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# Deconstructing the 1947 Partition: The Effect of the Central Recovery Operation through a Gendered Lens in India and Pakistan

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**Deconstructing the 1947 Partition: The Effect of the Central Recovery  
Operation through a Gendered Lens in India and Pakistan**

by Nitika Sachdev

A thesis submitted in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts  
with Honors in Women's Studies

**WMST 499**  
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Professor Navine Murshid  
Colgate University Hamilton, New York  
Spring 2017

Dedicated to my Naniji and Nanaji, my maternal grandparents whose teachings of truth and love  
have anchored me in my quest for honesty

“I have always wondered  
how women who carry war  
inside their bones  
still grow flowers  
between their teeth”

Ijeoma Umebinyuo, *Questions for Ada*

## **Abstract**

The partition and subsequent creation of India and Pakistan in 1947 continues to mark a watershed moment in my life, as I am an Indian student of Punjabi descent. The dominant history of the partition remains rooted in patriarchal constructions of honor situated on women's bodies. Though Pakistan was created a Muslim state, and India as a seemingly secular state, the Indian state fashioned Bharat Mata, Mother India, to justify its dominant Hindu practices and its overall existence. The Indian nation was created as a motherland, on a goddesses' body. The states of India and Pakistan continued to articulate its borders on women's bodies, specifically abducted women. Through the Inter-dominion Treaty and the Central Recovery Operation, the patriarchal state, community, and family communicated with each other by controlling women's bodies, sexualities, and lives. Women were not considered autonomous beings with full citizenship in the nation building project. By focusing on women's testimonies, I document and analyze their lived experiences in order to question and challenge the linear narrative of recovery put forward by the state. I honor women's diverse testimonies in my aim to speak the truth, reinvestigate, and retell, reconstruct history to become herstory.

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## **Introduction**

States all over the world continue to participate in the oppression of women in various forms, as the state is aligned with upholding patriarchal power structures. The partition of India in 1947 is one example of the violence of state machinery. Even though the partition has been written about extensively, I was never exposed to the many intersectional voices that were silenced during and after the partition; dominant literature holds minimal space for dissenting voices. In this project, I question and analyze the systemic and state level narratives in conjunction with women's voices, to shed light on how dominant narratives are challenged, subverted, or reified. How are bodies, individuals, and families violently partitioned under the guise of belonging and recovery?

Although the partition and subsequent creation of India and Pakistan occurred in 1947, it still marks a turning point in my life—a milestone that I continue to reflect on even in 2017, as I am always searching for a sense of home. The partition of India is one of the most violent social and political upheavals. The Mountbatten Plan, by which the subcontinent was to be divided into Pakistan and India, was announced on June 3, 1947. Though the exact boundary line was not yet determined dividing India and Pakistan (East and West), migration started taking place even before August 15, 1947. Roughly 12.5 million people were uprooted from their ancestral homes and migrated in accordance with their religion, as Pakistan was to be predominantly Muslim while India was to be predominantly Hindu (Ghosh, 2013).

I am an Indian student of Punjabi descent. My mother's parents migrated to India before the partition, while her extended family was forced to flee to India during the partition. By the time the partition plan was announced, Punjab had already experienced significantly gruesome violence. My father's entire family was forced to leave their home and escape to India during the partition. My mother's parents lived in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh and then migrated to Nigeria, where my mother was born. My father's entire family moved to Chennai, Tamil Nadu, a southern city in India. I grew up in a joint-family in Chennai, where my paternal family and I, lived in the same house. I viscerally felt, early on in my life, a sense of not belonging to the larger Tamilian community in Chennai. I knew we were different because my family carried Punjabi names, ate Punjabi food, married within the Punjabi and larger North Indian community, dressed and spoke differently.

My paternal grandmother died when my father was a toddler, so the men in my family controlled the ways in which the house was run, while the women listened. The women in my family often alluded to the partition but never explicitly gave me details, unlike the men. My paternal grandfather and my father's brothers spewed Islamophobic rhetoric casually, and this was not refuted by any of the elders in my home. My grandfather refused to eat *masoor dal*, a type of lentil because he claimed it was cultivated and used by Muslims. My grandfather and my uncles abstained from eating non-vegetarian food because they believed that eating meat linked them to Muslims.

Although many Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims lived in tightly-knit communities prior to the partition, the partition saw unprecedented genocidal violence. However, I cannot claim that sectarian violence and religious segregation did not exist before the partition. But communities co-existed and my family experienced generally peaceful lives living amongst the other communities. The seeds of Islamophobia were planted a few years before the partition, and reached a violent tipping point during the partition, as neighbors and friends suddenly turned on each other. Prejudice trickled down to the individual level. The Muslim, Hindu, and Sikh communities violated each other, with Hindus and Sikhs standing united against Muslims. The effects of this hatred continues, as my larger family remains to be Islamophobic and intermarriage is still seen as a sin. The trauma that I have inherited is wrapped up with patriarchal histories, a gaping loss, vile hatred, multiple silences, and a complicated class and caste status.

Although my family was able to attain a financially secure class status, I was told the story of how my family came to India with nothing except the clothes on their backs, time and time again, growing up. Fear, anger, hatred, sadness, and hopelessness accompanied their stories. All of their possessions were on their bodies. Women in my family buried jewelry, money, and other precious items in their homes, thinking they would go back for it. The governments did not allow them to bring any vehicles, machinery or other assets as this was to belong to the country they left. However they probably would not have taken anything with them, since it would have slowed them down. More importantly they did not think that the move to India would be permanent. This left them in an unfortunate situation as they suddenly plummeted down the class ladder. They lost the deed to their lands and were never given any appropriate reparations. They thought that they were escaping the violence and that they would return to their homes when normality was restored, but the new normal held no space for them. This search for home, of belonging is in my blood.

Growing up, I was surprised that my family was accorded a Scheduled Caste (lower-caste) status by the Tamil Nadu government. They never really mentioned this. However, when my cousin was trying to go to university, it was brought up. My family is labelled as Scheduled Caste, on account of being refugees. We are provided with reservations in government schools and colleges. However, my family upheld our Arya Samaj identity and never truly experienced the burden of being lower-caste citizens. Arya Samaj was founded in 1875 in Lahore by Swami Dayananda Saraswati, born a Gujarati upper-caste Brahmin. Dayananda preached against untouchability and prohibited idol worship (Roy, 2014). Although this sect of Hinduism seems reformative and radical, it upheld caste fissures and carries on a legacy of having upper-caste left-wing Hindus members. Dayananda utilized the term “Arya” instead of Hindu to signify the restoration of racial purity (Chakravarti, 55). In fact, Dayananda went on a mission that many of his disciples continue to follow, which is to “purify the impure” (Roy, 2014). This aim exists on the binary of pure and impure. It asserts that there are those who are pure and there are those who are impure, even though it centers a charitable agenda. All of the male elders in my family went to schools owned and operated by the Arya Samaj. We went to the Arya Samaj temple every weekend. My family found kin within this community of mainly North Indians in a South Indian



state. Though my family was oppressed, they were never treated as lower-caste citizens in society and could continue to perpetuate violent Hindu patriarchal ideas. They could separate themselves from the *true* lower-caste citizens, the Untouchables. My family took pride in the fact that they were able to maintain their upper-caste status and reputation within such an uncertain and harsh time.

My life has always been shaped by the partition, so researching the partition is of utmost relevance to me as it not only explores the history of my family but of thousands of families that were forced to flee their homes.

My project is an attempt to understand the ways in which large-scale, state-orchestrated violence plays out on human bodies and human lives. Women's voices, agency, and lives are constrained and I needed to know why. I specifically study the manner in which the state orchestrated control over women's lives, sexualities, and publicly articulated nationalism on women's bodies. Since the stories of partition were communicated to me via men in my family, they were filtered through a Hindu-patriarchal lens. They mainly focused on the bravado of Hindu men protecting Hindu women from the supposed inherent evil nature and wrongdoings of Muslim men. These stories are incredibly flawed and destructive because they paint a one-sided view of the partition. National traumas are retold and reshaped in order to create a sense of community against the *other* following such large-scale violence. I hone in on the impact of the Central Recovery Operation, to point to the ways that Hindu and Muslim women's lives were shaped by the partition. I add to the incomplete narrative of trauma that I know. My project will contribute to the existing body of literature on two accounts. First, it will analyze the ways in which India and Pakistan publicly articulated and situated boundaries of the nation and the discourse of nationalism on the female form during the partition era. Second, it will do so by focusing on the Inter-dominion treaty, the Central Recovery Operation and the ways in which the states communicated with each other by controlling women's bodies, sexualities, and lives. I question, to what extent do women's testimonies around the Central Recovery Operation serve as counter-narratives to the official discourse produced by the patriarchal state? In what ways do the content and form of women's testimonies differ? Do women's testimonies completely break with, reify, or work within existing nationalist rhetoric?

## **Theoretical Framework and Methodologies**

The ways in which I function as a feminist thinker is directly related to Cynthia Enloe's teachings of feminism as a project of curiosity. Enloe taught me that I have the power to speak my truth. In *Bananas, Beaches and Bases*, Enloe focused on the concept of having "genuine curiosity" and a "gender-curious investigation" as the means through which we should understand reality (Enloe, 1990, 3, 5). She encourages us to name and comprehend power structures and recognize our positionality within these power structures. We need to take women's lives seriously. She wants us to question: Where is the power? Who does it benefit? How are we connected?

I situate my findings within Feminist Standpoint theory to validate the knowledge of Indian and Pakistani women, and contextualize their individual and collective lived experiences. An individual's perspective is shaped by their own positionality, thus their collective perspectives and knowledges are multifaceted and provide a more wholesome picture when analyzing the partition. I utilize everyday lived experiences as a legitimate form of knowledge production. Since women are marginalized within the patriarchal context, through the outsider-within phenomenon, they may be better at understanding and acknowledging the role of systems and functions than the dominant group, men, who are privileged in such a context. Though this analogy is simplistic, women as a whole are marginalized within the patriarchy. However this oppression looks different depending on a woman's privileges and identity based on caste, religion, class, race, ethnicity, citizenship, ability, sexuality, and so forth.

I draw on black feminist epistemologies as they converse with standpoint theory, in order to validate oppressed knowledge that is formed through the lived experience of black women. In *Black Feminist Thought*, Patricia Hill Collins frames "Black feminist thought as situated in a context of domination and not a system of ideas divorced from political and economic reality" (Collins, 2000, 252). I document and study how Indian and Pakistani women question oppressive systems, by linking the patriarchy, religion, and nationalism, as the outsiders immersed within the group.

