imagination conjures up past images of Masud's city being built: masons, stonecutters, labourers, planners, *wazirs*,[119] and kings consorting to design courts, mosques, domes, minarets, gardens, tombs. The grandeur of seventeenth century Mughal architecture comes to mind.

What gives Masud's palace-like structures and their ruins an aesthetic sublimity is neither the image of imposing buildings nor their spacious elegance, but rather the unique ornamentation work all over the stone walls. While traditional Mughal art favoured large-scale inlay work of jewels and precious stones, here we have the tactile simplicity of smooth, cold stone engraved all over with a language thought to be long dead. In his inspiring treatise, Pallasmaa defines powerful architecture as that which "connects us with the dead.[120] Contemplating on architecture as a historical and cultural projection, Pallasmaa writes:

> As time loses its duration, and its echo in the primordial past, man loses his sense of self as a historical being, and is threatened by the 'terror of time'. Architecture emancipates us from the embrace of the present and allows us to experience the slow, healing flow of time. They enable us to see and understand the passing of history, and to participate in time cycles that surpass individual life.[121]

Through Masud's silent ruins, we are able to imagine what was once a great stone city with majestic walls and a glorious but brutal history engraved upon the proud structure. Faced by

[119] In the Mughal and Arab cultures, a *wazir* is the chief advisor to the king or sultan.
[120] Pallasmaa, *Eyes of the Skin*, 56.
[121] Ibid.

mute letters on stone, we envision an epic past: the bustle of the street, a royal procession making its way toward a grand entrance, high walls with large gateways, a great war, victorious conquerors. The reader's gaze projects the body onto the façade of these hallways and doors, where it roams around, tracing the grooves of the letters, symbols, and hieroglyphs on the dark surface of stones, a forgotten language that is witness to a rich, complex, tragic past.

Masud's stone ruins in "The Fifth Saasaan" have startling resonances with the desolate palace in Rabindranath Tagore's "The Hungry Stones",[122] arguably Tagore's greatest short story to date. In "The Hungry Stones", Tagore's narrator retells a story he was told by a fellow passenger during a chance encounter at a railway station. Narrating his encounter with eerie, ghostly creatures at a lonely palace in Barich,[123] this co-traveller mesmerises the other passengers. The passenger relates how he had been appointed as a collector of cotton duties by the Nizam of Hyderabad, and had to stay in a palace that had been built around two hundred and fifty years back. In the story, the deserted and spectral palace remains a silent reminder of the cornucopia of histories which it has witnessed:

> Before a week had passed, the place began to exert a weird fascination upon me. It is difficult to describe or to induce people to believe; but I felt as if the whole house was like a living organism slowly and imperceptibly digesting me by the action of some stupefying gastric juice.[124]

Soon the enchanting palace starts haunting the lonely dweller: he hears footfalls; the halls come to possess him with elusive spirits; the spectre of a woman makes him follow her through the dark alleys of the palace. As the parade of ghostly figures torments the narrator into near-

[122] See Rabindranath Tagore's *The Hungry Stones and Other Stories*, 2008, translated by the author and C. F. Andrews. *Project Gutenberg* http://www.gutenberg.org/files/2518/2518-h/2518-h.htm#link2H_4_0002 .
[123] A small town in what was then the princely state of Hyderabad in colonial India and is now a part of Pakistan.
[124] Tagore, "The Hungry Stones", *The Hungry Stones and Other Stories*.

maddening confusion, he desperately looks for a way to exorcise this returning past, but his efforts remain futile. Eventually, he decides to move out of the haunted palace. Like Masud's stone structure, Tagore's palace poses as historical fiction and provokes us to strive for an understanding of the present by exploring the possibility of a ghostly, possessed past. The lack of temporal specificity in both stories replaces actuality with possibility and blurs the opposition between real and unreal. At the same time, the material specificity of the stones and the palace underwrite the grip of reality over our present. Both stories thus attest to the limits of historicist writing without denying the importance of history in general; both point to our effable present, haunted by the re-turning spirits of a forgotten past.

This spectral historicality becomes even more pronounced in "The Fifth Saasaan" when the narrator discloses that the inscriptions on the stone structure were in a long-forgotten language preserved by a wise scholar remembered as the Fifth Saasaan. In Masud's telling, the Fifth Saasaan was descended from four generations of Saasaans and had died ages ago. This ancient language carved on the walls was the only trace of the Fifth Saasaan's life. For many years, we are told, scholars had tried and failed to decipher the writings and hieroglyphs carved on the ruins of these walls. After a long time, when Masud's scholars finally succeeded in the "art of reading dead languages"[125], they were able to decipher this fabled language. But after years of poring over the language, the scholars concluded that the language was not, in fact, a language. It was a forgery, and the Fifth Saasaan had duped generations of revered scholars and sages: "the Fifth Saasaan was the biggest deception or the biggest joke in the history of languages",[126] writes Masud. For Daniel Sheffield, this story mourns "a world in which ancient forms of meaning-making deemed incompatible with modern science obsolesce and are rendered

[125] Masud, "The Fifth Saasaan", 163.
[126] Masud, "The Fifth Saasaan", 163.

meaningless".[127] While the story clearly comments upon this incompatibility of history and modernity, I focus instead on Masud's cathedral-like structures and their speaking stones as architectural and scriptural metaphors for historical forgetting. The speaking stones of Masud's ruins in "The Fifth Saasaan" call into question what is worthy of preservation, how memory is maintained, and how history is forgotten.

We get a sense of the importance of historical amnesia in Masud's narrative from the two melancholic epigraphs that prelude the story. The first is an extract from Chidiock Tichbourne's "Elegy", an autobiographical work that Tichborne is famously known to have composed at the Tower of London the night before his execution:[128]

> My tale was heard and yet it was not told,
> I saw the world and yet I was not seen;
> My thread is cut and yet it is not spun,
> And now I live, and now my life is done.[129]

Tichborne's untold tale in these lines mirrors Masud's "dead language" written upon the ruins of the ancient monoliths. We are not told what the structure was before it fell into ruin: a palace, a castle, a shrine, a museum. "Travelers with imagination were amazed by the wide doors, high stairs, and very large niches of these ruins and they would conjure up images of the time when these remnants of past kings were still intact and those kings were still alive", writes Masud.[130] I read this unknown place as a mute architectural testimony, and translate the spatial placement of words upon stone not only as a site of textual dwelling but also as a historical site and place memory, connected to other histories and other memories. As in Masud's other tales, we are

[127] Sheffield, "The Language of Paradise", 162.
[128] See "Life and After Life" by Mark Jarman in *The Hudson Review* 69:2 (Summer 2016), 313.
[129] Masud, "The Fifth Saasaan," 162.
[130] Masud, 162.

again confronted by a nameless place, where memory crystallises and gives a nostalgic backwards glance to an unknown historic moment. One must pause to consider this historic moment, this break with the past. Masud's writings on stone represents the point where memory is torn in such a way that there is still historical continuity, embodied outside the body, becoming collective memory. It is the forgetting of this collective memory carved on stone—the collective forgetting, rather—that sacralizes this site, transforming it into a sort of memorial. It reminds us of our own social amnesia; of what not to remember; a testimonial to an unspeakable past forgotten collectively; a resting place for loss.

The Tichborne epigraph about an untold and unseen life is followed by another epigraph from renowned Persian poet Farid Al-Din Attar: "Are you mortal? Or immortal? Or both? / Both? Or are you not? Or is 'not' you?"[131] Read alone, the verse is a contemplation on the self, the transcendent, and Being. However, read in conjunction with the preceding epigraph and the narrative that follows, Attar's couplet seems to be posing these questions toward the ruins themselves, since the history of the ruins is inextricable from the history of those who are inscribed upon the walls. These histories loom large in the gaps and absences of meaning embodied by the unreadable mythology engraved in stone. While these histories are clearly visible, marked as they are on a public monument, commemorated by an ancient language, they remain untold and unseen:

> These words were used to mean things they didn't actually mean, in fact they had no meaning whatsoever. Nevertheless, every one of them was used for a particular meaning. That is, a speaker would say a word and, from it, he would intend a meaning, and the one who heard it understood the very same meaning the speaker

[131] Ibid.

> intended. However, in reality, that word didn't have the meaning the speaker intended and the listener understood because, in fact, it wasn't a word at all, and since it wasn't a word, it didn't have any meaning. [132]

The history written on Masud's enormous stone walls seems to be the physical embodiment of much of the national history of Partition, and its subsequent attempts at erasure: there is a memory, the memory has meaning, but the legacy of forgetting renders the memory fragmented and impermanent, at once reaffirming and effacing an untold and unseen collective history. The stone in "The Fifth Saasaan" is, in fact, a memorial.

In Sheffield's view, the story commemorates an obscure figure from Persian history called Azar Kayvan, and an ancient text titled *Dasatir-e-Asmani* (دساتیر آسمانی, translated by Sheffield into English as "The Celestial Regulations"). According to Sheffield, this sacred book of scriptures was composed in an ancient, "heavenly" language. [133] I quote from Sheffield's paper at length:

> European scholars first came across the name Azar Kayvān and the book he purported to contain the ancient scriptures of the Iranians, entitled the Dasātīr-i-Asmānī (The Celestial Regulations), attributed to the authorship of Sāsān the Fifth, a book composed in a supposedly ancient language with a commentary in pure Persian, devoid of Arabic loanwords. After the French traveller Anquetil du Perron returned to Paris from the city of Surat in Gujarat and published the *Zend-Avesta* in 1771, the scholarly world was plunged into controversy as to whether the text which Anquetil had published could in fact be the authentic scripture of Zarathustra. Sir William Jones, the renowned linguist of Calcutta,

[132] Masud, "The Fifth Saasaan", 164.
[133] Cited in Sheffield, "The Language of Paradise", 163.

> became Anquetil's most vociferous opponent. On the authority of the Dabistān, Jones believed that the *Dasātīr*, rather than the *Avesta*, contained the authentic beliefs and ancient language of pre-Islamic Iran, those of Zarathustra. In his "Discourse on the Persians" (1789), Jones cites the Aẕar Kayvānī version of Iranian history as he writes, "[T]he first monarch of Iran and of the whole earth was Mahábád … He received from the creator, and promulgated among men, a sacred book in a heavenly language, to which the Muselman author [of the Dabistān] gives the Arabic title of *desátír*, or regulations."[134]

However, when the book was later discovered and published by a Bombay Parsi priest in 1818, records Sheffield, English linguists realised that the language of the *Dasātīr* couldn't possibly be ancient, and that they had probably been duped. Saasaan the Fifth, thus, became a mythical figure. Sheffield's enlightening reading of Masud's story has much to offer, particularly in relation to understanding the history of Iran and Farsi literature. At the same time, the peculiarities of Masud's stone buildings, the ancient pictures, and the lengthy compositions chiseled on the eternal walls beckon at the reader, inviting an alternate visual paradigm and a more bodily encounter. Taking the lead, I approach "The Fifth Saasaan" with a cultural and political awareness in order to experience the natural, yielding aura of Masud's city of stone—to inhabit its limitless physical and embodied essence.

In my thinking, Masud's colossal stones engraved with meaningless words, hieroglyphs, and markings put the act of forgetting on grand display—a legacy spanning centuries, a memory of disappointment and failure, a refusal of history. In "The Fifth Saasaan", memory itself experiences major trauma. It is a petrified memory, an impotent recollection that nobody can

[134] Sheffield, "The Language of Paradise", 162-163.

decipher, perceive, or transmit. The reader witnesses, in a way, a crisis of witnessing. Masud's relentless question persists: whose history do these mute letters and symbols testify to? If the drawings on the stones are really "recounting the history of their time", then this mute city and its forgotten language are bound up with the problems of memory, witnessing, and testimony. It is impossible to tell who the Fifth Saasaan was, what he witnessed, and what he recorded. Furthermore, a particularly challenging moral difficulty that arises when reading Masud's tale as a critique of historical amnesia is the uncertainty about whether the story elevates or refuses the act of forgetting.

In a provocative work on remembrance and trauma called *In Praise of Forgetting: Historical Memory and Its Ironies*, David Rieff argues against "collective memory as moral and social imperative"[135] and claims that collective memory is frequently invoked in ways that fuel histories of trauma and suffering. Rieff goes on to assert that collective memory often comes at the cost of historical accuracy, and that in some cases remembering may prove to be morally ruinous. This argument is significantly useful in the context of the nationalist debates on Partition history and memory, where historians, activists, and journalists cling to hackneyed propositions about the so-called discord among Muslims and Hindus of British India rather than deliberately study the suffused, blurry historical realm of the subcontinent. Rieff uses the example of Auschwitz to develop his thesis:

> Auschwitz did not inoculate us against East Pakistan in 1971, or East Pakistan against Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge, or Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge against Hutu Power in Rwanda in Rwanda in 1994.[136]

[135] David Rieff, *In Praise of Forgetting*: *Historical Memory and Its Ironies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 58.
[136] Rieff, *In Praise of Forgetting*, 83-84.

Rieff concludes his argument by proposing that we all adopt something closer to Nietzsche's practice of "active forgetting",[137] calling for a rejection of our propensity to violate the historical record. Masud's mute stones, too, invoke a sense of urgent forgetting. Translating the ruins as remnants of national history, Partition memory emerges as a hoard of mute signs, tethered to the problem of remembrance as "political profit".[138]

Masud's city of stone with its mute language in "The Fifth Saasaan" emerges as a lived metaphor for that collective historical trauma that resides in the incarnate memory of body and skin. It is a written history, immortalised on the haptic surface of stone. Memory, time, space, and matter fuse into a singular dimension so we understand and remember the hidden, forgotten complexities of historic reality. Ultimately, the mute letters on Masud's stone structures enable us to remember and recognise ourselves. As Pallasmaa notes:

> The timeless task of architecture is to create embodied and lived existential metaphors that concretise and structure our being in the world. Architecture reflects, materialises and eternalises ideas and images of ideal life. Buildings and towns enable us to structure, understand and remember the shapeless flow of reality and, ultimately, to recognise and remember who we are. Architecture enables us to perceive and understand the dialectics of permanence and change, to settle ourselves in the world, and to place ourselves in the continuum of culture and time.[139]

"The Fifth Saasaan" and its architectural metaphor brings us face to face with our history. The story is an ineffable conscious interaction with a mute testimony—a testimony that is written but

[137] Rieff, 143.
[138] Rieff, *In Praise of Forgetting*, 80.
[139] Pallasmaa, *Eyes of the Skin*, 76.

not read, seen but not perceived, felt but not reconciled. Masud's silent walls extend, penetrate, and permeate our outer physical space as well as our inner psychic space. Gazing at Masud's immortal stones, we recognise that our history is existential rather than ideational, emotional rather than intellectual. We recognise that these ruins with their forgotten history are both iconic artefact and autonomous reality. A reality stored in the haptic memory of our bodies.

Chapter 2: Manto's Necrotic Fragments

"Political violence strips bare the social body, the better to place the stethoscope and track the life beneath the skin."

—Leslie F. Manigat, President of Haiti, February-May 1987

"To bear witness, it is therefore not enough to bring language to its own non-sense, to the pure undecidability of letters […]. It is necessary that this senseless sound be, in turn, the voice of something or someone that, for entirely other reasons, cannot bear witness."

—Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*

"What they named later in expressionism... a scream, is not only something escaping communication with abandonment of fixed linguistic articulation of the sense, but a truly desperate attempt to reach those who do not hear any more."

—Theodor W. Adorno, *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*

A prophet of modernity, feminism, and apocalypse, Sa'adat Hasan Manto was an artist bent on rebellion and resistance. His stories vividly capture much of what women were going through during the tumultuous years of the 1940s. Manto was a writer whose portrayal of women and their physical and emotional pain spoke not only to a new generation of feminists but also to an era more concerned with feeling than ideology. His short stories offer an unprecedented focus on the legacy of brutality and unacknowledged traumas of living in the shadow of Partition. Manto tackles the issues of dislocation, lived pain, and madness head-on, with an unflinching focus on the way in which the effects of violence during Partition have been silenced in conventional historical narratives. His body of work not only turns its attention to those experiences muted in nationalist progressive narratives but also links sustained formal experimentation and innovation to the articulation of these experiences. Much of Manto's work deals with the body in pain as

central metaphor or site for his experimentations—the body is not only the central trope of his fictions but also their structuring principle and a foundation for the process of meaning-making.

Manto's work is a movement and a sensibility, exposing the blind spot of his counterparts who—with great fervour—eulogised the geographical and political reformation ushered in by Partition. Contrary to his contemporaries in the All India Progressive Writers Association, Manto loathed the appropriation of art to political ends, and devoted his iconoclastic, obsessive works to the lowlifes of his time—the strumpet, the pervert, the lunatic. Manto explored the marginalised, peripheral body as a locus for a range of aesthetic and sociopolitical considerations and practices during the twentieth century. His oeuvre distills the human form to a cluster of fragments that—at first glance—respect the contours of tradition and the weight of gravity. At the same time, they undermine any semantic coherence or intellectual sense, exposing a modernist propulsion. In each of his stories, a cosmogony emerges in which the unrelenting focus is not the assemblage but its component parts, emphasis often converging on a singular component part. This principle is arguably the driving force of Manto's narrative fiction. Writing during a time when South Asia was overcome by a surge of violence and chaos, Manto imagined the place and meaning of the body within his sociopolitical sphere in highly innovative ways. In his stories, one man's realization that nobody knows the location of his village leads to a slow descent into madness; a child's mouth waters at the sight of a lump of blood lying on the road; and a man celebrating his sexual appetite is rendered impotent as he realises that he is raping a corpse. Manto abandoned sentimentalism and lyricism in favour of a more hard-bitten, unabashedly modern "anti-artistic" aesthetic that would define his work for years to come. With jagged detail and farcical composition, the author captured the random, the brutal, the excessive, and the absurd dimensions of violence, which provoked vitriolic reactions in the litterateurs of the time.

Manto figured prominently in the Partition years of twentieth-century South Asia. His status as an *enfant terrible* of Urdu literature follows from the writings that brought him into the courts on charges of obscenity. He was charged three times before 1947 for his short stories "Bu" ("Odour"), "Kali Shalwar" ("Black Shalwar"), and "Dhuan" ("Smoke"), and thrice after 1947 for "Khol Do" ("Open It"), "Thanda Gosht" ("Cold Meat"), and "Upar Neechay aur Darmiyan" ("Above, Below, and In-Between"). What critics have condemned as obscene, lewd, and vulgar in these stories is in fact an unveiling of Manto's heightened sensitivity towards female subjects. His characters disclose the ironic tensions at the heart of the cultural practices that inscribe meaning onto the female body in a transitional South Asia. What makes Manto's fictions so compelling is that we find on display the period's hegemonic perceptions of femininity and female sexuality. While the author explores the power of fetishism and deploys the patriarchal mechanisms of objectification that dehumanise the female figure, he also pushes forward the boundaries of what is erotically acceptable, problematises long-held views about desire and gendered subjectivity, and dares a new, mass readership to take stock of the various forms of sexual fantasy it is consuming.

In this chapter, I examine how Manto realised the bodily aesthetic of Partition. This anti-artistic aesthetic is present in various forms in his corpus, yet I will focus on his conception and articulation of the fragment and the fragmented body. As a survey of his extensive literary production reveals, the body that is ruptured by ferocious violence occupies a privileged place in his thinking. Manto's stories uncover the psychological interior of perpetrator and victim not through an in-depth exploration of character, but rather through the fragment the character connects with and appropriates outside of himself. His work lends itself favourably to contemporary critical theory—trauma theory, embodiment theory, Holocaust studies, and in

particular sensory studies—which approaches can illuminate the stories' as yet unexplored dimensions.

In Mantoean thought, the orifices, organs, and fluids of the body acquire extraordinary significance, harkening to the grotesque tradition. The conspicuous prevalence of the mouth, genitals, and various images of oozing in Manto's work—bowels spilling out, bodies bleeding, mouths watering—serve to highlight the author's and his characters' affinity with the world of matter, depicting the face of a nation with its mouth gaping open in a Munchian howl. This preoccupation with bodily organs and fluids is also a prominent feature of Irish dramatist Samuel Beckett's plays. Manto's protagonists elicit modern readers to think of images deriving from Beckett's most unforgettable characters: the bleeding Gogo and puking Estragon from *Waiting for Godot*, the inarticulate narrator at the conclusion of *The Unnamable*, Clov's awful portrayal of the world as "corpsed" in *Endgame*.

Not unlike Beckett, Manto's writing can best be characterised as a literature of the body. It puts the spotlight on that which is bruised, defaced, swollen, torn, slit, muted, or severed, and gives extraordinary attention to physiological anguish and desires. Manto's fictions foreground bodily events and experiences not only to provide insight into the victim's injury, but also to highlight the impact of violence on the perpetrators. Not only that, but Manto deliberately lingers on the unsettling intentionality of the compulsive killings which capture the historical and individual chaos of the nation at the time. He coaxes the unspoken elements of horror-struck South Asian culture out of hiding, not simply saying what is there but also understanding how that which is perceptible is shaped and formed by that which is imperceptible. It is the capacity of literary narrative to extend itself from what is seen and heard to that which is hidden and

unvoiced, that Manto's fiction sets out to test. His fictions read like creative exercises in openly fleshing out the skeleton of a patriarchal, hypocritical, and morally degraded South Asia.

The Sikh as Muselmann[1] in "Toba Tek Singh"

Manto's "Toba Tek Singh" is to Partition fiction what Gogol's "The Overcoat" is to the Russian short story. Published in the year of Manto's death, the scrupulously crafted story features as its protagonist the madman Bishan Singh. A disconcerting nobody, the babbling, inarticulate Bishan Singh both mesmerises and frustrates the reader, endlessly repeating his strange, incoherent thoughts. These babblings culminate in a ripping scream in the final pages of the story when Bishan Singh collapses and dies. The extraordinary story derives its political currency from its arresting construction and representation of a hitherto uncharted space in Partition fiction: the insane asylum of British India. The story's political undertones have been widely debated by scholars and coopted by writers and filmmakers, including—but not limited to—Ramu Nagappan, Smita Das, Gyanendra Pandey, Tarun K. Saint, Frances Pritchett, Afia Nathaniel, and Ketan Mehta. While these distinguished academics and artists have strikingly captured the ghastly revelations of displacement, madness, and mayhem of "Toba Tek Singh" in their work, certain profoundly enigmatic nuances stemming from the dilemma faced by Manto's protagonist

[1] In my analysis, I use the German spelling of the term as preferred by Daniel Heller-Roazen in his translation of Giorgio Agamben's *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (California: Stanford UP, 1998) and *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive* (New York: Zone Books, 2000). Agamben's original texts employ the Italian and French variants "musulmano" and "musulman", inspired by Primo Levi's meditations on the figure of the Muselmann in *The Drowned and the Saved* (London: Abacus, 1989). Several critics have called attention to other variants of the term, such as Jill Jarvis in "Remnants of Muslims: Reading Agamben's Silence" in *New Literary History* 45 (2014): 707-728, where she examines the status of "muslim" and "musulman" figures in and after the Algerian war. Karin Doerr in "Words of Fear, Fear of Words: Language Memories of Holocaust Survivors" prefers the Arabic variant "Muslim". Following Hamid Dabashi's lead in *Being a Muslim in the World*, where he explores the Western language of critical conversation with Islam, I dismantle Agamben's construction of the term "Muselmann" to examine its many reverberations with the fates of abject literary figures in South Asian literature. My analysis coalesces inexorably toward a rhetoric of unsayability powerfully operative in Partition fiction, examining its valences with the apophatic discourse of Holocaust literature. In this regard, adhering to the German variant "Muselmann" is a more appropriate linguistic choice.

have escaped their attention. In critical appraisals of "Toba Tek Singh", there has been little to no discussion about the significance of Bishan Singh's inarticulate sounds. My close reading of "Toba Tek Singh" emphasises this literary décalage and moves away from the familiar interpretations of Manto's story as a tale of Bishan Singh's ontological struggle between being and belonging, or an account of the border as the site of cartographic reconfiguration, or a farcical satire on the triangulated politics among Britain, India, and Pakistan. Placing these valuable perspectives in fruitful dialogue, I focus instead on the figure of Bishan Singh. I argue that this protagonist conveys the inward life of the unheard and indecipherable "complete witness"[2] of Partition, and that his deformed speech in "Toba Tek Singh" typifies what Giorgio Agamben, in his analysis of the Auschwitz death camps, christens the "non-language"[3] of witnessing and testimony. Bishan Singh figures in this Partition story merely as a spectre, the mute ghost of a man who has lost his language, who remains forever out of earshot. He is defined by the things he cannot say; one might even say he is haunted by them.

"Toba Tek Singh" opens in the time period immediately following the Partition with the news that the governments of Pakistan and India have decided to exchange the inmates of their mental asylums. The inmates of Pakistani asylums are to be transferred to India, and those in Indian asylums are to be relocated to Pakistan. This announcement is followed by the transportation of all the Hindu and Sikh inmates in Pakistan to the border with India. At this point, the narrative shifts to a lunatic asylum in Lahore. After their transportation to the border, the displaced Hindu and Sikh inmates from Pakistan hover like silent presences over the story, their fate withheld from the reader. The narrative then introduces the reader to some inmates

[2] Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive* (New York: Zone Books, 2000), 38. Hereafter cited as *RA*.
[3] Ibid.

from the Lahore asylum: a Muslim lunatic known as "Maulvi Saheb", who declares that Pakistan is "a place in India where they make cut throat razors";[4] a Sikh madman who is concerned about why he and fellow inmates are being sent to India when they do not know the language spoken there; a Muslim in the middle of a bath, who chants the slogan "Pakistan Zindabad" so forcefully that he falls and faints; another Muslim inmate who is so utterly agitated by the Partition that he climbs up a tree and declares, "I want to live in neither India nor Pakistan . . . I'd rather live on this tree".[5] We meet the "fat Muslim lunatic" Muhammad Ali, a member of the Muslim League, who begins to call himself Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the father of the Pakistani nation; another Sikh who follows this example and assumes the role of Master Tara Singh; a Hindu lawyer from Lahore who lost his mind when he lost his love for India, and two Anglo-Indian inmates wondering if they will still be served an English breakfast now that the English have departed from the country. Readers are introduced to Bishan Singh last.

A Sikh inmate who has been living in the asylum for the past fifteen years, Bishan Singh is perhaps Manto's most riveting protagonist. While Masud writes the mute voice of the Partition witness into existence as stutters, gestures, and coughs, in Manto's fiction the mute character figures in several variations: the raving lunatic, the raped figure, the truncated voice. Manto's story plays out the problems of wounding and articulation central to Partition testimony, meaning that any effective analysis of "Toba Tek Singh" must begin with a focus on the narrative gaps created through a voice marked by fear and violence:

> He would often be heard blurting out a string of strange, unintelligible phrases like "Opar di gurgur di annexe di bay dhiana di mung di daal of the laltain." He slept neither at night, nor during the day. The guards said that he had not slept a

[4] Sa'adat Hasan Manto, *Black Margins*, ed. Muhammad Umar Memon (Karachi: Oxford UP, 2001), 213.
[5] Ibid., 214.

> wink in the long period of fifteen years. […] His feet and ankles were swollen from standing all the time. But despite his physical discomfort, he would not lie down to rest.[6]

Surprisingly, the state of Bishan Singh's body has never made an appearance in critical interpretations of the story. A pile of swollen, misshapen limbs, Bishan Singh's sleepless, watchful body is as disordered as the speech it produces. Yet the mellifluous cadence of his repetitious prose encourages the reader to overlook what he is actually saying. "Opar di gurgur di annexe di bay dhiana di mung di daal of the laltain" may sound like nonsense to English-speaking ears, but repeated five times—albeit with slight variations—it takes on the quality of a song, or a cipher. This sound seems to make no sense, but meaninglessness is still beguiling. Such a sound is precisely what Steven Connor calls "noisance",[7] defining this term as a "useful nuisance of the voice's noisings". Critics must pay close attention, then, to the usefulness of Bishan Singh's rhythmic noisances and its many nuisances. The unheard, unheeded voice of a body trapped in an insane asylum, Bishan Singh's broken, repetitive musings epitomise the sounds of countless abject voices similarly rendered unintelligible, or mute, by the lived traumas of Partition's genocidal violence.

Bishan Singh's impaired speech and disfigured body also evoke the uncanny spectral image of Agamben's Auschwitz camp prisoner, "the *Muselmann*".[8] My reading of Bishan Singh begins with this image, and with Agamben's reflections on the unusual camp epithet *der Muselmann*. In *Remnants of Auschwitz*, Agamben devotes a chapter to the figure of "the *Muselmann*", where he defines, clarifies, and develops the term. The German "muselmann" (pl.

