REPRESENTING PARTITION:
ANXIOUS WITNESSING AND TRAUMA IN INDIA AND THE FORMER
YUGOSLAVIA

by

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ABSTRACT

“Representing Partition,” a comparative study on state division in India and the former Yugoslavia, investigates the way partition literatures, that body of texts covering the violent impact of state-partitioning, register their anxieties in a bid to alter political landscapes. The thesis argues that traumatic affects play a critical role in initiating an antipartitionist consciousness, a vital awareness which is key to the imagining, transformation, and enabling of political communities. My focus on different affects – including anxiety, melancholia, and nostalgia – and their ability to fuel forms of communal solidarity extends current work by postcolonial scholars. “Representing Partition” breaks with the theoretical focus on the nation-state by exploring how partition functions materially as well as symbolically in the generation of new political identities, at the levels of the individual, the regional, the diasporic, and in the creation of new institutions. In representing partition’s traumas, writers seek to perturb and provoke their audience, with a view to reshaping the subjectivities of the reading classes.

In four chapters, I examine the way literary narratives insistently return to partition as a site of multiple traumas and suggest new modes of commemoration, that are linked to political praxis. In naming partition’s heterogeneous traumatic effects, such discourses present an alternative to the ethno-national rhetoric of independence proclaimed by the post-partitioned state and gesture towards the formation of future communities. Chapter One analyses the important role of cosmopolitanism and affect in galvanising a form of commemorative ethics that responds to communal, class, and caste violence in novels by diasporic Indian writer Amitav Ghosh. Chapter Two examines the genre of the Indian partition anthology as a vehicle for articulating and, ultimately, institutionalising various collective traumas engendered by partition. Chapter Three concerns questions of recovery, retribution, and restitution as it
investigates the break-up of Yugoslavia and its repercussions on self-avowed and traumatised Yugoslavs in the novels of Dubravka Ugresic. Chapter Four looks at testimonies to the 1992-1995 Bosnian war in the comic books of Joe Sacco. Sacco’s visual, self-reflexive strategies and his focus on the international media industry provide a critique of the way trauma is mediated, (re)produced, and commodified.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.............................................................................................................................................. ii

Table of Contents................................................................................................................................. iv

List of Illustrations............................................................................................................................... vi

Acknowledgements ............................................................................................................................... vii

Epigraph................................................................................................................................................ 1

Introduction: Partition’s Experiential Reality...................................................................................... 2

The Rise of Partition Studies.................................................................................................................. 5

India and Yugoslavia: Brief Histories..................................................................................................... 7

Trauma and Partition.............................................................................................................................. 18

Situating Postcolonial Studies............................................................................................................... 34

Commemoration, Reconstruction, Political Praxis............................................................................. 44

Chapter One: Anxious Cosmopolitans: Partition’s Haunting Presence in the Writing
of Amitav Ghosh.................................................................................................................................... 53

Rooted and Utopic Cosmopolitanisms ................................................................................................. 60

The Consolations of Cosmopolitanism in *The Shadow Lines*......................................................... 66

Spectral Landscapes and Lost Communities......................................................................................... 76

Homosocial Kinships and Triangulations.............................................................................................. 86

*The Hungry Tide*: Critical Cosmopolitanism and Cosmopolitan Classes................................. 90

Political Turbulence and Utopic Possibilities..................................................................................... 98

Transformative Affects........................................................................................................................... 109

Chapter Two: The Disputes of Narrating Loss: the Collective Politics of Indian
Partition Anthologies............................................................................................................................ 116

Institutionalising Collective Memory and Trauma.............................................................................. 118

Academic Intervention and the Work of Partition Anthologies......................................................... 127

A Brief Overview of Partition Anthologies........................................................................................ 130

Partition in the East: Bengal’s Trauma................................................................................................. 150

In Conclusion.......................................................................................................................................... 166

Chapter Three: Memorialising Yugoslavia: Institution Building in the Literature of
Dubravka Ugresic.................................................................................................................................... 169

Witness Anxiety and the Effacement of Collective Memory............................................................... 175

Yugonostalgia: Absence and Loss......................................................................................................... 185

The Museum-in-flux.............................................................................................................................. 191

Berlin: City of Spectral Archives.......................................................................................................... 195

*The Ministry of Pain*: Yugoslav Refugees and Institutions.............................................................. 201

The University Asylum: The Pedagogy of Yugonostalgia................................................................. 205

The (Im)possibilities of the International Criminal Tribunal............................................................ 213
Chapter Four: Graphic Testimony and the Bosnian War: Representation and Responsibility........................................................................................................................................ 230
The Balkan Imaginary ........................................................................................................................................................................ 234
Trauma and Economics: the Trauma Economy ............................................................................................................................... 243
Joe Sacco and the Trauma Economy ................................................................................................................................................. 250
Self-Reflexive Critique ........................................................................................................................................................................ 268
Bosnian Testimonies .............................................................................................................................................................................. 281
Pencil Power and Political Education .................................................................................................................................................. 302

Concluding Thoughts
Public Domains, Literary Circuits, Multidirectional Memory .......................................................... 306
Reflections on Comparative Frameworks ................................................................................................. 311
Partition’s Aftermath and the Role of the Intellectual ........................................................................ 315

Works Cited....................................................................................................................................................................................... 317
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1   “Walking to the Holiday Inn” .............................................................. 261
Figure 2   “Sarajevo’s Twin Towers” ................................................................. 264
Figure 3   “Welcome to Goražde” ................................................................. 271
Figure 4   “Maps of Bosnia” ........................................................................ 275
Figure 5   “Map of Eastern Bosnia” .............................................................. 276
Figure 6   “Edin’s Testimony: the White Death” ........................................ 283
Figure 7   “Neven” ....................................................................................... 301
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Is not memory inseparable from love, which seeks to preserve what yet must pass away? Is not each stirring of fantasy engendered by desire which, in displacing the elements of what exists, transcends it without betrayal? ...It is true that the objective meaning of knowledge has, with the objectification of the world, become progressively detached from the underlying impulses.

– THEODOR ADORNO, MINIMA MORALIA

There are times when words seem futile, and to no one more so than a writer. At these moments it seems that nothing is of value other than to act and to intervene in the course of events.

– AMITAV GHOSH, INCENDIARY CIRCUMSTANCES
INTRODUCTION

Partition’s Experiential Reality

At the beginning of the twenty-first century we are still grappling with the traumatic reverberations of state partitions. Overwhelmingly associated with colonial endeavours, partitions seek to reorganize territorial sovereignty along ethnic or religious lines. Partition is always imposed as a last resort, a political solution contingent on the belief that there exist distinct blocs whose irreconcilable differences have made the original state untenable. Far from being relegated to the past, partition is still considered, at least in some circles of policy-makers and foreign affairs analysts, a viable path to conflict resolution. But history and literature suggest otherwise. The division of multiethnic, multireligious, and multilingual territories into smaller political units has frequently promulgated conflict, ethnic violence, and mass population displacements – traumas that continue to rivet, incite, divide, and affect millions of people across the world.

As the ongoing tensions in Northern Ireland and in Israel attest, the antagonism between groups does not end with partition alone. As sites that were divided many generations ago, these territories instantiate the trouble with partition and its separatist mentalities. More specifically, any attempt to establish a mono-ethnic or cultural state must always confront an irreducible remainder, a minority within the new borders, however carefully drawn. Consequently, the logic behind partition, unlike other nation-building enterprises, foresees no conclusion; as Rada Iveković suggests, “partitions, once achieved, in the quest of a ‘pure’ national state, in numerous

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1 Most recently, the surge of violence in Iraq, following the American-led invasion, has led a number of foreign policy experts and politicians to call for a tripartite division of the territory, with separate nations allocated to Iraq’s three largest communities – the Shi’a Arabs, the Sunni Arabs and the Kurds. The problems with this line of thinking are legion. One could ask what space will be left for Iraq’s Jews or its Christians or its secular humanists. By mentioning these groups, my purpose is to show that what is at stake is the way Iraq’s cosmopolitan history is being rewritten and forgotten. There, regional divides are now reconfigured as ethnic. Other partitions have been suggested as solutions in Burundi and Rwanda.
cases of pluri-ethnic or pluri-national societies, generally don’t solve the problems, but reproduce and multiply them (by the number of states) in time and in space” (“Partition” 21).

It might be said that, for many living under the conditions of a divided society, partition brings with it the uncertainty of future political schisms as well as the lingering memory of violence. Joe Cleary’s groundbreaking study of partitions in Ireland, Israel, and Palestine goes even further to suggest that, beyond the act of partition, “violence is not incidental to but constitutive of the new state arrangements produced” (6, original emphasis). In a recent edited collection, Smita Tewari Jassal and Eyal Ben-Ari build on Cleary’s formulation, when they emphasise that the catastrophic violence of partition extends beyond the apparatuses of the state. Accordingly, partition is “a constitutive experience,” which “creates a different experiential reality” for its human subjects (23).

*Representing Partition* seeks to explore and elaborate this “experiential reality,” by investigating how the traumas of partition structure subjectivity and fuel forms of communal solidarity. In order to do this, my focus is on literature, which has long been acknowledged as an important space to reflect upon these matters. That body of work designated by academics as “partition narratives” describes the violent rupture of the nation-state and its impact upon citizens, some of whom find themselves disenfranchised by new political realities. In other words, the traumas associated with partition are a defining feature of partition literature. That violence has wrought new identities has long been evident to scholars of partition, who have focused on what the Indian historian, Gyanendra Pandey calls “the making of the Partition subject” (*Remembering Partition* 20). These new subject positions were constituted through the (often) violent emergence of new nation-states, new nationalist histories, and new collective
memories, that sharply differentiate one communal group from another. In contrast, my study pertains to the way partition’s heterogeneous effects initiate an antipartitionist consciousness, a vital awareness which is key to the imagining, transformation, and enabling of political communities. My objective is to diversify the current understanding of partition’s traumas as well as explain their power in animating individuals, in driving them towards the task of what Jeffrey C. Alexander calls “civil repair,” the reformation of fractured communities (Civil Sphere 7).

I concentrate on the way cultural narratives register their anxieties about this present state of affairs in a bid to alter the political landscape. The representation of partition traumas, as I identify them, articulates the complex effects, emotional feelings, and the memories of state-divisions on citizens, sometimes generations and geographies removed from the actual event. I examine how partition narratives excavate the past in their attempt to account for and commemorate these many unmourned traumas and legacies. Breaking with the prevailing theoretical preoccupation with the nation-state, my study elaborates the way partition functions symbolically in the generation of new political identities. To achieve this requires understanding collective formations at the levels of the individual (on the basis of Maurice Halbwachs’ insight that an individual’s trauma invariably intersects with the collective), the regional, the diasporic, as well as through institutions, such as the museum. I do this by attending to the cultural production and mediation of partition experiences. Accordingly, Representing Partition encompasses a range of genres, including novels, short stories, essays, anthologies, and graphic novels. In this I illuminate the distinct ways that particular genres can be used to enunciate

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2 Pandey, Remembering Partition 15-16.
3 In his work on collective memory, Halbwachs explains the overlap between individual and collective thus: “the individual remembers by placing himself in the perspective of the group” and also that “the memory of the group realizes and manifests itself in individual memories” (40).
traumas variously, how they challenge partitionist ideologies, recuperate the past, and reach out to heterogeneous audiences.

**The Rise of Partition Studies**

One indication of partition’s enduring influence is found within the burgeoning academic field of partition studies. Distinct from political theory, partition studies is best understood as a synthesis of international relations, history, and cultural studies. It spans such diverse and disparate areas as Cyprus, the Indian subcontinent, Ireland, and Korea and seeks to explain how these various partitions have impacted upon the social, political, and economic lives of the affected populations. Like many academic disciplines, partition studies was already well underway by the time it acquired a name. For the most part, this early work was completed by area specialists whose attentions were focussed on single partitions in order to pass comment on the nation-states that were “born” in the partition event. Consider, for example, the prominent place of partition in histories of India. The focus, however, has been less on partition itself than on the transition from British colonialism to Independence and the birth of the modern state. Initially, political theorists and historians were concerned with partition’s high politics, and examined the figures in power: Gandhi, Nehru, Jinnah, and Mountbatten. These studies explored the challenges associated with state-building, including, diplomacy, economic policies, administration, and border-planning. Since the 1980s, these works have been supplemented by studies seeking to understand the rise of ethno-nationalist politics, as well as the contribution of regional movements within the nationalist struggle towards Independence. More recently, historiographers, anthropologists, psychologists, feminists, and literary critics have greatly

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4 For a more detailed account of these shifts, see Tan and Kudaisya’s analysis of the Indian partition’s changing historiography, 7-23.
revised the dominant understanding of partition, particularly by their emphasis on the microsocial, such as the many consequences of state division upon ordinary people.

In contrast to the focus on a singular state-division, Joe Cleary’s 2002 literary study of partitions across Ireland, Israel-Palestine, and Germany can be thought to have initiated a new orientation in partition studies, by demonstrating the benefits of a comparative approach. Around the same time, Radha Kumar and Sumantra Bose began to frame their political analyses of one partition (Bosnia-Hercegovina) in relation to the legacies of other partitions. Cleary’s inspirational study championed the virtues of comparison, as a way to gain new perceptions of the apparent intractibilities of partition produced by single-site work. While conceding some of the limits in a comparative analysis, Cleary argues that, “a broader perspective can help open up wider sets of theoretical issues and relationships” (10). Moreover, the hope as Cleary puts it, is that a comparative methodology not only fleshes out the “the dilemmas” of one partition, but “can help scholars rethink the Irish or Israeli-Palestinian situations in instructive ways” (9-10).

Cleary’s study has inspired subsequent debate on partition conflicts (Didur; Jassal and Ben-Ari). Radha Kumar’s influence is similarly discernable in the discipline of international relations, as indicated by the subsequent collections on different partitions, *Divided Countries, Separated Cities: The Modern Legacy of Partition* (2003) and *Partitions: Reshaping States and Minds* (2005). Sumantra Bose, in both his public and academic political writings, has also helped shift focus to the way multiple perspectives of partition can enrich inquiry into the convoluted (and often unintended) effects of partition, as well as offer resolutions, by “draw[ing] broader lessons about how the cause of peace can be advanced in adverse conditions” (*Contested Lands* 1).

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5 This is suggested by the rise of multi-disciplinary conferences examining partition across a range of global geographies.
6 *Divided Countries* is edited by Ghislaine Glasson Deschaumes and Rada Iveković; *Partitions* is edited by Stefano Blanchini, Sanjay Chaturvedi, Rada Iveković and Ranabir Samaddar.
Adopting a comparative methodology, my own study attends to cultural narratives produced about partition within two distinct contexts: India’s 1947 partition and Yugoslavia’s 1991 disintegration. While the partition of British India and the break-up of the socialist supranational Federation of Yugoslavia are two very dissimilar historical events, comparing their cultural mediations yields insight into the common ways in which the post-partitioned state appropriates and filters partition’s discourse and its lived experience in order to disseminate self-serving versions of the event. Moreover, while it reveals the state’s investment in cultivating certain partitionist mentalities, the comparison also illuminates the strategies adopted by writers in order to resist partition’s hegemonic interpretation. From these observations, I will argue that representing partition can play a vital role in energising a new cosmopolitan and communitarian ethics that breaks with the ethno-nationalist legacies of the divided state.

India and Yugoslavia: Brief Histories

Before undertaking any cultural analysis, it is necessary to provide some historical context to the Indian and Yugoslav partitions. It is not the aim of this thesis to explain why India was partitioned or why Yugoslavia ceased to exist. The factors and contingencies were, for both, legion, the complexity of each being sufficient to sustain entire academic monographs. Moreover, as scholarly debate and disagreements suggest, there still remain considerable gaps in our knowledge about the historical situation. Thus, this all-too-brief explication of both India and Yugoslavia, will say little about the dynamic political, economic, educational, and ideological forces operating both within and outside of the state apparatuses. Nor can I discuss

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7 The Yugoslav conflict, for instance, is very recent and much of its historical effects are still unfolding. The scholarship around it still remains somewhat contentious and polarised. In the Indian context, Khan notes that entire archives were destroyed after partition by the new governments. Also much of partition’s history is recorded in human memory, a prospect of some urgency as fewer survivors remain as every year passes.
the important role and (re)active agency of involved parties, whether international, national, diasporic (in the Yugoslav context), regional, or grass-roots, to the unfolding of events.

The 1947 division of the Indian subcontinent by the British into two sovereign states, India and Pakistan, was part of a political arrangement designated to appease two apparently irreconcilable communal groups. But, as scholars have since shown, the notion of discrete, homogenous religious communities is a falsification, belying partition’s inevitability. In part, this idea was shaped by almost two hundred years of colonial rule, which constructed its Indian subjects as knowable, by fixing identities via essentialist theories of race.\footnote{For examples of racial stereotypes and their inventions by the British, see Talbot 22.} The separating out of monolithic groups was part of a “totalising epistemology,” a way to simplify a divergent and pluralistic society where identities were fluid, formed not only along linguistic, cultural, and regional lines and localities, but also around class, caste, and income similarities and differences (Talbot 19).\footnote{Yasmin Khan notes, “Class, as ever, acted as a social gel and rich Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims of the same social standing partied together in gilded hotels irrespective of religion” (22). As well as simplifying, this construction of identity reflects British cultural (mis)understandings. Talbot points out that the British familiarised themselves with Brahmin texts and so “took at face value the notions of a hierarchized and clear-cut Hindu identity which they received” as opposed to considering the actual organisation of society (20).} This colonial endeavour was self-serving insofar that it propagated a “divide and rule” strategy, while legitimising colonial authority as modern and stable vis-à-vis perceptions of traditional conflicted native communities. Religious differences were further institutionalised politically within the colonial state as part of a balancing act, most prominently through the creation of separate electorates in 1909. While this act conferred official recognition on the Hindus and Muslims as India’s two dominant groups, it marginalised other groups (notably the Sikhs who, despite their demands, did not receive a separate electorate).

Yet, the promotion of abstract communal differences by the colonial government is complicated by the later political appropriation and internalisation of these identities by some
For instance, the seeds of Indian nationalism lay in the work of Hindu elites in searching out a (Hindu-dominated) Indian historical narrative, with which to contest colonial rule. In contrast, political separatist movements, such as the Muslim League, were precipitated by a sense of disenfranchisement when the Hindu elite, particularly during the Swadeshi (own country) movement gained vocality and far greater proportional representation in municipal committees. The agitation for Independence, however, diverse and multi-faceted, frequently ran across and unifying different religious communities. Galvanised by new ideas and the radicalising impact of the First World War, various anti-imperial movements emerged within India, as seen in the transformation of the political organisation, the Indian National Congress, by Gandhi to a party of the masses, with its Unity in Diversity theme, and its mobilisation of social groups across gender and class. But, in this “terminal breakdown of power in the spring of 1946” as Yasmin Khan notes in The Great Partition: the Making of India and Pakistan (2007), “militia groups, extremist parties and armed groups rapidly burgeoned” (50). By this stage, the Gandhian doctrine of ahimsa (non-violence) had little currency for many Muslim and Hindu groups. Khan explains how trust diminished and tensions and misunderstandings grew in an atmosphere replete with “uncertainties and hesitancies…about the meanings of swaraj [Independence] and Pakistan,” with little idea of what a final settlement would look like (60).

The role of extremist groups plays an important part in provoking riots and communal massacres in the run up to Independence. Indeed, such conflicts not only polarised groups, initiating retaliatory violence throughout India, but also instigated pro-partition movements and

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10 Talbot 19.
11 Ibid., 33-51; 115.
12 Khan 26-29.
13 See Khan 63-66 for details of the significant 1946 Calcutta riots and Noakhali massacres in east Bengal, which incited violence around India (69). According to Khan, this violence “was something entirely new…in a metropolis which also had a strong tradition of regional patriotism and coalition governance and where robust trade unions and anti-imperial organisations cut across religious lines” (66). One reason for this unprecedented violence is suggested in Tan and Kudaisya, who describe Calcutta as the “epicentre of the boundary disputes” (68).
propaganda by communities, terrified for their safety (Khan 72-76). In this atmosphere, the British Viceroy, Lord Louis Mountbatten put forward the proposal to partition the subcontinent between the two communal majorities. Once Indian leaders accepted the British plans for partition in June 1947, then the division of the subcontinent began in earnest. Barely two months later, a boundary line cutting through the provinces of Bengal, in eastern India, and Punjab, in the north-west, would be demarcated by Sir Cyril Radcliffe and announced two days after independence had been formally inaugurated.\textsuperscript{14} According to Tai Yong Tan and Gyanesh Kudaisya, Radcliffe was a man who

\begin{quote}
had no connections with India or Indian politics, and had absolutely no local knowledge of the territories he was to divide. The fact that no one objected to his appointment, despite Radcliffe’s evident lack of knowledge of the Indian problem and his inexperience in arbitration of this nature, suggested that it was probably the promise of his impartiality that was valued above all else. (84)
\end{quote}

The hastiness with which imperial disengagement was announced and by which the complex task of border-fixing was accomplished has been described astutely as “divide and quit.”\textsuperscript{15} Causing immense infrastructural and societal problems, the partition boundary severed rivers, canals, agricultural lands, village communities, and divided Pakistan by some thousand miles from its east wing in Bengal. As Khan suggests, the “paper plan…was entirely dislocated from the regional nuances of political life in India…[and] tragically unconcerned with human safety and popular protection” (88). This effectively meant massive last-minute transfers of around twelve million people who found themselves unprepared and, often, facing expulsion and the threat of violence by being on the wrong side of the border.

Without even going into the state-level disputes and conflicts over the allocation of resources, the transition to independence ushered in previously unseen levels of disarray and

\textsuperscript{14} Tan and Kudaisya 96. Tan and Kudaisya note that Radcliffe was given five weeks to complete this task (85).
\textsuperscript{15} The phrase “Divide and Quit” is the title to Penderel Moon’s eyewitness account of India and Pakistan’s independence. The British pulled out from India in just under seventeen months (Khan 83).
The upheavals of partition, their complexity and cataclysmic violence, are difficult to describe. They usually begin with the dispossession of minority groups. The exodus of refugees is interlinked within further patterns of violence and trauma, such as looting, the loss of one’s home, as well as the segregation of families and friends, since not all minorities opt to leave. Particularly affected was Punjab, which was “brutally sliced into two parts in 1947, and was the bloody battlefield of Partition” as newly divided communities perpetrated atrocities against one another (Khan 7). As well as mass murder and mutilation, abductions of women, rape warfare, and coerced prostitution were widespread in this region. Post-partition, the violence continued in the governmental form of forced recoveries of abducted women, the containment of refugees in displacement camps, usually under terrible conditions, corruption and profiteering, and state-hostilities, culminating in the Indo-Pak wars (Khan 177). The hardening of religious identities has also contributed to the growth of extremist and fundamentalist groups, as is demonstrated persuasively in a 2003 Pakistani film, *Khamosh Pani* (*Silent Waters*). Moreover, ethno-religious extremism has spurred more violence, as signified by the 1992 attempt of Hindu nationalists to cleanse the Indian landscape culturally by destroying the sixteenth-century Babri Masjid Mosque in Ayodhya, North India. The way such traumatic imprints are manifested culturally forms part of the subject of this study.

16 Khan’s research is exceptional in its depiction of “just how disorderly the whole process was and how threatened the very existence of the two new states” (4-5). She describes the range and complexity of the crises created by the lack of a coherent administration as “vast and unprecedented relief operations” had to be assembled quickly. There were immense problems created by the disruption of agricultural harvests, the closure of banks and shops, and the malfunctioning (and looting of) the post office (171). The departure of the professional classes from Pakistan was equivalent to “the wheels [coming] off the machinery off the state” (157). There were acute food shortages (148-49). The fact that the army was also divided up, rather than being kept impartial – as previously – meant that there could be no security or imposed order to stem communal violence. This polarization of religious identities within the military was another problem, since many soldiers anxious about rumours of violence and the safety of their families would join retaliatory militias (114-17).
Yugoslavia and India are similar perhaps only in terms of their complexity, in that they encompassed “communities of multiple identity”; and, in both cases, implementing partition and its essentialising principle of “rigid sovereignty” onto intermingled populations has induced appalling violence as well as further dilemmas. As my comparative framework will make clear, in the post-partitioned state minority subjects bear the brunt of increased suspicion and hostility. In the polarizing allegiances promoted by ethnic nationalism, there is a consequent transformation of institutional and civic cultures. This not only normalizes theories like the “clash of civilizations,” but also reinforces them through the escalation of schismogenetic violence and the radicalisation of identity politics. As with India’s drawn-out partition, exemplified by Bangladesh’s bloody secession from Pakistan in 1971, its ongoing disputes over Kashmir, its legacies of displacement, rehabilitation, and mass migration, so the dismantling of Yugoslavia’s coalition and the consolidation of these republics into distinct national(ist) states is not quite over. The very recent and controversial status of Kosovo, alongside the unresolved fate of its Serbian irredenta, evokes the situations of Kashmir and Bangladesh. Yet, for many, to consider Yugoslavia’s devolution into seven separate states as a “partition” is a contentious pronouncement, not least because of the multilateral demands for independence. Equally problematic, however, is the contention that Yugoslavia, a federation of Southern Slavs, which

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17 R. Kumar 20.
18 Bose, “The Partition Evasion.”
19 Tan and Kudaisya provide a detailed study of partition’s ongoing and long-term effects on the Indian subcontinent. As they demonstrate, mass migration abroad from India was especially pronounced in relation to its minorities, such as the Sikhs in (divided) Punjab, who were left effectively state-less, and the Sindhis in Sindh (230-234). They also describe the plight of other minority communities, marginalised because of linguistic or religious differences as outsiders (234-43). R. Kumar underscores some of the problems with partition in her brief overview of Kashmir. Noting that, as a Muslim majority, Kashmir should have gone to Pakistan rather than Hindu-dominant India, she argues that, to follow a partitionist mentality, Kashmir could not have remained whole and would have to have been partitioned into three to accommodate the Buddhist minority population. Yet, she also points out that the multiethnic make-up of Jammu in Kashmir, would “only set the stage for conflict and ethnic cleansing” (21).
20 Note that the UN Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) remains in Kosovo and that its Independence has been bitterly contested by Serbs as well as the Russians and many others (see fn. 25).
21 Yugoslavia now exists as Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia, and Kosovo.
included six republics and two autonomous provinces united by socialism, was an artificial creation, and that, logically, it was untenable, destined to failure and splintering into constituent entities. Here, as with the Indian context where Hindus and Muslims represent culturally and linguistically diverse groups, the division of Yugoslavia into separate ethnicities has consolidated the perception that such groups are “overly ‘homogenous’...at the expense of highlighting the diversity of experiences and attitudes existing within each of them,” to say nothing of the existence of other ethnic and religious minority groups (Dragović-Soso 28-29).

The beginning of Yugoslavia’s break-up is commonly associated with the conflicts around Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia’s declarations of independence between 1991 and 1992. But before we naturalise these separations as propelled by a nationalist impetus towards self-determination, it is helpful to contextualise the conflict in order to see it as a partition. Here, the political theories of Daniele Conversi are key, because they downplay the role of peripheral nationalisms within the Federation of Yugoslavia, and instead foreground the hidden secession tactics at the core initiated by the Serbs and their president, Slobodan Milosevic. This “secession by the centre” appears paradoxical since the Milosevic-run government appeared anti-secessionist, unitary, and even anti-nationalist (333). But, using a number of historical examples that have elsewhere been corroborated by political theorists and historians, Conversi points out that secession began with the consolidation and centralisation of Serb hegemony. Timing was crucial; the institutional and economic insecurity, in particular, that came with the end of the Cold War helped accomplish this feat. A role must also be attributed to the flourishing of Serb

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22 Macedonia also declared independence in 1991. While not involved in the Yugoslav wars, it was recognized as a nation by the EU in 1993. Montenegro would declare independence on June 2006; Kosovo on February 2008, though its independent status was recognized belatedly by some – for instance, Canada was initially concerned about setting a precedent to its own Quebecois separatists. Currently, Kosovo is not recognized by many nations, especially those with large minorities and irredentas, such as Cyprus, India, Indonesia, Israel, Slovakia, Spain, Sri Lanka, Romania, and Russia, amongst others.

23 Conversi thus differentiates the case of Yugoslavia from common understandings of secession, where secession is seen as a nationalist (ethnic) movement that comes from the periphery and is aimed against the centre (see 333).
nationalist propaganda and criticism of the socialist multiethnic regime, once firmly repressed under the totalitarian rule of Josip Broz Tito.  

One significant development was Milosevic’s 1990 act, to strip the constitutional power and autonomy of Kosovo and Vojvodina – two provinces with substantial minorities that lay within Serbian boundaries – and incorporate them under the authority of the Serbian Republic. The status of these two provinces had been part of a carefully managed balance, initiated by Tito, which had devolved power across the federation, both to these specific provinces as well as to the different republics. This was part of Tito’s strategy to prevent one (ethnic, republican, or economic) group dominating federal power.

Milosevic’s strategy in “reclaiming” land that he saw as belonging to Serbia was made perhaps most evident in 1989 when, to a crowd of a million Kosovo Serbs, he delivered a speech commemorating the 600th anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo (the victory of the Islamic Ottoman Empire over the Serbs). Here, he emphasised six hundred years of Serb humiliation and the need for ( Serbian) integrity – a reference to the segregation and vulnerability of Serb constituents in Bosnia, Croatia, and Kosovo. This rhetoric of victimhood helped mobilise nationalist support at a time when there was much anxiety about the (predominantly Muslim) Kosovo Albanians in terms of their rapid demographic growth as well as their nationalist

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24 An excellent overview of the political, economic, military, and societal developments (and their interconnections) is provided by Lenard J. Cohen and Jasna Dragovic-Soso’s edited collection of essays on Yugoslavia’s collapse. As the authors note, Yugoslavia faced many internal problems, especially economic ones due to a lack of economic reform, but also because it was “de facto bankrupt” after its Cold War allies stopped providing funding and soft loans (xviii). A fuller economic perspective is provided by Michael Palaiaret, who argues that Yugoslavia’s fall can be traced to the collapse of its socialist economic system, particularly its disastrous performance throughout the 1980s and Serbia’s attempt to centralise economic power; accordingly “the new states ha[d] to fight for separation” because of Serbia’s desire for political and economic domination: “Serbia needed to hold together the rest of Yugoslavia to be able to tap the resources of the breakaway republics” (221). Wachtel and Markovic also note that another contributing factor to Yugoslavia’s demise was the problems facing the unified educational system in the 1970s and 1980s. As they put it, “the national educational glue that had held Yugoslavia together was beginning to disintegrate” (204).