This project is a means to assert South Asian women as protagonists with agency, to challenge the dominant patriarchal narrative of the partition. In *Speaking In Tongues: A Letter To Third World Women Writers*, Gloria Anzaldúa writes, "Our speech, too, is inaudible. We speak in tongues like the outcast and the insane" (Anzaldúa, 1981, 165). Our inability to be heard or understood is not because we aren't speaking. Women have recorded the ways in which the partition affected them through oral testimonies, but they are often paid no heed in dominant discourse. The dominant systems actively chose not to hear these voices, which erases and invalidates these women's lives.

In *Research is Ceremony*, Shawn Wilson points out how dominant ways of knowledge production are extremely exclusive and violent. The current systems of oppression define and control what and whose knowledge is considered valid. The researched are framed as specimen

to be studied as, “Researchers come from outside to “study” Indigenous problems” (Wilson, 2008, 16). Thus, everyday lived experiences by marginalized communities are often labelled as delegitimate and subjective, whereas those conducted by dominant institutions are seen as objective, honest, and scientific, irrespective of “whether it reflects the community’s truths and realities” (Assil, Kim, Waheed, 2015, 6). Even within research conducted of the community by the community, marginalized voices are erased. Since I am already embedded within my community and I have prior and intimate knowledge of the partition, I hope that my project does not reassert these dominant paradigms. I apply Wilson’s indigenous research paradigm to analyze and closely read archival interviews of women who lived through the partition recorded by scholars in academic journals, books, memoirs of social workers, newspaper articles and those on blogs on the internet. How were women victimized, and how did women challenge, subvert, or reify the status quo?

I center the post-colonial scholar Chandra Mohanty’s aim to dispute the “production of the “Third World woman” as a singular, monolithic subject” in *Under Western Eyes, Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses* (Mohanty, 1998, 17). Though women did and continue to experience various forms of oppression and marginalization, “defining women as archetypal victims freezes them,” which fixes their identities as static; it doesn’t allow for multiplicity (Mohanty, 1998, 25). The narratives of women that I present do not create an essentializing figure of women frozen as victims, but rather pose a dynamic narrative of womanhood as I account for how women can also perpetuate patriarchal agendas.

Anzaldúa views lived experiences as legitimate forms of knowledge production. She says, “I write to record what others erase when I speak, to rewrite the stories others have miswritten about me, about you. To become more intimate with myself and you. To discover myself, to preserve myself, to make myself, to achieve self-autonomy (Anzaldúa, 1981, 169). I write this project in order to place the trauma that I have inherited within a larger context, to subvert the dominant narratives written about the partition, in order to validate my life and experiences and those of my community by employing a feminist lens. In *An Introduction to Research Knowledge*, Reem Assil, Miho Kim, and Saba Waheed write, “Research allows us to craft and manipulate political legitimacy based on *our* knowledge and *our* voice — which, ultimately, allows us to reclaim our power and achieve self-determination” (Assil, Kim, Waheed 2015, 4). Women’s experiences have not been given the important or respect that was given to men during the partition. I demand recognition for me, for the women in my community, to enrich the one-dimensional knowledge that is produced about us. I see women as vessels of knowledge. We are producers and purveyors of knowledge. By heavily drawing on oral testimonies, I do not subscribe to or adopt dominant forms of knowledge production, because it never included us, never reflected our values and ideals in the first place. Wilson says, “We need to remember that research does not have to be formal. It is a ceremony for improving your relationship with an idea. It takes place every day and has place throughout our history” (Wilson, 2008, 110). Through Wilson’s feminist indigenous paradigm, I see how research and knowledge production is an everyday practice. We are living theory through practice. To honor the stories and lives of those affected by the partition, I re-conceptualize the partition through a feminist

lens, to subvert the dominant narratives that are written through a patriarchal lens. By documenting, archiving, and analyzing, we proclaim that our lives matter, we are present, we exist.

## **Literature Review**

### **Nationalism as a Masculine Construct**

Nationalism is based on the idea that as a people, as a nation, *we* are a community that exists because *we* are ethnically, linguistically, religiously, and ideologically different from *them*. Specifically in the context of India and Pakistan, each nation in itself is ethnically, linguistically, religiously, and ideologically diverse. Thus, each nation relied heavily on constructing a nationalism to justify their separation and existence during the partition. The British-Czech social anthropologist, Ernest Gellner states that nationalism “invents nations where they do not exist” (Anderson, 1991, 6). India and Pakistan are the embodiment of such invented nations, as it is based on a mythic nationality that the French philosopher Etienne Balibar calls “fictive ethnicity” (Balibar, 1991, 96). Since members of a body politic often do not realize that their national identity is constructed, they embrace myths of the supposed uniqueness of the nation, which perpetuates both national myths and the boundaries of the nation itself. The image of Bharat Mata, or Mother India, was paramount in the construction of Indian nationalism. She helped the architects of the new Indian nation state create what Benedict Anderson, an American scholar focusing on Asian studies, calls “imagined communities” (Anderson, 1991, 7). In other words, Bharat Mata was central to systems of representations whereby people came to imagine a shared experience of identification with an extended community—the Indian nation.

There is a clear gendered distinction between those who created the nation, that is, the men who benefit from its creation, and the ways in which the nation is projected as feminine. Nationalism empowers those who are allowed to share a sense of belonging to the same “imagined community.” Gopal Balakrishnan, an Indian scholar shows how Otto Bauer, a leading thinker of the left-socialist Austro-Marxist movement asserted that the idea of the nation is bound up with ego (Balakrishnan, 1996, 63). Bauer stated, “if someone slights the nation they slight me too... For the nation is nowhere but in me and my kind” (Balakrishnan, 1996, 63). This notion of national empowerment is clearly linked with the male ego as the words “me” and “my kind” demarcate an *us* versus *them* paradigm that extends beyond ethnicity to include gender. Nationalism now becomes a language through which gendered exclusion is justified and masculine hegemony is exercised, as women do not have access to equality. Nationalism as a masculine construct allows for women’s voices to be erased as women are not figured as beings with agency in the nationalist project. Since the nation is created as a heterosexual male construct, it connects to patriarchal hierarchies that enable men to become its sole protectors and women its biological symbolic reproducers.

## **Feminization of the Land to Nourish a Patriarchal, Nationalist, Hindu Agenda**

The male architects of the new nation states of India and Pakistan publicly articulated and situated the boundaries of the nation and the discourse of nationalism on the female form during the partition era. When India characterized its land as Bharat Mata, Mother India, India's identity as a nation was conflated with gender as the country was defined by men through women's bodies. Bharat Mata was to be protected by brave male citizen warriors. Mary-Ann Milford-Lutzker, an American scholar, locates this practice of identifying India as the body of a goddess to the earliest of times, as she describes "Rivers, mountains, forests, deserts - all parts of her body - are venerated through ritual observances, prayers and offerings" (Lutzker, 2002, 22). She continues to state that it is common practice to believe "the fertility of the earth and the well-being of India must be maintained through appeasement, sacrifice and worship" (Lutzker, 2002, 22). India is not only marked as a goddess but also should be revered and protected as one. Although nations remain the domain of men, it is contingent on a "horizontal comradeship" (Anderson, 1991, 7). Class intersects with gender to complicate this narrative. In order to survive and justify its existence, the nation must preserve its uniqueness. It does so by designing proper behaviors for members of the nation and for the nation itself.

Since elites play a significant role in building the nation, nationalism exists to serve the aspirations of the elites as those who can define who is central and who is marginal to the national project. The elite male political heads, such as the upper-caste and upper-class Hindu Jawaharlal Nehru, who went on to become India's first prime minister, relied on Bharat Mata to infuse the national territory with Hinduism. Hinduism is a collection of castes. The word Hinduism is a foreign word, used by Mahomedans to describe Natives as Hindus, those living west of the Indus river (Ambedkar, 2014, 242). Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, a Dalit activist and the father of the Indian Constitution, wrote that Hinduism "does not occur in any Sanskrit work prior to the Mahomedan invasion. They did not feel the necessity of a common name, because they had no conception of their having constituted a community" (Ambedkar, 2014, 242). Thus upper-caste Nehru desperately needed to create unity between all Hindus, as Hinduism is a fractured practice, with caste division at its core. He need to garner support for his political party's decision, The Congress Party, in its quest to create India as a Hindu nation. Since Hinduism is a collection of castes, a Hindu nation would uphold caste binaries and be an exclusive one.

The Congress Party had an urban, privileged upper-caste and upper-class leadership (Roy, 2014, 57). The masses wondered who the Congress Party was fighting for, whose rights were they centering? So Nehru employed Bharat Mata as a means to band the peasant masses together. When Nehru met peasants in Punjab, they greeted him with the cry, "Bharat Mata ki Jai" (Moraes, 1956, 277). When Nehru asked them who this Bharat Mata was, they answered *dharthi*, the earth of India. Nehru then stated that Bharat Mata was not simply a patch of earth but rather she is, "you, all of you, and I. So when you cry Jai, you are shouting your own Jai as well as the Jai of all our brothers and sisters throughout Hindustan. Remember this, Bharat Mata is you, and it is your own Jai" (Moraes, 1956, 277). Bharat Mata allowed for the Hindu male-

dominated public to evolve from being passive citizens to a collective family; they were born from her womb and raised on her milk, which made them siblings.

In 1909, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi published *Hind Swaraj*, where he superimposed a map of Hinduism's holy sites onto the territorial map of India (Roy, 2014, 82). This marks India as a Hindu state, thirty-eight years before partition. The purity of India is defined through the motherland, through Bharat Mata, who gave birth to Hinduism. It can be said that Nehru drew on Sri Aurobindo's, an Indian philosopher and poet, vision of India as a beautiful goddess who was violated by the British. Aurobindo "referred to Bharat Mata and Devi interchangeably, declaring that she was not a piece of earth – she was a godhead" (Lutzker, 2002, 22). During this time, there is a definite dichotomy between Nehru, as the teacher, and the peasants, as students. Once he explains the concept of Bharat Mata to the peasants, he describes their response, "a glow suffused their faces and a light seemed to dawn on their slow, heavy, peasant minds" (Moraes, 1956, 277). Nehru is seen as the one who always has the knowledge, and he functions on the assumption that the peasants' ignorance is absolute, which invariably justifies his authority. Here, knowledge is seen as a gift bestowed by the knowledgeable expert, Nehru, to the ignorant peasants, which solidified Nehru's upper-caste leadership status. It allowed him to view himself as a mentor, guiding the downtrodden masses into knowing what is best for them. Nehru used Bharat Mata as political propaganda, as a weapon to secure his position as the first prime minister of independent India.

