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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

*Beeran ki kai jaat...?*  
The Figure of the Woman in Partition Discourse

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements  
for the degree Master of Arts

in

Ethnic Studies

by

Rashné Marzban Limki

Committee in charge:

Professor Denise Ferreira da Silva, Chair  
Professor Pal Ahluwalia  
Professor Yen Le Espiritu  
Professor Rosemary Marangoly George

2009

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Chair

University of California, San Diego

2009

This thesis is dedicated to Elizabeth Robinson/Emma Lundgren.  
For all that you continue to teach me.

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

*Beeran ki kai jaat...?*  
The Figure of the Woman in Partition Discourse

by

Rashné Marzban Limki

Master of Arts in Ethnic Studies

University of California, San Diego, 2009

Professor Denise Ferreira da Silva, Chair

This thesis deploys Partition, as produced through testimonies, in order to investigate how intimate violence is produced and narrated. Partition, here, is not the object of analysis; rather, given the associated symbolics and imaginaries that recuperate violence from its abstraction, Partition is used as a site for investigating the analytics of violence, specifically intimate violence, as they operate within, and across, the evental and the everyday. In this thesis, I offer a critique of social scientific readings of intimate violence that merely allow for inclusions and reconfigurations of the figure of the woman without addressing the global/historical structures that produce her exclusion in the first place. Consequently, using testimonies of violence from Partition,

I demonstrate how, far from disregarding gender, discourses on intimate violence often self-consciously reproduce gender subjugation. By following what Michel Foucault calls an archaeological analysis, I argue here that the objects of discourse that appear consistently in Partition testimonies – home, religion and nation – render the universal signifier of Partition as always already gendered. Next, using psychoanalytical theory, I assert that unless testimony is treated as an active political production, the figure of the woman in Partition will continue to remain an object of cultural contention, always already susceptible to a social scientific inclusion-exclusion paradigm. Thus, I examine testimony at the level of enunciation in order to open up possibilities for the figure of the woman to emerge as a political subject and hence ineluctable from the event.

# I

## **Bharat vibhajan ki kitni Kahaniyan?<sup>1</sup> Out of Many Partitions, One**

August 14, 1947:

*August in Bombay: a month of festivals, the month of Krishna's birthday and Coconut Day; and this year – fourteen hours to go, thirteen, twelve – there was an extra festival on the calendar, a new myth to celebrate, because a nation which had never previously existed was about to win its freedom, catapulting us into a world which, although it had five thousand years of history, although it had invented the game of chess and traded with Middle Kingdom Egypt, was nevertheless quite imaginary; into a mythical land, a country which would never exist except by the efforts of a phenomenal collective will – except in a dream we all agreed to dream...*

... (nine minutes to midnight)...

*The monster in the streets has already begun to celebrate; the new myth courses through its veins, replacing its blood with corpuscles of saffron and green. And in Delhi, a wiry serious man sits in the Assembly Hall and prepares to make a speech. ...<sup>2</sup>*

June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1947 – the day the Indian Independence Act of 1947 officially approves the independence and partitioning of India, to be executed on August 15, 1947. Preparations for the transfer of power begin at a frantic rate. On the calendar in his office, Mountbatten<sup>3</sup> crosses off each day, moving steadily towards August 15. (They must not leave too late... they could not afford to be held responsible for the bloodshed... the onus must fall upon the new sovereign nation-states... a quick exit was imperative.) In Cabinet Meetings, leaders fight over the division of the military,

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<sup>1</sup> Trans. "How Many Stories of the Partition of India?" A play on the title of the Anthology: *Kitne Toba Tek Singh. Bharat vibhajan ki das Kahaniyan*. (How Many Toba Tek Singhs. Ten Stories of the Partition of India.) Delhi, 1987.

<sup>2</sup> Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* (New York: Avon Books, 1980), 129-130.

<sup>3</sup> Lord Louis Mountbatten, last Viceroy of British India and first Governor General of independent India.

distribution of monetary and infrastructural resources, new flags for their independent states... Meanwhile, as Partition looms on the horizon, across cities in India, “(l)ying like the garbage across the street and in its open gutters [are] bodies of the dead.”<sup>4</sup>

Partition, a word weighted with many moments – moments of line drawing and border crossing, of “Tryst with Destiny” speeches<sup>5</sup> streaming into homes on the brink of immolation, of *kafilas* of the walking dead and ghost trains of the already dead, of silent memories and pregnant speech – Partition, one word satiated with unknowable moments. The stories written of Partition are also many. Sumit Sarkar, for instance, provides a nationalist historiography of British colonial rule and the subsequent nationalist movement that led up to Partition – as does David Ludden. Scholars such as Gyan Pandey, on the other hand, critique such historiographic work for its tendency to sanitize Partition, to vacate it of the messiness and uncertainty that characterize its struggle and violence. Consequently, Pandey attempts to write Partition as a moment of struggle, “a history of contending politics and contending subject positions.”<sup>6</sup> And while he succeeds in describing the ways in which Partition violence makes and breaks subjects and communities, particularly in the context of nation, the work of feminist

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<sup>4</sup> Unknown, *In Pictures: India's Partition*, BBC News, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/spl/hi/pop\\_ups/06/south\\_asia\\_india0s\\_partition/html/7.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/spl/hi/pop_ups/06/south_asia_india0s_partition/html/7.stm) (accessed November 15, 2007).

<sup>5</sup> Speech delivered by Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of independent India, on the occasion of Independence at mid-night on August 15<sup>th</sup>, 1947:

Long years ago we made a tryst with destiny, and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge, not wholly or in full measure, but very substantially. At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom. A moment comes, which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new, when an age ends, and when the soul of a nation, long suppressed, finds utterance. It is fitting that at this solemn moment we take the pledge of dedication to the service of India and her people and to the still larger cause of humanity.

“Jawaharlal Nehru: A Tryst With Destiny,” *Guardian*, May 1, 2007, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/theguardian/2007/may/01/greatspeeches> (accessed January 24, 2009).

<sup>6</sup> Gyanendra Pandey, *Remembering Partition*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 18.

scholars re-focuses this conversation to the realm of the everyday and the domain of the intimate. Thus, Urvashi Butalia and Veena Das, among others, turn to individual stories, especially of women, that reveal the ongoing work of Partition in the private realm. Through the testimonials of trauma presented, these scholars demonstrate how violence undergirds not only communal relations but, more importantly, relations of kinship.

Ultimately, however, each of these tells a story about violence – national/ist, communal, intimate – and how they all merge together to represent Partition. This thesis, then, is about representations of violence; or more specifically, about how they emerge from, and reproduce, the violence of an occurrence. For the purpose of this project, Partition is not the object of analysis; rather, it is a *site* for the analysis of violence. Woven together as it is with the shocking and the moving, the monstrous and the banal, Partition serves as an incredibly productive site for investigating the analytics of violence as they operate within, and across, the evental and the everyday. Thus, centering of Partition in this thesis is not a centering of the event, *per se*, but rather a centering of violence itself – the two are synonymous. Indeed, as Pandey notes, *Partition is violence*. The productivity of Partition, here, lies in its associated symbolics and imaginaries that recuperate violence from its abstraction.

Consequently, my thesis is certainly not historiographical in nature. But it does flow from where Butalia and Das left off. For, like these scholars, the moment of violence that I am interested in, is the discursive. Also, I am interested in how discourses on violence and on relations of intimacy are mutually constructed. Thus, following Butalia and Das, I deploy Partition, as produced through testimonies, as a site that enables the investigation of how intimate violence is produced and narrated.

However, unlike the work of these scholars, my work is neither sociological nor anthropological. My project will demonstrate that social scientific readings of violence, or in this case, Partition, merely allow for inclusions and reconfigurations of subject positions without addressing the global/historical structures that produce the exclusions in the first place. Thus, for instance, while Das and Butalia highlight the exclusion or subjugation of gender in their Partition narratives, their inclusionary gestures do not engage the ontology that not only allows, but also necessitates, the gendering of Partition, especially in the context of the intimate. Now, while I do not present an ontological critique, per se, I demonstrate in this thesis how discourses on violence are always already gendered. That is, using the language of intimate violence during Partition, this project will demonstrate how, far from disregarding gender, discourses on intimate violence often self-consciously reproduce gender subjugation.

Returning to the site of Partition, then, I base my analysis on the crucial assumption that survivors of Partition, while giving testimony, are not merely broken, fragmented subjects, but more importantly, political beings actively producing a history. Thus, using the tools of discourse analysis, I first ask what are the rules of discourse that guide the language of Partition? By following what Michel Foucault calls an archaeological analysis, I will argue here that the objects of discourse that appear consistently in Partition testimonies render the universal signifier of Partition as always already gendered. Under these conditions of discourse, I then ask, how does one approach and understand testimonial speech regarding intimate violence? How do we avoid treating testimony as merely a historical or cultural artifact, and grasp instead its political implications? Using psychoanalytical theory, I will argue that unless testimony

is treated as an active political production, the social implications of the gendering of Partition cannot be fully appreciated and that the figure of the woman in Partition will continue to remain an object of cultural contention, always already susceptible to a social scientific inclusion-exclusion paradigm. Thus, I argue for a greater focus on the politics of language as deployed in the realm of the intimate at the discursive moment of Partition.

Before proceeding further, let me first set up Partition as a site of analysis.

### **[Partitions]**

Partition – one word representing infinite moments narrated in numerous stories. Yet, most of these stories rely on the cultural – on stories of the politics of difference, on nations and nationalisms. In this chapter, I present some of the most-told stories, if only to argue against their telling. I use the idea of the global/historical, as defined by Denise Ferreira da Silva, to critique the naturalization of Partition that occurs in these stories and to argue instead for an ‘evental’ approach to Partition. I refer here to Alain Badiou’s idea of the ‘event,’ a term that I will apply to Partition as a moment of universal signification. Using these two ideas – of the global/historical and of event – I argue for a telling of Partition that is removed from historical teleology and that focuses on Partition as a moment – or, rather, on a moment of Partition – so as to understand one of the many different ways in which Partition is an active project. My aim in using these analytical tools, of course, is to emphasize how the gendering of Partition discourse replicates gender subjugation. This particular argument will be laid out in the following chapters. Before arriving at my chosen moment of Partition – i.e. the

discursive moment of intimate violence – I turn briefly to the many other moments borne by the word.

The responsibility of partitioning India (and Pakistan) was assigned by the British powers to Sir Cyril Radcliff, an English lawyer who had never traveled east of Paris but was known as a man “of great legal abilities, right personality and wider administrative experience.”<sup>7</sup> His task was seemingly simple: to draw a line. That, as he stated years later, was what the Indian leaders wanted and that is what he gave them. However, as the five weeks assigned to him for the task dwindled down (Radcliff arrived in India on July 8, 1947; the boundary decisions were formally announced on August 16, 1947), he noted in a letter to his nephew:

Nobody in India will love me for the award about the Punjab and Bengal and there will be roughly 80 million people with a grievance who will begin looking for me. I do not want them to find me. I have worked and traveled and sweated... oh, I have sweated the whole time.<sup>8</sup>

Radcliff’s sweat, we may safely assume, was not a result merely of the torturous heat of the (north) Indian summer to which he was subject. But whether his sweat was due to the sheer enormity of his task, the anxiety caused by its impossibility, the weighing down of his conscience by the consequences of his actions, or simply the fear of being swarmed by millions of ravaged brown folk – one may never precisely know. It is possible though, that his sweat was a result of all of the above, for the line that Radcliff was to draw was intended to

divide a province of more than 35 million people, thousands of villages, towns and cities, a unified and integrated system of canals and communication networks, and 16 million Muslims, 15 million Hindus

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<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 65.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

and 5 million Sikhs, who despite their religious differences, shared a common culture, language and history.<sup>9</sup>

And all this was to be accomplished with inadequate time, using maps coupled with old census statistics, and with no hands-on knowledge about the land or its people. Needless to say, what this ostensibly geographical division entailed was also a division of property and private resources, of jobs and livelihoods, of family, friends and community, and ultimately a division of ‘hearts and minds.’

From this grotesque moment of Partition, rose the monstrous. Radcliff’s divisions produced their own Partitions – a million dead; 12 million ‘swapped’ across a constantly shifting border<sup>10</sup>; 75,000 women raped, over 25,000 kidnapped or ‘disappeared.’ Numbers, sanctified by “rituals of blood.”<sup>11</sup> And against the backdrop woven together by these moments of Partition arose the banal legacy of Independence. The one last act of the colonial masters before they waved their sweet goodbyes; its violence appropriated by Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs murdering each other and their own, of the rape and mutilation, burning and pillaging, of ‘ghost trains’ and bloody rivers; images of the “damned [located] in the middle of madness and crime”<sup>12</sup> – these moments constitute not only some of the many moments of Partition but also the scene of Independence, of the birth of the nation-state(s), indeed of the nation(s). Yet, in a classically Renanian double-move of ‘remembering’ and ‘forgetting’ (or perhaps of

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 65-66.

<sup>10</sup> While Pakistan and India achieved ‘independence’ on August 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> respectively, the official announcement of borders – i.e. which city, which village, etc. would go to India or Pakistan – was not announced until August 17<sup>th</sup>, 1947.

<sup>11</sup> Rushdie, *Midnight’s Children*, 130.

<sup>12</sup> Alok Bhalla, “A Dance of Grotesque Masks: A Critical Reading of Manto’s “1919 Ke Ek Baat”,” in *Life and Works of Saadat Hasan Manto*, ed. Alok Bhalla, 28 (Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 2004).

‘remembering to forget and forgetting to remember’)<sup>13</sup> Partition is recalled, only to be stripped of its “rituals of blood,” and reduced to the prose of Independence and its legacy of ‘the nation.’ In eliding, or dismissing, the violence that it was, in treating it as a historical aberration – this is “not *our* history at all”<sup>14</sup> – Partition/Independence becomes merely a moment of “nationalising the nation”<sup>15</sup> – a moment against which inter- and intra-national relationships are negotiated.

My aim for this project, as already suggested, is to keep violence central to the narrative of Partition. The purpose, however, is not to ‘explain’ (or explain away) violence in anthropological terms – as the inevitable outcome of communalism or nationalism – or even to examine the constitutive productivity of violence – in terms of how new subjects and new communities emerge. Rather, what I hope to accomplish through this thesis is to examine how the telling of violence, *ex post facto*, secures Partition as a universal signifier of nation/alism. In other words, I do not re-examine historicist studies of Partition nor the ways in which Partition has shaped social, cultural and political subjectivities, but instead examine how those that were produced by Partition, produce Partition itself, in its epochal fixity. By studying survivor testimonies, I investigate not how Partition *is* a national/ist episode, but rather how it (*be*)comes to

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<sup>13</sup> In his seminal essay “What Is A Nation?” Ernest Renan expresses this double-move thus: first, he writes: “A heroic past, great men, glory..., this is the social capital upon which one bases a national idea. To have common glories in the past and to have a common will in the present... - these are the essential conditions for being a people” (Bhabha,19). But, earlier in the essay he also asserts that one dimension of the “common will” of the people, is the collective will to forget: “Forgetting, I would even go so far as to say historical error, is a crucial facot in the creation of a nation...” Further, “the essence of a nation is that all individuals have many things in common, and also that they have forgotten many things” (Bhabha, 11). This is precisely true in the case of Indian history, where ‘the nation’ collectively agrees to remember-forget Partition, in the fullness of its g(l)ory, as an aberration, but celebrates it in its most reductive form as Independence.

<sup>14</sup> Pandey, *Remembering Partition*, 3.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

signify one; I ask not why Partition *is* an unfortunate but necessary outcome of communal tensions in colonial India, but why this history has *become* central to the narrative of Partition. For it is here, in this telling of the story of Partition, that we observe the reproduction of the social – a reproduction that is key to understanding how the universal signifier that is Partition is fundamentally gendered.

This thesis is not intended to dismiss the aforementioned approaches to the study of Partition but rather to explore their limitations. I take my cue from feminist scholars such as Urvashi Butalia, Kamala Bhasin, Ritu Menon and Veena Das, among others, who challenge us to “put people – instead of grand politics – at its [Partition’s] center”<sup>16</sup> and to pay attention to “the most ordinary of objects and events... [in order to understand] how life was recovered not through some grand gestures in the realm of the transcendent but through a descent into the ordinary.”<sup>17</sup> I do depart, however, from their analytical perspective by focusing on the discursive moment of Partition and investigating how this moment produces Partition as a universal signifier on national/ism, rather than considering the ways in which Partition constructs its subjects. To explain the importance of this analytical move, I turn below to Denise Ferreira da Silva’s formulation of the global/historical subject.

### **[The Global/Historical and the Event]**

Silva’s book, *Toward A Global Idea of Race*, is rooted in a critique of contemporary social scientific accounts of racial subjection. These accounts, she argues,

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<sup>16</sup> Butalia, *Other Side of*, 77.

<sup>17</sup> Veena Das, *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007), 7.

are based on the sociologies of exclusion and are thus unable to challenge the foundational ontoepistemological tools of History and Science that have instituted the place of the racial subaltern subject within the global order. Critiquing, for instance, Critical Race Theory, Silva contends that so long as contemporary models focus on ideas of racial, or cultural, inclusion, the ontoepistemologies that produce racial difference and racial subjection, and that are embedded in social discourse, will reinforce rather than repudiate the figure of Man – i.e. the transparent subject. So long as the ontoepistemologies themselves remain untouched, writes Silva, “the racial combine[d] with other social categories (gender, class, sexuality, culture, etc.) [will continue] to produce modern subjects who can be excluded from (juridical) universality without unleashing an ethical crisis.”<sup>18</sup> It is for this reason that Silva introduces the figure of the global/historical subject – i.e. a subject who is produced “as an effect of ontoepistemological contexts, namely, historicity and globality, instituted respectively by the texts of history and science.”<sup>19</sup> It is my contention that, given that discourse bears the power to “reproduce the very logic that instituted the authority of the subject, the epistemological figure against which they write the other of history,”<sup>20</sup> the figure of the global/historical subject is particularly crucial to appreciating the rules of discourse through which the subject is made to emerge. It is for this reason that, the figure of the woman, as a global/historical subject, is central to my argument that the language of Partition is always already gendered.

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<sup>18</sup> Denise Ferreira da Silva, *Toward a Global Idea of Race* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), xxx-xxxii.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>20</sup> Joan Scott quoted in Silva, *Toward a Global Idea*, xxx.

But the global/historical framework is also key in counteracting the persistence of sociological and anthropological subjects of Partition. The idea of the global/historical is understood through the transparency thesis. This thesis introduces two entities – the transparent subject, or transparent *I*, and the affectable being. The transparent *I*, by definition, is the self-conscious, self-determined subject of Europe – and more importantly, to put it in Hegelian terms, transparent *I* is a self-actualizing subject, one who has exceeded the state of nature, and who recognizes and produces itself and its world through the realization of its own essence or Spirit. On the other hand, the affectable being is the other of Europe, a subject instituted through exterior determination, whose body and mind are both ‘things of world,’ affected by, or acted upon, by reason exterior to itself, a reason belonging to the realm of nature. The affectable being is not a thing of intellect or knowledge, and is incapable of recognizing, let alone actualizing, its own essence. The racial and sexual subaltern is always produced in affectability, but may emerge into *minor* transparency through the mediation of a transparent subject. Indeed, this was the logic of colonialism – that the colonial subjects, although unenlightened pre-contact, could *become* transparent through the intervention of the colonial masters. The condition, however, is that while an affectable being can *become* transparent, it never truly *is*. Thus, the racial and sexual subaltern can only be a *minor* transparent *I*. Silva argues that while such *minor* transparency allows for inclusion of racial and sexual subjects into the realm of History, their inclusion is always already contingent, and thus, their exclusion does not create any crisis in the social. Consequently, as I have argued, it is essential that the figure of the woman be considered within a global/historical framework, in order to appreciate

how her position in Partition discourse reproduces her position within the social. I will also demonstrate in this chapter how, when social scientific accounts write Partition as a national or nationalising moment, they tread the dangerous waters of writing Partition subjects into *minor* transparency.

In order to make this move – from the social scientific to the global/historical – I deploy Alain Badiou’s formulation of ‘event’ to describe Partition as a moment of universal signification. For Badiou, the ‘event’ is the marker, or the bearer, of the Universal. In *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, he demonstrates how St. Paul, through his writings, establishes the Resurrection of Christ as Universal. According to the author, the Universal is that which “independently of all anecdote, is intelligible to us without having to resort to cumbersome historical mediations...”<sup>21</sup> The conditions under which the Universal may emerge are based on the nature of ‘truth’ it holds. Describing Paul’s articulation of Universality, Badiou writes:

Paul’s general procedure is the following: if there has been an event, and if truth consists in declaring it and then in being faithful to this declaration, two consequences ensue. First, since truth is evental, or of the order of what occurs, it is singular. It is neither structural, nor axiomatic, nor legal. No available generality can account for it, nor structure the subject who claims to follow its wake. Consequently, there cannot be a law of truth. Second, truth being inscribed on the basis of a declaration that is in essence subjective, no preconstituted subset can support it; nothing communitarian or historically established can lend its substance to the process of truth. Truth is diagonal relative to every communication subset; it neither claims authority from, nor... constitutes an identity. It is offered to all, or addressed to everyone, without a condition of belonging being able to limit this offer or this address.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, trans. Ray Brassier (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 36.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

What I find particularly useful about the excerpt above is that it refocuses our attention away from historical determinism and instead towards confronting the event in itself. For Paul, writes Badiou, “the event has not come to prove something; it is a pure beginning.”<sup>23</sup> Pithily articulated, this statement can take the form of: The event *is*. I do not believe that Badiou is suggesting an ahistorical or dehistoricized approach to the study of happenings, but rather deploys the term ‘event’ for those *singular* occurrences that signify “an intervention within History, one through which it is... “broken into two,” rather than governed by a transcendent reckoning in conformity with the laws of an epoch.”<sup>24</sup> This break is so complete, writes Badiou, that existing traditions of thought and discourse are unable to comprehend or name the event, reducing it, therefore, to an irredeemable deviancy. For instance, in the case of the Resurrection, the deadlock of language produced the event as “folly (*moria*) for Greek discourse, which is a discourse of reason, and [as] a scandal (*skandalon*) for Jewish discourse, which insists on a sign of divine power and sees in Christ nothing but weakness, abjection, and contemptible peripeteia.”<sup>25</sup> Thus, Christian discourse arose to fill in the inadequacy of existent Greek and Jewish discourse.