[6] Manto, *Black Margins*, 215.
[7] Connor introduces the term 'noisance' in *Beyond Words*, 11.
[8] Agamben, *RA*, 41, emphasis in original.

Muselmänner) is from the Arabic for "Muslim", and according to Agamben signifies "one who submits unconditionally to the will of God".[9] He appropriates the German term as a proper name for lost witnesses. In his original work, Agamben uses the Italian "musulmano" (pl. musulmani), while the German "Muselmann" appears italicised in the English translation by Daniel Heller-Roazen. In the history of British India, Muslims, Hindus, and Christians were homogenously referred to as "coolies" and "blackies", derogatory slang words associated with the abject colonised figure of Indian origin. Considering that the Partition of India culminated in unprecedented religious massacre among Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims, it seems astonishing that the surfacing of the word "Muslim" in Auschwitz camp jargon does not inspire Agamben to explore the affinities between Nazi and colonial violence. Jill Jarvis severely criticises Agamben's appropriation of the term, calling it a "narrow resignification"[10] and "reductive Orientalism".[11] Jarvis qualifies her criticism by investigating the operation of the term "musulman" as a French legal term during the Second World War and subsequently in postwar Algeria. She emphasises Agamben's failure to acknowledge the appearance of the term as "a juridical category of exception experimented with by the French in Algeria since at least its 1848 departmentalization".[12] Since religion occupies a critical space in the heart of the debate on Partition, it is only right to explore the implications of how this word operates in both the German and French historical contexts in order to fully grasp the condition of Bishan Singh.

According to Agamben's ontological reflections on the term, a "Muselmann" represents the most abject figure among camp prisoners. Drawing on Auschwitz survivor Primo Levi's discussion of the death camps, Agamben writes:

---

[9] Agamben, *RA*, 45.
[10] Jill Jarvis, "Remnants of Muslims: Reading Agamben's Silence", *New Literary History* 45 (2014): 710.
[11] Ibid., 719.
[12] Ibid., 709.

> Now imagine the most extreme figure of the camp inhabitant. Primo Levi has described the person who in camp jargon was called "the Muslim," der Muselmann—a being from whom humiliation, horror, and fear had so taken away all consciousness and all personality as to make him absolutely apathetic.[13]

While Jarvis insists that the usage of the word "Muslim" in Agamben's *Remnants of Auschwitz* appears "sheared of its many other semantic valences and ambiguities",[14] I maintain that Agamben's insights on the state of the Auschwitz "Muselmänner" nonetheless play a pivotal role when it comes to an investigation of witnesses and witnessing in Partition literature. The physical description of the camp inhabitant in Agamben's discussion is particularly instructive:

> Being on his feet all the time made all the liquids in him accumulate in the lower part of this body. As the state of malnutrition grew, the edemas multiplied, especially on those who had to stand on their feet for many hours—first on the lower part of their legs, then on their behinds and testicles and even on their abdomens. The swellings were often accompanied by diarrhea, which often preceded the development of edemas. In this phase, they became indifferent to everything happening around them. They excluded themselves from all relations to their environment. If they could still move around, they did so in slow motion, without bending their knees […] Seeing them from afar, one had the impression of seeing Arabs praying. This image was the origin of the term used at Auschwitz for people dying of malnutrition: Muslims.[15]

[13] Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, 185. Hereafter cited as *HS*.
[14] Jarvis, "Remnants of Muslims", 708.
[15] Agamben, *HS*, 43.

One can only imagine the physiological complications assaulting Bishan Singh's body following fifteen years of standing on his feet: the gravitational orbit pulling his blood downward, legs the size of colossal tree stumps, the bloodless upper body slouching forward as it slowly transforms into a husk, the tongue drying up, and his thoughts with it. In other words, Bishan Singh is an uncanny embodiment of that *Muselmann* which Agamben interprets as *Muschelmann*, a "shell-man", or "a man folded and closed upon himself".[16] The image of a body folded and closed upon itself coincides starkly with Connor's development of the knotted voice of the stammerer that I discussed in the previous chapter, a voice "twisted, tangled, contorted, a body closed in or folded over on itself".[17] By hewing closely to the physiological and linguistic affinities between Agamben's *Muschelmann* and Connor's stammerer, I ask: why has Bishan Singh's folded, closed body with its complex noisances compelled so little contextual and critical reflection?

Bishan Singh's figure as Agambenian *Muschelmann* and witness gains relevance in view of his incoherent musings in "Toba Tek Singh": "Opar di gurgur di annexe di bay dhiana di mung di daal of the laltain".[18] In the Urdu original, this text appears as:

"اوپڑ دی گڑگڑ وی اینکس دی بے دھیانا دی منگ دی دال آف دی لالٹین۔"[19]

The first word, "اوپڑ" (*Upar*) is the Punjabi rendering of "up". Next, "دی" (di/the/of) is a more ambiguous term as it could be interpreted both as the English "the" or the Punjabi possessive "di" meaning "of". "گڑگڑ" (gurgur) in both Urdu and Punjabi languages translates as "noise" or "rumbling". The "وی" (vi/of) that follows is again a debatable term, translating into "we" if read in English and the possessive "of" in Punjabi. "اینکس" (annex) is Urdu for "annexe", followed by

[16] Ibid., 45.
[17] See note 40 in Chapter 1.
[18] Manto, *Black Margins*, 215.
[19] See Manto's "Toba Tek Singh" in Abdal Ahmed Jafri's *Sa'adat Hasan Aur Manto* (Lahore: Nigarshat Publishers, 2013), 194.

the uncertain Punjabi/English "دی" (di/the/of). Next we have the Urdu and Punjabi "بے دھیانا" (bay dhiyana), which may be interpreted as "unheeding", "distracted", "preoccupied" or "indifferent". However, if the translator is so inclined, "بے دھیانا" (bay dhiyana) could also be interpreted as the "unconscious" or "subconscious", which is why any attempt to find a direct equivalence is nearly impossible and therefore, questionable. The arguable "دی" (di/the/of) reappears, followed by the phrase "منگ دی دال" (mung di daal), which indicates a specific type of lentil in Urdu and Punjabi. "آف" (aaf) is the Urdu rendering of the English possessive "of". The final "دی" (di/the) most likely represents the English "the", and "لالٹین" (laltain) is "lantern" in Urdu and Punjabi. Critics have underexplored Bishan Singh's speech and voice, glossing these unintelligible sounds with various simplistic phrases, and offering rather reductive interpretations. Nagappan describes him as a "gibbering inmate" and "inarticulate madman" who is "without coherent desire";[20] Saint looks at Bishan Singh's utterances as "nonsense phrases";[21] Jennifer Yusin suggests that the protagonist is in a state of "disorientation" and "confusion".[22] Contrary to the established discourse on Bishan Singh's bizarre noisance, I take my lead from Agamben and Connor to frame Bishan Singh's "inarticulate babble"[23] as the sounds of "a non-language or a dark and maimed language".[24]

[20] Ramu Nagappan, "The Argument of Fiction", *Speaking Havoc*: *Social Suffering and South Asian Narratives*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005), 87-89.
[21] Tarun K. Saint, "The Long Shadow of Manto's Partition Narratives: 'Fictive' Testimony to Historical Trauma, *Social Scientist* 40, No. 11/12 (2012): 57.
[22] Jennifer Yusin, "Beyond Nationalism: The Border, Trauma and Partition Fiction", *Thesis Eleven* 105, No. 1 (2011): 24-25.
[23] Agamben, *RA*, 37.
[24] Ibid.

According to Agamben, the Levian testimonial paradox is that "the Muselmann is the complete witness".[25] The paradox of the "complete witness"[26] of the Shoah is that the witness is historiographically absent:

> The "true" witnesses, the "complete witnesses", are those who did not bear witness and could not bear witness […], the Muslims, the drowned. The survivors speak in their stead, by proxy, as pseudo-witnesses; they bear witness to a missing testimony. And yet to speak here of a proxy makes no sense; the drowned have nothing to say, nor do they have instructions or memories to be transmitted. They have no "story," no "face," and even less do they have "thought".[27]

At the heart of the paradox is Agamben's formulation of the figure called the *Muselmann*. It should be stated clearly at the outset that in Agamben's thought, the words "Muselmann" and "Muslim" signify a juridical rather than religious category. The *Muselmann* is one who "makes it forever impossible to distinguish between man and non-man",[28] a figure "reduced to a mute existence prior to extermination",[29] "the central figure in the tableau of mass dying—a death by hunger, murder of the soul abandonment; dead while still living".[30] For Agamben, the *Muselmänner* are the complete witnesses *because* they cannot return to describe what they have witnessed: "their death had begun before that of their body".[31] Here Jarvis's argument about the function of the camp epithet coincides with Agamben's use of the term as she deftly traces its history as a juridical category of the French Empire.[32] Jarvis recounts the events between 1830

---

[25] Agamben, *RA*, 42.
[26] Ibid., 33.
[27] Primo Levi, *The Drowned and Saved*, 90.
[28] Ibid., 47.
[29] Alex Murray and Jessica Whyte, "Muselmann," *The Agamben Dictionary* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2011), 134.
[30] Wolfgang Sofsky, "The Muselmann," *The Order of Terror: The Concentration Camp*, translated by William Templer (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2001), 200.
[31] Agamben, *RA*, 34.
[32] Jarvis, "Remnants of Muslims," 709-711.

and 1870 when Algeria was annexed to France by the French Second Republic and commissioned into three departments based on legal distinctions between the bearers of full citizenship rights and those subject to military conscription, forced labour, and a penal system that included concentration camps: "During World War II, "musulman" was a *French* legal term still used to classify which bodies the French imperial nation-state would protect and which it would dispose".[33] Bishan Singh's is a similar body that the nation-state eliminates and disposes rather than protects. His knotted, folded tongue along with his depiction as a body folded and closed on itself urges the reader and historian alike to investigate his double status as Sikh and *Muselmann*.

Before further meditating on the relations between Bishan Singh's tongue and Agamben's figure of the *Muselmann*, I want to speculate on the problematic operative history of the word "musulman"—and its variants—in both the French and German languages. A closer investigation of how this word has functioned historically in the French and German political milieux reveals the precarious link between Bishan Singh and Auschwitz camp rhetoric. In *The Invention of Decolonization*,[34] Todd Shepard spells out the fate of Algerian Muslims during France's "civilizing mission" and introduces the term "Muslims" in scare quotes, offering the following clarification in parentheses: "(a term I place in quotes because official references to those Algerians legally categorised as 'Muslim' did not necessarily refer to people who practiced Islam)".[35] During the course of his discussion, Shepard meticulously accounts for the ethnic and racial differences that emerged within the French population during the Algerian War, but he neither defines nor clarifies the identity of that Algerian population which was legally

[33] Ibid.; emphasis in original.
[34] Todd Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization: The Algerian War and the Remaking of France* (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 2006).
[35] Shepard, *Invention of Decolonization*, 7.

categorised by the French officials as "Muslim". The question of precisely *who* those Algerians were remains a parenthetical one. Nonetheless, Shepard's work brings to light crucial facts about the condition and perception of the "musulman" in French-occupied Algeria. For example, on the issue of citizenship Shepard quotes French prime minister Charles de Gaulle expressing his displeasure at the idea of an Algerian Muslim as a French citizen: "You cannot possibly consider that one day an Arab, a Muslim, could be the equal of a Frenchman?"[36] From the 1830s until the independence of Algeria in 1962, "Muslim" was a legal rather than a religious category, signifying those Algerians who were not of European or French origin—in other words, racially and ethnically inferior—this racial and ethnic difference being the premise on which the French government enforced laws that denied the Algerians French citizenship. In French-occupied Algeria, then, "Muslims" were men and women of colour with limited rights who were refused equality and excluded from full membership in the French nation.

While French law represents "Muslim" men and women of non-European and non-French origin as racially and ethnically inferior, German literature constructs the "Muslim" as a physiologically incapacitated figure. The German song "C-a-f-f-e-e" by Carl Gottlieb Hering, for example, warns children to not become like "Muslims": "*trink nicht so viel Caffee! Schwächt die Nerven, macht dich blass und krank. Sei doch kein Muselmann, der ihn nicht lassen kann!*" "Don't drink so much coffee! It weakens the nerves and makes you pale and sick. Don't be a Muslim who can't help it!"[37] It is worth noting that both Levi and Agamben turn to the German word and its German spelling for "Muslim", a language that assumes the figure of the "Muslim" to be that of the mute animal,[38] a spectre, a skeleton.[39] The fact that both writers seek shelter

[36] Cited in Shepard, 75.
[37] Cited in Gil Anidjar, *The Jew, The Arab*: *A History of the Enemy* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2003), 142.
[38] Sofsky, *Order of Terror*, 203.
[39] Ka-tzetnik, *Moni: A Novel of Auschwitz* (Secaucus, N.J.: Citadel Press, 1963), 116-117.

under the German construction and representation of the term, without taking into account its historical etymology in languages such as Arabic, Urdu, or Persian, indicates a meticulous linguistic formula operating within their analysis: a formula subscribing to depictions of the "Muslim" as a figure that is physiologically, morally, and intellectually incapacitated. Given that the word "Muselmann" functions in both Levi and Agamben's analysis primarily as an Auschwitz term, the expression evokes a certain proximity of Jews and Muslims. In Manto's "Toba Tek Singh", we come across a similar figure who is neither Jew nor Muslim, but Sikh. The figure of Bishan Singh—constructed by a South Asian writer in the Urdu language—curiously embodies the German construction and representation of the "Muselmann". Manto meticulously designs and writes this figure's maimed body to represent the crisis of testimony that Partition witnesses were grappling with following the horror unleashed by the events of 1947.

Bishan Singh's folded tongue, in particular, is preoccupied by the problem posed by Agamben's *Muselmann* for the practice of testimony. Agamben derives this testimonial paradox and his concept of non-language from Levi's experience at Auschwitz, as outlined in *The Drowned and the Saved*, with the three-year-old Hurbinek[40] and his repetitive babbling. Relating the story of the child's death at the Auschwitz camp, Levi writes:

> Hurbinek was a nobody, a child of death, a child of Auschwitz. He looked about three years old, no one knew anything of him, he could not speak and had no name; that curious name, Hurbinek, had been given to him by us perhaps by one of the women who had interpreted with those syllables one of the inarticulate sounds that the baby let out now and again. He was paralyzed from the waist

[40] Levi, *Drowned*, 37.

> down, with atrophied legs, as thin as sticks; but his eyes, lost in his triangular and wasted face, flashed terribly alive, full of demand, assertion of the will to break loose, to shatter the tomb of his dumbness. The speech he lacked, which no one had bothered to teach him, the need of speech charged his stare with explosive urgency.[41]

While the temporal, geographical, religious and racial differences between Hurbinek and Bishan Singh are self-evident, there are important resonances operating at the juridical and political levels that shouldn't be ignored. Both Hurbinek and Bishan Singh are prisoners in postwar states of exception: the camp and the asylum. Both are "complete witnesses"—their death begins before the death of their bodies as they witness the full horror of the camp and the asylum.

In considering Bishan Singh as a Levian witness of Partition, I track his babbling and wailing in the story to offer a new reading of his voice as the testimony of a suffering psyche. Bishan Singh's non-language emblematises the voice of those witnesses of Partition who were unable to give voice to the violence done to them. Theirs are the kinds of testimony that Gyanendra Pandey claims have been "sanitized and flattened".[42] "Toba Tek Singh" reveals to us not so much Bishan Singh's world inside the asylum as the process by which he struggles to recount, to articulate, and to bear witness. The story, which begins as a record of the transfer of lunatics effected by Partition, turns into a study of Bishan Singh's attempt to pull together the strands of his own ruptured language and weave them into the fabric of narrative. Bishan Singh, while not technically mute, emits no more than a stream of unintelligible babble, trying to put into words what conventionally remains outside the flow of historical narrative. His incomplete

[41] Levi, *Drowned*, 191.
[42] Gyanendra Pandey, *Remembering Partition*, 88.

telling helps unfold the ambivalences and ambiguities that shape both the way we read Partition fiction and how we think about Partition.

Looking back at the liminality of the Sikhs during Partition, Bishan Singh's jagged speech comes to represent much more than just a crisis of speaking. Rather, he embodies the infinite interior malady of the entire Sikh nation in a newly decolonised India. His voice represents the deafening silence of Sikh disaffection during Partition, and of the insidious politics of religion and ethnicity underwriting the Indian freedom movement. As British India hurtled toward Partition and independence, toward a Muslim Pakistan and a Hindu-dominated India, there was no room for Sikhs. As Gyanendra Pandey recalls: "While the Hindus got their Hindustan and the Muslims got their Pakistan, the Sikhs were like orphans, left with nothing".[43] Partition cleaved the Sikh nation, wresting them away from their birthplace, their holy sites, their way of being, forced into a half-life. Initially, Sikh identity was defined by piety. Later, it was configured out of the Sikh tradition of martyrology, sustained by the consistent repetition of stories of self-sacrifice and acts of bravery by Sikh warriors.[44] Toward the turn of 1947, however, Sikh identity became precarious. When the Sikhs came to Gandhi for help, he condemned them for committing atrocities against the Muslims and called them "cowards", advising them to protect the Muslims who had chosen to remain in India. [45] As Alok Bhalla recalls:

> As one should expect, many Sikh migrants, instead of taking umbrage, paid heed to Gandhi's pleadings. There are many fictional narratives, both from India and

[43] Pandey, *Remembering Partition*, 16-17.
[44] Louis E. Fenech, *Martyrdom in the Sikh Tradition: Playing the 'Game of Love'* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000), 33-38.
[45] See Alok Bhalla's "Moral Action in Times of Duragraha: The Representation of the Sikhs in Partition Fiction", *Social Scientist* 34, No. 5/6 (2006): 104-131.

> Pakistan, which bear witness to the fortitude and quiet dignity with which they absorbed their humiliation, endured their suffering, gave sanctuary to those they could help and consolation to others who, like them, were in pain and so fulfilled their pledged obligations to their Gurus.[46]

It is against this historical backdrop of lost nationhood and identity that Manto's "Toba Tek Singh" emerges, realizing the psyche and lore of the Sikh community in the 'noise' of Bishan Singh's unintelligible babbling and symbolising the quiet suffering of a stateless people.

For Smita Das, Bishan Singh symbolises a "linguistically hybridized"[47] subject who reveals the logic hidden in the nonsensical. Das interprets Bishan Singh's perplexing utterance as follows: "On the surface, the territorial possession of India by the British seems sweet, but those who do not pay attention become cooked like lentils".[48] While I whole-heartedly agree that Bishan Singh's babble has political underpinnings, Das's translation—while certainly ambitious—captures neither the colonial valences nor their juridical implications in Bishan Singh's "dark and maimed non-language". "Opar di gurgur di annexe di bay dhiana di mung di daal of the laltain" is a fascinating example of a multilingual sensibility that refuses translation. By incorporating Punjabi, Urdu, and English into an indecipherable string of vocal chaos, Manto forges a language that knows no physical or national bounds, reflecting and memorializing the inaudible, muffled Sikh voice of a dispossessed body. I propose to approach the question of Bishan Singh's voice differently, as being at the core of a rhetoric, and as Manto's attempt at a rhetoric of unsayability.

---

[46] Bhalla, "Moral Action", 111.
[47] Smita Das, "Space of the Crazy in Saadat Hasan Manto's *Toba Tek Singh*," *South Asian Review* 26, No. 2 (2005): 210.
[48] Ibid., 211.

As the story progresses, Bishan Singh's non-language evolves: "Opar di gurgur di annexe di bay dhiana di mung di daal of the Government of Pakistan", which Das translates into "On the surface, the territorial possession of India by the British seems sweet, but those who do not pay attention become cooked like lentils by the Government of Pakistan".[49] Then comes "Opar di gurgur di annexe di bay dhiana di mung di daal of Wahe Guruji da Khalsa and Wahe Guruji ki Fateh . . . jo bolé so nihaal sat sri akaal", translated by Das into "On the surface, the territorial possession of India by the British seems sweet, but people still get cooked. Anyone who prays and says the name of the Sikh gods will have victory and happiness".[50] This sentence is followed by "Opar di gurgur di annexe di bay dhiana di mung di daal of the Pakistan and India of the dur fité munh", which according to Das means "On the surface, the territorial possession of India by the British seems sweet, but those who do not pay attention, let their faces be cursed by Pakistan and India".[51] Finally, just before he collapses and dies, "Opar di gurgur di annexe di bay dhiana di mung di daal of Toba Tek Singh and Pakistan",[52] which Das reads as "On the surface, the territorial possession of India by the British seems sweet, but those who don't pay attention become cooked like lentils by Toba Tek Singh and Pakistan".[53] It is critical to note that nowhere in his broken, incoherent babbling does Bishan Singh imply anything about the seemingly sweet territorial possession of India, or people being metaphorically—or literally—cooked; Das leaps to these conclusions without sufficient evidence or analysis. Bishan Singh's voice is a suffering body's attempt at articulation. It is a voice that emerges as a departure: we hear it while Bishan Singh is dying a *Musselmann*'s death. In his analysis of the sob as an utterance, Connor argues:

[49] Das, "Space of the Crazy," 211.
[50] Ibid., 212.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Manto, *Black Margins*, 215-220.
[53] Das, "Space of the Crazy," 211.

"Suffering mutes and muffles articulation, which produces a further intensification of suffering, in the incapacity to give it voice; but that impeded voice then becomes the authentic voice of suffering".[54] As Bishan Singh's knotted, folded, dry tongue struggles against impediment to be heard, it materialises as Connor's authentic voice of suffering. It is impossible simply to translate his speech, because it is this repeated effort at articulation—and its mangled parturition—that demands a response.

Bishan Singh's "opar di gurgur di annexe di bay dhiana di mung di daal" leads us, therefore, not to a jumble of political babblings, but to the inexhaustible mystery of apophatic thought, of unsoundable language split open to something other than all it can contain. Bishan Singh's "dis-articulated"[55] speech represents that indefinable, inarticulable dimension of witnessing that lends language to ruptures—Bataille's "déchirements"[56]—in order to give voice to the unspeakable. It is an experience of violent silence inspired by the dread, the thrill, the horror that should not occur in the real world. As Bishan Singh's noisance reduces to minimal traces of dismembered, maimed, wounded words, linguistic categories dissolve, bringing out a hybridised syntax of three languages without any grammatical structure, and the unspeakable reality of what remains unarticulated between—and despite—the layers of utterances released. Bishan Singh's dis-articulated string of linguistic fragments can be understood only in terms of that which no testimony can name, but that every testimony intends and adumbrates. Hence, Bishan Singh's failing and foundering of words—accentuated by their artfully deliberate dismembering—bespeak a historical reality that cannot be represented or pronounced. His language is unencompassible in its infinity and can only be signified by the maiming and

[54] Connor, *Beyond Words*, 65.
[55] As William Franke posits in *A Philosophy of the Unsayable*, for meaning to be "arti-culated" is at the same time to be "dis-articulated", or broken into its component parts or members, 34.
[56] George Bataille, *Literature and Evil* (New York: M. Boyars, 1985).

wounding of words, by the destruction of concrete sensorial and semantic content in order to point beyond to the unsayable.

The 'Special' Train and the Decapitated Female in "Open It!"[57]

The 2018 biopic *Manto*, directed by the renowned Indian actress and filmmaker Nandita Das and starring the prolific Nawazuddin Siddiqui, premiered at the Festival de Cannes and features, as vignettes within the story of Manto's life, five of the author's most powerful short stories: "Toba Tek Singh", "Open It" ("Khol Do"), "Cold Meat" ("Thanda Gosht"), "The 100 Watt Bulb" ("Sau Watt Ka Bulb"), and "Dus Rupay Ka Note" ("The 10 Rupee Note"). Das sutures extracts from these poignant works into the jolting fabric of her biographical narrative, alternating between fiction and nonfiction to illuminate the disturbing links between Manto's work and life. In his review of *Manto* in the *Hindustan Times*, Raja Sen comments that the film "lacks flow", that Das "can't seem to enforce consistency", and that the editing is "choppy".[58] However, it is precisely this rupturing in the narrative that opens it up for critical reflection, willing the reader to meditate not only on Manto's stories but also on the violence that was unravelling around him and within him during Partition. The film opens with "Toba Tek Singh", followed by the controversial narrative of hideous sexual violence, "Open It".

As the plot of "Open It" unfolds on screen, viewers see Manto stepping into a Muslim refugee camp, where a dirty, dishevelled Sirajuddin is running every which way in a maddened state, asking repeatedly, "Sakina mili?" ("Has Sakina been found?").[59] Manto follows the disoriented Sirajuddin as he combs through the crowd with wild eyes, looking for his daughter.

[57] "Open It!", Translated by M. Asaduddin in *Black Margins*, 200-203.
[58] Raja Sen, "Manto movie review: Nawazuddin Siddiqui pours out a glassful of Manto", *Hindustan Times* (September 22, 2018).
[59] My translation.

He runs into a group of three young men—camp volunteers—and pleads with them to find his Sakina. "Mil jaye gi, mil jaye gi" ("We'll find her, we'll find her"),[60] they placate him. Sirajuddin rushes inside the camp hospital, Manto behind him, where a young girl's body is lying on a stretcher by a wall in the dim room. Her feet are blackened by dirt and her body is motionless, draped in a soiled mushroom and emerald green, floral patterned shalwar kameez. Sirajuddin cries out Sakina's name and approaches the lifeless figure. The doctor turns to examine the body, points to the window in the wall, and orders: "Khol do" ("Open it"). At these words, the "corpse"[61] is roused, her listless hands reaching mechanically under her kameez and undoing the drawstring of her shalwar. The doctor, unable to speak, breaks "into a cold sweat".[62] In her film Das portrays this unnerving scene powerfully, resurrecting one of Manto's most terrifying narratives. But there are certain details of the narrative that the film cannot accommodate—understandably so—considering the time constraints. One such detail is the opening line of the story.

Manto begins "Open It" with these words: "*The special train*, which left Amritsar at two in the afternoon, reached Mughalpura after eight hours. Several people were killed along the way, a good many injured, and some fled in different directions".[63] Peculiarly, Manto adopts the same rhetoric—"special train" (the English is rendered in Urdu script)—in his Urdu original:

"امرتسر سے اسپیشل ٹرین دوپہر دو بجے کو چلی اور آٹھ گھنٹوں کے بعد مغل پورہ پہنچی۔ راستے میں کئ آدمی مارے گئے۔متعدد زخمی ہوئے اور کچھ ادھرادھر بھٹک گئے"۔[64]

[60] Ibid.
[61] In the Urdu original, Manto uses the word *laash* ("لاش") to describe Sakina's figure, which translates as "corpse" or "dead body".
[62] Manto, "Open It!", 203.
[63] Ibid., 200. Emphasis added.
[64] Sa'adat Hasan Manto, *Manto Kahaniyan* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 2015), 11.

("Amritsar se special train dopeher do bajay ko chali aur aath ghhanton ke baad Mughalpura pohanchi".)

While it is not uncommon for Urdu writers to weave the English lexicon into their writings, here the fairly ordinary words "special train" are wrought with cultural and political nuances that have inspired me to carry over Manto's work from South Asia, to situate it within the more global context of modern violence. In my close reading of "Open It!", I will first explore how this image of the "special train" operates within Partition literature as the "death train" or "ghost train", and then I will examine the vignette from Manto's story in light of recent terrorist activity and violence perpetrated on railways around the world.

The 'special' train in "Open It" is a complex, layered symbol that invites the collective imagination to converge on a series of images: the figure of Sirajuddin, the train carriage where Sirajuddin's wife is massacred, the mechanical movement of Sakina's hands, and the refugee trains of Partition. When the story introduces Sirajuddin for the first time, he is awakening in the camp:

> At ten in the morning, when Sirajuddin opened his eyes in the camp and saw the tumultuous crowds of men and boys around him, he almost lost his wits. For a long time he kept staring at the sky. The noise filled the camp but old Sirajuddin's ears were as if sealed. He couldn't hear anything. Anyone seeing him would have assumed that he was deep in thought. But he had become senseless. It was as though he was suspended in space. As he kept staring vacantly at the sky, his eyes suddenly caught the sun. Its rays coursed through every pore of his body and he

> got up. A collage of images flitted across his mind—plunder, fire, escape, gunshots, night . . . and Sakina.[65]

Here, we meet another character rendered "senseless" by the chaos of Partition, not unlike Bishan Singh and the inmates in "Toba Tek Singh". It is remarkable how Manto's stories at times take on a Masudian texture as they, too, linger on figures who are suspended in an incoherent reality, and have "almost lost [their] wits". Sirajuddin, with his "vacant" eyes and "sealed" ears bears an uncanny—but not unlikely—resemblance to the knotted tongue of Masud's child-narrator in "Sheesha Ghat", or the failed gestures of his wastelanders in "Lamentation". While the two authors wrote at quite different times, both limned characters whose organs have become paralysed or impotent in some way—eyes, ears, tongues, and hands repeatedly resurface in their works as profoundly traumatised. Collectively, their narratives read like a montage of appendages from a dismembered body, silently evoking the unspeakable terror they have witnessed.