25 For more information on Tito’s constitutional reform act of 1974, see Pratt 136. Eric Gordy also notes that the 1974 Constitution restructured Yugoslavia “had been designed precisely to make the emergence of a new [transnational and ambiguously ethnic] Tito impossible” (284). Part of the power balance was a revolving presidency. By taking in the two provinces, Milosevic appropriated their two seats in the federal presidency, thus counting on four of eight federal votes in any dispute (see also Judt, Postwar 672).
movements and demands for greater republican status. Moreover, the dissemination of propaganda from Belgrade bolstered feelings of persecution and nationalism for Serb minorities. Thus, the promulgation of media discourses to the public not only denigrated Tito’s Yugoslavia as a disaster for Serbs, but warned of impending massacres, such as the Muslim jihads, as well as the resurrection of a fascist Croatian Ustashe regime, bent on eradicating Serbs.

Chief to his initial aim of centralising the Federation (rather than breaking it up) was Milosevic’s restructuring of the state and his control of its resources. By 1990, he had channelled much of the assets of the Yugoslav National Bank into Serbia and was able to co-opt the semi-autonomous and multiethnic Yugoslav National Army (JNA) to his cause of a unified Yugoslavia. At the same time, the republic of Slovenia (and Croatia to a more hesitant degree because of its large Serb minority population) became increasingly opposed to Milosevic’s policies – especially the revoked status of the autonomous provinces as well as the looting of Yugoslav federation money. The two republics advanced confederation as an alternative polity to Serb-dominated Yugoslavia. On the day that a confederalist proposal was announced

26 Nick Miller notes that unlike the national groups in Yugoslavia, the “Albanians existed in a constant state of tension with authority… The state treated them as a problem to be dealt with rather than as potential full partners” (192). Indeed, “because the existence of Albania right across the border always placed them under the suspicion of separatism,” the Albanians were never treated as the other groups and initiated numerous riots and movements to demand more rights, from autonomy to union with Albania (193).

27 Judt Postwar 675. Cushman and Mestrovic 18; 25.

28 According to Gallagher, Milosevic extracted an estimated $4 billion from the Yugoslav National Bank (193). See also Hodge, who points out that the Serbian National Assembly, under Milosevic, “voted secretly to authorise the printing of $1.4 billion in unauthorised loans to the Republic of Serbia, without federal approval” (6). The JNA supported Milosevic (though senior military figures resisted him) mainly because he endorsed the concept of Yugoslav centralization and had offered to increase army funding. This is also complicated by the army’s refusal to support multiparty politics since they viewed such elections as the destruction of the Federal state and the destruction of the Federation’s army. Indeed, Milosevic was able to relay Albanian unrest as a threat to Yugoslavia’s stability (and so gain support from the JNA). Eventually, Milosevic would subject the army to a series of purges and depoliticize it as an institution (see Bieber 316-20). The JNA was of enormous strategic importance, seeing as it was Europe’s fifth largest army.

29 As Judt notes, the Slovenes had contributed one-quarter of this budget, although their population only amounted to 8% of the federation (Postwar 673).

30 Yet, the president of Yugoslavia’s state presidency at that time (Borisav Jovic), confirms that in 1990 Milosevic was open to Slovenia’s secession, but Slovenia was not willing to take this step as its public and politicians were divided about independence, nor was there international support (Jovic 265)
between Slovenia and Croatia, the large Krajina Serb community in Croatia announced their autonomy. But, in fact, organised violence by the Croatian Serbs preceded this announcement. In the ensuing political environment, which saw the JNA come to the defense of the Krajina Serbs and the federal military police occupy the headquarters of the Slovenian Territorial Defence unit, Slovene and Croatian public opinion shifted drastically towards supporting independence (Jovic 271).

In effect, the break-up of the country was the response to the delegitimisation of the Yugoslav Federation, undermined by Milosevic’s self-serving reforms. In the words of Conversi: “the other republics of former Yugoslavia were rather pressed into developing their reactive forms of secessionism as the abuses exercised by the Milosevic regime made it impossible to sustain the state’s continuing legitimacy” (338). In other words, these republics had little option but to break away (sometimes violently as was the case of Croatia), when facing either Serb hegemony or secession on Milosevic’s “own terms, that is without the lands inhabited by Serbs” (Conversi 343). It is imperative here to recall historian Tony Judt’s summary of events in the run-up to war: “Yugoslavia did not fall: it was pushed. It did not die. It was killed” (Postwar 685, emphasis added). Though Milosevic is almost exclusively associated with the destruction of Yugoslavia, it was not his single-handed actions and ambitions alone that “pushed” the federation down this path. Competing ethnonationalisms are also to blame, most prominently in the case of Croatia and its leader, Franjo Tudjman, who had his own vision of a

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31 Conversi also cites Borisav Jovic’s conversations with Milosevic to highlight their proposal that unruly republics, such as Slovenia and Croatia, could be forcibly expelled from the federation, and borders redrawn (346).

32 For instance, Gordy’s essay on Milosevic describes him, not as a nationalist demagogue, but as someone “carried by events” and “sure of his ability to use force” in his attempt to force a resolution and retain power (297). Indeed, there is little proof that Milosevic initially set upon the course of a Greater Serbia; he was famously chameleon-like in his politics and beliefs. Once Milosevic mobilised nationalism as a strategy, counter-nationalisms fed off one another. Hodge points out that, in the face of economic collapse, Milosevic was losing much popular support in the early 1990s. She also argues that it was “the response of allies outside of Yugoslavia, particularly Britain, which helped shore up Milosevic’s hold over the army and the main political and economic power structures” (6).
powerful Croatia through his territorial designs on Bosnia (namely, Hercegovina). It is these counter-nationalisms and their virulent forms of ethnic intolerance that have led writers, such as Dubravka Ugresic and Slavenka Drakulic, alongside academics, to view the break up of Yugoslavia as a partition. This partition was both physical and ideological in that it divided up the pluralistic framework of the federation while enforcing ethnonationalism by the forced migration of minorities and the cultural erasure of a multiethnic history.33

The partition of Bosnia and Hercegovina (hereafter Bosnia) is a different, albeit interrelated, case. Considered a microcosm of the Yugoslav Federation, Bosnia declared independence in 1992, but was partitioned de facto in 1995 by the internationally-brokered Dayton Peace Agreement into two separate ethnicized cantonments. This agreement put an end to an extremely bloody three-year war initiated by the “defensive” actions of Serb separatists who had boycotted the referendum of Bosnia’s independence. Though Bosnia’s partition in no way resembles the colonial dismemberment of India, the scale and the scope of the aggression leading up to partition, recalls India’s “fratricidal” violence.34 Unlike India, partition in Bosnia has “ended a war, but did not create a state,” not least because of the role of the external bodies, such as the Office of the High Representative (created by the Dayton Peace Agreement) in directing and implementing policy.35 Thus, not only are Bosnian subjects lesser political actors

33 See Drakulic’s collection of essays in Balkan Express, especially “Overcome by Nationhood” and “The Smell of Independence,” which describes the destruction of Yugoslavia in terms that evoke the ideological partition of the Berlin Wall, “Walls are being erected throughout Europe, new, invisible walls that are much harder to demolish” (54). Chapter Three engages with the Yugoslav partition through Ugresic’s works, who also employs the Berlin Wall as a metaphor to discuss Yugoslavia’s partition. Rada Ivekovic uses the language and “the logic” of partition to describe Yugoslavia’s break-up and the movement towards national totality in “From the Nation to Partition.”

34 The term “fratricidal” was first recorded in G. D. Khosla’s 1949 survey of partition’s violence (ctd in Tan and Kudaisya 7). Partition scholarship frequently and mistakenly attributes the word to Jason Francisco, a scholar of Urdu literature who called attention to the importance of the term. By, scale of violence, I mean in proportion to the region’s size, but also in terms of atrocity, which included torture and rape camps and massacres. More people were killed in India; guesses suggest around one million and up to 12 million displaced. In Yugoslavia, about 5 million were displaced and some 200,000 killed.

35 Chandler, “Introduction” 13. The Peace Implementation Council (PIC), of whom the OHR is the Chief Civilian, is a group of 55 countries and international organisations that sponsor and direct the peace implementation process.
on their own, supposedly sovereign, territory, but they must deal with the constitutional entrenchment of divisive ethnic politics. Such institutional frameworks also assert the stasis of post-war Bosnia, in that they are replicated in the radically altered landscape, which – due to the population expulsions, and the ethnic and cultural “cleansing” of the war – is now populated by majority and (the occasional isolated) minority enclaves (as opposed to its previous interconnected, multicultural spaces). Yet, considering the very recent horrors of ethnic warfare and the difficulties of reconciliation, as Sumantra Bose tentatively suggests, the Dayton partition “in daunting fashion” and even paradoxically may provide “the most feasible and most democratic form of government for Bosnia’s precarious existence as a multi-national state” (“Bosnian State” 17).

**Trauma and Partition**

Given the magnitude of atrocity within these histories, it is unsurprising that partition studies frequently appeal to the vocabulary of trauma. This is apparent, for example, in the academic work on the Indian case, which has since become central to the field of partition scholarship. In a foreword to a 1972 historical study, to give one example, the Vice-Chancellor of Punjabi University describes the partition of Punjab as “a long and harrowing tale of death and destruction, of rape and abduction, involving millions of people,” adding that it is difficult to “construct the contemporary history, especially when we are living under the impact of those events” (Singh i). However, it was not until the mid-1990s that scholars began to examine more carefully the experience of trauma as well as the impact of partition on subjects’ lives decades later. In many cases these expository projects were undertaken by scholars whose own lives and

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37 This of course depends on time and reform, which, as Bose explains, should aim towards facilitating “a less segmented polity to emerge in BiH” (“Bosnian State” 17).
interests were profoundly shaped by partition. This subjective dimension forms a contrast to the study of major traumas, like the Holocaust, which deployed extensive psychoanalytic and clinical understandings of trauma to explain and diagnose the suffering of people. In any case, these inquiries helped transform partition studies away from its emphasis on political analysis and towards a broader recognition of its human effects. Because history “from above” excluded the details of traumatised communities and their traumatic emotions, scholars turned to literature as one of the sites where collective trauma is represented and memorialised. This is significant because literature was seen as an archive to oppose the triumphalism associated with the nation-state, whose self-defining narrative of an independence struggle disavowed the traumas of partition. As Ananya Jahanara Kabir suggests: “in the absence of public rituals and spaces of mourning sanctioned by the nation-state, Partition narratives present alternative, albeit contested sites for such mourning” (“Subjectivities” 246).

Scholars examining other partitions soon built upon the work of Indian academics in their concern to explicate partition’s micro-histories and to examine the way its traumas resisted or bolstered dominant conceptions of nation building. To investigations “from below,” they added the interdisciplinary tools created in the growing field of trauma theory, including its clinical and psychoanalytic approaches. Even more than partition studies, trauma studies has a complicated, multidisciplinary, and not always uncontroversial genealogy. Yet a thumbnail of its development is necessary in order to apprehend how partition scholars have imported and

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38 Much of this recent work acknowledges the extent to which it is informed by traumatic memories, as exemplified by writing of literary scholar, Alok Bhalla and feminist historiographer, Urvashi Butalia.

39 Khan notes, “In the 1940s and 1950s people were not well equipped with the language of psychiatry and psychoanalysis; it was too much to hope for any systematic understanding of the collective trauma which a generation had suffered” (187). But fifty years later, psychoanalytic studies on the Indian partition continue to be scarce. A notable exception is the work of psychoanalyst, Sudhir Kakar and the Freudian-influenced literary scholar, Ashis Nandy. This is not to say that studies of the Holocaust eschew the personal; much work on it is also influenced by personal memory. More recently, scholars like Marianne Hirsch have explicitly used their family history as a resource to writing about trauma and memory.
interpreted its terminology to apply to their own subjects. To begin simply, trauma studies conceives trauma as a wound, an understanding based on its etymological Greek roots. Strictly speaking trauma belongs to medical discourse, historically employed to describe a physical wound or rupture in the skin. However following the late-nineteenth-century emergence of psychology and psychoanalysis, the term also came to be applied to characterise a psychic violation, produced by an unexpected and shocking event that overwhelms understanding. Since it has been conceptualised, trauma, whether catalogued variously as hysteria, shell shock, or Post-Traumatic-Stress-Disorder (PTSD), is seen to produce both mental and physical symptoms. In a partition context, this ambivalence continues to be relevant, since it suggests the materiality of violence as well as its psychic manifestations. Moreover, as some scholars argue, traumatic symptoms must be linked to material systems and their structures of power (Saunders and Aghaie 19).

Trauma has been since taken up variously by partition scholars. Some have turned to Sigmund Freud’s concept of psychic repression to talk about the role of silence as a form of self-deception. There has also been interest in examining the kinds of neuroses produced by the mental containment of trauma. For Joe Cleary, silence relates to the traumatic experience of partition, understood as an event “so hurtful that the episode is repressed… and the original traumatic occurrence displays itself only symptomatically in apparently subordinate, concomitant memories of the original event” (106). Critics now tend to emphasise repression as a deliberate, rather than an unconscious, effort; but though repression appears a common theme, studies have yet to investigate more fully its nuances and expressions. In his study of

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40 Unlike the Irish context, Indian scholars, according to Cleary, have long seen partition as a “great Ur-trauma that serves to remind Indians of the potentially disastrous consequences of further communal conflicts” (106).
41 Here, I am thinking about the work on repression by John Kucich, which calls attention to ideological repression through “silenced or negated feeling” and “cultural prohibitions” (3). This formulation of repression casts it as
Arabs and Jews in the context of Israel, Gill Z. Hochberg singles out “the conditions of repression and active forgetting” in forging a culture of enmity between groups (ix). In comparing partition across Israel/Palestine and India/Pakistan, Jonathan Daniel Greenberg also concentrates on the repression of its traumas, but turns his attention to elaborate “the psychic costs of that repression” (92). The denial of this traumatic past means that it not only “remains unhealed” as a wound, but also that it resurfaces as a haunting presence, as with the Freudian return of the repressed (92). In Greenberg’s words, “each truncated landscape, abandoned by the exodus of refugees, remains a ‘phantom limb’ in the collective memory of former inhabitants… a limb whole populations can still feel, often with the most excruciating pain, more than five decades after the amputation took place” (93). As with other scholars writing on the Indian partition, there is an emphasis here on the originary trauma of partition as a national trauma. In viewing partition through the lens of Freudian repression, critics suggest that its traumas have been buried beneath a collective silence, an enforced forgetting that is not only inimical to the processes of reconciliation and healing, but also is a denial of the extent to which people are themselves “possessed” by this traumatic past.

More recently, and commensurate with arguments being made by postcolonial scholars, trauma theorists have begun to reflect upon their Eurocentric origins. Partition scholars, whose subjects are often themselves entangled in the legacies of European colonialism, have been conscious and positive; it is a libidinal act of the expression of refusal, which is “luxuriously self-disruptive” (3). While such an interpretation may not apply to the context of extremely traumatic partitions, Kucich is useful in delineating the limitations of existing models of repression, which do not focus enough on the role of ideologies. His study demonstrates that new models of repression can be configured to show how repression is neither “static nor absolute” (3).

In contrast, Pradip Datta cautions that to see the trauma of partition as resurfacing (in the form of communal riots, etc.) can also enact a “double repression,” since the deliberate suppression of partition can entail an appropriation of the past as trauma by a dominant group (319). Datta’s example is the Hindutva right-wing groups, who justified their attacks on Muslims as a way to master their own (invented) Hindu trauma.

Souvik Raychaudhuri’s analysis, in contrast, evokes the Freudian notion of melancholia as he describes India’s trauma as the “lost love object” of “the undivided (M)otherland” (22).
frequently at the forefront of these inquiries. Other new directions taken within partition studies reflect the theoretical transformation of trauma scholarship. From pondering the traumatic emotions generated by partition and the trauma of perpetrators, to the roles of second and third generation memories and issues of transnationalism, there is a growing interest in the ways cultural narratives can legitimate and explore the grief and nostalgia that have become illicit ever since national independence. The most innovative work is in the area of the Indian partition, an anticipated development considering the substantial body of research by Indian scholars as well as the influence of the Subaltern Studies project in its examination of history from below. Here, the contributions of feminist scholars, such as Urvashi Butalia, Kavita Daiya, Veena Das, Jill Didur, Priyamvada Gopal, Ananya Kabir, Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, and Sangeeta Ray have been pivotal to directing attention to the various gendered aspects of partition violence and trauma. Additionally, some of these scholars have cautioned against reading silence as a sign of repressed trauma, instead attending to the ambivalence of silence; others – albeit, to a lesser degree – have developed an increased sensitivity to local and regional specificities of partition traumas.

In these critical engagements, scholars have articulated various forms of ethical and political modes that help refine understandings of trauma as well grasp some of its multiple dimensions. For most of the theorists, historians, sociologists, and literary analysts discussing trauma, memory is usually central to working through the traumatic past. Memory refers not only to individual memory, but also to collective and cultural or social memory, what we might see as the social construction and location of memory in cultural artifacts and as mediated by semiotic objects. In such sites, we can trace what Moishe Postone and Eric Santner call “the nature of the afterlife of historical trauma, the ways in which disaster inscribes itself not only in
human memory but also in the very texture of cultural, social, and political life across generations” (12, original emphasis).

But these very sites are frequently unreliable and unstable, as suggested by the work of critics such as Cathy Caruth, Dori Laub, Kelly Oliver, and Roger I. Simon, who emphasise the impossibility, unrepresentability, and elusiveness of traumatic experience. The theoretical projects of postmodernism and poststructuralism have opened up new and valid avenues of inquiry into exploring the “gaps” of unassimilable trauma. But, they also risk bearing a dangerous correlation with relativism. For some, historical trauma is interpreted or uncritically appropriated as a teleological condition or symbol. For others, a trauma can be disavowed precisely because of its aporetic, ambiguous, and discursive dimensions; it is rejected because it is not considered credible or representing documentary truth. Because the experience of trauma is, at times, beyond comprehension and difficult to represent (and then only available in its mediated and discursive form), it does not necessarily follow that it did not occur. This inadequacy of testimonies, what Santner and Postone describe as the “the insufficiency of cognition in the encounter with the reality of what happened,” is one of the tenets that the polyphonic and disputed arena of trauma studies both productively engages and struggles with (12).

Against this, we can consider the importance of testimonial, historical, and literary accounts of historical trauma. While these are undoubtedly discursive fictions, frequently they are underpinned by what historian Eric Hobsbawm calls the “raw material” of “verifiable fact” (On History 272). Hobsbawm is of course well aware of the way historical discourses can be constructed and used powerfully to assert and legitimise traditions; yet, he insists that such

44 In response, many scholars of trauma have emphasised the validity of testimonies by emphasising how subjective truths, rather than empirical ones, are produced by witness accounts. See the work of Dori Laub (especially 62) and Simon.
“historical verifiability” can be ascertained by returning to the “old-fashioned” methods of proof and source-references to corroborate such accounts (272). By extension, witnesses to trauma embody such proof. As Ana Douglass and Thomas A. Vogler assert, there is a “special dependency on the witness, whose trauma authenticates…the reality of the traumatic event” (36, emphasis added). The claims “to some fundamental injury,” as Alexander puts it, are especially crucial to initiate the “demand for emotional, institutional, and symbolic reparation and reconstitution” (“Theory of Cultural Trauma” 11). Consider the role of the International Criminal Tribunal in relation to the Former Yugoslavia, where historical traumas have been corroborated within the court of law. Here the physical evidence of mass graves as well as the rhetoric of witnesses has been pivotal within legal prosecutions, both to proving genocidal acts occurred and to assigning responsibility.

But, even here, the Hobsbawmian reliance on the “supremacy of evidence,” such as the witness, raises ethical and methodological quandaries, most problematically, in relation to the repressive powers of new post-partition regimes (271). To begin with, Hobsbawm’s reliance on physical evidence means that in the absence of such materials, reparation and restitution are not possible. As my third chapter will demonstrate, the wars that accompanied Yugoslavia’s dissolution involved the systematic destruction and extirpation of materials that signified the existence of particular communities. Moreover, the witnesses to this political effacement were themselves targeted. Nor does the retrieval of such objects guarantee that justice or official acknowledgement can be established. In their work on testimony, Anne Cubilié and Carl Good have noted some of problems associated with prioritising corporeal evidence. Building on Elaine Scarry’s conceptualisation of pain, Cubilié and Good point out that pain is frequently immaterial and “prelingual” (10). Where pain is inscribed materially, then placing the burden of
evidence on the wounded body or corpse “as the site of survivorship” enacts “another injustice of dehumanisation” (10). Furthermore, as the body is reduced to a “crucial piece of evidence” this reduction overwhelms quotidian life (10). Transformed into a spectacle, the body is a “cipher that places the burden of interpretation on its viewers” (10). The danger of this symbolic violence is not merely the “pleasures of spectatorship” it can induce (10), but also the way it powerfully positions the viewer as the “active gaze[r],” which closes down critical stances of empathy and self-awareness in relation to trauma (11).

The constraints of institutions can be traced to their cultural, political, and economic structures. But, in their engagement with memory, trauma, and experience, institutions are profoundly important in their propensity to effect change, a theme I elaborate upon in this study. Yet, as repositories of culture (and particularly traumatic culture), institutions also risk isolating individuals and social groups. In part, this has to do with the reification of lived experience; more chiefly, however, it relates to the commemorative capacity of such institutions, what diasporic Bosnian writer Aleksandar Hemon describes as “a whole technology of storing records and memories outside of human beings.” According to Hemon, archives thus created are no more than “mechanisms for remembering,” where the “past and history are removed from people’s lives so they can happily live and shop in the eternal present.” In contrast, Hemon advocates the importance of literature as a form of testimony, a discursive representation of traumatic events that has a diurnal presence as they circulate amongst the populace.

Hemon’s point – that institutions help mediate and structure the way individuals think and feel – indirectly emphasises the importance of feeling in the manufacture and circulation of subjectivity. This is a significant reworking of Enlightenment discourses, which privileged “the faculties of thought and reason” above irrational passions, and so disparaged unruly emotions as
“a sign of our prehistory” that threatened “the formation of the competent self” (Ahmed 3). As recent work on affect theory suggests, it is not merely the many registers of emotions and affects that demand our attention, but it is also their ubiquity (Ahmed; Brennan, *Transmission of Affect*; Khanna, LaCapra; Massumi; Sedgewick; Thrift). Yet, to distinguish affect from emotions may be somewhat disingenuous since, as Nigel Thrift observes, “there is no stable definition of affect” (59). Indeed it is helpful to begin by quoting Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s reminder that affect is a contested term, which does not have “a unitary category, with a unitary history and unitary politics” (*Touching, Feeling* 110).

I see affect theory as having immense potential to supplement our understanding of partition trauma. Frequently viewed as a transferential force as well as a state of emotion, affect is understood to permeate environments and shape subjects. Broadly, affect describes an emotional energy, relating both to sensation and to an intensity of feeling, which compels or inspires an individual to (re)act in the world. Via affect theory, certain strong feelings are reconfigured as the agents rather than as the catalysts of knowledge production so that affect obtains a political dimension. In trauma studies, however, the remarkable scholarship on affect theory remains fairly untapped. In their engagement with testimony, scholars of trauma frequently point out the existence of “traumatic affects,” which circulate and disturb listeners and readers. To describe trauma simply as affect is a nebulous assertion that in some way replicates the difficulties of narrating radical loss and suffering. Yet critics recognise how traumatic affects – in and of themselves – testify and help facilitate an understanding of the extremity of traumatic experience. In her work on Holocaust narratives, Froma Zeitlin reminds us of the importance of affect and emotion in shaping culture and calling attention to the legacy of traumatic events, including the efforts to “relieve – but also relive – the effects of traumatic
experience through the act of writing itself” (201-202). It is surprising then that while researchers note the surplus of traumatic affect produced by testimony and literature alike, these affects still remain somewhat undertheorised in trauma studies. Dominic LaCapra, Marianne Hirsch, and Eric L. Santner have been particularly attentive in this regard. Above all, LaCapra brings to the forefront some of the academic concerns around traumatic affect imbedded in narratives, such as how the reader and researcher are frequently implicated within it, the risks of emulating traumatic affect, and the difficulties of acknowledging affect within disciplinary frameworks (“Holocaust Testimonies” 220-21).

Indeed, Freud, probably the central figure in trauma studies, frequently wrote about the place of affects in trauma and loss. My study takes up recent scholarly interpretations of trauma that have returned to, revised, and reformulated Freud’s concepts of the unconscious, including anxiety, melancholia, the difficulties of psychic assimilation, repression, the belatedness of recurring symptoms, the acting out of trauma, dissociation, hysteria, transference, notions of mourning, and working through. To discuss trauma, I identify the significance of anxiety as an affect, a feeling that initiates political action, confronting and redressing lingering injustices. Partition, it seems, is rife with anxieties, a fact that relates to the project of carving out and homogenizing ethnic sovereignties. But rather than examining the cartographic or cultural anxieties related to national construction (Tan and Kudaisya 19; 25), I am more concerned with anxiety as a self-critical mode of unsettlement towards partition’s totalist vision and its ongoing traumas. Anxiety is important because of its links to the Freudian concept of “unpleasure” (“Inhibitions” 92), and so as LaCapra points out, it “affectively inhibit[s] closure, complacency, or self-assurance” (History in Transit 52).45 Moreover, anxiety helps account for the fact that

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45 My reference to anxiety and “unpleasure” also references the work of Henry Krystal, whose research used survivors of natural disasters, the Nazi concentration camps, Nagasaki and Hiroshima. Krystal saw trauma as an
writers overwhelmingly emerge out of (relatively) affluent and elite classes, and therefore must disentangle their compulsion to act from the problem of speaking for or on behalf of a collective. Building on Edward W. Said’s notion of “anxious witnessing,” I show how, ideally, anxiety activates the critical self-scrutiny necessary to organise a writerly ethic that is appropriate for the purpose.  

It seems to me that Said’s notion of “anxious witnessing” is particularly apt for theorising the traumas of partition, since its anxieties relate to those with a “broken history,” who are “are cut off from their roots, their land, their past” (“Reflections” 177). For Said, anxious witnessing describes the critical understanding that accompanies the condition of exile, that “discontinuous state of being” (177). Whereas Said sees anxious witnessing specifically as a product of the trauma and the “estrangement” of the exiled intellectual (181), I propose to reformulate its meaning to extend it beyond an individual’s physical or geographical exile. Instead, I suggest we can consider the pertinence of anxious witnessing as a heuristic in relation to the dilemmas of partition. The sense of estrangement, prompted by the chauvinism of the new state, as well as the forms of hauntedness and agitation, produced by the unresolved losses, sorrow, melancholia, and nostalgic memories that remain in the postpartitoned order, are some of the affects that undergird anxious witnessing.

*Said references the idea of anxious witnesses and anxious witnessing throughout his essays in his 2000 collection* Reflections on Exile and Other Essays.  

“affective experience” of overwhelming sensations “of primary unpleasure” (Ullman and Brothers 57). I should note that Freud wrote extensively about anxiety in multiple ways (including seeing it in relation to prototypal danger of birth as well as the detached parts of the copulation act). In “Inhibitions, Symptoms, and Anxiety,” he saw anxiety as the “felt loss of the [loved] object” (137); yet it is also a response of helplessness to a traumatic situation, in that it is “an expectation of trauma, and…a repetition of it” (56). In The Ego and the Id, he sees “anxiety [as] the expression of a retreat from danger” (58). My formulation of anxiety is antithetical to this interpretation of a retreat. In some ways, it replicates postmodern theories of melancholia, where the ego holds onto an otherwise disabling affective state as a political stance. But, as I show in my chapters, I also stress how anxiety can initiate action.  

46 Said references the idea of anxious witnesses and anxious witnessing throughout his essays in his 2000 collection Reflections on Exile and Other Essays.
Equally, I am concerned to understand how writers struggle to marshal either sympathetic or empirical support for their accounts. Since partition is central to the “birth of the nation,” it has already been narrated by the nation’s established institutions. That powerfully ideological interpretation is deeply sedimented in public discourse, and so anxious witnesses must additionally confront problems of collective amnesia. I conceive of this condition as “witness anxiety,” which describes the struggle to narrate as the narrator attempts to recall the past in the disappearance of first-hand witnesses and in the face of a revisionist, state-sanctioned history.

While there is no doubt that partitioned states endorse an active form of forgetting, my deployment of affect theory explains the political futures opened by partition literature. It is not a shared repression, I argue, that binds readers and writers of partition literature together but rather affects such as anxiety, estrangement, what Said calls the “sense of dissonance,” melancholia, nostalgia, and love (“Introduction” xxxiii). Thus far, scholars of partition have tended to discuss traumatic affects as a unitary phenomenon (Kabir; Kumar, “Testimonies”), or have singled out one particular traumatic affect to the exclusion of others (Almond). My privileging of certain affects, nevertheless, is also a gesture that narrows the scope of this project, for partition is also re-experienced within the different registers of guilt, hatred, rancour, and shame, an especially resonant affect in relation to the sexual violence perpetrated in both Bosnian and Indian contexts.47 The affective dimensions of partition literature help account for

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47 Urvashi Butalia’s study details some of these feelings in her interviews with perpetrators of violence. In the Yugoslav context, the negative affects of perpetrators are only now being assessed in an official capacity via the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTFY). Other affects are rife within the exiled diasporic community, which played a large role in funding nationalisms (something that also occurred, albeit, post-partition with the diasporic Sikh community in Canada). These diasporic communities, according to Paul Hockenos, “bred infectious cultures of paranoia, hatred…fiercely bitter and screaming for revenge” (10). Part of the problem was that the diaspora lived in a micro-society and, largely banned from returning home, could only perceive Yugoslavia “through the filters of myth and legend” and through “decades of disparate socialization, conflicting propaganda, and limited travel possibilities” (4). The affect of shame in relation to rape is complicated,
the vicissitudes of the trauma, including not only its psychic pain and its epistemic or symbolic violence, but also its *materiality*, as seen in the rubble of destroyed homes and cities, or in the physical actualisation of violence on later generations, whether through communal riots, state hostilities, or of minority groups.