In terms of Partition, then, I deploy the idea of event in order to move away from the clamor of historicism and to focus instead on the process of signification that has universalized it. More importantly, following the two mutually constitutive arguments regarding a historical rupture that necessitates the creation of a new discourse, by articulating Partition as event I attempt to argue that the rhetoric employed

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 46.

to describe Partition – nation/nationalism, communalism, madness, etc. – is primarily functional, a way of naming the unnamable. Of course, it is way beyond the scope of this project, and the abilities of this author, to identify or suggest a new discourse that accurately captures Partition. But this is also precisely why Badiou’s articulation of ‘event’ is productive because in suggesting a move away from historical truth and focusing instead on evental truth, he leaves open the possibility for truth, even in its incomprehensibility and intractability, to exist and be accessible to those that wish it so.

This truth, writes Badiou, is accessible only to those that maintain a fidelity to the event and its consequences. For, as per his interpretation of Paul’s actions, “[e]ither one participates in it [truth], declaring the founding event and drawing its consequences, or one remains foreign to it.”<sup>26</sup> Moreover, this construction of truth produces subjects that are tethered not to identity but to the event itself – that is, the universal event is that which is “capable to structuring a subject devoid of all identity and suspended to an event whose only “proof” lies precisely in its having been declared by a subject.”<sup>27</sup> Here, I do not interpret Badiou as articulating an identity-less subject or one that has a singular identity. Rather, I interpret this to mean that the subjectivity that emerges from an event, especially an event that exceeds existent discourse, is a radical subjectivity, one that is neither reducible nor diversifiable to those identities that are tethered to contemporary structures of discourse. And it is precisely for this reason, I believe, that authors such as Veena Das advocate a focus on the ordinary, rather than the epochal,

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 5.

since it is within this context of the ordinary, the everyday, that the ‘truth’ of an event is experienced.

It is with these dimensions of the ‘event’ in mind – pure beginning, historical rupture/new discourse, and evental truth – that I appropriate the term for the study of Partition. Because, to reiterate, the idea of ‘event’ represents a move away from the pre-/over-determined articulations of Partition, and instead allows one to examine the radical intimate subjectivities that are articulated by those that declare themselves its subjects. However, as has been noted already, the event of Partition has not created any new discourse but rather, has appropriated objects and structures of discourse to name the unnameable. Consequently, the ontoepistemological context within which Partition is narrated continues to be that of the social as we know it. The introduction of the evental, or radical, subject, then, in no way discounts the significance of the global/historical subject. Rather, the purpose of introducing the evental subject into the global/historical framework is to move away from the idea of a teleologically produced *minor* subject while still retaining the ontoepistemological context within which a subject produces discourse. That is, the idea of event allows me to focus on Partition as a universal signifier without requiring a replaying of historical, political or social particularities. Instead, the context necessary to engage Partition is provided by the global/historical framework.

In the next two sections of this chapter, I demonstrate the limitations of social scientific readings of Partition and describe how the idea of ‘event’ allows us to move the conversation towards the global/historical.

### [Partition as National Occurrence]

One of the most prominent analytical frameworks employed in studies of Partition is that of nation/alism. The two primary reasons for this are, of course, the centrality of ‘nation’ in contemporary imaginings and structures of knowledge and being, in general; and the teleological writing of Partition history, in particular. In this section I argue against these forms of writing because they institute the ex-colonial subject as merely a *minor* national subject. Moreover, such readings, while they do not dismiss or disregard violence, leave open the possibility of casting upon violence the indictment of ‘bad nationalism.’ I use here the argument presented by Partha Chatterjee in his *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World* in order to critique the historicization of Partition, in particular, and the formulations of nation/alism, in general, as presented by Ludden, Bhabha, and Anderson, among others. In *Wretched of the Earth*, Franz Fanon provides a compelling argument regarding the productivity of colonial violence, one that addresses Chatterjee’s concern regarding the impugning of violence as ‘bad nationalism.’ And while Fanon’s argument might be productive in considering Partition violence as nationalist violence, I argue here that this interpretation is applicable only to the moment of Independence but not to the event of Partition. Overall, this section attempts to denaturalize Partition as a national/ist project and to reaffirm the value of treating Partition as an event – a theoretical maneuver that enables the institution of Partition subjects that are defined not through historical particularities, but rather within a global/historical context.

First, as Eric Hobsbawm notes, our understanding of at least the last two centuries of human history is incomplete without some basic knowledge of the trope of

nation.<sup>28</sup> Regardless of contemporary critiques of the impossible unity and homogeneity of nations, it is undeniable that ‘nation’ has been one of most influential signifiers of collective social existence produced by modernity. And while, arguably, definitions of the modern nation might have emerged from the historical space of Europe, there is also little doubt that anti-colonial movements across the globe were motivated, at least in part, by the idea of achieving a sovereign nation-state. This is especially significant since, under colonialism, the primordality of colonized peoples was often underscored by their apparent lack of, and inability to constitute, nation-ness. For instance, in the case of colonial India, the British Indian civil servant Sir John Strachey dismissed the potential of the Indian National Congress to ever foment a national movement, suggesting that:

there is not, and never was an India, or even any country of India ... no Indian nation, no “people of India” of which we hear so much ... that men of the Punjab, Bengal, the North-West Provinces and Madras, should ever feel that they belong to one great Indian nation, is impossible.<sup>29</sup>

Ironically, this sentiment is precisely that which is reflected in the quote from Rushdie that opened this chapter. Within a similar critical context, Strachey’s comment too could be read simply as a critical assessment of the present-day Indian nation-state as a colonial legacy; or, more generally, as a critique of the nation as a unifying force, or a unified entity. Yet, if one were to pay heed to the colonial context within which the comment was uttered, it would be clear that the words are aimed at denying the colonized subject self-determination, self-consciousness and self-transparency – three

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<sup>28</sup> Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalisms since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 1.

<sup>29</sup> Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India 1885-1947* (Delhi: Macmillan, 1983), 2.

key traits of the modern human, regarded as pre-requisites for the possibility of producing ‘nationhood.’ The strategy employed then by colonial subjects in order to respond to and resist the “not wholly human”<sup>30</sup> status imputed upon them, was that of ‘mimicking’ – a strategy that was central to much of the anti-colonial movement in India.

In the context of colonial discourse, Homi Bhabha defines mimicry as “the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*” (emphasis in original).<sup>31</sup> In other words, mimicry is a double gesture whereby the colonial master desires to reform and recreate the colonized subject in his image, yet disavows the possibility of the colonized subject emerging *as* himself. Thus, as Bhabha notes, per the rules of mimicry, “to be Anglicized is *emphatically* not to be English.”<sup>32</sup> The subject-objects of such colonial mimicry he terms ‘mimic men’ whose goals of reform and discipline are structured primarily through regulation, surveillance and coercion. So, for instance, the Bengali scholar-activist Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay founded his nationalist ideals on the post-Enlightenment principles of reason and morality, arguing for an anti-colonial movement that focused on a reformation of ‘Indian’ culture and building an awareness of ‘Indian’ history. For him, the possibility for Indian anti-colonial unity lay in the practice of a Hinduism that was instilled with the virtues of Western rationality, a goal that could only be achieved through pedagogy of the masses by the Western educated elite.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London/New York: Routledge, 1994), 122.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

<sup>33</sup> Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

Thus, mimic men played a crucial dual role – by attempting to teach ‘Western values’ to the masses they were able to position themselves as instruments of colonial power; yet, they also became what the British had always feared – subversive powers that instrumentalized western ideals to build an anti-colonial movement based on the affirmation of a productive difference, superiority even, in the spiritual and cultural traditions between colonizer and colonized. Indeed, the colonized mimic man asserted the adage of the colonizer: “We may be Anglicized, but we are not English.” It is within this subversive double move that Indian anti-colonial nationalism can be sited for it was the idea of an ‘Indian nation’ that, through the simultaneous articulation of equality with the colonizer within the context of modernity, yet of difference in the context of essential plurality,<sup>34</sup> ultimately allowed for the articulation of the right to self-determination. Given that the successful culmination of the Indian Independence movement required the ‘birth of a nation,’ it is not particularly surprising that Partition – an occurrence that birthed two nations – be read through a national lens. Yet, the causality whereby Partition becomes a national moment runs far deeper, far further back into the writing of Indian anti-colonial history.

In his widely influential book *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson defines the nation as “an imagined political community” – *imagined*, because it is constructed through psychic communion, and as *community*, because of the perception of horizontal camaraderie.<sup>35</sup> According to David Ludden, within the Indian colonial context, or the anticolonial movement, this imagined national community was forged

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>35</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London/New York: Verso, 2006), 6-7.

through the process of inventing “public identities.”<sup>36</sup> A brief overview of the process would go thus: similar to Bhabha’s mimic men, Ludden’s *native* identity was that which was assumed by the colonized intellectual elite, who took on the role of representing the native population and of exemplifying national identity. However, these native elite, and the native populous in general, were divided among themselves by *social* identity (i.e. “essential” identity, most often based on regional, linguistic, occupational differences) and *official* identity (generally “communal” or religious identity, as enumerated within the imperial census). Further, notes Ludden, since official categories were central to the “divide-and-rule” mantra of the British colonizers, and were also cited as the basis for the un-unifiability of the Indian colony, they generally tended to have little significance within the everyday – i.e. they had very little overlap with the performance of social identities. However, over time, the convergence of these two identities created *public* identities.<sup>37</sup> As Ludden writes:

Native society included countless *social* identities that were not represented officially, but *social* identity in general was increasingly influenced by official categories, as they became *public* identities in political mobilization and electoral activity. A cultural shift thus occurred toward the formation of *social* identities shaped by the combined force of *official* categories used in government, legal, administrative, and electoral operations, and of *public* categories used in mobilizing support for political causes and in discussing issues in civil society. (emphasis in original)<sup>38</sup>

Thus, by the beginning of the twentieth century in India, public identities were now performed as social identities; but, more importantly they also became inscribed as

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<sup>36</sup> David Ludden, *India and South Asia: A Short History* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2002), 195-196.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 181, 194-197.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 196.

native, *national* identities, specifically performed in opposition to the alien presence of the British.

Now, as scholars such as Partha Chatterjee have noted, the primary tool for creating an anti-colonial movement was forging a sense of ‘national unity.’ But the tools deployed to foment this unity ultimately complicated the possibility for its achievement. First, as Ludden and Chatterjee both point out, the process of constructing unity had begun long before the genesis of the national movement itself – commonly sited in the inauguration of the Indian National Congress in 1885 – through the process of *writing* the Indian nation. Along the lines of Anderson’s argument, Ludden and Chatterjee locate the seeds of the anti-colonialist writing of the nation within the pages of the vernacular print media, folk arts, drama, and within the institutions of family, education and culture. Or, to use Chatterjee’s terminology, the birth pangs of nationalism lay in the “inner” domain of native life – “the domain bearing the “essential” marks of cultural identity.”<sup>39</sup> Integral to this process was the concerted effort by native elite to produce native history. This push to write a native past, notes Chatterjee, “implied in effect an exhortation to launch the struggle for power, because in this mode of recalling the past, the power to represent oneself is nothing other than political power itself.”<sup>40</sup>

The problem with this process, however, as noted by Chatterjee, is that early anti-colonial nationalist writings, in re-claiming Indian history as essentially Hindu

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<sup>39</sup> Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought*, 6.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

interrupted by moments of colonial rule, included the Muslim or Moghul Empire under the colonialist umbrella:

... in the 1880s, a number of Bengali writers were announcing that the struggle for an independent historiography and the struggle for independent nationhood were both to be waged against colonialism. The difficulty is that by colonial rule, they meant both British rule and Muslim rule. In both cases, the object of national freedom was the end of colonialism; in both cases, the means was a struggle for power. There was no inconsistency in their agenda.<sup>41</sup>

Thus, as some segments of the Indian intelligentsia began to proclaim “India for the Indians,” they seemed to direct it not only at the British but at Muslims as well.

Consequently, runs the argument, a segment of the Muslim intelligentsia began to heed the call, evidenced most prominently by the establishment of the All-India Muslim League in 1906.<sup>42</sup> The establishment of the Muslim League becomes all the more significant when one notes that a number of Muslim Leaguers – including Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the ‘architect’ of Pakistan – had broken away from the Indian National Congress, thereby effectively rescinding the Congress’ status as representative of all Indians, and more particularly, of Indian Muslims.

To return to Ludden’s terminology, then, while in some cases social or public identities transcended official identities, in others they tended to converge.

Consequently, as Gyan Pandey points out, the Indian anti-colonial movement consisted of at least three strands – Indian nationalists, who were always assumed to be Hindu, nationalist Muslims, who were aligned with nationalist parties like the Congress in favor of a unified India, and Muslim nationalists, who were aligned with the Muslim

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<sup>41</sup> Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 109.

<sup>42</sup> Ludden, *India and South Asia*, 199.

League in favor of Muslim autonomy or, at a later stage, a sovereign Muslim state.<sup>43</sup>

Thus, if one were tracing a teleological history of Partition, it would be acceptable to credit its occurrence to the competing ideologies and demands represented by the three strains of nationalist thought identified above.

But this is also precisely why referring to Partition as a national/ist occurrence is deeply problematic. For tracing such a historical teleology leaves the violence that constituted the occurrence open to reductive sociological and anthropological interpretations. This argument is one that is made quite strongly by Chatterjee in his discussion on “Nationalism as a Problem...” The overarching cautionary note he sounds in this opening chapter of *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World* pertains to the framing of non-Western nationalisms not only as borrowed or transplanted, but more importantly as deviant versions of the original/authentic Western form. (Western) nationalism, he explains – a concept that “shares the same material and intellectual premises with the European Enlightenment”<sup>44</sup> – has positioned itself as “the attempt to actualize in political terms the universal urge for liberty and progress.”<sup>45</sup> And while liberal and conservative commentators alike have graciously ceded that non-Western nationalisms, too, are a quest for progress, these nationalisms are often attributed to ‘recently civilized peoples,’ whose cultures need much transformation in order to be suited to the introduction and application of nationalist thought. However, continues Chatterjee, the convergence of anti-colonialist and nationalist thought is often credited with a hurried imposition of nationalism among peoples where conditions are yet

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<sup>43</sup> Pandey, *Remembering Partition*, 154.

<sup>44</sup> Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought*, 3.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

“‘unpropitious to freedom’.”<sup>46</sup> The most important intervention that Chatterjee makes here, when following this line of thought, is that non-Western nationalisms – ‘special’ or ‘deviant’ as they are – become “consigned to the domain of the historically contingent, to be explained by a suitable sociological theory, and therefore not requiring a moral defense.”<sup>47</sup> Indeed, I would argue that in the case of ‘deviant’ violent nationalisms that are rendered irredeemable, without the possibility for “a moral defense,” the only means whereby they become legible, or even meaningful, is through an examination of the sociological conditions that enabled nationalism to emerge in the first place.

The problems with this line of investigation are numerous. First, as Chatterjee and others like Dipesh Chakrabarty<sup>48</sup> argue, this mode of analysis simply sites the non-West in the “waiting room of history,” firmly in line with the global *telos* marked out by the West. Here we have the ubiquitous problem of stripping the non-Western subject of agency and of casting them as *minor* national subjects. But, even beyond this primordializing gesture, is the danger that non-Western, or in a contemporary context non-classical, nationalist movements that are most often marked by devastating violence, become read as “belligerent, aggressive, chauvinistic nationalism [that] is a menace and thus irrational from the point of view of humanity as a whole.”<sup>49</sup> This form of reading has two consequences – first, violence becomes an historical aberration, or gets ahistoricized, so that it becomes analytically worthless. Of course, as I have

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>48</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).

<sup>49</sup> Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought*, 19.

already suggested this project casts aside such dismissive gestures that do not address violence head-on. But even if violence were to be considered, I would posit that it becomes anthropologically narrated as ‘inevitable’ and more so as ‘evil.’ For it gets viewed as a return of the subject to ‘affectability’ – i.e. to a state wherein they are no longer thinking subjects, but rather subjects returned to and impacted solely by the State of Nature, beyond the realm of law and morality.

Fanon answers this anthropologically tailored charge about anti-colonial nationalism very fluently in his *The Wretched of the Earth* through an elaboration on “psycho-affective violence.” In his *Foreword* to the book, Bhabha describes a “psycho-affective relation or response [as that which] has the semblance of universality and timelessness because it *involves the emotions, the imagination or psychic life*, but it is only ever mobilized into social meaning and historical effect through an embodied and embedded action an engagement with (or resistance to) a given reality, or *a performance of agency in the present tense*” (emphasis added).<sup>50</sup> Fanon demonstrates the two dimensions of this description (see italicized sections) as follows: First, he notes that the dehumanizing violence of colonialism keeps the colonial subject in a state of constant tension – “In the colonial world, the colonized’s affectivity is kept on edge like a running sore flinching from a caustic agent. And the psyche retracts, is obliterated, and finds an outlet through muscular spasms...”<sup>51</sup> In the decolonization movement, this tension gets harnessed towards creating complete disorder, for the colonized subject bears no illusions of the possibility for a harmonious existence with the colonizer. They

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<sup>50</sup> Homi Bhabha, “Foreword” in Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004), xix.

<sup>51</sup> Fanon, *Wretched*, 19.

realize that decolonization is achievable if and only if the colonizer and their world is completely obliterated – “For the colonized, life can only materialize from the rotting cadaver of the colonist.”<sup>52</sup>

Thus, per Fanon, violence is indispensable and crucially functional to the decolonial project:

...for the colonized this violence is invested with positive, formative features because it constitutes their only work. This violent praxis is totalizing since each individual represents a violent link in the great chain, in the almighty body of violence rearing up in reaction to the primary violence of the colonizer. Factions recognize each other and the *future nation is already indivisible*. The armed struggle mobilizes the people, i.e., it pitches them in a single direction, from which there is not turning back.

...[Further,] at the individual level, violence is a cleansing force. It rids the colonized of their inferiority complex, of their passive and despairing attitude. It emboldens them, and restores their self-confidence. Even if the armed struggle has been symbolic, and even if they have been demobilized by rapid decolonization, the people have time to realize that liberation was the achievement of each and everyone and special merit should go to the leader... *Enlightened by violence, the people's conscience rebels against any pacification...* The praxis which pitched them into a desperate man-to-man struggle has given the masses a ravenous taste for the tangible. *Any attempt at mystification in the long term becomes virtually impossible.* (emphasis added)<sup>53</sup>

My purpose in quoting Fanon at length here is to highlight his framing of national violence in the context of two specific moments – the decolonial and the nation-building. For him, a nation built through violence is “indivisible,” focused first, purely on destroying the colonizer and later on keeping the native elite and the government in check. Indeed, for Fanon, violence against the colonizer serves the same unifying purpose that leaders of the Indian national movement located in creating, say, a ‘common historical past’ for the ‘nation.’ The specific form of violence that he is

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 50-52.

referring to here is not national-communal/ethnic, but rather national anticolonial. In the Indian context, then, I would argue that this sort of Fanon-esque moment is represented by Independence but not by Partition. Indeed, I would posit that while it might be appropriate to view the moment of Independence as the successful culmination of a national movement, this interpretation is not easily transferable to Partition – it is necessary, then, that these two moments be treated as distinct and definitely not interchangeable.

Returning then to the question of Partition and violence, one may look to Fanon for an explanation of that as well. Referring to what he calls the “collective immersion in a fratricidal bloodbath,”<sup>54</sup> he writes:

Whereas the colonist or police officer can beat the colonized subject day in and day out, insult him and shove him to his knees, it is not uncommon to see the colonized subject draw his knife at the slightest hostile or aggressive look from another colonized subject. For the colonized subject’s last resort is to *defend his personality against his fellow countryman*. Internecine feuds merely perpetuate age-old grudges entrenched in the memory. By throwing himself muscle and soul into his blood feuds, the *colonized subject endeavors to convince himself that colonialism has never existed*, that everything is as it used to be and history marches on. (emphasis added)<sup>55</sup>

What is of note here, again, is that Fanon locates what might be viewed as ethnic/communal violence squarely within the realm of the colonial. He refuses any anthropological interpretations of violence among colonized peoples as inherent and hence inevitable. More importantly, he does not link this violence to any form of nationalism either; he makes no claims about fratricidal violence birthing nations. In short, Fanon’s conception of violence is decidedly anti-power, anti-oppression. For

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

Partition to be sited within this context, one would have to revert back to the Hindu-centric nationalist conception of the Muslim as a foreign invader and colonizer. While such ideas of ‘Muslim colonialism’ could be connected to British colonialism, especially given the notorious divide-and-rule strategy of the British, I do not wish to engage with this particular aspect of the issue in this thesis and hence will lay it aside.