"Open It!" takes readers on a similarly disconcerting journey of severed bodies. Following our encounter with Sirajuddin's "vacant" eyes and "sealed" ears, we are brought before the corpse of Sirajuddin's wife, where she lies with "all her entrails spilled out".[66] The extent of the horror which Manto describes so matter-of-factly is widely acknowledged as the most disturbing characteristic of his prose. It is important for Manto to draw his readers' attention to the disemboweled figure of Sirajuddin's wife and its material reality, an emptied shell with "all" its insides carved out. The hollowed body of Sirajuddin's wife, an unwitnessable life in the charnel ground of the "special train", harkens back to the Agambenian "shell-man",[67]

[65] Manto, "Open It!", 200.
[66] Manto, 201.
[67] Agamben, *HS*, 43.

or *Muschelmann*. It is instructive to see, read, and comment on the particular status of this term within the harrowing mosaic of Partition history, and to pay attention to those Muselmann bodies that Manto writes in his oeuvre, but which appear only as elisions within Indian and Pakistani state discourses. One such *Muschelmann* body is that of Sirajuddin's dismembered wife.

In "Open It!" both the killing of Sirajuddin's wife and the (gang) rape of his seventeen-year-old daughter take place on and around the "special train" from Amritsar. The refugee train as real and imaginative site for violence is marked by many valences in Partition history and literature. These refugee trains—or special trains—had been arranged by the state for the relocation of evacuees from India and Pakistan during the early months of Partition. In *Tracking Modernity: India's Railway and the Culture of Mobility*, an incisive study of train symbolism and the role played by the Indian railway in the formation and initiation of modern India, Marian Aguiar notes:

> The state-sponsored refugee trains on the border of West Pakistan represented the protection of the nation; symbolically, the Muslims fleeing west and the Hindus fleeing east sought refuge in the nation as they boarded refugee trains. They saw the railway as a national, secular space that could transcend the religious difference that now manifested itself in violence. The trains were not safe, however, for they did not have proper state protection, and the soldiers who did travel on-board often had their own communal allegiances. An article in an October 1947 issue of the *British Railway Gazette* noted that 3,000 passengers had been killed on a Muslim refugee train in Amritsar.[68]

[68] Marian Aguiar, "Partition and the Death Train", *Tracking Modernity: India's Railway and the Culture of Mobility*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 73-99.

The tracks of the Indian Railway that had previously charted a national space and the moving trains that had renewed a constituency of citizens across the interconnecting parts of the country by circulating civilians, troops, pilgrims, goods, and commodities thus turned into death trains in 1947. Like the trains of Nazi Germany transporting Jewish prisoners to Nazi concentration camps, the refugee trains of Partition transformed into symbolic targets of terror. They were usually marked as "Muslim trains" or "Hindu trains", becoming objects embodying the enemy. Muslims were the victims of rape, torture, and mass murder as the trains moved through Hindu-majority areas, and vice versa in Muslim-majority areas. Hence, after independence, train-related violence defined the new nation through terror in troubling ways.

Aguiar examines the politics of these refugee trains by turning to the motif of the "death train"[69] in Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*. Singh sets his novel in the fictional village of Mano Majra on the border of India and Pakistan in the summer of 1947, when millions were displaced to escape the gruesome communal violence. Singh represents Mano Majra as a pastoral idyll, until relations between Muslims and Sikhs break down as India moves towards Partition. The passing trains in Mano Majra, Aguiar notes, "foster the collective identity"[70] and represent harmony between the different classes and religions in the village. She discusses how in Singh's novel the character of the train first appears as a clock—the sound of the morning train begins the mullah's call to prayer, prompting the Hindu priest to commence his ablutions. Even the local thieves design their nightly raids in accordance with the timetable of the train. The passing trains impose a concordant temporality on the village, a measured time structuring the social life of Mano Majra. Railway time thus gives rise to a railway consciousness that becomes deeply entrenched in daily local life.

[69] Aguiar, "Death Train," 90.
[70] Ibid., 87.

The train in Singh's novel subsequently transforms into a hybridised human-machine, a "communally coded vehicle"[71] that becomes merged with the identity of its commuters. Singh describes the train arriving from Lahore to enter India as follows: "From the roof, legs dangled down the sides onto the doors and windows. The doors and windows were jammed with heads and arms".[72] The train itself becomes the very bodies of the Muslims travelling to Pakistan or of Sikhs and Hindus fleeing to India. When Singh's train arrives at the border, it completes its transformation, morphing into a spectre: "There was something uneasy about it. It had a ghostly quality".[73] In Partition literature, then, it is not only the abject figure of the Muselmann body that functions as ghost, as it does in Holocaust literature, but also the refugee train that operates as a fraught, spectral human-machine. It was in and around the ghost train that the most haunting scenes of massacres, beatings, and rapes materialised during Partition. The imprints of horror that Partition trains left on the psyche of the nation have been so powerful that the image of death trains that arrived across the border filled with hacked up bodies haunts any contemporary South Asian representation of the train. Manto's jarring account of the inside-out body of Sirajuddin's wife thus motivates my reading of her corpse not only as a frenzied sectarian killing, but more specifically, as a victim of a 'special' train. Partition writers such as Manto and Singh show how Partition violence on the train undid the clocks of modernity, converging the collective gaze toward an imagined communal past.

Recent years have witnessed a revival of the 'special' train and its symbolic history of terror not only in India but across the globe. The twentieth century saw a significant rise in terrorist attacks occurring on the train—the 1993 Bombay attack, the 1995 Tokyo subway attack,

[71] Ibid., 90.
[72] Khushwant Singh, *Train to Pakistan* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1990), 44.
[73] Ibid., 78.

the 2004 Madrid train bombings, the 2008 Mumbai bombings, the 2009 Nevsky Express attack in Russia, and the 2017 London bombing. For India alone, present-day news headlines read as follows:

> "Terror on the Tracks: Worrisome Suspects in India's Train Bombings"[74]
>
> "3 Suspects Sought in Connection with India Train Blasts"[75]
>
> "Series of Bombs Explode on 7 Trains in India, Killing Scores"[76]
>
> "At Least 26 Die in India in Assam Train Bombing"[77]
>
> "Bomb on Train Kills Dozens in India: Police Blame Separatists for Attack in Strife-Torn Eastern State"[78]

Thus the train, which has traditionally taken on the role of a cultural metaphor for modernity, mobility, and permeation in the postcolonial state, has turned into a modern symbol of fear. Aguiar deftly captures this troubling double-consciousness of the railway in these words:

> Railways were the preeminent image of progress because they proffered a means to achieve mobility. They brought nations together, even helped them into being, by facilitating the circulation of people and goods that tied together those imagined communities. Yet from their very origins in Europe, the railways also represented destruction as they tore holes through cities and transformed the countryside in environmentally and socially deleterious ways. In the twentieth century, the European railway became a way to reinforce a fascist nationalism and

[74] Sudip Mazumdar, Zahid Hussain, and Ron Moreau, "Terror on the Tracks: Worrisome Suspects in India's Train Bombings" in *Newsweek* 148, No. 4 (2006): 33.
[75] Somini Sengupta, *New York Times*, July 14, 2006.
[76] Saritha Rai and Somini Sengupta, *New York Times*, July 14, 2006.
[77] *New York Times*, December 31, 1996.
[78] *The Washington Post*, December 31, 1996.

to enable mass deportations. In this way, the railway represented the deep ambivalences within modernity.[79]

It is this entire arc of tradition, modernity, and ambivalence of railway trains that Manto captures so powerfully in his five opening words: "the special train from Amritsar". The disemboweled body of Sirajuddin's wife and Sakina's mother, lying motionless on a silent train with her entrails spilling out, embodies this contemporary emblem of terror and its legacy of violence.

In "Open It!" the reader thus steps into a world of female suffering inscribed onto the image of the 'special' train. After he wakes at the refugee camp, Sirajuddin remembers witnessing the horrific killing of his wife on the refugee train from Amritsar, and fleeing with his teenage daughter. His flashbacks are critical in piecing together the layers of Manto's story, but in his English translation of "Open It!", M. Asaduddin withholds certain pivotal details of Sirajuddin's analepses. This is unusual because the distinguished scholar and translator has himself taken issue with Khalid Hasan's omissions in translations of Manto's work.[80] One particularly damaging elimination in Asaduddin's translation is that of Sirajuddin's dying wife's last words that Sirajuddin recalls during one of his earlier flashbacks in the story. In the Urdu original, Sirajuddin relives his wife's dying moments:

"اس نے سرآج الدین کی آنکھوں کے سامنے دم توڑا تھا، لیکن سکینہ کہاں تھی، جس کے متعلق اس کی ماں نے مرتے ہوئے کہا تھا۔ "مجھےچھوڑو اور سکینہ کو لےکر جلدی یہاں سے بھاگ جاؤ۔"[81]

("Uss ne Sirajuddin ki aankhon ke saamne dum torda tha, lekin Sakina kahan thi, jis ke mutaaliq uss ki ma ne marte hue kaha tha, 'mujhe choro aur Sakina ko le kar jaldi yahan se bhaag jao.'")

This translates as, "She breathed her last in front of Sirajuddin's eyes, but where was Sakina, for

[79] Aguiar, *Tracking Modernity*, 164.
[80] M. Asaduddin, "Manto Flattened: An Assessment of Khalid Hasan's Translations", *The Annual of Urdu Studies* 11 (1996): 129-139.
[81] Manto, *Manto Kahaniyan*, 12.

whom her mother had said as she died, 'Leave me, take Sakina and run, quickly'" (translation mine). That Asaduddin disregards the only words we hear from Sirajuddin's wife throughout the narrative opens up a schism in the translation. While the exclusion initially seems benign, it tempers the textual angst about Sakina that Manto so painstakingly constructs in the story. From the story's very outset, it is wrought with anxiety about Sakina's whereabouts. "Where was Sakina?" is the question at the heart of this story. Her mother's dying words heighten the textual preoccupation with Sakina and prefigure the macabre fate that is to befall her.

Following Sirajuddin's erratic stream of consciousness, the reader learns that after six days of searching the camp in increasing alarm looking for Sakina, Sirajuddin approaches a group of eight camp volunteers and gives them his daughter's description: "She's fair and very beautiful like her mother, not me. She's about fourteen,[82] has dark hair, and a big mole on her right cheek. She's my only daughter. Please try to find her, god will bless you."[83] These lines reveal yet another omission by Asaduddin: he eliminates the description of Sakina's eyes. "آنکھیں بڑی بڑی"[84] ("aankhein bari bari"), reports Sirajuddin in the original story. She has "big eyes". It is curious that Asaduddin strips Sakina's feminine figure of her "big eyes". In the translated story, then, both Sakina's mother and Sakina are rewritten by the translator, collapsing into caricatures—Sakina's mother materialises as a figure without a voice, and Sakina without her "big eyes". The figure of the woman, thus, emerges as a kind of erasure—a muted head, a blinded face. The rewritten feminine figure and its disfigured head—stripped and bared of its face—evoke the infinite complexity associated with what the translator wants to show and what he means to hide.

[82] This seems to be a modification on Asaduddin's part, since the Urdu original clearly specifies Sakina's age to be "around seventeen years".
[83] Manto, "Open It!", 201.
[84] Manto, *Manto Kahaniyan*, 13.

The appropriated head of the woman is at the heart of Julia Kristeva's study of the face as sacred object in *The Severed Head*,[85] where she meditates on the human head as symbol, metaphor, religious artifact, and physical fact. Turning a critical eye to the worship of the female skull in archaic periods, Kristeva engages with early female representations as faceless and headless, defining them as "flat discs void of features, faces of nothing […] another version of decapitation?"[86] Kristeva's analysis of the disfigured head leans on Dante's *Inferno* and his decapitation victims in the eighth circle of Hell: "Sowers of discord and strife find themselves there, arms, legs, noses amputated, and, filled with horror: 'I saw it there; I seem to see it still— | a body without a head, that moved along | like all the others in that spew and spill".[87] If we consider the disfigured head of the woman as another version of decapitation, as Kristeva does, then Sakina's mother and Sakina both transmogrify into decapitated bodies in the translated story. Like the arms, legs, and noses of the amputated victims in Dante, Sakina's "big eyes" and her mother's vocal organs along with her eructed entrails become emblems of social and historical division, transforming the female figures into divided and unreconciled (non)speaking beings.

While Asaduddin's translation is the most striking of all English versions of "Open It" to date, by no means is it the only translation that takes liberties with Manto's original narrative. In a brilliant comparative study of Manto and Moroccan author Tahar Ben Jelloun, Dominic Rainsford examines two other translations of "Open It" by Khalid Hasan and Muhammad Umar Memon.[88] Rainsford dissects the two translations admirably, comparing them to the original,

[85] Julia Kristeva, *The Severed Head: Capital Visions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).
[86] Ibid., 18.
[87] Ibid., 104.
[88] Dominic Rainsford, "Literature, Catastrophe, and Numbers: Saadat Hasan Manto and Tahar Ben Jelloun", *The Comparatist* 41 (October 2017): 5-18.

arguing that it is the "traumatized text" itself that compels both translators to interfere with Manto's narration: "These differences do not reflect a lack of competence on the part of either translator, nor merely the ambiguity of the specific words that Manto uses, but rather some of the extremely difficult ethical issues that the story leads us into".[89] Rainsford's analysis begins with Hasan's translation of Manto's "کھول دو" ("Khol Do") as "The Return". Hasan translates the opening line of the story (see p. 21) as follows: "The special train left Amritsar at two in the afternoon, arriving at Mughalpura, Lahore, eight hours later. Many had been killed on the way, a lot more injured and countless lost".[90] In Memon's translation, however, the story begins differently: "The special train left Amritsar at two in the afternoon, taking eight hours to reach Mughalpura. Quite a few passengers were killed along the way, several received injuries, and some just wandered off to God knows where".[91] Contemplating the differences between the two translations, Rainsford questions whether "many" is a better choice or "quite a few". He also asks why Hasan translates Manto's "کچھ" ("kuchh") as "many" while Memon chooses "countless" in his newer translation. As Rainsford points out, "Manto's original, '*kuch idhar udhar bhatak gae*' (taken word for word: 'some hither [and] thither wandering went'), does not include anything that literally corresponds to 'countless'. Nor does it refer in any way to 'God'".[92] At the heart of Rainsford's argument about the differences between the two translations is the matter of determinacy. In both versions, the translators grapple with the opening lines of the story, which concern the fates of indefinite quantities of people. The indeterminacy of numbers in both translations illustrate the difficulty of assessing how, in the

[89] Rainsford, "Literature, Catastrophe, and Numbers," 9.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Ibid.
[92] Ibid., 9-10.

real events of Partition that inspired Manto's story, nobody could determine how many people had disappeared, who they were, and where they had gone.

For Rainsford, the divergences between the translations and their varying representations of the numbers involved in Sakina's rescue indicate the inability of the body to grasp the truth of Partition and the incomprehensible horror it ushered in. In Hasan's version, there are eight young men searching for Sakina (as in the original), but Sirajuddin meets them after "a few days", and there is no indication of how long they spend rescuing the "many" others, who are unable to find Sakina.[93] In Memon's translation, on the other hand, Rainsford notes that there is ceremonious adherence to Manto's original in the measurements dealing with time and numbers of people. Sirajuddin searches the camp for "three full hours" and six days later, eight young men agree to go to Amritsar to find Sakina. They rescue "several" others but fail to find Sakina during ten days of searching.[94] This takes the reader to a point seventeen days after the train massacre. As Rainsford notes, "For some readers—desperate for significance—this could echo Sakina's age, which is 'about seventeen' (*Bitter Fruit* 40; *My Name* 217), creating a momentary, perhaps subliminal (and trivial and false) sense of order, with numbers that somehow, mysteriously, add up".[95] In both translations, there is a conflict of indeterminacy regarding the scale of horror of the events of 1947. Both translations attempt a reading of numbers and quantities in "Open It!", hoping for coherence, but Manto's tale eludes logic. We are left only with a memory of that time, a memory that can merely be rendered as echoes and fragments; mouths, intestines, tongues, eyes, oesophaguses, and cavities remembering the body from which they have been severed.

[93] Rainsford, "Literature, Catastrophe, and Numbers," 10.
[94] Ibid.
[95] Ibid.

Let us return to Asaduddin's translation of Manto's "traumatized text" through Rainsford's lens, approaching the reimagined figures of Sakina's mother and Sakina as the traces of historic suffering. After Sirajuddin provides the description of his daughter, the eight volunteers leave for Amritsar where they begin their search for Sakina. After around seventeen days of scouring the landscape, they find her by the roadside. The camp volunteers ask her if her name is Sakina. The girl doesn't answer. When the young men reassure her that they only mean to help her, she tells them that she is Sakina, Sirajuddin's daughter. "They were kind to her. They fed her, gave her milk to drink and helped her up on to the lorry",[96] we are told. One of them even takes off his jacket and gives it to Sakina when he notices that she feels awkward without her dupatta. This is the same dupatta that Sirajuddin is left with in his hands when Sakina is separated from him during the train attack earlier in the narrative. As the eight boys comfort Sakina, it seems as though all will be well for Sirajuddin and his daughter. But here, the narrative shifts to Sirajuddin at the refugee camp, evidently at a later time. "One day" ("*ek roz*"), he sees the eight volunteers at the camp and rushes to ask them if they've found his Sakina. "Oh, we'll find her, we'll find her" ("*Mil jaye gi, mil jaye gi*"), they say, feigning sympathy. Later the same day, Sakina's body arrives at the camp hospital on a stretcher carried by four men. When Sirajuddin enquires about the body, he is told that she was found "unconscious near the railway lines".[97] He waits outside for a while as the stretcher is taken inside the hospital, reluctant to follow on behind. Eventually he goes inside, where the stretcher is lying in a "solitary room".[98] Sirajuddin approaches the body slowly, and someone switches on the light. When Sirajuddin recognises the familiar mole on the pale face, he screams out his daughter's name. Upon the

[96] Manto, "Open It!", 202.
[97] Manto, 203.
[98] Ibid.

doctor's enquiry, Sirajuddin chokes out that he is the girl's father. Pointing to the window, the doctor asks Sirajuddin to "open it".[99] The corpse reaches for the drawstring of her shalwar. At the sight of movement in the body, Sirajuddin shouts with delight, "میری بیٹی زندہ ہے!" ("meri beti zinda hai"), "My daughter is alive!"

In this passage, Manto purposely uses the words "لاش" ("laash") or "corpse", "مردہ جسم" ("murdah jism") or "dead body", and "بے جان" ("bejaan") or "lifeless" to insinuate that Sakina has already died. Clinically, the corpse is indeed alive, but the reader's worst fears are realised in this moment of grotesque irony as Sirajuddin fails to understand that he beholds a traumatised figure, delighting in the knowledge that there is still life in his daughter. The mechanical motion of Sakina's hands as they surrender her body to the male voice commanding "Open it" unmistakably gestures towards Sakina's (gang) rape by her rescuers, and possibly many others. Contrary to popular fictive and testimonial literature of Partition, where the men of each side condemn the other as rapists even while they rape the other's women in reprisal, here Manto constructs the rescuer as rapist. In so doing, he compels his readers to consider rape not as an act of reprisal, but rather the possibility of its alternative—an internal phenomenon: that is, the woman raped by her sentry during a state of undeclared civil war. Manto's dark narrative of internal rape exposes an adverse reality of Partition violence previously unexplored in Partition literature, likely because of the unspeakable nature of the practice. That the possibility exists for turning against their own women is a far greater shame for both Muslims and Hindus than the very practice of rape to which they turn. "Open It" thus offers a stringent critique of the monopoly of male dominance and authority during Partition, and addresses questions around woman, the body, and sexuality as they emerged in a state of exception. Partition was—as wars

[99] Ibid.

everywhere tend to be—also a gender war, and the politics of war implied a politics of gender that scarred literary and cultural production very deeply. In "Open It", Manto brings to life the real suffering of a woman whose female body is effectively a parallel battleground, plagued by the sadism of male power and the patriarchal straitjacket imposed on her by South Asian society and culture in the early twentieth century.

Fragmentation in "Black Margins"

Manto's "سیاہ ہاشیے" ("Siyah Hashiye") or "Black Margins" is a collection of thirty-four portraitures presented in a kind of montage, canvassing in some of the author's most inventive and evocative images the eerie figures that enact the pathology of Partition violence. These narrative depictions eschew the orthodox traces of Partition writing in favour of an impassive, affectless timbre, wresting the dehumanised objectivity of modernist writing to mordant ends. Manto's literary apparatus in this collection renders a world shrugging off the rigidity of form. The author conjoins seemingly unrelated characters in the sudden literal ruptures and eruptions of "Black Margins" in order to conjure up the spectre of Partition as fundamentally broken and fractured—more precisely, the psychological and physical legacies of its unprecedented violence, so frequently invoked through severed figures and fragmented limbs.

"Black Margins" was Manto's first creative brainchild after his move from Bombay to Pakistan. When the volume was published in October 1948, it was scathingly condemned by critics and readers, and Manto was accused of sensationalising a tragedy. For example, Ahmed Nadim Qasmi, the secretary general of the APPWA,[100] reacted as follows: "I regretfully say that while reading *Siyah Hashiye* I felt as if dead bodies were scattered over a large field and the

[100] All Pakistan Progressive Writers Association, which was a continuation of All India Progressive Writers Association (AIPWA) following the establishment of Pakistan.

short story writer was stealing money and cigarettes from their pockets."[101] Manto responded by saying:

> I tried to retrieve from this man-made sea of blood, pearls of a rare hue, by writing about the single-minded dedication with which men killed men, about the remorse felt by some of them, about the tears shed by murderers who could not understand why they still had some human feelings left. All this and more, I put in the book, *Siyah Hashiye*. (Qtd. in Misri, 33) [102]

Manto's analogy of pearls in a sea of blood offers the suggestion that the stories are in some way intricately bound up with issues of fragments, splinters, and fluids. As irritants, parasites, dirt, and grime invade the body of the mollusc through its mouth and make their way toward its internal organs, the animal releases defensive bodily fluids to protect its insides, sealing the intruding bodies with its bodily secretions until—finally—these remnants and fluids coalesce, transmuting into a pearl. An exploration of Manto's characters in "Black Margins", and especially their acts of severing and dismemberment, unveils Manto's construction of the textual, semantic, and psychological "pearls" occasioned by similar corporeal anguish. "Black Margins" is Manto's deliberate reversal of the experience of suffering, culminating in a kind of cathartic elaboration through nuanced observation of mass violence. Unlike other Partition writers and Progressives who celebrate the horrors of Partition as the coming of independence, Manto works with words and narration to light up the dark caves of the human psyche amid a high tide of

[101] See "Hamari Tehreek, Anjuman Taraqi Pasand Musanafeen Lahore Ke Hafta War Ijlas" ("Our Movement, the Weekly Meeting of the Progressive Writers Association Lahore") in Urdu magazine *Naqush* 5 (February 1949): 179-85.
[102] Deepti Misri, *Beyond Partition: Gender, Violence and Representation in Postcolonial India* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2014).

carnage. He spares neither the murderer nor the thief, relating with a semblance of sangfroid the arbitrary adventures of blades severing heads, necks, and figures.

In these portraitures—some as long as three pages, others as short as three sentences—Manto imagines and writes the killer, the pilferer, and the deviant as his strange protagonists. The form and style of these narrations are particularly remarkable in their treatment of language. The motif of the fragment is the crux of Manto's artistic vision in "Black Margins" not only in his literary and aesthetic aims but also in his visual rhetoric of fragmentation, mutilation, and destruction across the stories. The omnipresence of the fragment in Manto's work—in a variety of forms and with a wide range of possible significance—remains a powerful icon of Partition imagery and of postwar ideology in general. This enactment of dismemberment and fragmentation in Manto's oeuvre is also remarkably reminiscent of Spanish and Italian avant-garde literature, and the Surrealist art that was developing in the 1920s and 1930s. Federico García Lorca and Luis Buñuel's Surrealist writings focusing on the centrality of the dismembered body, and Salvador Dalí's *Apparatus and Hand* are particularly telling examples of the European avant-garde's possible influence across Manto's corpus. While these artists favour solid geometries and objective precision, however, Manto lays claim to more unruly forms of representation.

The insistent presence of bodies in Manto's texts, and especially of bodies in pieces, is quite extraordinary. Manto's fascination with fragmented bodies evokes this world in all its partialness. His narratives linger on and promote the fragment rather than pursuing the whole. Contrary to most Partition writers' overarching desire to circumscribe and control the chaos of Partition, Manto's texts counter popular Partition literature's structured and structuring coherence by a seeming delight for reproducing reality in its pieces, where even the human body

succumbs to morselisation. With a kind of synechdochic fury, the body is captured and contemplated through its disfigured limbs, its ashen eyes, its lost meshes of vocal cords. Manto's fragments—Bishan Singh's deformed legs, Sirajuddin's vacant eyes, his wife's bloodied intestines, Sakina's mechanical hands—betray a certain anguished gesture towards a poetics of fragmentation, luring protagonists and unsettling readers. Manto consigns the fragmented body to the realm of the object, shattering its coherence, casting its pieces on a tabletop like meat on a butcher's counter. At the same time, however, these organs are pregnant with life, as if they want to tell us something but are unable to do so. The boundaries of selfhood and the body are breached and extended, which Deleuze and Guattari claim is the function of the "body without organs".[103] This concept is best understood as a dehierarchisation of the body, or a deterritorialisation of the way in which the body is organised. In other words, Manto's fragments serve as a metaphor for the modern philosophical project: a perennial upsetting of established conventions, a pulling down of set modes of operating and thinking, a reassociation and overturning of accepted hierarchies and norms.

In "Black Margins" Manto's minimal, intensive use of language also leads us to what Deleuze and Guattari define as the minor style.[104] "Black Margins", like all of Manto's Partition prose, is written in the third person, insinuating a tension between the narrator and the various protagonists. There is no rhetorical flourish, the sentences are short and direct, the vocabulary is limited to dispassionate words, and there is little plot complexity. Discussing minimalism in Samuel Beckett's plays, Deleuze and Guattari call his reduction of plot a "willed poverty", an

[103] Deleuze, Gilles and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).
[104] Deleuze, Gilles and Felix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnestota Press, 1986).

under-development of language that privileges intensity over meaning.[105] Masud and Manto both prefer this impoverishment of language in their writings, designing their own "desert"[106] of the literary absurd. When I first encountered the Urdu original of "سیاہ حاشیے", I was struck by the disquieting experience of reading it. The collection reads like an outpouring of interruptions, the stories emerging abruptly and aborting rapidly, the narrative voice seizing, jerking, convulsing. The unusual narrative voice of "Black Margins" seems to be just as much a meditation on sounds as it is on words. Its series of expulsions forms almost an organised stutter, which catches its breath in a rhapsody of hiccups before taking the reader on a disordered peregrination around Manto's gallery of moribunds.

Reading "Black Margins" as the fragmentary soundscape produced by a narrative voice articulating the stories in a cacophony of hiccups takes us back to Connor and his mesmerising study of the voice's noisings.[107] In his discussion of the sob, Connor examines the relationship of sobbing to hiccupping, tracing the roots of "sob" in Latinate languages:

> the word for sob derives from Latin *singultus*. French has *sanglot*, into which some suggestion of the blood seems to have leaked, while Italian stays closer to Latin, with *singhiozzo*, like Spanish with *sollozo*. *Singultus* survives in English only as a posh technical term for a hiccup or retch […] Sobbing has at times been closely associated with hiccup and the words for it, for example the sadly obsolete verb *yex*, which is defined in Blount's 1661 *Glossographia* as "that we do, when we have the Hicket, or Hick up; some take it, to sob or sigh."[108]

[105] Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka*, 19.
[106] Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka*, 18-19.
[107] Connor, *Beyond Words*, 11.
[108] Ibid., 53.

"Black Margins" can thus be read as an explosion of grief: a mélange of sobs, sighs, and screams. These noisings and noisances of the voice materialise in the unorthodox form and style of Manto's prose, revealing the author's elegant sensibility to the nauseating grotesqueness of Partition violence. Nayanika Mookherjee privileges the fragmented form in her illuminating work on the birangonas. Speaking about the Bengali women who were raped during the 1971 Bangladesh war, Mookherjee states: "A linear, coherent 'narrative' of the traumatic memory of sexual violence (as commonly found in accounts of rape) would make language an end in itself. In contrast, the women's process of telling and showing involves fragmented imagery, snippets of talk, and bodily sensations, all of which highlight the inexpressibility of violence.[109] In "Black Margins", Manto's empathy emerges in the sophistication of his fragmentary form and style, in the horror that lurks in the marginalia of his stories, and in the meaningful aspects of the narrative voice's retching, coughing, hiccupping stutters.