In the absence of tangible evidence, traumatic affects become an equally significant resource for many of the characters and authors of the partition narratives I study. Building on Freud’s 1917 “Mourning and Melancholia” essay, cultural theorists have highlighted the productive role that affects, such as the loss and melancholy that emanate from a traumatic past, play in formulating political work that seeks to improve the present (Butler; Eng and Kazanjian; Khanna; Santner). In his essay, Freud describes how mourning has to do with coming to terms with loss by successfully assimilating the lost object; melancholia, in contrast, relates to the subject’s refusal to let go of this loss. In melancholia, as Freud puts it, “the existence of the lost object is thus psychically prolonged” (245). For theorists, this haunting condition may be grief-ridden, but it also represents an aesthetics or politics of loss as it enables new forms of agency. In particular, they view the adherence to melancholia as an act of resistance. In refusing to work through grief and leave it in the past, the subject holds onto the past over assimilation into the present, thus refusing much of what the present-day signifies.

Similarly, the characters of partition narratives frequently embrace these affective states in order to disrupt the partitionist present and resist its new national history. As my first and third chapters show, the pervasiveness of traumatic affects within communities and settings enables discerning characters to utilise them, and so draw up virtual archives that bear witness to

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since it exists at several levels within the Indian context as well as for the Bosnian Muslims of Bosnia. At one level, it relates to a cultural taboo, where community (and patriarchal) shame is linked to the identification of women as symbols and possessions. But at another level, it relates to the many ambivalent feelings of the women themselves. Some accepted these new circumstances in different ways, whilst others did not, but were nevertheless attached to the children of rape. See especially the work of Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin.
a past that no longer remains in the present. I draw upon the work of Eric L. Santner here and his formulation of “spectral materialism” to show how traumas can be remembered. For Santner, spectral materialism relates to an attunement to the invisible “history of suffering” that surrounds oneself (Creaturely Life 115). As the term “spectral materialism” implies, materialism, as Santner puts it, becomes spectral “in the sense that it registers and archives a real, whose status is, paradoxically, virtual” (52, emphasis added). Building on Walter Benjamin’s and W. G. Sebald’s writings as well as the work of artist Christian Boltanski and his Holocaust “archives of absence,” Santner shows how a traumatic history can be thus reanimated (53). The awareness of the spectres and traumas of the past “acquires the radical quality of thereness whose impact is experienced as traumatic” (51, emphasis added). In perceiving and exposing oneself to these registers of loss and traumatic absence, Santner suggests, spectral materialism opens up forms of engagement within the “sphere of ethical and political agency and production” (62).

So far, I have described the way traumatic affects both perturb characters and are channelled by them in the attempt to recuperate the past. I also want to highlight the (elusive) influence and effects of partition’s affects upon readers as well as upon the characters of the text. In his work on the Holocaust, LaCapra recognises the transferential energies of traumatic affect and their role in shaping people as well as (reading) practices. To avoid the dangers of uncritical empathy, he suggests that affect should be utilised as a critical intellectual force. Calling this “empathic unsettlement,” LaCapra argues that it would form the “affective dimension of inquiry which complements and supplements empirical research and analysis” (Writing History 78). As he explains, empathic unsettlement raises in pointed form the problem of how to address traumatic events involving victimization, including the problem of composing narratives that neither confuse one’s
own voice or position with the victim’s nor seek facile uplift, harmonization, or closure but allow the unsettlement that they address to affect the narrative’s own movement in terms of acting out and working through. (78)

Empathic unsettlement is different from anxious witnessing in that it relates more to the act of reading and research by the critic, rather than the exclusive witnessing and writing work of the writer. Nevertheless, it is reminiscent of anxious witnessing in that it involves a self-critical stance towards (representations of) worldliness and its traumas. This mode of reading checks the appropriation and passive consumption of traumatic affects by readers and researchers. As LaCapra notes, empathic unsettlement “poses a barrier to closure in discourses and places in jeopardy harmonizing or spiritually uplifting accounts of extreme events from which we attempt to derive reassurance or a benefit” (Writing History 41-42). As my study shows, this lack of closure is, frequently, a structural device reiterated by authors that reminds readers, writers, and critics alike that, far from disentangling ourselves from our texts, such unsettlement underscores the interconnections and cross-overs between cultural narratives, their global settings, and our own role in interpreting and consuming trauma.

LaCapra’s object in theorising empathic unsettlement is to understand more properly its influences on the way subjects “work through” trauma. In a similar way, throughout my subsequent chapters, I seek to elaborate the effects of anxious witnessing on working through. In his writings, LaCapra returns frequently to working through, not only because it is under-theorised, but also in order to stress its importance in addressing as well as engaging with trauma and its many psychic wounds, including, grief, loss, and despair. For LaCapra, working through offers a means to “viably come to terms with (without ever fully healing or overcoming) the divided legacies, open wounds, and unspeakable losses of a dire past” (“Trauma, Absence, Loss” 697-98). Introduced by Freud in his 1914 essay, “Remembering,
Repeating, and Working Through,” the term initially referred to the patient’s “resistance” to therapy as he or she underwent psychoanalysis. The concept illuminates the sustained, interpretative analysis conducted of a patient’s psychic conflict; indeed, for Freud, it helped explain the seriousness of neurosis because of the lengthy time frame needed for analysis while in the process of a cure. The term’s meaning has undergone some change and expansion over the years; overall, many psychoanalysts concur that working through is a “process of development” that facilitates insight, clear thinking, and, ultimately, beneficial change for the patient (Brenner 98). In contrast, LaCapra’s explanation of working through, perhaps most carefully formulated in his book, *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma* (1994) which I will only briefly summarize here, moves outside of the clinical practice of psychoanalysis in order to articulate its broader “ethical and political considerations” (210). This shift makes LaCapra’s interpretation especially pertinent for understanding the endeavours of the partition narratives examined in the thesis. In other words, many partition narratives function as a kind of working through, attempting to identify and make sense of trauma while at the same time indicating their own implication in such trauma, without recourse to totalising resolutions or redemptive notions of closure; through this effort, they relate to the “rebuilding of lives and to the elaboration of a critical historiography” (200). Thus, they disclose not only the differences between past and present, but also acknowledge a “comparison of experiences and…a reconstruction of larger contexts,” a self-questioning perspective that informs “one’s own problems” in relation to others and their larger sociopolitical implications (200).

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Situating Postcolonial Studies

Although I utilise anxiety, and Said’s concept of “anxious witnessing” more specifically as a critical hermeneutic, this thesis is not a psychoanalytic study of partition consciousness. By placing into dialogue current scholarship on trauma and affect with postcolonial theory, my work contributes to the efforts of investigating traumas that have emerged out of colonial, neo-imperial, and contemporary violence. The overlap between trauma and postcolonial studies is a productive one, because the multidisciplinary approaches of both fields open up critical inquiry, while directing new forms of meaningful and cross-disciplinary interpretation. As I have already made clear, Freudian psychoanalysis and its theoretical concepts are a large part of this study because, as Roger Luckhurst suggests, Freud’s work is “the unavoidable foundation for theories of trauma and this is undoubtedly the case for cultural studies” (8).

As is the case with feminist theories, Freud cannot be dismissed from postcolonial studies because of certain ideological incompatibilities. Instead, we might reconsider Freud in the light of Said’s assessment in his 2003 long essay, *Freud and the Non-European*. While recognising the historical bounds of Freud’s “own cultural moment” (23), Said acknowledges Freud as an “extraordinary” thinker, “whose work has enabled other, alternative work and readings based on developments of which [he] could not have been aware” (24). Said thus looks beyond the limitations of Freud’s cultural and historical tendencies in order to stress the achievements and provocative effects of his writing as it “travels across temporal, cultural and ideological boundaries in unforeseen ways to emerge as part of a new ensemble” (24). Said effectively rehabilitates Freud here as “an overturner and a re-mapper of accepted or settled

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49 Inversely, we could say that such a multidisciplinary venture helps illuminate specificities with less danger of falling into the academic niches of specialisation and its associated jargons.

50 Freud’s writing is not only gendered, but also affiliated with (at the very least) Eurocentrism, bourgeois patriarchy, and the discourses of modernity. Yet consider the productive way Juliet Mitchell has been able to take up notions of Freudian hysteria and rework them within a feminist critique.
geographies and genealogies" (27). Indeed, the range of Freud’s influence is suggested by the way scholars have engaged impressively with his work. These Freudian ideas are much in evidence in the texts and theories I examine by postcolonialists, such as Leela Gandhi, Paul Gilroy, Ranjana Khanna, and Sara Ahmed, as well as in the writings on trauma and reparation in postcolonial and anticolonial contexts.\(^{51}\) At a broad level, my thesis is informed both by Freud’s original writings as well as the analyses of academics who have called attention to some of the flaws and inconsistencies in Freud’s arguments.\(^{52}\)

If, in its engagement with trauma, postcolonial studies must overcome its distaste with Freud as a canonical, Eurocentric figure, it must also deal with the Jewish Holocaust as a prevailing (and at times, fetishized) paradigm within trauma studies. To many, the seminal importance of the Holocaust has the whiff of cultural imperialism about it, since the production of materials around it is inextricably linked to the genocide’s appropriation by the US and its subsequent central role in American culture.\(^{53}\) As Kali Tal has pointed out, the Holocaust continues to be the site of an “ideological struggle,” as its meanings are sacralised and consolidated in relation to political power (24). The Holocaust is also a controversial trauma because of the enormous cultural work associated with it, raising charges of the exploitation of trauma for profit, political, and economic. For postcolonial scholars, the dominance of the

\(^{51}\) The work, produced around South Africa (especially in relation to the post-apartheid Truth and Reconciliation Commission) and Israel-Palestine, provide an obvious example. The fact that traumatic encounters and experiences have informed postcolonial theory is also clear from the work produced around anticolonial studies and postcolonial theories by writers, such as Edward Said, Frantz Fanon, and Aimé Césaire, as well as my investigations into the Indian partition, and colonial partitions more generally.

\(^{52}\) For example, see the work of Herman; Leys; Luckhurst; Ullman and Brothers.

\(^{53}\) See Flanzbaum and also Shandler on the Holocaust within US cultural life. See also the 2008 Studies in the Novel special issue on “Postcolonial Trauma Novels,” edited by Stef Craps and Gert Buelens, which attempts to “decolonize” trauma studies. Yet to disparage predominant trauma paradigms as that of “white Westerners” is reductive, not least as Michael Rothberg notes in the same issue, because Jews and the Irish have not always been considered white (“Decolonizing” 2; 227-28). Instead, class and economics should also be considered part of the concern over hierarchies of trauma. I also find it ironic that the attempt to decolonize trauma studies involves looking at the novel, perhaps that most canonical and western of all literary forms (and indeed this focus appears to raise no questions in the issue)!
Holocaust and Freudian analysis within trauma studies is troubling. In a special issue on comparative non-Western traumas, Rebecca Saunders and Kamran Aghaie argue that

“trauma studies” as a field has been grounded in events and processes of Western modernity – such as industrialization and world wars – and…there has been insufficient exploration not only of how Western theoretical and diagnostic models translate into a ‘non-Western’ context but of how sites of traumatic memory in South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East (dis)confirm, challenge, or revise dominant Western conceptions of trauma and memory. (16)

In his study of the Indian partition, historiography, and violence, Pandey evokes the Holocaust as a point of comparison for the way collective violence can be historicized and explicated. Echoing Saunders and Aghaie, Pandey rejects the Holocaust as a possible referent for understanding the historical atrocities of 1947. As he sees it, the problem lies in socio-cultural specificity, for the Indian partition is “even more ‘unhistorical’ and inexplicable than the Holocaust. For this was not industrialised slaughter, directed from a distance, but a hand-to-hand, face-to-face destruction…Its sites were more random. Its archives are more dispersed and imprecise” (Remembering Partition 45).54

In the light of a study that examines two massive historical traumas, one that had occurred in Europe (although the location of trauma as a Western site is disputed) and the other in South Asia, these variegated approaches insightfully attest to the geopolitical and cultural differences of traumas. But, as my study will also show (particularly in my third chapter), scholarship on the Holocaust remains a rich and substantive vein for many non-Western scholars and for my own investigations into the cultural and critical dimensions of trauma scholarship. On an autobiographical note, the Holocaust as a historical and cultural event also underpins my interest and evaluation of trauma. But, as the granddaughter of Jewish Holocaust

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54 Pandey notes another difference: Unlike the Indian partition, Holocaust literature deals with “apportioning guilt” as opposed to “justifying, or eliding, what is seen in the main as being an illegitimate outbreak of violence…about how this goes against the fundamentals of Indian (or Pakistani) tradition and history” (Remembering Partition 3).
survivors, I also recognize the difficulties of reconciling traumatic experience with theoretical thought, however nuanced. This is not to suggest experience is fully opaque nor to dismiss theories of trauma out of hand, but rather to insist upon the historical specificity of trauma and to suggest that theoretical emphases tend to be inflected by the cultures in which they are produced. Because the history of a traumatic event is frequently contested, and especially so in the context of partition, where history can serve to distort and consolidate the past, there is an imperative need to remain vigilant to detailed and careful distinctions. While many scholars of trauma urge this approach, I have found the perspective of historiographers particularly indispensable. Consequently, my study draws much from the historically informed work of LaCapra and Alessandro Portelli, their self-awareness as scholars, and their refusal to amalgamate or totalise disparate experiences, while stressing the mutable conditions, under which knowledge and memories are (re)formed.

The vexed issues around the continuing prominence of the Holocaust signal the importance of postcolonial studies as a relevant tool in our thinking about trauma. Broadly speaking, postcolonial studies focuses on critiquing the operating structures of (neo)colonial orders, past and present. Building on Said’s *Orientalism* (1978), much of postcolonial theory

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55 The multiple geographical locations and experiences of three of my grandparents in relation to the Holocaust (involving hiding places and camps in Czechoslovakia, Germany, Poland, and Yugoslavia), and particularly their decision to remain in communist Czechoslovakia until 1968, when both sides of my family moved to Germany for good (“Of all places!” as my babička would say) provides a very different frame of reference for me that sometimes seems at odds with the dominant emphasis on the U.S. To give one example, I find that while Marianne Hirsch’s theory of postmemory is extremely useful in understanding the mediation of someone else’s memory, her emphasis on loss and absence does not correlate to the experience of my parents. Their inherited memories about the Holocaust precluded guilt and sorrow. Instead, there was shame, and resentment, since the second-generation wanted to disassociate with the war and the burden of suffering. Also, during my parents’ childhood, there was shame and the estrangement of being a minority (an ambivalent one at that, what Isaac Deutscher insightfully calls “the non-Jewish Jew”), linked to a tiny community in an implicitly anti-Semitic communist country.

56 As Portelli reminds us, mourning is “a process shaped (‘elaborated’) in historical time” (144). LaCapra also stresses the importance of historical specificity over any originary or transhistorical interpretation of trauma (*Writing History, Writing Trauma* xiii). Any focus on the writing of history (or historiography) helps call attention to the way shifts in international politics are linked to changing perspectives and new cultural interests. Following scholars that theorise the social construction of traumas, my study shows how major traumas, like the Holocaust, create a framework for helping integrate other traumas that have been elided in the West (see Alexander et al).
seeks to demystify the dominant, typically Eurocentric, politics and the way this hegemony both underlies cultural discourses as well as shapes the relationship between power and knowledge. In this, scholars have been able to draw attention to the way colonial power and institutional practices are consolidated as well as reveal forms of anticolonial resistance, so reinstating formerly excluded and misrepresented experiences and cultures. Postcolonial studies encompasses a divergent and contested field and its critical approaches to hegemony and cultural politics vary widely. Nevertheless, the field’s frequent return to the politics of representation offers a useful theoretical framework for assessing the occlusion of non-Western traumas, or indeed the marginalisation of “quiet” traumas, and for gauging the way epistemologies of trauma and suffering are constructed and privileged.

Whereas India is an obvious subject for a postcolonial inquiry, Yugoslavia’s place appears more problematic. It is significant to grasp the meaning of postcolonial studies as a critical practice of scholarship, rather than cast it as a historical event or paradigm (Lazarus, “Postcolonial Studies” 17-18). The demise of nineteenth-century empires should not be confused as the worldwide terminus of hegemonic or imperial projects. Moreover, the break up of Yugoslavia, the partition of Bosnia, the UN and NATO interventions, the role of international agencies, and the imposition of their neoliberal economic policies has already been described in neo-imperialist terminology, most notably in Michael Ignatieff’s resonant phrase “Empire-

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57 Timothy Brennan rightly notes that postcolonial studies is not “a discrete subliterary field but a collection of attitudes and styles of inquiry” (Wars of Position 94). Postcolonial studies is mostly synonymous with its deconstructionist and poststructuralist critics, most famously Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, as well as Homi Bhabha, and Robert Young who frequently focus their analysis on the textual and the linguistic. But as Laura Chrisman notes, this work was emerging simultaneously alongside materialist and Marxist analyses by critics such as Timothy Brennan, Arif Dirlik, Terry Eagleton, Benita Parry, (and Chrisman herself). The field has also produced critics that frequently cross both sides of the divide, such as Gayatri Spivak (see Chrisman 1-3). These differences have generated rancorous debates and conflict within postcolonial studies about its purpose and politics, leading to denunciations of the field itself.
Lite.”

Further analogies with interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan also invite postcolonial inquiry, and particularly that branch of analysis that deals with capitalist structures and the economic and political inequities perpetuated by them. But, while I see a place in postcolonial scholarship for such a project, there is also the danger that some critics have rushed to seductive and simple theories of new imperialism, without a careful historical assessment first. In such theories, there is the additional wrinkle that, during the outbreak of the war in Bosnia, the newly independent Bosnian government called for international involvement. This complicates the idea of western intervention as a purely imperial endeavour. The partitionist solution engineered by the Dayton Agreement is considered anathema, rather than a solution, for Bosnians who wanted an integrated Bosnia, with an overarching national identity. While partition has clearly benefited some parties, such as the Bosnian Serbs and their Republika Srpska, which was “founded on expulsions of hundreds of thousand of Muslims and tens of thousands of Croats” (Bose, *Bosnia After Dayton* 70), extreme nationalists, such as the Croatians in Herzegovina, are also dissatisfied and regularly demand an independent statelet (28-29).

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58 See Sungar Savran, who interprets American President George H. W. Bush’s “New World Order” as part of an imperialist politics. Savran suggests that international intervention in Yugoslavia was politically strategic, consolidating “the newly acquired power of imperialism in that region” (149).

59 For example, Jasminka Uдовicki and James Ridgeway’s *Yugoslavia’s Ethnic Nightmare* (1995), casts Serbia as the misunderstood victim of imperialist powers. Alexander Cockburn and Jeffrey St. Clair’s *Imperial Crusades: Iraq, Afghanistan, and Yugoslavia* (2004) provides a far more controversial thesis. An exemplar of historically inaccurate scholarship, Cockburn and St. Clair claim all sides in the war were equally perpetuating atrocities (the Croats with UN/NATO support). They even allege egregiously, that the Bosnian Muslims “were manipulating Western opinion, most notoriously by almost certainly lobbing a missile into a marketplace filled with their own people” (5). Kate Hudson’s revisionist *Breaking the South Slav Dream: The Rise and Fall of Yugoslavia* (2003) also views Serbia as the victim (and so unwittingly take up Serb propaganda and its rhetoric of victimization). Hudson defends the cause of Serbia as the last bastion of Yugoslav socialism and champions Serb action as “defending their right to self-determination (104). For Hudson, the Bosniaks, with the help of the Western media and a US-based PR firm (!) were “consistently and inaccurately portrayed...as the multi-ethnic victim of Serb aggression” (103). Hudson not only rubbishes evidence that suggested the Serbs carried out rape warfare and had rape camps, but claims that all sides were responsible for atrocities from the start. These atrocities and their perpetrators (notably Serbs, but also Croats) have since been verified by the ICTFY. A number of the statements of guilty pleas are available online at the ICTFY website.
To return to the question of imperialism and put it explicitly, Yugoslavia and Bosnia were never settlement colonies, and were definitely not colonies in the sense of the military conquest, economic exploitation, and racial stratifications that applied to places like British India, or Dutch South Africa. Simply applying models developed to understand these situations would be both ethically inappropriate and historically inaccurate. On the other hand, the Balkan region, which incidentally includes the regions of the former Yugoslavia as well as Greece, Romania, and Bulgaria, were part of the Roman and Byzantine Empires (Wilmer 32). The pre-World War region that later became Yugoslavia was within close proximity to the centres of the Habsburg and Ottoman Empires and was roughly divided between them. Consequently, these Empires did shape the geographic, historical, and cultural vicinities of these regions – Bosnia in particular reflects this meeting ground of plural cultures. The historical influence of these empires is evident in the ways the civilisations of Yugoslavia, as well as that amorphous Balkan entity, continue to be understood.\(^{60}\) Consider, for instance, the way the Balkans’ multiple cultural, geographical, and ideological allegiances are construed and mystified variously by others, whether in religious and political terminology or in ideological and cartographic (but never geographically specific) ones: secular, multicultural, Orthodox, Catholic, Muslim, Communist (bloc), Eastern Europe, South Europe, South-East Europe, the Balkans, the Western Balkans, etc.

It is imperative to keep in mind Yugoslavia’s heterogeneity and its shifting, ambiguous geopolitical affinities, which complicate discursive constructs of a passive other. In *The Balkans and the West: Constructing the European Other, 1945-2003* (2004), Andrew Hammond argues that the Balkan region (itself is a nebulous site) cannot be strictly understood within the

\(^{60}\) Here, I draw on Neil Lazarus’s assessment of conceptualisations of the West (“The Fetish of ‘the West’” especially 44-46).
Instead of conceiving the Balkans as “the alien other, that point of absolute difference from the West,” Hammond suggests they should be considered as “the outsider within,” an entity whose European location and marks of similarity to Western European culture produce a particular form of anxiety” (xv, emphasis added). This unsettling familiarity, according to Hammond, marks the break from postcolonial studies, since Balkanist “styles of representation emerge from both west and east [rather than from one dominant power].…The designation of other has been appropriated and manipulated by those who have themselves been designated as such” (xvi).62 Rejecting the binaries of Manichean conflict that sets east against west, Hammond instead cautions awareness of the complicated and intricate realities of the different Balkan nations. Perhaps because of these differences – between “the outsider within” and Oriental otherness, as well as in the assertion of multiple (Balkan) agencies – Hammond prompts attention to Yugoslavia within the representational discourse known as “Balkanism.” To an extent I agree with Hammond, but his thesis is also complicated by new interpretations of the Yugoslav wars that both supplement and resist the history of the Balkanist discourse applied to the region. This has much to do with the way the wars, and the Bosnian war especially, were perceived as ideological collisions. As Lene Hansen persuasively shows in her analysis of Samuel Huntington’s policies the Bosnian war was “the only conflict occurring directly on the fault line between the Western and the Islamic civilizations” and served as a microcosm for his clash of civilizations thesis (168). More prominently, the Western fear of involvement (especially the US) in the Yugoslav wars had Empire-lite echoes of the entrapment

61 Hammond builds here on Thomas Cushman’s work and his critique (26).
62 See also Tim Beasley-Murray, who offers a helpful assessment of the ambivalence and complexity of Slav cultures during the Habsburg Empire. Beasley-Murray builds on Todorova’s theories to describe Slav culture as “both familiar and alien, domestic and exotic, central and peripheral,” what might be designated the “internal other” (133). Wilmer reminds us that “people in Croatia and Slovenia [were] truly offended by the prospect of being thought of as being in the Balkans” (32).
of earlier ideological conflicts, such as the protracted Vietnam occupation or the military intervention in Somalia.  

Keeping these differences in mind, my study is generally in consonance with the thinking of other scholars that the break-up of Yugoslavia and its subsequent wars ushered in Balkanist conceptual framework (albeit a revised and updated one). Here, Chapter 4 will show in greater detail, Western media outlets were integral to instilling a binary vision, that not only obscured the historical specificity of Yugoslav culture and its regional history, but also constructed the Balkans negatively against ideas of “the West,” and engendered a sense of Western political and cultural superiority over the region. The problem with these misrepresentations and preconceptions is they have an enduring presence and so have permeated contemporary (international) perceptions of Bosnia as well as authorised disinterest from its traumatised site. But alongside this cultural violence, as it might be termed, there is also the matter of economic and political domination in Bosnia, which implicates the international media, the NATO forces, and even academic researchers as part of such structures.

Here, the contributions of postcolonial theory, and particularly attention to the unevenness of contemporary globalisms become immensely important. One innovative direction is the materialist model of cultural analysis applied to both colonial and post-colonial eras, a critical project which has emerged from the collaboration between Marxism and postcolonial studies.  

In a recent essay collection edited by Crystal Bartolovich and Neil Lazarus, Bartolovich argues that the overriding concern is to recognize all

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63 Hansen 135. But Hansen is careful to note that this ideological category was not the reason used by the West not to intervene in Bosnia. In fact, as Hansen notes, critics of Western inaction used this charge (i.e. that the West saw the Muslims as Other) because they were concerned that non-intervention would have a negative impact on relations with the Islamic nations (219). Hansen’s conclusion is that Islamic religion didn’t exert a large influence since “it seems more likely that the ‘Balkan Other’ was ‘Other enough’” (220).

64 A number of journal collections have emerged out of such collaborations, such as the 2006 *New Formations* special issue on “After Iraq: Reframing Postcolonial Studies,” by Priyamvada Gopal and Neil Lazarus. This
current global asymmetries, economic, political, institutional, ideological… The persistence of these asymmetries today… makes it doubly important to situate all cultural works and forms in their *specificity*, with reference to their conditions of production and circulation at their point of origin as well as in wider circles.… [We] must be ever vigilant to the inequality that structures production, circulation and use of cultural forms, and to the various irreducible effects of this inequality. (14-15)

This study endeavours to diagnose some of these conditions in relation to the production and reception of trauma (as all my chapters, and chapter 4 especially, will show). Thinking through these different hegemonic forms enables a serious engagement with issues around the canonization of culture and trauma (the relevance of *genre* here is a key consideration and its relation to elite institutions or mass culture, respectively), the sites of production and circulation of culture, as well as the question of audience. While my study seeks to identify the critical role of partition traumas in galvanising new political configurations, I ask what are the effects of these asymmetries upon the traumatised partition subject? Furthermore, in what ways do they (ir)reconcile the different positions of the reader of partition trauma with the traumatised subject?

Taking cue from Bartolovich, my project is occupied with the praxis and production of cultural work and the scope of my study helps rectify some of the biases dominant in postcolonial literary analysis. In gathering a wide assortment of narratives, a number of which deal with the experience of rural communities, I assert the need to examine partition’s imprints within peripheral and subaltern spaces as well as upon urban and metropolitan life. This is less a balancing act than an effort to attend to the diversity of partition narratives, as suggested by the broad selection of perspectives in my survey of Indian partition anthologies (chapter 3). In the academies and publishing world of North America and Europe, the fiction of the Indian partition

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collection examines the role for postcolonial studies in relation to the invasion of Iraq, and new developments in relation to labour and human rights (Guantanamo especially) environmental concerns as well as the Israel-Lebanon conflict. See also the recent issue of *South Atlantic Quarterly* (2009) on capitalism in the academy (Ganguly).
is frequently conflated with the diasporic writer, writing in the English language (Salman Rushdie being the prominent example). Yet, this does the disservice of entrenching the narrow and inaccurate perception of the subcontinent’s prolific and occasionally brilliant writings on partition, both in English and in Indian languages (here the Urdu short stories and sketches of Saadat Hassan Manto come to mind). One intrinsic limit here is that chapters 2 and 3 deal only with translated works into English. Chapter three engages novels, translated from their original Serbo-Croat into English. In contrast, many of the Indian anthologies are published in English, albeit by publishers in India, rather than in England. This Anglophonic context reinforces the hegemonic position of English as a language, spoken by “a global minority,” while also signalling a desire for inclusivity, in terms of international reach and within the institutional realms of canonization and pedagogy (Brennan, *Wars of Position* 27). Additionally, while we must not lose sight of the fact that English is also an Indian language, as Chelva Kanaganayakam has contended, there is the spectre of class, raised both by the problem of literacy in India as well as literacy in English in India.

**Commemoration, Reconstruction, Political Praxis**

The following chapters illuminate how partition traumas initiate new modes of commemoration, which are themselves linked to a political praxis in the face of representational limits. In sketching out the many ways ethnic violence and partition traumas have shaped contemporary life, writers not only capture the horror and atrocity of this past, but also demonstrate how the past continues to be felt palpably within the postcolonial and postsocialist present by individuals and groups. Frequently, there is a utopic imaginary at work here that expresses a multicommmunal solidarity or a cosmopolitan citizenry. Such visions of inclusivity and pluralism
challenge ethnonationalist regimes and their institutions. There thus exists a sense of hope or aspiration which finds its sustenance in the fleeting images and *objets trouvés*, affects and friendships, political and civic communities and projects that have either survived partition in fragmented form, or have been actively recovered via collective and personal memories. Yet, the meanings of these ideals can be contradictory, at once suggesting a level of wishful thinking and the transcendence of material conditions, whilst encouraging and advancing substantive change. Consequently, most of the texts examined here share a concern with their attention to audience. In fact, the narratives, at points, elaborate a self-conscious and reflective awareness, calling upon readerly participation and suggesting that a critical understanding, if not activism, of an antipartitionist politics simultaneously complements the worldliness of the text, while going beyond its literary dimensions.

As with the recent creation of divided states and partitionist ideologies, the authors investigated in this study are alert to the ideological abuses of history and the artifice of national discourses, more specifically. There is an attempt to highlight the construction of cultural institutions, whether literary canons, national cultures and apparatuses, or historical memories, and so not only destabilise these existing formations and question their legitimacy, but also produce counter forms of knowledge. This resistance gestures towards the important thinking of Walter Benjamin, Karl Marx, Georg Lukács, and Giambattista Vico. Essentially, these authors put forward a “critical philosophy” of history, “a theory of theory, and a consciousness of consciousness” that “dissolves the rigid, unhistorical, natural appearance of social institutions” (*History and Class Consciousness* 47). In the struggle to relate an antipartitionist cultural identity and legacy, each partition narrative adds to a body of knowledge. This growing material
repository helps structure and change public opinion, substantiating as well as authorising alternative institutions.

