

“How Many Pakistans?”
*Questions of Space and Identity in the
Writing of Partition.*

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THERE IS A passage in Saadat Hasan Manto’s famous Urdu short story, “Toba Tek Singh,” which could be read as an archetypal moment in the representation of the 1947 Indo-Pakistani Partition. As a comment on the relative sanity of national-communal division, Manto sets his story in a Lahore lunatic asylum and here the horror of Partition is conveyed in a bleak comic disorientation that takes hold of the inmates, as they become unable to situate themselves in the changed landscape of a newly independent South-Asia. The passage that stands out in Manto’s story articulates this dislocation as a repeated inquiry about the exact whereabouts of the new states:

As to where Pakistan was located, the inmates knew nothing. That was why both the mad and the partially mad were unable to decide whether they were now in India or Pakistan. If they were in India, where on earth was Pakistan? And if they were in Pakistan, then how come that until only the other day it was India? (25)

In other South Asian writings dealing with Partition (both in indigenous languages and in English), the physical and psychological ordeal of national-communal division is often underscored by similar crises of location. The very title of Kamleshwar’s Hindi short story “Kitne Pakistan?” (How Many Pakistans?) embodies this sense of disorientation, and in Rahi Masoom Reza’s Hindi novel, *Aadha Gaon* (referred to here, in Gillian Wright’s translation, as *The Feuding Families of Village Gangauli*), the gradual polarization of the community before Partition is preceded by shared uncertainty over place, as the villagers ask whether they will “go to Pakistan or stay in Hindustan” (47).

Indo-Pakistani independence heralded one of the largest mass-migrations of the twentieth century, and themes of displacement, travel, and relocation underpin the recorded experiences of *mohajirs* and refugees who crossed the Punjab in the latter half of 1947. Consequently, in literary writings which deal with this period, the birth of nation is often presented as a spatial rite of passage; a symbolic flight or pilgrimage into new territories and unpredictable futures. More pertinently, these diasporic narratives re-emphasize striking ambiguities in the geo-politics of Partition. These are most evident in the representation of the act of “crossing over,” and the presence of the Punjab boundary as a place of exchange and transfiguration, rather than a line of political containment. Here, the crossing of the Punjab boundary in the months following Partition involves negotiation in two senses of the word cited in the *Oxford English Dictionary* — as “the action of getting over or around some obstacle,” and as a “transaction” or personal reckoning of different geographies of belonging.

In keeping with broad theoretical trends in the north, postcolonial critical engagements with issues of identity and space/place have, until now, focused on colonial documents such as the map or travelogue, and on interstitial spaces of cultural alterity in the post-colonial nation or metropolis.¹ Concurrently, critical and editorial commentaries accompanying recent collections of Partition writings in translation have tended to elide the spatial aspects of these texts, framing them as chronologically structured responses to a historical “event.” In his collection of short stories in translation, *Stories about the Partition of India*, Alok Bhalla describes the literary representation of Partition as successive stages of a response: stories of “anger and negation . . . lamentation and consolation [and the] retrieval of memories” (xv). And in a review of recent anthologies of Partition literature (including Bhalla’s) Jason Francisco repeats this paradigmatic gesture by locating “thematic areas [of] rupture, protest and repair” in the literary representation of Partition. For Francisco, “these three motifs taken as a progression form a natural response to Partition, a continuum from pain to healing” (238). It is equally the case that in writings which treat Partition in historicist terms, as part of the transition from colony to nation, or in psychological terms, as a focus for memory and

subjective remaking, it is time that is characterized, in Foucault's words, as "richness, fecundity, life, dialectic," and space which is devalued as "the dead, the fixed . . . the immobile" (70).

In this paper, I do not wish to question the usefulness or validity of these approaches. Indeed, a critical awareness of memory, *durée*, and the contingency of historical narrative is particularly useful in reading fictions which deal with Partition retrospectively, such as Intizar Husain's Urdu novel *Basti*, and Bapsi Sidhwa's English text *Cracking India*. However, in the following pages, I shall attempt a reading of selected Partition literatures which reasserts the salience of space alongside issues of temporality and historical becoming. Calling for a renewed "theoretical consciousness" of human geographies in contemporary social sciences, Edward Soja argues the need for a spatializing reading when he states that "the critical hermeneutic is still enveloped in a temporal master-narrative, in a historical but not yet comparably geographical imagination" (11).² Soja is, of course, working within the cultural and philosophical environment of postmodernism, and in this essay his work will be resituated or rather, re-constellated³ in the postcolonial setting of South Asia on the threshold of independence.

By proposing a postcolonial spatial awareness in the study of Partition literatures, my paper contributes more clearly to an academic revaluation of the events of 1947 that has sought, in recent years, to draw attention to the silencing of certain voices and collective experiences as an inherent part of the creation of India and Pakistan. Thus, talking of women's narratives of Partition in Sidhwa's work, Deepika Bahri suggests that the cultural lack of "an institutional vocabulary of guilt, responsibility and survival after rape makes silence [for women who have been raped during Partition] a choice necessary for social survival" (220). While not focusing primarily on cultural geography, it is telling that Bahri uses metaphors of space and spatial occlusion to describe a culturally sanctioned sense of shame that prevents women from remaking their lives after Partition: "A woman raped and speaking of her shame must accept that she can no longer occupy any available and acceptable social space; she were, in fact, better dead" (220). For other critics, re-addressing Partition requires a sensitivity to comparable lacunae in the official geopolitical histories of the new

states. Thus, in a companion piece to Bahri's work on women's narratives, Shelley Feldman draws attention to critical biases in writing about Partition, and reads the "silenced histories" of the former East Pakistan as an integral part of official discourses of Pakistani nationalism and a more recent Bangladeshi identity. Because of the relatively limited literary response to the 1947 Bengal Partition I will deal solely with writings set in the Punjab in this paper, and my project therefore acknowledges but also maintains Feldman's critical distinction, in the Derridean sense, under erasure.