Let me therefore return to the limitations of considering Partition violence within the context of nationalism, a problem that I believe becomes exacerbated when contended with in the context of the postcolonial. Here, the ‘naturalness’ of nation as attributed to the nations of Europe gets lost, instead, to ideas of imposed, yet impossible, homogeneity. Moreover, the centrality of the political in defining nation is replaced by notions of the cultural, so that the newer, postcolonial nations are caught between what Bhabha terms the ‘pedagogical’ and ‘performative’ moments – i.e. the postcolonial nation is “articulated in the tension between signifying the people as an *a priori* historical presence, a pedagogical object; and the people constructed in the performance of narrative, its enunciatory ‘present’ marked in the repetition and pulsation of the nation sign.”<sup>56</sup> The productivity of the performative moment, as he suggests, is that it allows the nation to be inscribed as an idea, “an apparatus of symbolic power,” whose meaning and significance is constantly debated by its subjects.<sup>57</sup> Moreover, due to the tension between the pedagogical and performative:

the nation turns from being the symbol of modernity into becoming the *symptom of an ethnography of the ‘contemporary’* within modern culture. ...

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<sup>56</sup> Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 211.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

[Further] in place of the polarity of a prefigurative self-generating nation ‘in-itself’ and extrinsic other nations, the performative introduces a temporality of the ‘inbetween.’... The problem is not simply the ‘selfhood’ of the nation as opposed to the otherness of other nations. We are confronted with the nation split within itself, articulating the heterogeneity of its population. (emphasis added)<sup>58</sup>

While this critical re-conception of the nation may be valuable, I would argue that it cannot sufficiently account for the occurrence of violence. For when postcolonial violence is introduced into the mix it comes to signify a failure of the pedagogical moment – i.e. the inability of postcolonial peoples to be taught how to be a nation. And further, when this violence is read within the performative moment – i.e. the moment that is symptomatic of “an ethnography of the ‘contemporary’ ” – it becomes easily reducible to ethnic or communal strife. Thus, postcolonial subjects are deemed incapable of existing within progressive heterogeneity and thereby suitable only for primitive social existences. I would therefore suggest that within the framework of (cultural) postcoloniality, the national project is always already a failure.

Thus, if Partition is viewed primarily as a national-communal occurrence then all subsequent incidents of postcolonial violence can be treated as inevitable outcomes of an incomplete and failed nationalism. Moreover, the only possibility, then, for post-Partition existence, is violence. If, instead, Partition were to be treated as event, then this simple causality – i.e. Partition as the harbinger of all future violence – can be challenged. For, as Badiou notes, not only is the event a “pure beginning”<sup>59</sup> but also, it is akin to a “pure gift.”<sup>60</sup> In other words, an event, due to its universal address, consists of no particularities, abides by no law, and is in fact “without cause.” Thus, the power,

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 211-212.

<sup>59</sup> Badiou, *Saint Paul*, 49.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 77.

or meaning, of an event resides not in its substance but rather in its own excess, in its charisma:

There is in Paul a fundamental link between universalism and charisma, between the One's power of address, and the absolute gratuitousness of militantism. ...

There is for Paul an essential link between the "for all" of the universal and the "without cause." There is an address for all only according to what is without cause. Only what is absolutely gratuitous can be addressed to all. Only charisma and grace measure up to a universal problem.<sup>61</sup>

I do not believe that the description of an event, especially once such as Partition, as a "pure gift," or the attribution of charisma to such an event is intended to be a dismissive or trivializing gesture. Instead, I believe that it seeks to emphasize the uncanny power of the event to generate a universal fidelity towards itself *without* suggesting a causality or inscribing a teleology. It thus accords the event power for merely *being*. And, as suggested earlier, it is precisely this form of power that produces evental subjects – i.e. subjects whose identities are not pre-determined or over-determined by discursive descriptions of an occurrence, but rather those that share a singular and more intimate relationship with the event *itself*.

While this section argues that the idea of event allows a break from historical teleology and inscribes a radical subjectivity that is bound intimately to the event itself, it does not address the issue of gender subjugation, an issue that is crucial to this thesis. I address this issue, however, in the next section where I engage with arguments that posit Partition as a nationalising event – i.e. an event that produced new national subjectivities in its wake.

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 77.

### [Partition as Nationalising Occurrence]

In his *Remembering Partition*, Gyan Pandey writes Partition as that which enabled a process of “nationalising the nation.”<sup>62</sup> Describing the aim of his project, he writes:

I seek to recover the moment of Partition and Independence in India as a moment of nationalization, and a moment of contest regarding the different conditions of nationalization. On what terms would Muslims, Dalits (‘Untouchables’) and women be granted the rights of citizenship? Could they become citizens at all?

I wish to try and recover the history of Partition, therefore, as a renegotiation and a re-ordering, as a resolution of old oppositions and the construction of new ones.<sup>63</sup>

With relation to gender, scholars such as Veena Das, Ritu Menon and Kamala Bhasin argue that this process of nationalization appropriated women as political objects, at best, or excluded them, at worst. In this section I critique the inclusionary gestures of such arguments by suggesting that they do not take seriously the ontoepistemological context within which the exclusions are produced and hence rehearse the always already existent gender subjection. I argue instead for the appropriation of a global/historical framework that pays heed to the social conditions under which the figure of the woman is allowed to emerge and thus lays bare the impossibility of the woman with respect to both, the discursive moment of Partition as well as Partition as universal signifier of nation/alism.

The underlying argument for the construction of Partition as, both, a national and a nationalising occurrence, as has already been suggested, is that it gave birth to

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<sup>62</sup> Pandey, *Remembering Partition*, 17.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

two nation(-states). Thus, one of the most prominent subjectivities to emerge following the occurrence was that of the citizen subject. So, for instance, in the case of India, the nation-state was comprised of the “natural nation” – Hindus and all other non-Muslims – and the “non-natural,” those Muslims, and only those, that pledged to “defend it [India] against anybody to the last drop of their blood.”<sup>64</sup> The issue of citizenship, however, was far more complex – beyond being communally articulated, it was primarily gendered. And, as scholars such as Veena Das, Urvashi Butalia, Ritu Menon and Kamala Bhasin, among others, have argued, central to the construction of citizenship was the notion of national purity, an idea that had to be fulfilled through the securing of the heteropatriarchal family as the fundamental unit of nationhood, and consequently focused all attention on the regulation of women’s sexuality.<sup>65</sup>

In the context of Partition, this regulation was primarily enacted through the figure of the abducted woman. According to some unofficial records, close to 75,000 women were raped and abducted during the ‘population exchange.’ Concerned by the scale of these abductions, the Indian and Pakistan governments signed an agreement, called the Inter-Dominion Treaty of December 6<sup>th</sup> 1947, to recover and return any abducted women and children found on the wrong side of the border.<sup>66</sup> This operation, later known as the Central Recovery Operation, was ostensibly of a humanitarian nature, aimed at undoing the wrongs, or the violence, inflicted upon innocent women. However, as Butalia, and Bhasin and Menon point out, these operations had a greater

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 160, 162.

<sup>65</sup> Das, *Life and Words*.

<sup>66</sup> Butalia, *Other Side of*, 114.

political significance. First, the newly formed Indian state maximized this opportunity to secure its position as the more ‘civilized,’ ‘secular’ state vis-à-vis Pakistan:

The debate in the Constituent Assembly also provided Indian political leaders with the opportunity to use the question of the recovery of abducted women to pronounce on something quite different: the character of Pakistan. At the bottom of this lay the profound sense of betrayal that the creation of Pakistan had meant for so many Indian political leaders who saw themselves, and India, as secular, and tolerant. Speaker after speaker in the Assembly emphasized what they saw as Pakistan’s recalcitrance in keeping to the terms of their joint agreement. Such behavior, they said, was not what one would expect from a civilized government. It was, rather, a reflection of two things: the typical uncivilized behavior of Pakistan (made up, as it was, of Muslim men who had fought for a communal State and who were therefore communal by nature) and the much more humane – and civilized – approach of the Indian State.<sup>67</sup>

And even while the distinction was being drawn between India and Pakistan, it translated seamlessly into the consolidation of communal boundaries within India, with the Muslim (male) subject being cast as the perennial ‘intimate enemy,’ for whom the pledge of unflinching allegiance to the Indian nation-state became the only possible “the password to citizenship.”<sup>68</sup>

Further, Bhasin and Menon note that central to the articulation of ‘difference’ between India and Pakistan was the siting of the Pakistani nation as the “abductor-country” in opposition to India’s “parent-protector” role, “safe-guarding not only her women, but by extension, the inviolate family, the sanctity of community and ultimately, the integrity of the whole nation.”<sup>69</sup> Indeed, the unshakable duty of the Indian state in executing the recovery, especially in the face of supposed indifference or

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 162.

<sup>69</sup> Ritu Menon and Kamala Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India’s Partition* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 2000), 107.

non-compliance on the part of Pakistan, was articulated by some in distinctly gendered terms that evoked religious ideas of ‘purity’ and ‘honor.’ For instance, Butalia quotes one member of the Constituent Assembly as stating that:

If there is any sore point or distressful fact to which we cannot be reconciled under any circumstances it is the question of the abduction and non-restoration of Hindu women. We all know our history of what happened in the time of Shri Ram when Sita was abducted. Here, when 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.<sup>70</sup>

This sort of language, notes Veena Das, was aimed not only at highlighting the ideals of ‘purity’ vis-à-vis community and nation, but more so “to attribute all kinds of “passions” such as panic, incredulity or barbarity to the populace,” so as to ascribe a sense of urgency and moral righteousness to the recovery operations, and also to establish the state as the ultimate “guarantor of order.”<sup>71</sup> Indeed, this moment of apparent urgency and disorder was adeptly appropriated by the state in its efforts to “nationalize the nation,” an act that was achieved through the space of ‘the nuclear family.’ For the Indian state, the family became the ultimate site for the negotiation of gendered conceptions of ‘public’ and ‘private’ that were central to the production of the nation, and consequently, the figure of the abducted woman was deemed central to the construction of family itself.

First, by constructing the abducted woman as at the mercy of ‘lustful (Muslim) men,’ the state achieved the dual task of casting women as victims to be saved by ‘good (Hindu) men,’ and also encouraging Hindu men to be responsible citizens by

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<sup>70</sup> Quoted in Butalia, *Other Side of*, 141.

<sup>71</sup> Das, *Life and Words*, 19.

controlling their own lustful desires and creating family with the ‘right woman.’ The state thus attempted to create a social *and* sexual contract with men positioned as the heads of households and charged with protecting their women against violence from ‘the other.’ Moreover, this combined social and sexual contract also ensured the “purity of the nation,” for as Das notes:

The involvement of the state in the process of recovery of women shows that if men were to become ineffective in the control they exercise as heads of family, thus producing children from “wrong” sexual unions, then the state itself would become deprived of life. The figure of the abducted woman acquires salience because it posits the origin of the state not in the mythic state of nature, but in the “correct” relations between communities.<sup>72</sup>

And while the male “head of household” figure gains public valence through his role as agent of the state in protecting and guaranteeing purity, the role of the woman is ‘public,’ or political, only insofar as she teaches the man “to renounce his attachment to her in order to give life to the political community.”<sup>73</sup>

While I certainly agree with these processes of gendered “nationalisation” as described by Das and others above, this form of argumentation is limited in providing an explanation of the gendered nature of the discursive moment of Partition. What this argument does do, though, is set-up the global/historical framework within which the figure of the woman must be considered. As I will argue in this thesis, this framework is most productive when applied to Partition discourse since only then is the excludability of the woman from Partition – both, as a discursive moment and as a universal signifier – demonstrable.

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 35.

This thesis is anchored to the assumption that the discursive moment of Partition is crucial to the process of signification that casts Partition as universal. I have also argued thus far that, with regards to understanding the gendering of Partition, the figure of the woman must be posited as a global/historical subject. In the following two sections, I explain how the strategies of discourse analysis and psychoanalysis enable a reading of the gendered nature of Partition within this framework of the global/historical.

### **[Discourse Analysis]**

In the year 2000, Urvashi Butalia had the opportunity to travel with Bir Bahadur Singh, a Partition survivor, back to his native village, now across the border in Pakistan. During Partition, his sister, Maan Kaur, was ‘martyred’ by her father, a scene witnessed by Bir Bahadur and narrated in his personal testimony, which will be discussed later. However, in describing the impetus of this journey back to Pakistan, Butalia writes:

... Bir Bahadur was setting off to Pakistan on a journey of penance and reparation. When I asked him why he wanted to go to Pakistan and to visit Saintha, he said that he wanted to go because, “after all, once you have fought what is there left but to make up, what is there left but friendship.” But while he had, for all this time, kept alive the wish to apologize to his Muslim neighbors for his father’s lack of trust in them,<sup>74</sup> he made no mention at all of the tragic fate of his sister and other women who had been similarly killed. Revisiting these histories, and setting their memories at rest, was not such a priority for him.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Urvashi Butalia, “A Necessary Journey: A Story of Friendship and Reconciliation,” *Alternatives* 27 (2002), 148.

Earlier in the article, Bir Bahadur Singh recalls how, on hearing of the imminent attack on the village, a group of Muslim friends within the village itself offered to protect Bir Bahadur’s family but his father refused, preferring instead to protect his family through the ‘sacrificial’ killings.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

Butalia's suggestion that dealing with his sister's death "was not such a priority" for Bir Bahadur is, in my opinion, inaccurate. Instead, I suggest that Bir Bahadur's refusal to speak of Maan Kaur's death, and his focus on reconciliation with past neighbors, signifies not only his own contentious relationship with his history of violence, but also highlights the inadequacies of the rules of discourse in capturing this history. For Bir Bahadur, violence occurred on two fronts: one, in terms of the mistreatment and mistrust harbored against friends; the other, with regards to the killing of his sister and other women and children in his family. As I will argue in chapter 3 of this thesis, only one of these fronts offered any hope of redemption – given the ontoepistemological context within which friendship emerges, I will demonstrate the impossibility of redemption with regard to his sister, or women in general and argue that only through a reconciliation with friends could Bir Bahadur restore some form of continuity with himself, seek his way back into humanity.

In order to make these arguments, though, I appropriate the tools of discourse analysis and psychoanalysis to engage with Partition discourse. In this section, I demonstrate how Foucault's concept of archaeology enables the reading of discourse as an active production couched firmly within the epistemological context in which it is produced. Foucault's analysis of the production of discourse is a critique of the notion of transparency, and in fact reads the subject of discourse as a global/historical subject. Thus, with respect to Partition, his version of discourse analysis allows one to trace the process of signification, in which certain objects of discourse become deployed to narrate a socially comprehensible story of Partition. In short, as I will demonstrate in Chapter 2, Foucault's idea of discourse analysis, or archaeology in particular, stresses

the inevitability of the gendering of Partition – whether it be the discursive moment or the signifying event.

In *Archaeology of Knowledge*, Michel Foucault suggests that the purpose of discourse analysis is to ask: “how is it that one particular statement appeared rather than another?” a question answered through the ‘description of the events of discourse.’<sup>76</sup> Thus, the aim of discourse analysis is to define objects “by relating them to the body of rules that enable them to form as objects of a discourse and thus constitute the conditions of their historical appearance.”<sup>77</sup> What Foucault is attempting to underscore here is that discourse is constituted through discursive formations that abide by “body of anonymous, historical rules, always determined in time and space that have defined a given period.”<sup>78</sup> It is precisely these rules that are of vital importance to testimonial analysis because they “define not the dumb existence of a reality, nor the canonical use of a vocabulary, but the ordering of objects (of discourse).”<sup>79</sup> These rules are guided by what Foucault terms ‘the authorities of delimitation.’<sup>80</sup> Of course, these ‘authorities of delimitation’ do not fix discourse, but rather that they guide what can be said. For as Foucault argues:

...one cannot speak of anything at any time; it is not easy to say something new; it is not enough for us to open our eyes, to pay attention, or to be aware, for new objects suddenly to light up and emerge out of the ground. (Yet) it (the object) does not pre-exist itself, held back by

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<sup>76</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 27.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

some obstacle to the first edges of light. It exists under the positive conditions of a complex group of relations.<sup>81</sup>

With respect to intimate violence during Partition, the two prominent ‘objects’ of discourse that one might focus on are ‘home’ and ‘violence.’ The ‘authorities of delimitation,’ or what might more aptly be called the social authorities, that delimit these two objects rarely overlap – or, in other words, the discursive relations that enable each of the objects to appear, to be named and described are, within the field of the social, incompatible. And yet, within Partition discourse, the enactment of intimate violence brings together ‘home’ and ‘violence’ into an uncomfortably close association. As will be observed, within Partition discourse, discourse on intimate violence configures ‘home’ and ‘violence’ in one of two ways: either they occupy ‘points of incompatibility,’ wherein “two objects... may appear, in the same discursive formation [here, Partition], without being able to enter – under the pain of manifest contradiction or inconsequence – the same series of statements,” or they occupy ‘points of equivalence’ whereby “the two incompatible elements are formed in the same way and on the basis of the same rules; the conditions of their appearance are identical; they are situated at the same level; and instead of constituting a mere defect of coherence, they form an alternative.”<sup>82</sup>

I find the description of these two configurations useful because, in so far as testimony’s intent is to communicate the subject (i.e. the bearer of testimony), the relations that produce them (i.e. the configurations), in revealing the ordering of the objects, also reveal the (dis)ordering of the subject:

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 65.

In the proposed analysis (of the formation of enunciative modalities), instead of referring back to *the* synthesis or *the* unifying function of a subject, the various enunciative modalities manifest this dispersion. To the various statuses, the various sites, the various positions that he can occupy or be given when making a discourse. ... Thus perceived, discourse is not the majestically unfolding manifestation of a thinking, knowing, speaking subject, but, on the contrary, a totality, in which the dispersion of the subject and his discontinuity with himself may be determined. It is the space of exteriority in which a network of sites is deployed. ... (Further), it is neither by recourse to a transcendental subject nor by recourse to a psychological subjectivity that the regulation of its enunciations should be defined.<sup>83</sup>

Thus, the process of subjectivization that discourse analysis discloses is one rooted not in the event (Partition) per se, but rather in the immediacy of testimony. In other words, discourse analysis allows us to see the subject as a self-producing text that attempts to comprehend the event, in a more conscious process produced through interior determination. Thus, Foucault's discourse analysis negates the idea of a transparent subject and, in fact, enables the institution of Silva's global/historical framework. It is for this reason that I find his arguments particularly productive when dealing with Partition testimony in this thesis.

There are two mutually constituted concepts that Foucault introduces that I think are procedurally helpful here. The first is the archive. Foucault's description of the function of the archive highlights three significant criteria: 1) the archive is the set of rules or laws that govern the emergence of the statement-event; 2) each subject has a unique archive from within which they speak; and 3) the limit of the archive, beyond which exists that which cannot be said, represents one's own discontinuity with language.<sup>84</sup> The term used to describe archival analysis is 'archaeology.' The aim of

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 129-131.

archaeology, Foucault writes, is to “show in what way the set of rules that they put into operation is irreducible to any other.”<sup>85</sup> The importance of ‘irreducibility’ is that only then can one recognize the discontinuities and contradictions prevalent in discourse.

The history of ideas, writes Foucault:

usually credits the discourse that it analyses with coherence. ... it regards it as its duty to find, at a deeper level a principle of cohesion that organizes the discourse and restores to it hidden unity.

...

But one can adopt the contrary course, and, by following the thread of analogies and symbols, rediscover a thematic that is more imaginary than discursive... what one then discovers is a plastic continuity, *the movement of meaning that is embodied in various representations, images and metaphors.* (emphasis added)<sup>86</sup>

This idea of the “movement of meaning” has important implications for testimonies that refer to intimate violence during Partition. For, ‘home’ and ‘violence,’ two components of the social that ideally exist in tension or in conflict with each other, become unified as ‘intimate violence’ only through the intervention of ‘religion’ and ‘nation,’ so that intimate violence can be articulated, without contradiction, as ‘martyrdom’ or ‘sacrifice.’ The “movement of meaning” observed here does not signify malicious manipulation nor is it an unconscious product of trauma. Instead, it can be read as a ‘contradiction’ in discourse:

Contradiction is the illusion of a unity that hides itself or is hidden; it has its place only in the gap between consciousness and unconsciouness, thought and the text, the ideality and the contingent body of expression.

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Such contradiction, far from being an appearance or an accident of discourse, far from being that from which it must be freed if its truth is at last to be revealed, constitutes the very law of its existence: it is on the basis of such a contradiction that discourse emerges, and it is in order to both translate it and overcome it that discourse begins to speak;

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 139

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 149-150.

it is in order to escape that contradiction, whereas contradiction is ceaselessly reborn through discourse, that discourse endlessly pursues itself and endlessly begins again.<sup>87</sup>

Thus, following Foucault's suggestion, in undertaking an archaeological analysis of Partition testimony, I attempt to describe the discursive contradictions that constitute the current historiography of the event.

Now, while discourse analysis is useful primarily with the subject of a statement, this strategy is not sufficient when dealing with testimony. For, as will be presented below, every subject is fundamentally split – a rupture that, in the case of discourse, manifests itself as a split between statement and enunciation. The concept of enunciation is significant with respect to Partition discourse because it refers to that part of the subject, or that truth, that cannot be captured within discourse itself. Thus, as I will argue in Chapter 3, considering speech, or discourse, at the level of enunciation opens up new political possibilities for the emergence of the figure of the woman as ineluctable from Partition. In the following section, I explain how the use of psychoanalysis, which focuses more on the nature of the subject of discourse, rather than the rules of discourse, is also a crucial component in engaging the discursive moment of Partition.