The influence and inspiration of the critical thinkers mentioned above within the texts I examine is difficult to determine precisely. Yet, it is no coincidence that academics, scholars, teachers, artists, writers, social activists, and journalists, those who form the intellectual class, populate the texts examined here. Many are the actual authors or editors of the texts examined, such as the Indian scholars who have compiled anthologies of partition literature; others figure as textual characters and constitute key figures of inspiration and action. The task of testifying to traumas and explicating them often falls to such intellectual figures. In both Indian and Yugoslav contexts, there are efforts to search out and recover information from the past that opposes the ethno-nationalist cast of the present.

The Indian diasporic writer, Amitav Ghosh (whose novels are discussed in more detail in chapter 1) exemplifies such an intellectual. Before becoming a writer, he had completed a PhD at Oxford University and had published work for the Subaltern Studies group, looking at the way marginalised histories could be retrieved and re-imagined. In contrast, the Yugoslav writer, Dubravka Ugresic develops her conceptual tools from the work of past intellectuals and writers, such as Victor Shklovsky and Vladimir Nabokov. Searching out seemingly trivial objects and mementos, she is able to piece together a version of the Yugoslav past that strategically avoids both the ideological nets of the post-partitioned state and Tito’s socialist Yugoslavia. Ugresic’s methodology here is reminiscent of the historical practice articulated by Benjamin, and especially his description of the collector, whose act of collecting, even those discarded items considered worthless, resembles a form of practical memory (Benjamin, Arcades 205).
To return to the Saïdian concept of anxious witnesses, this then is the particular responsibility of intellectuals, to stand “apart from….the dominant currents of their own time,” witnesses to the “impinging and even threatening circumstances they could neither ignore nor elude” (“Reflections” xxi). The commitment to a worldly criticism, that calls attention to culture as “a system of exclusions” and overturns dominant conceptions, is idealistic, but necessary given the role of traditional intellectuals – understood in the Gramscian sense as those linked closely to the political apparatus of the state – and their complicity in bolstering the hegemony of the state and its memory politics (Said, The World 11). This was certainly the case in Croatia and Serbia, where academics, church leaders (Orthodox and Catholic) as well as politicians were instrumental in shaping nationalist propagandas and mythologies (Magaš and Žanic xxiv). Ugresic, an academic by trade, reminds us “to face our aspect, the history of our profession which has been compromised so often…to face the fact that some of us forge words like knives” (“Priests and Parrots” 46). Unsurprisingly, intellectuals who continued to sustain the legitimacy of Tito’s Yugoslav project and who resisted the new ethno-nationalist regimes were among the first to be targeted as casualties.

But whatever their personal experiences of persecution and exile, these intellectual figures are also the cultural and metropolitan elite. To cite Ugresic again,

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65 In his essay, “The Intellectuals,” Gramsci differentiates between the traditional and the organic intellectual. The traditional intellectual is the “man of letters, the philosopher, the artist,” and the priest, who has a socio-political purpose, linked to the State (141). As Gramsci notes, these intellectuals are “born and developed as an ‘economic’ group and turned into qualified political intellectuals, leaders and organisers of all the activities and functions of an integral civil and political society” (150). In contrast, the organic intellectual comes not out of “eloquence but in active participation in practical life” leading to the “possibility of proletarian cultural hegemony through the work process” (10, emphasis added).

66 Or as Hobsbawm says more bluntly of the practices of “dangerous” history: “The sentences typed on apparently innocuous keyboards may be sentences of death” (On History 277).

67 See Lavrence, who notes that, at the University of Belgrade, Serbia, faculty-wide purges were common. Academics received death threats from a nationalist group, who were also responsible for the disappearance of the Dean of Sciences (fn.8)
The identity of the writers, the intellectual, is called into question in the turbulent times of the destruction of old values and the establishment of new ones. Some have found an identity, others have lost one. To speak about identity at a time when many people are losing their lives, the roof over their heads and those closest to them seems inappropriate. (“Priests and Parrots” 45)

For Ugresic, there is a pervasive sense of anxiety in relation to this incommensurability. What for some was a political and ideological crisis was for others an unimaginable catastrophe. In making visible the material asymmetries of power, Ugresic reminds us that partition was felt variously across socio-economic classes. Every privileged migrant author has a double, in the figure of the impoverished refugee. As my analysis of partition literature demonstrates, the traumas of partition can be measured by their hierarchies of displacement and disenfranchisement, their scales of horror, atrocity, and suffering, inflected variously in rural and metropolitan settings. These differentiated aspects of partition’s violences necessarily unsettle any generalist reading of trauma *per se*.

The first chapter reads across the essays and novels of Amitav Ghosh to explore how the trauma of the Indian partition and, its traumatic affects, in particular, can galvanise new forms of cosmopolitical subjectivity. This chapter traces the emergence of a specifically affective cosmopolitanism in Ghosh’s writing – a cosmopolitanism formed by affects such as anxiety, sympathy, love, and longing that emanate from unorthodox attachments and encounters with others. I examine the development of Ghosh’s affective cosmopolitanism from its emphasis on the individual protagonist in *The Shadow Lines*, to its collective significance in his later work. In *The Shadow Lines*, affective cosmopolitanism is melancholic foremost, and is driven by unfulfilled desire to recuperate memories and substantiate spectral memories in order to work through personal traumas related to communal violence. In contrast, the affective

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68 It is important to note, in context of the incommensurability of traumas, that anxiety is frequently linked to secondary or vicarious traumatisation. See LaCapra, *History in Transit* 114.
cosmopolitanism in Ghosh’s novel, *The Hungry Tide*, emerges out of contact with a subaltern class of dispossessed Dalits, mostly refugees displaced by the events of partition. I demonstrate how, in this novel, subaltern affect is the agent of a critical transformation for the novel’s bourgeois cosmopolitan protagonists, animating them anew to push for social and political reconstitution for groups that were politically disenfranchised in the post-partitioned nation-state. In the pursuit of ethical interventions, we can trace the central role of anxious witnessing in shaping intellectual action. Anxious witnessing emerges out of the experiences of affective cosmopolitanism. Driven by the imperative to bear witness and respond to past traumas, it transmits traumatic affects as a surplus beyond the horizon of personal witnessing and into the larger community of writers and readers.

The second chapter returns to the Indian partition in order to map out the growing genre of the Indian anthology of partition literature. I argue that such collections provide a forum where the traumatic memories of partition are both constructed and commemorated. I pay special attention to the significance of this genre which is published in English on the Indian subcontinent, as they seek to establish dialogues with an English-speaking readership and the Indian nation-state. Such anthologies are important not only because the use of multiple narratives makes them appear more representative and thus more able to encase a national trauma, but also because they remain implicated in pedagogical institutions, especially universities. As with the novels of Ghosh, I illuminate how the project of the partition anthology emerges within a national context that lacks public commemoration of the suffering experienced. Thus far, academics in North America and the UK have acknowledged these anthologies, but have directed very little (if any) critical attention to their competing claims. A greater concern of this chapter is to develop a more complex understanding of the partition
experience by elaborating the differentiated and distinct forms of partition trauma represented by these anthologies. The findings of this chapter reveal that individual anthologies contest the notion of a singular collective or unitary national partition trauma. Instead, they demonstrate a heterogeneity of competing voices, experiences, feelings, and sensibilities shaped by partition, from its gendered violence, to the marginalisation of Indian Muslims, and the scattering of the Sindhi community. This chapter finishes with a detailed analysis of a recent Bengali partition anthology. Whereas scholars overwhelmingly focus on the partition of Punjab, this literary anthology – the first of its kind that exclusively considers the division of Bengal – enunciates the way partition has not only indelibly shaped Bengal’s regional, cultural, and intellectual identity, but how its melancholic and nostalgic affects can actually impede or mystify a critical awareness of the way pre-partition class hierarchies and their associated violences continue to be sustained in the present.

Marking the shift to the Yugoslav context, the third chapter explores the critical relationship between trauma and institution-building. Turning to the dissolution of Yugoslavia as represented in two novels by Dubravka Ugresic, this chapter assesses the significance of human institutions, such as the museum and the courts of international justice, in reconstituting and commemorating a rapidly disappearing past. As this chapter shows, the failure to memorialise the past not only perpetuates the irreconcilable ethnic divides of partitioned states but also disavows both the collective memory of Tito’s Yugoslavia and the unprecedented violence of the Yugoslav wars. In the novel, The Museum of Unconditional Surrender, Ugresic takes up the critical practice of nostalgia – known in this context as Yugonostalgia – to assemble the minutiae and the memories of the past. Here, she utilises the trope of the museum, in its spectral and corporeal forms, in order to resuscitate a Yugoslav multicultural subjectivity that
now no longer exists in the material world. If *Museum* denotes a theoretical model as well as an imaginative practice that transgresses the constraints of the partitioned present, by way of contrast, Ugresic’s later novel, *The Ministry of Pain* attempts to express that theory into practicable form. *Ministry* tells the story of Tanya, an ex-Yugoslav university teacher of (the now defunct) Serbo-Croatian language and culture and her class of ex-Yugoslav students in the Netherlands. Despite Tanya’s pedagogical attempts to excavate the Yugoslav past, both through her class and her visits to the International Criminal Tribunal in The Hague, *Ministry* offers a bleaker prognosis of the ongoing traumatisation and despair of ex-Yugoslavs by suggesting that without institutional reform, at national and international levels, not only is the critical promise of Yugonostalgia blunted, but also neither mourning nor justice are possible.

The final chapter constitutes an extended analysis of the discourses, produced for an Anglophone audience, of the 1992-1995 Bosnian war. The primary object of analysis is the way such discourses are foundational to authorising detachment or initiating forms of ethical witnessing in relation to Bosnia’s traumas. Whereas Bosnia’s war attracted extensive international media coverage, it has since received very little attention, a surprising development considering its precarious existence as an international protectorate and an ethnically partitioned polity. Indeed the shift within this discursive history can be seen as reflecting the greater asymmetries inherent in the relationships between powerful states and far less powerful ones. I single out the comic books of US artist and journalist Joe Sacco for consideration, not only because they focus on Bosnia as a space that was manipulated and misrepresented by the media as a war of ancient ethnic hatreds, but also because, ten years after the war, any knowledge about Bosnia (at least, in the West) continues to be shaped by these constructions. I show how Sacco’s attention to the voices of Bosnians themselves is of tremendous significance.
Assembling a wide range of Bosnian testimonies, Sacco highlights the disparities between local experiences of trauma and the way the media codified a complex war into reductive elements. What makes Sacco’s work especially pertinent, however, is his shift away from attempts to represent trauma and towards a critique of testimony as commodity. In Sacco’s narratives, the visual comic narrative plays a dialogic role in exposing what I call a *trauma economy*, the modes of mediation, representation, production, and commodification by which we perceive and think about trauma. While Sacco reminds us of the instability of all representational discourses, he ultimately insists that, like the cartoonist that includes himself in his drawings, his Anglophonic audience must reflect upon their own position (of power, of privilege, of desire) in relation to testimony before embarking upon meaningful sociopolitical change. Sacco’s self-reflexive strategies subvert the power relations between Bosnia and the West, complicating the idea that “when cultures are formed as objects of Western knowledge they are also formed as objects of Western control” (Hammond xvi).
CHAPTER ONE

Anxious Cosmopolitans: Partition’s Haunting Presence in the Writing of Amitav Ghosh

If cosmopolitanism is perceived as a broad term that evokes numerous, and often conflicting, discourses, its recent theoretical turn emphasises questions of responsibility and belonging that rest on the search for a political ideal. In line with contemporary theories of the cosmopolitan, this chapter centers on cosmopolitanism as an ethical project that both comes out of and searches for affective encounters in the post-partition space of independent India. In the wake of ethnic partitions, conducted under the auspices of nationalism, cosmopolitanism becomes a strained concept. The rigidity of homogeneous, national identity formations does not easily allow room for what Pandey has called the “hyphenated national” citizen, such as those found in minorities and marginal groups (“Disciplining” 159). To be cosmopolitan in the space of the nation-state implies hospitality to others; but such a notion places into jeopardy the post-partition and separatist project of state-building. To use a drastic example, the aspirations of South Asia’s post-colonial states, such as Bangladesh, make the practice of cosmopolitanism, with its tolerance of synthesis and integration, suspect at best and impossible at worst. Whereas the partitioning of societies functions to inhibit cosmopolitanism, cosmopolitanism works in reverse, enabling the overthrow of partitionist mentalities. Paying particular attention to the violent consequences of the 1947 Indian partition, my chapter examines the way the novelist Amitav Ghosh develops a form of cosmopolitanism that works through partition’s traumas. Ghosh’s conceptualization of cosmopolitanism relies on an ethics of openness and represents a move away from nationalism’s exclusivist loyalties. More specifically, in his recent novels, Ghosh advances cosmopolitanism as the basis of a new politics that responds to the unresolved dilemmas of partition, and is thus oriented towards the formation of future communities.
The tension between nationalism and cosmopolitanism is illustrated in Ghosh’s 1992 novel *In an Antique Land*, where a confrontation between the two ideological positions takes place. Ghosh describes a journey, taken in Egypt, to visit the tomb of Sidi Abu-Hasira, a Jewish saint who “had once been equally venerated by Jews and Muslims alike” (342). On reaching the tomb, Ghosh and his driver are detained and interrogated by uniformed guards, representatives of the state. Unable to fathom Ghosh’s interest in the tomb (for, as Ghosh’s interrogator asks, being neither “Jewish or Israeli…what connection could [Ghosh] have with the tomb of a Jewish holy man, here in Egypt?”), the guards let Ghosh go on the condition that he leave at once, without visiting the tomb. Pondering this episode, Ghosh realises the extent to which the historical displacements of colonial legacies and nationalist discourses are inscribed:

> It struck me…[that] the remains of those small indistinguishable, intertwined histories, Indian and Egyptian, Muslim and Jewish, Hindu and Muslim, had been partitioned long ago. Nothing remained in Egypt to effectively challenge [the interrogator’s] disbelief…It was then that I began to realize how much success the partitioning of the past had achieved; that I was sitting at that desk now because the mowlid of Sidi Abu-Hasira was an anomaly within the categories of knowledge represented by those divisions. (339-340)

Whereas *In an Antique Land* foregrounds these “intertwined histories,” Ghosh’s reconstruction of a medieval, non-western, multi-religious world has been much criticized by the feminist scholar Inderpal Grewal because, amongst other things, its cosmopolitanism can only be realized through the University of Oxford’s “repository of…documents that made this history possible” (55). Rejecting this precolonial world as idealized and nostalgic, Grewal argues that ultimately Ghosh provides us with wishful thinking, a depiction of “a utopian time and place” (54). My use of *In an Antique Land*, in contrast, serves as a brief introduction to Ghosh’s deployment of cosmopolitanism as a philosophy that provides the basis for a particular ethic.
If Grewal’s analysis provides a useful corrective to Ghosh’s selective cosmopolitanism – she urges us to consider the ways in which colonial histories play a part in producing his narrative, while calling attention to his marginalisation of female and working class diasporic subjects – she fails to contextualise or elaborate on the two implicit ideas of *In an Antique Land*, the diasporic intellectual and the space of utopianism, as incomplete critical modes that work towards a cosmopolitan politics. The first concerns Ghosh’s self-insertion into his text as writer and ethnographer-historian, whose diasporic displacement as postcolonial intellectual enables a particular cosmopolitan perspective.\(^{69}\) Ghosh implies that, from this critical position, hidden knowledges can be unearthed; the traces of heterogeneous communities and transcultural connections can be retrieved and reimagined. The figure of what might be loosely called the secular intellectual, embodied variously by the writer, the researcher, the humanitarian worker, and the academic, recur in many of Ghosh’s writings, and speak to the importance with which Ghosh views cosmopolitans as having (consciously or unconsciously) the imaginative tools that can challenge exclusivist ideologies.\(^{70}\)

Ghosh himself seems to exemplify the role of the secular intellectual in his public commentaries that tirelessly advocate greater social and political engagement; consequently, I

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\(^{69}\) I have borrowed the term “Ethnographer-Historian” from the title of Javed Majeed’s 1995 article.

\(^{70}\) I take the term “secular intellectual” to refer to particular commitments to a greater social good and to ideals that go beyond the self, such as to reformed political and social practices. My choice of the term is much influenced by Bruce Robbins’ idea of a “secular vocation,” where the “ethical, epistemological, aesthetic, and political beliefs” of an individual are “inextricable” from their “attachment to their work” (*Secular Vocations* 23). While Robbins’s emphasis is on professional scholars, my denotation of the “secular intellectual” also refers to non-academic, public, and independent figures, such as activists and humanitarian workers. The secular intellectual, unlike the connotations suggested by the phrases “ethnic” or third world intellectual, can be found within the third world, within diaspora groups, but also within western, non-diasporic groups. In Ghosh’s works, the secular intellectual can be seen in a whole or inchoate form in his characters in their pursuit of what Robbins calls “an ethic of public service” (*Secular Vocations* 216). My use of intellectual refers to the character of this cultural elite, and their implication in forms of knowledge (though as Pheng Cheah points out, cosmopolitanism in its French eighteenth-century context, stood for “an intellectual ethic.” See Robbins and Cheah, 22). Note that in *The Shadow Lines*, the narrator, like his uncle, embarks on a PhD thesis, while May Price is a humanitarian worker connected to various charities across the world; in *The Hungry Tide*, we have Piya, an academic researcher, Kanai, a linguistically gifted businessman, his uncle, a former university professor, and his aunt, who sets up a NGO that educates women and helps poor communities become self-sufficient.
turn to his journalistic writings, which foreground the issue of intellectual work and the theme of political agency. For instance, in “The Diaspora in Indian Culture” (1989), Ghosh articulates the importance of the diasporic subjectivities in relation to the Indian nation-state. His exclusive attention, however, is focussed on writers, “the specialists of the imagination” who “play so important a part” within this relationship (76). While writers of fiction are significant, Ghosh’s interest also extends to the social and political energies that come out of India’s intellectual culture. Like writers, intellectuals have a role in explicating the past, particularly in the overlap between disciplines in which Ghosh himself operates – history, literature, sociology, and anthropology. It might be argued that, as with cultural narratives, intellectual work lends itself well to offering an understanding of cultures, groups, and nations.71 For Ghosh, diasporic writings are part of India that is “both hostage and representative in the world outside” as the writer provides “the mirror in which modern India seeks to know itself” (“Diaspora in Indian Culture” 78). But the appeal to the readerly residents of “modern India” also contains a political and pragmatic subtext that can be traced in Ghosh’s other writings.72 In his 1995 essay, “The Ghosts of Mrs Gandhi,” Ghosh speaks of the “catastrophe” of sectarian violence, and couples it with the equally disastrous effect of its representation: the excision, within many cultural discourses, of the efforts to oppose and quell such violence (46). In reading accounts that describe the violent dilemmas of the world, Ghosh suggests that rather than thinking of these events as “mere spectacles,” we must “recognize the urgency of remembering the stories we have not written” (60; 62). He drives us, in other words, to think beyond the aesthetic character

71 Ghosh’s academic background is less relevant here than his interest in the role of particular academic groups, such as the subalternist studies group. Ghosh is all too aware of the dangers implicit in forms of knowledge, such as anthropology, which can turn “people into abstractions,” or history, which can be complicit in nationalist projects (Aldama 86). For an example of the optimistic, rather than the pessimistic view of academia, see Ghosh’s correspondence with Dipesh Chakrabarty. Here Ghosh extols the way Provincializing Europe provides “insights into oneself and the ways in which one’s own experience is constituted” (Ghosh and Chakrabarty 147).

72 Ghosh has explained the importance of India to his writing because “I have a much, much bigger audience in India than I have anywhere else” (Aldama 87).
of textual discourses to acknowledge the existing efforts that act and intervene within these volatile circumstances.

It is within such a framework that Ghosh’s utopianism must be understood since it denotes a conscious mode of political praxis. Whatever popular connotations it may have accrued, utopian thought does not necessarily suggest a disconnect from political realities, but rather represents a serious desire to resolve existing problems and to secure emancipation for groups enmeshed in particular political realities. Scholars such as Peter Fitting have pointed out that utopia has a

performative function...intended ideally to push the reader to action...utopia and dystopia by their very nature remind us of their connections with the real, and it seems foolish and obtuse to ignore the deliberate engagement of these works with contemporary issues. (142-43, emphasis added)

Similarly, Ghosh’s use of utopias sets up a way to advance a dialogical encounter between an imagined past and the present, through which new forms of experience, agency, and politics can be found. Rather than projecting an impossible ideal, the utopia of In an Antique Land responds to communalist separatism and its violences, encouraging and anticipating social change. This chapter examines Ghosh’s formulation of a utopic cosmopolitanism in two novels, The Shadow Lines (1998) and The Hungry Tide (2004). At the centre of each is the cosmopolitan figure of the displaced (though not necessarily diasporic) secular intellectual through whom Ghosh outlines a response to the diverse kinds of violence of the Indian partition. Through their bourgeois protagonists, the two novels search out a perspective that would contest the partitionist identities and the onset of historical amnesia, in order to recover some of the communitarian possibilities projected by utopian cosmopolitan ideals. These articulations of cosmopolitanism function as a form of working through, an orientation towards healing oneself and others of the traumatic histories of the past.
In distinction from other theorizations, Ghosh’s cosmopolitanism is energized, if not wholly formed, by the affects emanating from memories, experiences, and the spaces of otherness. By affect, I mean the experiential and frequently subliminal sensations or impulses, which one interprets or registers as particular feelings or emotions.\(^73\) Affect expresses our social practices and, as my investigation will reveal, is connected to particular histories, memories, and locations. Because I concentrate on the affective character of Ghosh’s cosmopolitanism, the general nature and history of cosmopolitanism, particularly as it is taken up by cultural theories, needs to be understood. Scholars frequently refer to the themes of cosmopolitanism in Ghosh’s work, but rarely do they explore its relationship to the concepts of affect and utopia (see Black). One purpose in this chapter is to show the overlap in ethical concerns between contemporary theories of the cosmopolitan and Ghosh’s ideas of cosmopolitanism.

The bulk of this chapter turns to the social and political role of Ghosh’s cosmopolitanism in relation to the traumas of partition, exemplified variously through displacement, communal riots, impoverishment, and individual, as well as collective trauma. In particular, my chapter traces a development in Ghosh’s use of an affective cosmopolitanism and the shift from his focus on the individual in *The Shadow Lines* to the collective in *The Hungry Tide*. *The Shadow Lines* seeks to counter the suppressed memories of partition and to scrutinize the role of communal violence in shaping the post-partition lives of individuals. The unnamed narrator utilizes a melancholic and cosmopolitan form of imagination to generate insight into his personal trauma. Mobilized through an intellectual desire for knowledge, the narrator searches

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\(^73\) Donna M. Orange offers a helpful differentiation between affect and emotions when she writes that emotions, like feelings, are “complex processes rather than…simple entities” that are “knowable or known only by introspection and empathy” (90). However, critics like Sara Ahmed talk of the difficulty of creating a divide between emotion and sensation (affect) as contact with a subject that generates feelings also involves the “histories that come before the subject...[if] the distinction between sensation and emotion can only be analytic...[it] is premised on the reification of a concept” (6). Affect must be understood as a broad and non-quantifiable concept, and its definitions continue to be widely debated. For a concise introduction to the different positions in this discussion, see Nigel Thrift’s essay on affect.
out the ghosts of the past in order to secure a coping strategy for the individual life. Melancholia, as well as the sensations of longing and unfulfilled love, inflect the narrator’s search through his memories. Through the cosmopolitan imagination, Ghosh offers us a critique of post-partition realities and challenges us to conceive of future kinships, based not on identificatory politics, but constructed around affinities of belief, what Timothy Brennan describes as “communities defined by shared positions, ideas, and visions for the future” (*Wars of Position* 6). In my analysis, I argue that any celebratory reading of such communities is undercut by Ghosh’s propagation of a masculinist norm where women, and in particular women’s bodies, serve only to reinforce homosocial links across cosmopolitan communities. In contrast, *The Hungry Tide* takes up Ghosh’s exploration of cosmopolitanism, reworking the masculinist cosmopolitan creed of *The Shadow Lines* into a *critical* cosmopolitanism that foregrounds its role within political and social practices. I concentrate on how *The Hungry Tide* addresses the predicaments of the subaltern, who is victim of the nation-state’s distribution of power. Ghosh’s subalterns are part of a displaced refugee community, whose struggle for post-partition recognition has been occluded from official discourses. Because the limited agency of the subaltern cannot withstand the material strength of the state, Ghosh calls upon the cosmopolitan intellectual to assume moral responsibility for an impoverished collectivity. Ghosh’s critical cosmopolitanism derives from a proximity with subaltern space and the subaltern’s traumatic experiences, which leave an affective imprint on his protagonists. Experiencing a sense of estrangement and disorientation, his characters become aware of new feelings of attachment. Unlike *The Shadow Lines*, *The Hungry Tide* is concerned with the formation of a new subjectivity. In this way, a critical cosmopolitanism seeks to redress the structural inadequacies of the postcolonial nation-state. In my analysis of *The Hungry Tide* I
want to argue that, as with India’s pre-Independence movements, critical cosmopolitanism emerges in a time of global turbulence, and culminates in the creation of unorthodox solidarities, pointing towards the promise of a new society. My discussion explores the role of the cosmopolitan intellectual, and Ghosh’s contemplation of the obligations that ought to come with particular privileges. Moreover, in aligning the reader with the viewpoints of his cosmopolitan subjects, and by stressing the modes of production of the book itself, i.e. its creation, its global publication, and its consumption by a bourgeois audience, Ghosh implicates the reader in his critical cosmopolitanism to demand an ethics that pushes for social and political reconstitution.

**Rooted and Utopic Cosmopolitanisms**

In western political philosophy, the tradition of cosmopolitanism begins with Diogenes the Cynic and his claim to be a citizen of the world. Broadly speaking, the premise of an allegiance to the world, rather than to any particular nation, raises ideas of tolerance and receptiveness to other cultures. Concurrently, it operates through a process of detachment, a loosening of local prejudices or affiliations. Cosmopolitanism was developed further after the Greeks during the advent of modernity. As Walter Mignolo notes, the major cosmopolitan projects emerged first during the sixteenth century, when technological innovations brought disparate communities into contact for the first time, and then later in the eighteenth century, most famously in Kant’s essay on “Perpetual Peace.” In both the Greek and the Enlightenment contexts,

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74 This detachment is viewed as positive and negative. For example, in the positive vein, both Paul Gilroy and Amanda Anderson talk about the need to cultivate degrees of estrangement in order to procure a critical perspective of one’s society. The negative understanding of detachment is exemplified by estrangement through an attachment to nowhere and nobody, a rejection of the nation-state (and thus the need for regional/national political frameworks) or an attachment to an abstraction too large to be helpful (the world or humanity in general). Detachment also indicates insularity as an attachment only to the nation; these examples are extremes that Kwame Anthony Appiah sums up as “the nationalist who abandons all foreigners or the hard core cosmopolitanism who regards her friends and fellow citizens with icy impartiality” (*Cosmopolitanism* xvii).

75 See Walter Mignolo’s historical genealogy of modernity and cosmopolitanism, pps. 725-37.
cosmopolitanism claimed abstract and universal ideals, but, as scholars such as David Parker argue, its formulation remained encased by a restrictive set of norms: it privileged the moral and cultural superiority of its European foundation, and posited cosmopolitanism as an objective philosophy, desirable and acceptable to all. Recent theories of cosmopolitanism break with this universalist framework to stress the importance of local space. Bruce Robbins, for instance, rejects the “preconceived totality” of cosmopolitanism as a critical mode since “intellectuals and academics are “not ‘detached’ but situated” in diverse ways (“Comparative Cosmopolitanism” 173; 172, original emphasis). Building on Spivak’s formulation of “worlding,” he argues instead for understanding cosmopolitanism as a “process in which more than one ‘world’ may be realised, where ‘worlds’ may be contested” (176). In postcolonial literatures and theory, the commitment to cosmopolitanism manifests itself in different ways: through multiculturalism, hybridity, mobility, a familiarity with many languages, literatures, and cultures, and so on.  

Most often, cosmopolitan subjects frequently surface in postcolonial literatures and theory as a privileged class. Their cosmopolitan perspective supposedly endows them with the disruptive power of a politics of difference. But such powers also exist in the “politics of deterritorialised flows” found in forms of global capitalism that also easily transcend borders (Hardt and Negri, Empire 142). Brennan is right to assert that cosmopolitanism is “a fundamentally ambivalent phenomenon,” articulated by ethical interests on both sides of the political fence (Wars of Position 205).  

In contrast to the idea that cosmopolitanism is somehow intrinsic to the experiences of diasporic intellectuals, Pnina Werbner argues that cosmopolitanism “does not necessarily imply an absence of belonging but the possibility of belonging to more than one ethnic and cultural localism simultaneously (34). She puts forward the case for working-class Pakistani cosmopolitans, who gain knowledge of other cultures through their experiences of migration and labour, opening up a transnational links that are not centred around Europe.  

See Brennan, At Home in the World for details of the relationship between corporatism and cosmopolitanism (209-11). Here Brennan reminds us of the xenophobic uses of cosmopolitanism in the nineteenth century when it was used to denigrate marginalised groups, such as Jews and homosexuals. Another example of imperial cosmopolitanism is offered by Paul Gilroy, who talks of an “armoured cosmopolitanism” (60) that refers “to the
implicit in the cosmopolitan ideal. Parker, who positions the classical interpretations of cosmopolitanism within their historical context of slavery and expansionism, explains that the terms on which cultural differences are encountered, appropriated and absorbed have never been free from power; from being embedded in the asymmetrical relationships and pressures of commerce, colonialism, and military force. (156)

Thus, we should remember that neither postcolonial cosmopolitan subjects nor postmodern capitalism necessarily resolve the crises prompted by intolerance, ethnic violence, and current inequities; in fact, they may perpetuate them.

Ghosh is sensitive to the diverse discourses of cosmopolitanism and their contradictions. For example, *The Hungry Tide* documents the rich religious cosmopolitanism of refugees whose physical immobility makes them unlikely cosmopolitans. On the other hand, *The Shadow Lines* describes the clichéd cosmopolitanism of global and capitalist professionals, who, despite their global travels, remain narrow-minded. Ghosh carefully delineates the partiality of all cosmopolitan sentiments, revealing cosmopolitanism, in its myriad forms, as neither universal nor neutral, but situated, inextricably dependent upon social, economic, and class distinctions.