In one of his interviews Michel Foucault makes the expansive statement that a "whole history remains to be written of *spaces* — which would at the same time be the history of *powers* — from the great strategies of geo-politics to the little tactics of the habitat" (149), and in the following pages I wish to develop my reading of Partition along these lines. The macropolitical strategies of Partition (as a protracted cartographic negotiation over an Islamic homeland) have already been outlined in relevant historical accounts, but their consequences have yet to be plotted out in the imaginative "habitats" of fictional narrative. At first, by tracing out the ramifications of national division on a local level in these texts, I will draw attention to Partition as a site of agonistic spatial imaginings. And second, I want to examine the paradoxical depiction of the new national boundaries between India and Pakistan in writing about Partition. As we shall see, even as national-communal boundaries and borders are traced out, their conceptual presence remains highly uncertain in the villages and rural communities depicted in these literatures. My analysis concludes by considering the significance of the border as a contested and re-narrated space in the fictional re-presentation of Partition.

For authors working in the indigenous languages of the subcontinent, the literary engagement with Partition has been far-reaching (particularly in terms of the short-story form), and therefore my analysis will not be restricted to works written in English, but will encompass translations of short stories written in Hindi and Urdu. For the latter I will rely heavily on Mushirul Hasan's anthology of short stories in translation, *India Partitioned: The Other Face of Freedom*, as well as drawing from comparable works such as Saros

Cowasjee and K. S. Duggal's collection, *Orphans of the Storm: Stories on the Partition of India*, and Khalid Hasan's collection of Saadat Hasan Manto's stories in translation, *Kingdom's End and Other Stories*. My theoretical position in this case is for an affirmative use of translation(s) that suspends the notion of "original" transcendent text — recognizing instead the provisional, context-bound nature of all readings — while at the same time maintaining a critical sensitivity to the "violating" potential of reading-as-translation.⁴

Finding Spaces for Pakistan

While the political and historical reasons for Partition are still fiercely debated, most commentators agree that the disastrous tri-section of the subcontinent was the result both of a rapid polarizing of communal factions in the Indian electorate (although in the case of Congress, Hindu communal identification was covert), and a hasty, mismanaged British exit from empire. The presence of incommensurable factions within the nationalist movement can be clarified if we refer to the work of the Indian political historian Partha Chatterjee. Attacking the idea that nationalism in the subcontinent is a wholly modular, borrowed political form in his work *The Nation and its Fragments*, Chatterjee argues that in Indian nationalism the civic demarcation of universal spaces of public and private selfhood (derived from the "ideology of the modern liberal-democratic state") conflicts with, and fails to map onto, the cultural and metaphysical field "where [the indigenous national elite] had imagined its true community" (10). In short, Chatterjee's view of Indian nationalism as an "unresolved contest" is meant to reveal the limits and contingencies of colonial and neocolonial power, and allow the creative imagining of new forms of postcolonial nationhood.⁵

But, as well as indicating the unrealized possibilities of nationhood, Chatterjee's work also points to the way in which anticolonial nationalism could foster a plural, and sometimes contradictory set of narratives of identity generated around civic sentiments, language, ethnic, and/or communal identification. Indeed, in more "discursive" models of nationalism, ethnic, or regional identities are placed in a much more dynamic relationship with the contingent emblems and narratives of civic citizenship. Here the nation

reveals itself as more obviously Janus-faced: a “modern project that melts and transforms traditional attachments in favour of new identities . . . [and instigates] a reaffirmation of authentic cultural values culled from the depths of a presumed communal past” (Kandiyoti 378). For Deniz Kandiyoti, in his paper “Identity and Its Discontents: Women and the Nation,” nationalism can be read as a less structured discursive economy which intervenes in itself: “a highly fluid and ambivalent field of meanings that can be reactivated, reinterpreted and often reinvented at critical junctures of the histories of nation-states” (378).

In colonial India, the late 1930s and early 1940s proved to be just such a critical historical juncture, and by the middle years of the Second World War it was becoming clear that Britain would not be able to retain its hold on India indefinitely. In 1942 Churchill dispatched the Cripps mission in order to try to obtain Indian loyalty in exchange for the promise of an Indian Union when hostilities ceased. Stanley Wolpert points out that in Gandhi’s view, the offer was clearly unacceptable: a “post-dated cheque on a bank that was failing” (334), and once again the Mahatma launched mass *satyagraha*, now with “Quit India” as his mobilizing slogan. However, by this time the Muslim League, following its meteoric rise to power after 1937, had plotted out a different political course for itself at the Lahore Session of 1940. Out of “at least six different proposals as to how the division of the continent might best be accomplished” (330), the League drew up a masterpiece of political ambiguity:

The Lahore resolution stated “that no constitutional plan would be workable . . . or acceptable to the Muslims unless it is designed on the following principles, viz., that geographically contiguous units are demarcated into regions which should be so constituted with such territorial readjustments as may be necessary that the areas in which Muslims are numerically in a majority as in the north western and eastern zones of India, should be grouped to constitute [autonomous and sovereign] states.” (330-31)

What the Lahore Resolution reveals most saliently is the geographically protean nature of the projected national-communal homeland. The clause on “territorial readjustments” allowed considerable room for manoeuvre, and later changes included a demand

for the whole of the Punjab and Bengal and an 800-mile-long “corridor” that would connect West and East Pakistan. Indeed, as we can see, this first proposal also seemed to suggest an autonomous independent Bengali state in the east, rather than the divided Pakistan that initially came into existence.