Paying heed to Kamran Asdar Ali's marvelous insights on Manto, I consider these characters as "queer subjects".[110] Taking his cue from Judith Halberstam's construction of "queer time" and "queer space",[111] Ali interprets Manto as a queer subject, both for his work as a rumination on marginal and nonnormative figures, and for his personal way of living.[112] In his instructive study on Manto, Ali defines queer subjects as:

> those who live outside what Judith Halberstam would call "reproductive time" or family time and also at the edges of the logics of capital accumulation. Hence ravers, club kids, the homeless, sex workers, the unemployed, drug dealers, and

[109] Mookherjee, *The Spectral Wound*, 109.
[110] I am indebted to Kamran Asdar Ali for introducing me to Judith Halberstam's important work on queer theory. For Ali's analysis of Manto as a queer subject, see his article "Progressives and 'Perverts'" in *Social Text* 29 (Fall 2011): 1-29.
[111] See Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time & Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York UP, 2005).
[112] Ali, "Progressives and 'Perverts'", 4.

> others become "queer subjects" as they may work when others sleep and also inhabit spaces that others have abandoned.[113]

I concur with Ali's characterisation of Manto as a queer subject, and I extend his concept of the queer subject towards a critical reading of the characters in Manto's corpus, particularly the fragments presented in "Black Margins". In Manto's work we repeatedly come across queer figures—the marginal and the displaced—whose behaviour adheres to a "nonnormative logics and organisations of community, sexual identity, embodiment, and activity in space and time".[114] These are the figures whose voices have typically been obscured by South Asian writers and society alike: the lunatic, the refugee, the pimp, the cab driver, the prostitute, the lover, the rapist, the thief, and the addict. While Ali rightly points out that Manto's work preceded the discourse on queer theory, he maintains that transporting queer theory across historical and geographical boundaries to interpret Manto's stories allows for articulating and understanding the experience of those figures who "may not be congealed into a dominant argument or a master narrative".[115] In order to further progress Ali's reading of Manto as a queer subject, a critical analysis of "Black Margins" is of urgent import. For the purposes of my project, I offer here a brief discussion of a few carefully selected narratives out of the thirty-four in Manto's original.

The vignette "Humility"[116] takes a paradigmatic moment in a railway journey—an official welcome of passengers travelling to a new place—and turns it into a nightmare of civic ceremony. The narrative puts us back inside the Partition death train, where the travellers witness an assassination of the passengers belonging to the "other religion".[117] Following the massacre,

---

[113] Ali, "Progressives and 'Perverts'", 5.
[114] Halberstam, *In a Queer Time & Place*, 6.
[115] Ali, "Progressives and 'Perverts'", 5.
[116] Manto, *Black Margins*, 186. See appendix for full text.
[117] Ibid.

the assassin makes a pleasant speech to the witnesses while his fellow assassins treat the survivors of the assassination to *mithai*:[118] "Bhaiyon aur Behnon! We found out about this train's arrival rather late. That's why, even though we wanted to, we weren't able to treat you in a more befitting manner."[119] The assassin's pleasantries toward a crowd that has just witnessed a massacre implicates the survivors in the brutality against the unknown community. Furthermore, the assassin's apology that his hospitality fell short of what he had wished makes the violence even more absurd. Here, Manto distorts the image of the railway as a state bureaucratic space and rewrites the notion of the train as a safe, secular space of modernity that was central to the promise of national independence in 1947. In Manto's texts, however, the character of this modernity emerges as unstable and flawed, eroding the ideal of the secular nation and breaking down the civil dreams of modernity.

The abrupt narrative "Jelly"[120] redirects our attention from the image of an assassination to that of the assassinated. It is a poignant yet chilling exploration of a child's gaze, and of his partaking in pleasure—a pleasure that seems to attest to a certain cannibalistic fixation. This micronarrative also reveals Manto's more personal aetiology of the human fragment and the politics of the act of looking. Nine sentences constitute the unnerving text of "Jelly":

> At six in the morning the vendor who sold ice on a pushcart was stabbed to death near the petrol pump. His corpse lay on the road till seven. Drops of water from the melting ice trickled down on it. At quarter past seven, the police hauled the corpse away. The ice and blood remained on the road. A tanga passed by. The child noticed the patch of fresh, congealed blood glistening on the road. His

[118] See note 43 in this chapter, 34.
[119] Manto, *Black Margins*, 186. "Bhaiyon" translates into "brothers," and "Behnon" into "sisters." In conventional Urdu idiom, the expression "Bhaiyon aur Behnon" translates as "Ladies and gentlemen."
[120] Manto, *Black Margins*, 187.

mouth began to water. He tugged at his mother's sleeve and pointed at it, "Look Mummy, jelly!"[121]

What M. Asaduddin translates here as a "patch of blood" doesn't quite reveal the palpable materiality of the fragment that the child gazes at with fetishistic curiosity. Manto describes the child's experience as follows:

"بچے نے سڑک پر جیتے جیتے خون کے جمے ہوئے چمکیلے لوتھڑے کی طرف دیکھا۔ اس کی منہ میں پانی بھر آیا۔"

("Bachche ne sardak per jeetay jeetay khoon ke jamay huay chamkeelay lothrday ki taraf dekha. Uss ke moun mein pani bhar aya.")

Nowhere is there a more complex blurring of body with object than in these spectacular lines charged with textual energy. I've taken the liberty of translating these lines myself, paying particular attention to Manto's evocation of the fragment, which is key to my close textual analysis: "The child gazed at the living, effulgent lump of congealed blood on the road, his mouth watering." This "lump" is in point of fact completely inanimate, but the reader is invited to forget this when it becomes the object of the child's gaze—the child's vision shapes the form the lump takes in the tangible world. This lump is thus the product of a gaze that both captures its visible contours and recreates them anew. That Manto writes this "lump" as something "living", that he transforms it into a lifelikeness that is utterly perfect, that the child feels his mouth watering at the sight of this sanguinary lump serves to highlight its material aspect in a form that is both hopeful and menacing. It is a fragment both living and not, both wakeful and somnambulent, both body and object.

In this glimmering object of the child's desire, we encounter Manto's deliberate construction of the human fragment, which takes on a distinctly material weight in the narrative.

[121] Ibid.

It becomes a concrete, literal marker that most occupies the protagonist's gaze, and that we as readers most remember. In addition, the narrator's act of looking further contributes to the fragment's constitution, often negotiating—and subsequently determining—whether the fragment is a thing to be feared, coveted, or destroyed. In this narrative, the fragment is thus effected in language—in narrative strategy and descriptive technique—and it is concurrently the expression of the gaze of a particular narrator, whose vision translates the object seen in a particular way. Strangely, the child's encounter here ("Look Mummy, jelly!") prefigures Frantz Fanon's experience of being discovered as—and in the process becoming—a black man in France for the first time: "Look, a Negro! Look, a Negro! […] Mama, see the Negro!"[122] For Fanon, to be hailed by a white French infant as a "negro" is a physiological experience: "Then, assailed at various points, the corporeal schema crumbled, its place taken by a racial epidermal schema […] I moved toward the other . . . and the evanescent other, hostile but not opaque, transparent, not there, disappeared. Nausea . . .". In becoming the object of the white gaze, Fanon confronts his own physiological self, his body given back to him "sprawled out, distorted, recolored".[123] The perspective is reversed in Manto's writing as the child protagonist gazes at the "sprawled out" residue of a fresh corpse.

As the child constructs a view of this fragment for himself, in the moment that he exclaims, "Look Mummy, jelly!" we and the narrator are made privy to his act of viewing. All these visions, each of these separate gazes, combine to construct a single gaze, one that pervades and hovers over the lump of ice and blood. In fact, it is this collective gaze—issuing from all sides and surrounding the hideous clot—that imbues it with life. Warmed to life with the child's own act of looking, the object emerges as a "living" partial body incarnated in the text. The very

[122] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (London: Pluto Press, 2008).
[123] Ibid., 84.

face of the partialised body that the child's gaze helps produce, thus becomes the endpoint of Manto's discursive enterprise—a morsel that the gaze appropriates and devours. Manto's story delights in taking the human body apart, and morselisation is entirely bound up with investing meaning in the part. Hence the narrative's abortive conclusion.

It is this utterly tangible fragment that we most remember from Manto's tale. After reading "Jelly" we recall less the affectless murder of the ice peddler than the frightful, glimmering lump that beckons to Manto's child protagonist. This persistent elevation of the part and the partialised in Manto's work seems also to reflect a quest for unity in a transitional South Asia, whose wholeness and natural harmony has been lost to view. As if to remedy this, Manto accumulates the infinitesimal residual fragments of bodies torn apart to carefully invest them with meaning and mould them into cohesive wholes. The state of exception from which Manto writes demands more insurgent answers, more immediate identifications. He makes of these parts the independent wholes he so desperately needs as his narrators and protagonists become their own species of collectors. The parts that captivate them function to redefine the incomplete as complete, and the remnants of bodies become the detached, movable objects that we recognise as whole. The fragment is also, however, always a whole for something smaller, a whole always a part in a larger system. On the one hand it raises the spectre of an infinite process of dismemberment and disfiguration; on the other, it threatens the destruction of the very possibility of the fragment. In either case its narrators and protagonists suture for themselves a world that is invulnerable, a world in which partial bodies begin to live, to function as though ontologically complete, in an imagined coherence that reverberates by the force of the narrator's and protagonist's own reflecting.

Closer consideration reveals a more nuanced significance of the living fragment, most palpably in the partialised female body. Partition narratives are replete with images of wounded, tortured, fragmented female figures, such as "men copulating with wailing children"[124] in Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India* and Kusum's body with its womb ripped out, "each limb severed at the joint […], sliced into six parts, then arranged to look as if she were whole again"[125] in Shauna Singh Baldwin's *What the Body Remembers*. These narratives represent the nauseating distortion and dismembering of the female figure that Menon and Bhasin catalogue and highlight in their collection of Partition testimonies:

> […] stripping; parading naked; mutilating and disfiguring; tattooing or branding their breasts and genitalia with triumphal slogans like "Pakistan, *Zindabad*!" or "Hindustan, *Zindabad*!"[126]; amputating breasts; knifing open the womb; raping, of course; killing foetuses.[127]

It is this hair-raising methodology of violence that women were subjected to, and the linguistic breakdown it prompted, that Manto's writings bring to the fore. Two extreme limits of literature—meaningless chatter and profound silence—converge and synchronize in his writing, narrators and protagonists losing their capacity to signify. Manto represents this dismantling of signification as a logic of violence in several stories, such as "Cold Meat" and "Open It", but also in his less canonical works, including two micronarratives from "Black Margins" and his uncanny tale "Pompoms", which I will discuss over the following pages.

---

[124] Bapsi Sidhwa, *Cracking India* (Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 1991), 218-219. The novel was previously published as *Ice Candy Man*.
[125] Shauna Singh Baldwin, *What the Body Remembers* (New York: Anchor Books, 1999), 446.
[126] "Long live Pakistan!" and "Long live Hindustan!"
[127] See Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin's *Borders and Boundaries*.

The capsule stories "A Raw Deal" ("گھاٹے کا سودا" or "Ghatay ka Sauda") and "Out of Consideration" ("رعایت" or "Riayat") presage the violence against the female body that Manto brings to a frightful apotheosis seven years later in his final and darkest short story, "Pompoms". With these literary splinters, Manto begins his grisly work of separating from Partition ruins the fragments of women's lives. In both texts, Manto puts pressure on the monstrous predicament of female bodies during and after Partition, leading to a breaking open of the present and causing cracks to open in the surface of the known. In both stories, Manto opens up the "hiatuses, holes, or tears" that Deleuze and Guattari argue "suddenly widen in such a way as to receive something from the outside or from elsewhere".[128] Indeed, Manto's stories lead readers to a panoply within these previously unmapped fault lines: the untold stories of public strippings, sexual assaults, mutilations, and dismemberment. The more forcefully his texts insist on horrors against the female body, the more insistently they discover multiplicity, difference, and the stirring of the new.

"A Raw Deal"[129] is a text which intensifies the unease set in motion by Manto in "Open It". The story begins with two friends procuring a girl for forty-two rupees. They rape her during the night, and the next morning one of the friends enquires about her name. When the girl reveals her name, it antagonizes the man: "But we were told you're from the other religion." The girl replies that they'd been lied to. When he hears this, the man hastens to his friend and proclaims: "That bastard double crossed us. He palmed off one of our own girls! Come on, let's take her back."[130] As with "Open It!", the story is overwrought with disquiet about the female body and

[128] Gilles Deleuze, "The Exhausted", in *Essays Critical and Clinical*, translated by Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco (London: Verso, 1998).
[129] This story has been translated as "Losing Proposition" by Khalid Hasan in his famous collection *Mottled Dawn: Fifty Partition Sketches And Stories.*
[130] Manto, *Black Margins*, 185.

identity. The girl is methodically "selected" from a lineup of ten or twenty others,[131] traded, then taken by two men under the assumption that she belongs to the "other" religion. After "spending the night" with her—which phrase clearly implies her sexual assault by the two men—one of them asks her name. When he discovers that they've paid for and raped a girl who belongs to their own religious community, he despairingly communicates this to his friend and proposes that they "return" the girl. There is no remorse for the rape that has been committed; there is only displeasure that it has been perpetrated on the wrong bodyscape.

Through the male discontent in the story—a kind of warped reversal of Sakina's gang rape in "Open It!"—Manto traces a dominant strand of Partition 'rape myth' that springs from the rise of communal warfare. The Partition 'rape myth' employs the figure of the rapist as "saviour" and projects sexual aggression as an inter-communal encounter in order to legitimize the act of rape. This myth is overly preoccupied by the cultural effects of rape rather than the crime of rape itself, and pertains largely to the positioning of female bodies in the patriarchal discourse of honour. In the wake of Partition, stripping, raping/revenge-raping, mutilating, and dismembering of women were attempts by one religious community at enforcing male power and chivalrously "preserving" the women and honour of their own community. This Partition rape myth has shaped the ways in which gendered bodies have been produced and regulated, the ways in which sexual violence has been conceptualised, and the political projects to which rape has been harnessed. By rendering certain bodies the reproducible property of others, communal warfare during Partition created conditions authorising, vindicating, and valorising the rape and killing of women. In Manto's micronarratives we find the inseparable intertwining of Partition

[131] Ibid.

'rape myth' and rape as social fact. His attention to these Partition subtexts traces the mutation of national projects into communal and intra-communal ones.

Religious sanctity and communalism operated in terms grouped simultaneously around the reproductive female body. Their fantasies of honour depended on the portrayal of the female body as a boundary marker under attack by the threat of 'communal peril' offensives. The discourse of 'communal peril' functioned as a regulatory regime by which men of a particular religious community were cast as rapists and women of the other religious community were marked as fragile and threatened bearers of purity, dependent on male protection. Manto's writings remind us of the historical silences imposed on women, and of the (re)production of gendered bodies as the property of men. Attention to these silences in Manto's stories encourage us to rethink these historical iterations and creates the opportunity for more complex subtexts to emerge. His fragment "Out of Consideration"[132] allows one such distressing image of historical silence to surface. This is one of Manto's briefest sketches in *Black Margins* and is composed of the following dialogue: "'Don't kill my daughter in front of me.' 'All right, all right. Peel off her clothes and throw her in with the other girls!'"[133] Once again, we witness the appropriation of the female body as object on which the desire for nationalism could be projected and a memory for the future made.

Screams in "Pompoms"

Manto's "Pompoms", also translated by some as "Tassels", was first published as "Phundne" ("پھندنے") in Lahore in 1955. "Pompoms" is regarded by Manto's readers as his most innovative

[132] In *Partition: Sketches and Stories*, translated by Khalid Hasan (New Delhi: Penguin Books India (P) Ltd., 1991), 31.
[133] Ibid.

and disturbing narrative. Even though Manto wrote extensively and acutely about women in his writings, "Pompoms" is his only story that seems to be narrated by a woman. This alone makes the short story distinctive and important, setting it apart from Manto's other works. The stream-of-consciousness in "Pompoms" is an experience in the aesthetic of incoherence and hysteria, playing out a derangement of the senses unlike any other narrator in the history of the Urdu short story. The speaking woman as narrative focaliser in "Pompoms" entraps the reader with fear and madness, evoking a series of disjointed, frightful images: "her tasseled red silk drawstring […] was coiled around her neck […] the murderer had twisted it so hard that her eyeballs had popped out", "the wretched woman gave birth to a child on her bed…it was a large red tassel"; "She had very big eyes. If her throat had been strangled hard, they would have popped out of their sockets like the eyes of a slaughtered goat"; "From the graves that had not yet been dug, her unborn children were crying out for the milk that could have been theirs"; "In the quarters, the child dried up".[134] The narrative reads like a discordant soundscape—spurts of distorted speech and screams emanating from a surreal work of a Dali-like literary aesthetic. Like Masud's stammering child in "Sheesha Ghat" and Manto's mad Muselmann in "Toba Tek Singh", I approach the incoherent speaking woman in "Pompoms" as Manto's intellectual handling of the incomprehensibility of Partition reality.

A most peculiar and fascinating feature of Manto's style in "Pompoms" is the omnipotence of the narrative voice. While the story is written in the way of a maddened woman's erratic stream of consciousness, it is told in the third person, distancing the narrator, in a way, from her own voice. Through this narrative voice, Manto decentres the protagonist as subject in a way that she becomes the object of her own gaze. By effectuating a distance between

[134] Manto, "Tassels" in *Black Margins*, story translated by S. M. Mirza, 276-286.

the narrator and her narrative voice in such a manner, Manto provokes a particularly *unheimlich*[135]—or uncanny—voice of suffering: the narrator is both inside, outside, and beyond her story, relating her experience as the experience of another, or that of 'an Other'. Othering his narrator thus, Manto seeks an alternative way of communicating with his reader, the omnipotent narrative voice making the disorder and incoherent reality of the woman's body and memory even stranger. Furthermore, the narrative voice shifts and moves in and out of the text in a way that it is impossible to tell if we are being told the story of one woman, or several. The voice takes on a plurality, multiplying quickly into a cacophony of voices filling the reader's head—one woman stands in for many, one act of violence represents all. With his incoherent storyteller's unorthodox use of language and method of narration, Manto breaches the twilight zone of silence that defines the Partition experience of women in the dominant discourse of Partition. His narrative focaliser mourns the loss of self and the world in her incomprehensible stream-of-consciousness, the hysteria in her voice enacting a language of pain that rejects linguistic coherence and destroys apparent meanings to give way to a deeper meaning and an inexplicable, chaotic reality.

Manto's preference for incoherence in "Pompoms" seems to reflect his attitude precisely towards this chaotic reality—or surreality—of Partition. The narrative voice, which is constantly in a state of flux, blurs the distinction between the conscious and subconscious state in the structure and telling of the story. This blurring gives some insight into Manto's critical treatment

[135] See Sigmund Freud's *The Uncanny*, translated by David McLintock (London: Penguin Books, 2003). Although Freud's "uncanny" refers primarily to a psychological state experienced by actual patients, he argued that "the uncanny that we find in fiction—in creative writing, imaginative literature—actually deserves to be considered separately" (155). He identifies at least two sources of the uncanny. First, surmounted forms of thought, and second, repressed complexes. I focus here on the former, which Freud links to primitive belief: "Let us take the uncanny effects associated with the omnipotence of thoughts, instantaneous wish-fulfilment, secret harmful forces and the return of the dead" (154). My close reading of "Pompoms" is inspired by this philosophy of the uncanny and its particular alienating and familiarising effects achieved by Manto's narrator.

of the way women's bodies were subjected to psychosomatic violence during the Partition. With this narrative voice slipping in and out of a sometimes-wakeful, sometimes-unconscious state, Manto casts the "real" reality of Partition as opposed to a superficial, conscious reality. While the entire story is a hysterical recollection of convoluted metaphoric images, there are sudden glimpses of precise, meaningful events. For example, in the final pages of the story, the narrator sits naked in front of a mirror, staring at her bared body. She picks up a paintbrush and begins to paint pictures all over her skin. These pictures, rather than being mere designs on the surface of her body, are an outward expression of what lies hidden in the depths of her body:

> […] she took out all the paints, washed each brush, put them on one side and stood naked before the mirror. She started drawing figures on her bare body. This was her attempt *to lay bare her being*.
>
> She could only paint the front of her body. All day her naked body was her canvas—she stood before the mirror , without food or water, daubing different colors on her body, making crooked lines.[136]

The woman's painted body puts on display the unverbalised experience of her "being". Making visible that unspoken hysteria which has not always been tolerated or accepted, the narrator's painted body simultaneously communicates and obfuscates the morass of unthinkable thoughts and unbearable emotions beneath the surface of her skin.

In her important work *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary*, Veena Das reads the body of Manto's narrator-character in "Pompoms" as a "carnival of images"[137] and describes Manto's women as figures "in whom one could see the completion of

[136] Manto, *Black Margins*, "Tassels", 285. Emphasis added.
[137] Veena Das, "Language and Words" in *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary* (California: University of California Press, 2007), 55.

that project [of Partition] of making the nation visible by a surrealist juxtaposition of images".[138] Like the bodies of Sakina and her mother in "Open It!", the body of the narrator-character in "Pompoms" is a receptacle of pain, whereby pain must be contained, protected in its mutedness, absorbed in flesh, blood, and skin. Perhaps that is the reason that the three women in "Pompoms" keep screaming in the story when confronted by "loud"[139] abstract paintings in a place called Ajanta:

> As they [women] watched the paintings they were themselves transformed into pictures. There were colours all around—red, yellow, green, blue—all loud colours. They were silenced by the creator of those very colours. He had long hair and wore an overcoat in both winters and summers. He was good looking and always wore wooden sandals whether indoors or outdoors. After silencing the colours, he himself would start screaming—the three would quieten him. As he would quieten down, they would begin to scream.[140]

In the above lines, the writer engages with the body in pain by transforming its trauma into creative expression. Hence, the truth about what happened to the three women can only be inferred and transcended—it only speaks and has meaning—through projection onto the mute paintings. Manto's experimental story attempts to give voice to a silenced, submerged pain by writing those silences and evasions on canvas with "loud" colours. Owing to my interest in muteness and sound, I want to linger here on the word "loud". I therefore turn my attention to the original Urdu piece titled "پھندنے" ("Phundne").

[138] Das, *Life and Words*, 56.
[139] Manto, "Tassels", 280.
[140] Ibid.

Manto's words for the colours in "Phundne", which S. M. Mirza translates as "loud" in his rendering of the Ajanta scene, are "چیخنے والے" ("cheekhne walay"):

"سب کے سب چیخنے والے ہیں۔"[141]

("Sab ke sab cheekhne walay hain.")

"چیخنے والے" literally translates as "screaming". In Manto's imagination, the colours of the painting that is the object of a collective gaze in Ajanta are "screaming" colours rather than "loud" colours. The difference might be perceived as slight, but in a study of sound, silence, and sensation, the translation of "screaming" as "loud" could have dangerous repercussions on how muteness and voice are (mis)understood. The word "loud" opens up the possibility of a cache of sounds: speaking, shouting, weeping. Since it is used to describe the colours of a painting, "loud" can also be interpreted as flamboyant, or ostentatious. There is no ambiguity, though, about the word "screaming" in the original work, especially considering the eccentric writer's emphasis on voice and birthing. Manto's scream comes as a shock wave—psychic *cum* somatic—a violent, visceral engagement both cleaving from and penetrating the body. But Manto doesn't confine this fatal spasm of the living body to human subjects. In his imagined world, the scream also manifests as a disembodied, spatialized voice: colours scream, paintings scream, unborn children scream. Since the politics of the scream involves the identity of the body that produces the scream, Mirza's interpretation of "چیخنے والے" as "loud" instead of "screaming" is a lamentable error. It misrepresents the experience of the disembodied voice, muting the immanent violence in the scream—the tearing of language, the dismemberment of speech.

[141] Manto, "Phundne" ("پھندنے"), Rekhta https://www.rekhta.org/stories/phundane-saadat-hasan-manto-stories?lang=ur . Accessed on October 25, 2020.

Reading "Pompoms", we are struck in particular by those screams that emanate in the absence of any living body. We hear the scream, but there is no anatomy of face or body to go along with it. The screaming colours, for example. It is as if the identity of the body that produces the scream is superfluous, or the fragment—noise—is proof enough of a body's life and being, like the bloody lump in "Jelly". Speaking about the voice as a "privileged object"[142] of the theatre, Emil Hrvatin writes:

> We want to see what is missing—the body which produces the voice; we want to give voice symbolic form. The voice is a part of the body, but once it leaves it, it leaves behind only traces of that body. The trace of the body in voice initiates a phantasm of the presence of the body.[143]

Screams from the painting in "Pompoms" can thus be understood as the traces of an invisible, absent body. The screams exist as colours of the abstract image in the painting—formless, blurred, concealed—frozen in a visual occurrence. The screams come from somewhere, and yet, from nowhere. They are both disembodied and dislocated. Hence, the artist and spectators watching the painting in Ajanta experience these screams as two absences: disembodiment and dislocation. They cannot recognize the body that produces the scream; they cannot see it scream; the scream fills the space; they cannot locate the origin of the scream. More than the loudness of the scream, they are horrified by the way it permeates them. Indeed the artist and spectators are bound to each other by the screams of the painting, which reenact the original trauma beneath the skin, linking art to an ethos of engagement with and response to the psychosomatic devastations of violence. There is a sense of suffocating entrapment figured in the imagery and sound of the

[142] Emil Hrvatin, "The Scream," *Performance Research* 2. 1 (1997): 82-91.
[143] Hrvatin, "The Scream," 83.

paintings, but it is an entrapment in flux, dramatising the fluidity of the border between inside and outside: painting becomes gaze, gaze becomes colours, colours become screams.

It is impossible to theorise the scream without giving a nod to Antonin Artaud's articulation of the scream and the theatre of cruelty. For Artaud, the scream is the sound of a body in pre-language state. Artaud locates the scream in the memory of the theatre. For Artaud, the scream is that which is located beyond the boundary of language: the sum of all unscreamed, mute, silent screams. In *The Theatre and Its Double*, Artaud declares: "It is through the skin that metaphysics must be made to re-enter our minds".[144] The Artaudian scream thus reframes the human. It tracks life beneath the skin of the social body, becoming both a form of expression and a way of knowing. As Derrida says in his reading of Artaud in *La Parole Soufflée*:

> Having always preferred the shout to the text, Artaud now attempts to elaborate a rigorous textuality of shouts, a codified system of onomatopoeias, expressions, and gestures—a veritable theatrical pasigraphy reaching beyond empirical languages, a universal grammar of cruelty.[145]

The 'theatrical pasigraphy' Artaud allegedly reaches for echoes Manto's artistic vision in "Pompoms". Both covet that which is unbearable, unimaginable, and undescribable. A phantasmagoric collection of unintelligible memories, disembodied screams, and grotesque bodies, "Pompoms" presents us with an utter disruption of the normalised configurations of materiality, embodiment, and space. What we encounter is a terror of the unseen in the seen, a memory that can only be articulated as a dispossessed scream.

---

[144] Antonin Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*. Translated by Mary Caroline Richards. (New York: Grove Press, 1994), 99.
[145] Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1978), 191.

Yet another important and instructive feature of the Ajanta scene in "Pompoms" is the interdependence of the screams. The screams of both artist and spectators are bound in a peculiar relationality in that the artist's screams give way to the spectators' screams. It is almost as if the women scream because the artist's screaming awakens their gaze to something in the paintings that they couldn't perceive before. In a way, then, the gaze of the artist and the gaze of the three women are also in a relational bind similar to their howls, groans, and cries. While the artist and spectators never look at each other, their gazes fixed upon the art hung on the walls, the object of their gaze binds them in a relationality that is composed neither exclusively of the artist nor the spectators, but is rather conceived as the tie between gaze and voice. The "loud", screaming painting elicits an unnamable fear within the artist and spectators—a grief, perhaps, that debilitates speech and speechlessness alike. It is as though the painting is being consumed in its totality rather than simply being gazed upon. Beholding the painting by the unknown, nameless artist thus constitutes an uncanny aesthetic experience. The painting exceeds its own limits and mirrors back to the spectators a sense of awareness, which in turn produces a kinship among the onlookers. It is a relationality, hence, that is based on grief and hysteria. In *Precarious Life*, Judith Butler describes this relational experience of grief as follows:

> Many people think that grief is privatizing, that it returns us to a solitary situation and is, in that sense, depoliticizing. But I think it furnishes a sense of political community of a complex order, and it does this first of all by bringing to the fore the relational ties that have implications for theorizing fundamental dependency and ethical responsibility. If my fate is not originally or finally separable from yours, then the "we" is traversed by a relationality that we cannot easily argue

> against; or, rather, we can argue against it, but we would be denying something fundamental about the social conditions of our very formation.[146]

The "relationality" that Butler outlines above emerges in "Pompoms" as the hysterical screams of the man and three women, who are tethered to each other and to the paintings in Ajanta. The reciprocal screaming seems to identify pain and the problem of its expression and witnessing as central to the narrative.