### **[Psychoanalysis]**

The underlying intervention that Foucault seeks to make in the field of discourse analysis is to disrupt any notion of continuity of discourse: “We must renounce all those themes whose function is to ensure the infinite continuity of discourse and its secret

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 150.

presence to itself in the interplay of a constantly recurring absence.”<sup>88</sup> One of the strategies he suggests for avoiding this fallacy is to *reject* the conception that:

manifest discourse is secretly based on an ‘already-said’; and that this ‘already-said’ is not merely a phrase that has already been spoken, or a text that has already been written but a ‘never said’, an incorporeal discourse, a voice as silent as a breath, a writing that is merely the hollow of its own mark. It (should not) be supposed therefore that everything that is formulated in discourse was already articulated in the semi-silence that precedes it, which continues to run obstinately beneath it, but which it covers and silences.<sup>89</sup>

This claim, however, runs directly counter to my argument in the previous section that a subject is constituted primarily through speech. Indeed, according to Lacanian social thought, the subject, or the social ‘I,’ emerges only through the symbolic network of language. And language exists prior to the subject; the subject is born when it enters into the symbolic, into language. As per Lacan, “(t)he awakening of consciousness in the child coincides with the linguistic apprenticeship which gradually introduces him into society;”<sup>90</sup> that is, it is within the structure of language that the individual is able to recognize itself as ‘of society’ or ‘of the world.’ In order to *enter* society, however, the subject must articulate itself, a goal that is achieved through speech, or discourse. To use Foucault’s terminology, then, language is the ‘already-said’ against which discourse is always already produced.

More importantly, however, language is also that which alienates the subject from its *self*. This is the underlying principle of the Lacanian split subject or *Spaltung*, defined as “the division of being revealed in psychoanalysis between the self, the

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Anika Lemaire, *Jacques Lacan*, trans. David Macey (London/Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), 53.

innermost part of the psyche, and the subject of conscious discourse, behavior and culture.”<sup>91</sup> Now language, as has already been noted, is the medium through which “the order of the world (is) instituted and (while it) allows acts of reflection and of consciousness upon the world and upon sense impressions to be carried out,”<sup>92</sup> it is always already incapable of capturing the *self* as it sees itself. This is because language is constituted through a chain of signifying elements, each of which merely represents, or stands-in for, the Real: “one of the specific characteristics of language is that it *evokes* a thing, a reality, by means of a *substitute* which this thing is not, evoking, in other words, *its presence in its absence*” [emphasis added].<sup>93</sup> Language thus produces a mediated relation between the self and the subject, the self and its other, the self and the social, etc. In doing so, language also produces the unconscious and the repressed, on the one hand, and the ego, on the other.

Psychoanalysis suggests that the unconscious is that dimension of the being which registers the Real, the ‘true’ lived experience, and is waiting to be heard, but can never be spoken because its content is unacceptable to the social order and, thus, to the subject; more dangerously, the unconsciousness threatens to reveal the discontinuity of the subject with itself and with society. The function of the ego, then, is to restrain to keep the unconscious and the repressed as such; as the nucleus of the subject, or the ‘I,’ the ego masks the unconscious and the repressed, creating the illusion of the subject as unbroken and alienating the *self* within it. And it is discourse that performs the role of the mask:

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>93</sup> A. de Waelhens quoted in Ibid.

What remains of the most truthful and the most important part of the personality is the underside of the mask, the repressed, Nature, in short, life, bowed before a superior force. Whereas, in the mask, in discourse, ego and social behavior, the subject proliferates in the multiple forms he gives himself or has imposed upon him.

These forms are nothing but phantoms, reflections of the true being which reveal to analysis a temporal and logical organization that is completely distinct from the 'self.'<sup>94</sup>

Consequently, the more the subject immerses itself in discourse, the further away it moves "from the truth of his essence."<sup>95</sup> We can thus surmise that discourse, as that which keeps silent the unconscious and repressed, is indeed produced against the 'never said' of the unconscious.

It is significant to note that this Lacanian definition of the always already split-subject of speech also, like Foucault and Silva, dismisses the idea of a transparent subject. Indeed, all these theorists treat the subject as a performative being that can emerge only within an always already existent ontoepistemological context. Yet, what Lacanian theory adds to the value of discourse analysis is a focus on the subject of enunciation – not as an effort to seek the truth, or the essence of the subject, but rather to understand the possibilities of that which will not, or cannot, be spoken. I demonstrate this use of psychoanalysis in Chapter 3.

In short, when engaging in testimonial analysis, I choose to appropriate both Foucault and Lacan because they each address the two sides of the Symbolic – while Foucault's archaeology describes how the subject emerges through its negotiation of the social (i.e. how the ego maintains the illusion of an unfragmented 'I'), Lacanian

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 7.

psychoanalysis reveals precisely this broken-ness (i.e. it attempts to reveal what the ego conceals).

### **[Chapter Overview]**

In this chapter, I have laid out a critique of social scientific readings of Partition – in terms of both, its discursive and signifying moments. In order to remove Partition from its teleological reading, I have argued for a use of Silva’s global/historical framework in analyzing Partition discourse. Moreover, in order to prevent Partition discourse from falling prey to historicist readings, I have sited Partition as an event, as a pure beginning.

Building off this framework, in Chapter 2, I engage directly with survivor testimonies. I identify three objects of discourse – home, religion, and nation – that are pervasive within Partition discourse. By using Foucault’s idea of archaeology, I trace the social authorities that guide the emergence of these objects in order to demonstrate that these objects are always already gendered. Thus, I argue that deployment of these objects in Partition discourse reproduces the gender subjugation.

Chapter 3 of this thesis first lays out the ontoepistemological context within which the figure of the woman is allowed to emerge. I engage here Derrida’s *Politics of Friendship* and Carole Pateman’s *The Sexual Contract* in order to argue that the figure of the woman is always already excludable from the social and, consequently also from the process of signification that institutes Partition as a universal signifier of nation/alism. This chapter then argues for a more interpretive approach to the study of Partition testimony. Here I stress the importance of heeding the testimony-producing

subject as a split-subject and thus highlight the need to consider testimony at the level of enunciation. I make this argument not to impute meaning onto Partition testimony but rather in order to open up possibilities for the figure of the woman to emerge as inexcludable from the event.

## II

### Beeran ki kai jaat...?<sup>96</sup>

#### The Figure of the Woman in Partition Discourse

Is there such a thing, then, as a gendered telling of Partition? I learnt to recognize this in the way women located, almost immediately, this major event in the minor keys of their lives. From the women I learned about the minutiae of their lives, while for the most part the men spoke of the relations between communities, the broad political realities. Seldom was there an occasion when a man being interviewed would speak of a child lost or killed, while for women there was no way in which she could omit such a reference.<sup>97</sup>

There are two ways of understanding the gendered nature of Partition – the first is, as Butalia describes above, a difference in the moments deployed to narrate the event by male and female subjects of Partition. Another is to investigate which moments are considered excludable from both, the discursive and the signifying moments of Partition. In fact, I do not believe that it is a coincidence that the moments that women seek to narrate are precisely those that are omitted from or invisible in Partition as a universal signifier. Given the always already excludable status of the figure of the woman – and by extension, the irrelevance of the sphere of the intimate – it is no surprise that moments borne by the voices of women are also those that are excludable from Partition.

This is not to say, however, that the figure of the woman is always excluded from the discursive moment of Partition. Indeed, as the work of Butalia and Das, among many others, demonstrates, there are numerous survivor narratives and testimonies that directly address the role of women in Partition. Much of this narrative history speaks to

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<sup>96</sup> Trans. “What caste/nationality does a woman have?” North Indian proverb.

<sup>97</sup> Butalia, *Other Side of*, 12.

the sacrifice or the ‘martyrdom’ of women as they were killed or committed mass suicides in order to preserve the honor of family, faith or nation. The issue, however, is not whether women are included in certain discursive moments of Partition, but rather whether they can be excluded – and they ultimately are, with regards the signifying moment of Partition – without “unleashing an ethical crisis.”<sup>98</sup> In this chapter I will argue that the epistemological context that guides the rules of discourse, reproduces the social irrelevance of the woman, thereby relegating her to her always already excluded position within the social, and more specifically, within Partition. In order to make this argument, I treat the figure of the woman as a global/historical subject and apply an archaeological strategy to analyze the most pervasive objects of discourse that define Partition – home, religion and nation. Of course, violence and the figure of the woman will remain a crucial consideration in my analysis. However, instead of treating them as distinct objects of discourse, I tether ‘violence’ and ‘woman’ to each of the above three objects in order to reveal how discourse pertaining to each of these produces a gendering of Partition discourse.

### **[Home]**

In *Life and Words*, Veena Das writes the story of a woman named Asha. Asha’s story, like many others, is intricate. While I do not mean to do injustice to this story, I will provide here only a brief overview of the parts pertinent to this section. Asha was a young widow, living with her deceased husband’s family in Lahore, prior to Partition. Throughout marriage and widowhood, she shared a strong bond with her two sisters-in-

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<sup>98</sup> Silva, *Toward a Global Idea*, xxx-xxxi.

law. Yet, when the family migrated to India in 1947, having lost not only their property and wealth, but also the elder daughter (i.e. Asha's elder sister-in-law) tensions arose between Asha and her conjugal family. For years, however, she continued to spend time between her parents' home and that of her husband's family, until a few years later and after some persuasion by a friend, Asha remarried. This event caused both of her families to disown her; yet Asha persisted in keeping in touch with her first conjugal family, especially with her husband's remaining sister. Writing Asha's story in the context of Partition violence, Das writes:

I would suggest that for many women such as Asha the violence of the Partition lay in not only what happened to them in the riots and the brutal violation of their bodies but also what they had to witness – namely, the possibility of betrayal coded in their everyday relations. Think for a moment about what was taken to be the givenness of life in Asha's account and how that involved a form of concealment of which she was to be made aware only in the unfolding of events. Who could have predicted that a major political event would show the concealed side of kinship relations to be made of the possibility of betrayal? ... the point is that the horrendous violence of communal riots solidifies the membership of a group at one level, but it also has the potential to break the most intimate of relations at another level.<sup>99</sup>

These are women's stories of Partition. As Butalia and Das note, unless asked specifically, women rarely talk about Partition – it lingers though in their everyday. Yet, as Butalia asserts, when speaking directly of Partition, “for women there was no way in which she could omit such a reference.”<sup>100</sup>

Women's stories are not merely excluded from Partition, they are excludable. Most often, women's stories are about home and family – i.e. objects of discourse that are irrelevant to the process of signification that institutes Partition as a universal

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<sup>99</sup> Das, *Life and Words*, 72-73.

<sup>100</sup> Butalia, *Other Side of*, 12.

signifier of nation/alism. And yet, for numerous women, home was in fact the site of unspeakable violence. During Partition, acts of intimate violence were performed in familiar spaces – in the houses of family and friends, at the village temple, at the local well. Yet, Partition discourse about home – especially about homes lost – rarely touches upon intimate violence, focusing instead on the more politically potent idea of a ‘homeland.’ In this section I will argue that the social authorities that define home as an object of discourse with respect to the figure of the woman, place it (home) squarely in the realm of the domestic. Consequently, violence committed within this space is rendered politically and historically irrelevant. The only way in which intimate violence can be spoken of, is if it is attached to a larger social configuration, such as community or religion – i.e., for instance, intimate violence is explained as women sacrificing themselves in order to preserve communal honor. Thus, I will argue here that while discourse on intimate violence fixes the woman as a political object, Partition discourse on ‘home’ always already treats women as excludable since ‘home,’ as an object of discourse, is politically productive only when it is made to extend into the realm of the social.

For Urvashi Butalia, Partition is deeply personal. Her mother, Subhadra Butalia, and much of her extended family, are survivors of Partition, forced to India from Lahore. One of Subhadra Butalia’s brothers, however, stayed behind, keeping their mother with him and converting to Islam. For forty years, the families across the border barely made any contact – until Butalia herself traveled to Lahore to visit her uncle Rana. Contact was then revived, and a few years later, Butalia traveled with her mother

and aunts to visit their brother in Pakistan. Narrating the experience of visiting her childhood home, Subhadra Butalia says:

He'd [Subhadra Butalia's brother, Rana] brought the car to take us home. We were driven to a place which had been my home for so many years. As we drove in, I looked at the house: the same majestic look, but, as I peered through the dark to see, I found two things missing. My father's name no longer decorated the gate, and the big religious symbol "Om" which has been drawn on the water tank above the house did not seem visible. ... It was only in the morning that I had noticed that all the fruit trees were gone. Rana said he had had to get rid of them because of water shortages. But I felt a real sense of loss, an almost physical hurt. My father had loved those trees more than anything else. It seemed like a betrayal. I thought, we had lost so much in Partition – what did a few trees matter, yet to me at the time they seemed like a symbol of everything we had lost...<sup>101</sup>

As with Subhadra Butalia, the meaning of 'home' is emotionally fraught for survivors of Partition. Most often, home became a site of loss – it was a place where one once knew "every stone, every nook and cranny,"<sup>102</sup> but that was ultimately left behind; it was that "something inexpressible, [to which was attached] some longing for a sense of place, of belonging, of rootedness;"<sup>103</sup> yet sometimes, it was also a place that provided security, "where there was work and family."<sup>104</sup> But while the meaning of home varies from one individual to another, when used as an object of discourse, 'home' conjures up certain specific social meanings.

In *The Politics of Home*, Rosemary Marangoly George writes:

One distinguishing feature of places called home is that they are built on select inclusions. The inclusions are grounded in a learned (or taught) sense of kinship that is extended to those who are perceived as sharing the same blood, race, class, gender, or religion. Membership is maintained by bonds of love, fear, power, desire and control. ... They

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<sup>101</sup> Butalia, *Other Side of*, 49-50.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

are places of violence and nurturing. A place that is flexible, that manifests itself in various forms and yet whose every reinvention seems to follow the basic pattern of inclusions/exclusions. ... Home is the desired place that is fought for and established as the exclusive domain of a few. It is not a neutral place.<sup>105</sup>

This definition of home – specifically, as a non-neutral space, based on inclusions and exclusions – is also pertinent when considering the dynamics within home ‘itself.’

Indeed the exclusions that are produced within the home, or within the family, are replicated in the production of a more generalized idea of home, as defined above. I am referring here to the centrality of the structure of kinship, and the functioning of the Oedipal moment in instituting the ontoepistemology of home.

The structures of kinship provide a name and location to each individual within the home:

...the family structure manifests a transcendence of all natural order by the establishment of Culture. It alone allows each and everyone to know who he or she is. ... In this sense, the name, in so far as it is an element conveying relations of proximity, is a token of recognition of individuals by one another.<sup>106</sup>

Of course, the structure of kinship is fundamentally gendered, primarily through the regulation and control of sexuality – i.e. in terms of which women’s bodies a male subject may have access to. But this gendering is most significant with reference to the Oedipal moment – indeed, this is the primordial moment of gendering. For not only does this moment institute a sexual prohibition of the mother, it also institutes the Name-of-the-Father, or the male subject, as Law. And in so doing, it fixes the mother –

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<sup>105</sup> Rosemary Marangoly George, *The Politics of Home: Postcolonial Relocations and Twentieth-Century Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 9.

<sup>106</sup> Lemaire, *Lacan*, 62.

or, more generally, the figure of the woman – as subject to the Law of the Father. This process is deemed crucial to the ‘proper’ subjectivization of the child:

By internalizing the Law, the child identifies with the father and takes him as a model. The Law now becomes a liberating force: for once, separated from the mother, the child can dispose of himself. He becomes conscious that he is still in the making and, turning towards the future, integrates himself into the social, into Culture, and re-enters into language. Three components must be distinguished in the Oedipus: (i) the Law, (ii) the Model, and (iii) the Promise. The father is he who ‘recognizes’ the child, giving him a personality by means of a Speech which is Law, a link to spiritual kinship and a promise.<sup>107</sup>

Thus, it is only through the separation from the mother, and by recognizing the Father as Law, that a child might accede to the social. But this process is possible only through the collusion of the mother. For, according to Lacanian theory, in order for a child to accept the Law of the Father it is necessary for the mother to recognize the Father’s Speech as Law. If the position of the Father is questioned, the child refuses the Law of the Father and remains subject to the mother’s desires.

The reason the separation from the mother, and the mother’s acceptance of the Law of the Father, are imperative is because the woman is herself deemed unfit for ascension to, and participation in, the social. Just like the racial subject, the sexual subject also is viewed as a *thing* of exterior determination, of affectability and hence a being that is in fact a danger to the maintenance of the social. Thus, the mother is an obstacle to the proper subjectivization, and ascension to the social, of the child. Of course, ‘child’ here refers specifically to the male child, but I will not get into the differences in the processes of subjectivization of the male versus the female child because that is not key to my argument. What is key, however, is that an analysis of the

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<sup>107</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*, 84.

structure of ‘home,’ demonstrates that, far from being distinct from the sphere of the civil or political, the space of the ‘home’ produces its own gendered inclusions and exclusions that are in fact the founding blocks of the social. As Rosemary George states, “Communities are not counter-constructions but only extensions of home, providing the same comforts and terrors on a larger scale.”<sup>108</sup> Yet, despite the fundamentally political nature of home, the social authorities that define ‘home’ as an object of discourse render it politically irrelevant. This irrelevance arises from the principle of the social contract wherein the father – i.e. the arbiter of the politics of the home – is acting in fact at the behest of a higher (state) Law. Thus, the social or political relevance of home is restricted to the exercise of patriarchal power by the father, acting as an agent of the State. In short, the social authorities that produce ‘home’ generate a fundamentally gendered space, wherein the feminine dimension of ‘home’ exists outside of and is an object of the social, whereas the masculine aspect of home extends into, and is integral to the functioning of, the social.

In the case of Partition discourse, then, home emerges in two distinct configurations – occupying either ‘points of incompatibility’ with woman, or ‘points of equivalence’ with community, religion, nation, etc. Recall that Foucault’s definition of points of incompatibility is where “two objects... may appear, in the same discursive formation, without being able to enter – under the pain of manifest contradiction or inconsequence – the same series of statements.” Thus, given the status of Partition as a political event on the one hand, and the socially and politically irrelevant status of women and home, on the other, these two objects cannot emerge simultaneously within

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<sup>108</sup> George, *Politics of Home*, 9.

the discursive formation of Partition. As objects of discourse, woman and home, are relevant if and only if they can be attached to other objects of social relevance. But when they appear simultaneously, in the same of series of statements, they offer nothing to the process of signification that produces Partition as a universal signifier of nation/alism. Consequently, stories such as Asha's and Subhadra Butalia's that are so intimately attached to home – i.e. the feminized, domesticated form of home – have no space within Partition. Indeed, as Das notes, what these stories reveal is “the possibility of betrayal coded in their everyday relations” and hence represent a failure of patriarchal power in maintaining social order. These stories must therefore be relegated to the private where they pose no threat to the social.

On the other hand, the figure of the woman occupies points of equivalence with the political extensions of home. Points of equivalence are those whereby “two incompatible elements are formed in the same way and on the basis of the same rules; the conditions of their appearance are identical; they are situated at the same level; and instead of constituting a mere defect of coherence, they form an alternative.”<sup>109</sup> As I will argue in the next chapter, one way of reading intimate violence during Partition is to suggest that the killing of women was a patriarchal gesture aimed at maintaining proper social order. In this case, home puts on the social garb of family, community, religion, nation, etc. – i.e. configurations that are controlled and regulated by the State – so that the woman, although socially irrelevant, may be allowed to emerge in the context of the political, but even then only as an object of political power. The narratives of intimate violence, then, focus not on the figure of the woman but rather on

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<sup>109</sup> Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, 65.

the preservation of social order – a social order often encapsulated in the idea of honor. The figure of the woman is merely an instrument in the preservation of honor, of social order. And within this objectified position, the figure of the woman continues to remain excludable from Partition. This excludability, I argue in the following two sections, arises once again due to the gendering of ‘religion’ and ‘nation’ so that these objects of discourse that are crucial to Partition can still be narrated without reference to the figure of the woman.

### **[Religion]**

During his 2000 journey to his old home, Saintha, in Pakistan, Bir Bahadur Singh articulated two express wishes: “to drink water from the village well and to eat in the home of a Mussalman.” These wishes represented his intention to repent the rituals of untouchability that his Sikh family followed against their Muslim neighbors. For instance, despite the fact that his family was the only non-Muslim family in the entire village of Saintha, there was a village well reserved solely for their use, from which it was forbidden for Muslims to drink. Similarly, Bir Bahadur’s family would never share eating utensils with their Muslim friends, or ever eat food cooked, or even touched, by Muslims. Thus, writes Butalia:

water and food played a major part in his journey home. “There are two things I want to do if we make it to Saintha,” he had earlier said to me. “To drink water from the village well and to eat in the home of a Mussalman.” This was his private penance, his reparation, his way of asking forgiveness for the harshness and cruelty of Hindu “untouchability” and the purity and pollution taboos of the Hindu religion. ...

[Upon arriving in Saintha and requesting a glass of water, Bir Bahadur] touched it to his forehead and drank deeply. He closed his eyes

and seemed to pray as he drank. I could not make out the words, but I thought he was asking for forgiveness, not so much for himself as on behalf of his people.<sup>110</sup>

In this section I argue that the same sentiments that produced rituals of untouchability also produced the death of Bir Bahadur's sister Maan Kaur and numerous other women. And yet, while the practice of untouchability among friends is lamented, its manifestation in the form of intimate violence is valorized.

