A Legacy of Loss: No Return Address: Partition and Stories of Displacement

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Abstract

76 years have elapsed since the dramatic Partition of the Indian Subcontinent: yet, its specter continues to loom large over the three countries that were established following the end of the *Raj* and the liberation war that led to the formation of Bangladesh, in 1971. In an effort to shed light on the still underexplored partition of Bengal, Manjira Majumdar has compiled and edited a collection of ten short stories and a longer fictional piece meaningfully entitled *No Return Address: Partition and Stories of Displacement* (2022). This essay sets out to investigate the feelings of uprootedness and loss experienced by the protagonists, longing for a place to belong.

Parole chiave

Belonging, Partition, Trauma

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1. The Partition of India: An Introduction

The *1947 Partition Archive*, the ever-expanding repository preserving and disseminating oral narratives (more than 10,000) by Partition survivors[1], bears witness to the enduring, collective interest in one of the most traumatic episodes in the history of the Indian Subcontinent or, to quote Tulika Chakravorty, «the last, departing blow of the British towards the Indians»[2]. One may wonder what keeps this interest and attention alive, even when the generations that experienced the Partition are fading away, why so many novels, short-stories collections, scholarly essays on the subject continue to be yearly published and read, reaching peaks of intensity around landmark anniversaries, such as the 50th or the 75th. In an effort to provide one of the possible answers to these questions, this essay sets out to explore a 2022 collection including ten short-stories and a novella, entitled *No Return Address: Partition and Stories of Displacement*, edited by Manjira Majumdar. A brief outline of the dramatic events in 1947 and their tragic aftermath will constitute the framework to contextualize the analysis.

After the end of the *Raj* on August 15, 1947, India's long-awaited independence was paradoxically accompanied by the partitioning of the nation, allegedly intended to mitigate ethnic and religious tensions. The Subcontinent was therefore dismembered into the secular state of India and the Muslim state of Pakistan − an intricate entity in itself, as it comprised two geographically separated regions: West Pakistan and East Pakistan (its eastern province), separated by over one thousand miles of Indian territories. Millions of Hindus and Sikhs were obliged to relocate to India, leaving their homes and belongings in Pakistan, while the reverse route was followed by the Muslims who resided on the wrong side of the Radcliffe Line (the newly drawn boundary). The moment of collective bliss and emancipation from the British colonial rule was tragically overshadowed by atrocities, fratricidal bloodshed, and widespread devastation, when the mass exodus began. Harvests were abandoned to rot and the cattle went astray; elderly people, unfit to cover long distances, were mercilessly left behind or refused to abandon their own dwellings. The largest peacetime migration ever recorded in human history unfolded amidst chaos, brutality, relentless onslaughts of violence, accompanied by ingrained resentment. Enemies on both sides were tortured, killed, or experienced forced religious conversions: many opted for suicide, since they could not adapt to the changed circumstances. As for women, they were kidnapped, raped, and maimed, while villages and towns fell prey to looting, arson, and destruction. To date, the exact number of victims has not been ascertained, nor has the precise figure of those who were displaced been determined. As Urvashi Butalia has documented, however, immediately after the Partition, the number of refugees exceeded twelve million, while one million died; moreover, approximately 75,000 women were abducted, compelled to conceive, or held in sexual servitude[3]. As Harjyot Kaur and Pooja Jaggi have observed, since men's

[1] The archive (https://www.1947partitionarchive.org/) also promotes exhibitions, events, posts and grants, and collaboration opportunities with the research group. The site features a 'Partition Library' section, highlighting books, films, videos, and other web resources related to the Partition.

[2] Tulika Chakravorty, *Partition of India: Through Gendered Perspectives*, «The Indian Journal of Politics», 53, 1-2, 2019, p. 142.

[3] Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence*, New Delhi, Penguin Books India, 1998, p. 3. See also Jill Didur, *Unsettling Partition: Literature, Gender, Memory*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2006, pp.

honor supposedly resided in women's bodies, «the act of raping a woman was a way of taking revenge from the whole community to which that woman belonged»[4]. The narrative of the Partition is still marked and disrupted by significant gaps and silences, caused by both the incompleteness of official records and the «selective silence»[5] of the survivors, reluctant to share the emotional (not the factual) contents of their overwhelming experience. The traumatic division of India – or the 'cracking' of India, to quote Bapsi Sidhwa's groundbreaking novel[6] – left a collective wound that continues to ache and impact the nation, leaving an enduring inheritance of grief and suffering.