The relational hysteria of the artist and the three women in "Pompoms" resonates with Butler's notion of "that primary way in which we are, as bodies, outside ourselves and for one another", and of the means through which interdependence is articulated as an "ongoing normative dimension of our social and political lives".[147] There is clearly a political aspect to "Pompoms", and even though the entire narrative is rendered as a cerebral clutter of thoughts, one image stands out that grants a certain logic to this vexing, disordered stream-of-consciousness: car number 9612. The narrator recounts, repeatedly, a visit from her friend who arrives by train to Pakistan in car number 9612. The train car number transports us back inside the sinister refugee train of Partition, the most feared space during and after Partition that I discuss in my reading of "Open It!" Manto references the train car thrice in the story, each time in reference to either the narrator's 'friend' arriving on the train, or travelling to somewhere else. The repeated references to this one particular train car—number 9612—suggests the strong possibility of a past experience on the train. A distant memory, perhaps, of being transported from one side of the border to the other; maybe even a not-so-distant memory. It is significant that the first reference to the train car in the story is followed shortly by this detail: "When her friend met her again, she told her that a change had come over her. She had *actually* changed,

---

[146] See Judith Butler's *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004), 22-23.
[147] Butler, *Precarious Life*, 27.

now she had two bellies, one old and one new, piled over each other".[148] It is tempting to argue that the two stomachs symbolise the grotesque sexual violence the body has been subjected to. However, this may be stretching the point. Violence is evident, that much is clear. But the narrator's body has been violated in a way that it has 'actually' changed. The unflinching focus on the word 'actually' is of note here. Das interprets the first stomach as a "normal one" and the second as a receptacle "for them [women] to bear the fruits of violence within themselves".[149] While I do not disagree with this analysis, there is something more eerily perturbing about the two stomachs that 'actually' protrude from the body of the narrator in "Pompoms". Juxtapositioned alongside the tassel and the scream, the two stomachs imply a more sinister logic at work.

These visual and aural fragments are, in fact, bits of the [female] body—a dangling piece of flesh, two pear-shaped, slippery stomach sacs bulging out, an ear-splitting scream. The imagery is profoundly evocative of a body giving birth. The birth, however, is not an ordinary one. Here, birth unfolds as a complete dissolution of the contained bodily form. Manto's fragmentary metaphoric image of birth entails a turning inside-out of the body, transforming the story into a horror narrative. What is born is not a child, but rather, the body has expelled itself: tassels of flesh, and slippery, swollen sacs spewing out in the midst of a piercing scream. Something monstrous is birthed, and a perverse recomposing of bodily organs effected. In her rereading of Freud's case studies, feminist psychoanalytic scholar Barbara Creed focuses on Mikhail Bakhtin's reading of the grotesque body as morbidly maternal flesh. As Creed writes:

> …the act of birth is grotesque because the body's surface is no longer closed, smooth and intact—rather the body looks as if it may tear apart, open out, reveal

[148] Manto, "Tassels", 278-279. Emphasis added.
[149] Das, "Language and Body", 55.

> its innermost depths. It is this aspect of the pregnant body —loss of boundaries— that the horror film emphasizes.[150]

The birthing process in Manto's story presents a loss of boundaries that produces a new, haphazard assemblage of flesh, a human identity whose boundaries are breached from all sides. I read this image of monstrous birthing in "Pompoms" as a metaphor for Partition, and the genesis of a mangled, hastily sutured nation. Here, Manto grapples with the postmemory[151] of Partition by resisting a coherent, ideologically inflected narrative in favour of a provocative fragmentariness and dizzying absurdity. In the opening lines of "Pompoms", after a brief description of a garden where newly born kittens are devoured by a tomcat, Manto writes, "Countless years passed".[152] I read this passing of "countless years" as indicative of the narrator's legacy, an inherited memory and narrative that even though not experienced firsthand, perhaps nevertheless dominates the psyche of the narrator and shapes her life. Manto places a deliberate focus on the inside-out, monstrous female body, which becomes a kind of performing body in the text.

Traditionally, the performing body insists on a relationship between performer and audience to examine political violence as a binding, affective experience.[153] In "Pompoms", this political violence and the subsequent "binding, affective experience" are never articulated, but persistently alluded to. Returning to the scene in Ajanta where the artist and spectators glance at

---

[150] See the work of Barbara Creed in *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1993), 58.
[151] Marianne Hirsch first used the term "postmemory" in an essay on Art Spiegelman's *Maus* titled "Family Pictures: Maus, Mourning, and Post-Memory," *Discourse* 15. 2 (1992-1993): 3-29. In "The Generation of Post-Memory", she defines the term as "the relationship of the second generation to powerful, often traumatic experiences that preceded their births but were nevertheless transmitted to them so deeply as to constitute memories in their own right," (*The Generation of Post-Memory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 29-54.
[152] Manto, "Tassels", 276.
[153] Here, I am echoing an argument made by Patrick Anderson and Jisha Menon in their introduction to V*iolence Performed: Local Roots and Global Routes of Conflict* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 5.

the painting, the narrator relates that the bodies of the artist and spectators "themselves transformed into pictures".[154] The bind is thus not between the subjects alone, but also between the body of the subject and the object of its gaze—the subject comes to mirror the object of its gaze in this act of painter becoming painting. It is of interest how in "Pompoms" the body is constantly transforming, but not as a vanishing or dematerialising typically associated with magical realism. Rather, each time the body assumes new form, it does so in a choppy, awkward, absurd way, like the panels of a comic strip in disarray: eyeballs pop out, a large tassel-child is born, living bodies become pictures, two stomachs grow inside one body, two bellies of different colours, a body blackened with tuberculosis, a cubic artist who poisons herself and dies, unborn children screaming, the narrator painting her naked body in front of the mirror, then gazing at it, screaming and dying. The entire tableau unfolds like a play on stage, where Manto employs the absurd, screaming body as a politically-motivated performance prop, a medium for the awakening of others to their bondage to violence. In Manto's overwhelmingly strange story, the disfigured body makes the connection between the ubiquitous violence in real life and its reenactment in literature and art. Whether this connection can elicit any meaningful reaction on the part of those whose awakening is sought, or whether it will remain within the limits of a literary spectacle, is entirely another matter.

What heightens the unusually striking effect of the paintings in the Ajanta scene is that gazing upon his own paintings, the artist himself gives in to hysteria. A man screaming is seldom encountered in the Urdu *afsāna*, or in non-Urdu literature for that matter. It is usually the figure of the woman that is susceptible to the aural forces of hysteria and to rupture: the scream, the shriek, the howl. Peter Hutchings notes in his study of British cinema:

[154] Manto, "Tassels", 280.

> [t]he visual and aural repertoire of fear—the panicked gesture, the eyes widened helplessly, the high-pitched scream—somehow seems more apt or credible when expressed or articulated through the body of the woman. By contrast, the spectacle of men in extreme states of fear is an altogether rarer phenomenon in our culture and when it does occur is often marked precisely as being exceptional or unusual.[155]

While Hutchings' observations are limited to the realm of the cinema, his argument holds here nonetheless. Rarely do we see, in any literature, the image of a man with a body vulnerable to the sensations and expressions of hysteria. Madness is a more common phenomenon, but even madness in men usually surfaces in the form of a heightened cerebral intensity, or a masculinised agency stemming from this supposedly male power to deliberately suppress the scream. The scream is sought—almost always—in the female body. Author and scholar Angelica Fenner writes that "a man's shout is regarded as exercising will and thereby delineating the boundaries of the self, while a woman's scream becomes associated with limitlessness and the dissolution of self".[156] In Manto's gritty writings, on the other hand, maleness and femaleness are both defenceless against hysteria. Bishan Singh in "Toba Tek Singh" howls in agony as he prostrates to his death, and the artist in "Pompoms" screams at the sight of his own creations. Historically, femaleness and illness may have been remarkably compatible, but in Manto's creative productions, maleness takes on a diseased character of its own.

---

[155] From Peter Hutchings, "I'm the Girl He Wants to Kill": "The Woman in Peril" Thriller in 1970s British Film and Television, *Visual Culture in Britain*, 10, No. 1 (2009): 53-69.
[156] Angelica Fenner, "Aural Topographies of Migration in Yamina Benguigui's *Inch'Allah Dimanche*", *Feminism, Culture, and Media Studies* 22.3 (2007): 106-107.

In a short but insightful analysis of Manto's fiction titled "Manto as a Modernist",[157] Linda Wentink identifies four dominant themes in "Pompoms". According to Wentink, these themes are birth, food, sex, and death: "There is sex without love, food without nourishment. Family ties are represented by their absence […] Fathers consume their children, and children kill their parents. Fecundity leads to death, and life becomes meaningless".[158] Wentink's views are meticulous and instructive, and she deals admirably with the nuances of birth and death in the story. However, there is another theme in the narrative that is critical to understanding the narrator-character and her stream-of-consciousness. It is the immensurable quality of the surreal, powerful, evocative art in the story. In a way, it is the art that links all four themes that Wentink discusses in her paper. Art in "Pompoms" is not limited to the abstract painting that I have studied thus far in my analysis, but extends to and pervades the elements of clothing and body in the story.

Manto paints baroque, elaborate descriptions of "pompoms" or "tassels" in the story, which clearly marks them as the most important objects of vision. After what transpires in Ajanta, the narrator relates the particulars of a wedding. The artist, who is now called the "creator of Ajanta colours",[159] decorates flowerpots and doors. We are told once again that his "loud colours" eclipse everything around them, and that "extremely dark lipsticks paled" when they saw the artist's colours. The creator also designs the wedding dress, which consists of many "facets".[160] The description of the wedding dress reads like an homage to an abstract masterpiece:

---

[157] See Linda Wentink's "Manto as a Modernist" in *Journal of South Asian Literature*, 20.2 (Summer, Fall 1985): 121-130.
[158] Wentink, 125.
[159] Manto, "Tassels", 281.
[160] Ibid.

> Viewed from the front, it showed bunches of multicoloured drawstrings. From another angle, it looked like a basket of fruits. From yet another vantage, a floral curtain draping the window. From behind, a heap of crushed watermelons, and from yet another angle, a jar full of tomato sauce. From above, it seemed like an example of incomparable art and from below, the vague poetry of Miraji.
>
> Discerning eyes saw her in her wedding dress and were all praises for her.[161]

An orgy of sense and colour, the extravagant wedding dress presents such an exaggerated, carnivalesque picture of the artist's creation that it exceeds the conventional category of costume. It is only fitting that Manto compares this yet another "loud" pièce de résistance of Ajanta's creator to high art, and to the poetic stylings of Indian poet and pre-Partition pioneer of Urdu free verse, Miraji. Miraji's appearance in Manto's work is startlingly unexpected, as Manto did not think highly of his work. There are many similarities between Manto and Miraji: both close contemporaries and writers of the first order, both eccentric, and rebels in their own right, both considered the creative maestros of Partition. Like Manto, Miraji too passed away of alcoholism. But Manto was not an admirer of Miraji's work. He pronounced his verdict on Miraji's poetry by comparing it to dead and decaying leaves, and calling him a "fraud".[162] I do not want to dwell on the poetry of Miraji here, as this would detract from the tighter focus on monstrousness, screaming, and art; rather, I want to note that what has become apparent in my close analysis of Manto's story is his explicit attentiveness to the hysterical and inside-out body, and his desire to emphasise the incoherent reality of violence as a monstrous yet artistic creation.

---

[161] Ibid.
[162] Asif Farrukhi, "Miraji 1912-1948: Salam, Miraji!" in *Dawn*, 4 Nov, 2012, https://www.dawn.com/news/761473/miraji-1912-1949-salam-miraji

Providing traction for this line of inquiry is a burgeoning series of horror images in the opening pages of the story: a girl is strangled to death in the garden with "a tasselled red silk drawstring"; there is a wedding in which a girl is wearing "a sparkling red dupatta with tinselled fringes around her neck"; there is a band of musicians playing "coloured bagpipes" at the wedding, wearing uniforms covered in "many [dangling] tassels"; the bride is found wearing "a red tasselled drawstring" the morning after the wedding, and the narrator-character wonders why the drawstring wasn't discovered wrapped around the bride's neck.[163] Manto's exposition of tassels with their hair-raising, lurid occupations in the story evoke sharp images of Frida Kahlo and Gustav Klimt's celebrated compositions: anguished bodies in pain, figures draped in fine silks. In what reads like an unlikely Kahlo-Klimt collaboration, Manto shapes his own artistic vision in "Pompoms" with a deft, blood-saturated paintbrush. The author takes great pains to inspire an intricate, decorative image of tassels for the reader, only to associate it with hysteria and corporeal trauma. The scenes of murder are memorable in particular owing to the violence accorded to the tassel. The story is replete with portraits of frightening deaths and horrific births—each act of violence accompanied by the momentary glint of a soft, silken tassel.

Surely Manto's most unforgettable image in his entire corpus, the tassel in "Pompoms" becomes the ultimate fragment to symbolise the cry of psychological and physical distress. A young maid is strangulated by her tasselled red silk drawstring around her neck. A tassel-like child is born, "a large, red tassel",[164] who kills the mother and father. The three women paint many works of abstract art in Ajanta, the third woman painting only tassels of drawstrings on her canvas.[165] There is another wedding in the story, a bride called "dulhan bhabhi",[166] who is found

[163] Manto, "Tassels," 279.
[164] Manto, 277.
[165] Ibid.
[166] Manto, 282.

dead one morning with "two big tassels of congealed blood" tied around her neck.[167] Finally, the life of this fragment reaches an ineludible denouement as the narrator-character becomes its final victim in the concluding pages of the story:

> After moving around for some time she came and stood before the mirror again. Around her neck, under her jewellery, there was a drawstring-like scarf that had big tassels, which she had painted with a brush.
>
> Suddenly she felt the scarf tightening and slowly digging into her neck.
>
> She stood silently all the while, her eyes fixed on the mirror, as they started to come out.
>
> After a while all the veins of her face began to swell up.
>
> Then all of a sudden she let out a scream and fell face down on the floor.[168]

In the finale of the story, the two focal points—tassel and scream—come together to consummate an absurd suicide. It is what Freud would identify as an *unheimlich* death, making a disturbing and alienating reading despite—or perhaps because of—the strange familiarity of Manto's imagined world. The frightening effect of the tassel and scream derives largely from their very familiarity to the contemporary reader: the tassel resembling a scrap of meat, a bloodied shred of skin, a moist piece of flesh; the scream a sonorous trace of routine violence on the stateless, placeless body.

The tassel and the scream, Manto's bizarre and horrific fragments, transport us back in time to that moment when the dismemberment of a nation caused a reversion to the pre-language of screams. While that scission of state and body has now become the faint, ghostly echo of

---

[167] Ibid.
[168] Manto, "Tassels," 286.

postmemory, the scream itself reaches beyond time. It travels from ear to ear, leading us towards listening. In an age of postwar terror, the uncanny screams in "Pompoms" are, in the sense of gruesome, familiar. Reading Manto today is to experience the violence of the castrated, unarticulated voice anew. In "Pompoms", he masterfully gives us the two extremities of language—silence and scream. Neither belongs to the order of speech, but at any moment they can paralyse it. In Manto's world, the scream is not subject to the laws of linguistic articulation. It is an effraction of memory, something that the body casts out of itself through the scream. It is a tearing of speechlessness that crawls over and under the skin, of chaos experienced in silence. It is an attempt, as Adorno would say, "to reach those who do not hear anymore".[169] Manto's scream is an aesthetic creation, driving the gaze of the spectator toward the mute body. A body which finally breaks the silence and begins to scream about what it cannot speak about.

[169] Theodor W. Adorno, *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*. Translation of *Einleitung in die Musiksoziologie*. (New York: Seabury Press, 1976).

Chapter 3: Ismat Chughtai and the Nation as Foetus

"Colonization can only disfigure the colonizer."

—Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*

"India was operated upon by such clumsy hands and blunt knives that thousands of arteries were left open. Rivers of blood flowed, and no one had the strength left to stitch the wounds."

—Chughtai, "Roots"

Sahebs[1] and Skins in "Quit India"

The historical figure of the Saheb has a rich, complex literary legacy in the discourse from and about the Indian subcontinent. From the aristocratic Nawab Sahebs of the Mughal Empire to the hypermasculine British soldier in India, from Kipling's low-caste Kim[2] to Forster's Burra Saheb[3] in *A Passage to India*, from the cosmopolitan Indian-born Saheb to the minor colonial official of European descent in the Urdu short story, the figure of the Saheb in (post)colonial discourse negotiates the manifold seams and ruptures in the diachronic space of colonialist deep time.[4] Specifically, in the Urdu tradition, the figure of the Saheb inhabits a hybrid space—a migration, dissemination, and translation of the colonialist worldview. Of the myriad constructions of the

[1] In present-day South Asia, the term "Saheb" (also spelt "Sahib") is traditionally used as a form of address for a man, the Urdu equivalent of "mister" and "master". However, in Partition literature, it is specifically tied to the colonial history of the Indian subcontinent and signifies a European colonial officer of the British Raj. The honorific is often shortened to "Saab".

[2] Rudyard Kipling, *Kim* (London: Penguin Books, 1989).

[3] E. M. Forster, *A Passage to India* (London: Edward Arnold, 1967).

[4] In *Through Other Continents* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2009), Wai Chee Dimock introduces her idea of "deep time" as an extended, nonlinear, and nonstandardised time frame. She defines "deep time" as a historical depth that doesn't "slice" world history in neatly periodised, sequenced, discrete temporal segments, but rather as a cumulative history extending outside, across, and beyond national and territorial borders. Following Dimock's lead, I use the term "colonialist deep time" to render the historical processes of colonialist consciousness as stretching, intersecting, and overlapping across the jurisdiction of races, nations, periods, and ages. This formulation of colonialist history as a large-scale, hybridised timescale seeks to map those far-flung twilight zones of absences and silences that are unable to break down the standardised dividing lines of nationalist narratives.

Saheb in Urdu writings, Chughtai's rendering of the imperial Saheb in "Quit India" as a decayed/decaying figure is particularly provocative and has been almost completely neglected in critical writings on the works of Chughtai.

First published in 1966, "Quit India" is one of Chughtai's lesser known stories. In 2017, when the collection *Quit India: And Other Stories* was published to mark seventy years of India's independence, there was a ripple of renewed interest in the story. However, "Quit India", along with several other formative stories by Chughtai, remains overshadowed by her more controversial writings such as "The Quilt" ("لحاف" or "Lihaaf") and "Lingering Fragrance" ("بدن کی خشبو" or "Badan ki Khushbu"), or her more popular short stories like "Gainda"[5] ("گیندہ"), "The Mole" ("تل" or "Til"), and "Two Hands" ("دو ہاتھ" or "Do Haath"). While these stories are certainly pivotal to Chughtai's fearless oeuvre, my interest lies in those among her writings that deal more directly with the voices and bodies figured and disfigured by the individual politics and traumas of Partition. "Quit India" is just such a narrative, and centres on a one-eyed Englishman, William Eric Jackson. Unlike most Partition stories that focus on the fate of those who have been silenced, this story harks back to the fate of the one who silences: the Saheb.

"Quit India" opens with a gripping tableau: Jackson Saheb has just died, and the narrator is looking out the window at Sukhu Bai, Jackson's native Indian mistress, who is grieving "volubly"[6] in the Marathi[7] language with their illegitimate mixed-race children outside their house on the Bombay street. Here, the story flashes back to 1942, when the narrator first meets Jackson at the height of the eponymous Quit India Movement.[8] Locals are rioting in the streets,

[5] "Gainda" can be translated as "Marigold", but in Chughtai's story it is the name given to her child-protagonist.
[6] Chughtai, *Lifting the Veil*, translated by M. Asaduddin (India: Penguin Books, 2001), 94.
[7] A widely spoken native Indian language from the west of the country.
[8] A civil disobedience movement launched in August 1942 by the All-India Congress, calling for immediate British withdrawal from India.

chanting "quit India!", calling for the British to leave the country, and burning their belongings in a crazed furore: "Fluttering ties, stately hats and newly ironed trousers were being ruthlessly thrown into the flames".[9] The narrator recollects a similar incident inside a railway compartment, when rioters had ripped out the seats from the train and thrown them out the window:

> It seemed as though the railway, the ties, the trousers etc., did not belong to us but to our enemies. Setting those on fire was like setting the enemy on fire, uprooting them from here and throwing them out of the country. Close to my house they had put the long stump of a tree on the road, and by heaping garbage on it built a barricade to block traffic. I had crossed it with great difficulty and reached the doorstep of my flat when the military lorry came. The tommy who climbed down first was none other than Jackson.[10]

Thus, Jackson emerges in the story from the mise-en-scène of a burning Bombay, stepping out of a military truck at the forefront of a pyre fashioned from the livery of his kinsmen. It is important to note that the story never reveals where Jackson is originally from. We are told that he has a wife, Dorothy, whom everyone addresses as "the Memsaheb",[11] and that they have two children together: an elder daughter, and a son who is "twelve or thirteen".[12] Readers are never introduced to Jackson and Dorothy's offspring, and it is mentioned briefly in passing that they live in London with the Memsaheb, and occasionally visit Jackson in Bombay. Jackson has had various affairs with the native women since he arrived in India—first with a hillwoman and then a rope-dancer. When Memsaheb arrives on her visits to India, Sukhu Bai generously returns to her

[9] Chughtai, *Lifting the Veil*, 94.
[10] Chughtai, 95.
[11] The female counterpart of "saheb" (see note 1).
[12] Chughtai, 96.

household duties, posing as the Memsaheb's "ayah",[13] looking after the children and running errands to arrange the couple's many dinner parties. During these visits, Jackson is seen "dressed in uniform or an excellent gown", walking in the gardens, fulfilling the "norms of etiquette" with his wife. [14] However, as soon as the Memsaheb departs from Bombay, "fed up with this dirty, soggy land and its people", Jackson breathes a "sigh of relief",[15] and Sukhu Bai resumes her role as Jackson's mistress and substitute lady of the house. Jackson has a habit of drinking and then beating Sukhu Bai mercilessly, sometimes also beating his daughter Philomena, with her "golden cheeks, blue eyes, and big lips", and his son Pattu (Peter), with his "black eyes, brown hair, and wheatish complexion".[16] Jackson is thus introduced as a one-eyed extravagant rascal, notorious for his drinking, gratuitous violence, and multitude of mistresses.

From the outset of the story, the narrator casts Jackson in the role of the archetypical white colonizer—a "Pucca Saheb"[17]—repulsed by the sight of him, longing to scratch his face with her nails.[18] Readers are transported to Bombay in the 1940s, tyrants of the British Raj ruling over their dark-skinned natives, diffusing their imperial ideology among the "backward" Indians in their colonial enterprise. The imagery that the narrator resorts to in her description of Jackson exposes him as one such European tyrant. While the English translation of this story doesn't give away the gender of the narrator, the Urdu original makes it clear that the narrator is a woman. In Chughtai's Urdu version, Jackson's mistress, Sukhu Bai, addresses the narrator as "Bai", an Urdu/Hindi term used only to address a woman. The narrator accuses him of belonging to a "community of oppressors" and divulges how he has "sprayed children with bullets and

[13] A maid or nanny.
[14] Chughtai, *Lifting the Veil*, 96.
[15] Chughtai, 96.
[16] Chughtai, 94-100.
[17] "Pucca", typically meaning "true", implies the legitimacy or "Europeanness" of the coloniser in Chughtai's story. Jackson, in other words, is a complete or "true" saheb.
[18] Chughtai, 97.

showered fire from machine guns on unarmed people", and "stained the road with the blood of our valorous fighters".[19] She recalls how he barges into her flat looking to arrest any "youths" causing trouble and mischief, demanding that she surrender them to him. As she relives her first encounter with Jackson, the narrator's revulsion for him converges entirely on the most striking, uncanny feature of Jackson's face: his glass eye.

The prosthetic eye is a mesmerising image, evoking the cold, tireless, policing gaze of the coloniser—an unmoving, unnatural, depthless eye. The narrator regards Jackson's "sparkling" eyes with increasing antipathy, calling his glass eye "the best specimen of Europe's surgical excellence". She indicts the glass eye for its alienating, dehumanising impulses: "It smacked of the duplicity of the white race to which Jackson belonged. His sense of superiority, which was like poison, glimmered equally forcefully in both his eyes".[20] For Chughtai, Jackson's "glimmering" glass eye is akin to a mechanical device—it is without soul: a mute, lifeless quasi-eye, a duplicitous apparatus designed to conceal an impotent gaze. To the narrator, Jackson is half-blind, his glass eye flattening out the depth of all people, objects, and the environment of Bombay in his visual field. Jackson's prosthetic eye is indicative of his prosthetic vision—a fixed, unseeing eye lacking in light and perception, probing the dark flesh open to its half-gaze, becoming absorbed in it.

In *Samuel Beckett and the Prosthetic Body*, Yoshiki Tajiri discusses the influence of the prosthetic gaze in Beckett's work, drawing on the short novels *Murphy* and *Ill Seen Ill Said*, the monologue *Not I*, and the screenplay *Film*. Commenting on Beckett's construction of the camera eye in *Film*, Tajiri writes:

[19] Chughtai, *Lifting the Veil*, 100.
[20] Chughtai, *Lifting the Veil*, 96-97.

> The extraordinary close-up of Buster Keaton's eye at the beginning of *Film*, which accentuates the strangeness of the physical eye and defamiliarises our normal idea of the eye and seeing, could also be regarded as an offshoot of surrealist photographers' discovery of the unfamiliar body. Here it is possible to discern two connected factors: the technology of the camera eye, which isolates and enhances our vision as prosthesis; and a new discovery of the body, the formless body in particular in the case of avant-garde art.[21]

However, while the Beckettian eye "breathes" and "digests", Jackson's glass eye in "Quit India" is lacking in any palpable physicality. It is a non-human, detached, false oculus that observes ceaselessly but sees nothing.

Jackson's prosthetic eye, a marvel of "European surgical excellence" in its design and workmanship, testifies to Europe's scientific and technological advances that Michael Adas discusses in his powerful book *Machines as the Measure of Men: Science, Technology, and Ideologies of Western Dominance*.[22] Adas argues that it was Europe's influential scientific achievements and advanced technology, and not merely their sense of racial superiority, that provided the primary impetus behind and justification for their "civilising-mission ideology".[23] In the industrial era, then, these scientific and technological triumphs became measures of European superiority, as well as gauges of the abilities—or alleged lack thereof—of the non-Western world. Remarking on the absence of scholarship on Europe's scientific and technological accomplishments as markers of European dominance, Adas offers an astonishing

---

[21] Yoshiki Tajiri, *Samuel Beckett and the Prosthetic Body: The Organs and Senses in Modernism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 116-17.
[22] Michael Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men: Science, Technology, and Ideologies of Western Dominance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989).
[23] Adas, *Machines*, 4.

range of authors and their works, unveiling how these writings influenced European perceptions of China, India, and sub-Saharan Africa. Discussing the case of India, Adas mentions James Mill's *History of British India*, and directs our attention towards a particularly telling detail:

> He [Mill] asserted that the Indians "knew nothing" about the use of glass for windows or *improved sight* and that their furnaces for working both glass and iron were of poor quality. The fact that "all Europeans" who had visited India had been struck by the "rudeness" of Indian tools, he concluded, was one of the surest proofs of his contention that Indians had never been truly civilized.[24]

Jackson's glass eye in "Quit India" figures as a "sparkling"[25] symbol of this British sense of superiority over Indians, and claims its place in Chughtai's literary landscape as an anomaly and an absurdity. Mill's conviction in Europe's "improved sight" is key to understanding the ways in which Jackson's absurd colonialist eye—and later, his inner gaze—operate in Chughtai's spellbinding story. Moreover, Mill's assertion that the Indians had never been "truly civilised" complicates the notion of Jackson as "Pucca" or "true" Saheb, as we find Jackson's role reversing from that of a true, civilised "Saheb" to madman over the course of the story. Contrary to Mill's asseverations about Europe's intellectual mastery, Chughtai debunks the myth of European superiority in her story, and her protagonist embodies the figure of an absurd Saheb, an imposter, stricken with lack of (in)sight, and left behind by "true" Sahebs.