I have already suggested that intimate violence against women can be given meaning only when attached to larger political configurations such as religion and nation, even as women continue to be positioned as objects of the political. Indeed, it is this objectified position alone that allows them to emerge in Partition discourse. I will argue here that gestures of conciliation are possible only between political subjects, and hence they cannot be extended to women. Consequently, while the rules of religion themselves can be criticized, the centrality of women to maintaining social order does not easily lend itself to such critique. In order to make this argument, I first present the social authorities that construct religion to reveal the underlying political nature of the configuration. I then apply the politics of friendship to the issue of religion in order to argue that while intimate violence can continue to be validated by religion, the same need not be true of communal violence. Moreover, I will argue that while narrations of intimate violence need not appear in Partition discourse, communal violence must be invoked if only to keep open the space of political possibilities.

My reference to religion does not imply an analysis of a particular religious tradition – in this case, Hinduism, Islam or Sikhism – but rather refers to “the whole

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<sup>110</sup> Butalia, “A Necessary Journey,” 154.

objective content of the idea that is expressed when *religion* in general is spoken of.”<sup>111</sup>

In providing a definition of religion as a universal concept, Émile Durkheim writes:

[a]t the foundation of all systems of belief and cults, there must necessarily be a certain number of fundamental representations and modes of ritual conduct that, despite the diversity of forms that the one and the other may have taken on, have the same objective meaning everywhere, and everywhere fulfill the same functions. It is these enduring elements that constitute what is eternal and human in religion.<sup>112</sup>

These fundamental representations and modes of ritual conduct that he refers to are organized around the ideas of the sacred and the profane. Defining the dynamic between sacred and profane, Durkheim writes:

The two worlds are conceived of not only as separate but also hostile and jealous rivals. ... The opposition of these two genera is expressed outwardly... wherever it exists. The mind experiences deep repugnance about mingling, even simple contact, between corresponding things, because the notion of the profane in man’s mind, and because we imagine a kind of logical void between them.<sup>113</sup>

This functioning of the sacred and profane is precisely what drives the rituals of untouchability among Hindus and Sikhs on the one hand, and Muslims on the other.

Take for instance, Bir Bahadur’s description of intercommunal relations in his village prior to Partition:

Such good relations we had that if there was any function that we had, then we used to call Musalmaans to our homes, they would eat in our houses, but we would not eat in theirs, and this is a bad thing, which I realize now. If they would come to our houses, we would have two utensils in one corner of our house, and we would tell them, pick these up and eat in them and they would then wash them and keep them aside and this was such a terrible thing. ... We, if a Musalmaan was coming along the road, and we shook hands with him, and we had, say, a box of

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<sup>111</sup> Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Form of Religious Life*, trans. Karen E. Fields (New York: The Free Press, 1995), 4.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

food or something in our hand, that would then become soiled and we would not eat it: if we are holding a dog in one hand and food in the other, there's nothing wrong with that. But if a Musalmaan would come and shake our hands our dadis and mothers would say son, don't eat this food, it has become polluted...<sup>114</sup>

In Bir Bahadur's description above, the body of the other – the Muslim – is conceived of as the profane object – one that threatens the sacred and evokes deep repulsion. The sacred, in this case, is the 'faith' itself and, by extension the body that carries it. The social hierarchization and boundaries of interaction that Singh speaks of reflect the logic of Durkheim's assertion that the sacred and the profane – conceived of as genera that occupy two distinct, antagonist zones – can never overlap or switch from one space to another; i.e. the locations of the profane and sacred are fixed. Moreover, religious thought exhorts the individual to forgo the realm of the profane and limit oneself exclusively to the sacred. In terms of the politics of religion, then, this is the foundation of social order. Given that the body of the woman is viewed primarily as reproducer, she is positioned as bearer not only of social order, but also of the sacred. Thus, in the case of Partition, intimate violence became a necessary strategy to disallow the sully of the sacred, and to maintain a separation of and distance between the sacred and profane. Indeed, according to Durkheim's theory of religion, religious suicide (and killings) marked the pinnacle of prescribed asceticism where "the only means of escaping profane life fully and finally is escaping life altogether."<sup>115</sup>

What is clear thus far is that the politics of religion – i.e. the inclusion/exclusion dynamic facilitated by ideas of the sacred and the profane – enable both, the practice of untouchability as well as the execution of intimate violence during Partition. Yet, each

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<sup>114</sup> Butalia, *Other Side of*, 175-176.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

of these enters Partition discourse in two distinct forms – while the discriminatory and unjust consequences of untouchability are often cited as the reasons for the event of Partition and its attendant communal violence, the practice itself is often repented and its consequences viewed as avoidable. Intimate violence, on the other, is neither deemed repentable nor avoidable – instead it is valorized. Consider, for instance, the testimony of Som Anand who, around the time of Partition, was completing his final year of school in Lahore. Referring to the relations among Sikh, Hindu and Muslim middle class households in Lahore, he states:

At one level, they were... they had very cordial relations. Our Muslim neighbors were very good. They helped us; we helped them. But, see, Hindus had a curious inhibitions (sic). My mother's... well actually she didn't allow any Muslims to enter her kitchen; any cooked thing from a Muslim home was not allowed to enter the kitchen. When she was eating, she would not allow her Muslim neighbor, lady, to touch her. So such inhibitions and customs, they, they kept us apart. ...

The Muslims were not getting enough jobs, education... they were not so education (sic). They envied Hindus who had the best of jobs, and they always wanted. That's why the slogan of a Muslim homeland became very popular among the Muslims.<sup>116</sup>

Referring to the violence that occurred during Partition, another survivor, Harjit, states:

“I cannot explain it... but one day our entire village took off to a nearby Muslim village on a killing spree. We simply went mad. And it has cost me fifty years of remorse, of sleepless nights – I cannot forget the faces of those we killed.”<sup>117</sup> Compare these testimonies however to that of Mangal Singh, describing the ‘martyrdom’ of seventeen women and children in his family:

After leaving home we had to cross the surrounding boundary of water. And we were many family members, several women and children who would not have been able to cross the water, to survive the flight. So we

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<sup>116</sup> *The Day India Burned*, (BBC Documentary: 2007), 7:52-10.00.

<sup>117</sup> Butalia, *Other Side of*, 58.

killed – they became martyrs – seventeen of our family members, seventeen lives... our hearts were heavy with grief for them, grief and sorrow, their grief, our own grief. So we traveled, laden with sorrow, not a paisa to call our own, not a bite of food to eat... but we had to leave. Had we not done so, we would have been killed, the times were such...

And when pressed further by Butalia on whether he thought they – i.e. the women and children killed – felt fear, Mangal Singh retorted:

Fear? Let me tell you one thing. You know this race of Sikhs? There's no fear in them, no fear in the face of adversity. Those people had no fear. They came down stairs into the big courtyard of our house that day and they all sat down and they said, you can martyrs of us – we are willing to become martyrs, and they did. ... The fear was one of dishonour. If they had been caught by Muslims, our honour, their honour would have been sacrificed, lost. It's a question of honour... if you have pride you do not fear.<sup>118</sup>

The difference in the nature of the testimonies, as I will argue in the next chapter, does not necessarily represent a 'true' difference in the way the subject of discourse views communal and intimate violence. Rather, the difference lies in the manner in which discourse on religion reproduces gender subjugation. I make this argument by investigating the role of friendship within the realm of the political.

In explaining the nature of friendship, Derrida writes:

[T]he friend is, as the translation has it, 'our own ideal image.' We envisage the friend as such. And this is how he envisages us: with a friendly look. Cicero uses the word *exemplar*, which means portrait but also, as the *exemplum*, the duplicate, the reproduction, the copy as well as the original, the type, the model. ... Now according to Cicero, his *exemplar* is projected or recognized in the true friend, it is his ideal double, his other self, the same as self but improved.<sup>119</sup>

If one were to follow this definition of friendship, and given the functioning of the sacred and profane as described above, friendship between Hindus and Sikhs, on the

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 155.

<sup>119</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore/London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 4.

one hand, and Muslims on the other would be impossible. Yet, Derrida also argues that friendship always exists in its potentiality, in its imminence, and is only re-invented or re-invigorated through its utterance: “To think friendship with an open heart... one must perhaps be able to think the *perhaps*, which is to say that one must be able to *say* it and to *make* of it, in saying it, an event...”<sup>120</sup> Thus, even in the case of those for whom religious rites and rituals might appear to have hindered a ‘true’ friendship with Muslims, the possibility of friendship was always open, and hence friendship always already on the horizon.

What is evident here is that while religion caused the dissolution of relationships, it did not foreclose a recovery or recuperation of the same. But, as Derrida asserts, and as I will demonstrate in my next chapter, the figure of the woman can never be positioned as friend (or enemy) within the social. That is, the bond of friendship is always possible only among men. Thus, the recuperation of relationships, achieved through the rearticulation of friendship, is possible only in the case of violence committed among men – i.e. communal violence. In the case of intimate violence, the possibility of ‘recovery’ is foreclosed because there is no relationship, or friendship, to begin with; the figure of the woman is fixed, instead, as a political object. Moreover, as Derrida argues, the figure of the friend is crucial to the functioning of democracy: “[d]emocracy has seldom represented itself without the possibility of at least that which resembles... the possibility of *fraternization*.”<sup>121</sup> Consequently, gestures towards the recovery of friendship, among men, leave open the space of political possibility, thereby

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., viii.

also leaving open the process of signification that produces the universality of Partition. (I will elaborate on the significance of this situation towards the end of the next section.) Intimate violence, on the other hand, does not bear such discursive potential; it's meaning remains fixed, so long as the ontoepistemology of the political is unaltered, and hence the issue of intimate violence, along with the figure of the woman, remains excludable in Partition discourse. Thus, although religion, as an object of discourse, enables the emergence of women, it also upholds the subjugation of gender that is replicated in Partition.

By treating religion as an object of discourse, my analysis represents a move away from anthropological conceptions that treat religion, and religious violence, as an effect of cultural difference. Thus, by deploying the tools of discourse analysis within a global/historical framework, I have attempted to denaturalize communal violence and step away from the teleology within which such violence is sited. Indeed, it is only through such denaturalization that the realm of religion and religious violence may be opened up to an investigation of gender subjugation. In the next section, I undertake a similar analysis of nation, as an object of discourse, in order to demonstrate the excludability of women from the national/ist discourse of Partition.

### **[Nation]**

Beneath the valorization of intimate violence during Partition, lies hidden the figure of the abducted woman. A common refrain heard in Partition discourse referring to communal violence is 'Not a girl of ours was taken away, not a single Sikh gave up

his (her) religion'<sup>122</sup> Statements such as these anchor the valorization of those that committed and those that endured intimate violence. Yet, this valorization is made possible only against the figure of the abducted woman. Partition discourse refers to abducted women as those that 'disappeared;' indeed, their stories too are disappeared from Partition. Recalling an interaction with two brothers who were survivors from Rawalpindi, Butalia writes:

But they'd made no direct mention of their sisters, two of them, who had 'disappeared' at the time. Everyone around them, *knew* this story, they'd been part of the same community, the same village, and they spoke about it in whispers. 'Speak to them,' a neighbour told me, 'two of their sisters disappeared at the time.' The way he said it, it sounded as if this were something to be ashamed of. So I didn't ask. But it was when I went back over our conversation that it struck me that that awkward silence, that hesitant phrase was perhaps where the disappearance of the two sisters lay hidden: in a small crack, covered by silence.<sup>123</sup>

Das tells a similar story about Asha's sister-in-law, the one referred to in the previous section, who was 'lost' during Partition. Although no one in the family was aware of whether this sister had killed herself during the riots of Partition, or had been abducted, the family, when questioned, simply referred to her as dead. "In all the narratives about Lahore that I heard in this family," Das writes,

there was a blanking out of this period. For instance, I have seen photographs of the whole family in which, this woman – now dead – appears in various happy contexts. These occasions usually evoked narratives of the event portrayed in the photograph, but no reference was ever made to her present absence. A question such as "What happened to her?" was met with a cursory answer – "She died in that time."<sup>124</sup>

In this section, I argue that these silences are demanded by the narratives of nation that Partition discourse generates. By analyzing the social authorities that define

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<sup>122</sup> Pandey, *Remembering Partition*, 193.

<sup>123</sup> Butalia, "A Necessary Journey," 106.

<sup>124</sup> Das, *Life and Words*, 64.

nation as an object of discourse, I demonstrate how the figure of the woman, as the bearer of purity and morality, is central to its narrative, yet always only as an object. Consequently, as in the case of religion, intimate violence becomes valorized as a sacrifice – undertaken by both, the sacrificed and the sacrificer – on behalf of the nation. The figure of the abducted woman, however, represents a failure – a failure not only of the political subject (the sacrificer) and its object (the sacrificed), but also of the nation itself. Thus, while the sacrificed woman may be raised on a national pedestal, the abducted woman is (re-)disappeared. This distinction in the ways in which the figure of the woman is allowed or disallowed to emerge in discourse, emphasizes the objectivized, and hence excludable, status of women in Partition.

In *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, Eric Hobsbawm highlights the centrality of the idea of ‘nation’ to modern political existence. “[T]he last two centuries of the human history of planet Earth,” he writes “are incomprehensible without some understanding of the term ‘nation’ and the vocabulary derived from it.”<sup>125</sup> Yet, for an idea, or a configuration, of such grave consequence, the ‘nation’ has been a peculiarly intractable ontoepistemological object. In Chapter 1 of this thesis I presented a sociological/anthropological overview of the ways in which nation has been defined as a cultural object. Within this context of culture, nation is defined alternatively as a conglomeration of peoples based on a commonality of race, religion, language, or geographical and commercial/economic interests; as Silva notes, “The nation was consolidated as the concept that instituted modern polities as historical (moral) subjects, that is, as bound by principles expressed in its common language, religion, art, and so

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<sup>125</sup> Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism*, 1.

on.”<sup>126</sup> This consolidation was made tangible only through the evolution of nation to state. Thus, Hobsbawm defines nation as a “body of citizens whose collective sovereignty constituted them a state which was their political expression.”<sup>127</sup> And it is within this context of governmentality inaugurated by the state, that the nation becomes a site of political struggle and contention. As Bhabha notes in *Nation and Narration*, “in each of these ‘foundational fictions’ [i.e. race, religion, etc.] the origins of national traditions turn out to be as much of acts of affiliation and establishment as they are moments of disavowal, displacement, exclusion, and cultural contestation.”<sup>128</sup> I suggested in the previous chapter that such social scientific definitions of nation naturalize the concept, and that more importantly, in the case of the ‘others of Europe,’ nations get sited within an historical teleology always already traced by Europe. Thus, if a discussion on the social authorities that define nation, especially Third World nations, traces its social scientific “foundational myths” then it runs the risk of instituting particularist, historically (over-)determined *minor* transparent subjects.

The key, then, to examining the social authorities that define ‘nation’ as an object of discourse within a global/historical context is to consider the ontology that inaugurates the nation. In *Toward a Global Idea of Race*, Silva argues that the idea of nation, as an ontological signifier “produces modern subjects as an effect of historical (interior) determination, which assumes a difference that is resolved in an unfolding (temporal) transcendental essence.”<sup>129</sup> That is, the nation is posited as the ultimate

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<sup>126</sup> Silva, *Toward a Global Idea*, xxxi.

<sup>127</sup> Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism*, 18-19.

<sup>128</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, “Narrating the Nation,” in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha, (London/New York: Routledge, 1990).

<sup>129</sup> Silva, *Toward a Global Idea*, xxxvii

manifestation of a self-actualizing, transparent subject. Moreover, particularistic or individualistic differences are resolved in the idea of nation, for it is only the subject that transcends the particular in favor of the universal who may lay claim to, or become a subject of, ‘nation.’ This universal, sometimes designated with similar effect as ‘the transcendental,’ refers to the characteristics of reason and morality – i.e. the constituents of transparency. In the context of the nation then, only the subject that is guided by reason and morality is capable of becoming a subject of the nation.

This ontology, instituted the ‘nation,’ epistemologically, as “a soul, a spiritual principle.”<sup>130</sup> In his *What Is A Nation?* Renan defines nation as:

A large aggregate of men, healthy in mind and warm of heart, [which] creates a kind of moral conscience... So long as this moral consciousness gives proof of its strength by the sacrifices which demand the abdication of the individual to the advantage of community, it is legitimate and has the right to exist.<sup>131</sup>

This idea of morality as the foundational ‘essence’ of nation becomes extremely clear in national debates regarding abducted women. For instance, when introducing the Abducted Persons (Recovery and Restoration) Act of 1949, Shri N. Gopaldaswami Ayyangar, a minister in the Indian Parliament stated:

among the many brutalities and outrages which vitiated the atmosphere... none touched so low a depth of moral depravity as these mass abductions of women on both sides... Those of us who think of civilized government and want to conduct the government on civilized lines should feel ashamed.<sup>132</sup>

Similarly, when debating the issue of the return of Muslim women abducted by Hindus,

Pandit Thakur Das Bhargava argued:

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<sup>130</sup> Ernest Renan, “What is a Nation,” in ed. Bhabha, *Nation and Narration*, 19.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>132</sup> Das, *Life and Words*, 26.

I don't suggest for a moment that the abducted Muslim girls should be kept here because I believe that not only would it be good for them to be sent away but it is equally good for us to be rid of them. I don't want immorality to prosper in my country.<sup>133</sup>

Each of these statements draws a connection between the restoration of a moral order and the preservation of national honor. In this case, a sociologically defined subject – i.e. the Hindu subject – gets marked as the only moral being capable of being part of the Indian nation; the Muslim other is cast as amoral and hence outside of the Indian nation. It is in this context that the figure of the woman emerges in national discourse, but only as an object through whose body morality, and hence the possibility of sustaining the nation, is negotiated.

Take, for example, the following testimony given by a retired military man from the village of Thamali, located now in Pakistan:

If [at all] they managed to take any girls from our village [*sic*], we got them back. Not a girl of ours was taken away. No such mistake [*galt kaam*, literally, bad deed] occurred... People *were* killed. But they were extraordinarily brave. No one was afraid of... [the] Mussalmans, our women too were not in the least bit afraid... The girls/women were all killed earlier... the young women [and girls] were not surrendered... They lost their lives, killed by their own kinsfolk – or by the enemy...<sup>134</sup>

The crucial aspect of this bit of testimony is the sentiment that no woman was allowed to be taken over to the other, amoral side; thus the morality of the community was preserved. In the context of Partition, the moral conscience of the nation was either maintained through the committing of intimate violence, or restored through the return of abducted women. Those women that were not returned, were marked as 'disappeared' – disappeared, that is, from the national memory so as not to sully the

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>134</sup> Pandey, *Remembering Partition*, 191.

moral conscience of the nation. As Renan writes, “the essence of a nation is that all individuals have ... have forgotten many things.”<sup>135</sup> These many forgotten things are those that threaten or corrupt the moral conscience of the nation – such as the figure of the abducted woman who marks the failure of the (patriarchal) agent of the nation in preserving the morality of the collective.

It is important to note that the moral crisis confronting the nation in the figure of the abducted woman is not read as a failure of, or betrayal by, the woman. The woman, rather, continues to be positioned as an object – a *thing* to be controlled, protected, destroyed or forgotten, all in the name of morality, and the nation. The moral conscience of the nation is anchored to the body of the woman. Thus, within Partition discourse, the valorization or silencing of the narratives of women reflect the success or failure of male subjects in preserving the epistemological coherence of nation. Butalia highlights this objectivized position in her discussion on the recovery operations aimed at abducted women:

National honour: the honour that was staked on the body of Mother India, and therefore, by extension, on the bodies of all Hindu and Sikh women, mothers and would-be mothers. The loss of these women, to men of the ‘other’ religion, was also a loss to their ‘original’ families. These, and not the new families which the women may now be in, were the legitimate families, and it was to these that the women needed to be restored. If this meant disrupting relationships that they may now be in, that they had ‘accepted’ for whatever reason, this had to be done. The assumption was that even if asked for their opinion, women would not be able to voice an independent one because they were in situations of oppression.<sup>136</sup>

And more importantly, as Butalia further notes, these recovery operations, often enforced upon abducted women, were undertaken not always at the behest of the

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<sup>135</sup> Renan, “What is a Nation,” in ed. Bhabha, *Nation and Narration*, 11

<sup>136</sup> Butalia, *Other Side of*, 151.

‘original’ families. In many cases, in fact, the ‘original’ families did not want to accept ‘returned women’ because of their familial issues of morality and purity. The recovery operations then were conducted primarily to restore the image of national morality.

What this section demonstrates, then, is that the social authorities that define nation as an object of discourse in terms of a shared, or common, morality enable the replication of gender subjugation pervasive within the ontoepistemology of modernity. Of course, as I argued in the previous section on religion, even while the profane-ness, or amorality, of the other is asserted by valorizing the sacrificed woman or disappearing the abducted, gestures of friendship towards the previously enemy-other are still possible. This situation represents what Foucault calls ‘contradictions’ in discourse, brought about by “a movement of meanings.” Recall that, Foucault defines contradiction as that which:

far from being an appearance or an accident of discourse, far from being that from which it must be freed if its truth is at last to be revealed, constitutes the very law of its existence: it is on the basis of such a contradiction that discourse emerges, and it is in order to both translate it and overcome it that discourse begins to speak; it is in order to escape that contradiction, whereas contradiction is ceaselessly reborn through discourse, that discourse endlessly pursues itself and endlessly begins again.<sup>137</sup>

Thus, even while the objectivization of the woman, fixes religion in its sacredness, and nation in its morality, gestures of friendship, extended among men, keep open the possible meanings of religion and the nation. This contradiction, as defined above, is not restrictive but productive; yet I would suggest that this productivity is pertinent only to the subjects of discourse. Discursive contradictions, especially since they are not

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid, 150.

intended to be unraveled, do not impact the status of the woman as a political object. In the case of Partition, then, while men are able to negotiate relations among themselves, through discourse, within the context of social ontoepistemologies – a negotiation made possible through the politics of friendship – women remain fixed as a political objects that can be manipulated within these negotiations. Thus, while the figure of the woman is used to fix Partition as a universal signifier, gestures of friendship and conciliation across borders, among men, keep open future political possibilities represented by the event. This is not to say that narratives of friendship are crucial, or inexcludable, from Partition discourse. Rather, a recognition of the gestures made towards friendship and reconciliation among men, highlights the fixity of the woman as a political object.