Embedding a woman's body on India's geographical boundaries encapsulates the feminization of the nation. India was figured as in need of protection from Pakistan or rather from Muslims, who were *othered* as a means to assert the birth of newly independent India. Those called to protect Bharat Mata were imagined as her sons, fathers, brothers, and most of all as heroes, establishing a brotherhood. Mass produced images of Bharat Mata, who was not only based on Hinduism but was a Hindu became a vehicle for political propaganda (Gupta, 2001, 101). Indian nationalists utilized the symbol of Bharat Mata to unite and mobilize the Hindu masses in their efforts to legitimize a new Hindu majority state. Bharat Mata allowed the state to justify its *othering* of Muslims, by blanketing all Muslims as those who do not belong, as Pakistanis.

Although Lutzker views Bharat Mata as an empowered figure "the ideal of freedom for both the nation and for women. Neither a consort nor obedient spouse, Bharat Mata was the source of strength and inspiration" (Lutzker, 2002, 22), I argue that this representation is flawed. Even though Bharat Mata is the head of a network of male-dominated structures in India, which allows her to function as an empowered figure, she is not truly a liberated figure. She is endowed with an abundance of powers that provide her with a goddess-like status, immediately elevating her status and distancing her from the average Indian woman. By giving her this superwoman identity, the male-dominated public does not have to view her simply as a woman, but a deity. Males enable themselves to maintain their power and imagined superiority over females because they are not dictated by a woman, but by a goddess. Despite being seen as a powerful unified figure through her status as a goddess, Bharat Mata is very multi-faceted as a result of the many

personas that she is provided with by her male creators. This prevents her from threatening the patriarchy. She was represented as a generous figure, a destructive figure while continuously implicitly and explicitly being viewed as a suffering, frail victim in need of protection.

Particular facets of the goddess's personality and character were manipulated to serve different purposes that supported nationality and nourished patriarchal structures. For example, in *The Call of the Mother*, Bharat Mata inhabits the map of India (Ramaswamy, 2001, 106). She has long hair, a symbol of fertility. She wears a sari, a crown, and earrings, accessorized with a Hindu spear. A halo rests on her head and light rays project from her hands as blessings, symbolizing her power as a goddess. Her arms are open wide, to represent compassion while the freedom fighter Bhagat Singh offers her his decapitated head. She is flanked Subhash Chandra Bose, a nationalist in uniform, kneeling beside her, saluting to her. She is raised above children in uniform bearing guns, with their arms above and forward in a *let's go* stance. In this instance, she is seen as a powerful goddess who unites men and children and calls for their self-sacrifice for the benefit of the collective, which is embodied by her need for personal protection. Her constrained agency is cloaked in the power that she possesses. She is a puppet for the patriarchy as she is objectified and easily manipulated to serve different purposes. In reality, little was done to re-imagine modern India as a gender-inclusive nation or to build collective movements that truly support feminism, as Bharat Mata instead works to perpetuate patriarchy ingrained in Indian society.

Bharat Mata was paramount to the process of conflating Hinduism, India, and Nation. The Bharat Mata temple in Benares, a holy Hindu site, contains a monumental relief map of the nation state surrounded by a brass railing. This transforms Bharat Mata from being a representation of an entity to a physical entity itself. Charu Gupta, an Indian scholar, points out how there was an "overwhelming use of upper caste Hindu symbols" (Gupta, 2001,103). The temple was inaugurated with a Hindu style prayer ceremony "along with offerings and recitations from all the four Vedas by eight orthodox Brahmin specialists" (Gupta, 2001, 103). By locating the temple within a holy Hindu site, by calling the site a temple and by enclosing the temple with the hymn *Vande Mataram*, national identity is consistently defined in terms of upper-caste Hindu identity. Since the physical manifestation of Indian territory and its representation in the Bharat Mata temple is an attempt to create a composite national identity, it initially seems ironic that a figure so distinctly based on Hindu goddesses would serve to amass people with varied beliefs and identities. But the Indian state truly functions through an elite Hindu hegemony, which shows how the imposition of Bharat Mata as the image of India, allows Hindus to perpetuate their dominance by converting religious dogma into political rhetoric. The lines of the nation were expressed on the female form, through Bharat Mata, as India relied heavily on constructing an invented nationalism to justify its separation and existence during the partition. This respect for Bharat Mata was not extended to Indian women. Bharat Mata is a deity and we women are mere mortals, which made it easier for the masculine state to control women's identities, femininity, modesty, religiosity, body, and sexuality.

## **Hegemonic Masculinity in Hindu Nationalism**

The construction of nationalism and gender is interwoven as the Indian national project is based on assertions of hegemonic masculinity. Since the British Empire relied on hegemonic masculinity to assert its superiority, the masculinity of Indian men was often questioned as Indian men were viewed as weak. Edward Said, Palestinian-American scholar and a founder of postcolonial studies, discusses how such criticism is related to a process of feminization wherein the Orient was created as the weak, irrational, non-martial “other” in contrast to a rational, strong, martial European “self” (Said, 1979, 207). Similarly, Ronald Inden, an American scholar, alludes to the European masculine hero who would conquer and create order out of the feminized chaos that was India (Inden, 1990, 17). Due to the feminization of India, these authors imply that India was colonized because Indian men were effeminate, that is, their inferior/feminine status allowed for them to be conquered. Their conquered state was at odds with traditional male qualities of aggressiveness, militarism, and physical strength. Cynthia Enloe, an American feminist scholar, suggests that nationalism has been built “from masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation and masculinized hope” (Enloe, 1990, 45). Thus, ideas of hegemonic masculinity played a central role in colonialism and forced Indian men to reassert their masculinity as India fought for independence. Swami Vivekananda, an elite Indian political figure and Hindu monk who founded the Ramakrishna Mission, internalized this British colonial criticism as he began to ridicule India for its weakness and inability to defend its motherland. He called upon Indians to be men and take back their motherland, by force if needed. He wished to create an Indian model of manhood built on hegemonic masculinity:

“What we want is muscles of iron and nerves of steel, inside that dwells a mind of the same material as that of which the thunderbolt is made. Strength, manhood, Kshatra-Virya (warrior courage)... We have wept long enough. No more weeping, but stand on your feet and be men. It is man-making religion we want. It is man-making theories that we want. It is man-making education all around that we want... take away my weakness, take away unmanliness, and make me a man” (Jyotirmayananda, 1986, 29).

An obsession with manliness exists, through its creation by embodying traditional masculine traits that the British valorized and its reassertion of manhood. These ideas of masculinity are codified in terms of a warrior tradition, as men are urged to become the protectors of the nation, as visualized through Bharat Mata. Steve Derne, an American scholar, argues that Indian men developed a sharper consciousness of their nation and their bodies when British colonialism challenged their masculinity. Indian men emphasized both control over their bodies and control over women’s bodies through body-building and celibacy, and through controlling women’s sexualities (Derne, 2002, 43).

The discourse of masculinity started to depend on preserving women’s femininity, modesty, and religiosity, because the nationalist narrative built around the intersection of nation and masculinity has focused on protecting women, especially women’s sexualities from assault by foreigners. In the narratives, the nation is virtually always feminized and characterized as in



needs of protection. Women are figured as the biological and cultural reproducers of the nation and as pure and modest. Men defend the national image and protect the nation's territory, women's purity and modesty and the moral code. The construction of nationalism relies on ideological binaries that distinguish masculinity from femininity in order to naturalize the power hierarchy. Women are represented as the nation's social and biological womb and the men its protectors. The repetitive performance of these acts in the name of the nation helps construct hierarchies of gender and sexuality. The empowerment of one gender, one nation always occurs at the expense of disempowerment of the other. Despite the political rhetoric of equality for all who partake in the national project, the nation remains the property of men.

The nation is constructed as the hegemonic domain of both masculinity and heterosexuality that makes it a primary site for the institutionalization of gender differences. Anne McClintock, an American feminist scholar, shows how the nation has been symbolically figured as family. It has acquired a patriarchal hierarchy within which members are assigned distinct roles in accordance with their gender (McClintock, 1995, 34). She argues that the colonizer marked the boundaries of newly colonized territories by "ritualistically feminizing borders and boundaries with female statues, wooden female figures on ships, mermaid imagery on maps, and tropes of invading "virgin" territory" (McClintock 1995, 24). During the partition, India was facing a similar crisis of origin. It explicitly perpetuated gendered versions of territory and cartography, in order to be seen as a legitimate state. It mapped borders and bodies. It is men who claim the authority to define the nation and its boundaries, to define the process of nation building, and to articulate what kind of masculinity and femininity are appropriate to the nation.

### **Conflating the Preservation of the Nation with the *Recovery* of Women**

In this process of nation building, the body becomes an important marker, even a boundary for India. Since women's bodies represent the purity of the nation, they are heavily guarded by men, and thus an attack on these bodies becomes an attack on the nation's men, and eventually the nation's identity. The story of partition, the uprooting and dislocation of people, was accompanied by the story of the rape, abduction and widowhood of thousands of women on both sides of the newly formed borders. Women represented the embodiment of the Nation, and this respect for women within the community led to violence against the women of the *other* community. Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, Indian feminist activists and scholars detailed how the Central Recovery Operation carried out between 1948 to 1956 constructed the identities of abducted women based on prescribed religious backgrounds, which were interwoven with patriarchal constructions of sexuality, honor, and purity (Menon, Bhasin, 1993, 3, 4). The state aimed to recover abducted women and to restore them to where they "rightfully belonged" (Menon, Bhasin, 1993, 2). It wished to transferring them to their *correct* country, community, and family. The state is not a neutral figure, since it constructs its nationalism through gendered repression to exercise an elite masculine hegemony. The abduction of women was seen as an assertion of power and identity on the *other* community. It was common to abduct older women and widows for their property. Abductors would demand that the women legally adopt them as their sons, in order for the abductors to lay claim to the property (Butalia, 2000,

135). Since many abductions were accompanied by religious conversion and marriage, the effects of such an abduction extended to the family and community's honor (Menon, Bhasin, 1993, 3). The fear of abduction prompted many women to commit suicide, while many were killed by family or community members, as they were afraid of being “‘used’ and polluted” (Menon, Bhasin, 1993, 3). This demonstrates women's multifaceted agency, as although committing suicide must have been a choice for some women, for others, they may have felt instigated by their families or communities in order to preserve their honor. Since many were murdered by their *own*, women were simultaneously active agents and victims in constructions of honor.