The Quit India movement comes to an end and the British depart from India. Despite his loved ones' urgent pleas that he return to London, Jackson refuses to leave the country, choosing instead to stay in Bombay with Sukhu Bai and their illegitimate children. This resolution is of significant import, especially considering his psychological and physiological deterioration

[24] Adas, *Machines*, 170, emphasis added.
[25] Chughtai, *Lifting the Veil*, 96.

following the decision. Jackson's refusal to depart and his rapidly degenerating state provoke important questions about the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised. Albert Memmi grapples with this issue of the coloniser who refuses to leave the country he has colonised in his penetrating work *The Colonizer and the Colonized*:

> Since his rebellion has closed the doors of colonization to him and isolated him in the middle of the colonial desert, why not knock at the door of the colonized whom he defends and who would surely open their arms to him in gratitude? […] Let him take one more step, let him complete his revolt to the full […] Refusing the colonizers, damned by them: let him adopt the colonized people and be adopted by them; let him become a turncoat.[26]

Jackson certainly demonstrates all the traits of a turncoat in Chughtai's narrative, masquerading as Saheb, lover, husband, and father, "richly endowed with all the evils associated with a one-eyed person".[27] He betrays his wife, his children, his country, and, finally, himself—stranded as he is in the unstable space between coloniser and colonised, failing to wholly adopt or refuse either ideology.

Soon after the retreat of the British from India, doctors find Jackson to be of unsound mind because of his heavy drinking. They diagnose his brain as being "affected",[28] and "Sahebs" take him to the lunatic asylum for a prolonged confinement. Here, Jackson's madness has unmistakable resonances with Manto's lunatic Bishan Singh in "Toba Tek Singh". While Bishan Singh embodies the maddened figure of the colonised, Jackson symbolises the afflicted body of the coloniser. In the figure of Bishan Singh—driven mad because nobody knows the location of

[26] Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (London: Earthscan Publications Ltd., 2003), 66.
[27] Chughtai, *Lifting the Veil*, 103.
[28] Chughtai, *Lifting the Veil*, 99.

his village—madness externalises as feverish repetitions of a single phrase: "Opar di gurgur di annexe di bay dhiana di mung di daal of the laltain".[29] Jackson's madness, on the other hand, manifests as a slow dissolution, an imperceptible decay of the body over time. Most strikingly of all, while the two figures symbolise opposing verges of the colonised–coloniser schism, insanity in both protagonists materialises as a kind of muted, unspeakable bodily agitation rather than the more conventional cerebral representations of insanity as a recognisable and readable inner life or stream of consciousness. Such emergences of mute madness in Partition literature speak to the legacy of unutterable traumas and silenced feelings of disorientation prompted by the frenzy of violence and dislocation ushered in by Partition: a corpse sprawled out on the border, a half-blind, decayed Saheb. Both colonised and coloniser come to mirror each other in their somatic disturbances.

Jackson's transformation into the mad, "affected" Saheb also has profound synergies with George Orwell's protagonist–narrator in the 1936 essay "Shooting an Elephant".[30] In this essay, Orwell—who is widely believed to be the protagonist[31]—captures the decline of a white man's dominance and the end of civilising-mission ideology in Burma. One scene from Orwell's essay in particular helps us frame Jackson's regression in "Quit India", where the European official must execute an elephant to fulfil his role as Saheb:

> Here was I, the white man with his gun, standing in front of the unarmed native crowd—seemingly the leading actor of the piece; but in reality I was only an *absurd puppet* pushed to and fro by the will of those yellow faces behind. I perceived in this moment that when the white man turns tyrant it is his own

[29] Sa'adat Hasan Manto, *Black Margins*, 215.
[30] George Orwell, "Shooting and Elephant," in *Shooting an Elephant and Other Essays* (London: Penguin Books, 2009).
[31] Orwell served as a policeman in Burma in the mid-1920s.

> freedom that he destroys. *He becomes a sort of hollow, posing dummy, the conventionalized figure of a sahib* […]. He wears a mask, and his face grows to fit it. I had got to shoot the elephant. I had committed myself to doing it when I sent for the rifle.[32]

Orwell's Saheb in the Burmese backwater ultimately fragments into a shell of a figure, a puppet of the British Raj, who must pose as Saheb because the natives—along with his kinsmen—expect him to be one. Jackson, who has also, in a way, been posing as a Saheb in Bombay during his duty as coloniser and tyrant, eventually loses both his mind and his eye, disintegrating into a hollow/hollowed out figure with a partial, incomplete head.

It is only towards this point in the story, when Jackson runs away from the insane asylum and returns to his bungalow, that he truly begins to see himself. The runaway lunatic abandons his glass eye, exposing the chasmal opening on the surface of his face. The narrator begins to get reacquainted with him, and they become more and more familiar as time passes. Jackson is now described as a figure that has become "thin as a wafer", his formerly "ruddy, beetroot complexion that reminded one of a monkey" now "a tanned brown", his hair greying.[33] No longer dressed in a uniform or gown, Jackson is clothed in the ordinary native lungi and dirty vest, sitting at the doorstep, gazing "absent-mindedly" at pebbles like a child.[34] Jackson's transformation is complete as he sits cloaked in dirty local clothes, playing with pebbles, infantile and lost. No longer a Saheb, Jackson has returned with eyes that have lost their glimmer, reduced to dull, inanimate objects: "Though the glass was still bright, transparent and 'English', the real eye had lost its former lustre and sunk deep in its socket".[35] Jackson's

[32] Orwell, "Shooting an Elephant," 95, emphasis added.
[33] Orwell, 101.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Chughtai, *Lifting the Veil*, 101.

prosthetic gaze now evolves into a self-scrutinising gaze as he stops wearing the glass eye altogether. His "improved sight" that has led to his decay becomes a distant memory. In the prosthetic's place is a dark, gaping hole that arouses a sense of inner change and self-estrangement, as the "Pucca Saheb" is disfigured—both inside and outside—reemerging as a figure naked and exposed: "Jackson, their [the white race's] own flesh and blood, was shedding his garb, and no missionary was coming forth to cover his nakedness".[36] The Beckettian eye socket assumes an ambiguous association with both the inside and outside of Jackson's body. Jackson, like the narrator of *The Unnamable*, is no longer on one side or another. Rather, he is in the middle, like Bishan Singh in no-man's land: a partition between the two worlds of his inner space and outer space, truly belonging to neither. The gaping hole on his face, carved out by a rogue eye, marks the precarious boundary between Jackson's interior and exterior—an opening in the skull, a wide gash, a displaced scream.

During these encounters with the disfigured, child-like Jackson, the narrator discovers that he was born the bastard son of a noblewoman. His grandfather had left Jackson with a peasant, paying for his upkeep, and "all this had been done with such finesse that even the peasant didn't know about the family of his ward".[37] The peasant and his sons were brutal, violent men, beating and torturing Jackson every day. When Jackson reached puberty, he ran away and eventually made his way to London. There he worked various jobs, and finally met Dorothy, an aristocratic lady with no prospects other than Jackson. It is at that juncture that the narrator introduces readers to Dorothy. Contrary to racist belief that white skin marks the apotheosis of pure beauty, Chughtai's narrator describes Dorothy's skin not as something beautiful, but rather as "frigid" and corpse-like:

[36] Chughtai, 107.
[37] Ibid.

> Her skin was rough like a raw turnip, as though she had been left buried in some dark, cold grave for years and then taken out. Her untidy, thin hair made her look old. That is why people of Sukhu Bai's class thought her an old woman, or an albino, who is considered an object of pity in India. When she washed her face, her eye-liner would vanish, and her face looked like a drawing disfigured by a cheap eraser.[38]

Chughtai thus reimagines the European ideal of whiteness as a deathly carapace, likening Dorothy's whiteness to entombed skin, and in so doing, the author reverses the stereotypical "racial epidermal schema"[39] of whiteness, to use Fanon's words. In *The Book of Skin*, Steven Connor notes that European women strove after this ideal of "pure white skin" as far back as the sixteenth century.[40] Chughtai's imagery in these lines of a body buried alive in a "dark, cold grave", and then unearthed, elicits Connor's stunning insights on whiteness, tracing the link between whiteness and (in)visibility: "Words like 'blank' and 'bland', which derive from the French 'blanc', evoke a skin which is both present and absent, in the field of vision, yet featureless, visible as invisible, and giving no hint of the slugs and snails that squirm behind it".[41] Connor's rendering of white skin and its inherently vanishing nature could easily be mistaken for a commentary on Dorothy herself, with her erased, featureless face and her deathly pallor. In the story, Dorothy's sepulchral body consistently disappears from the reader's view, lurking in extraneous details, a subtraction from the text—an absence—like the colour white itself.

---

[38] Ibid., 105.
[39] Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 84.
[40] Steven Connor, *The Book of Skin* (London: Reaktion Books, 2004), 161.
[41] Connor, 161.

Connor's exposition on whiteness is further insightful in a colonial context, particularly his thoughts on white skin as a kind of corruption. Connor argues that since white is an absence of colour, it needs another colour in order to perfect its whiteness: "But whiteness needs subtle tinctures to be white: cream needs its peach. Only another skin can perfect the skin. It is for this reason that whiteness can function, not only as glory, but also as the sign of decay and corruption".[42] In "Quit India", this corrupted white skin emerges in different forms—from Jackson's madness, to Dorothy's deathliness, to their daughter Philomena's "golden" skin:

> All the young men of the mohalla[43] were mad about Philomena. They didn't care whether the seed that begot her was black or white. When she returned from school their deep sighs and wistful gazes followed her. While falling in love no young man ever remembered the fact that she was the daughter of a white brute who had shed the blood of fourteen-year-old youths at the entrance of Hari Nivas,[44] had fired on unarmed women right in front of the church because they were raising the slogan "Quit India", had squeezed out the blood of youths on the sands of Chaupati[45] and fired on a procession of hungry and downtrodden boys

[42] Connor, 163.
[43] The Urdu word "mohalla" denotes a small neighbourhood.
[44] Following the Partition, tens of thousands of Muslims were massacred in the Jammu region of the state of Jammu and Kashmir by extremist Hindus and Sikhs in October-November 1947, led by Maharaja Hari Singh.
[45] It is unclear which specific episode of police violence Chughtai has in mind here. Anglophone sources point towards the Salt Protest from the 1930s. Other parts of the foreign press, however, suggest that Chaupati Sands were regularly used for demonstrations and saw various instances of police violence in this and other contexts. In April 1930, the French newspaper *Le Populaire* announced that a demonstration of 100,000 was expected to take place on the beach, while in October 1930, another French paper *L'Humanité* reported that fifteen people had been injured on Chaupati Sands during another large demonstration protesting against Jawaharlal Nehru's arrest and many had been arrested. In January 1932, *Le Matin* reported on a further demonstration (circumstances undetermined) and indicated that the police had injured numerous protestors on the beach and that there had been numerous arrests. 'L'agitation aux Indes,' *Le Populaire*, 12 April 1930, 3, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k8200249/f3.item; 'La révolte des Indes,' *L'Humanité*, 22 October 1930, 3, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k4036943; 'L'effervescence aux Indes,' *Le Matin*, 15 January 1932, 3, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k577497m/f3.item.

> with machine guns! All of them had forgotten these. They only remembered that the girl had golden cheeks and blue eyes"[46]

Philomena's tinted skin is wrought with corruption—the golden hue tainted by her mother's black tincture, her body pervaded by her father's incongruous horrors. Like Dorothy, she is all skin, and nothing but her skin.

Dorothy, Jackson, and Philomena thus acquire a cadaverous quality in this tale of colonialist decay. Dorothy's "erased", featureless face and Jackson's emptied eye socket become metaphors for the degenerating gaze of the coloniser, their policing eyes dissolving into blank, silent spaces. The imperial gaze that has surveyed, measured, and restrained the city of Bombay for years is suddenly rendered impotent. While Masud and Manto evoke visions of "holes" or chasms in the colonised body—the muted tongue, the sprawling guts, the raped corpse—Chughtai exposes the "holes" in the decaying, corrupted body of the colonial administration. While Memmi asserts that "the two [coloniser and colonised] are far from being connected",[47] both manifest as deeply connected through their mutual process of organic decay and disfiguration in the writings of Masud, Manto, and Chughtai.

In the concluding pages of "Quit India", Jackson's sunken, lustreless eye and emptied, cavernous eye socket simultaneously invoke his inner speech and inner eye as he awaits a slow, excruciating death. A fever strikes, the next day taking the form of delirium. In a final, satirical flourish, Chughtai gives an agonising account of Jackson's last moments:

> He kept muttering to himself the whole night. God knows who he was thinking of. Maybe his mother, whom he had never seen and who, in all probability, might have been giving lectures on morality at some august gathering; or his father, who

[46] Chughtai, *Lifting the Veil*, 100.
[47] Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, 67.

> had rendered his services like a bull to perpetuating the race, and who had given him no more importance than the filth released from his body—and who, perhaps, sitting in some other colonised country, was devising plans to consolidate imperial power […]. He kept on screaming and tossing in bed the whole night. His heart continued to beat.[48]

In the throes of delirium, Jackson's inner eye is directed at himself, and seeing gives way to being seen. Unseen by his mother and father his whole life, his prosthetic gaze giving way to inner and outer decay, Jackson ultimately comes face to face with himself. In a position of complete powerlessness, constituted as an object, his inner vision fixates on itself. Here, we come across deep valences between the dying Jackson and the narrator of Beckett's *The Unnamable*: "Curious how this eye invites inspection, demands sympathy, solicits attention, implores assistance".[49] Jackson, like Beckett's subject, finds himself split between seeing and being seen in his final moments, an object of his inner gaze. Closing in on Jackson's inner eye and inner speech, Chughtai focuses solely on the relation between the perceiving self and the perceived self. The space in and around Jackson's skull seems to be of crucial importance, since it is here that his inner senses take effect. The story stages the full awakening of Jackson's self-scrutinising inner eye in his dying moments, exploring the intricacies of his inner space as he nears death.

Chughtai's investment in excremental imagery during Jackson's inner monologue disturbs the historical perception of the pure, imperforate, civilised European body. Contrary to the colonial view of the Western body as immaculate and the colonised or non-Western native body as unsanitary and excremental, Chughtai's deliberate and calculated symbolic inversion of

[48] Memmi, 107.
[49] Beckett, *The Unnamable*, 378.

colonial norms here exposes the European coloniser's body as open, porous, and unclean. That Jackson sees himself as the "filth released" from his father's body conjures up images of various bodily emissions like shit, phlegm, drool, vomit, sweat, piss, and blood. Chughtai thus draws attention to Jackson's body—and the body of the Saheb—as scatological residue. In "Excremental Postcolonialism", Joshua Esty considers excrement not only as a symbol for the vilified native in colonial settings, but also as a marker of the unwanted ex-coloniser: "If, in the colonial era, shit often functioned as a sign of the actively denigrated native, it also comes to function, in the decolonization era, as a sign of *the actively repudiated ex-colonizer*, the alien and unwanted residue of a sometimes violent political expulsion."[50] On the one hand, Jackson's body represents not only the excremental remains of his absent father but also the defiled, lingering efflux of the departed Sahebs who have returned to their country, paying no mind to Jackson's precarity. On the other hand, Jackson's body serves as a sign of colonial failure, a spoilage and debasement thrust aside at the close of the civilising mission, an excremental image of the wasted political energies of the European colonialist enterprise.

The Sacred Womb in "Roots"

"Roots" is the story of human remains—their beginnings, and their endings. For the purposes of my analysis, it is key that the viscera and integuments in this story be examined not in isolation, but rather considered alongside images of the disarticulated foetuses in Chughtai's "Mutthi Maalish"[51] ("مٹھی مالش", translated as "Of Fists and Rubs"), which I will discuss later in this chapter. "Roots" is also a deeply moving narrative about the profound interconnectedness of

[50] Joshua Esty, "Excremental Postcolonialism," *Contemporary Literature* 40, No. 1 (Spring 1999): 22-59, emphasis added.
[51] I have referred to the English translation of this story by Muhammad Umar Memon in his collection *The Greatest Urdu Stories Ever Told* (India: Rupa Publications, 2017).

body and place, and of the experiences of melancholia that follow in the wake of a violent uprooting of peoples from their native land. In this story, Chughtai gives an account of a minority Muslim community living in Marwar (now Jodhpur) and their struggle to relocate after Partition. The Muslims of this community have been coexisting with Hindus amicably for many years: "In the state of Marwar, Hindus and Muslims had much in common and could not be distinguished from one another by their names, features, or attire".[52] The author portrays an idyllic Muslim–Hindu community, of which there were many in British India, which was unsullied by intercommunal conflict. The story opens with a day in the life of the narrator's Muslim family, which we come to know as Barré Bhai's[53] family. The children are on their sixth forced holiday from school, obliged to stay indoors due to political tensions: "For the last couple of days the atmosphere had become so foul that the Muslims of the city were virtually living under siege. The houses were padlocked, and the police patrolled outside".[54] The country is wrought with hysteria, swelling with the hordes of refugees pouring in and out of the border. One day it is openly decided by the Hindus to force the minority members out of the community, and thus begins the exile of Muslims. Barré Bhai's family is one of the few Muslim families that remain, and they are particularly close to a Hindu family comprising three generations: Roopchandji's household.

The conflict between the two clans begins when one of the children from Barré Bhai's family, Chabban Mian, mischievously writes "Pakistan Zindabad" on the school wall. Roopchandji's children protest by inscribing "Akhand Hindustan". This leads to "a fight,

[52] Chughtai, *Lifting the Veil*, 186.
[53] "Barré" in Urdu can be translated as both "older" and "elder", and "bhai" means "brother". "Barré bhai", then, signifies the narrator's elder brother.
[54] Chughtai, *Lifting the Veil*, 186.

intimidation, and death threats",[55] the police are called in, and the few Muslim children on the scene are sent home. At this point in the story, the narrator looks back to the years of ties with Roopchandji's family: "Roopchandji was not only our family doctor but was Abba's longstanding friend as well. His sons were my brother's friends and his daughters-in-law were friends of my sisters-in-law. This close friendship extended to the children".[56] Both families are equally invested in the politics of the country, and both families have produced members of the three major political parties in India: the Muslim League, the Congress, and the Hindu Mahasabha. Heated political and religious debates are tradition, but in a spirit of camaraderie rather than malice, like "a football or a cricket match."[57] Following the incident of the school wall, however, an unbreachable chasm divides the two families. Refugees start arriving in the community in various states of trauma and dispossession, the rift widens, and Barré Bhai's family begin packing up their belongings.

However, Amma, the narrator's mother, refuses to leave. She merely stands mutely, watching them. When her family vacates the house and departs, Amma is alone in her courtyard, "her restless eyes [gazing] helplessly towards the other side of the chasm".[58] Here, the narrative takes on the spectral overtones of a ghost story. Roopchandji comes out of his house with "heavy steps", eyeing the desolate house on the other side, "[tracing] the images of those who had left in the dust haze".[59] With a last wistful glance at Roopchandji's house, Amma turns back to wander through the empty verandas of her house, peregrinating the abandoned doorways. She navigates the reader as she walks fearfully around the vacant rooms, remembering:

[55] Chughtai, 187.
[56] Chughtai, *Lifting the Veil*, 188.
[57] Chughtai, 188.
[58] Chughtai, 196.
[59] Chughtai, 194.

> In the room on the other side, her eldest daughter had been born, whose memory pierced through her heart like lightning. There, in the corner, her umbilical cord was buried […]. In fact, all her children had their umbilical cords buried there. Ten images of flesh and blood—ten human beings were born in that hallowed room from the sacred womb which they left behind that day. They had left her hung in thorns like an old snake-slough and made good their escape.[60]

Chughtai's snake-slough metaphor here functions as an analogy for the shrivelled-up skin of Amma's uterus and the limp, sagging outermost skin of her body. The vesture of Amma's sacred womb, merely reduced to a withered slough-off, mimics the wind-blown spoils of Amma's body that cling to her house, where she lies now like "an enshrouded corpse".[61] Here, Amma's womb and skin signify the presence of death—her corpse-body thrust aside, a cadaverous effigy, entombed with the decayed remains of her children's umbilical cords.

The womb is pressing and pervasive in Chughtai's thinking. Her short stories solicit a permanently heightened attention towards the womb, its many figurations, and its complex politics during Partition. Since Partition was a matter of nationhood, and nationhood was to be formed by the demarcation of the nation's geo-body, the geo-body of India came to be feminised as 'Mother India', or 'Bharat Mata'. In Chughtai's corpus, however, the nation as maternal body is downtrodden, wretched, and inhospitable. Chughtai's engagement in her writing with materiality and embodied emotions is inextricably bound with this conception of the nation as female and abject, which I will discuss in detail in my close readings of "Roots" and "Of Fists and Rubs". In her autobiography,[62] Chughtai's reflections repeatedly look to the womb,

---

[60] Chughtai, *Lifting the Veil*, 194.
[61] Chughtai, 194.
[62] M. Asaduddin, *Ismat Chughtai: A Life in Words* (India: Penguin Books India, 2012). Translated from Chughtai's Urdu original *Kaghazi Hai Pairahan* (کاغذی ہے پیرہن).

particularly while she remembers her mother, Amma, and her aunt—her father's sister—Phupi Amma. Considering there is very little specific attention paid to the womb in Partition literature, Amma's womb in "Roots" and the prominence of the womb in Chughtai's meditations urge the reader to understand the ethical mission of the author's works on the female abject.

Chughtai's autobiographical "Dust of the Caravan"[63] opens with the sounds of weeping and beating. With these two sounds, Chughtai spells out a whole history and a whole teleology of Partition:

> I was weeping inconsolably.
>
> Someone was being beaten brutally. The perpetrator was a giant like monster, while the one being beaten was a tiny, dark-skinned child. I do not remember clearly the people involved as I was very small at the time. But I remember that when the big cane struck it made a horrific, slithering sound. The sound is embedded in my memory, and I often still hear it.
>
> It was probably then that I realised that the big beat the small, the strong batter the weak. That was when the strong man implanted himself in my subconscious, like a tall pillar, the weaklings strewn like garbage about his feet.[64]

These sounds of weeping and beating from the recesses of Chughtai's memory evoke the effect of a suppressed voice in her short stories, an invisible but palpable exertion of frightened and frightful noisances. It is this muffled, muted sob, a choked drawing of the breath, that strains for articulation in Chughtai's work. The women in her narratives can be read as complex figurations of uttered and unuttered sounds and, as I will show, these sounds do not always manifest as speech but also as exerted echoes that emanate from an abject womb.

---

[63] Chughtai, *A Life in Words*, 1.
[64] Chughtai, 1.

Following her ruminations on the sounds of sobbing and beating that she witnessed as a child, Chughtai turns her attention to her mother. She provides an unusual, distressing account of the maternal figure:

> We were so many siblings that my mother felt nauseated by the very sight of us. One after another we had tumbled to the earth, pummeling and battering her womb. Suffering endlessly from vomiting and labour pains, she looked upon us as objects of her punishment. Her body had flattened at a young age and looked like a platform. She had become a grandmother at the age of thirty-five and suffered continual punishment.[65]

Here, the figure of Chughtai's mother can instinctively be read as a prelude to the mute, abandoned Amma who appears in "Roots". Like the matriarch in the short story, Chughtai's mother is psychosomatically punished, her suffering experienced and expressed as a residue of her damaged womb. Chughtai's description of her mother's body as a flattened, platform-like form seems like the rendering of a dead body rather than a living one. In Chughtai's writings, it is the corpsed mothers and the wretched remains of their wombs that heed the unheard sounds inside and outside the abandoned bodies suspended in the twilight zone of Partition.

My reading of the maternal figure as corpse is tightly bound with Julia Kristeva's conception of the abject. In her long essay *Powers of Horror*,[66] Kristeva identifies the corpse as "the most sickening of wastes", and "a border that has encroached upon everything".[67] For Kristeva, the corpse represents the abject:

---

[65] Chughtai, *A Life in Words*, 1-2.
[66] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, translated by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).
[67] Kristeva, 3.

> The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject. It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object. Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us.[68]

Both mothers' transformation from fertile, life-giving, and maternal into corpse-like, abject, and threatening has pronounced valences with this idea of "something rejected" infecting life. For Chughtai's mother, and Amma in "Roots", it is the remains of their punished[69] wombs that threaten to engulf them—the flattened body, the discarded skin. In Chughtai's oeuvre, the reader experiences the distinct becoming-articulable and becoming-intelligible of these remains. While the old umbilical cords in Amma's house and the brittle, sloughed-off lining of her womb are essentially dead skins, in my reading of Chughtai's work, these abject wombs and skins have far-reaching implications extending outward into the realm of the aural.

Contemporary thinkers and scholars in the field of cultural studies conceive of the womb and foetus as a complex figuring and figuration, a multisensorial force field that comprises the visible, audible, and articulable. In a comprehensive study of the foetus as cultural, textual, and ethico-political object,[70] Mahmut Mutman and Ersan Ocak discuss the techno-scientific processes of ultrasound imaging and the production of foetal image and text. Mutman and Ocak

---

[68] Kristeva, 4.

[69] In her memoir, Chughtai talks about the relationship between her mother and Phupi Amma, her father's sister. The writer describes Phupi Amma as an "incomplete woman" (90) who had given birth to fourteen children out of whom only two had survived, and later one of the two surviving daughters (Hashmat Jahan) also died. By contrast, Chughtai's mother—Phupi Amma's brother's wife—had given birth to ten healthy, surviving children. Chughtai calls her Amma a "fully realized, complete woman" (90). Despite the contrast, both women are represented in terms of foetal status, both punished—in different ways—by childbirth. Phupi Amma, after losing almost all of her children, loses her mind, spewing curses at everyone. She calls Chughtai's mother a "snake" (77). Chughtai calls her a "shrew" with "tumultuous" ways (84). Phupi Amma's husband, Phupa Mian, thinks her mad: "The woman in my house is insane . . . she lost so many children that it turned her brain upside down" (85). On the other hand, Chughtai's mother's continual suffering by childbirth is her flat, platform-like body, the body of a grandmother at the age of thirty-five.

[70] Mahmut Mutman and Ersan Ocak, "Fetal Culture," *Radical Philosophy* 147 (January/February 2008): 23-32.

meditate on the politics and aesthetics of the originary human form, calling for the foetus to be extricated from medical discourse in order to open up new perceptions and articulations of the body and its formation. Among their many illuminating thoughts on the foetus, the maternal body, and its skins, Mutman and Ocak's reflections on the production of the ultrasound image as foetal text is particularly striking:

> Ultrasound imaging makes it [the invisible] visible by sending inaudible sound waves into the body. What is inaudible to the human ear is registered or 'heard' by the tissural substance of the body, which responds to the source by echoing the sounds it receives. The body—matter—is itself a differential force field. As the tissues of the womb and of the fetus have different densities, they reflect the high-frequency sounds in different intensities. These echoes are then converted into electrical pulses, which are processed and transformed into an image by the ultrasound machine.[71]

Based on the tissural morphology of the body, then, the womb and foetus are intrinsically configured as hearing organs and surfaces. They perceive and reflect those high sounds that are beyond the power of human hearing—tremors, vibrations, echoes.

Foetal Text in "Of Fists and Rubs"

"Of Fists and Rubs" ("Mutthi Maalish", or "مٹھی مالش") is the culmination of Chughtai's sophisticated ethical mission as a feminist writer. This short story is Chughtai's most Mantoesque narrative, given her preoccupation with the question of class and grievability: is the prostitute's and peasant's experience of abortion grievable? Here, Chughtai's material concerns

[71] Mutman and Ocak, 28.

of female embodiment, pregnancy, and childbirth are fully realised as she explores the universally elided issue of illegal abortion. I read Chughtai's master tale of horror about abortion and ungrievable life as an allegory for Partition, the geo-body of India transforming into the swollen body of the abject female, and the fractured, mutilated foetuses elucidating the mangled birth of a new nation. The idea of the nation as abject female has gained in political currency during the last decade, particularly among India's elite.

Sumathi Ramaswamy investigates this theme of abjection in her article "The Wretched of the Nation",[72] examining the cartographic representation of "Bharat Mata"[73] or "Mother India" in Indian art. The writer compares visual productions of the map of India from the twentieth century[74] with the artwork of contemporary artists, particularly the series of watercolours by Gujarati artist Atul Dodiya. Ramaswamy discusses depictions of the map of India as goddess and deity in the artwork from the early twentieth century, emphasising the body of this goddess that stands in for the geo-body of the nation:

> The scientific map is anthropomorphised, its empty secular space taken over by the sensuous, female, and very Hindu presence of Bharat Mata, who is more often than not imagined as benign and benevolent, in need of help from her children, especially her sons, to protect and cherish her, break her shackles, and restore her back to power and dignity in a free India.[75]

[72] Sumathi Ramaswamy, "The Wretched of the Nation," *Third Text* 31 Nos. 2-3 (2017): 213-237.
[73] For more on "Bharat Mata" or "Mother India", see Charu Gupta's "The Icon of Mother in Late Colonial North India: 'Bharat Mata', 'Matri Bhasha' and 'Gau Mata'" in *Economic and Political Weekly* (2001): 4291-4299, and Ramaswamy's "Visualizing India's Geo-Body: Globes, Maps, Bodyscapes" in *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 36 Nos. 1-2 (2002): 151-189. See also Ramaswamy's "Maps, Mother/Goddesses, and Martyrdom in Modern India" in *Journal of Asian Studies*, 67.3 (2008): 819-853.
[74] Ramaswamy calls artists of this period the "barefoot cartographers", 214.
[75] Ramaswamy, 213.