### **[Conclusion]**

This chapter began with the question: “Is there such a thing, then, as a gendered telling of Partition?” By recuperating the less-told, untold, silenced stories of Partition, many feminist scholars have asserted that in fact there is. Yet, my argument in this chapter is that the gendering of Partition must be read not only in terms of *which* stories are told, but more importantly in terms of *how* the stories – those that are integral to the process of signification that institutes Partition as a universal signifier of national/ism – are told. My argument is based on Foucault’s idea of discourse as that which represents an epistemological split between “consciousness and unconsciouness, thought and the text, the ideality and the contingent body of expression.” That is, I treat here Partition discourse not as an ‘authentic’ or ‘true’ production of the interior-determined transparent subject, but rather as a performance that follows the rules that guide the

emergence and ordering of objects of discourse. Consequently, this chapter presents not only the social authorities that enable the emergence of particular objects pervasive in Partition discourse – i.e. home, religion and nation – but also how the meanings of these objects shift with reference to various subjects, i.e. in this case, women and men.

The key argument here, which I follow through in my next chapter, is that discourse is in fact a performance. Following Lacan's definition of a subject as that which is ontologically split between the self and the subject, I argue that by focusing on the subject of discourse – just as I have in this chapter focused on the rules of discourse – opens up the space of discourse to allow for alternate readings that sit uncomfortably within existent rules of discourse. That is, in the next chapter I will argue that, by acknowledging the ontologically split subject of discourse, we can open up the space of testimonial discourse to interpretive analysis. By deploying this strategy of interpretation, I present a re-reading of intimate violence that is removed from the patriarchal configuration of the social, and that, thus, enables the re-positioning of women as political agents.

### III

#### Shaheedian<sup>138</sup>

#### Re-thinking the Figure of the ‘Martyred’ Woman

*sura to pehchaniye  
jo lade din ke het  
purza purza kat mare  
kabhi na chode khet*

know him as the brave one  
who fights against the enemy  
let his body be cut into a hundred pieces  
but never will he give up his faith<sup>139</sup>

Among the numerous-nameless women “cut into a hundred pieces” during the moment of partitioning, lies the body of a young sixteen-year old girl named Maan Kaur. At the time of Partition, Maan Kaur lived in the village of Saintha in the Rawalpindi District. This district, now in Pakistan, is infamous for the most devastating violence experienced by its large Sikh community – not only that experienced at the hands of Muslims but, more significantly, that inflicted upon Sikh women and children by their own. Indeed, Maan Kaur herself was felled by such a fate. Driven by violence to Thoa Khalsa, the site of martyrdom that haunts the verse above, she is known now by name only in the speech of her brother, Bir Bahadur Singh. Recalling the imminent attack of marauding Muslims, and the violence that ensued, Singh says:

In the bushes we could see men chanting Allah hu Akbar! God is Great. They were waving their axes and spears. They were very aggressive, very angry, as if they were going to devour us. This was something new for us as we’d lived there for centuries. What had happened? ... The girls (of the village) were aged between 10 and 40 and were very pretty,

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<sup>138</sup> Translates to “Martyrdoms.” Kirpal Singh, *Shaheedian*, (Amritsar, 1964).

<sup>139</sup> Butalia, *Other Side of*, 287.

especially in my area as it was a mountainous area. First of all... *[long, distraught pause, apparent inability to speak and desire to avert the gaze of the camera, then continues in breaking voice...]* First he (my father) called my sister, his daughter, and said, “Daughter Maan come here.” My sister, Maan Kaur, who was two years older than me, she was 18 or 19 years old. She sat down and my father raised his sword but it didn’t strike properly. God knows what happened. My sister lifted her braid over her head, and my father angrily pulled her head scarf back and brought down his sword and her head rolled away. Both my uncle and nephew and my father’s elder brother – who was a big guy – all started beheading. All you could hear was the cut cut cut sounds. Believe me, even after 60 years, I still remember that nobody made a sound. They just chanted god’s name, nobody ran away, nobody screamed...<sup>140</sup>

The violence, however, did not cease with the beheadings. Soon after, the young Bir Bahadur witnessed the suicide of Mata Lajjawanti and the ninety other numerous-nameless women who followed her to their deaths:

I was sitting with my mother, this incident of the twenty-five women [the beheading] had taken place... so sitting at the well, Mata Lajjawanti, who was also called Sardarni Gulab Kaur, she said two words, she jumped into the well and some eighty women followed her... they also jumped in. The well filled up completely; one woman whose name is Basant Kaur, six children born from her womb died in that well, but she survived. She jumped in four times, but the well had filled up... she would jump in, then come out, then jump in again... she would look at her children, at herself... till today, she is alive.<sup>141</sup>

Incidents of this nature are not muted in Partition histories; rather they are valorized, as in the verse above. I argue in this chapter, however, that the valorization of women’s acts of ‘martyrdom’ reproduces, rather than counters, gender subjugation. Narratives of the violent acts executed upon, or executed by, women during the uncertain and chaotic movements and moments of Partition can be excluded from Partition narratives without the “ethical crisis” that Silva points to. My argument here is not that existent gender

<sup>140</sup> YouTube, “Punjabi Lok,” <http://youtube.com/watch?v=Y4GJF9moVm0> (accessed May 22, 2008).

<sup>141</sup> Butalia, *Other Side of*, 164.

subjection allows for the exclusion of the violence committed upon and by women, but rather that the ontoepistemological context within which the narratives are told reproduces the always already excluded position of women from history. By locating the figure of the woman within a global/historical context, I will argue that the language deployed to address gender in Partition testimony is based on the operation of the dichotomy between friend and enemy within the social, a dichotomy that necessarily excludes any political relevance for the figure of the woman. This political irrelevance to which women are relegated has already been addressed by some authors such as Veena Das, Ritu Menon and Kamala Bhasin. I will revisit this issue here, focusing primarily on how this subordination plays out specifically in the context of intimate relationships. I will do so by demonstrating how the sexual contract is replicated in the friend-enemy dichotomy. In doing so I will argue that the language used to narrate the role of women pertaining to Partition violence, grapples with casting the figure of the woman as either friend or enemy, a task that both politically and discursively proves itself impossible.

My analysis of the above issues is anchored to the idea of ‘interpretation.’ Given that most testimonies of intimate violence are second-person narratives referring to an absent subject, I will argue that these testimonies must not be treated as mere cultural or historical artifacts but must be actively engaged with. In *Antigone’s Claim*, Judith Butler argues that in order for the female subject to be read as the author of an act – a political act, to be precise – it is not sufficient for the act to be merely attributed to her, but she must be able to claim the act. It is in this act of claiming alone that the female subject is able to assert political sovereignty – an assertion without which, I would add,

the female subject can be excluded from the history produced by the act. Therefore, in this chapter, I advocate the strategy of interpretation in reading Partition testimonies about intimate violence. The purpose of interpretation is not to judge the truth value of the testimony but rather to consider the political possibilities that rest beneath testimonial statements. For, I will argue, unless these possibilities are engaged with the figure of the woman in Partition will remain an excludable entity – an entity that remains irrelevant to Partition, and thus to the realm of the social itself.

Of course, the possibilities that I point to here are not intended to impose meaning onto these acts, or onto the testimonies. My argument is merely a critical commentary on how the language of Partition violence always already excludes the woman from political, and hence historical relevance, thereby replicating the already existent social configuration. Moreover, this project does not presume to suggest a new ontoepistemological context within which the figure of the woman might transcend her social scientific value – a task far beyond the scope of this project and this author – but rather merely emphasizes it.

### **[Interpretation]**

As is the case with most testimonials, survivor accounts of Partition are filled with emotional contradictions. These contradictions, as I will demonstrate later, function primarily within the space of the friend-enemy dichotomy and are of particular note when investigating the gender subjugation reproduced by Partition testimony. What is at issue here, though, is how one engages Partition testimonies narrating intimate violence. Or more precisely, how does one grasp the political implications that

the contradictions bear on the issue of gender subjugation? To answer this question, I review the field of history and memory studies in order to highlight its limitations in engaging testimony. My critique is based on the concepts of ‘voice’ and ‘speech’ that, when introduced into the framework of testimonial analysis, demonstrate the imperative to read testimony as an active production. Also, this intervention is foundational to my deployment of discourse analysis and psychoanalysis in developing the remainder of this thesis.

A brief survey of the field of history and memory studies demonstrates that much of the work produced, especially as regards witnessing and testimony, emphasizes the power of testimony in disrupting ideas of ‘historical truth’ and revealing, instead, a responsibility towards a personal, or private, truth or reality. This re-direction of ‘truth’ is reflective precisely of the move away from grand politics and towards the ordinary or everyday that Das and Butalia advocate in their work on Partition. This form of productivity of testimonial analysis can be discerned, for instance, in Shoshana Felman’s description of the film *Shoah*, a film she cites as an exemplary testimonial text. *Shoah*, she writes:

... revives the Holocaust with such a power... that it radically displaces and shakes up not only any common notion we might have entertained about it, but our very vision of reality as such, our very sense of what the world, culture, history and our life within it are all about,

But the film is not simply, nor is it primarily, a historical document about the Holocaust. That is why, in contrast to its cinematic predecessors on the subject, it refuses systematically to use any historical, archival footage. ... Rather than a simple view about the past, the film offers a disorienting vision of the present, a compellingly profound and surprising insight into the complexity of the *relation between history and witnessing*.

It is a film about witnessing: ... What is testified to is limit-experience whose overwhelming impact constantly puts to the test limits

of the witness and of witnessing, at the same time that it constantly unsettles and puts into question the very limits of reality.<sup>142</sup>

Studies such as this, that investigate the productivity of giving testimony and bearing witness, particularly within the context of ‘trauma,’ recognize the process as one that constitutes a challenge to sovereign, or historical, power. And, as mentioned above, this process consequently opens up the possibility for an articulation of a more intimate subjective truth – i.e. what Badiou might refer to as ‘evental truth.’ Yet, scholars of trauma studies emphasize that the ‘impossibility’<sup>143</sup> of trauma lies in its inability to be spoken or shared, arguing that it cannot, indeed should not, be addressed directly. Indeed, the language of trauma has thus been constituted through ideas such as ‘the entrapment of words in silence,’ ‘remembering through forgetting,’ the “*encircling of trauma*.”<sup>144</sup> Each of these strategies is meant to preserve the integrity of trauma, to protect it from gentrification,<sup>145</sup> to maintain its impossibility and, in so doing, re-affirm the broken-ness of the subject that emerges from trauma and highlight the ruptures in the supposed linearity of history.

Commenting on this issue, Jenny Edkins writes:

...the process of re-inscription into linear narratives, whilst probably necessary from some points of view – it is argued that telling the story alleviates traumatic stress, for example – is a process that generally depoliticizes, and there is an alternative, that of *encircling the trauma*. We cannot try to address the trauma directly without risking its gentrification. We cannot remember it as something that took place in time, because this would neutralize it. All we can do is ‘to *encircle* again

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<sup>142</sup> Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*, (London/New York: Routledge, 1992), 205.

<sup>143</sup> I use the term ‘impossibility’ to reflect the relationship between language and trauma that Jenny Edkins’ points to. Thus, the impossibility of trauma lies in the fact that for survivors “What we *can* say no longer makes sense; what we *want* to say we can’t. There are no words for it.” Jenny Edkins, *Trauma and the Memory of Politics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 8.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 15, 59.

and again the site' of the trauma, 'to mark it in its very impossibility'. Memory and forgetting are crucial... in keeping open a space for a genuine political challenge by encircling the trauma rather than attempting to gentrify it. The reinstallation of time as linear and the narrating of events as history are central to the process of re-inscription. However, there are forms of memory and memorialisation... that do not produce a linear narrative, but rather retain another notion of temporality. These are ways of encircling the real. (emphasis in original)<sup>146</sup>

Thus, Edkins emphasizes the idea of “*encircling the trauma*” as central to the conditions under which the impossibility of trauma can be rendered a critical site of disruption, wherein “(w)hat has been forgotten... (can) return to haunt the structures of power that instigated the violence in the first place.”<sup>147</sup> In a move slightly away from the idea of “encircling the trauma,” Veena Das provides her own insight into the concept of impossibility of trauma through the powerful imagery of wordless voices and wounded bodies that put themselves on display among the ordinary and the everyday to become embodied monstrosities, themselves signifiers of violence,<sup>148</sup> refusing to take their place in a neat historical timeline, “in history as done and finished with.”<sup>149</sup>

The ‘impossibility’ that Edkins and Das point to, as regards testimony and witnessing, is pivotal in producing what Walter Benjamin has termed a ‘monad’ – a configuration of thought that emerges through the arrest of the smooth flow of thinking, producing a crisis of knowledge and suggesting the existence of a different, troubling historical trace.<sup>150</sup> And it is in this context that the purpose of testimony and witnessing, as described above, is meant to be fulfilled – i.e. a new ‘truth’ is revealed and a new

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>148</sup> Das, *Life and Words*, 102.

<sup>149</sup> Edkins, *Trauma and the Memory*, 59.

<sup>150</sup> Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, (New York: Schocken Books, 1969).

framework for accountability introduced. Now, this is precisely the kind of “new beginning” that Badiou states is central to the conception of ‘event.’ However, I would argue that, unlike the ‘event,’ the underlying principle that guides the formulation of fulfillment in the case of testimony and witnessing is that of ‘authenticity’ – not an ‘authentic’ history, but rather the ‘authenticity’ of ‘feelings,’ of traumatic memories. And, while I do believe in the general productivity of testimonial analysis, my concerns with idea of ‘authenticity,’ as detailed below, determine my move away from the framework of memory and trauma studies, and towards Badiou’s framework of ‘event’ instead.

Testimonial accounts, in the context of memory and trauma studies, are described as “emotionally charged and difficult to listen to. . . . Often they involve a reliving of the events described, producing an account that is not selective, incoherent in many ways, and not designed for any particular audience. Sessions take a long time, and once begun cannot be abbreviated or condensed.”<sup>151</sup> Moreover, ‘bearing witness’ is generally viewed as “an aggressive act. It is born out of a refusal to bow to outside pressure to revise or repress experience, a decision to embrace conflict rather than conformity, to endure a lifetime of anger and pain rather than submit to the seductive pull of revision and repression.”<sup>152</sup> Thus, for instance, Edkins argues that for testimony to achieve its potential, it is the responsibility of witnesses to testimony to accept it “in

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<sup>151</sup> Edkins, *Trauma and the Memory*, 190.

<sup>152</sup> Kali Tal, quoted in *Ibid.*, 191. In this quote, Tal seems to use the phrase ‘bearing witness’ in both possible contexts – referring to a survivor who ‘bears witness’ through testimony, as also to those who, by virtue of ‘receiving’ testimony, are charged with the responsibility of ‘bearing witness.’

all the ambiguity and difficulty of the accounts of those survivors brave enough to give us their stories.”<sup>153</sup>

But, as has already been noted, in the case of trauma, experience exceeds words, that is, the existent linguistic network proves inadequate in efforts to communicate itself (i.e. the impossibility of trauma). Describing the nature of testimony provided by Nazi Holocaust survivors, Jenny Edkins writes:

For survivors, what happened in the camps was the only true thing. The facts of their persecution are so real, nothing is truer. But at the same time, what happened in the camps is unimaginable. It is a reality that exceeds facts. This aporia of historical knowledge, between facts and verification, on the one hand, and truth and comprehension on the other, is the lacuna that forms the very structure of testimony.<sup>154</sup>

Here, testimony is structured not only through speech or gestures, and but also through silences. Hence, to truly ‘bear witness,’ one is required to listen to the survivors ‘voice’ – i.e. to ‘read’ what is said, and more importantly what remains unsaid. But if, as I have suggested, the value of testimony lies in the assumption of ‘authenticity,’ then as per the above definition of the structure of testimony, the ‘voice’ – both, heard and unheard – becomes the fundamental signifier of ‘authenticity.’ Derrida, in his *Of Grammatology*, explains how this idea of the ‘voice’ as signifier of authenticity has come to be.

In terms of the voice-that-is-heard, Derrida suggests that, throughout modern history, this voice, as the carrier of *phonè*, has been privileged as the producer of a subject. Referring to a Hegelian, self-actualizing version of the subject, he writes: “The system of “hearing (understanding) -oneself-speak” through the phonic substance – which *presents itself* as the nonexterior, nonmundane, therefore nonempirical or

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 173.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 177.

noncontingent signifier – has necessarily dominated the history of the world during an entire epoch, and has even produced the idea of the world, the idea of world origin...”<sup>155</sup> This statement rehearses the already widely accepted psychoanalytic definition of the subject, as that which emerges within an already existent symbolic structure. But what it further corroborates is the idea that a subject is constituted primarily through speech. Derrida does so by arguing that the symbolic order within which the subject is produced, itself determined by universal *logos*, is intimately connected to *phonè*. Consequently, we are made to understand the *phonè* as the most proximate signifier of truth or reason – “the essence of the *phonè* would be immediately proximate to that which within “thought” as *logos* relates to the “meaning,” produces it, receives it, speaks it, “composes” it” – and the voice the most authentic signifier of the mind – “the voice, producer of *the first symbols*, has a relation of essential and immediate proximity with the mind. ... It signifies “mental experiences” which themselves reflect or mirror things by natural resemblance.”<sup>156</sup> By extension, we see that the voice is the most authentic signifier of the subject:

The voice is *heard* (understood) ... closest to the self as the absolute effacement of the signifier: pure auto-affection that necessarily has the form of time and which does not borrow from outside itself, in the world or in “reality,” any accessory signifier, any substance of expression foreign to its own spontaneity. It is the unique experience of the signified producing itself spontaneously, from within itself, and nevertheless, as signified concept, in the element of ideality or universality.<sup>157</sup>

This conception of the connection between ‘voice’ and ‘self’ that Derrida describes is particularly productive for understanding the reverence with which testimony is

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<sup>155</sup> Derrida, *On Grammatology*, 7.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

generally treated; for recognizing why it has been viewed as a pure ‘revelation,’ something that must be received but remain untouched, and why silence – viewed not as lack but rather as that which exceeds the voice – must remain uninterrupted.

But the problem with this *phonocentrism* that establishes the ‘purity’ of voice, Derrida argues, is that it falsely posits a unity between the signifier and signified of speech.<sup>158</sup> He critiques this notion by introducing the concept *différance*, a term he describes as “an economic concept designating the production of differing/deferring.”<sup>159</sup> The productivity of this term is that it not only introduces a rupture in the supposed unity of signifier-signified in speech but also highlights how every signifier is in fact a “signifier of the signifier” in a long chain of signifiers.<sup>160</sup> In other words, using *différance* Derrida deconstructs the duality of the Saussurian ‘sign’ by suggesting that the sign is in fact a long chain of signifiers in which the meaning/essence of the signifier is always already ‘deferred’ through the chain to produce ‘differing’ meanings/essences between the signifier and signified of speech. The only signifier that is irreducible to another, Derrida writes, is the transcendental signifier of ‘Being,’ and it is only the ‘Voice of Being’ that can produce pure speech.<sup>161</sup> Thus, by introducing *différance*, Derrida suggests a rupture between speech and voice – where speech is a signifier of the subject and voice of the self.

This rupture is replicated by Lacan in his splitting of the subject of speech into the subject of the statement and the subject of enunciation. Here, the subject of the

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<sup>158</sup> I emphasize “of speech” because, as Derrida points out, there is no supposed unity of signifier and signified in writing. Indeed, he notes that the logic of presence treats writing as a necessarily corrupted or impure form of language, while speech because of its presence maintains its purity.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 20, 22.

statement reproduces its ego in speech, whereas the subject of enunciation reproduces its super-ego. What is of note here is that just as the subject is always already a split-subject, so also speech is always already ruptured. I therefore suggest that testimony must also be treated as a ruptured production and thus must be actively engaged with within the socio-symbolic network in which it is produced and received. This act is what I refer to as ‘interpretation.’ What I am suggesting here is neither an imputation of meaning onto testimony, nor that trauma and testimony should be treated as if they are freely accessible or sharable by all. The danger of ‘gentrification’ that Edkins points to must be taken seriously, as must the fact that trauma exceeds speech and hence is, at least to some extent, unreachable. Yet, this unreachability holds true of all subjects precisely because all speech and all subjects are always already split. I therefore reiterate that testimony, as speech, must be engaged with as an active production, failing which it loses its critical political productivity. The act of interpretation allows one to distinguish between truth at the level of the statement and truth at the level of enunciation. Undoubtedly, excavating enunciative truth is an impossible task for it is always unknowable. Yet, I argue that it is also dangerous to read speech, or testimony, solely at the level of the statement, just as it is problematic to treat speech at the level of the statement as a foil for the truth of enunciation.