Thus, after the British had failed to conciliate the nationalists with the earlier Cripps plan for a disempowered Union and only a few months before independence, Mountbatten showed Jawaharlal Nehru a contingency plan (later known as the “Balkan Plan”) that proposed a division of India along more provincial lines. M. K. Akbar describes it thus: “The government in Delhi would be weak . . . [and] with uncertain power being transferred to so many different points . . . at least a dozen confused nations would emerge” (408). As Akbar makes clear, the “Balkanization” of India was more than a distinct possibility both before and after Independence. Indeed, in Chaudhry Rahmat Ali’s 1940 cartographic projection of “The Pak Commonwealth of Nations” (Ahmed xxvii) in which new Muslim states appear in central India and Kerala, a multiple division of the subcontinent is also anticipated.

While we remain attentive to the selective discourses of both civic and ethnic/communal nationalisms, we should be wary of established interpretations of the Lahore Resolution as a fixed statement of divisive political intent, or of the Congress party as necessarily a force for sub-continental unity. In recent years revisionist historians such as Asim Roy have argued that the deliberate vagueness of the Lahore Resolution was due to the fact that Mohammed Jinnah engineered it as a bargaining ploy for power in a united India (102-32). Other commentators such as R. J. Moore have stated, to the contrary, that Jinnah’s fight for Pakistan never compromised his commitment to “a right to [communal] territorial asylum . . . in the north-western and eastern regions of India” (196). In both cases there is, however, general consensus on the heterogeneity of the territorial models proposed. As R. J. Moore stresses, Jinnah was willing to accept “from time to time, quite different constitutional forms as consistent with the Pakistan demand,” and this adaptability was a response “in part [to] the necessities of a dynamic situation” and to “the advice proffered by colleagues” (196).

In many ways, then, the proliferation of geopolitical plans in the years directly before independence signal a serious uncertainty over the degree to which communally and culturally defined minority groups could be integrated into the secular civic polity and still maintain democratic political leverage. Khushwant Singh points up the paradoxical nature of this problem when he describes it as a process of choice and exclusion: “Am I Indian first and Punjabi or Sikh second? Or is it the other way round? I don’t like the way these questions are framed. I want to retain my religious and linguistic identity without making them exclusive” (7). In the above passage, Singh indicates a central concern of the “Partition” literature addressed here; the representation of communities, families, and individuals who are suddenly persuaded or forced to make exclusive and essentializing choices about their identities—choices that are intimately linked to their sense of place.

The (Dis-)Location of Identity in Partition Literature

In the introduction to his collection of Partition writings, Alok Bhalla states that “There is a single common note which informs nearly all the stories written about the Partition and the horror it unleashed — a note of utter bewilderment” (ix), and this bewilderment is clearly apparent in the “insane” disorientation of the protagonists in Manto’s “Toba Tek Singh.” However, the upheavals of Partition are so cataclysmic they also seem to unsettle the form of Manto’s short fictions, which become radically decontextualized themselves, evoking the hastily scribbled notes, personal belongings or pieces of newspaper found in the wake of civil conflict and genocide. Representative examples of this “shattered” writing can be found in Manto’s first collection of Partition stories, *Siyah Hashye* (edited and translated by Mushirul Hasan in *India Partitioned* as *Black Margins*), which sometimes only comprise a few punning lines of text, or an anecdotal, paragraph-length narrative. Here, it is the challenge of representing the (often surreal) violence of communal conflict that forms the basis of Manto’s creative project. And although the short stories comprising Manto’s next collection (translated by Khalid Hasan in *Kingdom’s End*) take a more orthodox form and do not deal exclusively with Partition, we still encounter characters in them whose fragmented, frameless narratives evoke an acute sense of dispossession.

In the title story, "Kingdom's End," an itinerant film director, Manmohan, who usually sleeps rough on the streets, takes up temporary residence in an empty office while his friend is away on business. After answering a misdirected call he strikes up a relationship with a disembodied female voice on the telephone, and soon starts to look forward to his daily conversations with the mystery woman. Instead of working, Manmohan spends his days walking around the city and this aimless wandering, like the anonymity of his telephone relationship (he does not know the woman's name or number) reinforces the presiding tone of existential futility. The couple decide to exchange telephone numbers when Manmohan's reign over his office "kingdom" comes to an end, but Manmohan falls desperately ill and after waiting for a call is only able to whisper "My kingdom has come to an end today" to his anonymous interlocutor before he dies, clutching the receiver. "Kingdom's End" is not a short story that engages directly with Partition, but Manmohan's tenuous custody of his own personal space — his office kingdom — and his final, cryptic statement can be seen as symbolic reflections of the general spatial and subjective uncertainties of the period. In an ironic contrast to Nehru's metaphorical architecture in his "Tryst with Destiny" speech: "we have to . . . give reality to our dreams . . . we have to build the noble mansion of free India where all her children can dwell" (2), Manmohan is not interested in "realising his dreams," and is effectively homeless, dwelling "on the footpaths of the city" and in liminal, semi-public spaces such as corporate offices.