For Ramaswamy, this figuration of India as goddess turns the scientific map of the nation into "a homeland *and* a motherland to die for".[76] Chughtai's story, first published in 1956, is a grisly portrait of this figuration of nation as goddess. In Chughtai's narrative, the nation emerges as a wretched female rather than a hallowed deity, and it is in fact "her sons", it appears, who have put her in shackles. With cold, unceremonious logic, Chughtai writes a dejected, despised, and degraded class of women into a piercing account of grievable and ungrievable lives.

"Of Fists and Rubs" unfolds at a polling station, while the narrator waits in an unending queue to cast her vote. The entire story occurs in a flashback following the opening scene as the narrator stands in the queue, recalling the last election:

> Five years ago, too, we'd formed such endless lines, as if we'd come to buy cheap grain, not to cast a vote. Wisps of hope flitted across our faces: regardless of how long the lines, our turn was bound to come sometime. And then you just watch, we'll be raking in piles and piles of money. He's our trusted man; the reins of good fortune will be in the hands of one of our own. All our miseries will vanish".[77]

During the course of the story, the narrator's "trusted man" is gradually revealed as more than an unnamed shadow lurking in the story. The many intricate literary threads Chughtai lays out for the reader lead to the figurehead of this "trusted man", the caste-wallah, and his fist as a symbol of life. The palimpsestic fist is Chughtai's tour de force—at once triumphant fist, clenched fist, and finally, nihilistic fist that effaces all life. It is worth mentioning here that while Memon

[76] Ramaswamy, 216, author's emphasis.
[77] Chughtai, "Of Fists and Rubs," in *The Greatest Urdu Stories Ever Told*, ed. Muhammad Umar Memon (New Delhi: Aleph Book Company, 2017), 159.

translates Chughtai's symbolic figurehead as a solitary man, i.e., "our trusted man", and "one of our own", the original Urdu points to many:

"اپنے بھروسے کے آدمی ھیں۔ قسمت کی باگ ڈور اپنوں کے ہاتھ میں ہو گی۔"[78]

"Apne bharose ke admi hain, kismet ki baag dor apnon ke hath mein ho gi", which roughly translates as, "they are our trusted men, the reins of kismet will be in their hands". The word "کے" ("ke") indicates the plural form, i.e. many men. The story's Urdu version makes clear then, that it is more than one man and more than one fist that are culpable.

As the narrator waits with countless others to vote for their caste-wallahs, a woman "wrapped in a dirty-looking kashta" with "filthy, yellow teeth"[79] recognises her and grabs her hand: "Bai, O Bai! How are you?"[80] The woman is Ratti Bai, a hospital worker that the narrator doesn't seem to recognise at first. She mistakes Ratti Bai for another hospital worker, Ganga Bai, but Ratti Bai tells her that Ganga Bai has died. "Rubs or fists?" asks the narrator. "Rubs," comes Ratti Bai's answer. In a flash, the narrator remembers Ratti Bai from her time at the hospital where she had given birth to her daughter:

> Five years ago, when I was in the hospital giving birth to my Munni, Ratti Bai said that she was on her way to the polling station to vote for her caste-man. He'd made a solemn promise before a crowd of tens of thousands gathered at Chowpatty that the second he came into power he would change everything. Milk would flow in rivers, life would become as sweet as honey. Today, five years later, Ratti Bai's sari was even shabbier, her hair even more grey and her eyes

[78] Chughtai, "Of Fists and Rubs," 159.
[79] Chughtai, 158. A "kashta" is a dhoti-like style of draping a sari common to the Maharashtra region of India.
[80] Chughtai, 158.

twice as dazed. Hobbling on the crutches of promises made again today at Chowpatty, she'd come to cast her vote.[81]

Chowpatty emerges here as a symbolic space, similar to that which is portrayed in "Quit India", wherein the narrator recalls how the police had gunned down fourteen-year-olds on "the sands of Chaupati" (see pg. 166 of this thesis). Chaupati is marked by a long, violence-ridden political history,[82] and Chughtai resurrects its fraught past repeatedly in her stories. During the 1930s, Chaupati was crucial to Congress's large public gatherings, commemorative meetings, and protest actions. In "Of Fists and Rubs", Chaupati's history of political unrest comes to life in the "hobbling" figure and "dazed eyes" of Ratti Bai, who comes to the polling station every five years to vote for her caste-man, or caste-wallah, who has promised among the thousands on Chaupati Sands to "change everything".[83] Now, five years later, our narrator and Ratti Bai meet again at the polling station to cast their votes for new caste-wallahs and new promises.

Chughtai's adoption of the term "caste-wallah"[84] also underscores the deep-seated culture of caste-consciousness in the Hindu society of India, perhaps the world's longest surviving social

[81] Chughtai, "Of Fists and Rubs," in *The Greatest Urdu Stories Ever Told*, ed. Muhammad Umar Memon (New Delhi: Aleph Book Company, 2017), 159.

[82] Chaupati (alternatively spelled "Chowpatty") is a public beach in the Girgaon area of Mumbai, India. In 1930, when Mumbai was known as Bombay, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi led thousands in a march to the sands of Chaupati to defy Britain's salt tax. This march is also called the Salt Satyagraha, or the Salt March. Satyagraha is a word of Sanskrit origin which roughly translates as "truth-force". More than 80,000 Indians were arrested during and after the Salt March as Gandhi and his satyagrahis violated the colonial Salt Laws to produce their own salt, leading to Gandhi's arrest. Since then, there have been countless incidents of political gatherings, police and military brutality, and civil unrest in Chaupati. For a detailed account of the Salt Satyagraha, see Michael C. Grillo and Stuart J. Kaufman's chapter titled "Gandhi's Nonviolence, Communal Conflict, and the Salt March" in Stuart J. Kaufman's *Nationalist Passions* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015). 148-175.

[83] Among other things, Chaupati is known for political rallies, and over the years a myriad of politicians has organised campaign speeches in Chaupati. These include Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi, and Bal Thackeray.

[84] In Urdu, "ذات والا" or "zaat wallah". Chughtai spells the word "zaat" as "jaat", substituting the conventional "ذ" sound ("z") with the "ج" sound ("j") in order to capture the dialectical cadence of a woman of Ratti Bai's social background, i.e., peasant, hospital worker, and prostitute. While caste-consciousness is all-pervading in India, it is particularly rooted among the peasantry and non-elite.

hierarchy. A space overly wrought with religious,[85] ethnic, linguistic,[86] and gender conflict, India's political ideology has been driven through the ages by these pivotal, precarious ruptures. However, Partition history rarely focuses on these concrete, definite realities of gender, caste, and class differences. It is in the fictions of artists like Manto and Chughtai that these unencompassible differences surface. In a revealing account of such marginalised and silenced Partition voices in *The Other Side of Silence*, Urvashi Butalia notes:

> So much writing on Partition has focused on Hindus and Sikhs and Muslims—or more correctly on Hindu and Sikh and Muslim *men*—that it is as if no other identity existed. More, being Hindu, Muslim, or Sikh has been understood only in *religious* terms. Differences of status and class among Hindus or Muslims, or indeed differences of gender or caste, those difficult things that complicate the borders of what we see as identity have, by and large, been glossed over. In its almost exclusive focus on Hindus and Sikhs and Muslims, Partition history has worked to render many others invisible.[87]

Chughtai's acute sensibility for the unrepresented artfully negotiates this space of the unuttered and unutterable as she articulates those elusive voices and sounds that emanate from the muted centre of Partition history. The urgent differences of gender, caste, and class that Butalia discusses in her work, and the unique, incomparable experiences of exiled voices, are palpable realities that remain unseen and unsaid in the gendered tellings of Partition. The reports of enquiry commissions, newspaper articles, press conferences, political pamphlets, and

---

[85] While Muslims and Hindus make up the majority of the Indian population, minorities of Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Zoroastrians, and others are also present.
[86] Indo-Aryan languages like Hindi, Urdu, Bengali, Gujarati, Marathi, and Punjabi are widely spoken in the north, while farther south are millions of speakers of Dravidian tongues such as Tamil and Telugu.
[87] Urvashi Butalia, "Margins," in *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 235.

government dossiers evade the textures, shapes, and sonorities of those voices that Chughtai renders audible in her writings. In the present story, the social hierarchy between Chughtai's narrator, Ratti Bai, and Ganga Bai[88] elicits this *cri de coeur* of unheard voices from the depths of the subcontinent's splintering caste-divide: a "seth's"[89] wife on the one side, a farmer's wife on the other.

As the narrator takes in the haggard, skeletal appearance of an immiserated Ratti Bai at the polling station, her flashback begins, and readers are transported to a hospital five years ago. The narrator remembers how Ratti Bai and Ganga Bai, the two hospital workers who were attending to her at the time, were always at odds, calling each other names like "slut", "whore", and "tramp".[90] Ganga Bai tells the narrator what she knows about Ratti Bai's personal life, and when Ganga Bai leaves and Ratti Bai's shift begins, she tells the narrator all about Ganga Bai's family. Both women are part-time hospital workers, part-time prostitutes, with farm labourers for husbands. Both dream of someday returning to their villages, where they would be housewives owning their own rice paddies:

> Ratti Bai's husband lived in a village near Sholapur.[91] He had a small piece of land and was stuck to it. The entire yield was sucked up by debt and interest payments. Just a little bit was left; before long it too would be paid up. Then she would go and live with her children, happily ever after threshing rice to separate it from the husk. Both women dreamed with such longing of living happily pounding rice in their homes, the way a person dreams of Paris.[92]

---

[88] Chughtai refers to women in Ratti Bai and Ganga Bai's line of work as "bai log", 164. "Bai" is a colloquial term for a female attendant, and "log" literally translates into "people".
[89] "Seth" or "سیٹھ" can be loosely translated as "exalted", "chief", or "lord". In India, it usually denotes a wealthy merchant with lands and a title.
[90] Chughtai, "Of Fists and Rubs," 159-161.
[91] A city located in the south-western region of Maharashtra, India.
[92] Chughtai, 159.

When the narrator asks Ganga Bai when she will return to her village, Ganga Bai's "shining black eyes [drift] off to the lush green haze of fields far away".[93] Ratti Bai and Ganga Bai's lived realities, however, are in stark contrast to their fantasies of threshing rice in the fields. Both have succumbed to prostitution as a means to make ends meet, and both get "thrashed", "beaten", and "whacked" by men they're having extramarital relations with.[94] Ratti Bai earns forty rupees as a hospital worker, which she sends home to support her children who live with her husband. When the narrator asks her why she "whores around"[95] despite the income from the hospital, Ratti Bai recounts her expenses: "How else would I manage? Three rupees for renting the kholi, the rathole where I live, and then I have to pay five to Lala".[96] "Lala" is traditionally a term of endearment for a big brother, but Ratti Bai uses it here to refer to her pimp. Strangely, Ratti Bai uses fraternal terms for both her lover and pimp. Ganga Bai reveals in one of her hospital conversations with the narrator that the man Ratti Bai called her "brother", Shankar, was actually her lover. When the narrator enquires about Ratti Bai's "brother", she laughs: "Bai, that's just how we talk".[97] Ganga Bai refers to them as her "friends".[98] However, the story doesn't give away whether these "friends" are lovers, pimps, or both, as in Ratti Bai's case.

At the hospital, Ganga Bai and Ratti Bai work in alternating shifts, attending to the narrator, who has been bleeding since the birth of her daughter. The bais visit her in rotations, changing her bedpan, massaging her legs, and keeping her company with incessant gossip. The narrator, for whom these bai log are the only people to talk to, offers them small bribes to keep them engaged in conversation:

---

[93] Chughtai, 161.
[94] Chughtai, "Of Fists and Rubs," 160.
[95] Ibid.
[96] Chughtai, 160. In Marathi, "kholi" literally translates as "room".
[97] Chughtai, 160.
[98] Chughtai, 161.

> Staying in a hospital is nothing less than solitary confinement. Friends and acquaintances visited me for two hours in the evening, the rest of the time I spent chatting and gossiping with Ganga Bai and Ratti Bai. Had it not been for them, I would probably have died long before then from boredom. A little bribe was all it took to get them to spill all kinds of things about each other, whether true or false.[99]

The bais become faithful pets to the narrator, anxious to earn her favour in return for fripperies. The narrator's bribes include things like chappals[100] and face powder, items of luxury for the two bais, each woman scheming to get her hands on the offered inducements before the other. During one of these frequent exchanges, the narrator gives Ganga Bai a pair of old chappals she had promised her, who "promptly [pounces] on the chappals".[101] Here, we catch a glimpse of the class system at work that so terrorised Chughtai as a little girl: the strong standing tall, the weak strewn like dirt under their feet.

While the narrator interrogates Ganga Bai about her husband and his mistress back in the village, Ganga Bai enquires about the narrator's husband, the seth, and asks if he would "be mighty angry" and "get himself another wife" now that she had given birth to two daughters in a row.[102] The narrator retorts that if he does, she would get another husband. This remark takes Ganga Bai by surprise: "Your people do that? Bai, I thought you come from a high caste".[103] Despite the narrator's explanations, Ganga Bai remains convinced that she would get a beating from the seth for giving birth to another girl: "If my seth didn't beat me black and blue, then he

[99] Chughtai, "Of Fists and Rubs," 162.
[100] Sandals or slippers for everyday use.
[101] Chughtai, 161.
[102] Chughtai, 162.
[103] Ibid.

must be an absolutely third-class seth".[104] In a flourish, Chughtai captures the complex set of social codes at work in a caste-conscious, patriarchal society. A seth was not considered high-caste if he did not assert his rank and power by thrashing his wife for not bearing him a son. Once again, the sounds of weeping and beating from Chughtai's childhood resurface and linger, evoking the terror and persecution that haunts Chughtai's historical meditations. In all her stories, as the major events unfold, they unfold around the same image of a "strong man", a "tall pillar" battering the weak,[105] a signifier that has been encoded into her historical perception ever since her childhood encounter with violence. In "Quit India", this image takes the form of a half-blind coloniser firing a machine gun at children; in "Roots" it manifests as a devastated womb; in "Of Fists and Rubs" it is symbolised in repeated overtures to the vagaries of the fist.

In the final pages of the story, Chughtai confronts history head on and develops her allegorical impulse to dismantle the façade of a patriarchal regime. Her relentless reproduction of the fist as master signifier of violence turns into a form of critical questioning when an incident between the two bais leads to a nauseating conversation with Ratti Bai. One morning, Ratti Bai and Ganga Bai get into a fight which quickly escalates to "fisticuffs".[106] The cause of the fight is the cotton pads used in treating wounds, pregnancy, and childbirth, and then discarded: "According to the city ordinance, they had to be carefully burned, but it turned out that the two bais would remove the soiled cotton from the containers, wash it clean, roll it into a bundle and take it home".[107] Since relations between Ratti Bai and Ganga Bai have become increasingly tense, Ganga Bai snitches on Ratti Bai and complains to the supervisor, and Ratti Bai has to beg and plead until the supervisor agrees to keep it quiet. Later, when Ratti Bai comes to change the

[104] Chughtai, 162.
[105] Chughtai, "Dust of the Caravan," 1. See discussion of "Roots" on p. 21.
[106] Chughtai, "Of Fists and Rubs," 163.
[107] Chughtai, 163.

narrator's bedpan, the narrator interrogates her about the used, dirty cotton, and how it is disposed. Ratti Bai tells her that they wash it, dry it, and then sell it to the cotton merchant, who sells it to "the mattress man—the one who makes cushions for the rich people's furniture". [108] The narrator reels with revulsion, wondering if her baby daughter's mattress at home was also filled with the same cotton that was used at hospitals for wiping blood and pus. As the narrator despairs, Ratti Bai divulges another one of Ganga Bai's shocking truths to the narrator:

> All those abortions Ganga Bai had had over time, and the live baby she had dumped in the gutter that still kept breathing even after she stuffed the umbilical cord in its mouth! A whole crowd had gathered near it. If Ratti Bai had wanted to, she could easily have spilled the beans and gotten her caught, but she buried the secret in her chest. And look at the cheek of that vile woman, the way she sits on the sidewalk selling piles of unripe jujube and guava, as though nothing had happened.[109]

When the narrator asks Ratti Bai why Ganga Bai is never taken to a hospital for her abortions, and what if something were to go wrong, Ratti Bai dismisses the question, claiming that there were plenty of bais who were just as skilled as any doctor. The narrator enquires if the bai having the abortion is given any medicine to get rid of the foetus, to which Ratti Bai replies that fists and rubs work better than any medicine. "What is this 'fists', 'rubs'?"[110] Again, Ratti Bai dismisses the question, but when the narrator offers her the powder case she had been eyeing for a few days, Ratti Bai gives in:

[108] Chughtai, "Of Fists and Rubs," 163-164.
[109] Chughtai, 164.
[110] Ibid.

> "Rubs" works perfectly during early pregnancy—like a doctor, absolutely first class. The bai makes the woman lie down flat on the floor, then holding herself with a rope suspended from the ceiling or to a club, she stands on the woman's stomach and works it with her feet real well, until the "operation" is performed. Or she makes the woman stand against the wall and after combing her hair she ties it tightly into a topknot. Then, after dousing it with a fistful of mustard oil, she bangs it against the woman's legs like a ram. Certain young women, used to hard labour, don't respond to this. Then it's time for "fists". After dipping her unscrubbed hands with their grimy nails in oil, she just pulls out the throbbing life from the womb.[111]

In these concluding paragraphs of the story, Chughtai provokes the reader's disgust and horror in order to collectively tackle one of the most unmentionable subjects in a chillingly restrictive South Asian culture—the female body. In her embodied, visceral account of "rubs and fists", Chughtai shocks the reader, and by shocking, she sears it into the reader's memory. The image of thick, greasy fists with their filthy nails breaching the female body and dragging out a pulsing, throbbing foetus from its womb is one that dismantles the orthodox traditions of Urdu literature, sharply undercutting the pretensions and pieties that are sacred in South Asian culture. Writing concrete encounters with the bodies of concrete women, Chughtai imposes the condition of woman as muted subject upon us by capturing our attention with the contours, spillages, and excesses of the female body.

"Of Fists and Rubs" rejects the historical principles of decorum, sanctity, honour, and shame in favour of a text that attests to the harsh experience of the fluctuation between the image

[111] Chughtai, "Of Fists and Rubs", 164-165.

of the female body and the body of each and every woman. In India—or Mother India—where women's struggle to lay claim over their own bodies continues to this day, women are denied any way to demand a change in their situation. In the fictional depictions of British India and the newly independent 'Bharat Mata', women survive in a state of exception, and anyone who is able to come to their aid can merely preserve their existence of mere life, or 'bare life'.[112] Ariella Azoulay examines this condition in *The Civil Contract of Photography*, her deeply absorbing work on disaster and citizenship:

> Existence on the verge of catastrophe is not the kind of situation that can be sustained before the actual outbreak of catastrophe. Rather, it is a new form of catastrophe itself, a prolonged situation lacking any spectacular means of interrupting its routinization.[113]

In Chughtai's short story, both Ratti Bai and Ganga Bai are caught in this routinisation on the verge of suffering, waiting year after year to vote for their "caste-man" who has promised to change their lives, then waiting again for the next election in a perpetual cycle of destitution, prostitution, and abortion to make ends meet. Here, Chughtai transforms Partition literature's gendered field of vision, of the capacity to speak about what appears in it, and of the possibilities of intervention in what occurs in it. She captures a "shock photo" or "horror photo"[114] of a botched abortion and invites the reader to become a spectator, to look on the horror which is visible and accessible yet rendered unseen.

In the final lines of the narrative, the botched abortion matures into a metaphor for nation-formation, or de-formation:

---

[112] Agamben, *Means Without End*, 203.
[113] Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography* (New York: Zone Books, 2008), 206.
[114] Azoulay, 164-165.

> Most of the time the operation goes off without a hitch on the very first assault. If the performing bai happens to be a novice, sometimes one of the hands is broken off, or the neck comes out dangling, or even a part of the woman's own body that needed to stay in spills out.
>
> Not too many die from the "rubs", but the woman generally falls prey to all kinds of disease. Different parts of her body swell up. Permanent wounds form and never heal, and if her time's up, she dies. "Fists" are used sparingly—only when everything else fails. Those who survive aren't able to walk. Some drag on for a few years and then croak.[115]

With unnerving detail, Chughtai captures the horror of what we rarely perceive as violence: the loathsome image of gestation, the greasy hands, the inside spilling outside, a slimy, viscid, fractured bastard-foetus. Chughtai's uncanny description of abortion triggers a visual process, a conjuring up of aversive things—membranes, blood, slime, ooze, tissue, mucous, bone, fluid—things that do not come lightly to our sensibilities. These are the substances that William Ian Miller investigates in the spectacular book *The Anatomy of Disgust*. Speaking about disgust as an emotion that ranks us in moral and social hierarchies, Miller contends:

> Here we have the most embodied and visceral of emotions, and yet even when it is operating in and around the body, its orifices and excreta, a world of meaning explodes, coloring, vivifying, and contaminating political, social, and moral orderings.[116]

[115] Chughtai, 164.
[116] William Ian Miller, *The Anatomy of Disgust* (London: Harvard University Press, 1998), Prologue, xii.

Disgust operating in and around the orifices of the female body is at the crux of Chughtai's writing, explicating her ethical mission of making the female body a visible and sovereign political subject in the public gaze.

Chughtai's shocking images of the inside and outside of the female body during a dangerous, horrifying abortion challenge the gaze and, in so doing, expose it to the unseen and unspoken violence against the abject body that had become routine by the time Chughtai wrote this story. The author's language in her description of "rubs" is illuminating, particularly in the Urdu text:

"جسم میں سے دھڑکتی جان کو توڑ کر نکال لیا جاتا ہے۔"

Transliteration: "Jism mein se dharakti jaan ko tor ker nikaal liya jata hai".

The word "توڑ" or "tor" can be literally translated as "break" or "fracture". If we incorporate the literal meaning of the word in Memon's translation, the last line in Chughtai's quote reads as follows: "The throbbing life is broken and extricated from the body". This "breaking" and "extrication" of life from the body objectifies the catastrophe of Partition itself, the wounded life of mother and foetus symbolising the wounded nation and its broken, splintered children. Just as Manto puts the inside-out body of the nation on display with its bloodied tassels dangling and unborn children screaming, Chughtai offers the wrenched, mutilated foetus as the newly birthed nation-state, a half-life extracted by force of fist.

Chughtai's nation-state emerges as a parade of bare lives and immiserated bodies, a museum of sorts, of the victims of the nascent nation-state. In her metaphor of abortion, the *bai* who breaches the maternal body with her bare hands and yanks out the misshapen foetus delivers something monstrous. The birth of the malformed nation comes as a spillage and hemorrhage, a violent act of expulsion through which the incipient body tears itself away from maternal insides.

There is a flow of blood, fluid, and membrane—an unnatural birth evoking a powerful viscerality that lends itself to the 'fleshiness' of our own and others' existence. Chughtai's nation-state presents us with a corporeality wracked and deformed with fissures inside and out. Like Frankenstein's monster, a chimerical creature is created out of the bastard-foetus, all of its mismatched parts rising to the surface, presenting a body that can no longer contain or fit.

Conclusion

Mute Truths

Silence, st…st…stutters, mute screams, remains of half-formed voices and bodies—such are the ways in which we grasp the veritable reality of lived pain and its human consequences in the Partition writings of Masud, Manto, and Chughtai. The literatures of these authors leave us with potential reimaginations of Partition that adumbrate a living micro-fragment of historical trauma; not of nawabs or victors or heroes, but of ordinary people; children, maids, lunatics. I call this micro-fragment 'mute speech', but in my present study this word signifies a lot more than just silence. 'Mute speech' is the name I have given to that living fragment which characterises the whole of a nation (de)composed violently. It signifies the liminal consciousness of that spectral refugee who is rendered a non-figure by forced migration, a non-space that contains only a trace, a remainder of the body that just vacated. It symbolises that marginal moment of history that unravels voice, body, and text. While silence has been an intrinsic and inextricable dimension of Partition fiction, including the works of renowned scholars such as Urvashi Butalia, Rini Bhattacharya, Alok Bhalla, Jennifer Yusin, Gyanendra Pandey, and Suvir Kaul, these critics and writers have merely given a cursory glance to the embodied experience of muteness that materialises and eternalises the historical trauma in Partition literature. In this thesis, with particular reference to Masud, Manto, and Chughtai, I hope to have demonstrated the deeper reality of mutedness, mute speech, and mute figures that recodes the story of the fateful year of 1947.

Harkening to Rancière's philosophy of a silent poetics, I have analysed the short stories of these authors and the ways in which they proffer the memory and postmemory of the mute body. The task of these images, sounds, and sensations of 'mute speech' and its cognates is

twofold—to listen, and to remember. To listen to those petrified silences and screams that we are willfully not attuned to. To remember the echoes of that history that we seem to have lost altogether. As time loses its duration and its resonance in the past, we lose our relational tie with the history inscribed on our bodies and skins. To my mind, these disarticulations of the body in pain—the faint echoes, the loud silences, the hollow groans and shrieks, the muffled laments and cries—need to be commemorated, owing to their inexorable historical value. These silences are memory's *mise-en-scène*. This thesis contends that the mute witnesses in the Urdu *afsānas* of Masud, Manto, and Chughtai are entombed alive in their own silence, articulating an intersensorial monologue of skin, flesh, and scream. The current discourse on Partition, silence, and trauma theory reveals a startling dearth of commemoration of mute speech in the Urdu literatures of South Asia. In my thesis, I hope to have shown the extraordinary power, affective nature, and historic value of mutedness as testimony in the works of Masud, Manto, and Chughtai.

Chapter 1 discussed Masud's dream theatre of magical realism, phantasmal life, and historic atmosphere and its affinity to Partition trauma. Through the characters of the stuttering child narrator in "Sheesha Ghat", the wastelanders in "Lamentation", and the fictive scholar in "The Fifth Saasaan", Masud reveals a hidden politics of voice at work in the gaps and absences that shape these figures and their repeated attempts at articulation, meaning-making, and remembering. In his tales, we discover no eternal verities or concrete truths. Rather, we encounter misty, bleak spaces and quiet, abandoned creatures, with only an aura of place, time, and mind. This is a deliberate strategy by which Masud configures the relation between the aesthetic and the political, shaping a language of unsayability and historical pain. My research into the politics of speaking in Masud's fictions indicates that the mute tongue, impotent gesture,

and forgotten language in the Masudian cosmos signal a fearful failure of voice. At the same time, however, his characters exude strange syncopations and energies of sound—anxious pauses and spilling profusions—attempts to bind up a deep gash in the voice. In the Masudian canon, the phenomenon of voice is best understood as a kind of glitch in the order of things—an obstacle, a black hole, a convulsive interval—in which life holds back and curdles into sound. Here, it is not words that are spoken, but sounds that are shaped and palpated—the guttural, the fricative, the sibilant—Masud's elegiac gesture to the maimed and unheard mouth which the protocols of history have failed to heed.

Chapter 2 dealt with Manto's grisly short stories that capture the full register of the sanguinary habitus of the dismembered and fragmented body. This chapter tries to counter the limited understanding of the impacts of Partition violence in Manto's *afsānas*, whereby the maddened, severed, or raped body is only understood as an abnormal, dehumanised victim. My analysis argues against the prevalent perception that historical pain is engulfed in silence and can only be understood through the horrific life trajectories of those violated. Rather, my close textual analyses of Manto's narratives showed that violence means neither one moment of violation nor a lifetime as a pariah. Instead, the fractious events of 1947 are folded into the everyday lives of those brutalised and those who brutalise. I explored these events as the living truths embedded in each bodily fragment—skin, bruise, fracture, scream—lingering on the ways in which the body carries violence and becomes memory. My chief contribution lies in breaking fresh ground in Manto studies by using a kind of 're-directional' memory to analyse the author's sizeable corpus: an approach that at once draws on and seeks to break from the older models of analysis because they do not speak to the exigencies of the current political, aesthetic, and historical moment. Fragmentation, aphasia, embodiment, abjection, the senses—all these aspects

of my analysis enunciate a frustration with the methodological limits of now canonical interpretations and a hunger for new ways of thinking about trauma, pain, and silence.