Critical theorists, principally James Clifford, Kwame Anthony Appiah, Pheng Cheah, and Homi K. Bhabha, have elaborated this nuanced understanding of cosmopolitanism variously as “discrepant,” “rooted,” “embedded,” and “vernacular.” Producing an ethical cosmopolitanism as a critical view towards the planetary, Ghosh follows the description of “discrepant cosmopolitanism” offered by Robbins. For Robbins, discrepant cosmopolitanism is “modest” in its “impulse to knowledge that is shared with others, [its] striving to transcend partiality that is

elaboration of a supranational system of regulation that opposes or contains the nation state from above...In the names of cosmopolitanism and humanitarianism, these particular moral sensibilities can promote and justify intervention in other people's sovereign territory on the grounds that their ailing or incompetent national state has failed to measure up to the levels of good practice that merit recognition as civilized” (59-60).
itself partial” (176; 181). In short, this form of cosmopolitanism is not a new world view in itself, but rather a declaration of a search for new ways of understanding the world.

Like the “rooted,” “vernacular,” and “discrepant” interpretations of cosmopolitanism, Ghosh’s cosmopolitanism recounts to the ethical relation between self and other. As we see in recent formulations of the term, Ghosh uses cosmopolitanism to critique our ideological situatedness, “to clear up the encumbrances of the past, and to point to the future” (Mignolo 735). In Ghosh’s model of critical cosmopolitanism, revealed in The Hungry Tide, the cosmopolitan is not only acutely aware and open to others, but carries a strong sense of collective responsibility towards others. The responsibility towards others is prioritized over individual interest; the self experiences a radical decentering. I use the phrase “critical cosmopolitanism” to gesture towards similar conceptualizations of cosmopolitanism, which have surfaced recently in cultural theory to apprehend modes of self-transformation, obligation, action, and agency.78 For instance, sociologist Gerard Delanty deploys the term “critical cosmopolitanism” to understand the process by which a new consciousness, which he calls “the cosmopolitan imagination,” occurs in response to cultural and social transformation. Propounding its dialogic and developmental role as the “new relations between self, other and world…in moments of openness” (27), Delanty sees the cosmopolitan imagination as going beyond the recognition of plural differences; through its openness, “the social world is made intelligible,” expressing “new ideas, opening spaces of discourse, identifying possibilities for translation and the construction of the social world” (42). For Delanty, critical cosmopolitanism occurs in the tensions of modernity (i.e.: in the dialectical tensions of global and local, universal

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78 Mignolo also alludes to a form of critical cosmopolitanism that he calls “border thinking,” which he views as “the alternative to separatism, the recognition and transformation of the hegemonic imaginary from the perspectives of people in subaltern positions” (736-37). As with Ghosh’s cosmopolitanism, this mode of thinking seeks “to escape the ideological frame imposed by global designs” in order to search for “other options beyond both benevolent recognition and humanitarian pleas for inclusion” (724).
and particular), and its ethical core appears to lie in its expression “towards self-problematization” (35). Delanty’s critical cosmopolitan instills a new way of thinking, a heightened awareness to the contingency of one’s position, which manifests itself through irony, reflexivity, skepticism, and a commitment to dialogue. However, Delanty does not make clear what the obligations of critical cosmopolitanism are, outside of embodying the values described above. His articulations of self-awareness and situatedness recall notions of anxiety and vulnerability, affective registers that I see as crucial to implementing an ethos that responds to the inequities produced by entrenched orthodoxies, such as class and caste.

I would like to turn to Kwame Anthony Appiah’s work on the ethical dimensions of cosmopolitanism as a model for understanding Ghosh’s critical cosmopolitanism. In *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (2006), Appiah advances two cosmopolitan positions: first, “the idea that we have obligations to others” and second, “that we take seriously the value…of particular human lives, which means taking an interest in the practices and beliefs that lend them significance” (xv). Cosmopolitanism, for Appiah, is steered towards pluralism and, at its center lies the “sense that our knowledge is imperfect, provisional, subject to revision in the face of new evidence” (144). Appiah’s view of what might be termed a “modest cosmopolitanism,” is imperative for shaping a sense of accountability, because he places emphasis on the contingency of privilege (what is usually called “the accident of birth”) and pushes us into greater political action. True cosmopolitanism comes with a “collective obligation” to maintain attachments formed through one’s identity, and it also includes a commitment within a national framework, to change the nation-state, if it cannot or does not respond to local needs (164).
While Appiah’s cosmopolitanism goes a long way to explaining the actions of Ghosh’s characters, it is important to differentiate in his call for rights and tolerance the avocation of liberal thought from a true pluralist cosmopolitanism. Cosmopolitanism differs from liberalism in its valorization of difference so that even intolerance would become part of the cosmopolitan conversation, rather than being subject to a particular law of justice or rights. In his review of Appiah’s work, John Gray observes that cosmopolitanism in fact depicts a tension between “the possibility of mutual understanding between…different moralities” and the overall lack of “any ultimate consensus” (26). Gray argues that thinkers like Michel de Montaigne offer a cosmopolitan ethics precisely because they reject the singular, whether a form of government or a way of life, in order to affirm “a common humanity” that emanates from different customs and traditions (27). I see a modification of Appiah’s theory as necessary in order to incorporate de Montaigne’s dimension of ethics, but I would argue that these two versions can work productively together in critical cosmopolitanism without succumbing to either the liberal or colonial framework in which they were originally articulated.

The positive utopia of de Montaigne’s cosmopolitanism can be seen to supplement Appiah’s “rooted” cosmopolitanism; the pragmatic turn to the local, in other words, benefits from having a utopian ideal that offers a politics of hope through its progressive vision. Picture Imperfect (2005), a study that responds to the contemporary dismissal of utopia by Russell Jacoby, delineates the goal of utopic thinking as promoting the idea of harmony and alliances, the opposite of “nationalist, ethnic, and sectarian passions” (xii). Jacoby’s definition of utopia might be seen as elaborating the political hope of critical cosmopolitanism in an age of ethnic

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79 In an earlier essay, Appiah explicitly defends a liberal cosmopolitanism that tolerates differences on the grounds that “these differences meet certain ethical constraints – so long…as political institutions respect the basic human rights the notion of human rights – we are happy to let them be” (“Again National Culture” 178). As John Gray observes, such an argument presumes that there is a universal set of rights that applies equally to all communities rather than allowing for a mutual understanding between communities.
and caste-based violence: utopia “seeks to emancipate by envisioning a world based on a new, neglected, or spurned ideas” (12, emphasis added). Utopia, as envisioned by Jacoby can help us understand Ghosh’s cosmopolitan aspirations. The postcolonial present is thus nourished by the inspirations of an idyllic cosmopolitan past.

**The Consolations of Cosmopolitanism in *The Shadow Lines***

In *The Shadow Lines*, the affective cosmopolitan imagination has a specifically palliative function. It not only provides insight for the narrator into the national and personal traumas of partition, but also helps him work through his sense of loss.\(^{80}\) Readings of the novel that emphasise the trauma of partition are commonplace, sustained both by historical accounts that alert us to the traumas of displacement, communal riots, and by Ghosh’s assertion that he wrote *The Shadow Lines* in response to his own childhood memories of communal violence and to the 1984 Sikh pogroms of Indira Gandhi’s Operation Bluestar.\(^{81}\) However, in these same readings, the referencing of trauma appears cursory at best; as an already-formed analytical tool, trauma supplements their theses that *The Shadow Lines* is foremost a memory novel that investigates “the burden of a colonial past” (Bose, “Introduction” 17). Ghosh’s critics seem to take for granted that trauma *per se* exists in the text, without really examining the symptoms of trauma, or, more puzzlingly, why it might be important for Ghosh to focus on the trauma of an individual removed from the sites of disturbance (i.e. at a third-generation distance from partition, as well as the narrator’s literal absence from Tridib’s death).\(^{82}\) On the one hand, the

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\(^{80}\) For example, see many of the fifteen essays in Arvind Chowdhary’s collection; see also Brinda Bose’s collection of edited essays.

\(^{81}\) See Ghosh’s essay “The Ghosts of Mrs Gandhi” (60), and for a more detailed analysis of Ghosh’s childhood memories, violence, and his writing of *The Shadow Lines* see his essay, “The Greatest Sorrow: Times of Joy Recalled in Wretchedness.”

\(^{82}\) One possible reason for the reluctance of critics to engage trauma categorically, whilst simultaneously avowing or assuming the novel to be traumatic, might be the complex and unresolved status of partition traumas (including
subject position of the traumatised and anonymous narrator indicates how partition violence has been captured in a residual collective memory that haunts the cultural identity of groups across generations. On the other, Ghosh’s focus on a third-generation figure might suggest possibilities for new understandings and resolutions of trauma to emerge as the originary event becomes more remote and abstract. The narrator’s trauma draws upon a number of anxieties and affects; a detailed investigation speaks to the mediation and the meaning of trauma, but also offers a glimpse into the trauma’s resolution.

Structured around the narrator’s family history, at a first glance The Shadow Lines fits the description of a memory novel, since it is a narrative that insistently returns to the memories of the narrator’s favourite uncle Tridib. The novel intersperses these memories with the narrator’s activities as a student in London, where he meets his cousin, Ila and renews his acquaintance with May Price, an old family friend, who had a romantic friendship with Tridib, and whose brother, Nick, ends up marrying Ila. The narrator’s meetings with these characters evoke further “lines” of memories, through which the narrator plots out his own and Tridib’s experiences, his feelings of love for Ila, as well as his fraught relationship to his nationalistic grandmother, Thamma. Thamma’s history is plotted against the colonial history and partition of India, and memories of her pre-partition home in Dhaka, East Bengal, haunts much of the narrative. In fact, towards the end of the novel, we learn that Tridib was killed in a communal riot some twenty years earlier during a special return trip to Dhaka, to see Thamma’s ancestral home and rescue her aged relative.

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those of communal violence) within India, reflected in the presuppositions and disinclinations in the writings of (mainly Indian) critics. Another reason could be the largely underdeveloped relationship between trauma theory and postcolonial studies, which leads scholars to downplay trauma; for instance, critics repeatedly employ the term trauma, but rarely pausing to consider its variegated meanings.
Concerned with the reconstruction of three generations worth of history, the novel juxtaposes past and present, memory and lived experience, overlapping fiction with imagination and recorded historical events. Reading *The Shadow Lines*, one is reminded of a detective novel except that, instead of pursing a culprit, the narrative searches out the actual event of Tridib’s death as well as its underlying logic; in doing so, the narrator shows how ethnic and religious antagonisms were amplified as a consequence of the 1947 partition. The narrator’s preoccupation with both Tridib and the veil shrouding the circumstances of his death establishes a palpable sense of melancholy. According to Freud’s 1917 essay “Mourning and Melancholia,” melancholia, unlike mourning, can be understood as an abnormal clinging to the lost object: the subject’s “love for the object…cannot be given up though the object itself is given up” (251). Freud’s understanding of melancholia is helpful insofar as it suggests why the narrator attempts to “psychically prolong” Tridib’s existence, and even self-identify with him (245), however, for the narrator in *The Shadow Lines*, melancholy does not inhibit the “normal” course of mourning, but instead offers a productive course of action, a re-engagement with the past in a way that passes on a critical legacy into the future.

The narrator’s fixation with memories of Tridib, his own childhood, and personal histories (mainly made up of other people’s stories and newspaper accounts) leads him to confront the formation and pattern of historical conflicts; his search for counter-histories constitutes a form of working through. These counter-histories are not uncovered, revealed, or remembered through either an archaeological or archival expedition; rather they are imagined. Furthermore, a very specific form of imagination is at work, a narrative agency which originates

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83 Freud explains that the lost object must be of “great significance” for the ego (“Mourning and Melancholia” 256); he also argues that melancholia establishes “an identification of the ego with the abandoned object,” which helps explain why the narrator frequently points to (usually incorrect) similarities between himself and his uncle (249).
in a particular perspective, which many scholars have identified as cosmopolitan, first held by Tridib and later emulated by the narrator (see Black; Brinda Bose; Chowdhary; and Khair). In contrast to what Tridib calls the one-sided “inventions” of nationalism (31), his imagination pieces together “sights” of multiple cultures that are “infinitely detailed [and]…precise” (29). This is a profoundly cosmopolitan position since it harmonises with Appiah’s insistence that cosmopolitanism is, above all else, an “idea that we can learn from people's differences” (4). Moreover, Tridib’s cosmopolitanism is affective; it is motivated by “a painful and primitive desire, a longing for everything that was not in oneself, a torment of the flesh, that carried one beyond the limits of one’s mind to other times and other places” (29). This affectively-structured cosmopolitan imagination allows the narrator to supplement both his own incomplete memories of the past, and his family’s repressed history.

This affective cosmopolitan imagination spurs the critical agency of the narrator’s melancholia.\footnote{Here I do not disagree with Ian Almond’s assertion that sadness “provokes, necessitates and surrounds” the imagination,” but rather I differentiate between two forms of melancholia: a more passive form that imbues the narrator’s life, and its critical form, which enables the return of the spectral past (92).} Whereas it is frequently normal to say that memories and melancholia can constitute a form of haunting, in The Shadow Lines the narrator literally produces ghosts, inaugurating a spectral landscape. He finds himself watched and surrounded by “the ghosts who had been handed down to [him] by time” (178). Yet through his imagination the tenor shifts from haunting to communion. Their ghostliness dissipates, so that “they were all around me, we were together at last, not ghosts at all: the ghostliness was merely the absence of time and distance – for that is all that a ghost is, a presence displaced in time” (178). It is presence, and not memory, that the narrator craves. This feeling is an example of what LaCapra terms the “melancholic sentiment,” that is, the narrator’s fidelity to the traumatic past and his dedication to a “bond with the dead” (Writing History 22). Approaching the sites of Calcutta and London,
the predominant settings of the novel, the narrator utilizes the tools of memory and the cosmopolitan imagination to generate an archive of spectral histories. These sources open up a genealogy of radical communities, involving several characters in the novel that the narrator desires in various ways, namely, Tridib, his cousin, Ila, and an English friend of the family, Nick. The narrator’s ability to take up this genealogy forms a remedial practice to a traumatic absence that is structured around the emotional states of desire and love.

In exploring the melancholia of the novel in greater depth, my analysis suggests that Ghosh conceives of melancholia as a concept that registers loss but remains fundamentally dynamic, driving the narrator to form new attachments. While critics have recently begun to acknowledge the emotional aspect of *The Shadow Lines*, only Ian Almond has specifically identified and engaged the critical role of melancholia in the novel. Working primarily with the trope of sadness, Almond claims that melancholia is a phenomenon of the postcolonial intellectual, a figure stuck in a limbo between an artificial nationalism and a defunct colonialism. While Almond identifies melancholia as the “central thread which binds all the…themes of the book” (92), he never carries it beyond that impotent state of limbo, a nebulous Lacanian lack that is tied strangely – if one considers the recent efforts made in the field of postcolonial studies to theorise the agency provided to those who occupy in-between, hybrid spaces – to the “failure of the imagination” (94).

In contrast to Almond, who defines melancholia exclusively as a lack, I do not think we should so quickly consign melancholia to the veritable dustbin. While certainly in many cases melancholia is indeed debilitating, there are instances when it can become productive. A casual

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85 For example, Shawkat Hussain observes that the “anxiety of migrancy” dominates the novel, and serves as a form of “post-colonial angst” (127), while Shubha Tiwari notes the “sad, sweet sensation” of the text, which he ascribes to Ghosh’s authorial skill, rather than for any particular end (22). Such critiques neglect a fuller investigation into novel’s affect, and tend to ignore its entanglement in trauma.
paragraph in Alpana Neogy’s “The Shadow Lines Between Freedom and Violence” illustrates my point. Though she never uses the specific word, it is clear that Neogy is thinking about melancholia as she describes the narrator’s sense of acute personal loss:

The tragedy of Tridib is the central focus of the novel. His presence and his absence haunt the reader from the first pages till the end when the mystery of his death [is revealed]. The absence of Tridib (and the violent manner of his death) is like an unexpressed sorrow, a silent pain… a suppressed sob. (82)

Neogy correctly diagnoses the source of the novel’s affect, yet she does not consider whether the search for knowledge could be intrinsic to the narrator’s desire to understand Tridib’s death and to self-identify with him. As Ghosh describes it, Tridib’s death in a communal riot leaves “so complete an absence,” that the young narrator strives to compensate by constructing acts of memorializations (234). The melancholic affect of the novel, then, stems from the narrator’s posthumous attachment to Tridib; his identity in fact depends entirely on his memories of Tridib. Melancholia arises from the narrator’s experience of an untimely intimacy; indeed, such melancholic affect also resides in the desire for (an impossible) fulfilment, and thus has its place in the novel’s greater themes of unrequited and thwarted love.

If we turn to current interpretations of melancholia, we can discern a shift in critical thinking that builds upon Freudian analysis, while embracing a more radical position that advocates an ethics of the other, an idea that is particularly relevant to Ghosh’s The Shadow Lines. The position held by this latter group, an assemblage of postmodernists, queer theorists, deconstructionists, and postcolonialists, is only viable through a selective reading of Freud’s work, a strategy which has upset more orthodox critics. For instance Freud’s “Mourning and

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86 The narrator’s process of recollection is only available to him as an adult (he is now roughly the same age as Tridib when he died.) On the one hand, the narrator’s adulthood signifies his agency and the accumulation of resources to be able to embark on a commemoration of Tridib’s life. On the other hand, it also suggests that this belated investigation of Tridib’s death is a response to his family’s repression of the event.
"Melancholia" begins with the premise that the melancholic subject pathologically refuses to let go of the loved object, to assimilate it normally as it were, and relegate it into the past. Melancholia denotes the unconscious absorption of the object into the ego, a process that Freud sees as leading to a “distressing self-denigration,” as the ego rages against itself (247). As critics such as Greg Forter have noted, those who wish to portray melancholia as somehow empowering have deliberately elided the characteristics of melancholia’s effects, including numbness, self-abasement, and the “delusional expectation of punishment” (Freud 244) that culminate in the melancholic’s suicidal tendencies. Such selective reading should not be condemned however; instead, it might be more fruitful to take up Freud’s assessment of melancholia as one particular historical interpretation of the myriad states of melancholia. Freud directs his essay, within the social (and patriarchal) framework of his time, towards the case of lost love, given in the two specific examples of “a betrothed girl who has been jilted” (245), and the relationship between a husband and an “incapable” wife (248). Outside of these illustrations, applying melancholia to a variety of concrete and abstract concepts, such as the death of an Indian person in East Pakistan, the loss of an empire, or the loss of a pre-colonial culture that was never fully known, cannot be subsumed solely under a Freudian category, not least, as Ranjana Khanna points out, because of psychoanalysis’s vexed status as a discipline “dependent on…the politics of colonial relations” (Dark Continents 2). For scholars of postcolonial, queer, and affect theory, melancholia offers an aesthetics of loss that can be used

87 Freud argues here that melancholia is already preconditioned by an ambivalence – the “opposed feelings of love and hate” for the object – which are then “turned round upon the subject’s own self” (“Mourning and Melancholia” 251).

88 Forter argues that critics wrongly interpret mourning as a forgetting of the object: Such “an assumption misconstrues, for one thing, the profoundly unconscious character of melancholia: the melancholic cannot remember the lost object because she or he does not even know what she or he has lost” (138).

89 Freud also foregrounds a sense of uncertainty at the beginning of his essay, when he argues that melancholia’s many definitions cannot be grouped together “into a single unity” (“Mourning and Melancholia” 243). The essay offers other conjectures that are more easily dismissed, such as Freud’s claim that the melancholic’s fear of becoming poor is derived from anal eroticism (252).
as the basis for a new politics; these critics reject mourning, not because they construe it as forgetting the object (by letting go), but rather because mourning symbolizes the move back to a political status quo.\textsuperscript{90} In his book On Creaturely Life (2006), Eric L. Santner offers a useful summary of the deconstructionist claim to melancholy as

the only affective posture that can maintain fidelity to those losses [which] the reigning ideological formation would like to disavow. Whereas mourning… proves to be an ultimately adaptive strategy to the governing reality principle and the demand “to get on with life,” melancholy retards adaptation, attaches itself to loss; it says no! [sic] to life without the object (or ideal) and thereby… holds open the possibility of alternative frameworks of what counts as reality. (89, original emphasis)

Melancholia offers a way to challenge the hegemonic culture, particularly by minority subjects. In the case of The Shadow Lines, melancholia contests the dominant norms of nationalism in searching out possibilities that are lodged, through the lost object, in the rejected colonial past, prior to Indian Independence.

The condition of melancholy, thus illuminated, leaves its trace on the world around it via the melancholic. In The Shadow Lines, melancholia manifests itself through a series of spectral presences associated with the past. My assertion builds upon the work of Khanna, who views postcolonial melancholia as an affect prompted by “the strife created by worlding” (19). Khanna relies upon the work of psychoanalytic theorists Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok to reformulate melancholia’s critical agency, a Freudian concept of the inassimilable that appears in his 1914 essay “On Narcissism.” Khanna argues that the inassimilable loss of melancholia manifests itself in language and through discourses, such as literature and philosophy. The encryption of melancholia produces haunting symptoms. Her examination of haunting differs

\textsuperscript{90} For example, see Ahmad’s seventh chapter on “Queer Feelings,” which discusses the national appropriation of queer loss and grief after 9/11 (Cultural Politics). Paul Gilroy uses melancholia in its original ambivalent sense to speak of a “postimperial melancholia” to describe contemporary guilt-ridden British culture. Silverman, and Klass return to Freud to argue that his description of mourning did not refer to an actual death, but to Oedipal love. They submit that Freud’s relatively new theory of mourning breaks with previous and much older traditions of grief.
from the articulations of Shoshanna Felman, Cathy Caruth, and the affiliated “Yale school” of trauma theorists in that Khanna does not restrict her study to the unique moment of trauma that is experienced by the survivor alone, but rather places emphasis on the secondary experience of trauma as well as the passing down of trauma through generations.\textsuperscript{91} Her explanation is worth quoting at length:

A phantom constitutes a transgenerationally transmitted signifier of repression. It originates in a trauma or a repressed secret that has not been introjected, but rather has been incorporated – swallowed whole rather than psychically assimilated. The repression is thus not something that can be worked through at all, whereas what has been introjected has been fully worked through…what Abraham and Torok do give us, which is not available in the Freudian scenario, is the idea of transgenerational repression, one that can be passed down particularly through familial lines, so one can, in a sense, be in possession of (and therefore possessed by rather than in ownership of) someone else’s repression. This could then emerge as a phantom, that is, as a signifier of this secret or repression, at a given moment in which circumstances create the occasion for the phantom to emerge as symptom and as signifier in the use of words, in performative acts, and in the creation of narratives. (\textit{Dark Continents} 255)

Despite the problematic syntactical tautology at the end of this paragraph, where the phantom (i.e. the signifier) emerges as the phantom (i.e. the signifier), I think there is much that can be taken from Khanna’s thoughts. The idea that transgenerational repression, when prompted by a particular set of circumstances, emerges “in the use of words” can be identified in Ghosh’s novel, where the narrator seeks to reconstruct past events, creating narratives of the past. The truth of Tridib’s death is suppressed by the narrator’s family, and turned into a secret. The

\textsuperscript{91} The Yale School of trauma theory led by Shoshanna Felman and Cathy Caruth focuses on post-traumatic stress disorder, and argues that a traumatic loss appears belatedly as a haunting in the body and psyche: this manifestation is due to a lack of assimilation as the trauma is unconsciously repressed. Building on Freud and Lacan, Caruth, claims that trauma is “experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly…trauma is not locatable in the …violent…original event in an individual’s past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature – the way it was precisely not known in the first instance – returns to haunt the survivor later on” (4, her emphasis). There are many reasons why this reading cannot be applied to \textit{The Shadow Lines}. For instance, Caruth believes that a trauma cannot be claimed because it is never known in the first instance as it occurs. In contrast, I want to examine the extent to which the narrator is able to claim the repressed histories of trauma. Caruth stresses that it is the survivor who experiences this haunting. However, the narrator is not the survivor of the event in which Tridib dies, nor is he assailed by nightmares that continually relay the violence of the trauma. This interpretation of trauma can be read in the symptoms experienced by his Uncle Robi, who witnessed Tridib’s death and is overwhelmed by the past, suffering repetitive nightmares of the traumatic event.
narrator’s surfeit of memories operates not only to haunt, but also to examine the past. When the death occurred, the narrator was a child, too young to grasp the radical singularity of death. As an adult, looking back at the way he learnt of Tridib’s death, he observes that he felt “no shock, no grief”; he did “not understand that [he] would never see [Tridib] again” (234). Death remains a mere “word” that has “no means of attaching [itself] to a real presence, like Tridib’s” (234). Physically absent from Tridib’s death in Dhaka and his cremation in Calcutta, the narrator is told that “Tridib died in an accident” (234), but he always suspects that the death was “the result of something more than an accident” (233). The lack of bereavement, the euphemisation of the event as an “accident,” the way the topic is dropped and never again discussed all suggest a repression of the past, a reluctance to unlock the greater implications of Tridib’s death.\footnote{A useful point of comparison between the narrator’s trauma (especially the secretive circumstances around Tridib’s death) can be found in analyses on the “disappeared” of Argentina’s dirty war. Turning to the case of the Argentinian national trauma, Mario Di Paolantoni, for instance, argues that the lack of a body in particular creates a problem for mourning. The disappearance of an individual and the lack of a ceremony of mourning, brought about by a funeral, prevents the subject from coming to terms with death. Instead, and here Di Paolantoni cites Nancy Caro Hollander, the “unknown and cryptic state of the disappeared” leads to “intolerable guilt feelings” and the sense of a “live entombment in some uncertain realm without any mark of separation/death” (163).}

We must comprehend the narrator’s pursuit of memories as part of his detective work to retrieve the past in order to assimilate psychically Tridib’s death: at one point, the narrator even invokes a pun that exposes his search for psychic understanding through a network of communities, “kindred spirits” that are linked to the haunting of trauma (52). As Bishnupriya Ghosh has noticed elsewhere in Ghosh’s fiction, ghosts offer an “ethical spectrology” to “imagine a radical postfoundationist future” (198; 206). Ghosts are not only the symptoms of trauma, but also indicative of a productive agency: they are the tools to work through trauma’s significance.
Spectral Landscapes and Lost Communities

Tridib’s affective, cosmopolitan, and imaginative project is the dynamic that compels the narrator’s turn to the past. Already, the narrator feels haunted, deeply implicated as he is in Tridib’s imagination, which is passed onto him in the form of stories and memories. In emulating Tridib’s historiographical imagination, the narrator seeks out ghosts that would unlock the secret of his uncle’s death. Reconstructing scenes of unfamiliar spaces and times, the narrator uses his imagination “with precision” as a means of travel (24). It is Tridib who originally teaches him to use his imagination in order to free himself from geographical and ideological constraints. Implicitly, such a project is based on his uncle’s intellectual quest for knowledge that is very different from his own. Tridib, for example, is able to

- hold forth on all kinds of subjects – Mesopotamian stelae, East European jazz, the habits of arboreal apes, the plays of Garcia Lorca… (9)
- the behavioural differences between the Elapidae and Viperidae families of snakes… the design of the temples at Karnak… the origins of the catamaran (19)

It is significant that Tridib is studying for his PhD in archaeology, and that the narrator also embarks on a thesis, studying the transcultural textual trade of India and Britain. As with the rigours of academia, Tridib embodies what Shameem Black calls a “true cosmopolitanism,” which “demands careful contemplation rather than passive transcultural experience” (53). While Tridib’s cosmopolitan knowledge shapes his imagination, he is primarily concerned with cosmopolitanism as a sympathetic project: it allows him to travel figuratively and escape the oppression engendered by “other people’s inventions” (31). The world is experienced “concretely in [his] imagination” (29). For the narrator however, the imagination does not offer a means of liberation in the same sense, but rather perpetuates the “clamour of voices” inside him (88). It is this unsettlement that drives him to explore the mysteries surrounding Tridib’s death.
In the sites of Calcutta and London, architecture and space play an important part in relation to the cosmopolitan imagination and the haunting of the past. In Calcutta, the narrator feels Tridib’s absence most poignantly since he sees the city’s landmarks as invested with memories of Tridib. When he comes across the Victoria Memorial, he thinks of it as a “haunted site” that invokes an earlier childhood visit with Tridib and his British friend May (167). For the narrator, the site signifies a personal history that remains frustratingly enigmatic. He feels he “could not go [to the memorial]…without hearing Tridib’s soft voice whispering” (167). Tridib’s words to May, “This is our ruin,” resonate, leading the narrator to ponder over the meaning I couldn’t fathom, but which I knew existed, despite me…I would wonder about those words; they would ring in my head, and I would try to take them apart, see what they meant, always without success. (167)

Tridib’s lingering spectral presence is a reminder of the impossibility of total recall, of piecing together past histories and situations that are no longer accessible to the narrator. The haunting here invokes what LaCapra calls a “disturbance in the symbolic order” that has not yet been resolved, but it also represents the repression of the truth that stimulates the narrator’s inquiry into the past (Writing History 215). To take up this inquiry means that the narrator must find witnesses who can furnish him with information and he must be willing to walk in spaces that prompt his memories of the past.

In The Shadow Lines, London is central to any such investigation of the past since it is a place that has already been “invented” for the narrator, in the sense that he is possessed by other people’s imaginations of the city. Sitting in a pub with Ila, the narrator explains how he cannot be free in London because London is haunted by ghosts from the stories told to him by Ila and Tridib (31). If London offers a multiple landscape of memories, it also plays a pragmatic role, providing a series of unique experiences that enable the telling of traumatic memories. For
example, May, one of the few witnesses to Tridib’s death, who lives in London, gives the narrator access to other memories of Tridib that supplement his incomplete and inaccurate childhood recollections. At the same time, London opens up a diasporic mix of South Asian ethnicities, class, religions, nationalities, and dialects that are not always available to the overprotected, middle-class narrator. For instance, when he first explores Brick Lane, the narrator claims he hears a “dozen dialects of Bengali” (98). The exposure to these alternative South Asian histories and cultures are triggers that make possible the piecing together of Tridib’s life. London, unlike any other space in the novel, is predominantly a haunted space that holds presences from the past, providing the context that finally enables the narrator to embark on a journey of working through the past.