2. The Significance of Partition Narratives: Processing Traumas

Contrary to what happened in Germany, for example, with the Holocaust, to date, few attempts have been made to memorialize and musealize the Partition: The Partition Museum in Amritsar was eventually established in August 2017[7], while its counterpart in Delhi was only inaugurated on May 18, 2023. Hence, as Anjali Gera Roy and Nandi Bhatia have argued, «literary and cultural texts and artifacts [have also functioned] as memorials»[8]. Nonetheless, this is only one of the conceivable reasons to account for such a wealth of Partition narratives and treatises. In Antoinette Burton's opinion, «Partition will never be over. It is destined to return again and again not just as memory, but as history, politics and aesthetics as well»[9]. Functioning as a recurring nightmare, in fact, its specter lurks in the multiple facets of contemporary sectarian violence[10]: in the 1984

4-6. According to Radhika Mohanram, the number of refugees ranged between twelve and fifteen million. Radhika Mohanram, *Gendered Spectre: Trauma, Cultural Memory and the Indian Partition*, «Cultural Studies», 25, 6, 2011, p. 921.

[4] Harjyot Kaur and Pooja Jaggi, *Intergenerational Trauma in the Context of the 1947 India-Pakistan Partition*, «Psychological Studies», 68, 3, 2023, p. 378.

[5] Ibidem. The expression was used by Amrita M. Uttamchandani in her PhD dissertation entitled Crossing Borders and Generations: Sharing of Partition Stories among Survivors and Families of the Partition of British India (2011). Jonathan D. Greenberg has also emphasized the «collective amnesia about Partition's immense horror and tragedy». Jonathan D. Greenberg, Against Silence and Forgetting, in Partitioned Lives: Narratives of Home, Displacement, and Resettlement, edited by Anjali Gera Roy and Nandi Bhatia, New Delhi, Pearson, 2008, p. 258. In Gyanendra Pandey's view, «as in history-writing, so in films and fiction, Indian intellectuals have tended to celebrate the story of the independence struggle rather than dwell on the agonies of partition». Gyanendra Pandey, In Defence of the Fragment: Writing about Hindo-Muslim Riots in India Today, «Economic and Political Weekley», 26, 11-12, 1991, p. 560.

[6] The novel was originally published as *Ice-Candy Man* (1988), and republished as *Cracking India* three years later.

[7] The museum came into existence to compensate for the lack of structured information regarding the Partition. As clearly stated in the *About Us* section of the site, «despite the extensive loss to life and property, almost 70 years later there existed a severe lacuna that no museum or memorial existed anywhere in the world to remember all those millions». See https://www.partitionmuseum.org/about-us#trustee (Accessed September 28, 2023).

[8] Anjali Gera Roy and Nandi Bhatia, *Introduction*, in *Partitioned Lives: Narratives of Home, Displacement, and Resettlement*, edited by Anjali Gera Roy and Nandi Bhatia, New Delhi, Pearson, 2008, p. xiv.

[9] Antoinette Burton, *Foreword*, in *The Indian Partition in Literature and Films: History, Politics and Aesthetics*, edited by Rini Bhattacharya Mehta and Debali Mookerjea-Leonard, London and New York, Routledge, 2015, p. xvi.

[10] See also Jenni Ramone, Postcolonial Literatures in the Local Literary Market Place: Located Reading, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2020, p. 33.

massacre of Sikhs, after Indira Gandhi's assassination[11], in the demolition of Babri Masjid, attacked by a Hindutva mob in 1992 (allegedly, the mosque had been built on the site of Rama's temple)[12], and in the 2002 Gujarat riots, ignited by the burning of a train in Godhra and the resulting death of 58 Hindu pilgrims, supposedly attacked by Muslim offenders[13] (needless to add, destruction of property, brutal killings, and rapes of Muslim women were reported for several months). Cathy Caruth has investigated the haunting nature of trauma, showing that it «repeats itself, exactly and unremittingly, through the unknowing acts of the survivor and against his very will»[14]; in the case of the Partition, however, trauma is also intergenerational: second and even third generations have inherited its distressing legacy and behave accordingly, almost re-enacting 'postmemories', borrowing the term coined by Marianne Hirsch to describe «the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood nor recreated»[15]. Fictional and non-fictional texts, therefore, act as powerful instruments for a transgenerational healing, which is all the more necessary; Ritika Singh's reflections on the significance of the *1947 Partition Archive* may be slightly modified and extended to the growing body of Partition literature: «the ones [*whether real people or characters*] who lived through [the historical event] indulge in a cathartic talking and the others participate in a cathartic listening and understanding»[16].