Alternatively, in stories such as "Xuda Ki Qasam" ("I Swear by God"), and "The Reunion," both translated by Khalid Hasan in Cowasjee and Duggal's collection, Manto's representation of radically decentred subjectivities operates in a less symbolic mode. In these narratives, subjective dislocations are realized in the depiction of women whose identities are transfigured or fragmented as a result of abduction and rape. In both stories the plot involves an older character's search for a younger female relative lost during migration. And in both cases, the anticipated, redemptive meeting is frustrated because the younger woman has undergone communal conversion and/or a form of psychological trauma at the

hands of her abductors. In "I Swear by God," a liaison officer involved in recovering abducted women tells the story of an old Muslim woman, whom he meets repeatedly in various Indian cities, who is trying to trace her daughter, Bhagbari. The old woman finally encounters her daughter in the street, only to find her with a Sikh man: "The girl looked up, but only for a second. Then, covering her face . . . she grabbed her companion's arm and said: 'Let's get away from here' " (169). In this instance, Bhagbari's abduction, and subsequent self-transformation, involves a displacement from the situated familial and cultural ties of her earlier life. Here, she resembles characters such as Lenny's Hindu ayah in Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India*, whose fate (after she has been abducted by one of her former, Muslim, admirers) is manifested as both a silencing, and the violent imposition of a new, token identity of Islamic womanhood.

Talking of more contemporary experiences of migration, Iain Chambers argues that it is precisely the fictional unity of self-identity that is challenged in the discontinuous cultural and spatial landscapes inhabited by the present-day migrant. As Chambers states, although "we imagine ourselves to be the author, rather than the object of, the narratives that constitute our lives," the cultural intermixtures of postmodernity — particularly in cosmopolitan spaces such as the European city — interrupt the "apparent closure of the 'I'" with the "interval of another story" (26). For Chambers, this form of subjective unsettling is cause for approbation, because it represents a challenge to the ethnocentric orders of the Western *cogito*. In contrast, the importance of Partition writings lies in the testimony they bear to different kind of subjective, migrant interruption, in which the closure of the "I" the fabricated, spatialized narrative of selfhood, is often interrupted as a sign of (or a survival response to) actual physical violence.

As Chambers makes clear, while the fiction of selfhood implies a degree of cultural and epistemological closure, it is also "life-preserving" in that it "saves us from the discontinuities of the subconscious, from schizophrenia, self-destruction and the entropy of madness" (*Ibid*), and this is a point that is sometimes lost in de-historicized accounts of the politically enabled — but fragmented, ambivalent, or hybrid postcolonial subject. Certainly, a

type of psychological entropy is exactly what occurs in Manto's story, "Khol do" (which is translated in Khalid Hasan's collection as "The Return," and in Cowasjee and Duggal's as "The Reunion"). Here, an aged emigrant searches for his daughter, Sakina, in a refugee camp, but when the two are finally reunited in the camp hospital, the daughter he "finds" is so traumatized after being raped that she cannot speak, and automatically unfastens her clothes in response to the doctor's request that her father "open up" the window. As in the garbled nonsense-speech which Bishan Singh repeats in "Toba Tek Singh," Manto deploys a sinister linguistic misinterpretation or slippage here in order to evoke an analogous sense of *subjective* ambiguity.

Imagining the Place of the Nation

As we have already seen, in much of Manto's work, space is used to frame the physical and existential violence of Partition, and, through the cataclysmic transformations of civil unrest and migration, characters are disembedded from the ethical and cultural topographies of their former lives. However, as part of this subjective disorientation, Partition writings also engage with the more specifically geographical problems of actually locating the newly created Islamic homeland. If the large-scale geopolitics of Pakistan were far from certain in the pre-independence period, then the territorial space of Pakistan is even more equivocal in the conceptual geographies of Partition literature. In the sequences of vernacular dialogue that punctuate the Muslim Shiite writer Rahi Masoom Reza's Hindi novel *Aadha Gaon*, translated in part by Gillian Wright as *The Feuding Families of Village Gangauli* (in Hasan, *India Partitioned*), which deals with the effect of the Muslim League's mass contacts campaign on an Indian rural community, the inhabitants of Gangauli are suddenly faced with new narratives of communal identity — recounted by Muslim League activists from the university at Aligarh.

"We hail from Aligarh," said one of the young men in the correct Urdu of an educated city dweller. [He] . . . proceeded to deliver a complete speech which Kammo didn't understand in the least because the young man was mentioning matters [which had no connection] with him or with Gangauli. (49-50)

Significantly, the Aligarh activists, in trying to mobilize the rural constituency, articulate their political agendas spatially. In his work on the cartographic inscription of nation Benedict Anderson stresses the value of the map-as-logo: a coloured cartographic shape that can become a “pure sign; . . . infinitely reproducible” and “instantly recognizable” (175). The political force of this kind of territorial projection comes across in the exhortations of the League activists in Wright’s translation. Thus, echoing an earlier imperialist concern with the colour of mapped colonial possessions, one of the Aligarh students states that “the most important thing [about the creation of Pakistan] is that the map of the world will be marked with the colour of one more Islamic government” (58). Amongst the villagers, the geo-political notion of “Pakistan as logo” is met with suspicion and incomprehension. And rationalizing this abstract political space on a local level, we find one of the characters in *The Feuding Families of Village Gangauli* describing Pakistan as an architectural, rather than a geo-political structure: “‘Eh, Bibi, where is this Pakistan being made?’ said Chikuriya . . . ‘If it is made in Ghazipur then I can go and see it! . . . I’m thinking that [it] must be some mosque or other’” (54).