The November 1946 session of the Indian National Congress at Meerut stated that abducted women “must be given every opportunity to return to the life of their choice” (Menon, Bhasin, 1993, 4). However, women did not have a choice in their fate, as the state did not recognize them as autonomous citizens. Despite the politic rhetoric of *equality for all* who partake in the national project, the nation remains the property of men. The Abducted Persons Recovery and Restoration Bill, which later became an Act, stated that a police officer may “without warrant, enter and search the place and take into custody any person found therein who, in his option, is an abducted person” (Bombay High Court Database). Thus, a male police officer was entrusted with the authority to deem who an abducted person is. However, police officers were often the abductors themselves, and raped women after they rescued them (Singh, 1972, 171). The states of India and Pakistan also issued a declaration, the Inter Dominion Treaty that de-recognized forced religious conversions and forced inter-religious marriages in its efforts to restore abducted women to their original home (Ministry of External Affairs, 1950). It set a date, March 1st, 1947, after which all intermarriages or conversions were categorized as forced (Ministry of External Affairs, 1950). This predicated itself on the idea that all conversions and marriages were forced and hence not acceptable. This also did not account for children borne in such marriages. The language of “recovery” and “rehabilitation” of these abducted women was a euphemism for forcibly returning Hindu, Sikh and Muslim women to “their proper homes,” as Hindu and Sikh women were sent to India and Muslim women were sent to Pakistan (Butalia, 1993, 14, 16). Men defined the *other* community and defined when and which women had to be brought back to their *own* community, curtailing women's agency (Butalia, 1993, 16). In this effort to restore women, women's identities was premised on religion and so the homes they actually might have chosen to be in was of no consequence to the patriarchal state.

Since the circumstances of abduction varied widely, this narrow view did not account for women who voluntarily stayed back, or married somebody of another religion out of choice. Nor does it account for women who were abducted but now had families and wanted to live with their new family as “many were converted and married and lived with considerable dignity and respect” (Menon, Bhasin, 1993, 5). Thus, while many were actually abducted, it is equally possible that some may have gone of their own accord. Nevertheless, Pakistan and India treated all women missing or living with men of the other religion after a particular time as abducted women. Navnita Behera, an Indian scholar, states that the number of Hindu and Sikh women who were recovered in Pakistan was 7,981, and the number of Muslim women who were

recovered in India was 16, 168 (Behera, 2006, 139). Although the Indian state perceived itself as a secular nation, religion defined its identity. These women forcibly returned to their original homes, either in India or Pakistan. Furthermore, if the status of abduction was questioned, the Indian government finalized the decision to return these women (Menon, Bhasin, 1993, 4), as the government saw religious background as paramount to identity. This allowed them to designate a plethora of women as abducted and return women to their original homes whether these women “desire to or not” (Menon, Bhasin, 1993, 7). Chandra Mohanty asserts that such laws were based on the oppressive ideology “of a particular nuclear family, where women are never accorded subject status but are always assumed to be legal appendages of men” (Mohanty, 1991, 69).

The state went through great lengths to recover abducted women, as it was crucial for the state to legitimize its authority and territory. The fate of abducted women was bound with the nation’s honor. Urvashi Butalia, an Indian feminist scholar wrote, “Some of the women were now ‘soiled’, they had lived with, married, borne children to the men of the ‘other’ community, they had therefore ‘diluted’ the ‘purity’ of the community” (Butalia, 1993, 17). Specifically, the aspect of women’s sexuality and the children born out of these *wrong* unions were of great concern, as they indicated that these women were sexual and reproductive beings. “Safaya” or abortions were performed on these women in camps, without their consent (Butalia, 1993, 15, 18). The root of the word *Safaya* means to clean out. The patriarchal state and the patriarchal family invested women with upholding honor, and therefore their recovery was seen as a “‘humanitarian’ task an ‘honorable’ enterprise and so on” (Butalia, 1993, 18). Through this, the family, community, and state could veil their perpetuation of gendered oppression in an aura of compassion. The state shrouded its oppression in its ability to serve as a protector, from the violent *other*.

Since men viewed themselves as protectors of women, the fact that they had been unable to protect their women implied “a collapse, an emasculation of their own agency” (Butalia, 1993, 19). It undermined their masculinity, thus, the state gained authority in its ability to function as an umbrella for the masculinized hegemon who attached their masculine identities on their women. “As the central patriarch, the state now provided coercive backing for restoring and reinforcing patriarchy within the family” (Butalia, 1993, 19). The restoration of abducted women was an exercise by the “post colonial, deeply contested, fragile and vulnerable state” in establishing its legitimacy (Butalia, 1993, 19). For the continuous production and reproduction of the family and the nation, women’s sexualities needed to be controlled by their *own* men. Thus, constructions of nationalism were located within women’s bodies.

Leaders expressed their concern and anger at the moral depravity that characterized this shameful chapter in the history of both countries; the fact that our innocent sisters had been dishonored was an issue that could not be looked upon with equanimity. “If there is any sore point or distressful fact to which we cannot be reconciled under any circumstances, it is the question of abduction and non-restoration of Hindu women. We all know our history” said one MP, Pandit Thakurdas Bhargava in Parliament, “of what happened in the time of Sri Ram when Sita was abducted. Here, where thousands of girls are concerned, we cannot forget this. We can

forget all the properties, we can forget every other thing, but this cannot be forgotten! As descendants of Ram we have to bring back every Sita that is alive” (Constituent Assembly of India Debates, 1949, 642). Since the *Ramayana* is one of the main texts of Hinduism, and described Ram’s rescue of his wife Sita from the demon king, the outsider, Ravana, this analogy underlines Hinduism premise within the partition narrative. Here, the Muslim man is figured as a hypersexual, aggressive, and violent Ravana who kidnapped Sita from her gentile and loving husband Ram. The Hindu man’s honor, Ram, is contained within the control and recovery of the helpless Hindu woman, Sita. The Hindu political elite assume that all of the abducted women identify with Sita, whereas, in reality many lived fulfilling lives.

By evoking its protective functions, the state was able to curtail the rights of abducted women with an aura of legitimacy. The state, community, and family employed coercive and abusive means to control women’s sexuality, as these women could only act on their sexuality with a man of the same religion. It functioned under the assumption that these women were all heterosexual beings who could not be trusted to exercise their own agency. Thus, sexuality has become the primary method through which national identity is articulated, as forced removal of “abducted” women to be returned to their original homes, without their consent, makes their bodies the nations marker. This figured as a violation of national boundaries, a violation of national autonomy, and national sovereignty. Essentially, the preservation of the purity of women’s sexuality, conflates the preservation of the nation with the protection of women.

## **FINDINGS**

### **Gendering Dominant Versus. Marginal Narratives**

The state's meta-narrative of the partition is presented through an elite patriarchal lens that demarcates victims and villains. Women's narratives are ignored as they disturb the state's chronological, linear, reductive meta-narrative. The hegemonic narrative sophisticatedly recapitulates the fallacy of the *other* by creating a moral distinction between Hindus and Sikhs vis-à-vis Muslims. The Indian scholar and founder of the Subaltern Studies Project, Gyanendra Pandey, offers the Indian proverb "beeran ki kai jaat?" (what caste or nationality can a woman have?)—for she *belongs* to someone else (Pandey, 2001, 165). She belongs to his caste, nationality, and religion. Pandey highlights the paradox, "Yet, the evidence from 1947 seems at times to suggest almost the exact opposite: not that 'women had no religion or community or nation,' but that they came for a moment to stand for nothing else" (Pandey, 2001, 165). Women's humanity and agency were ignored. Women were empty of caste, nationality, and religion as they were seen as legal accessories to men. However, during the partition, women were figured as nothing more than these very identities. A woman's family, community, and state colluded to freeze her identity as a symbol of honor and a site of violence, to reassert the patriarchal state's power and existence.

The parameters of nationalist identity silenced the lived experiences of women, to restrict the ways in which women's voices challenged the monolithic patriarchal state. The postcolonial Indian scholar, Partha Chatterjee argues that the public realm is a masculine space while the private realm is a feminine space (Chatterjee, 1993, 130). During the partition, politics and government were categorized as masculine while the every day was relegated as feminine (Chatterjee, 1993, 130). Dominant and marginal sites are delineated through a gendered lens that allows patriarchal narratives to be public, dominant narratives, and counter-narratives to be private, marginal narratives. Women's testimonies deterritorialize nationalist discourse by interrupting narratives that are written about women, as dominant narratives do not center women's everyday lived experiences.

A reading of oral testimonies by women who lived through and were affected by the partition disrupts the hegemonic narrative. It presents a fragmented view of the partition, by highlighting the cracks in the dominant narrative. How do women's testimonies challenge, subvert, rewrite or reify hegemonic narratives about the partition? Since women were symbolic markers of territory, communal identity, and nationality, it is imperative to center women's lived experiences in order to close the gap in our collective imaginary, as women's testimonies create a more wholesome narrative about the partition.

### **The Politics of *Correct* Kinship**

The figure of the abducted woman was co-opted and manipulated by the patriarchal state. The state only acknowledged women's suffering when it could be used by the state as a symbol

to respond to and exert its power. The discourses around nation building and national belonging were structured on women's bodies. When states returned women to their *rightful* homes, they claimed to reinstate *correct* kinship. Who was this kinship *correct* for, as the state did not recognize the woman's desires or interests? While some women were grateful to be found and returned to their *rightful* homes, others were plucked from homes they had settled into and returned to a place they did not recognize nor want. At the same time, some women were coerced into committing suicide to save themselves from the hands of the *other*—celebrated as a heroic sacrifice for the nation. Violence and sexual assault were crucial components of the partition, as women were not only circumscribed as sexed beings but also as symbols of honor for the community and nation. In this violent context, how did women make sense of their identities? How did the discourse of nationalism and *othering* regulate the ways in which they remembered and made meaning, as women are more than mere symbols?