3. No Return Address: Partition and Stories of Displacement

The case of the Bengal Partition was further complicated by the region's specific history, marked by another religiously-justified partition in 1905, which was reversed six years later[17]. Moreover, the birth of the independent nation of Bangladesh[18] (arising from the

[11] The so-called 1984 anti-Sikh riots occurred across India in response to the assassination of the Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, committed by her Sikh bodyguards.

[12] For further information, see *The Babri Masjid Question 1528-2003: A Matter of National Honour* (2003), a collection of documents in two volumes edited by A.G. Noorani.

[13] The pilgrims were returning from Ayodhya (Uttar Pradesh), identified as the birthplace of Rama.

[14] Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, Baltimore and London, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996, p. 2.

[15] Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory*, Cambridge, Hervard University Press, 1997, p. 22.

[16] Ritika Singh, Remember, Recover: Trauma and Transgenerational Negotiations with the Indian Partition in This Side That Side and the 1947 Partition Archive, «Prospero», xx, 2015, p. 192.

[17] Implemented by the authorities of the *Raj*, who found it challenging to govern British India's largest province, the 1905 partition of Bengal aimed at separating the Muslim-majority eastern areas from the Hindu-majority western areas, «as a means of destroying political opposition in this province». Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *From Plassey to Partition: A History of Modern India*, New Delhi, Orient Longman, 2004, p. 251. The Swadeshi movement, which aimed at promoting self-sufficiency while boycotting foreign goods, strongly opposed this 'divide and rule' policy, thus contributing significantly to the reunification of Bengal.

[18] In the shaping of the Bangladeshi identity, a crucial part was played by the Bengali language. In East Pakistan, there was a demand for Bengali to be granted national language status alongside Urdu and English, in order to reflect the diversity of the country. Conversely, the central government sought to suppress Eastern Bengali identity by erasing their language and culture. See Sufia M.

ruins of East Pakistan, following a nine-month liberation war marred by atrocities against civilians) once again resulted in a substantial influx of refugees and extensive relocations. As Bashabi Fraser has suggested through the subtitle of her seminal 2008 anthology, *Bengal Partition Stories*, the Partition of Bengal is still *An unclosed chapter*, worthy of additional exploration, as fewer scholarly efforts as well as literary endeavors have been devoted to it[19]. Unquestionably, Manjira Majumdar's *No Return Address* contributes to filling that void. Released on the 75th anniversary of the Partition, the collection features fresh narratives alongside an excerpt from a novel, previously published short-stories and a longer piece, thus emblematically defying the very logic of separation through the combination of heterogeneous materials. Established and emergent writers, journalists and amateurs are also juxtaposed, for analogous reasons; nor is chronology respected, as the sequence of texts moves back and forward in time, as in a circle. The subtitle of the collection, *Partition and Stories of Displacement*, is revealing of the broader scope of the volume, which actually begins with Partition(s) narratives (the first four, delving into the 1947 and 1971 political and human events), only to move on to different, equally poignant *stories of displacement*, involving climate refugees, transnational subjects adrift, mentally deranged individuals, vanishing cultural minorities[20]. The therapeutic space delineated by the collection, therefore, is deliberately crafted to treat and heal not just the intergenerational wounds of the Partition, but also diverse expressions of vulnerability, stemming from alternative social divisions, including those between men and women, the wealthy and the poor, the healthy and the diseased. Accordingly, the book is inscribed «To the rootless, displaced and alienated»[21], regardless of the context. Besides, in the *Introduction* penned by Soumitro Das (one of the contributors), the editor's intentions are effectively summarized: in the various sections that compose the volume (*Displacement*, *Alienation*, *Belonging*, *Revolution*) «more than partition *per se,* the effect of it on the post-Tagorean society and a growing sense of loneliness in urban life are well captured»[22].

The opening text, *The Woman Who Wanted to Become a Tree* by Shoma A. Chatterji, conveys the feelings of uprootedness experienced by the protagonist, Sheema, whose

Uddin, *Constructing Bangladesh: Religion, Ethnicity, and Language in an Islamic Nation*, Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 2006, pp. 120-129.

[19] In her *Introduction* to the anthology, Fraser has also underlined that «the influx of refugees across the Bengal border has never stopped, to date», thus determining the peculiar nature of «West Bengal's "porous" border». Bashabi Fraser (ed.), *Bengal Partition Stories: An Unclosed Chapter*, London, Anthem Press, 2008, p. 5.