In addition to the site-specific memories that haunt the narrator, the ghosts that appear are actively conjured up when the narrator confronts new landscape scenes around him that are charged with his childhood history. The dynamics of such haunting can be best understood through what Eric Santner terms “spectral materialism” (*Creaturely Life* 53). Santner’s seemingly paradoxical concept, drawn from Walter Benjamin’s analysis of the Paris Arcades, centres on the attentive passer-by’s ability to discern in the material world the spectral, the “traces of life that are no longer there” (Santner 51). For Santner, as for Benjamin, spectral materialism involves registering the past, but here Santner differs from Benjamin in emphasising its traumatic quality as it recreates, if momentarily, a “virtual” and affective archive, replete with the imaginative detail of lived history, the melancholic remainders of lives uprooted by political violence, and the pathos of their absence (53).  

While Santner’s foregrounding of the melancholic and disturbing experience of the spectral is relevant to an understanding of the narrator’s reimagining of history, Benjamin’s

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93 Santner argues that spectral materialism is an essentially traumatic experience (*Creaturely Life* 51).
original analysis, nonetheless, remains pertinent for explicating both the framework and the ultimate goal of spectral materialism. The narrator’s peregrinations around London may be reminiscent of Benjamin’s *flaneur*, but his joking remark that he likes to visit his “old haunts” in the city belies the more serious goal of awakening the city’s multiple histories (242). The materiality of buildings and roads spark the memory that enables the narrator to travel imaginatively back to another time. He is frequently “absorbed” into the ghostly reconstructions of such places, and, as a spectator, is made aware of their index of loss (56; 59). As with Benjamin’s Parisian landscape, London manifests within itself a series of “hieroglyphic clues to a forgotten past” (Buck-Morss 39). It remains for the narrator to track down the significant objects and bring them to life. Benjamin’s project of spectral reconstruction is particularly apt for understanding the narrator’s search for a past that would provide some guidance for his future. In her explication of the Arcades Project, Susan Buck-Morss argues that Benjamin sought a dialectical perspective that came out of past and present, which would reveal both historical truths and a myriad of historical possibilities that were tied to the revolutionary promises found in the past. Benjamin’s philosophy provides an insight into a similar process at work in *The Shadow Lines*. For example, his observation that a city contains the residue of a “fossilized community” resonates with Tridib’s creed as well as his profession (qtd in Buck-Morss 66). As an archaeologist, Tridib replicates Benjamin’s efforts “to rescue the metaphysical experience of the objective world” (Buck-Morss 66). When the narrator takes up Tridib’s legacy, a similar search for hope can be traced. Though technically the narrator knows “nothing about London,” he is eager to show his cousin, Ila, not the tangible physical geography of London but the contours and the potential of its spiritual, historical, and political experiences (98). The narrator’s sense that the past offers a political lesson oriented towards the future is
made explicit in the contrast between himself and Ila. Unlike the narrator, who engages the spectres of the past, Ila isolates herself from both “the tide waters of the past and [consequently] the future by steel floodgates;” the existence of symmetries and interconnections between past and future would seem to suggest that any detachment from one risks the forsaking of the other (30).

The ghosts of spectral materialism offer the means to work through a past trauma by revealing a genealogy of human connections that can be traced to the present day. Ghosh represents the spiritual past as a way to foster cross-cultural, often unorthodox, alliances in the present and to gesture towards cosmopolitan possibilities. Searching for a past that brings him closer to Tridib, the narrator explores the city that corresponds to Tridib’s memories of wartime London. What he discovers is a record of dynamic communities and affiliations that emerged in response to the major social crisis emanating from the Second World War. We see that, unlike native Londoner Nick Price, the narrator has a surer knowledge of the political possibilities contained within the cityscape. For example, when the narrator visits Solent Road, at first he sees only a row of “pretty, quiet houses” (56). While the narrator knows that the road’s wartime history is “lost in a forty-year old past” (56), he rejects the everyday tranquillity of the present, explaining that:

> despite the clear testimony of my eyes, it seemed to me still that Tridib had shown me something truer about Solent Road a long time ago in Calcutta, something I could not have seen had I waited at that corner for years – just as one may watch a tree for months and yet know nothing at all about it if one happens to miss that one week when it bursts into bloom. (56-57)

The narrator’s vision of England “in bloom,” in what he calls “her finest hour,” depicts the way communities bond together to help one another (57). The lost past contrasts with the Thatcherite present, represented by Nick with his dreams of making money and by London’s “young
bankers wearing pin-striped suits and diamond earrings,” proclaiming the nation’s obsession with capital (31). But as we see through Ila’s group of activist friends and their skirmishes with “jack-booted racists,” London also contains its own contemporary sites of antagonism that echo those of earlier political communities (57). Such examples remind us that the narrator’s melancholy yearning for past communities is also part of a rose-tinted wistfulness that is dependent on imaginative reconstructions rather than any first-hand knowledge.94 The aporias in the narrative are significant because they point towards a double impossibility: that of attaining a complete historical knowledge of events, and that of attaining closure on traumatic pasts. The role of past communities in *The Shadow Lines* is integral to the novel’s sense of aporetic resolution. The motif of communities drawing together recurs in the novel; it attests not only to the way that kinship can materialize in adversity, but it also indicates how the creation of communities contains the capacity to overcome cultural differences. For example, it is evident in the British wartime spirit of exhilaration and friendship that welcomes Tridib’s mother, Mayadebi, into its folds, or the way the Kashmiri community unites in syncretic solidarity. Each demonstrates flickers of hope from which the narrator can draw strength to deal with past traumas.

The narrator’s turn to spectral materialism to recover lost communities is prefaced by references to the role of spiritualism in consolidating one particular cosmopolitan alliance. Ghosts, it would seem, have long been significant in illuminating new insights and shaping new friendships. This community, organised around an Indian-British friendship made three generations earlier, culminates in the relationship between the narrator and May. It is useful to recall the importance of Ghosh’s rooted cosmopolitanism here; as Shemeem Black argues in her essay on cosmopolitanism and domesticity, Ghosh’s emphasis on the family vis-à-vis the

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94 The narrator concedes to Ila that he “knew nothing at all about England except as an invention” (103).
nation-state suggests that the cosmopolitan ideal is brought about through the imaginative “embrace of domesticity and kinship” (45). The narrator’s reengagement with his roots and his family history through memory and the project of spectral materialism can be understood as opening up towards the world, towards old, new, and “foreign ways of living” (Black 57). Beginning with May’s grandfather, Lionel Tresawsen, a former industrialist who pursues theosophy, the pursuit of new knowledges enables radical friendships. Lionel Tresawsen meets and befriends not only a number of “leading [Indian] nationalists” but also, at a séance in Calcutta meets Tridib’s grandfather, a high court judge (51). The friendship between Lionel Tresawsen and Judge Datta-Chaudhuri is sealed by their shared interest in occult practices, but elsewhere is marginalised for its subversive nature. In *The Shadow Lines*, this unconventional relationship expresses an essential core, a blueprint for future generations. Spiritualism, with its faith in the resurrection of ghosts, implies that history is never quite over. The seemingly odd union of spiritualism with capitalism and justice is in fact very telling, as it gives voice to the relationship between past and future. It confirms the necessity of re-examining the historical past, with its tyrannies, traumas, and injustices, as well as its radical politics, with a view to the building of a just society.

Drawing on this community as an inspiration, the narrator utilises the project of spectral materialism to examine the wartime community of May’s uncle, Alan Tresawsen and his intellectual friends, not only to empathize with the traumatic past, but also, in doing so, to understand his own grief better. Using Tridib’s childhood memories of Tresawsen, the narrator embarks on a Benjamin-esque exploration of London in order to bring the essence of this past community to life. When he visits Brick Lane for the first time, the narrator is anxious to locate Tresawsen’s house. Brick Lane, however, is a shock to the narrator, for, as he comments, “I had
not means of recognizing the place I saw; it did not belong anywhere I had ever been” (98). In the wake of globalization, London’s migrant histories, embodied by neighbourhoods such as Brick Lane, are in constant flux, as buildings disappear or are converted into businesses or left to dilapidate. While traces of Brick Lane’s history have been made famous, as a result of the racial, cultural, and class tensions of the area, other more subversive parts of its history have been effaced.95 For instance, Nick points out the Jamme Masjid in order to tell the narrator that the mosque was once a synagogue, but he is unaware of its earlier history as a church for Huguenot refugees, and is shocked when he learns that his uncle Tresawsen once lived nearby. As it happens, Tresawsen’s house has been transformed into a Bengali travel agency; its “crumbling masonry” holds no clue to its former inhabitants so the narrator activates his imagination by focusing on one of its windows (101). In his gaze, the social history of the community becomes manifest and the narrator becomes immersed within it as a spectator to the life and activity of Tresawsen’s friends and flatmates:

That was the window of Dan’s bedroom, I decided. It was easy to see how the window panes might have been blackened out with ink-blackened newspapers. It was this window that Dan had opened that September night in 1940…He had hardly slept at all that week and he had to get back to work at the press tomorrow, as usual.

But it wasn’t any easier upstairs. The drone of the planes seemed much louder there. And every time a bomb exploded somewhere in the neighbourhood, a screw that had come loose in his steel bed would rattle eerily…He climbed out of bed, lit a cigarette, and opened the window just a little…the fresh air was a relief for the night was warm and still. (102)

Attuned to the intimate detail of a life, spectral materialism pulls the narrator into the affective and aural atmosphere of the blitz. Though his personal experiences are dissimilar – the sustained oppressiveness of life under the blitz differs greatly from the explosive spontaneity of

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95 John Eade documents the local conflicts that had arisen in the 1980s as the Brick Lane area began to gentrify and calls for conservationist efforts were made by incoming middle-class white residents. The Bangladeshi community’s decision to refurbish the mosque, removing the original nineteenth-century panelling and gallery – all that remained of the Jewish synagogue – to build a mezzanine floor that would accommodate a growing congregation caused particular tensions.
communal violence – he is able to register the tensions and the disruption of lives fissured by the historical violence of wartime London.

The spectral archive, brought about by the cosmopolitan imagination, casts the narrator as melancholic witness to the experience of loss. As Santner has observed, spectral materialism involves “a capacity to register the persistence of past suffering that has in some sense been absorbed into the substance of lived space” (57). The sense of melancholia then carries over from the traumatic specificity in the narrative, the documentation of the unravelling of once-existing lives. The following passage, for example, offers an instance of this – what Santner also calls an “archive of absence” – the shuttling between past and present that marks a chronological disjunction, and so captures the tragic dissonance between past and contemporary knowledges (53):

Dan flinched as a high-pitched metallic shriek tore the air, but then it went suddenly silent, so he relaxed and drew on his cigarette. If it had happened a little later in the blitz, when the city had developed its collective wisdom about bombs, he would have known…he would have thrown himself flat on the floor, and if he had he might have lived, even though the bomb hit the pavement, just in front of his window, carving out a ten-foot deep pit, and pulling down a large part of the front of the house with it – that part where the Taj Travel Agency’s display windows now stood. But it happened too early… He was standing right beside the window when the blast shattered the panes into fine, sharp splinters and blew them into the room like a curtain of needles. When the men from the Heavy Rescue Services carried his body out, every last inch of it was tattooed with the fine, clean perforations of the scalpel-sharp slivers of glass that had been blown through him by the blast.

The stairs were the first part of the house to collapse. The wood gave a long, wrenching groan when the blast shook the foundations. That gave Tresawsen time to push Mike clear of the stairs and throw his body over Francesca’s. Then a beam fell upon him, killing him instantly, breaking his spine.

Francesca was pinned under his body, rigid with shock but otherwise unhurt, until they dug her out. A month later she was sent to an internment camp for enemy aliens on the Isle of Wight. Mrs Price never heard of her again. As for Mike…[i]n 1943 Mrs Price read his name in the casualty list in The Times and learnt later that his ship…had been torpedoed by a U-boat, not far from Lowestoft harbour. (102-103)
In reconstructing the historical experiences of Tresawsen and his community of friends, the narrator calls attention to his own state of grief through the process of grieving for others. The cosmopolitanism that he celebrates — for Tresawsen’s community is made up of an Irishman, a German Jew, an Anglo-Indian, and an Englishman — is abruptly dismembered by the violence of a war waged between rigid nationalist formulations. The failures of nationalism to accommodate the nuances of belonging — for instance, Francesca’s Jewishness is subsumed under the category of German, an “enemy alien” — are contrasted by the existence of a melancholic alliance between such radical communities and the narrator that spans the past and the present.

In spite of the traumatic atmosphere that permeates the project of spectral materialism, the narrator turns to the forgotten past in order to unlock the extraordinary power held by such communities. Ghosh juxtaposes the possibilities of the past with the dearth of humanist action that accompanies capitalism. When Ila, Nick, and the narrator leave Brick Lane, the narrator takes a last look at Tresawsen’s house, “trying to see it with a great hole gouged out of its side, as Tridib had” (106). In contrast, Nick, who also looks back at the house, sees only the Taj Travel Agency, understanding the building through his capitalist consciousness as a “thriving little businesses” (106). Nick’s inability to read the building’s spectral history is marked as an effect of capitalism, an antithesis to the cosmopolitan imagination, with its affective qualities of sympathy and curiosity. Despite his earlier suggestion that the travel agency might run “a sweat-shop upstairs,” Nick is indifferent to these experiences: for him, the pursuit of wealth takes precedence over the realities of labour and work in the capitalist system (106). If capitalist subjectivity signals the deadening of empathy, Tresawsen’s community demarcates a radical political alternative. Inflected by humanitarianism, Tresawsen’s group of friends offer an example of a cosmopolitan alliance that extend their ties to other groups through their
commitment to political and socialist causes, seen in their demonstrations to demand accommodation for London’s poorer East End population, their involvement in trade unions, socialist newspapers, and anti-fascist causes, such as the Spanish Civil War. This social activism fascinates the narrator for whom the group is “brilliant” and “worldly” (64). Like Tridib, the narrator sees their life as a “bright, pure world,” even as he agonizes over his own lack of knowledge of the “tawdriness” that must have accompanied it (66). Even as he laments their short-lived community, the narrator draws on the cosmopolitan energies of these friendships and their engagement with other lives and the needs of local groups.

Homosocial Kinships and Triangulations

At the very end of The Shadow Lines the hope of a new community emerges through the shared solace of May and the narrator over Tridib’s death. The image of serenity in the novel’s final sentence follows from May’s eyewitness account of Tridib’s death and suggests a sense of closure, as the narrator shifts his attention from past communities to the future, in order to take up their legacies of kinship and hope:

I stayed, and when we lay in each other’s arms quietly, in the night, I could tell that she was glad, and I was glad too, and grateful, for the glimpse she had given me of a final redemptive mystery. (252)

As a concluding trope, the lovemaking between the narrator and May opens up a vision of a community brought together through equality and reciprocity. Despite its comforts, the novel’s endorsement of closure is problematic at a number of levels. Jon Mee, for instance, has voiced his uneasiness over Ghosh’s use of “a dangerously seductive romantic trope of transcendence” (98). The melancholic scope of the narrator’s relationship with May also belies any gesture towards resolution; May’s tears, the couple’s silences, the palpable sense of sorrow, guilt, and
pain all call to mind Judith Butler’s suggestion that an “enigmatic trace” is left by a loss that is never fully recoverable (“Afterword” 468). Instead, it might be more productive to frame the narrator’s relationship with May as part of a genealogy of communities that bring into relief the fleeting but palliative moments of kinship amongst the traumatic histories of loss inscribed in the narrator’s own life and in the pasts of other people. It is not my intention, however, to investigate further trauma’s ambivalence, but rather to scrutinize how this genealogy of hope operates in tension with conceptions of gender, affirming membership for one group, but in doing so exposing the disempowerment of the other.

The novel’s focus on past communities, I would suggest, is structured around a distinctly homosocial bond that connects the narrator across different ages. This emphasis on the masculine, in turn, encodes women as a third party in a particular power configuration, reminiscent of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s triangular schemas of desire, that map out male relationships and construct women “as exchangeable…symbolic property for the primary purpose of cementing the bonds of men with men” (26). While some feminist readings of the novel have noted both the predominance of the male bonding and the problematic representation of women, they have not identified or critiqued the purpose of such triangulations.96 Beginning with the cross-cultural friendship of Justice Chandrashekhar Datta-Chaudhuri and Lionel Tresawsen, Ghosh sets up the centrality of male kinships, at its most evident in the trope of mentorship. Tridib’s admiration of Tresawsen, his view of Dan as Tresawsen’s “political mentor,” and the narrator’s esteem for Tridib form part of a pattern of homosocial ties from which women are seemingly excluded (61). Even Nick, contemptible as he is, belongs within this kinship, through his attachment to Lionel Tresawsen.97 Early on, the narrator has idealised

96 See Multani; see also Chandra.
97 As a child, Nick had always “wanted to be like his…grandfather Tresawsen” (50).
Nick as “the kindred spirit whom I had never been able to discover among my friends,” thus emphasizing Nick’s membership within the masculine political alliances initiated by their families (52). Nick functions as a “ghostly presence” in the novel, “growing with” the narrator, “but always bigger and better, and in some way more desirable – I did not know what, except that it was so in Ila’s eyes and therefore true” (50). Ghosh’s construction of this relationship can be easily read within the terms of Sedgwick’s triangulation, since it confirms a link between men that is organised through the bodies of women. The beautiful and free-spirited Ila takes on the symbolic status of object that reinforces the homosocial, and implicitly homoerotic, connection between Nick and the narrator, manifested through their sexual rivalry for their possession of her.  

A triangle also exists between Robi, Ila, and the narrator that articulates the structure of patriarchal power in a more explicit way. Following Ila’s suggestion that they celebrate in Calcutta’s Grand Hotel’s nightclub, Robi and the narrator remain uneasy and grim, refusing to dance, and repudiating the setting as dark, sleazy, and artificial. When Ila approaches one of the businessmen sitting there to dance with her, Robi forces her to leave, wrenching her away and punching the man. Robi’s patriarchal gestures to put Ila into her place, since “girls don’t behave like that here,” corresponds to Nick’s later treatment of her in their marriage (88). Nick subdues and punishes Ila for her possessive behaviour, her wealth, and her success, by flaunting his affair with other similarly exotic women (88). What is most disturbing about these triangulations is the way the narrator reinforces the intimacy of the homosocial bond between himself and the other males. Robi is admiringly seen as a man who retains an instinctive moral

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98 Moreover, Ila’s value increases for the narrator because she is desirable in other men’s eyes.
99 The narrator also condemns Ila for Nick’s ill-treatment of her as a sign of retribution as her “sins have finally come home to roost” (188); yet his own visits to prostitutes remain part of an acceptable code of his life (111).
integrity, “moral in the purest sense,” while Nick is represented, not by his treatment of Ila, but by his emasculation (84). The narrator construes Nick’s behaviour sympathetically as part of his helpless dependence coupled with despairing little acts of rebellion. I wanted to get up then and hold him, chest to chest, his shoulders to mine. But of course, I didn’t – he did not know of the part he had played in my life, standing beside me in the mirrors of my boyhood. (189)

Other triangulations of desire are repeated throughout the novel through the variously positioned figures of the narrator, Tridib, and Tresawsen, symbolically connecting all three male figures. Tresawsen’s community functions as a more idyllic example of triangulation, since the gender politics and power of the people involved in it are never made transparent to the narrator. The last scene of the novel is organised around the trope of the triangle. When he makes love to May, the narrator evokes Tridib in several ways. To some extent, the narrator’s constant identification with his late uncle places him as a sort of substitute figure. But Tridib is also the unacknowledged third member of the narrator’s alliance with May: he has initiated their relationship and their bonds of empathy revolve around him. The narrator fulfils Tridib’s fantasy, and foregrounds homosocial attachments in creating such a community, of loving “a woman-across-the-sea,” as in the stories told to Tridib by May’s father, Snipe. Indeed, May is instrumental (and is instrumentalised) to perpetuating a homosocial kinship that links the narrator to Tridib, and Tridib to her uncle Tresawsen. In such a light, the narrator’s relationship with May seems less a genuine invocation of affinity, but rather a way to seal his love for Tridib, thus finding a level of comfort to the “pure, painful, and primitive desire” that drives his cosmopolitan project in Tridib’s memory.

If cosmopolitan communities and kinships offer a way to deal with the traumas of the past, how is it possible to reconcile the power problematic contained within Ghosh’s triangular configurations? The next section shows how Ghosh resolves the ambivalence of this
cosmopolitan solution to focus the importance of a selfless love that cuts across gender differences, triangulations, and power structures. Through a genuine cosmopolitan altruism, *The Hungry Tide* underscores the fallibility of human love, placing it as secondary to the material and political obligations of its cosmopolitan subjects.

**The Hungry Tide: Critical Cosmopolitanism and Cosmopolitan Classes**

In *The Hungry Tide*, Ghosh uses the Morichjhãpi massacre, whose victims constituted the rootless remnants of the Indian partition, to address the issues of caste and class in relation to the formation of new nation-states. *The Hungry Tide* documents how partition continues to affect groups who are marginalised in the political sphere of the Indian nation-state. While not an obvious partition text in the sense that the novel eschews a focus on the dissolution of British India, *The Hungry Tide* consistently summons the Indian partition as an essential frame of reference for the reader. Partition here functions as a political subtext linking these subordinated communities to the failed promises of Independence. Early in the novel, Ghosh makes the connection explicit in his description of the island of Lusibari and its population of low-caste agriculturalists and fisherman:

> Some of its people were descended from the first settlers, who had arrived in the 1920s. Others had come in successive waves, some after the partition of the subcontinent in 1947 and some after the Bangladeshi war of 1971. Many had come even more recently, when nearby islands were forcibly depopulated in order to make room for wildlife conservation projects. (50)

What is noticeable here is the *scattering* of people; the image of settlers borne by waves emanating from the explosive impact of partition and war implies a history of minority status, probable violence, and evacuation. As Ghosh demonstrates, these flotsam and jetsam communities do not find any refuge within the framework of the Indian nation-state.
Foreshadowing the subjugation of the Morichjhâpi settlers, the low-caste inhabitants on the “nearby islands” are treated as sub-citizens. “[F]orcibly depopulated” by the Indian government, they are too few and too weak to utilize in their defence the legal, political, or economic apparatuses of the nation-state. Like the Morichjhâpi settlers, these people constitute the abject, the “poor and unnoticed,” whose lawful rights does not preclude their suffering at the hands of the hegemon (249). The Morichjhâpi settlers’ story reconstructs their history, beginning with their displacement to a settlement camp in central India after their village is burned down during communal violence in the Bangladeshi Sundarbans (136-37).

The historical overtone to their geographical alienation is provided in Ghosh’s “Afterword,” which cites the scholarly work of Ross Mallick and Nilanjana Chatterjee. Ghosh’s depiction of the settlers in The Hungry Tide draws heavily on Mallick’s anthropological research on Bengal, which maps out the history of these refugees in relation to the independence of India and places their story within the context of centuries of class conflicts.100 As some of the “the poorest of rural people, oppressed and exploited both by Muslim communalists and by Hindus of the upper caste,” many of the Dalit Hindu communities fled for India, post-partition, after increasing communal violence began to target them (The Hungry Tide 98-99).101 Many of these were moved into a camp, before eventually being forcibly resettled in north-eastern India, since the government claimed that there was no land available in Bengal. The resettling proved unsuccessful; the new land allocated for incoming refugees belonged to the indigenous tribes of the area, who subsequently subjected the new residents to hostility and frequent attacks. After

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100 Mallick also notes that communal conflict goes back centuries; however, he points out that such communal antagonisms were often class-based, between the upper-caste Hindu landlords and the Muslim tenants (“Refugee Resettlement” 104).
101 There is still a certain percentage of Hindus (mostly low-caste) left in Bangladesh; many others converted to Islam as the newly founded Bangladesh began to move towards a more fundamentalist and less tolerant version of Islam.
hearing about uninhabited islands in the Sundarbans, the refugees began to organise themselves politically and left for Morichjhâpi to build a community there. However, their encroachment on tiger conservation territory was considered illegal by the Bengal government, which first sent in troops, and then gangs of criminals to remove them, resulting in large-scale raping and killing. Though the crime was well documented at the time by journalists, its perpetrators have remained unpunished. Prior to its fictionalisation in Ghosh’s novel, Morichjhâpi’s history had lapsed into all but oblivion.

In *The Hungry Tide*, the posthumous notebooks of Nirmal Bose, a retired schoolteacher who has lived for over twenty years in the tide country, focus overwhelmingly on the history of the Morichjhâpi settlers. For Nirmal, the exclusion of the low-caste refugees within the nation-state is allegorised in the settlers’ confrontation with the police. The settlers assert a politics based on their shared identity of the “dispossessed”(210). Nirmal, however, interprets the call not as “a shout of defiance,” but as a “question…on behalf of a bewildered humankind” (211). Nirmal identifies with what he sees as their rootlessness, because partition alienated him from his family and his home city, Dhaka. Thus, in his “deepest uncertainties of [his] heart,” he asks, “where did I belong? In India or across the border?” (211). But for the refugees, such a question addresses not the problem of a homeland, but a question of power, evoking the pre-partition movements of the Scheduled Castes for political autonomy. Nirmal touches at the root of their dilemma when he considers their achievements at Morichjhâpi. He writes in his notebook, it was as though an entire civilization had sprouted suddenly in the mud...It was universally agreed that the significance of Morichjhâpi extended far beyond the island itself. *Was it possible that in Morichjhâpi had been planted the seeds of what might become, if not a Dalit nation, then at least a safe haven, a place of true freedom for the country’s most oppressed?* (159, emphasis added)

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102 The Congress government of Bengal was responsible for resettling the refugees. Ironically, communist groups in Bengal urged the refugees to depart for the tide country. When the communists were elected as the coalition Left Front government, their position on the Morichjhâpi issue changed drastically.
Neither Bangladesh nor India can accommodate this group: Bangladesh because its religious minorities must be crushed in order to quell the threat of the other to its homogenous Islamic national identity; India because its democratic and nationalist structure is welded to a high-caste order.

Excluded from the political and economic processes of the post-partition state, the settlers profess a religious belief that offers a palliative to their daily oppressions. The Bon Bibi legend, which blends together different languages, religious scriptures, and histories, projects their idea of an accountable, ideal society. The tale of Bon Bibi is important not only because it offers an alternative to the schismogenic horrors of partitionist communalism, but also because it delineates the radical restructuring of society. The legend details the story of the tiger goddess, Bon Bibi who rules the tide country jungle and maintains a careful balance between animal and human dependence on the land. Worshipped by the Morichjhâpi settlers, Bon Bibi serves as an example of a syncretic, transreligious community that embraces social justice through the “law of the forest,” punishes “the rich and greedy,” and rewards “the poor and righteous” (The Hungry Tide 88). If Bon Bibi is the hope of the poor, it also forms their utopic vision, the antithesis to all the injustices that have been perpetrated on them.

Though Bon Bibi’s transnational community reproduces a cosmopolitan utopia, like all utopias it remains a discourse that has not yet become a social and political reality. If we examine the term “utopia,” originally coined by sixteenth-century theologian Thomas More, we see that it brings together two words from the ancient Greek: “eu,” which refers to “not” and “topos,” which means “a place.” If utopia is not a place, this does not indicate that utopia is, by definition, impossible. Instead, my use of the term understands it in conjunction with More’s political tract Utopia (1516), the imagining a perfect political system that does not yet exist. It is
evident that, for the abject masses, the likelihood of their utopia emerging is small; the contemporary structures of power stifle any move towards the realisation of such a goal. Yet in telling their tale, Ghosh makes it clear that something needs to be done to resolve their suffering.

Searching for a solution, Ghosh turns to the figure of the cosmopolitan, in order to ask whether the existing practices of cosmopolitanism can initiate the move towards social justice and practical reform. *The Hungry Tide* introduces a variety of cosmopolitan figures, whose lives, and experiences intersect across time and space: the contemporary narratives of Piya Roy and Kanai Dutt thus meet and overlap with the past narratives of Kanai’s aunt and uncle, Nilima and Nirmal Bose. Piya, an American cetologist of Bengali heritage, is in the tide country to conduct fieldwork. Kanai is a successful Bengali businessman living in Delhi, a reluctant visitor who has come only to collect a notebook bequeathed to him by his deceased uncle. His uncle Nirmal and his aunt Nilima, originally from Kolkata, have been living and working in the tide country since the 1950s. Ghosh presents his characters as cosmopolitans in the general sense as identified by Amanda Anderson: they all operate at a “reflective distance from [their] original or primary cultural affiliations, [and possess] a broad understanding of other cultures and customs and a belief in universal humanity” (Anderson 63). In *The Hungry Tide*, all four characters have cultural ties to the region of Bengal although they have no direct link to the tidal country they now reside in. To orient themselves, they draw upon worldly views in an attempt to transcend the social and cultural boundaries separating them from the subaltern inhabitants. Several Eurocentric cosmopolitan visions are in operation here, repeating antagonisms made familiar to us during the revival of cosmopolitan theory in the mid-1990s.\(^{103}\) Piya, “of no fixed address,” exemplifies cultural hybridity and cosmopolitan mobility, while simultaneously subscribing to the universal discourse of secular rational science (106). Kanai, on the other hand, speaks six

\(^{103}\) See Cheah and Robbins for a useful overview of the plural varieties of cosmopolitanisms.
languages and mobilises his professional translation skills in the service of both multinational capital and transnational agencies.\textsuperscript{104} Nirmal and Nilima are educated city-dwellers, who are committed to the ideals of international socialism. For each of these four characters, the experiences of, meetings with, and memories of the other overturn sedimented norms and expose the limits of their cosmopolitan aspirations. Such experiences are primarily affective, and are registered through various reactions of shock, unease, and fear. When Nirmal and Nilima leave Kolkata to settle in the Hamilton Estate, in the tide country, they are left profoundly unsettled when their confrontation with a subaltern alterity makes clear the insularity of their affluent, scholarly lives. By the time they arrive, the estate has fallen into disarray, functioning as a “prison camp” of wretchedness (67). Horrified to learn of the levels of poverty, corruption, and deaths on the estate, Nirmal and Nilima subject their beliefs to scrutiny:

\begin{quote}
 It shamed them to think that this man – a foreigner, a burra sahib, a rich capitalist – had taken it upon himself to address the issue of rural poverty when they themselves, despite all their radical talk, had scarcely any knowledge of life outside the city…

 For their first few months on the island they were in a state akin to shock. Nothing was familiar; everything was new. What little they knew of rural life was derived from the villages of the plains: the realities of the tide country were of a strangeness beyond reckoning. How was it possible that these islands were a mere ninety-seven kilometres from home and yet so little was known about them? How was it possible that people spoke so much about the immemorial traditions of village India and yet no one knew about this other world, where it was impossible to tell who was who, and what the inhabitants’ castes and religions and beliefs were? (66)
\end{quote}

Faced with the plight of the tide country’s marginalised people, Nirmal turns to the writings of Lenin for consolation, but he finds that critical reading offers no “definite answers” to the lack of a civic infrastructure (67). The Boses can accommodate neither the destitution nor the culture of rural Bengal within familiar and historically dominant narratives such as Marxism. For all their cosmopolitan beliefs, the Boses find the views they had always presumed universally

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\textsuperscript{104} Kanai’s business specialises in “serving the expatriate communities of New Delhi: foreign diplomats, aid workers, charitable organisations, multinationals” (The Hungry Tide 17).
applicable are ineffective in this subaltern space. Because the space is situated outside the cosmos of their worldly ideology, it reveals the limitations of elite metropolitan philosophies and here, I find Gayatri Spivak’s analysis of Mahesweta Devi’s writing, also set in rural Bengal, pertinent. Spivak points out that Devi’s subaltern spaces do “not share in the energy” of decolonisation, but instead they present “a dystopic representation of decolonisation as such” (164, original emphasis). By extension, these spaces give lie to the mythology of discursively constructed rationalist ideals. In that vacuum, a form of localised ethics, subject to specific sites, must be compiled.