I continue this argument into the next section where I describe the prominent ways in which testimony regarding intimate violence is read. I contend that these readings limit the possibility of testimony at the level of the statement and thus retain the ontoepistemological context within which the testimony itself is produced. The remainder of this chapter will then be devoted to providing an alternative reading that

pays heed to the testimony-provider as a subject of enunciation, a subject who cannot emerge from within the rules of discourse.

**[Testimony]**

March 13<sup>th</sup> marks *Shahidi Divas*, or Martyr's Day, for a small community of survivors in Jangpura, New Delhi. Each year, a decreasing number of survivors and a growing number of witnesses gather together to pay homage to the valor of those who sacrificed their lives in 1947. In this section, I will argue that the valorization of women's martyrdom that occurs in recountings of Partition functions so that while women are discursively present in Partition, they are excluded, indeed excludable, from the process of signification that renders Partition a universal signifier of nation/alism.

Most of the survivors and memories that gather in Jangpura to partake in *Shahidi Divas* are from the Rawalpindi district in Pakistan – the district is infamous for its incidents intimate violence, including mass suicides. The evening begins with prayers in memory of the dead, and then proceeds into recountings of the acts of 'honor' and 'martyrdom' undertaken, mostly by women, as they faced the onslaught of a shameless enemy. As the epochal story of Mata Lajjawanti – the woman who led ninety other numerous-nameless women to their deaths by drowning – comes to a close, a *bhajan* rises from some assembled singers:

*sura to pehchaniye  
jo lade din ke het  
purza purza kat mare  
kabhi no chode khet*

know him as the brave one  
who fights against the enemy

let his body be cut into a hundred pieces  
but never will he give up his faith<sup>162</sup>

But the acts of martyrdom referred to here hold significance beyond faith or religion. Indeed, some like Bir Bahadur Singh count the women and children who died as among those who died for the cause of independence. For not only did the deaths protect their *Sikhi*, but they also enabled others to keep living. As Urvashi Butalia notes, “[t]alk of the martyrdom of women is almost always accompanied by talk of those women whose lives were saved, at the cost of those which were lost, and although there may not be any direct condemnation, it is clear that those who got away are in some ways seen as being inferior to those who offered themselves up to death to save their religion.<sup>163</sup> It is for this reason that, for example, Bir Bahadur Singh, while being able to name Maan Kaur as his martyred sister, is unable to similarly recognize Basant Kaur – the woman who was denied martyrdom in the well swollen with bodies – as his mother. “Much easier, then, to speak of a sister who died an ‘honourable’ death, than the mother who survived.”<sup>164</sup>

Partition scholars have argued that the valorization of death acts is possible only when the horror of the act is tamed by eliding the possibility of coercion. Maan Kaur, for instance, was only sixteen at the time of Partition. To what extent, asks Butalia, did this young woman fathom the politics of Partition? How did she understand her ‘martyrdom?’ Did she truly believe that her life was worth the cost of a new nation?<sup>165</sup> Butalia, Das, Ritu Menon, Kamala Bhasin, among others, note that testimonies of

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<sup>162</sup> Butalia, *Other Side of*, 287.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.

<sup>165</sup> Butalia, “A Necessary Journey,” 160.

‘sacrificial’ deaths borne by women during Partition erase the role of coercion in, and the horrific nature of, the enactment of violence. (In fact, it may be argued that for women Partition violence was a continuation, albeit a more devastating form, of everyday violence. In other words, Partition did not create the conditions of possibility for the infliction of violence, but rather exacerbated them.) For Maan Kaur, and hundreds of similarly ‘martyred’ women, then, feelings of fear and hesitation are discounted, while “the waste of (young lives) in the service of a myth called “community” and “nation”” are valorized.<sup>166</sup>

Urvashi Butalia notes three specific reasons that are often cited to help explain the purpose of the ‘sacrificial’ acts: First, that if the women had not committed suicide or been killed, they would have been abducted and converted, a fate equivalent to that of death. Second, the “power of such a supreme sacrifice” would warn of the superior strength and determination of the women to preserve the honor of their faith and thus strike a chord of fear among the enemy. And finally, during a time as exceptional as Partition, the best way for men to protect their dignity was to disallow the enemy, by any means necessary, from violating their women.<sup>167</sup> Explanations such as these, Butalia writes, enable the disavowal of the coercive violence of the acts. Indeed, the role of coercion in the performance of suicidal or familial violence has to some extent been documented. For instance, Gyan Pandey writes of another young girl from Thoa Khalsa – the site of Maan Kaur’s and Mata Lajjawanti’s deaths – whose cousin attempted to coerce her into joining a group of women preparing to drown themselves;

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>167</sup> Butalia, *Other Side of*, 166.

yet she and some other women escaped that fate, she with the assistance of her brother and mother.<sup>168</sup> Yet, of course, the narratives of these women who escaped – not only their own families but also the enemy-other – are visibly absent from Partition narratives. And while assertions of “not a girl of ours was taken away, not a single Sikh gave up his (her religion)” are celebrated, the valor of those that escaped, that protected themselves through their own doings, is rarely, if ever, mentioned. My argument is that whether the sacrifice of women is valorized, or the escape of women is silenced, the testimonial discourse in both cases may not be intended merely to mask coercion, but rather that the ontoepistemological context in which the discourse is produced disallows any other possibility for the figure of the woman. What this also implies is that the stated motivations that Butalia points to as regards acts of intimate violence, while possibly true at the level of the statement, need not be treated as true at the level of enunciation. I will further this argument in the last two sections of this chapter. For now, however, I elaborate on the figure of the woman as a global/historical subject in order to demonstrate the discursive conditions under which the woman is allowed to emerge in Partition narratives.

### **[Figure of the Woman]**

Throughout this thesis I have argued that women are not merely excluded from Partition discourse but are in fact excludable; that even when testimonies recall women, the language of these recollections continues to render the stories of women expendable. Moreover using the global/historical framework, I have asserted that this

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<sup>168</sup> Pandey, *Remembering Partition*, 193.

expendability is rooted in the ontoepistemological context within which the figure of the woman is allowed to emerge. In this section I demonstrate how the mutual workings of the political and the intimate spheres ground this context, and argue that the exclusion of women from the universal signifier of Partition will cause an ethical crisis, if and only if women are viewed as political subjects. In order to make this argument, I juxtapose the formulation of the friend-dynamic as the foundation of political existence with the functionings of the sexual contract. I turn here to Derrida's *Politics of Friendship* and Carole Pateman's *The Sexual Contract*.

Following Carl Schmitt's *Concept of the Political*, Derrida views the friend-enemy dynamic, and more significantly, the figure of the enemy, as crucial to the functioning of the political. The function of the figure of the friend as well as that of the enemy is deeply political. The figure of the enemy is that which prevents society from descending into mad, lawless violence. As Derrida writes,

Losing the enemy would not necessarily be progress, reconciliation, or the opening of an era of peace and human fraternity. It would be worse: an unheard-of violence, the evil of a malice knowing neither measure nor ground, an unleashing incommensurable in its unprecedented – therefore monstrous – forms; a violence in the face of what is called hostility, war, conflict, enmity, cruelty, even hatred, would regain reassuring and ultimately appeasing contours, because they would be *identifiable*. The figure of the enemy would then be helpful... because of the features which allow it to be *identified* as such... An identifiable enemy – that is, one who is *reliable* to the point of treachery, and thereby familiar.<sup>169</sup>

And while the figure of the enemy is socially crucial, that of the friend extends also into the politics of the self.

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<sup>169</sup> Derrida, *On Grammatology*, 83.

Appropriating the work of philosophers like Aristotle and Cicero, Derrida writes that we create our friends in the image of ourselves. In other words, the bond of friendship enables one to create an *exemplar*:

[T]he friend is, as the translation has it, ‘our own ideal image.’ We envisage the friend as such. And this is how he envisages us: with a friendly look. Cicero uses the word *exemplar*, which means portrait but also, as the *exemplum*, the duplicate, the reproduction, the copy as well as the original, the type, the model. ... Now according to Cicero, his *exemplar* is projected or recognized in the true friend, it is his ideal double, his other self, the same as self but improved.<sup>170</sup>

The point to note here is simple: the construction of friend and enemy enables the drawing of lines that guide social and political action. Yet, what is interesting specifically about Derrida’s analysis of the friend-enemy dynamic is that it not only addresses the role of friend and enemy within the social, but it also opens up the possibility of bringing this analysis into the realm of the intimate. For instance, Derrida’s *Politics of Friendship* argues that the bond, the love, that we experience for our ideal selves, for the friend, cannot be a possessive love, a love that “always hopes for new property.”<sup>171</sup> Rather, he argues that friendship must be guided by *lovence* – i.e. the act of loving rather than the desire to be loved. And it is because of *lovence*, and through *lovence*, that a true friend renounces friendship in the name of friendship:

[T]he sage, for friendship’s sake – this is what makes him a sage – takes on the disguise of a fool, and, for friendship’s sake, disguises his friendship in enmity. But what is he hiding? His enmity, for the coldness and lucidity of his true nature are to be feared only where they may hurt and reveal some aggressivity. In sum, the sage presents himself as an enemy in order to conceal his enmity. And why does he take such pains? Out of friendship for mankind, philanthropic sociability. His pose consists... *in feigning to be precisely what he is*, in telling the truth to conceal the truth and especially to neutralize its deadly effect, to protect

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 65.

others from it. *He loves them enough not to want to do them all the evil he wants for them. He loves them too much for that.* (emphasis in original)<sup>172</sup>

Similarly, in the case of the enemy, Derrida argues for a transformation of enmity to friendship – i.e. from enmity to the need or desire for the enemy, that is, to intimacy.<sup>173</sup> The reason I find this formulation productive is because it (re-)affirms the space of kinship, or of the intimate, not as an a-political entity but rather as the locus of the political. And, as I will demonstrate here, Derrida’s formulation of friend and enemy also re-affirms a critique of the sexual contract which argues that the excludability of women from the sphere of the social is in fact a reproduction of their exclusion even within the context of the intimate.

In *The Sexual Contract*, Carole Pateman contends that despite apparent progress towards sexual equality, women are always already positioned as political *objects* vis-à-vis the State. Her argument is based on a critique of the play between the social contract and the sexual contract in the founding and sustenance of modern society. Pateman asserts that while the ‘original,’ or founding, contract – i.e. the ‘contract’ whereby it is supposed that “inhabitants of the state of nature exchange the insecurities of natural freedom for equal, civil freedom which is protected by the state”<sup>174</sup> – is in fact a socio-sexual contract; that the sexual dimensions of the contract have merely been disappeared from sociopolitical consciousness. Of course, the ‘sexual contract’ is a serious misnomer because, as she points out, the precondition for a being to be party to a contract is that they be ‘individuals’ – i.e. that, in the state of nature, they be born free

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<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>174</sup> Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 2.

and equal to others. Women can never satisfy this pre-condition because, even in the state of nature, women are considered subordinate to, and dependent upon, men. Thus, a woman can never be party to a contract.

Furthermore, the initiation of the ‘sexual contract,’ far from elevating women to the status of equals, is anchored in, and perpetuates, the status of women as subordinate. The function of the sexual contract is two-fold – in transforming the natural right of men over women into a “civil patriarchal right,”<sup>175</sup> it not only secures the obedience of women unto men within the confines of the family, but, by extension, also secures the political position/rights of men within the civil sphere:

The social contract story requires that some clear indication is present that women are part of civil society and capable of entering the contracts (slaves must be seen as part of humanity). Women must enter into the marriage contract. But the sexual contract requires that women are incorporated into civil society on a different basis from men. Men create patriarchal civil society and the new social order is structured into two spheres. The private sphere is separated from civil public life; the private sphere both is and is not part of civil society – and women both are and are not part of the civil order. Women are not incorporated as ‘individuals’ but as women, which, in the story of the original contract, means as natural subordinates (slaves are property). The original contract can be upheld, and men can receive acknowledgement of their patriarchal right, only if women’s subjection is secured in civil society.<sup>176</sup>

Pateman argues that the repression of the sexual contract within contemporary society enables a false division between the two social spheres, i.e. the civil, or political sphere and the private sphere that is deemed to have no political significance. Consequently, women are always already barred from political subjectivity. I would further argue that, even in its most progressive form, the most that a sexual contract might achieve is the

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<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 180.

installation of women as *minor* political subjects. Indeed, so long as the idea of the sexual contract is reified, it remains the only possible avenue whereby women may participate in the social contract, and consequently it sustains the status of women as subordinate, or *minor*, to men. Furthermore, so long as the sexual contract persists, women who attempt to circumvent it and become party to the social contract on their own terms, will always be viewed as masculinized deviants – a mindset that is extremely palpable in the context of contemporary debates on issues concerning women such as same-sex marriage, women who choose not to marry, unwed or single mothers, etc.

Thus, the sexual, or socio-sexual, contract makes the figure of the woman recognizable only within the sphere of the family, and even then only as a *minor*, excludable, subject. Moreover, the ‘love’ directed at women is constituted through desire, i.e. a love that wishes to possess, to own more property. This is not the love, or *lovence*, that enables the politics of friendship. Indeed, given that the figure of the friend is positioned as *exemplar* of the self, the socio-sexual contract that at most allows women the status of *minor* subject, bars the woman from the sphere of friendship. And it is precisely here that Derrida and Pateman converge; for Derrida too asserts that friendship – true, political, friendship – is never accessible to women. Instead, he writes, “the figure of the friend, so regularly coming back on stage with the features of the brother... seems spontaneously to belong to a *familial, fraternalist* and thus *androcentric* configuration of politics” (emphasis in original).<sup>177</sup> Indeed, the figure of the woman sits uncomfortably whether as friend or as enemy. For, if the purpose of the

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<sup>177</sup> Derrida, *On Grammatology*, viii.

woman is to enable the male subject his ascension to the social, then she is merely an object – a precious object, one that may not be relinquished, but yet an object.

Consequently, within the ontoepistemological context of modernity, the woman is merely culturally relevant – where culture is that state of being that precedes what is alternately known as the social, the civil and the political. And it precisely this cultural-only relevance that makes women excludable from Partition – an event that has become a universal signifier of nation/alism. But in order for women to be not only included, but inexcludable, from Partition requires a re-thinking of women as *major* political subjects. In the following two sections I offer precisely such a re-thinking, thereby demonstrating that the explanations of intimate violence listed by Butalia play to the always already irrelevant position of women within the intimate and the social.

**[*Beloved*]**

During a conversation with Urvashi Butalia, Basant Kaur – the mother of Bir Bahadur Singh and Maan Kaur, the woman who was unable to drown herself in a well satiated with bodies – talks of her time with Mata Lajjawanti, as she and tens of other women contemplated their impending fate:

Then we all talked and said we don't want to become Mussalmaan, we would rather die. So everyone was given a bit of afim, they were told you keep this with you... I went upstairs, and when I came down there was my husband, my jeth's son, my jethani, her daughters, my jeth, my grandsons, three granddaughters. They were all killed so that they would not fall into the hands of Mussalmaans.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> Butalia, *Other Side of*, 157.

Recalling similar incidents of intimate violence and mass suicides in Thoa Khalsa, Bir Bahadur states:

Yes, many women were still left in our village. Mostly our family women died, and then the ones who jumped into the well. But the others were saved. Because the Mussalmaans saw they were killing themselves. The ones who sacrificed... if the one of our family had not been killed, and those who jumped into the well had not taken their own lives, the ones who were left alive would not be alive today.<sup>179</sup>

Testimonies such as these epitomize the explanations for intimate violence that Butalia cites. To recap, the explanations cited are as follows: that if women had not committed suicide or been killed, they would have been abducted and converted, a fate equivalent to that of death; that the power of a “supreme sacrifice” would warn of the superior strength and determination of the women to preserve the honor of their faith and thus strike a chord of fear among the enemy; and finally, that during a time as exceptional as Partition, the best way for men to protect their dignity was to disallow the enemy, by any means necessary, from violating their women. But, as I have already argued, these explanations appear to consider testimony only at the level of the statement. Moreover, such explanations sit well with the ontoepistemological context in which they are produced – i.e. where the figure of the woman is primarily a cultural being and not a political subject. In this section, I first describe how discourse and context converge in order to fix woman as a political object. Next, in order to disrupt this context I consider the political possibilities that the testimonies might hold at the level of enunciation. This section focuses solely on these possibilities with respect to the act of killing. Incidents of mass suicide will be analyzed in the following section.

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 166.

Of the three explanations listed above, one suggests that if women did not commit suicide or were not killed, they would be abducted and converted, a fate equivalent to that of death. What this argument alludes to is the possibility of, and a refusal to accept, social death. The concept of social death is especially stark with respect to the condition of slavery. According to Orlando Patterson, a slave embodied social death because “he ceased to belong in his own right to any legitimate social order.”<sup>180</sup> Similarly, in the case of women, the workings of the sexual contract relegate them to the edge of social death. A woman’s social existence is mediated through the figure of the patriarch, without which she may have no social existence whatsoever and is returned to the state of nature. Thus, the loss of the patriarch – the proper patriarch – implies social death. The idea of the ‘proper patriarch’ is crucial to understanding the political implications of social death and intimate violence within the context of Partition.

The advent of Independence, which brought with it the creation of two separate nation-states, marked a replacement of the law of the colonizer with the Law of the nation-state. The ‘nation’ became what Homi Bhabha calls a pedagogical object constructed to “signifying the people as an a priori historical presence”<sup>181</sup> so that the new Law of the nation-state imposed the definition of ‘nation’ as the ‘natural home’ of specific peoples, defined along communal lines – India for the Hindus (and other non-Muslims) and Pakistan for the Muslims. Partition caused this law to be forced upon unwilling subjects, so that, as Rosemary George notes in her piece on the

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<sup>180</sup> Quoted in Pateman, *The Sexual Contract*, 64.

<sup>181</sup> Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 211.

“(Extra)Ordinary Violence” of Partition, “the birth of two nations...cannot be separated from the birth of two diasporas, which are wrenched from one home to a more “fitting” home.”<sup>182</sup> The deep cut that the nation created right across the social thus produced profoundly dislocated beings. For, as one nation threatened to *push* people out for not belonging, another was *pulling* them away by enforcing national loyalty to a place elsewhere. This dynamic, I suggest, produced liminal subjects caught between the colonial and postcolonial condition. In other words, as the nation-state took on the role of the colonizing power, more so did the figure of the other, imagined as the embodiment of the new colonial power. Consequently, it may be argued that the ideas of family and religious community took on a whole new significance, the protection of which became crucial for the maintenance of social order. And what this implied, too, was that the preservation of women within the proper space of kinship, determined by the Law of the proper patriarch, was absolutely crucial not only for the preservation of social order, but, arguably, also to preclude any possibility of social death.

Yet, the political significance of intimate violence becomes far more complex than the preemption of social death, if one considers also the explanation that the deaths, horrific as they were, were aimed at demonstrating the superior strength and determination of the women to preserve the honor of their faith, thereby striking fear among the enemy. In the *Fragile Absolute*, Slavoj Žižek argues that the most destructive power that an enemy other may exert is by threatening objects that one holds

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<sup>182</sup> Rosemary George, “(Extra)Ordinary Violence: National Literatures, Diasporic Aesthetics and the Politics of Gender in South Asian Partition Fiction,” *SIGNS*, 33:1 (2007), 140.

to be precious. The act of destroying that precious object, then, is a radical act of liberation from the power of the enemy. In a situation of forced choice, writes Zizek:

the subject makes the ‘crazy’ impossible choice of, in a way, *striking at himself*, at what is most precious to himself. This act, far from amounting to a case of impotent aggressivity turned against oneself, rather changes the co-ordinates of the situation in which the subject finds himself: by cutting himself loose from the precious object through whose possession the enemy kept him in check, the subject gains the space of free action. (emphasis in original)<sup>183</sup>

Thus, the act of killing is of political consequence not so much to the sacrificed as it is to the sacrificer. In the case of Partition, then, whether the act of killing was done to preempt social death, or whether it was enacted as a radical gesture to “gain the space of free action,” the sacrificed being – i.e. the woman – continues to be positioned as the political object, pawn even, of decidedly masculinist acts. That is, in either case, the intimate violence executed by male subjects was performed with the sole intention of maintaining the proper (andro-hetero-centric) social order.

There is, however, another way of reading intimate violence. As described above, the act of killing appears to abide by the Law – i.e. the force of reason and morality. However, instead of being viewed as an act of Law, it is also possible to read it as an act of Love. Consider again the conditions produced by Partition. I have already argued that, just as Partition, or the moment of partitioning, itself lay on the cusp of the colonial and post-colonial, it also produced subjects caught between the colonial and postcolonial condition. Within the context of this liminal existence, Gyan Pandey suggests that the spread of news during the time of Partition took on the characteristics of rumor. Under conditions of heightened anxiety, he explains, “rumor feeds on

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<sup>183</sup> Slavoj Zizek, *The Fragile Absolute*, (London/New York: Verso, 2000), 150.

itself...escalating in repetition, becoming part of the violence and serving to produce new kinds of truth.”<sup>184</sup> Thus, descriptions of violent incidents, that were essentially hearsay, took on a common structure of narrating chaos and brutality, a structure that soon became part of the circumstances and discourses that framed Partition.<sup>185</sup> More significantly, Pandey argues that the spread of “news” through hearsay:

favored the spread of false reports, the distortion and exaggeration of facts, the growth of legends...In the empty silences [of waiting] every word had the most extraordinary resonance and was taken as gospel. In due course, the rumour would reach the ear of the journalist who would imbue it with new strength by putting it into print.<sup>186</sup>

Thus, through the involvement of media, the “indeterminacy, anonymity and contagion” of rumors, primarily of violence, became translated into certainty. And for those living through the uncertainty of Partition, violence became the only certainty, and the fear, or hatred, of the other, and consequently the fear of social death, took on terrifying proportions. Under these conditions, I argue that the act of killing may be read as an act of Love, rather than Law.