[20] Majumdar's decision has been harshly criticized by Rina Mukherji in her review of the volume. According to the scholar, in fact, the editor «ought to have worked harder on the compilation […]. In selecting stories that do not speak of Partition, post-Partition trauma, displacement and alienation on our eastern borders, the book falters and sort of loses focus». Rina Mukherji, *Stories of Partition-related Displacement Continue to Haunt*, «Press Institute of India», June 24, 2023, https://pressinstitute.in/vidura/stories-of-partition-related-displacement-continue-to-haunt/ (Accessed September 30, 2023).

[21] Manjira Majumdar (ed.), *No Return Address: Partition and Stories of Displacement*, New Delhi, Vitasta, 2022, p. v.

[22] Soumitro Das, Introduction, in No Return Address: Partition and Stories of Displacement, cit., p. xvi.

symbolic name means «"limit" and "border"»[23]. The woman has lived all her life trapped in a liminal position, shifting from place to place, including the «mental home»[24] she is committed to, at a certain stage of her life, for being on the verge − once more, in a liminal position − of insanity, for dreaming of growing roots and becoming a tree. The daughter of a couple of refugees from East Pakistan during the 1971 liberation war, she does not share their status, as she was born in India after their flight; yet, paradoxically, «her entire childhood had been rootless. Journeying from one place to another because their illegal status made them live a life of fear − the fear of getting caught and being sent away to Bangladesh»[25]. Following her marriage to an Indian, as her husband explains to her, she could finally regard herself as an 'immigrant', legitimately entitled to settle down; nevertheless, Bengal-born Sheema cannot identify with this label either: hence, she continues to mentally drift, to nurture the aspiration of merging with nature and participating in its regenerative cycles that transcend limits and borders. In the end, she gently crosses the threshold between life and death in her sleep, lying on her bed in the fetal position, as if she were preparing for a much-coveted rebirth. She leaves a poignant message behind, penned on an old, «forgotten»[26] boarding pass (the objective correlative of her life in perpetual transition): «I am not a refugee; I am not an immigrant»[27]. With a touch of magical realism, the narrative concludes with the image on a tiny sapling, sprouted out of the ground under a banyan tree, hinting at the possible fulfilment of Sheema's lifelong dream.

In *Pishi's Room* by Monideepa Sahu, echoes of Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* are clearly discernible. The story revolves around an elderly lady who lived through the Partition and, over time, adopted the habit of finding shelter, solace, and a degree of independence and peace in a special 'room' beneath her bed, where she also preserved all the cherished relics from her past: letters, palm leaf manuscripts, wooden figurines, which she had managed to save from destruction when she left East Pakistan. The narrative explores an intergenerational friendship and the possibility that, beside passing down their traumatic legacy of pain and horror, Partition survivors could also transmit their coping strategies to future generations, as Kaur and Jaggi have suggested[28]. In this case, in fact, the young female narrator feels empowered by Pishi's recollections of how she bravely defied gender expectations with the help of her husband, who secretly nurtured her intellectual curiosity with books and journal articles, instead of excluding her from the world beyond domesticity. As the woman recalls, in fact, «he used to bring books from his college library and sneak them to [her …]. At night, after everyone else was asleep, he would read to [her] from Bankim Chandra, Sharat Chandra, and Tagore's works»[29]. As a result, the girl's ambition to pursue a career in medicine feels more attainable in comparison to the ordeals Pishi had

[23] Ivi, p. 4.
[24] Ivi, p. 1.
[25] Ivi, p. 5.
[26] Ivi, p. 10.
[27] Ivi, p. 11.
[28] «Resilience-based mechanisms to overcome or effectively deal with […] trauma can also travel across generations». Harjyot Kaur and Pooja Jaggi, *op. cit.*, p. 376.
[29] Manjira Majumdar (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 24.

to face to enhance her education; moreover, the options now available to women are no longer overlooked or neglected: «I thought of the opportunities [Pishi] never had. I would never again take the benefits of my time for granted»[30].