Where the rhetoric of liberatory Marxism fails, Nilima’s establishment of an Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) – the Badabon Trust – and her conversations with local women highlight a pragmatic way to make positive contributions in an unfamiliar society through institution and community-building. The Trust’s success is nonetheless limited for while Nilima can procure funds through her connections to metropolitan affluence, her reliance on institutional support (both political and financial) means that the trust must function along a politics of compromise. The strongest indictment of the exclusivity of this organisation occurs when Nilima refuses to help the Morichjhāpi settlers who are denounced by governmental edict. Knowing that the hospital and the Women’s Union, her “life’s work” (100), is forfeit if she works with the refugees, Nilima faces an ethical dilemma, and consequently opts for “the greater good” (102). The outcome of her utilitarian choice is disastrous for the settlers who, already abandoned by the various political communities they have appealed to, now face the impending violence of the state.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ The settlers invite the metropolitan city-dwellers such as writers, journalists, photographers, and authors to view their way of life on Morichjhāpi (158).
One might argue that the cosmopolitanism espoused by Ghosh’s characters is doomed to failure because of its long-standing association with class and privilege. Timothy Brennan’s assertion that “cosmopolitanism springs from the comfortable culture of middle-class travellers, intellectuals, and businessmen,” is well-suited to The Hungry Tide’s cultivated characters, who Ghosh depicts as elitist and metropolitan (“Cosmopolitanism and Internationalism” 77). This bourgeois ideology seems entirely inadequate to producing a solution to the inequalities faced by the Morichjhâpi settlers. But this does not mean that Ghosh abandons cosmopolitanism as a doctrine. As we see through the Bon Bibi legend, cosmopolitanism is invested with transformative social and cultural meaning that creates a condition of hope. In contrast to the multiple models of what could be described as “self-interested” or “practical” cosmopolitanism, Ghosh advocates in The Hungry Tide an affective and critical cosmopolitanism that effectively asks his central bourgeois characters to form a political consciousness which accounts for the subaltern. Initially, Ghosh’s cosmopolitan characters espouse what at best can be described as a situated cosmopolitanism, since they are ensconced in the world of the privileged individual, and so, their claims of cosmopolitanism work towards the realisation of their own ideals, rather than the ethical task of sacrificing their interests for those of others. Critical cosmopolitanism can thus be understood foremost as a consciousness that demonstrates an awareness of responsibilities towards others. It is shaped by collective interests and, because it situates these concerns before the individual self, it is a form of subjectivity that is structured along the lines of altruism and sacrifice. Like the cosmopolitanism of The Shadow Lines, critical cosmopolitanism in The Hungry Tide is shaped by the desire for new forms of society; in contrast to the cosmopolitanism of the former, the latter is committed to social justice at all levels of class.
My concept of a critical cosmopolitanism builds on Leela Gandhi’s work on affective communities. Investigating the unorthodox alliances that sprung up between British metropolitan anti-imperialists and colonized Indians, Gandhi describes how an ethics of solidarity with outsiders also constitutes a betrayal of one’s own cultural and imperial affinities. Taking her cue from Derridean notions of hospitality, Gandhi argues that the “politics of friendship” situates otherness and difference before all individual and filial loyalties, thus giving rise to a “non-communitarian communitarianism” (26). It is this “utopian mentality” that “shows the way forward to a genuine cosmopolitanism” (31, emphasis added). Critical cosmopolitan, in a sense, iterates this formulation in reverse: in the spaces produced by “non-communitarian” alliances, Ghosh shows how a critical cosmopolitanism can emerge and work towards the formation of a better society. As such, critical cosmopolitanism functions as a practice that necessarily draws on the past, on the energies of past utopic ideas and political collaborations between classes and communities.

**Political Turbulence and Utopic Possibilities**

In a normal state of affairs, with an established hegemonic order, these non-communitarian alliances would not appear. Thus, critical cosmopolitanism relies to a large extent on political turbulence, both for its inspiration and its development. In order to understand the emergence of critical cosmopolitanism in *The Hungry Tide*, it is necessary to grasp the turbulent historical movements and struggles that inform it. In the case of the Bengali Sundarbans this means drawing a connection between the energies of pre-partition India, and the current phase of globalisation. Both these periods can be roughly defined as a time of political instability that produced the conditions necessary for the materialization of various struggles and unique
coalitions. These struggles are characterised by their desire for the manifestation of utopic ideals, and the subsequent push for political reform. In the early twentieth century in Bengal, many such struggles were driven by the call for independence; others opportunistically seized the nationalist movement to demand greater political and social recognition; all gained increasing strength and numbers in the 1900-1945 period. That this period is also more or less characterised by moves towards partitions – respectively, the 1905 partition of Bengal, and the 1947 partition of the entire subcontinent – suggests that, to an extent, partition as a concept helped animate these struggles, regardless of whether they were simply appropriating nationalist politics to their own ends, to demand political autonomy or whether they were agitating as a force to protest the impending partition, as in the case of the 1905 proposal to divide Bengal.

As Ramnarayan Rawat argues of the period preceding the 1947 partition, the “prospect of Partition created a new and volatile situation [where] constitutional discussions about independence and the rights of minority communities in the new nation…enabled new forms of Dalit activism and struggle” (113). In the decline of the British Raj, India experienced social and political agitation due to, variously, revolutionary activities, their subsequent suppression, the onset of the war, and considerable economic shifts, most notably, the draining of wealth to prop up Britain’s world wars and feed its population. This economic framework would set in motion further economic and social instability, seen in food price rises, and general inflation that would culminate disastrously in the 1943 Bengal famine.

While this turbulence exacerbated communal tensions, it also made new political alliances possible. The most famous of these protests, the swadeshi movement (1905-1911) – the boycott of foreign goods – was led by the Indian western-educated elite, who also were also

106 These struggles had existed in nineteenth-century Bengal in inchoate forms, but had come into sharper focus at the turn of the century.
107 Partha Chatterjee points out that the Swadeshi movement came out of the protest against the 1905 partition (27).
at the forefront of Gandhi’s non-cooperation and civil disobedience strikes. Despite the active role of the bourgeoisie, as Sumit Sarkar observes, there were also other localised movements that crucially provided the “pressures below” in the build-up towards independence (Critique 116). In his 1989 study, Modern India, 1885-1947, Sarkar describes the tumultuous politics that brought down the British Raj. The onset of strikes, mutinies, and mass struggles drew together various factions from across social groups. In particular, the relative weakness of the Indian National Congress in Bengal allowed for a more multifarious number of movements to develop. For example, Sarkar argues that creation of the Non-Cooperation-Khilafat alliance of 1921-22 to demand self-rule proved the “point of greatest strength and unity [between Hindus and Muslims] in the entire history of the national movement in Bengal” (218). So too, the communist movements that grew out of the nationalist cause brought together peasants, Muslims, tribals, workers, and students, particularly during the co-ordination of famine relief and in the 1946 Tebhaga protests against high crop payments to landlords.

This period of anti-imperialism also helped shape the political action of the Dalits and the Scheduled Castes. The Namasudra movement of Bengal relates to the political organisation of low-caste Hindu and Muslim peoples into a collective cultural and social identity. The onset of Swadeshi and Hindu Nationalism against colonial rule proved an opportunity for the Namasudras to amass a position of power that allowed them to demand recognition for political rights from other dominant parties (alternately – from the British, the Muslims, and the Hindu Nationalists).\footnote{Similar Dalit movements were also organised in other parts of India, such as the Schedule Caste Federation in the Upper Provinces and Punjab, which also created alliances between Muslims (Rawat 113).} The Namasudras protested against their subordinate position and their domination by higher castes.\footnote{Though made up of several castes and sub-castes, the group identity of the Namasudras created a sense of solidarity that submerged the distinctions and differences between them.} Beginning in eastern Bengal and made up of groups not
dissimilar to the Morichjhāpi settlers (fisherman, agricultural labourers), the Namasudras took form in the late nineteenth-century, reaching their apex in both size and organisation by the Swadeshi era. As Sekhur Bandyopadhyay points out, the Namasudras continued to be highly vocal and critical of nationalist groups; their power, like that of the Muslim League, much weakened Congress’s political position and, consequently, their political support was highly desirable (5). The Namasudras refused to support the Swadeshi movement, arguing that, since Hindu Nationalism did not change the question of social rights or freedom for untouchables, it remained “the slogan of the rich, educated zamindars who had always in the past ignored the interests of the poor” (Bandyopadhyay 69). Uniting with the Muslims, with whom they identified as a group of outcastes, the Namasudras coordinated anti-Swadeshi protests, continuing to reject nationalism and to shun the Indian National Congress. Despite the occasional communal tensions and riots that came out of local land disputes, the Hindus were able to maintain such a strong relationship with the Muslims. However, the alliance eventually began to fracture once the Scheduled Castes were given a small share of political representation and formally admitted into nationalist and constitutionalist politics.

Early on in The Hungry Tide, the utopic, socialist vision of S’Daniel Hamilton, a Scottish capitalist, underscores some of the aspirations that occupied pre-partition India and points towards the eventual nullification of such promises within the modern nation-state. The Hamilton Estate that is set up in 1920s rural Bengal offers a radical social order, free from exploitation and commodified forms of currency. S’Daniel invites everybody to participate in the commune “on one condition. They could not bring all their petty little divisions and differences” (44). S’Daniel’s project resonates with the emancipatory politics of India’s nationalists, who embrace his ideas wholeheartedly:
What [S’Daniel] wanted was to build a new society, a new kind of country. It would be a country run by co-operatives, he said. Here people wouldn't exploit each other and everyone would have a share of the land. S’Daniel spoke with Mahatma Gandhi, Rabindranath Thakur and many other bujuwa nationalists. The bourgeoisie all agreed with S’Daniel that this place would be a model for all of India; it could be a new kind of country. (45)

But S’Daniel’s view of an egalitarian society, that seeks to alter the structure of the Indian social system, cannot function in a corrupt order where individual interests form the greatest obstacle: funds allocated for the greater public good are appropriated by the estate’s managers; while settlers who protest are penalized and physically abused.

Critical cosmopolitanism responds to these histories and, in the age of modern globalisation, enables the breakdown of old systems; the forces of change offer points of departure for utopic projects that can overcome the hegemonic interests of the nation-state. In *The Hungry Tide*, the fate of the Hamilton Estate foreshadows the Morichjhâpi massacre once the settlers have taken up “Hamilton’s call” to build a community founded on interdependence and collaboration (137). But amidst their failures, Ghosh insists that utopic possibilities can be brought about by those who control or have access to the modes of production. Here, the cosmopolitan transnational individual, a figure produced by the turbulence of globalisation, is active in bringing together international and local affiliations. Potentially this individual can organise an alternative internationalist power that keeps the interests of the national or regional hegemon in check. We see, for instance, how two of the cosmopolitan protagonists – Piya Roy and Kanai Dutt – are able to mobilize distinct international communities that empower the subaltern inhabitants of the tide country. Piya achieves this through her scientific and academic contacts, as well as through Internet groups; Kanai’s venture is through publishing channels, with the aim of reaching international communities of readers and scholars. In describing their efforts, *The Hungry Tide* invites comparisons to Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s thinking in
Empire (2000) and Multitude (2004), which were published around the same time as Ghosh’s novel. The international communities animated by Piya and Kanai indicate movements of increasingly self-aware social groups, evoking Hardt and Negri’s multitude: a group of networks that realises its strength through its affective organisation and collective agency. It would be disingenuous to draw a parallel between Ghosh and Hardt and Negri, since Ghosh is particularly concerned about the strategic role of the nation-state, i.e., the importance of citizenship and diasporic links to instigating any change in the local arena of India’s rural countryside. In bringing Ghosh into relation with Hardt and Negri, my object here is to emphasise a similar context of turbulence that is picked up by both works, and the immanent possibilities in global systems (“global” in the sense that it is a world shared by an international elite) created by the expansion of networks (trade, finance, transport, etc.). Consequently, Ghosh’s choice of Piya’s hometown as Seattle cannot be read as either innocent or neutral. The several references to Seattle in the novel’s framework of globalisation, resistance, and struggle for social justice suggest that we should see Seattle as a location that reveals utopic hopes for a new society: the optimism generated by the iconic 1999 Seattle protests against the World Trade Organisation are exemplary of Hardt and Negri’s “new circuits of operation and collaboration that…allow an unlimited number of encounters” in the pursuit of change (Multitude xiii).

While critical cosmopolitanism is prompted by a volatile political context, its manifestation as a critical practice rests on transformative affects, which redirect the political

\[110\] In Empire, Hardt and Negri expose themselves to much criticism (see Balakrishnan; Passavant and Dean). Despite their many generalisations, abstractions, and privileging of struggles in places of economic power, Hardt and Negri nonetheless raise an intriguing notion in their rearticulation of Baruch Spinoza’s multitude, whose affiliative cohesion is created by “affective labour” (292-93). While such an idea applies to The Hungry Tide at a certain level, it would need to be further teased out and historicized within the space of the local. Though I draw a cursory parallel between Ghosh’s ideas on communities and Hardt and Negri’s multitude, Ghosh in fact differs greatly from Hardt and Negri in many ways. One particular digression is Ghosh’s refusal to romanticize poverty and the agency of the poor. Hardt and Negri aphoristically affirm “the poor itself is power” (157); but as Ghosh shows, the agency and power of the poor is always subject to the crushing material power of the state and its hegemonic classes.
actions and philosophical intentions of its bourgeois, cosmopolitan characters. Nirmal’s posthumous notebook, which approaches Morichjhâpi’s forgotten history, bears the mark of emotions, such as anxiety, melancholia, and selfless love, in shaping a new political consciousness. Nirmal’s notebook relates his growing critique of the Indian and international academe, and also articulates a possibility for ethical action in the failure of existing local, metropolitan, and international organisations. Much of Nirmal’s account reads like Edward Said’s notion of anxious witnessing, an affective state prompted by alienation, particularly, cultural, geographical or national dislocation. For Said, anxious witnessing is a concept that is already loaded with affect; he speaks of it in terms of permeating emotions: there is “sadness” (“Introduction” xiv), the “unsettling contentiousness of experiences” (xvii) and the “crippling sorrow of estrangement” (“Reflections” 173). Ranjana Khanna has called attention to the underlying melancholia in Said’s work, in order to point towards affect’s productive capacities.111 As she argues, Said’s melancholia does not bask in the bleakness of the world, but instead takes up the “thwarted hope – the only hope available in modernity” both to affirm and to motivate his vocation as an intellectual (“Post-Palliative”). As with Nirmal’s writing, Said’s “[s]tylistic affective expression gives form…to solidarity and the demand for justice beyond identity” (“Post-Palliative”). Said’s practice of reflexive critique resonates in my reading of The Hungry Tide because Nirmal’s notebook denotes the critical power of affect in shaping and transmitting forms of knowledge.

However, Khanna’s evaluation of Said overlooks the significance of his cosmopolitanism, which, I argue, underwrites the agency within anxious witnessing. While Khanna relates Said’s melancholic style to his postcolonial and “humanist cosmopolitanism”; she does not quite say how it is related, instead, focusing mainly on Said’s “personal affect” as

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111 In “Post-Palliative,” Khanna specifically refers to Said’s 1995 essay “On Lost Causes.”
the fount of the critical agency in his work. But despite her emphasis on the affect of historical situatedness, Khanna’s following assertion inadvertently underscores the importance of cosmopolitanism, in her emphasis on detachment:

I would propose that the form of melancholia theorized by Freud and to some extent Fanon allows for a reading of Said involving critical disidentification with space even as it calls for justice in the affective attachment to it. (emphasis added)

As Amanda Anderson argues, disidentification, as with detachment, forms an intrinsic characteristic of cosmopolitanism, since it allows for “affiliation, disaffiliation, and reaffiliation, simultaneously insisting on the need for informing principles of self-reflexivity, critique, and common humanity” (30). Rather than providing agency on its own, melancholia works on the cosmopolitan subject, displacing personal interest in favour of a critical cosmopolitanism that asserts an ethical practice. Anxious witnessing is thus an intellectual response that comes out of critical cosmopolitanism.

Functioning as an original if melancholic productivity, anxious witnessing is a narrative that is fascinated with the unfolding of extreme events. For Said, displacement is part of the process of attaining intellectual insight, as the writer grapples with the turbulence of “worldliness,” which he defined variously as war, ethnic cleansing, and forced migration.

112 “Personal affect,” which relates mainly to melancholia refers to Said’s diagnosis with leukaemia, his commitments to a political and intellectual vocation, and his “political disappointment, cultural analysis, and the study of literary and musical genre and form” (Khanna, “Post-Palliative.”)

113 Anderson here echoes the theorization of cosmopolitanism offered by Robbins, where he argues that cosmopolitanism is not an “idea of detachment” but rather “a reality of (re)attachment, multiple attachment, or attachment at a distance” (Powers of Distance 3).

114 To return briefly to Said, we can note how the affects of anxious witnessing are replicated in his other writings, for example, his thoughts on secular criticism reflect the broader anxieties of his own subject position: as an affluent and cosmopolitan Palestinian-in-exile living in New York, Said was frequently estranged by his political views in the US, but was also aware of his own outsider status in relation to the issues of Palestinian culture, language, and education, and particularly to Palestine’s material dispossession. Anxious witnessing derives much from Said’s notion of “secular criticism,” which places emphasis on the responsibility of the intellectual to “stand close to…a concrete reality about which political, moral, and social judgements have to be made and, if not only made, then exposed and demystified” (The World the Text and the Critic 26).
Said’s sense of anxious witnessing, as with his valorisation of exile, provides us with an aporetic formulation. Bound up with a particular elite, in which literacy is a given norm, anxious witnessing is not only inflected by a romantic vision of solitariness, but it can only function within an economic space of privilege that allow writers the freedom to chronicle the “dominant currents of their own time” (xxi). But whereas the misery of exile can foster “a plurality of vision,” the worldliness inherent in anxious witnessing points towards larger traumas that threaten to overwhelm the individual experience of displacement (“Reflections” 186). Anxious witnessing unsettles precisely because it is an act of witness; as Ana Douglass and Thomas Vogler have elsewhere suggested in their work on witnessing and memory, such an act seeks out its readers and hearers, and demands their attention. In the case of anxious witnessing, the testimony takes on the burden of a collective, rather than an individual, suffering. Anxious witnessing is thus a concept that already engages the field of ethical inquiry since it conflates the creative vision of the displaced writer with the ethical obligation of the intellectual.

Like Said’s, Nirmal’s critical cosmopolitanism emerges from his sense of alienation. Though Nirmal has become accustomed to his self-imposed “exile” for the last thirty years, in rural Bengal, as his interest in Morichjhâpi becomes more sustained, he segregates himself from his community and from his wife, Nilima; additionally, his elite cosmopolitan and privileged

115 This particular interpretation of “worldliness” differs somewhat from its meaning in several of Said’s essays, which uses the term in numerous different ways, including to emphasise an awareness of place (of the text) within a global setting (see “Politics of Knowledge”), as a foil to the “otherworldly,” stressing the importance of secularity and knowledge: “a jaded savoir-faire” (“Representing the Colonized” 301). In both these cases, Said is playing a variation on the theme of the role of the cosmopolitan, displaced intellectual.

116 As Said explains, “exile” carries for him “a touch of solitude and spirituality” (“Reflections” 181). One wonders if such a viewpoint would be forthcoming from underpaid working-class migrant labourers and similarly disenfranchised refugees.

117 See Douglass and Vogler 44. Though Douglass and Vogler never discuss Said’s concept, they provide a useful illumination of the fears present within an act of witness. For them, witnessing functions as a “nagging presence” in its urgent desire to procure listeners and readers (43).
background means he is also alienated from the refugee community. For Nirmal, failed writer and “Leftist Intellectual” (*The Hungry Tide* 76), the events at Morichjhāpi animate his creative powers and enable him to write, something he has “not been able to do for the last thirty years” (69). Seeing the oppression of the settlers sharpens a sense of urgent responsibility: “For the Poet himself had told me,” he writes in his notebook, “This is the time for what can be said…Speak and testify” (227). Ghosh sets up Nirmal as a solitary figure who challenges the silencing of history, rebuking the failures of mainstream academics and the international community to speak of the violence perpetrated on the refugees. In a chapter entitled “Crimes,” Nirmal records a refugee’s starving cry to the world addressing and implicating the reader in the human abuses of Morichjhāpi. Her voice, mediated through Nirmal, demands accountability to our version of ethical standards:

> Who are these people…who love animals so much that they are willing to kill us for them? Do they know what is being done in their names? (216-17)

As Nirmal immerses himself into the Morichjhāpi community he documents the ways in which the refugees establish a society, through sheer will and hard work. These are not “large herds of innocent and bewildered people requiring urgent international assistance,” but human agents, whose humanity is stripped away by institutional violence and reduced to impoverished anonymity (“Reflections,” 181). Nirmal glimpses the persecution faced by the refugee population, confronted as they are by hegemonic apparatuses. Ghosh’s critique excoriates not only the superstructures of the Indian nation-state, such as the police and the justice system, but also the non-state bourgeois apparatuses via the NGOs and Calcutta’s political and literary society. *The Hungry Tide* implies that the elite’s detachment from the Morichjhāpi incident is symptomatic of their disinterest in fomenting radical civic change after the demise of the colonial government.
If Nirmal’s anxious witnessing signals the culmination of his creative and political vocation, we must recognize that its worldliness is underpinned by an affect that is fervent, and empathic with the other. For Nirmal, this affect is configured as a form of selfless and reverential love and is energised by a curiosity towards the other. Ghosh’s return to affect and emotions presents a rethinking of modernist and rationalist forms and an attempt to move towards new political futures. One might ask whether the cause of Morichjhāpi would energise Nirmal in the same way if he were not nostalgically attached to the idea of revolutions, performing what Gopal Balakrishnan calls “revolutionary emoting”(ix)? Nilima in fact sees Nirmal as being “in love with the idea of revolution…it is what makes [him] come alive” (100). This idealism works in tandem with, rather than against, Nirmal’s fascination for Kusum, a young orphaned village girl who later reappears on Morichjhāpi as one of the settlers. For Nirmal, Kusum and the other settlers of Morichjhāpi represent an unknown world, which is “new, unexpected, [and] full of surprises” (186). As opposed to “the quiet persistence of everyday change,” Kusum and the cause of Morichjhāpi stand for “the heady excitement of revolution” (180). Nirmal’s behaviour around Kusum is an indication of his complex affective responses to her proximity and his exposure to the galvanizing atmosphere and energies of Morichjhāpi’s community.

The twin tropes of revolution and love, suggesting a romantic longing for escape either through the unfamiliar or via a political cause, are already familiar to Ghosh’s reader. In The Shadow Lines, the narrator’s grandmother used to dream about her young Nationalist classmate, who was arrested by the British for his terrorist activities. Similarly, in The Hungry Tide, the somewhat sheltered Nilima is drawn to Nirmal because of his “fiery lectures and impassioned recitations” (64). But if such experiences suggest middle-class self-indulgence, Nirmal’s activity

118 See The Shadow Lines pps. 36-38.
and his desires are structured by a love that demands sacrifice and selflessness. This love initiates his desire to record the events unfolding in Morichjhāpi, despite extreme personal risk. Yet Nirmal fears that “after the storm passes, the events that have preceded its coming will be forgotten” (58). As a schoolteacher in rural Bengal, he is aware of his limited influence in India’s political arena. Consequently, he turns to his nephew, addressing him directly in the notebook:

> I hope this finds its way to you Kanai. I feel certain you will have a greater claim on the world’s ear than I ever had. (230)

Despite his sense of ethical obligation, Nirmal’s affectively-structured intervention is constrained: he cannot bring Morichjhāpi’s history to the wider world. In contrast, Kanai’s economic success with his translation business in Delhi gives him access to powerful international and elite contacts, “the businesses, embassies, the media [and] aid organisations” that make up his clients (165). Yet commensurate with Kanai’s achievements is the insularity of the privileged city-dweller. If Kanai’s smugness is paradigmatic of the self-satisfied, self-important, and well-educated bourgeois citizen, Kanai also functions as a stereotype of the dissipated, prosperous individual: “an example of a certain kind of Indian male, overbearing, vain” (163). As his aunt Nilima observes, “Things have come very easily to [Kanai] so he doesn’t know what the world is like for most people” (208).

**Transformative Affects**

Nirmal’s anxious witnessing nonetheless carries within it affects that leave their distinctive imprint on Kanai as they communicate a traumatic history. Nirmal’s notebook is interruptive in the sense that it ruptures the main narrative of *The Hungry Tide* and disturbs Kanai’s professional urban life. Like a spectral presence, the notebook turns up twenty years after its
composition bearing repressed memories. Although Kanai jokes that the ghost of Nirmal is “risen from his ashes to summon me” (13), this ghost becomes manifest when Kanai has a strangely “vivid recollection of Nirmal’s silhouette, outlined against the sky” (22). As Kanai has already started reading the notebook by this time, we are invited to infer that this spectral presence is an affective excess that cannot be contained within Nirmal’s writings. By the time he has finished reading the notebook, Kanai finds that “his hands were shaking” (230). This reaction, reminiscent of what Dominik LaCapra has termed “empathic unsettlement,” passes on both affective and historical understanding (“Trauma, Absence, Loss” 699). We can further trace within this affective reaction Kanai’s newly stirred sense of bereavement for his uncle’s death. The flaring up of residual affect triggers memories of his uncle and Kanai’s time as a young visitor in rural Bengal, where his friendship with Kusum began. Prompting a recollection of “the most primeval divide” between [classes and] people, Kanai feels “an awakened curiosity” to cross this barrier (*The Hungry Tide* 76). Such memories, experiences, and meetings with the other begin to work a transformation in him enabling an examination of self, the condition that makes Ghosh’s critical cosmopolitanism possible.

As Kanai travels with Piya on her cetological project, the effect of his surroundings as well as the notebook on him becomes noticeable, suggesting Kanai’s move away from middle-class complacency. In one scene, where a tiger is burned alive by a mob of villagers, Piya directs her sense of outrage and horror at the villagers; her perspective, that of the outsider, is rooted in what Rob Nixon calls “ecoparochialism” (238). But Kanai corrects Piya’s interpretation of the act as part of an atavistic otherness (“like something from some other time – before recorded history”), by inviting Piya to consider the situation from a subaltern viewpoint (248). As a representative of the middle and international class, Kanai sees himself and Piya as
perpetuating an economy of horror that turns a blind eye to the thousands of human deaths by predators and rural hardship because “these people are too poor to matter” (248). So, too, Piya notices Kanai is beginning to deviate from the “Indian male” stereotype, opting for a contemplative and companionable silence, where there once would have been a “[sexual] joke or a satirical remark” (256).

But if Kanai now has developed a sense of integrity, Ghosh demands a more thorough shattering of his character’s core beliefs. In their conversation following the burning of the tiger, Kanai asks Piya whether she would be willing to “pay the price in lost lives” (249). Piya’s affirmative answer only serves to highlight Kanai’s reluctance to relinquish his middle-class comforts. For Ghosh, the formation of a new ethical consciousness can only materialise when sedimented norms are scrutinized or overturned, something he suggests can only occur by putting one self in unfamiliar spaces, in proximity to the other. When such occasions arise, affect transfixes the characters. Witness Nirmal, watching the work of the settlers: “I felt something changing in me…I felt all of existence swelling in my veins” (141). Likewise, consider Kanai’s denigration of Fokir, Kusum’s son and a low-caste fisherman. Like Kusum did for Nirmal, Fokir embodies an otherness that Kanai can only understand condescendingly as an “utterly unformed” quality like “unshaped clay” (263). Kanai’s abuse stems from his need to assert his class-inflected authority and reconstitute his social and cultural norms. But as he directs his fury at Fokir, Kanai is overwhelmed. The “atavistic explosiveness” of his anger punctures his secure subjectivity, and makes him conscious of how entrenched his class and cultural convictions are. Even as he curses Fokir, he inwardly acknowledges the

sources whose very existence he would have denied: the master’s suspicion of the menial; the pride of caste; the townsman’s mistrust of the rustic; the city’s antagonism towards the village. [Kanai] had thought he had cleansed himself of these sediments of
the past, but the violence with which they spewed out of him now suggested that they had only been compacted into an explosive and highly volatile reserve. (269)

This comprehension is swiftly followed by insights that heighten Kanai’s sense of self-realisation. In the past, Kanai’s occupation as a translator had placed him advantageously on the cusp of multiple cultures, a cosmopolitan perspective which enables cross-cultural exchange. “The instrument of language,” as the narrator puts it, functioned as “a transparent film, a prism that allowed him to look through another set of eyes” (270). By way of forming a new ethical consciousness, Kanai’s cosmopolitan vision arises spontaneously, unbidden, and replete with glaring moral truths. Kanai is confronted with a disconcerting image of himself as

a double for the outside world, someone standing in for the men who had destroyed Fokir’s village, burnt his home and killed his mother; [Kanai] had become a token for a vision of human beings in which a man such as Fokir counted for nothing, a man whose value was less than that of an animal. (270)

Here, Kanai apprehends the structures of violence and oppression operating within the dominant social order. In his epiphany, Kanai becomes aware not only the decentring of his identity and values, but the extent of his bourgeois false consciousness.