In “Toba Tek Singh,” we encounter a comparable concern over the spatial location of Pakistan. Evoking the subversive wit of the Bakhtinian carnivalesque, or the absurd proverbial truths of folk-tale characters such as Shaikh Chilli,⁶ the lunatics of the Lahore asylum in Manto’s story provide an ironic commentary on the political insanity of national-communal division. In their responses to Partition, the enduring fixity of geographical place suddenly becomes unsettled, and towns and countries threaten to slip into each other, or disappear entirely:

It was anybody’s guess what was going to happen to Lahore, which was currently in Pakistan, but could slide into India any moment. It was also possible that the entire subcontinent of India might become Pakistan. And who could say if both India and Pakistan might not entirely vanish from the map of the world one day? (27)

As if to escape the tectonic shifting of the very ground across which new national identities are being mapped, one of the lunatics in Manto’s story actually “uproots” himself and climbs into a tree, seating himself on a branch and declaring “I wish to live neither in

India nor in Pakistan. I wish to live in this tree" (25). Giving a farcically literal turn to what some critics have called the "arborescent" rootedness of nationalism, Manto's character suspends the problem of political belonging, and dismisses the personal relevance of national identity altogether. As Manto recalled of his own reaction to news of Partition: "What my mind could not resolve was the question: what country did we belong to now, India or Pakistan?" (90).

While writers such as Manto or Rahi Masoom Reza indicate the difficulty of mapping local and national space simultaneously in their portrayal of the effects of Partition, they also explore local reactions to the new narratives of communal identification. In texts such as Reza's this reaction often takes the form of local expressions of the importance of the village as a site of identity. In these exchanges, the Aligarh students who canvass the villagers are reduced figuratively to their anonymous black *shervani* coats, and local characters such as Kammo and the war veteran Tannu become richer as they are forced to defend non-Muslim aspects of their identities:

"I am not a voter!" Tannu interrupted the black shervani, "I am a Muslim. But I love this village because I myself am this village. I love the indigo godown, this tank and these mud lanes because they are different forms of myself. On the battlefield, when death came very near, I certainly remembered Allah, but instead of Mecca and Karbala, I remembered Gangauli." (60)

In *Mano Majra*, the village that provides the tragic setting of Khushwant Singh's English Partition novel, *Train to Pakistan*, the significance of local matrices of power and identity is stressed again — this time in relation to moral absolutes. As Singh states, "[in] the Punjabi's code . . . truth, honour [and] financial integrity . . . were placed lower down the scale of values than being true to one's salt, to one's friends and fellow villagers" (54).

However, for both the inhabitants of *Mano Majra* and the community of Gangauli village, a complacency born of rural isolation ("We live in this little village and know nothing"), and a reliance on a local mapping of identity (Tannu's "forms of [him]self"), are not enough to prevent the spread of communal antagonism and violence. In Singh's text, the fracturing of the local community is

foreshadowed by an ominous change in the rhythms of the railway and river that border the village. "Early in September the time schedule . . . started going wrong. Trains became less punctual than ever before . . . it seemed as though the alarm clock had been set for the wrong hour . . . ghost trains went past . . . between midnight and dawn disturbing the dreams in *Mano Majra*" (92-93). Singh's concentration on the altered rhythms and ghoulish cargoes of the railway is instructive because it points up the impossibility of divorcing a spatial reading of Partition from an awareness of time. As Soja warns, "the reassertion of space in critical social theory does not demand an antagonistic subordination of time and history" (23). In Singh's novel, the arrhythmia of the Lahore-Delhi railway connects the fragmenting space and time of *Mano Majra* with the political rupturing that affects the country on a national level. Against this backdrop, and in response to the murder of the local moneylender, the village of *Mano Majra* is suddenly "divided into two halves as neatly as a knife cuts through a pat of butter" (141). More important, the resulting sense of communal suspicion starts to crystallize the "meaning" of Pakistan, as a designated communal space instead of a piece of political rhetoric: "[For the Muslims] quite suddenly every Sikh in *Mano Majra* became a stranger with an evil intent. For the first time the name Pakistan came to mean something to them" (141).

Inscribing the Boundary

The geopolitical meaning of the new homelands depended on the demarcation and recognition of national boundaries, and these marginal borderland spaces are especially pertinent to my discussion of space and identity. What is most revealing in both historical and literary representations of the newly inscribed national borders is their strange lack of authority. Indeed, as a demarcation of communal difference, the political division of the Punjab was, in its initial implementation, strangely "hyperreal." I use Jean Baudrillard's self-consciously postmodern term out of its context here because it provides us with an interesting critical angle on the cartographic inscription of Partition, one which coincides with certain postcolonial ideas about the ideological function of the colonial map.

By way of an introduction to his famous essay, "Simulacra and Simulations," Baudrillard cites a story by Jorge Luis Borges in which the cartographers of a fictional empire produce a map so detailed that it covers the represented territory exactly. However, as the empire declines, the map becomes frayed and returns to the soil "rather as an ageing double ends up being confused with the real thing" (166). For Baudrillard, Borges's story in its surreal confusion of the "real" with the "referential" becomes an example of (third order) simulacral abstraction in which

Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being [but] the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal. The territory no longer precedes the map, nor survives it. Henceforth it is the map that precedes the territory — precession of simulacra — it is the map that engenders the territory. (166)

Admittedly, Baudrillard's technologized age of continual, "simulacral" representation is a far cry from the last, drought-ridden months of the British Raj. However, in the confinement of a bungalow on the edge of the vice-regal estate in Delhi, the "real" India had effectively disappeared for Cyril Radcliffe, the boundary commissioner. As Collins and Lapierre relate, Radcliffe was compelled to demarcate an average of "thirty miles of frontier a day" and would never "walk in a rice paddy or . . . visit a single one of the hundreds of villages through which his line would run" (211-12). In fact, he had been picked for the job precisely because of his "neutral" ignorance of South Asia.