A Hindu social worker, Krishna Thapar, recounted how in 1950, she was required to escort 21 Muslim women from their new homes in India to Pakistan. These women did not want to return, but the governments decided that they must go. They were abducted by Sikh men and were determined to stay with their new families in India. Thapar “had to use real force to compel them to go back” (Menon, Bhasin, 1993, 5). A few women said, “Why are you destroying our lives?” and “Who are you to meddle in our lives?” (Menon, Bhasin, 1993, 5). These women resisted by refusing to conform to the demands of the state; they actively pursued their agency. However, their agency was constrained and controlled by the state. One of the women who Thapar was *restoring*, angrily confronted the Hindu social worker Mridula Sarabhai, who helmed the Central Recovery Operation. The woman said, “You say that abduction is immoral and so you are trying to save us. Well, now it is too late. One marries only once—willingly or by force. We are now married—what are you going to do with us? Ask us to get married again? Is that not immoral? What happened to our relatives when we were abducted? Where were they?... You may do your worst if you insist, but remember, you can kill us, but we will not go” (Menon, Bhasin, 1993, 97). The woman directly confronted the female leader of the Central Recovery Operation; the woman challenged the law, her family and the nation's right to determine their fate. She questioned the shifting concept of protection as her family, and the state did not protect her from being abducted in the first place. In fact, the cause of abduction was due to the state's decision to enforce partition.

Damyanti Sahgal, a Hindu social worker, tried to recover an abducted woman, Satya Devi, from Pakistan. Wanting to bring Devi back *home* to India, Devi's brother confronted Sahgal. Devi shouted, “Who has come to take me? This bastard woman? This woman has come to take me away? I will not go” (Butalia, 2014, 154). Devi took her shoe in her hand and shook it in defiance at Sahgal. Sahgal returned Devi to her brother, but Sahgal did not know what ultimately happened to Devi (Butalia, 2014, 156). Social workers encountered resistance by abducted women who refused to leave their current homes and *go back*. Sahgal said, “Of course we felt for the women we were flushing out—sometimes we had to use the police to bring them out. But what we were doing had to be done” (Butalia, 1993, 20). She is idealistic about the Central Recovery Operation's supposed humanitarian agenda, and uses this to justify the

violence that she and the state are enacting. State violence, enforced by the social workers, was normalized as benevolence. Abducted women and their sexuality were seen as property to be owned by a community of men. They were forcibly taken by one community and returned to another community of men, without paying any heed to their desires and needs. Women's rights to self-determination in the case of their futures, of nationhood, was obliterated. Due to this, the social worker Rameshwari Nehru was at odds with Mridula Sarabhai, who helmed the Central Recovery Operation. Naidu opposed forcible recovery and advised the government to stop. She said, "[although] the figures of recovery have been encouraging, we have not achieved our purpose...Figures alone are not the only criterion against which such work should be judged" (Nehru, 1949). She urged the government to consider the issue from a "human" perspective; however, she was ignored (Nehru, 1949). In July 1949, she resigned as Honorary Advisor to the Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation, leaving Sarabhai as the sole person in charge. Her resignation shows a clear commitment to her unwavering belief that abducted women should be consulted on their futures, instead of using them as pawns within a larger agenda. Rameshwari Nehru served as a strong opponent to the government machinery, where women were abducted and recovered as community property.

Social worker Anis Kidwai questioned the powers of the state, "Why are these girls being tortured in this way?...What is the advantage of uprooting them once again? If making them homeless again is not idiocy, what is it? To take a woman who has become a respected housewife and mother in her new home, and force her to return to her old home and her parents, is not charity but a crime. Forget this business: those who are left in Hindustan and those left in Pakistan are happy where they are" (Kidwai, 2011, 219, 220). In another instance, Kidwai reflects on the identity of a young girl who faced sexual assault before she was restored to India. Kidwai wrote, "Today she sits by my side, silent, a question-mark. Her terrified, startled eyes ask me and call out to every human being to tell her who she is?... She has lost all hope, agility... youthfulness...beauty. Will readers be able to tell us whether we acted criminally in bringing them back? Or whether it would have been a sin not to have brought them?" (Kidwai, 2011, 318). Kidwai is uncertain about the purpose of the Central Recovery Operation. The state considered the girl to be *restored* and *recovered*. Yet this restoration is predicated on the state's nationalist agenda instead of recognizing the girl in her daunting state, as the girl's condition and fate challenge the nationalist narrative of recovery.

India and Pakistan mainly focused on the actual transfer of women without regarding women's lives after recovery as important. A woman's security or well-being after recovery was of little consequence to the state. The state was not overly concerned with where and how women made their new homes after recovery; the state was only concerned with establishing that these new homes were located in the *correct* nation. The state's efforts to rehabilitate abducted women largely focused on uprooting them from their new homes where many women had settled down with their abductors, where they were often incorporated into regular family life. By uprooting women again, the state doubled the suffering and violence that abducted women faced. Women's bodies were objectified as bodies belonging to a certain community, religion, and nation, required to be controlled by state machinery.

## The Circularity of Violence

Women questioning state machinery is erased from the state's record of the partition, as the state usually appears as a humanitarian construction in the dominant public perception. A social worker, who was not named, recalled that some Hindu women said, “You have come to save us; you say you have come to take us back to our relatives. You tell us that our relatives are eagerly waiting to receive us. You do not know our society. It is hell. They will kill us. Therefore, do not send us back,” as she tried to restore them to India (Hardgrove, 1995, 2427). Another woman said, “I have lost my husband and have now gone in for another. You want me to go to India where I have got nobody, and of course, you do not expect me to change husbands every day” (Butalia, 2014, 148). Many women wished to stay with their new families and found protection within this helm of abduction. Specifically, some abducted Hindu women refused to be restored. They were afraid of the rigidity of the Hindu caste system and the fact that they were now considered impure and defiled. Many Hindu families blatantly refused to accept their daughters back, and some killed their daughters once they were rightfully restored due to shame and the loss of honor. Kamlaben Patel, a Hindu social worker, recounts that Muslims did not consider abducted women to be “impure, but the Hindus did. With Muslims, there was no problem about women’s impurity, and they hesitated much less when taking them back” (Menon, Bhasin, 1993, 77). If accepted back into the Hindu family unit, Hindu families would often say that *returned* women were living away with family, instead of stating that they had been abducted by Muslim men (Menon, Bhasin, 1993, 77). They wanted to erase evidence that evoked the women’s experience with the *other*. A social code of forgetting abducted women’s experiences was enforced in order to save the family’s honor within Hindu society.

In Pakistani Punjab, a group of 165 Hindu women were recovered. They refused to leave their new homes and threatened to commit suicide if they were forcibly removed. In fact, 46 of them successfully escaped from a transit refugee camp where they were held (Gopal, 1972, 117-121). When I ruminate on the practice of arranged marriages, such as the kind most of the elders in my family had, I know that women often did not have a say in who they married. In this sense, marriage can be expressed as a kind of abduction, as a woman marries a man of the same religion and/or community, who is still unknown to them. Traditionally, the man and his family choose a bride. Women’s refusal to be *restored*, and their fears about being killed unabashedly questioned and confronted the state’s enactment of a monolithic national/communal identity, and its supposedly benevolent act of restoration.

Women social workers were often recruited to *return* abducted women to their original homes. The authority of women social workers was used to discipline and silence the voice of abducted women. This underlines the American feminist scholar, Kathleen Barry’s, notion of circular violence of masculinity, which uses violence to protect against more violence and so on (Barry, 2011, 12, 25). It requires women’s complicity in accepting men’s protection, and in turn justifies male aggression and violence, to protect women from violence conjured by hegemonic masculinity (Barry, 2011, 12). Violence is both the cause and the consequence of violence. Here, women social workers are driven by idealistic notions of nation building, without recognizing



that the new nation state exists exclusively to serve the needs of men, as it was created through the patriarchal framework of militarized masculinity. This concept of militarization is reverberated by Enloe. It is a means for the states and masculine figures to “compensate for his insecure masculine identity, which helps shape power relations between his country’s military and the society it is supposed to be protecting” (Enloe, 1990, 7). By investigating the different forms of power—who wields it and the gendered wielding of power camouflaged so as to not resemble power—we can see how the state uses the language of aid to veil its true intentions. Camouflaged operations of power simply maintain the masculine hegemonic state as the true leader and protector of the realm, when in actuality the costs of stabilizing such a hierarchy are glossed over.

Women suffered trauma inflicted by the states of India and Pakistan, as well as their family, their own and the *other* community, who acted as extensions of the state. Social workers and law enforcement agencies served as agents of the state. They often forcibly restored women who did not want to leave their new families behind, as they had settled in. Others did not want to return to their natal families, and neither did they want to stay with their new families. At times, social workers complied with the women’s desires and acted against the state. The state was eager to control women’s sexuality by exercising its rights over the body, religion and family life. The discourse around morality, the nation-building process and the euphoria over the anti-colonial movement did not hold space for the lives of women and their desires. Many women challenged being uprooted again, as they hid, escaped and abused social workers. One woman, in particular, questioned the authority of the state. She shouted, “Is this the freedom Jawaharlal won? Shame on him!” (Menon, Bhasin, 1993, 80). However, it was difficult to challenge the control of the political elite, it constrained women’s agency. The state devised policies that controlled women’s fates without consulting with the women themselves. Ironically, the state itself can be viewed as abductors as it forcibly returned women without their consent. The state acted as though the only credible response to forcible abduction was forcible recovery. Women served as repositories of family, community, and national honor, without any acknowledgment of women’s constructions of honor. The state-based the Central Recovery Operation on the patriarchal, national, hegemonic theory of how women’s desires and interests should be perceived.

### **Hierarchy between the Researched and the Researcher—Honoring Silence**

How do researchers and scholars *abduct* women’s oral testimonies and identities for our agendas? How is it that when women are asked about sexual assault, abduction, and other violence by scholars, they may feel compelled to speak? The postcolonial scholar, Gayatri Spivak argues that testimonies are a recovery of memory as much as it is a loss of the wholly other (Spivak, 1999, 198). Spivak characterizes this as a “double bind” that informs the “excavation, retrieval and celebration of the historical individual, the effort of bringing her within accessibility” (Spivak, 1999, 198). At the same time, we contain and appropriate testimonies because of the invariable disconnect between the researcher and the researched. This disconnect reduces the women’s testimonies, as we document women as sites of violence, which

risks our ability to record them as whole human beings. The testimonies presented in my project are not transparent, even though the women interviewed are recounting their experiences. There is still a gap as the scholars and I translate, interpret, and exclude their language, even if I try my best not to do so.