The text that lends its title to the whole collection, *No Return Address* by Manjira Majumdar, epitomizes the wounds and scars of the Partition, the irretrievable loss of a familiar place to go back to, signified by the missing return address on a letter envelope. The young narrator ponders on the gloomy existence of her uncle, the black sheep of the family, who ended up mentally ill, a misfit in «between two worlds, the real and the unreal»[31], stuck in a vacuum of place and time, after August 1947. The voluntary amnesia of the narrator's father, «a displaced person» (the legal term used to describe Partition refugees)[32], is also delved into[33], as well as his inability to process the emotional contents of his dreadful experience, which he never even alludes to: as the narrator elucidates, «I think like most people who hide a deep secret pain within, he too would skirt around the issue»[34]. Therefore, he is not just «rendered in a state of perpetual mourning for a loss»[35], borrowing Rupayan Mukherjee's and Kritika Nepal's words to depict refugees, he also *displaces* his unexpressed sorrow onto trivial matters: «he complained if the rice was overboiled, he complained if the fish was undercooked but he never complained about the Partition»[36]. Furthermore, the narrator's difficulty in re-membering, in piecing together shreds of information about the Bengalis' shared history, beyond abstract and sanitized data, is forcefully conveyed:

> All these words like erstwhile East Pakistan and now Bangladesh, and West Bengal are mere nomenclatures in the face of the human tragedy, which I am still trying to piece together. What I once considered historical, political, or geographical issues are perceived through the prism of grief, loss, rootlessness and personal history laced with indignation[37].

In *Alam's Own House* by Dibyendu Palit, which concludes the *Displacement* section of the collection, the boundary between familiar and unfamiliar, domestic and foreign is disturbingly blurred. When the narrator goes back to his own family home in Calcutta, swapped with the house of another family that had to leave Dhaka in 1971, small, telltale details reveal that he is indeed a stranger within his own walls: the beautiful *kanthalichampa* tree near the front gate has disappeared, replaced by a sweetshop; his

[30] Ivi, p. 26.
[31] Ivi, p. 38.
[32] According to Anjali Gera Roy and Nandi Bhatia, in the context of the Partition, 'displacement' was understood «in its literal meaning as the geographical movement of persons from their homes». Anjali Gera Roy and Nandi Bhatia, *op. cit*., xviii.
[33] «[…] my Baba was totally amnesiac regarding this sudden and chaotic transition from one region to another». Manjira Majumdar (ed.), *op. cit*., p. 36.
[34] Ivi, pp. 30-31.
[35] Rupayan Mukherjee and Kritika Nepal, From Home to Homeland: Negotiating Memory and Displacement in Dibyendu Palit's "Alam's Own House", in Partition Literature and Cinema: A Critical Introduction, edited by Jaydip Sarkar and Rupayan Mukherjee, London and New York, Routledge, 2020, p. 113.
[36] Manjira Majumdar (ed.), *op. cit*., p. 37.
[37] Ivi., p. 35.

great-grandfather's oil painting no longer hangs on the wall; the furniture in his bedroom has been rearranged. Consequently, the narrator «can never be at home in the homeland which has evolved into a foreign country»[38], nor is the love-story with his old-time girlfriend possible, since they do not share the same religion (the concept of 'partition' operates at multiple levels in the story). The happy ending Alan had initially envisioned, the possibility of recomposing fractures and embracing difference and cosmopolitanism, clashes against the bitter realization that «water and oil can never mix»[39].

The *Alienation* portion of the anthology comprises four deeply emblematic narratives that visibly expand the meaning of 'partition'. In *Pressure Cooker* by Anjana Basu, the cooking utensil that must be handled with care, not to cause harm to its user, serves as a metaphor for our precarious and problematic existence. In *The Hunter* by Soumitro Das, circumstances turn the main character, a hunter, the protector of his kin against a pack of ferocious wolves, into a vicious werewolf (a quintessential offender), thus posing questions on the subtle line between good and evil, between defending and offending. Das exposes the risks of responding to violence with violence, of refusing a dialogue that would prove essential to bridge existing gaps. Indeed, the hunter's metamorphosis into a beast occurs when, having acquired a taste for blood and revenge, he rejects the wolves' offer «to bury the hatchet and […] live in peace and harmony»[40]. In *The Firebird* by Saikat Majumdar (an excerpt from his namesake novel, set in the 1980s), gender prejudices against theatre actresses who, through their performative art, ventured beyond the domestic sphere and transgressed its values of innocence and purity, are brought to the surface. In *The Watch without Hands* by Shoma A Chatterji, the pet hate of the narrator, namely watches with no hands, undergoes a subtle transformation in her perception. Initially representing chaos and disorder (as, without hands, time cannot be measured nor can it be divided into small units), they eventually come to symbolize one's capacity for self-determination: «whether a watch had the hour or not did not bother her anymore. Her time was hers – fluid, flawless and free»[41].