Thus in Radcliffe's division of the subcontinent, "the territory," as Baudrillard states, "no longer precedes the map" . . . instead, "it is the map that engenders the territory." In South-East Asia the same strategy, appropriated from Europe, underpinned the spatial expression of nationalism in Siam. The Thai historian Thongchai Winichakul puts it thus:

In terms of most communication theories . . . a map is a scientific abstraction of reality . . . In the history I have described, this relationship is reversed. A map anticipated spatial reality, not vice versa. In other words, a map . . . had become a real instrument to concretize projections on the earth's surface. (Qtd. in Anderson 174-75)

As a description of the political-ideological intent of Radcliffe's partitioning of both East and West Pakistan, this analysis is also very

apt. In the event, however, the newly “concretized” nations did not immediately “set” into contained national and communal blocs. Instead, as Bipan Chandra states, they endured a terrible interregnum period during which “millions of people on both sides of the border refused to accept the finality of the borders” (Chandra et al 502), experiencing them instead as dangerous, politically unstable areas across which lay the safer hinterlands of communal nation. On Independence day there were “strange scenes” along the border regions of the Punjab: “Flags of both India and Pakistan were flown in villages between Lahore and Amritsar as people of both communities believed that they were on the right side of the border” (499).

Michiel Baud and Willem van Schendel, in their study of borderlands, emphasize the vulnerability of political boundaries to local negotiation and challenge. Locating different stages in the “life-cycle” of national borders, Baud and van Schendel describe new territorial demarcations as “infant borderlands.” In this early stage of the border

pre-existing social and economic networks are clearly visible, and people on both sides of the border are connected by close kinship links. National identities are still vague and undefined. Regional inhabitants can opt for a future on either side of the border . . . the border is still a potentiality rather than a social reality. (224)

Nevertheless, the simulacral “precession” of Radcliffe’s border inscriptions means that even where national blocs are being willed into existence, there is little certainty over actual demarcations on the landscape. This interruption in the “life-cycle” of the Punjab border was due to a delay in the publication of the Punjab Boundary Award until after Independence — a strategy designed to lessen colonial responsibility for any subsequent bloodshed. The following transcript, from the Viceroy’s sixty-ninth staff meeting of 9 August 1947, is from Kirpal Singh’s collection of documents on Partition:

It was stated that Sir Cyril Radcliffe would be ready that evening (9th August) to announce the award of the Punjab Boundary Commission . . . it was now for reconsideration whether it would in fact be desirable to publish it straight away. Without question, the earlier it was published the more the British would have to bear the responsibility

for the disturbances which would undoubtedly result. Lord Ismay gave his opinion that it would be best to defer publication. (458)

Furthermore, Radcliffe's own description of the boundary decision, recorded in the official reports of the Punjab Boundary Commission, reveals repeated, diffident references to the arbitrary nature of the border. This is signalled particularly clearly in his statement that "legitimate criticism" could be made of his decision, as of "any other line that might [have been] chosen" (9). Later in the same edition, Radcliffe concludes "The award . . . cannot go far towards satisfying sentiments and aspirations deeply held on either side." For the leaders of independent India and Pakistan, these were the same sentiments and aspirations for which they had spent long periods in prison, and which had quickened their very political existence.

Writing Across the Borders

Ritu Menon emphasizes changing conditions in the "life-cycle" of the border when she states that, until the mid 1950s, the frontier-zone between India and Pakistan in the Punjab saw a "relatively easy traffic of goods and people. . . . In some cases land was still being farmed in the canal colonies of West Punjab by families who continued to live in the East" (161). Indeed in narratives such as Fikr Tauswi's "Wagah ki Nehar," translated from the Urdu by A. S. Judge as "The Wagah Canal," and reproduced in Mushirul Hasan's *India Partitioned*, we witness the unexpected rejoining of divided communities at an impromptu marketplace on the border at Wagah, a year after Partition. In the bustling market, all the official indications of communal division are erased: "There was no sign of . . . the border . . . there was just a sea of people who had swallowed up all the marks which demarcated one country from another" (242). In an echo of the satirical authorial comments which punctuate "Toba Tek Singh," the narrator of the story laments the lack of respect for the official borders shown by the market-goers: "I really felt sorry for the way the two governments functioned. What could be more absurd than this: that all those thousands of people [had] . . . no feeling and regard for the dignity and honour of their respective governments?" (*Ibid*). However, these transgressive moments of cross-national exchange are short lived

and, conforming to Baud and van Schendel's theory of frontier lifecycles, Tauswi's story ends with the official reinforcement of border restrictions that prevent the local inhabitants from crossing over and indulging in "the outmoded and uncivilized way of friendly social intercourse" (245).

Elsewhere in the histories of the Indo-Pakistani frontier it is not the political or cultural permeability or informal reinscriptions of the border that stand out; instead, the problems of maintaining a fixed margin on naturally unstable terrain are most evident. In some instances the border is maintained as the result of a military impasse, and the political theorist Shankaran Krishna cites a case in point when he draws attention to the long-running Indo-Pakistani conflict on Kashmir's Saichen glacier. As Krishna states, this part of the border was left unmapped at Partition: "the terrain was so incredibly inhospitable and the details so sketchy that [Radcliffe] never anticipated it would become a matter of contention" (200). Even so, military conflict has persisted sporadically since 1949, in high-altitude conditions that mean that one in every two Indian soldiers sent to forward posts on Saichen dies of exposure, altitude sickness, or in avalanches (barely three percent are killed by enemy fire). Krishna's research is important precisely because it draws attention to the violent military production, or attempted concretization, of the border across a space (a high-altitude glacier) that is as unstable, in geological terms, as the politically permeable "infant" border zones that provide the setting for Tauswi's story.