However, some women also resist being appropriated as symbols of identity for scholarly purposes by refusing to talk about their experiences. S was abducted by Muslims when she was 15 or 16. She made Pakistan her home; she was happily married with three children until her brother forced her return to India (Menon, Bhasin, 1993, 6). Indian men's sense of masculinity started to depend on preserving women's femininity, modesty, and religiosity. The nationalist discourse built around the intersection of nation and masculinity has focused on protecting women, especially their sexuality from assault by foreigners or the *other*. When Menon and Bhasin asked S about being abducted, she said, "Leave it. What use is it recalling the past? Forget about it, I've banished it all from my mind. I lead a respectable life now, why look back to the past—even my children don't know anything about it. Nothing can be done about it now. It can't be resolved" (Menon, Bhasin, 1993, 7). Another woman, Kanta Seth, told the Indian postcolonial scholar, Anjali Bhardwaj Datta, "I do not want to recall those bitter days...kya fayeda?" (What's the use?) (Datta, 2006, 2). Similarly when the Indian postcolonial, scholar Devika Chawla asked Sheila about recalling her story, as Sheila's grandson is very interested in history, Sheila said, "If he asks, I answer, but I am not so interested in remembering those days" (Chawla, 2014, 167). Another woman, Farkhanda Lodi, spoke to the British scholar Pippa Virdee. Lodi described how one female relative was abducted. Lodi said, "But she never speaks about her abduction. As you see, our respectable culture does not allow us to speak about such things. That is why she never discusses this issue" (Virdee, 2013, 478). Though Lodi understands the woman's silence as due to respectability politics, and the ways in which our culture silences woman's voices, it may be equally as possible that her relative may not have wanted to speak for a plethora of other reasons that need to be honored. The relative may have not been able to reconcile her past with her present, she may not have been able to process the violence, or she may not have wanted to share such intimate details for fear of reliving trauma through recalling the past.

When we honor silence, it does not mean that there should be silence around women's lived experiences of the partition. Instead, we need to be conscious of the conditions that make silence necessary for women's survival. The silence in their refusal to talk about their sexual assault, abduction, and restoration may not be an attempt to hide their trauma. Rather, it may be a sign of their inability to find a verbal language to properly articulate their experiences. In the Jewish Holocaust, survivors "are usually depicted as overwhelmed by memories and unwilling to recount their tale for fear of the pain it will re-evolve. Their problem is not the limits of memory, but of language" (Kirmayer, 1996, 174). Language often restricts the ways in which one can describe trauma. When scholars ask women to share oral testimonies about their traumatic experiences, their present status is invalidated. The women are asked to *inform* on the actions or inactions of their families and communities, which alienates them from their families and communities. It makes them vulnerable to patriarchal discourses of *othering*, of recovery and

restoration that may not operate in their best interests. As scholars access and encourage women's testimonies, how do our narratives delegitimize the normalcy and respect that these women have managed to carve out for themselves? A woman's silence may be necessary, not only to protect her from reliving trauma, but in so far that silence equates to relative safety in the present and the future.

### **Abducted Women's Testimonies and Negotiating *History***

My project is a form of herstory, a departure from history. History presents a record of the past through a patriarchal lens, whereas her-story questions and deconstructs patriarchal histories by reconstructing an alternative form of presenting the past. Herstories center marginal voices that histories try to erase.

An abducted woman told Veena Das, "What is there to be proud in a woman's body? Every day it is polluted by being consumed" (Das, 1996, 85). Ranjit Kaur, a retired headmistress, talked to Ravinder Kaur about the women she met in Muzaffarabad, Pakistan in 1985. She describes that all 30 of them were abducted by Muslim men, converted from Sikhism to Islam, and now lived in relative comfort and peace. Except for one woman who "killed every child that was born to her of the Muslim Khan who married her forcibly. This was her protest. Finally, when there was no hope of her being rescued she allowed two children to live, and was now happy" (Kaur, 2004, 147, 148). Though there is an integral piece of the story missing, as the woman shifts from aborting her children to then giving birth to two children, and is described as "happy," this story needs to be given attention and respect. The woman was not ready to have children earlier as she may have been filled with anger and frustration on account of being abducted. The woman's womb can be read as occupied territory. She may have felt that by killing her children, she was cleaning her body of occupation by the *other*. We may understand this as her trying to prevent the undesirable proliferation of the *other's* descendants. At the same time, she may have also been sitting in her anger for being abducted and displaced. This could have been her coping strategy. However, once she realized that she would not be "rescued," she succumbed to her fate and may have been more willing to bear children with her abductor. This seemingly quick transition can be seen as routine during such a savage time of violence as women were extremely constrained and did not have a lot of choices. The woman, whose name Kaur does not mention, told Kaur, "When the attack took place we all gathered together. After they started beating up people we were headed towards the river...our men fought back, but they were killed, and they captured us...and this ancient man, he caught hold of me and brought me here" (Kaur, 2004, 150). How did the ways in which women were constructed as sexed individuals force women to ultimately assimilate the violent experiences of partition as part and parcel of a woman's life? The woman was "caught" by the "ancient man," which may stand as an image of her agency and body being directly constrained, corrupted, and violated by historic and yet contemporary forms of violence common during wartime—rape, and abduction. How are these savage and dramatic forms of violence linked to the everyday forms of violence in a woman's life?

The postcolonial scholar, Yasmin Khan, wrote, “Rather than being raped and abandoned, tens of thousands of women were kept in the ‘other’ country, as permanent hostages, captives, or forced wives; they became simply known as ‘the abducted women’” (Khan, 2007, 135). Why did the men keep the women that they had abducted as their maids, wives, sisters, and assimilated them into the household? Khan situates this as their, “impulse to consume, transform, or eradicate the remnants of the other community” (Khan, 2007, 135). Each community defines itself through an exchange of violence on the other community. Only by demolishing the other, can the self be reasserted. Women become bearers of the exchange, a vehicle that bears impact, is marked by the continuation of violence, and may be eventually subsumed by the perpetrators of violence.

Fatima Bibi was described as a “Sikhnee” to Majid Sheikh, a writer, when he was at a village 18 miles outside of Lahore, Pakistan. First Bibi’s son, the village mullah (priest), did not allow Sheikh to talk to Bibi. However, Sheikh said that he would not name Fatima Bibi nor would he direct anybody else to their house, as Bibi’s son wanted to uphold the silence around his mother’s life. Fatima Bibi is a moniker for her real name. Bibi is a Sikh woman who was abducted in August 1947. A few elders killed their daughters before the mob could reach them. The remaining people were trucked to Sheikhpura railway station and stuffed into a train like animals. Their train was attacked, men, children and old women were brutally killed, as Bibi said, “Tottay kar ditay sadday!” (We were hacked into little pieces!) (Sheikh, 2010). The fact that men, children, and old women were killed goes to show how younger women were preserved for their reproductive abilities—the sexualization of their youth. Bibi continued to speak without any tears in her eyes though Sheikh was openly crying, “Javani lut lai-ee. Kakh na chaddaaya. Rool ditta. Jeenday jee maryaa ve nahis” (They looted our youth. Didn’t even leave its ashes. Ruined us. Left us neither living nor dead) (Sheikh, 2010). Bibi looked at Sheikh and said: “Baoo, athroo da koi faida nai jaddon mera bapoo tottay ho gay” (What’s the point of tears, when even my father was hacked into pieces) (Sheikh, 2010). After Bibi was raped by a number of men, she does not remember how many, the village mullah rescued her and nursed her back to good health. He then proposed to marry her if she converted to Islam. Bibi recounted how a year later, social workers along with the army, came to collect the abducted women. Bibi was warned that Sikh men were killing the recovered women upon their arrival, as they had been dishonored by Muslim men. Bibi was pregnant at the time and successfully remained in Pakistan with her husband. However, she still waits for the day she would die, “Baoo, mera akhri saah barra mitha hoyay ga” (My last breath will be a very sweet one) (Sheikh, 2010).

Bibi tells her story in a matter of fact fashion. Thought the interviewer, Sheikh was “openly crying,” Bibi was not. When she asks, “what’s the point of tears,” she demonstrates how she is able to manage her emotions, which shows how violence became normalized through the manner in which she communicated. She did not hide stories of violence but instead presented them in a stoic manner. Does she manage her emotions to be believed and taken seriously because dominant society tells us that the show of emotions takes away from our credibility? What emotional labor goes into making herself seem like a reliable source? Her management of her emotions is also a coping mechanism, so as to not re-live the trauma while telling it. Bibi has

accepted the past in order to survive in the present. However, she is not fulfilled and eagerly waits for her death—her trauma continues to linger even if it seems as though she has accepted it. Though the violence did not disrupt the ways in which she seemed to recall and present her past, violence still centrally figured in her story. The normalization of the violence that was enacted on her does not make it any less violent.

### **The Public Theater of Violence**

Male anxiety about the body politic being violated expresses itself through the abduction, rape, and murder of women's bodies. Women were seen as objects to be possessed and served as vehicles of communication between the in-group and the out-group. In 1992, Menon and Bhasin interviewed Bimla Bua, who read from a diary she kept during Partition. Bua remembered: "Then they caught hold of a beautiful 17-year-old and her sister who wouldn't let go of her hand. They dragged them for a long distance, and the girls kept calling out, 'Bachao, bachao ...' (Help, help) The kabailis were collecting all the Hindus and Sikhs in a hideout, Bala Pir. The two girls were already there ... Night fell, they kept raping the women, then dumped them" (Menon, Bhasin, 1998, 52). Since perpetrators of sexual assault at the time were mainly men, they were not hiding the fact that they were committing acts of rape. The community shrouded these acts in silence, even though they weren't a secret. In this way, though Bua did not witness the act of rape in her account, her words have value because the act of raping was not hidden. Women were raped in public, and many faced multiple aggressors.

The social worker, Anis Kidwai recalls, "The volunteers told me of many, many women who had had "Pakistan Zindabad" tattooed on their foreheads and the names of numerous rapists cut into their arms and breasts ... Hundreds of Muslim girls were also brought to me, on whose arms hoodlums had tattooed their names and even the date of their crimes" (Kidwai, 2011, 216). The cutting of their breasts may be a sign of a community's desire to desecrate the *other*, by eliminating a core symbol of a woman's traditional ability to nurture and develop progeny. Though Kidwai is not clear as to which community was the perpetrator of this violence, we can assume that it was all three communities. Kidwai wrote about the similarity on both sides of the border as Hindu, Sikh, Muslim communities were concurrently victims and perpetrators. She wrote, "so similar that at times we were compelled to think that someone else had planned the whole scheme, made two copies of it and handed one over to each side" (Kidwai, 2004, 142). Women's bodies were coded as sites for patriarchal protection or destruction. They were seen as territories to be conquered, marked and claimed by each community. They carried messages to the *other* community and their scars, as well as their trauma, served as evidence that they were violated by the *other*. The inscription of nationalist slogans on the bodies of women as well as proclamations of possession and actual possession of women's bodies, through the tattooing of names and dates, created a situation where the women, community, and nation would never be able to forget that they had been claimed and violated by the *other*.