The two stories that form the section entitled *Belonging* touch upon the complexities and the vibrancy of multiracial and transnational subjects, who inherently challenge the either/or perspective typical of any kind of 'partition'. In *About Time, Jessica*, Rimi B. Chatterjee brings to the fore the waning community of 'Eurasians', an ancient mixed ethnic group resulting from the fruitful grafting of different cultures, whose origin «lie in the spice trade»[42], as the 'Author's note' informs. In *The Shelf Life* by Aniket Majumdar, a box of pastries from a most favourite shop in Calcutta succeeds in annihilating the emotional and physical distance between an elderly father, «who had endured a lot in his lifetime — the Bengal Famine of 1942, the Partition of India in 1947»[43], and his son, now based in Phoenix, where his «itinerant feet»[44] have finally brought him.

[38] Rupayan Mukherjee and Kritika Nepal, *op. cit.*, p. 117.
[39] Manjira Majumdar (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 63.
[40] Ivi, p. 91.
[41] Ivi, p. 114.
[42] Ivi, p. 132.
[43] Ivi, p. 142.
[44] Ivi, p. 134.

The much-relished delicacies that father and child used to enjoy thirty years earlier function as Proust's madeleine, enabling them to reclaim the past while continuing to live in the present.

The volume culminates with the novella by Soumitro Das entitled *Revolution*, which offers a fresh reinterpretation of the theme of the Partition with a contemporary touch. The narrator's newly rented, beautifully furnished flat is illegally occupied by an elderly man (who shares the narrator's name and surname, as if he were his underprivileged alter-ego in a parallel universe), his daughter, and her children who, as readers gather, have lost all their possessions «to the floods»[45], due to the modern-day climate crisis that looms large over the text. As there appears to be no legal means of eviction, new imaginary boundaries are drawn within the flat to delineate the two, mutually hostile, territories to be vigorously defended. As the narrative progresses, guerrilla warfare begins around the sofa in the living-room, which marks a fictitious dividing line, separating the affluent senior corporate officer from the «bunch of parasites»[46], as he contemptuously regards the derelicts. Given the circumstances, the war-related imagery widely employed in the story is stripped of its disquieting potential; far from appearing threatening, in fact, the narrator looks bizarre and ridiculous, as he strives to halt the 'enemy''s advance:

> I could have easily shifted the television to my bedroom. But, I understood, correctly, this would be treated by the enemy as a retreat, emboldening him to take the offensive further. I was no longer watching television. I was defending territory. The territory of myness[47].

The novella seems to head towards an uplifting conclusion, when the narrator begins to empathize with the poor children, realizing that they are the victims of tragic circumstances, and not enemies: «I felt pity. […] It suddenly dawned on me: these people had so little, I had so much. So great was the distance between our two worlds»[48]. However, his compassion proves to be short-lived: the narrative ends in a crescendo of rage, callousness, and madness on both sides. Conscious of his superior social status, the narrator begins to treat the intruders as if they belonged to a different, less advanced species, to be tamed and subdued: «I noticed that they did not have as much control over their vocal chords as people like us did […]. They came from a rudimentary world»[49]. Violence escalates, as he dreams of «being a military dictator and ordering genocide»[50]: «I wanted to crush them, annihilate them, subject them to the worst kind of humiliation, have them savagely beaten up»[51]. As Soumitro Das seems to suggest, when viciousness and division hold sway, victory eludes all and justice finds itself debased; deserted by his fiancée and friends, obsessed by his unquenchable thirst for power, deprived of any

[45] Ivi, p. 147.
[46] Ivi, p. 162.
[47] Ivi, p. 167.
[48] Ivi, p. 169.
[49] Ivi, p. 174.
[50] Ivi, p. 197.
[51] Ibidem.

feeling that would make him human, the narrator turns into the mirror image of the loathed refugees: scared, suspicious, distressed, and lonely.

4. Conclusion

As this essay has tried to illustrate, the abundance of texts focused on the Partition of India attests to its haunting and enduring resonance, particularly evident in contemporary manifestations of sectarian violence. *No Return Address: Partition and Stories of Displacement* provides a fair example of how the increasing corpus of Partition literature still serves as a figurative recovery environment for those affected by intergenerational trauma, while also addressing current-day issues. In a world where new borders, limits, divisions are being created (both literally and metaphorically), this volume can offer valuable insights into acknowledging the post-memories that may affect us and devising new strategies for individual and collective healing.