A comparable sense of futile border-engagement is apparent in Manto's military stories (translated by Khalid Hasan as "The Dog of Titwal" and "The Last Salute") both of which are set in the valleys of Kashmir, and deal with similar instances of military standoff. In "The Dog of Titwal" the frontier is maintained by a ceremonious exchange of gunfire: "the soldiers had been entrenched in their position for several weeks, but there was little, if any, fighting except for the dozen rounds they ritually exchanged each day." And in "The Last Salute" a similar production of the border "in conflict" is particularly disturbing because the opposing armies are invisible to each other, and can only hear strangely personal abuse from the opposing trenches, which "echoes across the hills and valleys and evaporate[s] into the air" (28). Like the unofficial commercial meeting at the border in "The Wagah Canal," Manto's

story presents us with an instance of uncanny doubling — as the soldiers on each side realize that they are old comrades from the same regiment in the formerly colonial Indian Army. Instead of facing a cultural or political “Other,” the soldiers must struggle to comprehend the legitimacy of a war that is really an act of uncanny, self-destructive doubling. “Formerly, all of them were Indian soldiers and now some were Indian and others were Pakistani . . . Rab Nawaz had finally come to the conclusion that such intricate and subtle matters were beyond the comprehension of a simple soldier” (27). In the story’s conclusion the integrity of the new political division breaks down completely, as the Pakistani soldier, Rab Nawaz — who has been mortally wounded and taken prisoner by his former comrades — salutes his old (Indian) sergeant-major.

The transient or blurred designation of national boundaries is also noticeable in Partition writings that deal with the act of crossing the Punjab during Partition. Several South Asian writers and commentators have talked of these mass-migrations as forms of epic or anti-epic narrative, both in their demographic scope and in their impact on peoples’ collective identities. As Ashis Nandy states in a recent essay, the events of 1947 have become “an unwritten epic” that “everyone in South Asia pretends does not exist but nonetheless are forced to live by . . . an epic which dissolves the heroic and the anti-heroic” (306). In this unwritten epic (a term that echoes the title of one of Intizar Husain’s short-stories), as in the Koranic *hegira* or the journey to exile in the *Mahabharata*, it is the transformative and harrowing effect of the whole journey as a metaphorical act, rather than the crossing of a particular point in space, which is stressed. And for many of the Muslim refugees who arrived in Pakistan, the act of travelling *to* the new state — something which Husain calls “part of the community’s consciousness . . . [the] central experience of migration” (166-67) — becomes important in consolidating Pakistani national identity. As Husain goes on to argue:

people who were previously living in regions of Pakistan and didn’t undergo the experience of physical migration were still very much aware of how Muslims in India had abandoned their homes and come here, and they were also aware of their sorrow and despair. In this respect [migration] became an experience of our whole people

(166).

Again, the border is somehow over-written in these experiences of communal exodus, as the margins of the new countries become more obviously zones of transit and collective suffering (and an experiential prefacing to nation) rather than recognizable lines of political control.

Returning to the short story with which I started this paper, Manto's "Toba Tek Singh," we find yet another (contradictory) instance of transit across the new border, when the inmates of the Lahore asylum are involved in a national "exchange" of lunatics "a couple of years after Partition." In the light of Fikr Tauswi's narrative, it is telling that the exchange takes place at the Wagah checkpoint, although in Manto's text the protagonists are decidedly uneasy about crossing the new border: "They simply could not understand why they were being forcibly moved" (30). Manto's anti-hero, Bishan Singh, who is associated eponymously with his home-village by his continual inquiries about its location, is also reluctant to cross the border, and the transfer of lunatics is thrown into confusion when Manto's protagonist — on being told that his home, Toba Tek Singh, will be left behind in Pakistan — runs into the no-man's land between the borders in protest.

Because, in Baud and van Schendel's formulation, borders represent the margins of cultural/political homeland and are therefore the "ultimate symbol[s] of [national] sovereignty" (226), the inert space *between* borders, into which Bishan Singh escapes, is at once a necessary and disquieting component of the nation. Marking out a strange lack of political signification between the checkpoints and fences of newly-formed states, this strip of deserted earth can only be seen as a partial variant of the enabling "in-between" space of interpretative instability that is so influential in current theory (although the border zone does carry some of the latter's disruptive force). Nor, in this case, can it be read a barrier between polarized cultural and political blocs; the cultural exchanges and uncanny reflections which occur in stories such as "The Last Salute" reveal that the two new nations are, in many ways, postcolonial images of each other. Instead, in Manto's story, the between-space of the border represents an absence in the joint narratives of Indo-Pakistani self-determination. Indeed, it can be read as a spatialized instance of the violent "blocking of alternative

[spatial] narratives” which Michael Shapiro⁷ finds at the centre of authoritarian geopolitical discourses. And because of his personal identification with the space of his home village, Bishan (“Toba Tek”) Singh’s escape into the border-area must be interpreted as a direct challenge to these wider, official discourses of nation.