Nusrat Maqbul, a nurse who now lives in Lahore described the horrors to Furrugh Khan, a Pakistani postcolonial scholar. Maqbul saw, "There was one train which came from Amritsar to

Wagah in three days. Everybody, when I say everybody, I mean every adult was killed on that train. Most of the girls had been abducted. For three days there were some babies...we had to clean those children, bathe those children, feed those children. And the smell of blood. (She starts to sob, then apologized for becoming emotional). Young girls, 20, 16-years-old, one breast chopped off, the other cut into small pieces as if it was minced meat. I am sorry I have to tell you these gruesome stories. Women refugees told us that two men would get hold of their legs, open them up and with a kirpan they...Oh God...they cut the private parts as if they chopped off a piece of baked meat. This was the condition” (Khan, 2006, 112). These situations of violence mark the partition and the establishment of the nation as born in blood. Maqbul expands on what Kidwai wrote about the cutting of woman’s breasts. Maqbul described that men opened their legs and chopped off women’s private parts. This haunting image reasserts the connection between women’s roles as nurtures and reproducers of the community and the nation. Men wished to destroy symbols of women’s reproductive and nurturing capabilities in order to destroy the proliferation of progeny of the *other*. Maqbul said that women’s bodies were being “cut into small pieces as if it was minced meat,” making a connection between women’s bodies and the nation. The land was partitioned and carved by the elite patriarchy who did not consider women’s interests; they dehumanized women as women were not seen or valued as human beings with agency. Women did not have a say in the national project.

Mairaj Begum spoke to Farrukh Khan, “No, there was no happiness. There was no happiness about Pakistan’s creation at that time. All we were concerned with was self-preservation. We were scared for our lives, and did not care about being happy or not. Afterwards, people would come and tell us “today is Pakistan Day” and we would tell them you are only making us remember the home and the homeland we have left behind. We left everything behind, and you are reminding us of it. People lit lamps and celebrated, but we did not feel any happiness at all” (Khan, 2006, 114). A celebration of the nation contains the memory of trauma. Pakistan is not seen as her homeland, instead pre-partition India is considered her homeland. Begum longs for the relatively peaceful time between Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs before partition. The partition was situated on bodily sacrifice, in order for the new nation states to be established. The new nations could not come into existence without the old one being destroyed. In this way, women’s bodies were being violated in order to establish a post-colonial national patriarchy—divorced from the white man. The celebration of the birth of the independent nations of Pakistan and India is a direct form of commemoration of the partition as sites of violence and memory. By inhabiting these spaces, individuals remember partition. By celebrating the birth of the nation, citizens invariably celebrate the partition. How does the existence of the nation, the theory of nationhood, take priority over the brutally vicious ways in which it came to be? The nation asks that we celebrate and commentate it, however, many abducted women’s refusal to celebrate the birth of the nation challenges the dominant requirement. The establishment of the nation cannot undo what has been lost. In the discourse of abducted women and the Central Recovery Operation, the states assumed that once women were restored, their honor would have been restored. Through this restoration process, the state assumed that the slate would be wiped clean. The state presumed and necessitated that its citizens would bask in the birth of the homeland, which does not hold true for all abducted women, as abducted women

were not considered to be full citizens—their opinions that challenged the state power were camouflaged and disregarded.

### **Abducted Women's Hope for *Recovery***

I do not argue that *recovery* blatantly should not have occurred. Instead, I argue that all women's interests, desires, and needs should have been prioritized instead of the state's patriarchal agenda that placed all abducted women under one umbrella of forcible recovery. The state generalized all women as wishing to be recovered when the reality was more complex. Shrimati Laj Wanti was twenty-three years old when she was abducted in August 1947. As she was fleeing to India from Kamoke, a mob of Muslim men attacked her train. They killed her husband and took her son. She recounts her experience to the Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, who published her statement in a report on the violence against Hindus and Sikhs in Punjab. Though their report was biased against Muslims, as they are formed by Gurdwara members, Sikh Punjabis, her account must still be held as truth, as it is her experience. She said: "The women-folk were not butchered, but taken out and sorted. The elderly women were later butchered while the younger ones were distributed. I saw an old woman who cried for water being caught hold of by her feet by a Muslim and flung twice on the ground and killed. The children were also similarly murdered. All the valuables on the persons of the women were removed and taken away by the mob. Even clothes were torn in the effort to remove valuables. My son was also snatched away in spite of my protests. I cannot say who took him away. I was taken by one Abdul Ghani to his house. He was a tonga driver. I was kept in the house for over a month and badly used. I went to other houses to look after my son. I saw a large number of children but I was unable to find my son. During these visits I also saw a large number of Hindu women in the houses of the Muslim inhabitants of Kamoke. All of them complained that they were being very badly used by their abductors" (Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee, 1950, 261).

Wanti narrated the violence by only illuminating some aspects and leaving other parts to the imagination. She said she was "used," and pointed out that many other women were "badly used" as well. It is up to us to decide what "used" means. This gap in her language reveals the intensity of what she has been through, and underlines how language cannot fully capture trauma. The inadequacy of language may have led to a complete unavailability of vocabulary to express her trauma. Language can be employed to articulate one's memories and trauma, but these memories and trauma are also shaped by the language that is available to use. Similar to Fatima Bibi's testimony, Wanti recalled how older women were killed right away, because they were no longer of childbearing age, while younger women and girls were awarded to men, like chattel. Younger women are still objectified, they are sexualized more than older women, as older women are seen as being past their prime and hence desexualized. Furthermore, since the nation is figured as a mother, Bharat Mata, the violation of the national politic through the abduction and rape of women, the removal, and recovery from and to their families and communities is seen as a violation to motherhood. Each woman was considered to have or had the ability to be a mother. As an abducted woman, her sexuality could not be contained by the patriarchy, and thus motherhood was tarnished. The men often raped and abducted women of the

*other* community to desecrate the woman, the *other* community, and ultimately the *other* nation's honor.

Allah Rakhi, a Muslim woman, who now lives in Oorah, Pakistan spoke to the Farrukh Khan. She said, "My husband and his elder brother had already left for Pakistan sometime earlier. This is how they were able to survive. After we were attacked, no Muslim (man) remained to defend us women, and we were abducted. They locked us all in a school-like place for two of three days and teased us and misbehaved with us. Then I was taken to a house and had to live there. I was treated very badly...I lived like this for six years. I gave birth to two sons at this time. I had no idea of what had become of my family. The military used to come and enquire about abducted women, but the villagers would lie and tell them there were none. One day, the military came and faced their way into our courtyard. I came out and told them that I had been abducted; they said that 'we have come to get you.' I got into the military car with my 10-month-old son. My captors would not let me bring my other son with me. He was two-years-old and I had to leave him behind. I remember they followed the military car all the way to Jammu. We arrived at a camp full of abducted women. A number of other women had not brought along their children, they had left them behind. We were eventually brought to Lahore. I remember one woman who kept trying to run back to Jammu. Of course, I remember that horrendous time, even to this day. It is impossible to forget. I still miss the son I left behind with my abductors. We did try to get him back but were unsuccessful" (Khan, 2006, 110).

Rakhi elucidated that there were no men left to protect her, which underlines how she internalized the discourse around patriarchal protection. Similar to Shrimati Laj Wanti's testimony, Rakhi's testimony has a gap as she quickly moved from being "treated very badly," to giving birth to two sons. She does not describe how this shift occurred, and we are left to fill in the gap with our knowledge of the sexual violence that was heavily employed as a tactic during the partition. Similar to Wanti, language may have failed Rakhi as well. At the same time, however, Rakhi may not have wanted to recall the specificity of trauma so as to not relive her violence she endured. This could have been her coping strategy, she may have needed to repress the gory details in order to survive. Both Shrimati Laj Wanti and Allah Rakhi were successfully recovered by choice. Nevertheless, Rakhi remembered a woman who kept trying to escape recovery. This differing narrative demonstrates how women's desires and needs cannot be generalized and encapsulated under the umbrella of *all women must be recovered*. Instead, this patriarchal discourse needs to be complicated as each woman is a different person. By focusing on multiple women's testimonies, I remember and honor the many different women whose lives were marked by the recovery operation and the partition. Instead of erasing women's voices to present neat, chronological, *fact-based* narratives of the partition, I illustrate more wholesome, honest, realistic images of the partition by incorporating women's voices.

Judith Herman, a psychiatrist and scholar on trauma, wrote how women may share their own individual and unique stories of trauma, but through this, the group experiences form some sort of universality (Herman, 1992, 74). How are oral testimonies understood within the context of the system? Since the power structures that produce the conditions of these women's



experiences are similar, how does a universality within the ways in which they express their trauma form? How were the models that employed to express trauma similar? This similarity does not mean that these women's experiences were the same, but it means that women's voices can be put into conversation with each other. Women often used templates in order to describe their trauma, as templates make it easier to remember, which demonstrates how there are connections between all of the narratives. There was silence as women used language that was general, or women described the surrounding setting and events without describing their actual rape, so as to not relive the trauma. Rape is often used as a tool of pornography in literature, thus when abducted women retell their stories, the gap in many stories may protect them from being taken advantage of in the actual retelling. It is crucial to recognize that many women who experienced communal violence and sexual assault are either hidden within their new communities or died without giving testimony. There is a gap in the kinds of testimonies that are analyzed in my project due to this reason.