In the *Fragile Absolute*, Žizek argues that obedience to the Law is always haunted by the desire to transgress it:

our obedience to the Law itself is not ‘natural,’ spontaneous, but *always-already mediated by the (repression of the) desire to transgress the Law*. When we do obey the Law, we do so as part of a desperate strategy to fight against our own desire to transgress it, so the more vigorously we *obey* the Law, the more we bear witness to the fact that, deep within ourselves, we feel the pressure of the desire to indulge in sin. (emphasis in original)<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> Pandey, *Remembering Partition*, 73.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>187</sup> Žizek, *Fragile Absolute*, 142.

Recall that kinship is defined through the masculine Law of the Father (charged with maintaining familial Order in service of the state) and the feminine Love of the Mother (charged with producing sons to sacrifice in service of the state). Thus, to obey the Law is to execute the violence inherent in these definitions. But when the love of the father supercedes the Law, that act of love is in fact a transgressive act. More significantly though, this transgression, instead of reinforcing the act as ‘masculine,’ renders it ‘feminine.’

In his discussion of Toni Morrison’s novel *Beloved*, Žizek argues that the mother Sethe – who attempted to kill her children, and succeeded in killing one, in order to protect them from slavery – performs a radical politicization of the ethical. Relegated to the sphere of kinship, women are considered bearers of the ethical, a position that requires them to stay outside the political. Indeed, women cannot be trusted within the political realm because of their supposed *affectability* – “women are what they are by nature,”<sup>188</sup> instinctive, impulsive, non-thinking creatures. Within this definition of woman, especially a black woman, Sethe’s act is read as brutally primitive. However, discussing Sethe’s character, Toni Morrison remarks that in attempting to kill her children, “Sethe is claiming her role as a parent, claiming the autonomy, the freedom she needs to protect her children and give them some dignity.”<sup>189</sup> Thus, writes Žizek, through the act of killing, of sacrificing her children, Sethe in fact demonstrates a fidelity to them. Moreover, it is this suspension that constitutes the radical ethics of Sethe’s act:

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<sup>188</sup> Pateman, *Sexual Contract*, 176.

<sup>189</sup> Žizek, *Fragile Absolute*, 153.

In the modern ethical constellation, ...one *suspends this exception of the Thing*: one bears witness to the Thing by *sacrificing (also) the Thing itself*. ...And is this not the very unbearable crux of Sethe's act – that she killed her children *out of her very fidelity to them*, not as a 'primitive' act of brutal sacrificing to some obscure superego gods? Without this suspension, there is no ethical act proper. (emphasis in original)<sup>190</sup>

But this ethical act, is also inherently political *and feminine*:

In contrast to this ('masculine') universality of the struggle for power that relies on the ethical figure of the Woman as its inherent exception, the ('feminine') ethical act proper involves precisely the *suspension* of this exception: it takes place in the *intersection* of ethics and politics, in the uncanny domain in which ethics is 'politicized' in its innermost nature, an affair of radically contingent decisions, a gesture that can no longer be accounted for in terms of fidelity to some pre-existing Cause, since it redefines the very terms of the Cause.

...the 'feminine' ethical act involves precisely the suspension of this boundary [between the 'feminine' ethical and 'masculine' political] – that is to say it has the structure of a *political* decision. Yet, what makes Sethe's act so monstrous is the 'suspension of the ethical' involved in it, and this suspension *is* 'political' in the precise sense of an abyssal excessive gesture that can no longer be grounded in 'common human considerations.' (emphasis in original)<sup>191</sup>

Thus, it may be argued that, under the conditions of Partition, the Father, or the male subject, as sovereign exercised his sovereignty not in the name of Law, but rather in the name of love and fidelity, an act that stripped him of his 'masculine' power and replaced it with a radical 'feminine' ethical-political subjectivity.

Interestingly, this radical ethical-political subjectivity is similar to the kind of 'true friendship' that Derrida alludes to – i.e. the renunciative friendship guided by *lovence*. Thus, what this re-reading of intimate violence achieves is a re-inscribing of the figure of the woman as friend, indeed as *exemplar*. For, an act of love that demands a suspension of the ethical, that demands an uncompromising fidelity to the *Thing*, is an

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<sup>190</sup> Ibid., 154.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 155.

act of the truest recognition. And it is this recognition of another, as *exemplar*, that constitutes a friendship that lasts beyond death:

Friendship provides numerous advantages, notes Cicero, but none is comparable to this unequalled hope, to this ecstasy towards a future which will go beyond death. Because of death, and because of this unique passage beyond life, friendship thus offers us a hope that has nothing in common, besides the name, with any other.<sup>192</sup> ...

Since we watch him [the true friend] looking at us, thus watching ourselves, because we see him keeping our image in his eyes – in truth in ours – survival is then hoped for, illuminated in advance, if not assured, for this Narcissus who dreams of immortality.<sup>193</sup>

Thus, in the case of Partition, as in the case *Beloved*, the sacrificer recognizes the (to-be-)sacrificed as friend, and performs the act of killing in the name of an immortal friendship. In doing so, the sacrificer allows themselves to be offered up as victim to an ever-present yet temporarily-suspended ethical guilt. As Bir Bahadur says of his father, “A father who kills his daughter, how much a victim, how helpless he must be...”<sup>194</sup>

Yet, as I have already argued, neither the ethical nor the ontoepistemological context of modernity allows the figure of the woman to emerge as a political subject – or as friend – in Partition discourse. Thus, in order to create the space for the woman to emerge as a political subject, it becomes necessary to consider the enunciative possibilities of testimony – i.e. possibilities that testimony, at the level of statement, might belie. I continue this process in the next section where I consider incidents of mass suicide.

### [*Antigone*]

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<sup>192</sup> Derrida, *On Grammatology*, 3.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>194</sup> Butalia, *Other Side of*, 168.

The figure of the woman, as we already know, is never meant to act within the political. And even if and when she does become visible outside of the private, her acts may never be construed as political, or else they are marked as deviant. As Judith Butler notes, when writing of the figure of Antigone, when a woman attempts to step outside of the space of kinship, she:

perverts the universal [nature of the juridico-political realm], making the state into possessions and ornaments for the family, decorating the family with the paraphernalia of the state, making banners and shawls out of the state apparatus. This perversion of universality has no political implications. Indeed, “womankind” does not act politically but constitutes a perversion and privatization of the political sphere, a sphere governed by universality.<sup>195</sup>

Consequently when violence is performed by women within the social, the acts are read as a product of *affectability* – a violence that is primal, instinctual, deviant. Violence, to the extent that it is considered politically and historically productive, can never be ascribed to women. In this section, I address the issue of ‘mass suicides’ performed by women during Partition by first demonstrating how terms such as ‘martyrdom’ that are used to describe these acts replay gender subjection. Following this discussion, I present what Partition discourse might look like if the patriarchal monopoly on violence was disabled.

Referring to the acts of violence committed by and upon women during Partition, Bir Bahadur Singh states:

I think really all honour to those people who killed their own children, who jumped into wells. And they saved us... you take any household of martyrs, and you will find it will take root and grow. Blood is such a thing, that as you water a plant, a tree, so also the tree grows, so does the martyr’s household. ...My mother would weep all day when she

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<sup>195</sup> Judith Butler, *Antigone’s Claim. Kinship Between Life and Death*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 35.

remembered those incidents. She would cry, almost sing the dukhan about her family. All day long she would cry. But Vahe Guru must have heard her. Now we are three brothers, we all have children, I have five boys, grandchildren, we have a good, large family and now my mother complains that she isn't even able to sleep because there is no peace in the family! So you should be happy that fate has turned this miracle for you.<sup>196</sup>

The productivity ascribed to violence here is primarily of a reproductive nature – i.e. the death of some women enabled the life of many more. The productivity of these death acts, thus, is sited not in the realm of the political but rather solely within the private and supposedly a-political realm of kinship. Consequently, while the term ‘martyr’ generally holds political implications, in the case of Partition, and with particular regard to women, the term becomes stripped of the political, it is rendered docile. And in this rendering of the word ‘martyr,’ the acts themselves become stripped of any violent possibilities. In fact, referring to the patriarchal monopoly on violence, Butalia remarks:

One of the myths about violence of the sort we have seen in Partition is that it is largely male: that women, in times of sectarian strife, are the victims of violence, not its perpetrators, not its agents. Much of this is, however, predicated on how we understand such violence: I believe that our notions of violence are so patriarchal that we find it difficult to think in terms of women, those custodians of the domestic sphere, as violent beings.<sup>197</sup>

Thus, in Partition discourse, violent acts committed upon, and especially by, women become valorized in a domestic sense – a heroic act yet one that is politically and historically irrelevant.

I argue here, however, that when these acts of violence are considered beyond the level of the statement, we are able to see the figure of woman as a political subject –

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<sup>196</sup> Butalia, *Other Side of*, 191.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*, 169.

one who is inexcludable from the social. I believe that the act of ‘interpretation’ I am about to undertake is important, because, as Butler notes, a subject cannot be viewed as author of their own acts – indeed as a subject with political sovereignty – unless they themselves are allowed to claim the acts. Arguing this point with reference to the figure of Antigone, Butler writes:

Antigone comes, then, to act in ways that are called manly not only because she acts in defiance of the law but also because she assumes the voice of the law in committing the act against the law. She not only does the deed, refusing to obey the edict, but she does it again by refusing to deny that she has done it, thus appropriating the rhetoric of agency from Creon himself. Her agency emerges precisely through her refusal to honor this command, and yet the language of this refusal assimilates the very terms of sovereignty that she refuses. He expects that his word will govern her deeds, and she speaks back to him, countering his sovereign speech act by asserting her own sovereignty. The claiming becomes an act that reiterates the act that it affirms, extending the act of insubordination by performing its avowal in language. ... thus her authority is gained through the appropriation of the authoritative voice of the one she resists, an appropriation that has within it traces of a simultaneous refusal and assimilation of that very authority.<sup>198</sup>

Given the absent voices of most of the women who died during Partition, my analysis investigates what the political meaning of the claiming of suicidal acts by women might look like. In the argument below, I demonstrate how, through suicidal acts, women did in fact appropriate the voice of the law even as they defied it, thereby performing ‘manly acts.’

In the previous section I have already argued that the moment of partitioning, occurring as it did at the cusp of the colonial and postcolonial, engendered circumstances under which the maintenance of Order implied the maintenance of proper structures of kinship. In this context, the act of killing may be read as that committed in

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<sup>198</sup> Butler, *Antigone's Claim*, 11.

obedience to the Law. At issue, then, is how this formulation of the preservation of Social Order might apply to women who committed acts of suicide. Referring to the self-sacrificing figure of Antigone, Žižek writes:

In the traditional (premodern) act, the subject sacrifices everything (all ‘pathological’ things) for the Cause-Thing that matters to him more than life itself... Here the structure is that of the Kantian Sublime: the overwhelming infinity of sacrificed empirical/pathological objects brings home in a negative way the enormous, incomprehensible dimension of the Thing for which one sacrifices them. So [for instance] Antigone is sublime in her sad enumeration of what she is sacrificing – this list, in its enormity, indicates the transcendent contours of the Thing to which she retains her unconditional fidelity.<sup>199</sup>

Similarly, it may be argued that, in the case of Partition, the women who committed suicide did so as a gesture or expression of fidelity to kinship. But, even while they acted in the name of kinship, their acts transgressed the norms of kinship and gender. For, the act of safeguarding the proper structures of kinship – an act that is crucial to the proper functioning of the state – is the prerogative of the male subject. In appropriating the role properly belonging to the male subject, the women who committed suicide “assume(d) the voice of the law (even as they) committed the act against the law.”<sup>200</sup> This dual relationship that women have with the law – of opposition through appropriation – is precisely what renders their suicidal acts political. For, just as Butler remarks about Antigone, the power of the women who committed suicide during Partition lies in “the social deformation of both idealized kinship and *political sovereignty* that emerges as a consequence of (their) act(s)” (emphasis added).<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> Žižek, *Fragile Absolute*, 154.

<sup>200</sup> Butler, *Antigone's Claim*, 11.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

Thus, it may be argued that in the case of Partition, women were not merely passive victims of violence, but rather, their acts constituted a radical reallocation of gender roles. To do so would require that the acts of suicide committed by women be considered as positive gestures – violent *and* political. This form of reading would allow, as Butalia suggests, our understanding of violence to be shorn of its patriarchal construction, and for women to be re-cast as productive agents of violence, instead of mere instruments – willing or otherwise – of social production.

### **[Conclusion]**

My thesis for this chapter has been that the discursive moment of Partition – a crucial moment in the process of signification that renders Partition as a universal signifier of nation/alism – reproduces the conditions of gender subjugation. Moreover, I have also demonstrated that traditional readings of Partition discourse, even those that critique the absence of the figure of the woman, themselves replay the ontoepistemological context of modernity that casts the woman as historically and politically irrelevant, and hence excludable from the event of Partition. Thus, by paying heed to the figure of the woman as a global/historical being, I have presented an alternate reading of Partition testimony that demonstrates what Partition might look like if women were positioned as political subjects. I follow here the strategy of ‘interpretation’ that opens up the space for separating truth at the level of statement from truth at the level of enunciation. Of course, the need to pay attention to the enunciative level of testimony extends beyond merely attempting a re-figuration of woman. Indeed, the strategy of interpretation is significant because the rules of

discourse, through which the subject of the statement emerges, are unable to capture the truth as understood by the subject of enunciation.

One of questions I posed at the beginning to this thesis was what is the significance in the difference in language used when talking about intimate violence versus communal violence. I referred to Butalia's travel with Bir Bahadur Singh to Pakistan in 2000, where she noted his hesitancy, or lack of interest, in addressing the death of his sister, Maan Kaur. According to Butalia, Singh appeared to be focused singularly on recuperating friendships with people across the border. In a conversation with Butalia a few years prior to their 2000 journey, Bir Bahadur explained his remorse with respect to the violence that occurred between friends. Referring to Sikh/Hindu-Muslim violence he said:

I am not saying that you should change your religion and become a Musalmaan, after all, religion has its own place, but what I am saying is that humanity also has a place and we simply removed that, pushed it aside as if it did not exist. ... By separating they did a good thing [referring to the creation of Pakistan]. We were not capable of living with them. And all the punishment we have had at their hands, the beatings they have given us, that is the result of all this. Otherwise real brothers and sisters don't kill and beat each other up. After all, we also had some sin in us... to hate someone so much, to have so much hate inside you for someone... how can humanity forgive?<sup>202</sup>

This expression of remorse is strikingly different from Bir Bahadur Singh's testimony that sites 'martyred' women as life-givers, where the futility of martyrdom is not cited, and the extent of its productivity is fixed firmly within the domestic sphere. This distinctly reflects the workings of friendship described earlier in this chapter. Following Derrida's definition of friendship not only as andro-centric, but also as one that survives

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<sup>202</sup> Butalia, *Other Side of*, 178.

time, speaking of violence between friends leaves open the possibility for re-inventing or renewing the bond of friendship. But, as has been demonstrated, the possibility for friendship is always already closed to women. Moreover, what is at stake in friendship is something beyond the hope of immortality – friendship provides a point of entry back into humanity. For, if a friend is the image of the self, then the bond of friendship enables recognition of the self once again as human. Given the workings of friendship, I would argue that for Bir Bahadur Singh, the point of entry back into humanity was achievable only through reconciliation with his Muslim (male) friends.

This chapter stresses how this form of discursive gendering is produced by a gendered social. Yet, what it also argues is that, while the answer to the question posed earlier partially lies in the political expendability of the figure of the woman, the question itself also allows for an opening up of the political, one that might be achieved through the strategy of ‘interpretation.’

## Conclusion

It is not legitimate, then, to demand, point-blank, of the texts that one is studying their title to originality, and whether they really possess those degrees of nobility that are measured here by the absence of ancestors. The question can have meaning only in very precisely defined series, in groups whose limits and domain have been established, between guide-lines that delimit sufficiently homogenous discursive fields. But to seek in the great accumulation of the already-said the text that resembles ‘in advance’ a later text, to ransack history in order to rediscover the play of anticipations or echoes, to go right back to the first seeds or to go forward to the last traces, to raise or lower its stock of originality, to say that the Port-Royal grammarians invented nothing, or to discover that Cuvier had more predecessors than one thought, these are harmless enough amusements for historians who refuse to grow up.<sup>203</sup>

Foucault was undoubtedly referring here to something of far greater gravity and accomplishment than my thesis. Yet, when I first read this paragraph – months too long ago to remember, at one of those inevitable moments of graduate student self-doubt, questioning whether my work was actually saying something, leave alone something ‘original’ – from Foucault’s words emerged a smile, and an easy escape for the desolate scholar hiding somewhere within me. For, as far as he is concerned, the search for originality is the work of “historians who refuse to grow up.” And who am I to argue with Foucault?

Of course, my interpretation of Foucault’s argument was simplistic then, but looking at it again now, it still offers a sense of vindication. As I initiated this project, I had in mind a simple goal – to address the issues of violence and gender as they played out in *Partition*. But as I began to engage with *Partition* literature, I realized that the

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<sup>203</sup> Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, 144.

things I wanted to say had already been said, by many people and in ways far better than I probably ever could. But beneath the sense of hopelessness that had begun to descend on me, lay a nagging sense of incompleteness, an inarticulable *something* that I felt was missing. But, as Avery Gordon suggests, the work of a scholar – or any individual, for that matter – is to chase ghosts... and so I chased mine. The arduous process of following numerous traces and coming up, most often, empty handed, led finally to this piece of work – a work that has numerous ancestors, and probably very few, if any, progeny; yet a work that provides just one more story to the discursive field of Partition. And as always, the limitations of this work are many.

- As readers might already have observed, most of the testimonies used here are from Sikh survivors of Partition. This is because I have relied heavily on the work by scholars of Indian descent. Political tensions and mistrust between India and Pakistan make it difficult for scholars to cross boundaries even to do research. Moreover, for various reasons, these scholars have also chosen to do their research in North India – around Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and Punjab areas. Given that, in the Northwest, a significant proportion of the partitioning occurred within Punjab, a stronghold for Sikhs and Muslims, most survivors on the Indian side tend to be of Punjabi and Sikh descent. Yet, it is my belief that, thematically, these testimonies are in fact ‘representative’ of Partition discourse, as it is currently known. Of course, most of my sources of testimony have a similar project, and rely on each other as well; thus, undoubtedly, there are other narratives out there yet waiting to be captured.

- In terms of intimate violence, I have focused only on the figure of the woman since that is the mission of this work. However, as Butalia's work demonstrates, the narratives of children and of Dalits ('untouchables') are also missing from Partition. I believe that looking at these testimonies would broaden my understanding/critique of the ways in which discourse institutes Partition as a universal signifier, and I hope to be able to do so as I continue this work. Moreover, something that I have purposefully left out of this project is the incidence of intimate violence executed upon men. Again, I do not think that this omission undercuts the main arguments I present in this thesis. However, I do think that an inclusion of these occurrences would significantly complicate how one understands the productivity of intimate violence and intimate violence discourse. This is especially true when considering the operation of the politics of friendship, and how the events of intimate and communal violence operate in conjunction with each other.
  
- I situate this work within the field of, and as a critique of, postcolonial studies. Yet, I believe that Partition cannot be read merely as a post-colonial event. I argued in Chapter 3 of this thesis that Partition lies as the cusp of the colonial and post-colonial. Yet many moments of Partition may be read as fundamentally colonial as well – most significantly Radcliff's line-drawing, but also the moment of communal violence. By marking these moments as colonial in nature, I am not attempting to trace a historical teleology that suggests that

communal violence is an inevitable outcome of colonialism. Rather, my suggestion is that the moment of communal violence can be read as Fanonian “psychoaffective violence” of the colonial subject. Of course, this would not remove Partition from postcolonial studies but would instead open up the ways violence is understood within postcoloniality.

Besides these limitations, and others that I am certain readers will point too, there are much larger issues that I have been contending with in the process of writing this thesis. Writing this has been an emotionally and intellectually difficult process – how does one deal with another’s life, another’s experience, with robbing them of themselves, of their own meaning? Was I doing a disservice by trying to translate blood and tears onto a page? In the conclusion of her book on Partition, Urvashi Butalia writes “It is the present, our involvement in it, our wish to shape it to lead to the kind of future we desire, that leads us to revisit and re-examine the past.”<sup>204</sup> It was this sentiment that I think ultimately drove my work. This thesis was not an attempt to impute meaning or project critique onto those that survived Partition and those that did not. It was meant instead to be a critique of the ontoepistemologies that we are so committed to, and so unable to break open. I am not sure where this thesis will lead, but I hope that it will be a stepping stone in my own understandings of the global/historical we inhabit.

When you embark on an exercise that seems, to you, unusual, perhaps unique, you begin by congratulating yourself on having discovered something new, a new approach, new material, a new way of looking at things. And, in the mistaken conviction that yours is the unique perspective, you begin by asserting that no one has looked at things in

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<sup>204</sup> Butalia, *Other Side of*, 276.

quite this way before. Yet research is a humbling thing, as I found out.  
Nothing is really new, other than your interpretation of it...<sup>205</sup>

This then is my interpretation...

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<sup>205</sup> Ibid., 277.

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