Chapter 3 focused on Chughtai's postcolonial metaphors that stand in for a mutilated, partitioned body politic—the one-eyed Saheb, the abandoned womb, the dislocated foetus. Recurring images of corporeal dismemberment emerge from her protagonists' experiences, providing disquieting and highly critical insights into the processes of decolonisation and nation-building. Muteness in Chughtai's writings materialises in her figurations of the vulnerable recipients and poignant symbols of (post)colonial damage—Jackson, Dorothy, Amma, Ratti Bai, Sukhu Bai—emblems of a culture of silence Chughtai lived through in her own experience. The content and context of her fictions are inspired by her real life: the members of her family, the maids and servants of her household, and her friends became the protagonists of her stories. Her hypersensitive texts meticulously expose the oppressive mutedness forced upon an entire sub-continent embodied in a single soul—the grocer, the grandmother, the servant girl, the *bai*. Chughtai blends existential angst, child-like fantasy, and a feminist thrust to redirect the gaze of Urdu literature toward the trampled, crushed female body, her metaphor for the monstrous birth of the newly (mal)formed nation in 1947. While most critics and writers have excavated the representation of domestic spaces and class consciousness in Chughtai's stories, my central concern in this project has been to unravel the sutured mouth of the material body in pain so that it may speak its historical trajectory of systemic violence.

To date no single critic has yet published a monograph charting these authors' concerns with mute testimony and non-language. What renders the works of Masud, Manto, and Chughtai distinctive within the broader literature on Partition is their preoccupation with that which remains unspoken, or half-spoken. Their characters are locked in an agonising, solitary struggle:

pain is Medusa-like, freezing its witness in the act of contemplating its unspeakability. Yet these texts are also pregnant with an imminence that resists this sense of paralysis—the fragility of the skin, the insistence on somatic agony, the broken, screaming voice—these études are such that a breach, trespass, or release of some sort seems inevitable. These frame tales posit a contagion of labored, palpable somatic distress that insists on the significance and signification of the body. They are remarkable for the rich tactility of the imagery and language that bespeaks a body in the fullness of its own vulnerable, precarious physicality: the stippling of cuts, the hollowness of belly, the discoloration of bruises, the drooping of flesh. Not only that, these fragments establish a semantics of the body—each wound echoing in terms of historical time and prefiguring in terms of narrative sequence, each scream insisting on the corporeal weight of the psyche.

The primary intellectual motivation behind my research project is to bring the Partition *afsāna* in conversation with the current postcolonial debate on the politics of violence, embodiment, and silence. With this project, I hope to have sparked this conversation with the evanescent textual kernels of Masud, Manto, and Chughtai. My thesis is a tribute to the Urdu *afsāna* both in form and content, a novella of a thesis that mimics the intense, epiphanic moments of the short story. There is a deliberate absence of beautification and lyricism in favour of crafting a miniature compendium that pays homage to the climactic epiphanies, fleeting insights, and momentary flashes of the *afsāna*. As I outline in my introduction, it is the academic intention of this thesis to interrogate the Urdu short story alongside contemporary translation theory in order to open up future avenues for research and to situate Urdu literature within the global debate on *Weltliteratur*.

To that end, my purpose is to expand this microcosm of a thesis and carry over the voices of other Urdu authors—including but not limited to—Intizar Hussain, Qurratulain Hyder, Amrita

Pritam, and Julien Columneau. While the writings of Hussain, Hyder, and Pritam have already been widely translated and disseminated in English, it is abundantly evident that the relentless repetitions of violence in their works—particularly those endemic to trauma—are in urgent need of critical attention. Columeau, however, constitutes a different category. A Frenchman writing in Urdu, Columeau's *afsānas* remain untranslated in the contemporary moment, and are begging to enter into the ever-shifting spheres of world literature by way of translation. It is practically necessary to translate his prolific writings and cultural sensibilities into the English language and bring them to the Anglophone reader. Moreover, Columeau's historical fictions, which have inspired enormous public interest in the Urdu-speaking world, are utterly wanting in criticism. In this era of multiculturalism, his work has much to offer in terms of the various contestatory, marginal, and subaltern perspectives in the field of comparative studies.

Collectively, the writings of these authors have the potential to transform our understanding of the multitemporal and multicultural dimensions of world literature. It is a need of the times to pay close attention to particular languages, specific texts. The very structure of the Urdu short story is comparative, and the dynamic heterogeneity of the Urdu language can give us a unique purchase on the scope of world literature. Bringing the mute heirs of the Urdu *afsāna* within earshot is a promising start.

Works Cited

Abbott, H. Porter. *Real Mysteries: Narrative and the Unknowable*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2013.

Adas, Michael. *Machines as the Measure of Men: Science, Technology, and Ideologies of Western Dominance*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989.

Adorno, Theodor W. *Introduction to the Sociology of Music*. Translation of *Einleitung in die Musiksoziologie*. New York: Seabury Press, 1976.

Agamben, Giorgio. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Translated by Daniel-Heller Roazen. California: Stanford UP, 1998.

Agamben, Giorgio. *Means Without End*. Translated by Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.

Agamben, Giorgio. *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*. Edited and translated by Daniel-Heller Roazen. California: Stanford UP, 1999.

Agamben, Giorgio. *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*. Translated by Daniel Heller-Roazen. New York: Zone Books, 2000.

Agamben, Giorgio. *State of Exception*. Translated by Kevin Attell. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005.

Aguiar, Marian. *Tracking Modernity: India's Railway and the Culture of Mobility*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011.

Ahmad, S. Maqbul. "The Position of Urdu in India Today." *Language and Society in India*. Lucknow: Prem Printing Press, 1969.

Ali, Kamran Asdar. "Progressives and 'Perverts.'" *Social Text*, 29 (2011): 1-29.

Alonso, Ana Maria. "The Politics of Space, Time and Substance: State Formation, Nationalism and Ethnicity." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (1994): 379-405.

Anderson, Patrick and Jisha Menon. V*iolence Performed: Local Roots and Global Routes of Conflict*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

Anidjar, Gil. *The Jew, The Arab: A History of the Enemy*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 2003.

Arendt, Hannah. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1951.

Artaud, Antonin. *The Theatre and Its Double*. Translated by Mary Caroline Richards. New York: Grove Press, 1994.

Asaduddin, M. "Manto Flattened: An Assessment of Khalid Hasan's Translations." *The Annual of Urdu Studies* 11 (1996): 129-139.

Asaduddin, M. *Ismat Chughtai: A Life in Words*. India: Penguin Books India, 2012. Translated from Chughtai's Urdu original *Kaghazi Hai Pairahan.*

Azoulay, Ariella. *The Civil Contract of Photography*. New York: Zone Books, 2008.

Baldwin, Shauna Singh. *What the Body Remembers*, New York: Anchor Books, 1999.

Barenscott, Dorothy. "'This is Our Holocaust': Deepa Mehta's Earth and the Question of Partition Trauma." *UCLA Historical Journal* 21 (2006): 60-79.

Barker, Clare. *Postcolonial Fiction and Disability: Exceptional Children, Metaphor and Materiality*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

Basu, Lopamudra. "The Repetition of Silence: Partition, Rape, and Female Labor in Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India.*" *South Asian Review* 28, no. 2 (2007): 5-26.

Basu, Priyanka. "Becoming 'folk': religion, protest and cultural communism in the Kabigāna of Ramesh Sil and Gumani Dewan." *South Asian History and Culture* 8, no. 3 (2017): 317-337.

Bataille, George. *Literature and Evil*, New York: M. Boyars, 1985.

Beckett, Samuel. *Endgame: a play in one act*. London: Faber and Faber, 1964.

Beckett, Samuel. *The Unnamable*. London: Calder and Boyars, 1975.

Beckett, Samuel. *Waiting for Godot: a tragicomedy in two acts*. London: Faber and Faber, 1959.

Bell, Elizabeth. "The Un-Contexted Master: An Out-of-Culture Experience of Naiyer Masud." *The Annual of Urdu Studies* 12 (1997): 279-87.

Bernard, Anna and Ziad Elmarsafy. *What Postcolonial Theory Doesn't Say*. New York, London: Routledge, 2016.

Bhalla, Alok. "Memory, History, and Fictional Representations of the Partition." *Economic and Political Weekly* 34, no. 44 (Oct/Nov 1999), 3119-3128.

Bhalla, Alok. "Moral Action in Times of Duragraha: The Representation of the Sikhs in Partition Fiction." *Social Scientist* 34, No. 5/6 (2006): 104-131.

Bhalla, Alok. *Partition Dialogues: Memories of a Lost Home*. New Delhi: Oxford UP, 2006.

Bhalla, Alok. *Stories About the Partition of India*. New Delhi: Manohar Publishers & Distributors, 2012.

Brass, Paul. *Language, Religion, and Politics in North India*. London: Cambridge UP, 1974.

Brown, Bill. "Thing Theory." In *Things*. Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 2004.

Butalia, Urvashi. *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2000.

Butler, Judith. *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. London: Verso, 2004.

Caruth, Cathy. *Literature in the Ashes of History*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2013.

Chughtai, Ismat. “Mahfil Interviews Ismat Chughtai.” *Mahfil* 8, no. 2/3 (Summer-Fall 1972): 169-188.

Chughtai, Ismat. “Of Fists and Rubs.” In *The Greatest Urdu Stories Ever Told*, selected and translated by Muhammad Umar Memon. New Delhi: Aleph Book Company, 2017, 158-166.

Chughtai, Ismat. “Quit India.” In *Lifting the Veil*, translated by M. Asaduddin. India: Penguin Books India, 2001, 94-108.

Chughtai, Ismat. *Quit India: And Other Stories*. Translated by Tahira Naqvi. India: Women Unlimited, 2017.

Connor, Steven. *Beyond Words: Sobs, Hums, Stutters, and Other Vocalizations*. London: Reaktion Books, 2014.

Connor, Steven. *The Book of Skin*. London: Reaktion Books, 2004.

Cooppan, Vilashini. “Ghosts in the Disciplinary Machine: The Uncanny Life of World Literature,” *Comparative Literature Studies* 41, no. 1 (2004): 10-36.

Creed, Barbara. *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*. London: Routledge, 1993.

Daiya, Kavita. “Re-Gendering the Nation: Masculinity, Romance, and Citizenship.” In *Violent Belongings: Partition, Gender, and National Culture in Postcolonial India*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008.

Damrosch, David. *What is World Literature?* Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2003.

Daniel, E. Valentine. “Embodied Terror.” In *Charred Lullabies: Chapters in an Anthropography of Violence*, 135-153. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996.

Das, Smita. “Space of the Crazy in Saadat Hasan Manto’s *Toba Tek Singh*.” *South Asian Review* 26, No. 2 (2005): 202-216.

Das, Veena. *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019.

De Kesel, Marc and Sigi Jottkandt. “Misrecognising the Other.” In *Eros and Ethics: Reading Jacques Lacan's Seminar VII*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009.

De Vries, Hent. *Minimal Theologies: Critiques of Secular Reason in Adorno and Levinas*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019.

Deleuze, Gilles and Felix Guattari. *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. London: Bloomsbury, 2013.

Deleuze, Gilles and Felix Guattari. *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan, Minneapolis: University of Minnestota Press, 1986.

Deleuze, Gilles. “The Exhausted.” In *Essays Critical and Clinical*, translated by Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco. London: Verso, 1998.

Derrida, Jacques. *Of Grammatology.* Translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins UP, 1976.

Derrida, Jacques. *Writing and Difference*. Translated by Alan Bass. Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1978.

Dimock, Wai Chee. *Through Other Continents: American Literature Across Deep Time.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009.

Doerr, Karin. “Words of Fear, Fear of Words: Language Memories of Holocaust Survivors.” *Explorations in Anthropology* 9, No. 1 (2009): 47-57.

Esty, Joshua. "Excremental Postcolonialism." *Contemporary Literature* 40, No. 1 (Spring 1999): 22-59.

Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Translated by Charles Lam Markmann. London: Pluto Press, 2008.

Farrukhi, Asif. "A Conversation with Naiyer Masud." Translated by Muhammad Umar Memon. *The Annual of Urdu Studies* 12 (1997): 265-78.

Farrukhi, Asif. "Miraji 1912-1948: Salam, Miraji!" in *Dawn*, 4 Nov, 2012, https://www.dawn.com/news/761473/miraji-1912-1949-salam-miraji

Fenech, Louis E. *Martyrdom in the Sikh Tradition: Playing the 'Game of Love'*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Fenner, Angelica. "Aural Topographies of Migration in Yamina Benguigui's *Inch'Allah Dimanche*." *Feminism, Culture, and Media Studies* 22, No. 3 (2007): 93-127

Forster, E. M. *A Passage to India*. London: Edward Arnold, 1967.

Franke, William. *A Philosophy of the Unsayable*. Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2014.

Franke, William. *On What Cannot Be Said: Apophatic Discourses in Philosophy, Religion, Literature, and the Arts*, Volumes 1 & 2, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007.

Gooptu, Nandini. "The Urban Poor and Militant Hinduism in Early Twentieth-Century Uttar Pradesh. *Modern Asian Studies* 31, no. 4 (1997): 879-918.

Graff, Violette, ed. *Lucknow: Memories of a City*. New Delhi: Oxford UP, 1997.

Grillo, Michael C. and Stuart J. Kaufman. "Gandhi's Nonviolence, Communal Conflict, and the Salt March". In *Nationalist Passions*, edited by Stuart J. Kaufman, 148-175. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015.

Gupta, Charu. "The Icon of Mother in Late Colonial North India: 'Bharat Mata', 'Matri Bhasha' and 'Gau Mata.'" *Economic and Political Weekly* (2001): 4291-4299.

Halberstam, Judith. *In a Queer Time & Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*. New York: New York UP, 2005.

Hall, Alice. *Disability and Modern Fiction: Faulkner, Morrison, Coetzee and the Nobel Prize for Literature.* London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

Hasan, Mushirul. "Memories of a Fragmented Nation: Rewriting the Histories of India's Partition." *Economic and Political Weekly* 33, no. 41 (October 1998): 2662-2668.

Hasan, Mushirul. *India Partitioned: The Other Face of Freedom*. Vols. 1 and 2. New Delhi: Roli Books, 1995.

Hasan, Mushirul. *Inventing Boundaries: Gender, Politics, and the Partition of India*. New Delhi: Oxford UP, 2000.

Hasan, Mushirul. *Legacy of a Divided Nation: India's Muslims Since Independence*. London: C. Hurst, 1997.

Hirsch, Marianne. "Family Pictures: Maus, Mourning, and Post-Memory," *Discourse* 15. 2 (1992-1993): 3-29.

Hirsch, Marianne. *The Generation of Post-Memory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2012.

Homer, Frederic D. *Primo Levi and the Politics of Survival*. London: University of Missouri Press, 2001.

Hrvatin, Emil. “The Scream.” *Performance Research* 2. 1 (1997): 82-91.

Hutchings, Peter. ‘I’m the Girl He Wants to Kill’: ‘The Woman in Peril’ Thriller in 1970s British Film and Television. *Visual Culture in Britain* 10, No. 1 (2009): 53-69.

Hyder, Qurratulain. *River of Fire*. New York: New Directions, 2003.

Jafri, Abdal Ahmed. *Sa’adat Hasan Aur Manto*. Lahore: Nigarshat Publishers, 2013.

Jalal, Ayesha and Sugata Bose. *Modern South Asia: History, Culture, Political Economy*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2004.

Jalal, Ayesha. “Secularists, Subalterns and the Stigma of ‘Communalism’: Partition Historiography Revisited.” *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 33, no. 1 (1996): 93-103.

Jalal, Ayesha. *The Pity of Partition: Manto’s Life, Times, and Work Across the India-Pakistan Divide*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2013.

Jalal, Ayesha. *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, The Muslim League, and the Demand for Pakistan*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

Jalal, Ayesha. *The Struggle for Pakistan: A Muslim Homeland and Global Politics*. Cambridge, London: Harvard University Press, 2014.

Jarman, Mark. “Life and After Life” in *The Hudson Review* 69:2 (Summer 2016): 313-321.

Jarvis, Jill. “Remnants of Muslims: Reading Agamben’s Silence.” *New Literary History* 45 (2014): 707-728.

Jayal, Niraja Gopal. *Citizenship and its Discontents: An Indian History*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2013.

Ka-tzetnik. *Kar’u lo piepel*. Tel-Aviv: ‘Am ha-Sefer, 1961. Trans. Moshe Kohn as *Moni: A Novel of Auschwitz*. Secaucus, N.J.: Citadel Press, 1963.

Kennedy-Andrews, Elmer. *Ciaran Carson: Critical Essays*. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2009.

Khan, Yasmin. *The Great Partition: The Making of India and Pakistan.* London: Yale UP, 2007.

Kipling, Rudyard. *Kim*. London: Penguin Books, 1989.

Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982.

Kristeva, Julia. *The Severed Head: Capital Visions*. Translated by Jody Gladding. New York: Columbia University Press, 2014.

Lacan, Jacques. *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959-1960: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book VII*. Translated by Dennis Porter. London: Routledge, 1992.

Lévi-Strauss, Claude. *The Savage Mind*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1972.

Levi, Primo. *The Drowned and Saved*. Translated by Raymond Rosenthal. London: Abacus, 1989.

Levi, Primo. *The Voice of Memory: Interviews 1961-87*. Edited by Marco Belpoliti and Robert Gordon. Translated by Robert Gordon. Cambridge: Polity, 2001.

Maier, Carol. "Translating as a body: meditations on mediation (Excerpts 1994-2004)." In *The Translator as Writer*. Edited by Susan Bassnett and Peter Bush, 137-148. London: Continuum, 2006.

Manto, Sa'adat Hasan. "Phundne." In Rekhta https://www.rekhta.org/stories/phundane-saadat-hasan-manto-stories?lang=ur . Accessed on October 25, 2020.

Manto, Sa'adat Hasan. *Black Margins*. Edited by Muhammad Umar Memon. Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Manto, Sa'adat Hasan. *Manto Kahaniyan*. Lahore: Sang-e-Meel Publications, 2015.

Masud, Naiyer. *The Essence of Camphor*. Translated by Muhammad Umar Memon. New Delhi: Katha, 1998.

Mazumdar, Sudip, Zahid Hussain, and Ron Moreau. "Terror on the Tracks: Worrisome Suspects in India's Train Bombings." *Newsweek* 148, No. 4 (2006): 33.

Mbembe, Achille. "Necropolitics." *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (2003): 11-40.

Memmi, Albert. *The Colonizer and the Colonized*. London: Earthscan Publications Ltd., 2003.

Memon, Muhammad Umar. *The Greatest English Stories Ever Told*. India: Rupa Publications, 2017.

Memon, Muhammad Umar. "Naiyer Masud: A Prefatory Note." *The Annual of Urdu Studies* (1997): 1-8, https://minds.wisconsin.edu/handle/1793/11983.

Menon, Ritu and Kamla Bhasin. *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition*. New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1998.

Miller, William Ian. *The Anatomy of Disgust*. London: Harvard University Press, 1998.

Misri, Deepti. *Beyond Partition: Gender, Violence and Representation in Postcolonial India*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2014.

Mookherjee, Nayanika. *The Spectral Wound: Sexual Violence, Public Memories, and the Bangladesh War of 1971*. London: Duke University Press, 2015.

Morton, Stephen. "Violence, Gender and Partition in the Narration of the South Asian Nation." In *The Other India: Narratives of Terror, Communalism and Violence*. Edited by Om Prakash Dwivedi, 40-50. Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012.

Muller, Patrick. "The Impediment That Cannot Say Its Name." *Anglia* 130, no. 1 (2012): 54-74.

Munos, Delphine and Bénédicte Ledent. *Minor Genres in Postcolonial Literatures*. New York, London: Routledge, 2019.

Murray, Alex and Jessica Whyte. *The Agamben Dictionary*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2011.

Muse, John Kenneth. "The Craft of Naiyer Masud." *The Annual of Urdu Studies* 21 (2006): 3-22.

Mutman, Mahmut and Ersan Ocak, "Fetal Culture." *Radical Philosophy* 147 (January/February 2008): 23-32.

Nagappan, Ramu. *Speaking Havoc: Social Suffering and South Asian Narratives*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005.

Naim, C. M. and Carla Petievich. "Urdu in Lucknow/Lucknow in Urdu." In *Lucknow: Memories of a City*, edited by Violette Graff. New Delhi: Oxford UP, 1997.

Orwell, George. *Shooting and Elephant and Other Essays*. London: Penguin Books, 2009.

Padamsee, Alex. "Uncertain Partitions: Undecidability and the Urdu Short Story." *Wasafiri* 53, no. 1 (2008): 1–5.

Pallasmaa, Juhani. *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses*. Chichester: Wiley Academy, 2012.

Pandey, Gyanendra. "The Prose of Otherness." In *Subaltern Studies VIII: Essays in Honour of Ranajit Guha*. Edited by David Arnold and David Hardiman. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994.

Pandey, Gyanendra. *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism, and History in India*. New York: Cambridge UP, 2001.

Pandey, Gyanendra. *Routine Violence: Nations, Fragments, Histories*. California: Stanford UP, 2006.

Paul Kumar, Sukrita and Sadique. *Ismat: Her Life, Her Times*. New Delhi: Katha, 2000.

ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times. “At Least 26 Die in India in Assam Train Bombing.” *New York Times*, December 31, 1996. https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.york.ac.uk/docview/430706796?rfr_id=info%3Axri%2Fsid%3Aprimo .

ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Washington Post. “Bomb on Train Kills Dozens in India: Police Blame Separatists for Attack in Strife-Torn Eastern State.” *The Washington Post*, December 31, 1996. https://www-proquest-com.libproxy.york.ac.uk/docview/1033930787?OpenUrlRefId=info:xri/sid:primo&accountid=15181 .

Rahman, Tariq. “The Teaching of Urdu in British India.” *The Annual of Urdu Studies* 15 (2000): 31-57.

Rainsford, Dominic. “Literature, Catastrophe, and Numbers: Saadat Hasan Manto and Tahar Ben Jelloun.” *The Comparatist* 41 (2017): 5-18.

Rajaram, Prem Kumar. “Disruptive Writing and a Critique of Territoriality.” *Review of International Studies* 30 (2004): 201-228.

Ramaswamy, Sumathi. “The Wretched of the Nation.” *Third Text* 31 Nos. 2-3 (2017): 213-237.

Ramaswamy, Sumathi. “Visualizing India’s Geo-Body: Globes, Maps, Bodyscapes.” *Contributions to Indian Sociology*. 36.1-2 (2002): 151-189.

Ramaswamy, Sumathi. *The Goddess and the Nation: Mapping Mother India*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010.

Rancière, Jacques. “Farewell to Artistic and Political Impotence” (Interview with Gabriel Rockhill and Alexi Kukuljevic). *Machete* 1, no. 3 (December 2009): http://www.marginalutility.org/publications/zines/2009/machete-zines-december-2009/

Rancière, Jacques. *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*. Translated by Steve Corcoran. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009.

Rancière, Jacques. *Mute Speech*. Translated by James Swenson. New York: Columbia UP, 2011.

Rancière, Jacques. *The Flesh of Words*. Translated by Charlotte Mandell. California: Stanford UP, 2004.

Raychaudhuri, Tapan. "Re-reading Divide and Quit." In *Divide and Quit: An Eyewitness Account of the Partition of India*, edited by Penderel Moon, 297-306. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Rieff, David. *In Praise of Forgetting*: *Historical Memory and Its Ironies*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016.

Roy, Rituparna. *South Asian Partition Fiction in English: From Khushwant Singh to Amitav Ghosh*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010, pp. 33, 44, 100, and 148

Rudolph, Lloyd I. and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph. *In Pursuit of Lakshmi: The Political Economy of the Indian State*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987.

Rushdie, Salman. *Midnight's Children*. London: Vintage, 1995.

Saint, Tarun K. "The Long Shadow of Manto's Partition Narratives: 'Fictive' Testimony to Historical Trauma." *Social Scientist* 40, No. 11/12 (2012): 53-62.

Saksena, Ram Babu. *A History of Urdu Literature*. New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1990.

Samaddar, Ranabir. *The Politics of Dialogue. Living Under the Geopolitical Histories of War and Peace.* Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2004.

Sangari, Kumkum. “The Politics of the Possible.” In *Theory of the Novel: A Historical Approach*, 900-922. Edited by Michael McKeon. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000.

Sen, Raja. “Manto movie review: Nawazuddin Siddiqui pours out a glassful of Manto.” *Hindustan Times*, September 22, 2018.

Sengupta, Sagaree. “An Interview with Naiyer Masud” in *The Annual of Urdu Studies* (1998): 123-160. https://minds.wisconsin.edu/handle/1793/12039.

Sengupta, Somini and Saritha Rai. “Series of Bombs Explode on 7 Trains in India, Killing Scores.” *New York Times*, July 14, 2006. ProQuest Historical Newspapers. https://search-proquestcom.libproxy.york.ac.uk/docview/433372586?rfr_id=info%3Axri%2Fsid%3Aprimo .

Sengupta, Somini. “3 Suspects Sought in Connection with India Train Blasts.” *New York Times*, July 14, 2006. ProQuest Historical Newspapers. https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.york.ac.uk/docview/433369608?rfr_id=info%3Axri%2Fsid%3Aprimo .

Shaw, Valerie. *The Short Story: A Critical Introduction*. London and New York: Longman, 1983.

Shepard, Todd. *The Invention of Decolonization: The Algerian War and the Remaking of France*. Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 2006.

Shum, Jane A. “Authorial Intention and the Question of Meaning in the Works of Naiyer Masud.” *The Annual of Urdu Studies* 21 (2006): 23-100.

Sidhwa, Bapsi. *Cracking India*, Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 1991.

Singh, Anita Inder. *The Origins of the Partition of India, 1936-1947*. Delhi: Oxford UP, 1987.

Singh, Khushwant. *Train to Pakistan*. 1956. Reprint, New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1990.

Singh, Sujala. “Postcolonial Children Representing the Nation in Arundhati Roy, Bapsi Sidhwa and Shyam Selvadurai.” *Wasafiri* 41 (2004): 13-18.

Sofsky, Wolfgang. *The Order of Terror: The Concentration Camp*. Translated by William Templer. Princeton: Princeton UP, 2001.

Spivak, Gayatari. “Can the Subaltern Speak?” In *Can the Subaltern Speak? Reflections on the History of an Idea*, 21-78. Edited by Rosalind Morris. New York: Columbia University Press, 2010.

Steiner, George. *Language and Silence: Essays on Language, Literature, and the Inhuman*. New York: Atheneum, 1977.

Svensson, Ted. *Production of Postcolonial India and Pakistan*. London: Routledge, 2016.

Tajiri, Yoshiki. *Samuel Beckett and the Prosthetic Body: The Organs and Senses in Modernism*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

Tan, Tai Yong and Gyanesh Kudaisya. *The Aftermath of Partition in South Asia*. London: Routledge, 2000.

Thornber, Karen. “Mashal Books as Cultural Mediator: Translating East Asian, Middle Eastern, and African Literatures into Urdu in Lahore.” In *Literary Translation and Cultural Mediators in 'Peripheral' Cultures: Customs Officers or Smugglers?* Edited by Diana Roig-Sanz and Reine Meylaerts, 157-182. Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.

Venuti, Lawrence. *The Translator’s Invisibility: A History of Translation*. London: Routledge, 2017.

Wentink, Linda. “Manto as a Modernist.” *Journal of South Asian Literature* 20, No. 2 (Summer, Fall 1985): 121-130.

Yusin, Jennifer. “Beyond Nationalism: The Border, Trauma and Partition Fiction.” *Thesis Eleven* 105, No. 1 (2011): 23-34.

Zamindar, Vazira Fazila-Yacoobali. *The Long Partition and the Making of Modern South Asia: Refugees, Boundaries, Histories*. New York: Columbia UP, 2010.

Appendix

Excerpts from Manto's *Black Margins*:

"A Raw Deal"

Two friends pooled their resources. They selected a girl from a group of ten or twenty and bought her for forty rupees.

After having spent the night with her, one of them asked, "What's your name?"

The man was furious when he heart the girl's name.

"We were told that you belong to the other religious community!"

"You were told a lie," the girl replied.

The man ran to his friend and said, "That bastard doublecrossed us. He palmed off one of our own girls! Come on, let's take her back."

"Humility"

The moving train was forcibly brought to a halt. Those who belonged to the other religion were dragged out and killed with swords or bullets. The rest of the passengers were treated to halva, fruits, and milk.

Before the train continued on, the chief organizer of the hospitality addressed the passengers, "Bhaiyon aur Behnon! We found out about this train's arrival rather late. That's why, even though we wanted to, we weren't able to treat you in a more befitting manner."