### **The Discourse of Forced Self-Sacrifice and Martyrdom**

Basant Kaur, a Sikh woman, spoke to Urvashi Butalia. Kaur stated that the men of the village decided to kill all the women and girls. "My husband, he killed our daughter, his niece, his sister, and a grandson. He killed them with a kirpan (sword worn by Sikh men). My jeth's (brother-in-law) son killed his mother, his wife, his daughter, and a grandson and granddaughter, all with a pistol. And then, my jeth, he doused himself with kerosene and jumped into a fire" (Butalia, 2014, 199). Kaur said, "They were all killed so that they would not fall into the hands of Musalmaans. One girl from our village, she had gone with the Musalmaans, She was quite beautiful, and everyone got worried that if one has gone, they will take all of our girls away...so it was then that they decided to kill the girls" (Butalia, 2014, 199). The men gave opium packets to the other women, and "pointed out" the village well. Mata Lajjawanti, a female elder, led the procession of women to the well and jumped. Other women followed, and then Kaur jumped as well. However, since there were many bodies in the well, the people at the top of the well, such as Kaur, survived. There was not enough water to drown everyone. Kaur said, "It's like when you put rotis (bread) into a tandoor and if it is too full, the ones near the top, they don't cook, they have to be taken out. So the well filled up, and we could not drown. Those who died, and those who were alive, they pulled out..." (Butalia, 2014, 45). Butalia wrote, "There is no record of the number of women and children who were killed by the men of their own families, their own communities. Unlike in the cases of abducted women, here families did not report the deaths of their own women, for they themselves were responsible for them" (Butalia, 2014, 208). How did women who committed suicide or those who were killed by their families enter into the realm of martyrdom? Women's communities performed violent acts to suit their own agendas. This militarization that is often enacted on the *other* community, is mirrored in their own community.

Since men often failed to protect their women from being abducted, they found that the way to preserve community honor would be to kill the women themselves. The word for wife in Sanskrit, *grahastha*, means household. Thus, women were seen as the bearers of the home, and

so any violation of the women was a violation of the home. Hindu and Sikh women were coerced by their families to commit suicide as a means to prevent abduction and rape by the *other*. Women also encouraged other women to commit suicide, which shows how women were needed to support this circularity of violence. This demonstrates how the ideology of honor was factored as more important than the lives of actual women. Where are women safe and are they ever safe? On 18 September 1947, Gandhi gave a speech supporting these acts of honor killing. He said, “I have heard that many women did not want to lose their honor and chose to die. Many men killed their own wives. I think that is really great because I know that such things make India brave. After all, life and death is a transitory game. Whoever might have died are dead and gone; but at least they have gone with courage. They have not sold away their honour. Not that their lives were not dear to them, but they felt it was better to die with courage rather than be forcibly converted to Islam by the Muslims and allow them to assault their bodies. And so those women died. They were not just a handful, but quite a few. When I hear all these things, I dance with joy that there are such brave women in India” (Gandhi, 1983, 202). Honor killing is seen as a means to preserve the purity of women’s sexuality. If women were sexually assaulted by the *other*, their defilement is reflected as the vandalizing of community and state honor, as illustrated by Gandhi. Gandhi is the *father of India*, and he “dances with joy” when he hears about honor killings, which saddens me. This sickening ideology is reproduced within the familial and communal structure as well, and supported by leaders of the nationalist movement such as Gandhi. This brutal nationalism extols and requires the annihilation of women.

These deaths are interpreted as an expression of women’s agency; however, I cannot believe that women committed suicide on their own accord. One man, Iqbal, recounted to Menon and Bhasin that the women in his family killed themselves out of their own free choice. He said, “The decision was theirs” (Menon, Bhasin, 1993, 51). He doesn’t see the role that coercion played, but his wife quickly interjected and said, “They must have enraged them, after all, what could ladies do in this situation? They must have persuaded them, what could the women do?” (Menon, Bhasin, 1993, 51). Though his wife has not been named, she points out how she finds it extremely improbable that women voluntarily committed suicide. She asserts that men would have coerced and forced these women to kill themselves to conserve familial, and communal honor that revolved around patriarchal constructions of honor.

Another woman told Das, “three women stood firm and refused to kill themselves or their children, despite the fact that packets of poison were ready for them all. No more, they said, We’re not going to kill our children. One aunt (Veeran) refused to take poison or give it to her 13-year-old daughter in spite of the menfolk urging her to do so. Later she justified her refusal by saying that someone had to stay back and cook for the men if they survived, but she was made to feel ashamed of her “cowardice,” her lack of courage in embracing her death” (Das, 1995, 54). Within this rhetoric of suicide as an articulation of women’s agency, there are real cleavages and instances where women challenge this discourse. Though the woman who survived veiled her confrontation by embedding it within traditional women’s roles, as she justified it through a seemingly non-threatening discourse of service, it is clear that she boldly asserted her agency in a space where she was not regarded with respect. She resisted. The women who committed suicide

were celebrated as goddesses and martyrs, as their actions were perceived as a sacrifice for the nation, while those who survived were not. Why are these women only celebrated as goddesses in death and not in life? When a woman died through suicide, she was accommodated within the narrative of purity, an honorable, though dead citizen. How is it that countless women who continued the work of living life everyday in the midst of this violence, women who resisted being *restored* to their *original* homes, or those who wished and succeeded in being *restored* to their *original* homes are not accounted for in this discourse of heroism and sacrifice in name honor?

## **Conclusion**

Maybe the wound is the place where the light enters me

The women who were abducted during partition, those who chose to remain with their new families, those who chose to leave their abductors, and those who were forcibly recovered complicate the dominant linear narrative of the partition. India and Pakistan did not acknowledge women as autonomous beings. Women's identities were premised on religion and so their needs and desires, the home and country they chose were ignored by the patriarchal state. These women were silenced. The state abusively shoved all abducted women under the umbrella of recovery, without recognizing that recovery was more often than not forced. The state constrained the rights, voices, and agency of abducted women, by invoking its supposed protective functions and masking it as an act of benevolence. Communities and families served as extensions of the patriarchal state and controlled women's bodies, sexualities, and lives. Women's bodies served as the main method through which national identity was articulated, as the state recovered abducted women, often without their consent in order to restore familial, communal, and national honor.

By documenting and analyzing women's testimonies during the partition, I honor how abducted women experienced the partition very differently. The partition was not a clean, surgical line that neatly separated two nations, but instead, it was complex, messy, and bloody. Women figured as sites of violence and memory; they were seen to embody familial, communal, and national honor. This burden goes hand in hand with the violence enacted upon their bodies and only served to continue to traumatize them. Studying testimonies is not a straightforward process. Remembering and retelling shifts experiences, as stories morph through time. However, testimonies need to be seen as truth as there is not one way to recall an experience. Although the language may change, the experience still exists at the core of each retelling. Fragmentation and hybridity of testimonies, as well as points of similarity between women's testimonies, provides a better representation of the partition. The lived experiences of women need to be considered as theory, encapsulated within *theories of the flesh*.<sup>1</sup> Our bodies are vessels of knowledge production; we become through experience and trauma.

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<sup>1</sup> See Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, *This bridge called my back: Writings of radical women of color*.

Writing this thesis has been incredibly difficult and painful. I dreamt of my ancestors, I dreamt of being with them during the partition. I would often wake up in the middle of the night crying, my pillow drenched in tears, my heart throbbing, as my research of the partition deepened the vivid violence in my dreams. It is 2017, and I am still harboring pain that compounded as I intensified my research of the partition.

The black feminist scholar, Joy DeGruy used the frame of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder to create the term Post Traumatic Slave Disorder, which addresses the particular kind of trauma that people who are descendants of enslaved black people experience (DeGruy, 2005). Feminists such as Joy DeGruy have been saying for a long time that intergenerational trauma needs to be given more attention, as trauma can be coded genetically and passed down. However, now scientists have finally corroborated DeGruy's theory. The scientist, Dr. Rachel Yehuda, researched epigenetic and intergenerational trauma. She found that when people experience trauma, their genes change in a highly distinct manner (Shulevitz, 2014). When these people who have experienced trauma have children, their children inherit these altered genes (Shulevitz, 2014). Thus their progeny's genes are encoded with trauma that can continue to be passed on. Though the partition of India and Pakistan cannot be compared to the brutality and horrors of centuries of chattel slavery, the broader theory of intergenerational trauma can be utilized to shed some light on how I feel. We are supposed to accept that trauma is in the past in order to heal. But trauma for me is only compounded by the current and continuing systems of oppression—the patriarchy, capitalism, neocolonialism, and whiteness. Due to these systems of oppression, sexism, racism, and ableism continue to impact my life daily and constrain my healing process.

In my thesis, I researched and witnessed the ways in which women were speaking back against dominant narratives of the partition. Women were creating herstories, in order to complicate and correct histories that marginalized them. By remembering, we can honor truth. Through truth, we may be able to reach a space of healing. Within the spaces of oppression, there are small pockets of resistance, where we can rewrite what is written about us, in order to reclaim ourselves. These women's testimonies allow for a re-inscription and re-articulation of history, as their lived experiences have been silenced and erased by the dominant society. However, I do not wish to claim that all women healed from their testimonies, as many refused to speak about their lived experiences. Nevertheless, I have come to learn that writing and speaking are tools to reach a place of healing. Hopefully, those who read this thesis, and specifically my community, we may feel less alone in our pain. I am creating space for alternative and wholesome narratives of the partition. For me, healing is resistance; it is continuing to live and breathe every single day when dominant society may not want me to. I will not forget, and my thesis is a direct act of refusing to forget. When our experiences are erased from history, from our lineages, our identities are contorted and seen through a corrupt lens that is rooted in the patriarchy. However, when we remember, we honor. Through this, we start to create and exist in a new framework that holds a place for us; we carved a place for us, and maybe we can then being to heal and ultimately reclaim a sense of belonging. Ultimately, I

hope through reflection and critical engagement, by locating, retrieving and honoring truth, we will come to a place of healing and find freedom.

## **Reflections**

I hope to continue to research the partition. I wish to expand my focus on intergenerational trauma and healing practices, by centering the mental health of people of color, specifically South Asian transgender people, gender non-conforming people, and cisgender women. My research within this thesis has focused on the violence that cisgender women experienced during the partition, by utilizing the violence against women framework; however, this framework is reductive as it is rooted in the gender binary. It is exclusionary as I did not consider the violence that transgender people may have experienced. Since dominant structures continue to uphold and define gender through the binary of man and woman, those were the ways in which people were classified during the partition. I was unable to find testimonies by transgender and gender non-conforming people. However, this does not excuse the fact that I did not include their experiences within my research as I reified dominant gender paradigms. I recognize how sexual violence has been historically and is still a tool of *othering*—racism, economic exploitation, criminalization, and state violence. In fact, I know that the transgender community faces unprecedented rates of sexual violence more other groups. Thus, even within the violence of partition, there is a hierarchy in survivor experiences as cisgender women are given more importance. Though my thesis disrupts the dominant meta narrative, it simultaneously asserts normative models of sexual violence and survivorhood.

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