In the experiences of the *mohajirs* and refugees who found themselves uprooted in the process of Partition, migration entailed a reckoning with images of homeland that projected into the past as well as the (potential) future. And for many, an awareness of the treachery of political space meant that personal identity became a movable place in itself. But whilst places are transposed and re-articulated in the portable narratives of identity generated by many migrants during Partition, there is a sense, in “Toba Tek Singh,” that Bishan Singh’s “stand” of protest represents a contrary impulse — an attempt to anchor the self and to reassert the spatial meaning of home on a particular piece of territory. Master Tara Singh’s claim for a separate Sikh homeland, Sikhistan, was itself excluded from the geo-politics of the final division of the subcontinent and it is apt, therefore, that it is a Sikh, Bishan Singh, who makes an unspoken claim for a personal space between the borders on “a bit of earth which [has] no name” (31). In Manto’s story we are told that Bishan Singh never sits down or sleeps in the asylum, and the terrible spectacle of his final stance, as he plants himself “in no man’s land on his swollen legs like a colossus” (30) transforms him into a figurative symbol of stasis and rooted immovability. Inevitably, Bishan Singh’s attempt to reconcile subjectivity and location can be nothing more than a desperate gesture: a single tragic attitude in a repertoire of ironic or evasive responses that punctuate Manto’s fictional engagement with the trauma of Partition.

Thus, for Manto, as for other South Asian authors of his generation, the writing of Partition entails a certain level of cynicism or reflexive distance towards the very idea of located, unified identities, but also demands a recognition of the rhetorical force of these narratives of a belonging. In postcolonial studies, the diasporas of the Black Atlantic, and the experiences of post-war immigration to the European centres tend to exert a paradigmatic influence in the theorizing of migrant identities. And, as some commentators such

as Ania Loomba have pointed out, “it is always tempting to present this experience [of postcolonial migration/exile] in universalised terms” (180). Hence, perhaps the most important lesson that the Partition writings teach us is that “different kinds of dislocations cannot result in similarly split subjectivities” (181). To be more specific, these texts, as expressions of postcolonial diaspora, demand a “dense contextualisation” (like those provided by theorists of Atlantic migration) within the spatial narratives of their own surroundings. For it is only here, amidst the divided villages and on the permutable borders of the Punjab in 1947, that we become fully sensible to the complex re-mapping of identity that traces itself across the literature of Partition.

NOTES

- 1 See Paul Carter; and Homi Bhabha’s essay “Dissemination: Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation”
- 2 Soja is meticulous in plotting the theoretical provenance of these claims — as responses by Marxist critics working in the North to what Fredric Jameson calls the “new and historically original . . . multidimensional set of discontinuous realities [that make up the] spatial peculiarity of postmodernism” (351). Clearly, India’s Partition offers us a rather distinct cultural-political context in which to apply a postmodern critical awareness of space, and even though the landscape of 1947 may present us with comparably discontinuous ontological landscapes and (violently) decentred subjectivities, these are very much the product of the “contradictory logic” of decolonization, rather than the cultural logic of late capitalism.
- 3 I use re-constellation to mean the strategic act of wrenching the text “out of its proper context and put[ting] it within alien argument” (Spivak 241).
- 4 See Spivak’s essay “The Politics of Translation” (179), and her comments on the ethics of translation in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (162-64). An authoritative study of the relevance of poststructuralism in postcolonial translation is provided by Tejaswini Niranjana in *Siting Translation*. And critical responses to this work can be found in Susan Bassnett and Harish Trivedi’s informative collection of essays, *Postcolonial Translation: Theory and Practice*.
- 5 In his description of Indian nationalism as a hybrid structure, Chatterjee’s work bears an interesting, and somewhat unexpected, formal resemblance to models of South Asian nationalism produced by area-studies specialists such as the anthropologist Clifford Geertz. Although their political agendas are very different, Geertz also sees nationalism in India as a difficult marriage of “European” civic identities, and older (essentialized) “primordial” attachments that he lists as blood-ties, ethnicity, language and custom. And where Chatterjee reads the failures of the postcolonial period as indicative of a surrendering of the political imagination: “Here lies the root of our postcolonial misery: not in our inability to think out new forms of modern community but in our surrender to the old forms of the modern state” (11), Geertz defines communalism and regional identifications, more pessimistically, as an integral part of the development of nationalism. In Geertz’s view, nationalism, as it is thrust upon the “mass of a still largely unmodernized population” leads to the growth of *both* an interest in central government and an “obsessive concern with the relation of one’s tribe, region, sect . . . to [the] centre of power” (269-70).

- 6 For translations of some of the popular Shaikh Chilli stories, see Russell 101-03.
- 7 In each of the texts cited above, the challenge and negotiation of new identities during Partition involve a complex transacting of both cognitive geographies of selfhood, and newly territorialized spaces of nationhood. Indeed, in his work *Violent Cartographies: Mapping Cultures of War*, Michael Shapiro suggests that it is the primacy of "resident" spatial meanings (which instigate a sense of belonging before the fact of actual, violent conflict) which prevents an ethical encounter with the Other: For Shapiro, "to claim membership in a particular tribe, ethnicity, or nation — that is, to belong to a people — one must claim location in a particular genealogical and spatial story." Furthermore, "such stories precede any particular action aimed at a future result and provoke much of the contestation over claims to territory and . . . collective recognition" (174). Whether or not a form of ethical violence inheres in the actual production of "resident meanings," what the fiction of Partition shows above all is the incredible complexity and the narrative proliferation of these meanings, which seep across the clearer demarcations of communal homeland and nation. I am indebted to Christopher Farrands of Nottingham Trent University for bringing this aspect of Shapiro's work to my attention.

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