Ghosh does not end Kanai’s “trial by ordeal” here (260). He additionally subjects him to the position of the subaltern, that is, by placing him in the same mortal jeopardy experienced daily by the refugees. Kanai finds himself vulnerable to attacks from Bengal’s wildlife; the “immense” presence of the tiger that confronts him engulfs all rational thought. Unable to speak, Kanai experiences a distilled terror:

It was as if his mind, in its panic, had emptied itself of language…the sluices between his mind and his senses had collapsed: his mind was swamped by a flood of pure sensation. (272, emphasis added)

This affect instils an emancipatory, if humbling, consciousness. A wiser if more wistful person emerges from this affective encounter; when Piya inspects Kanai later, she finds it difficult to
reconcile his earlier “certainty” and “imperiousness” with “the halting, diffident manner of the man who stood before her” (276). Looking back, Kanai confides to Piya that he is a changed man, in awe of the “shocking novelty” of the emotions he feels (291). The sexual desire he previously felt for her has been reconfigured into an altruistic impulse: “to ensure someone’s happiness, even if it should come at the cost of [Kanai’s] own” (291). Such profound feeling inculcates an alternative mode of knowledge, a humanist awakening inherent in Kanai’s concluding remarks: “how little I know of myself and of the world” (291).

Kanai’s subsequent desire to publish Nirmal’s notebook is an ethical response to his self-reflexivity and to Nirmal’s testimony; in doing so, he takes up Nirmal’s unfulfilled desire to compile a book about Nirmal’s knowledge of the tide country (Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide* 179). But rather than replicate Nirmal’s story, he is driven to write of his own encounter, “how [the notebook] came into his hands, what was in it, and how it was lost” (399). In its finished form, if we can indulge in a moment of playful speculation, Kanai’s project may prove uncannily similar to Ghosh’s novel. Like Nirmal’s notebook, Kanai’s book, will embody a self-conscious form of remembrance that prompts what Benita Parry calls the “capacity to nourish resistance against present inequities” (180). So too, *The Hungry Tide* constitutes “a slender connection to the ears of an unheeding world” (Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide* 100). It tries to breach our own protective space by flooding us with the affective excess of other histories, experiences, and places. Overcome by this affective deluge, we are directed towards an inquiry of self-knowing, and provoked into meticulous reflection over our thought and actions. Ghosh’s engagement with the oppressions and inequalities of rural Bengal chafes at our conscience, heightening our awareness of our privileged status, and shakes us out of our comfortable contemplation. It repeatedly asks us to question our desensitisation to and ignorance of poverty and the subaltern
condition. Here, Ghosh is following through on the assertion he makes about the dilemmas of writing and reading about violence in his essay, “The Ghosts of Mrs Gandhi:"

When I now read descriptions of troubled parts of the world, in which violence appears primordial and inevitable, a fate to which masses of people are largely resigned, I find myself asking, Is that all there was to it? Or is it possible that the authors of these descriptions failed to find a form – or a style or a voice or a plot – that could accommodate both violence and the civilized willed response to it? (62, original emphasis)

Ghosh’s response to the writings of others is a statement of critical intent in his own fiction. Indeed, his call for action may seem at odds with the novel’s uplifting and reconciling ending; but, despite the complaints of critics who viewed Ghosh’s ending as a literary shortcoming, I argue that this, in fact, marks his objective.\footnote{See reviews by Neill Freudenberger and Philip Graham.} I submit that as with Kanai’s preface to his translation of the Bon Bibi legend, the novel is a “gift…[that has] such flaws…that will prevent [the translator] from fading from sight” (354). Thus, the visibility of the author is made manifest. Similarly, the veering between the novel’s anxious witnessing of history and its reconciliatory ending is a necessary reminder of the story’s textuality. The reader can be enticed into the fantasy of the novel’s idyllic conclusion, but is confounded by his or her empathic unsettlement.\footnote{LaCapra, in fact, argues that empathic unsettlement “poses a barrier to closure in discourses and places in jeopardy harmonizing or spiritually uplifting accounts of extreme events from which we attempt to derive reassurance or a benefit (for example, unearned confidence about the ability of the human spirit to endure any adversity with dignity and nobility)” (Writing History, Writing Trauma 41-42).} Instead, as readers, we are urged to think outside of what Ghosh laments as the “dominant aesthetic of our time – the aesthetic of…indifference” and towards the hope of social and political transformation offered at the end of the novel (“Ghosts of Mrs Gandhi” 61). Though this promise lies in the final chapter, the reader’s involvement is perhaps made more apparent in the paratextual appendix, the “Author’s Afterword,” which gestures beyond literary exegesis and turns to the external and sober world of political, intellectual, and social activism.
The Hungry Tide asserts that the emancipatory possibilities of an interventionist ethics reside within the very structures of transnational middle-class privilege. Ghosh demonstrates how advantageously the cosmopolitan class is placed to utilize the resources within capitalist globalization to contest the subjugation of communities. In invoking an ethical practice of critical cosmopolitanism, Ghosh intends to keep us vigilant to notions of responsibility and to remind us of our own, often, arbitrary and precarious access to power. But our obligation as citizens of the world, in the face of civic inequalities and suppressed histories, like those of Morichjhâpi, do not dissolve at the moment of witnessing alone. Rather than lapsing into a form of naïve humanism, Ghosh wants us to respond affectively and socio-politically. Only then, can we begin to transcend the failures of modern nation-states by inaugurating a new societal order composed of affective and ethically responsive networks.
CHAPTER TWO

The Disputes of Narrating Loss: the Collective Politics of Indian Partition Anthologies

If Amitav Ghosh’s partition novels delve into the genealogy of a family trauma and its interconnection with other communities, they also assert the spatial and historical coordinates of a Bengali partition consciousness. In contrast, the recent emergence of partition literary anthologies, published in English on the Indian subcontinent, claims to give voice to a greater Indian grief over partition. Yet, despite the increasing publication of these anthological compilations, relatively few attempts have been made to understand their pedagogical significance, particularly in relation to their assertion of a collective trauma. Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith’s general study of literary collections on testimony and human rights offers a clue in understanding the work done by partition anthologies. They comment that, “anthologies gain their ethical force by gathering multiple narratives of shared victimization into one volume whose purpose is to challenge and rewrite history, call the reader to recognition, and spur action” (45).

This chapter details how partition anthologies provide a discursive terrain for articulating a distinctly collective traumatic memory of partition. Since the 1980s, the ongoing appearance of new anthologies testifies that, though partition is a historical event, it is far from over. The growth of such anthologies implies a need to revisit the event in order to explore more fully the contours of its traumas. Unlike the work done by a single novel, partition anthologies present multiple stories by different authors, conveying the scope and the importance of partition, both in terms of its traumas, and its historical effects. The project of the partition anthology, like

121 Unless I make clear otherwise, all my references to anthologies relates to partition anthologies published in English on the Indian subcontinent.
other genres of partition literature, does, indeed, rewrite history and demand recognition, within a national context that lacks public commemoration of the suffering experienced. The nation-state’s failure to acknowledge this extends to a collective amnesia over partition, reminiscent of what Bernhard Giesen has called the “coalition of silence” in another context (“Perpetrators” 116). Against the “absence of public rituals […] spaces of mourning” and a general lack of testimony, Ananya Kabir notes, “Partition narratives present alternative, albeit contested, sites for such mourning” (“Subjectivities” 246). In their expression of trauma, both single-authored works and anthologies are implicated in a larger collective framework, as they take on the role of “appalled witnesses to an age of genocide” (Bhalla xviii). However, unlike novels, anthologies perform a critical and cultural role in their articulation of a collective trauma. This is manifest in their bid for greater representation, as reflected by their inclusion of polyphonic voices within a single-bound text. Smaro Kamboureli adumbrates this difference in intent, when she explains that, by their very structure and subject, anthologies are designed to “make a collective statement” (133).

But if they make a collective statement, individual anthologies also contest the notion of a singular collective trauma by enunciating the emergence of different collectivities and their experience of partition trauma. Here, a rough distinction can be drawn between, at least, two phases of anthology production. The first few collections frequently invoke a nebulous national collective trauma; in contrast, the anthologies of the late 1990s give expression to the particular grievances felt by a community. The literary field of partition anthologies and the texts themselves remain fairly small, both in number and length, when compared to the dense canonical tomes well known to first-year students at North American universities. Of the eighteen or so anthologies that have appeared over the last twenty-five years, I focus on the few

122 See Butalia 288.
that characterise the “first phase,” which proved foundational to subsequent collections. I then turn to the “second phase” of anthologies that react to these earlier works, and claim a particular, but as yet marginalised, experience of partition trauma for a political community. In doing so, my assessment calls attention to the processes which consolidate and institutionalise partition’s traumas. Additionally, my analysis subjects to scrutiny the more general concept of collective trauma itself as well as the way in which anthologies negotiate uneasily between a general theme of loss and the disparate claims of various groups.

My discussion of partition anthologies falls into three sections: first, I offer an explanation of cultural, collective trauma and the rise of a traumatic consciousness about partition; second, I examine the importance of genre in relation to institutionalisation, modes of historical recollection, globalization, the role of the English language, and the purpose of academics and intellectuals; third, I sketch out an overview of six anthologies from the first and second phases; finally, this section ends on a sustained critical engagement with a Bengali collection, the first of its kind that was published in 2003.

**Institutionalising Collective Memory and Trauma**

Collective trauma implicates both the individual and the collective. In his work on group psychology, Freud recognized the blurred relationship between these two social bodies, in the

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123 I disagree with Di Leo’s definition that anthologies are constituted of already published work, while collections consist of original, previously unpublished work (see Di Leo 3-4). Partition anthologies now cover not only multiple-authored collections, but single-authored, and academic ones as well. In many anthologies, previously unpublished work is mixed with older, well-known writings. The multiple-authored anthologies I have omitted from this chapter include: Sukrita Paul Kumar and Muhammad Ali Siddiqui’s *Mapping Memories: Urdu Stories From India and Pakistan* (1998); Ravikant and Tarun Saint’s *Translating Partition* (2001); Harris Khalique and Rohini Kohli’s *Unfinished Histories: Stories of Separation and Belonging from the South Asian Diaspora* (2002); Tarun K. Saint’s *Bruised Memories: Communal Violence and the Writer* (2002), as well as all anthologies published after 2004, such as Ritu Menon’s *No Woman’s Land* (2004), Moazzam Sheikh’s *A Letter From India: Contemporary Short Stories From Pakistan* (2004), Bashabi Fraser and Sheila Sengupta’s *Bengal Partition Stories: An Unclosed Chapter* (2006), as well as Frank Stewart and Sukrita Paul Kumar’s *Crossing Over: Partition Literature from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh* (2007).
way that the individual invariably extends towards and involves others. But he also asserted that, in a group, the individual risks “contagion” when his or her personal interests are subsumed or sacrificed into the larger collective interest (Group Psychology 7). Taking up Gustave Le Bon’s account of crowds, Freud claimed that a group can control and transform the individual when an unconscious personality, that identifies with the group, takes over the individual’s consciousness. Freud emphasises this unconscious component in the affective, libidinal ties within institutional groups, such as the church or army. Freud’s idea offers some useful points in understanding the formation of collective memory. A collective memory is made up of discourses and cultural norms, many of which can be at once unconscious, ideological, as well as intentionally acquired, such as history, traditions, and values that “represent” and interpellate the individual, but also efface his or her agency. Collective memory is essentially a construct that is selective, assembled from genuine, as well as invented, events and memories from the past and the present that are reified in societal institutions.

Maurice Halbwachs’ work on collective memory is seminal to understanding how a society establishes a shared history as collective memory. For Halbwachs, there was no such thing as individual memory, since it is always “a part or an aspect of group memory;” there are instead, many social groups with their distinctive sets of collective memories (53). Developing Emile Durkheim’s concept of collective consciousness, Halbwachs argued that collective memory is “reconstructed on the basis of the present” and according to “the predominant thoughts of the society” (40). Halbwachs uses the example of the nobility of the

124 Note that, as Paloma Aguilar argues, collective memory has been given different names such as “social,” “historical,” and “public” (6). Aguilar also notes that the label of “collective memory” inherently simplifies and abstracts “the plurality of memories that exists within any given society” (6).

125 Halbwachs argues that the individual is implicated in group memory because he places “himself in the perspective of the group” but also because “the memory of the group realizes and manifests itself in individual memories” (40).
seventeenth-century Europe to examine how group memories function ideologically. There, the appeal to a past both spiritual and material, transmitted via inheritance and upheld through tradition, reinforces the group’s claim to power. This “foundation of remembrances” establishes the basis for the group’s authority (125). Following from Halbwachs’ argument, collective memory follows a similar logic to Eric Hobsbawm’s “invented traditions,” in the sense that a particular past is selected by a group in the present and invested with a “significant or ritual function,” denoting the insufficiency of old traditions and institutions, while introducing the new (3).

In his work on African-American identity, Ron Eyerman offers another way to understand Halbwachs’ theory when he argues that collective memory is “similar to myth” (“Cultural Trauma” 67). This discounting of collective memory is perhaps too all-encompassing. In his search for a “more objective” understanding of a group’s historical memory, Eyerman sidelines that what Halbwachs seeks to expose: the ideological propagation of a particular past by a particular group to secure its position in society (67). What is of more interest to me is not the elusive search for truth that occupies Eyerman, but the practices of development and formation that undergird collective memory. Consequently, I want to emphasise collective memory as an artificial process, frequently aligned within a system of power in order to secure the hegemony or the displacement of particular groups. Like ideology, collective memory is not necessarily commensurate with historical truth, but is best understood as a perspective or philosophy of history. Over time, collective memories are consolidated

126 Arguing that this memory “must continually be made over” to fit “the group’s needs and interests,” Eyerman debunks collective memory in favour of academic history, which he sees as “something wider, more objective, and more universal than group memory” (“Cultural Trauma” 67). While Eyerman’s view is careful to emphasise the role of the physical and material (as opposed to a memory) in corroborating, discounting, shaping or manifesting particular memories, Eyerman falls into the trap of constructing academia as somehow impartial, and not complicit (to whatever degree) within any sort of Althusserian ruling class hegemony or Halbwachian collective, societal framework. For instance, universities could be said to espouse a collective memory in the name of an ideal, such as humanism, or liberalism, that endows it with authority.
through traditions or institutions. I would like to broaden this understanding of collective memory to include the amassment of different individual memories.

Like collective memory, trauma does not exist in or by itself, but relies on a context of social recognition and mediation, which legitimises it and gives it meaning. Jeffrey C. Alexander argues that consciousness about a collective trauma only emerges when members of a collectivity identify a “horrendous event” that has marked them indelibly and following that moment of recognition define themselves in relation to it (“Theory of Cultural Trauma” 1). The most famous example of collective trauma can be found in the extensive discourses circulating around the Jewish Holocaust, where institutions and designated sites of remembrance restore the collective traumatic memory of Jewish suffering. Such discourses work symbolically “to restore collective psychological health” (“Theory of Cultural Trauma” 7). In considering what Norman G. Finkelstein has derisively termed the “Holocaust industry,” which manifests itself through Holocaust centres and museums, academic courses, cultural artifacts, and narratives, it is important to note that Holocaust trauma was not simply socially constructed and remembered ad hoc, but rather was created as a result of a material practices in relation to the growing economic and political power of Israel and the Jewish diaspora. The suffering of the Jews had to be legitimised prior to the construction of a collective traumatic narrative first, through public knowledge (the birth of Israel, the revelation of the concentration camps) and second, through public support and public spectacle (the Nuremburg trials, and the more important Eichmann trial which gathered sympathy from the Jewish diaspora and the public at large).¹²⁷

While the traumatic occurrence of the Indian partition was roughly contemporaneous with the Holocaust, no project of such scope on collective traumatic memory has been

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¹²⁷ See the collection edited by David Cesarani. In it, Postner and Santner argue that “sustained historiographical work on the Holocaust only began in earnest after the Eichmann trail,” which itself was staged “in part, as an effort to disseminate knowledge” (3).
assembled. The “coalition of silence” played a prominent part, not least because official historical narratives preferred to emphasise the future, particularly the grand narratives of national achievements over partition’s traumatic past. This pattern continues to be repeated throughout India and Pakistan’s superstructure. According to Suvir Kaul, pedagogical institutions “glossed over” the event, and have “not taught [it] in the detail and density that its scale and historical importance might warrant” (9). Similarly, the state has built no monuments nor arranged commemorative vigils. The crimes of perpetrators have never been recognized at a national level by the holding of tribunals (thus achieving a level of symbolic and collective working through).128

In the absence of a sanctioned collective memory of cultural trauma, an alternative and repressed form of consciousness existed (and continues to exist), with little expression in the public sphere. Most commonly, accounts of partition exist in popular memory and life narratives that are passed down orally, trans-generationally, and mediated within social institutions, like the family, persisting either as rumours or stories, what Marianne Hirsch has called “postmemory.”129 Such memories and postmemories are rarely registered in the public sphere. Instead, the deliberate social amnesia surrounding partition has allowed for uncritical appropriations of the past by Hindu nationalists, such as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). This archive of knowledge resurfaces in volatile

128 Greenberg 96. By way of comparison, Bangladesh has also submerged its memories of partition within a nationalist agenda, claiming that the 1947 partition is “an event of two foreign countries” (Tan and Kudaisya 5). Here, the memory of partition has been overtaken by the more recent traumatic events of the 1971 war of Independence and the brutal repression experienced at the hands of the Pakistani authorities. This trauma (including the suppression of a syncretic Bengali Islam) is evocatively detailed in Tareque Masud’s 2002 film The Clay Bird. This is not to say that the original 1947 partition was not traumatic in East Bengal nor that an engagement with the two partitions (Bengal/ Pakistan’s east wing) is not productive to understand the violence of colonial legacies, but rather illuminates the way its violent communal events have been integrated into the narrative of “colonial” oppression so that awkward questions over complicity and collaboration can be displaced onto the Pakistani Other. Marianne Hirsch’s concept of postmemory refers to “a specifically generational response to memory and trauma...the response of the second generation to the trauma of the first” (“Surviving Images” 8). Many South Asian scholars talk about the importance of partition memory. See work by Butalia; Menon and Bhasin; Kakar; Mahua Sarkar. Anjan Ghosh is currently working on the role of partition memory in rumour.
times, such as during the 1964 Calcutta riots and the 2002 Gujarati riots, prompting memories of earlier partition violence. Left unchecked, reenergized postmemories play an important role in circulating affects, such as fear, anxiety, and hatred of the other. On the other hand, these postmemories can also offer a counterpoint in their recollection of intercommunal aid during times of violence and tensions.\textsuperscript{130}

Personal memory and postmemory also play a significant role in historiographical and literary scholarship on partition. This scholarship, among which I count partition anthologies, comes out of and often interacts with the private experience of subjects who are haunted by their inherited memories of partition. But while some editors foreground their testimonies, others overwhelmingly appeal to another trauma, the Holocaust, as a paradigm for the institutionalisation of partition studies. In extending a connection between the Indian partition and the Holocaust, editors call attention to “the history of public responses to the Holocaust” and contrast partition’s own glaring lack of coverage in the public sphere (Postone and Santner 2).\textsuperscript{131} The Holocaust consequently becomes a self-conscious mode of reference to the anthologies’ efforts in creating an academic framework for the study of partition. In this endeavour, the anthologies seek out wide-spread recognition that partition, like the Holocaust, should stand as “a symbol of human suffering and moral evil,” an impetus paving the way for material restitution, not least the “ethnic, racial, and religious justice [and] for mutual

\textsuperscript{130} See the autobiographical accounts and oral histories related by Appadurai; Butalia; Ghosh, \textit{In an Antique Land}; Nandy (in Saint); Sarkar, “Muslim Women” 148; and Sen (pps. 170-7). My thanks also to Mandakranta Bose for divulging her family history, including accounts of intercommunal tension and aid during partition in Noakhali, East Bengal.

\textsuperscript{131} Suvir Kaul actually argues for a Partition memorial “equivalent of a Holocaust Memorial in which to house these scholars and archives” (10). Ashis Nandy has written an essay comparing the two “genocides” in his essay, “The Invisible Holocaust.” Butalia uses James Young’s writings on testimonies and memories of the Holocaust as a model for her own research (7-8). Holocaust comparisons are also made in Bhalla xvii; Bagchi and Dasgupta 4 and 163; Ravikant and Sant, xxiii; Samaddar 127. Bagchi and Dasgupta also argue for a comparison between the Jewish refugees of the Nazi regime and Indian refugees, see 1 and 59.
recognition” but also the regulation of ongoing conflicts (Alexander, “Social Construction” 197).

The appearance of the partition anthology, much like its role in shaping a traumatic consciousness was enormously helped by socio-cultural changes occurring in the globalised, English-speaking and Indian cultural spaces, ushering in an increased awareness about partition by the late 1980s. At one level the interest in partition can be attributed to the Raj revival (and colonial nostalgia) in the UK, as evidenced by the British mini-series *The Raj Quartet* (1984) and Richard Attenborough’s film *Gandhi* (1982), which both focus on the decline of Anglo-Indian colonisation and the ushering in of Indian Independence. At another level, a new awareness about partition can be traced to the success of diasporic South Asian writers writing in English, and the Western demand for what Graham Huggan has called the “postcolonial exotic.” Such demand is linked to the commodification of ethnicity and foreignness, the existence and interests of sizeable second- and third-generation diasporic communities, and new social engagements with diversity. Most prominently, the rise of the Indo-Anglian novel, and particularly the publication of the diasporic partition novel in the 1980s, meant authors, such as Salman Rushdie, rapidly gained centre stage as their work was established and recognized internationally.132

The interest in partition cannot be limited to the global English-speaking faction only. Kabir has pointed out the “pan-Indian televising of serials on the partition of India (*Tamas, Buniyaad, Hum Log*) during the 1980s” (“Gender, Memory, Trauma” 189). The 1986

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132 Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* was published in 1981 and won the Booker McConnell prize. In 1993, Rushdie’s novel received the “Booker of Bookers award.” Rushdie, of course, was made even more famous by the notoriety surrounding *The Satanic Verses* (1988). Anita Desai’s partition novel *Clear Light of Day* was published in 1980. Other partition novels include Bapsi Sidhwa’s *Cracking India*, originally published as *Ice-Candy Man*, which came out in 1988. The same year also saw the publication of Amitav Ghosh’s *Shadow Lines*. From anecdotal conversations with Bengalis and fellow Brits and Canadians, Ghosh’s novel seems to have made more of an impact in India (also judging from the volumes of critical work on him published in India) than in the UK, the US, or Canada.
serialisation of Bhisham Sahni’s Hindi partition novel *Tamas* (1974), in particular, proved a “classic,” entering middle-class consciousness when it was broadcast all over India. Its popular success was enhanced by its controversial reception by Hindu nationalists groups. In its revisiting of the past, *Tamas* cultivates sympathetic, if not empathetic, understandings of partition, exposing its audiences to the suffering during partition and alerting them to the threat of contemporary communal movements. The serialisation of *Tamas* was a landmark in the terrain of collective memory as most of its audience would have never directly experienced the event. As one of the very few Hindi narratives about partition, *Tamas* took on a crucial role in educating post-partition generations who would have known far less about partition in contrast to those well acquainted with Bengali, Punjabi, and Urdu cultures (Sharma).

The appearance of partition anthologies published in India in English needs to be assessed in the context of English as a hegemonic and global language. One of the earliest partition anthologies, *When the British Left: Stories on the Partitioning of India, 1947* (1987), offers an explanation for its use of English when its editors, S. Cowasjee and K. S. Duggal acknowledge its global reach: “More today is being written, especially in the English language, on the theme of partition than during the first two decades of partition” (x). English here acts as a vehicle for didactic purposes as a way to promote greater attention to the regional, cultural, and political histories within India. English of course remains predominant in the economics of book production. But, the fact that partition anthologies are further published by the Indian

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133 Hindutva groups, such as RSS and Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), held public demonstrations against the series. Sahni and the director of the series, Govind Nihalani, were placed under police protection for seven weeks (Sharma, and Us Salam). The producers of the mini series were also taken to court to prevent it from being telecast (Saksena 63).

134 As Igartua and Paez argue, such “semiotic structures will produce more emotional activity, more reflection, and a stronger identification with the characters. These processes are linked to a stronger agreement with critical and negative beliefs on the [traumatic event]” (99).

135 Most famously, the Subalterrn Studies series is published in English. Gayatri Spivak is also known for her translation of Mahasweta Devi’s stories from Bengali into English. She has compiled four collections of Devi’s stories, including *Imaginary Maps* (1993) and *Breast Stories* (1997).
offshoots of multinational English language publishers, such as Penguin or HarperCollins, and made available through a virtual network of international booksellers, like Abebooks and Amazon, also suggests a wider demand for partition narratives as well as a desire for new approaches towards partition both internationally and in India. This is not to say that anthologies in regional languages do not already exist and are not in demand; the earliest partition anthologies were produced initially in local languages, such as Bengali and Hindi. It seems that if the anthologies address the English-speaking reader, they also include the Indian diaspora (now numbering twenty million worldwide) as an audience. The presence of this global audience is suggested both by the anthology’s use of English as a medium, and by the way the anthologies gloss their texts. For instance, some point out language puns in the stories, such as those contained in the names of characters, but feel no need to translate the name or explain the pun; others emphasise that English is a more accessible medium to stories written in diverse Indian languages.

The role of English as a linguistic medium is not without its problems. Aijaz Ahmad’s vitriolic critique of English in the western academy has placed emphasis both on the language’s removal from Indian cultures and its special position worldwide. First, Ahmad castigates those academics who privilege the small portion of Indian literature written in English and ignore the “prolix and variegated archive” of cultural narratives (243). Second, Ahmad goes further by

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136 For instance, one Bengali anthology, which was published in 1975, is made up of the serialisation of autobiographical accounts of East Bengal that had originally appeared in Calcutta newspapers in the 1950s; unfortunately, this project still awaits translation. See Dipesh Chakrabarty’s examination of the narratives of this anthology in his essay “Remembered Villages.” Chakrabarty reveals the politics of constructing a traumatised memory through narrative structure. These accounts deliberately occlude a historicist version of past communal tensions and power struggles in order to depict Partition as inexplicable, unexpected, and inherently traumatic. Another partition anthology, this time Hindi, appeared in 1975, compiled by Narendra Mohan. See Mathur 9 for more details.

137 For example, Alok Bhalla tells us “note the bitter pun on his name,” without elucidating further (xxi). See also Bhalla xvi. In contrast, Debjani Sengupta, the editor of Mapmaking explains that by translating her anthology into English, she offers “a small introduction to a body of Partition literature that was not available to English readers” (186).
denouncing the English language’s capacity as a translatory medium, contending that English cannot adequately take on the multilingual, polyglot, overlapping, and fluid phenomenon of, arguably, untranslatable literatures. In his struggle to define a literary theory for Indian literatures, Ahmad rejects English, and tries to move away from the way English has already been institutionalised as a scholarly language in India. For Ahmad, English is the “most removed in its structure and ambience from all the other Indian languages, [and] hence least able to bridge the cultural gap between the original and translated text” (250). Ahmad’s critique rightly speaks to the (neo)colonial issues associated with English language discourses; however, English already exists as an Indian language, used by a cultural elite, in business and in the academy.

**Academic Intervention and the Work of Partition Anthologies**

In relation to the growing awareness of cultural trauma, partition anthologies position themselves as critical venues that are foremost pedagogical, in terms of production and consumption, and that are connected to an English-speaking, (quasi-) academic, marketplace. The anthology genre is significant here since it is closely associated with academic disciplinarily and canonicity; its selection of texts institutionalises the partition as a legitimate subject of study. The partition anthology has an important position in relation to canonical literature and to a dominant understanding of partition. Long understood as a pedagogical genre, anthologies are frequently aligned with either national interests or some political objective. For instance, in his work on Palestinian literary culture, Salah D. Hassan goes as far as to claim that anthologies form “a central institution in the construction of national literary traditions” (“Nation

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138 Canon here refers to less of the Arnoldian imperative, “the best which has been thought and said in the world,” than a “map of the territory” which the canon encompasses and subsequently authorizes (Bloom 90).
Validation” 10). In his study of anthologies, Jeffrey Di Leo points out that such texts are considered “necessary and immutable” for students, scholars and general readers, approving some authors and texts while marginalising or effacing others (2). In this way, anthologies register the literatures of a particular tradition, but they can also situate themselves to dialogue with or challenge the discourse of the existing canon. They are particularly effective because, as Kamboureli points out, “perhaps more than individual titles, [they] reflect the values shaping a given tradition or, conversely, a perceived need to revise that tradition” (133, emphasis added).

Thus, partition anthologies have the ability to (re)shape a national consciousness and foreground the traumatic experience of partition. By their presence alone, anthologies establish partition as a topic of importance. This is especially the case for those that outline partition’s considerable historical repercussions and encourage readers to investigate and understand the past.\textsuperscript{139} Partition anthologies function as commemorations, a reminder of historical responsibility. Additionally, they diversify and deepen our understanding of the event, indicating new areas of interest and challenging existing conceptions of partition outside of the Indian subcontinent.\textsuperscript{140} In their use of already canonical literature, anthologies gesture towards a pre-partitionist consciousness that unites both Indian and Pakistan. For instance, most include the Urdu short story writer Saadat Hasan Manto. Despite his relative anonymity in western academia, Manto’s epigrammatic and political literary aesthetic has made him one of the most widely read authors on the subcontinent (Hasan, vol. I, 10). By positing Manto, a secular Muslim writer, as one of India’s most brilliant and subversive writers on partition, the

\textsuperscript{139} I concur with Nancy Cirillo that partition anthologies, like other anthologies, are historical artifacts, “not only [in] being aware of themselves” but also in “having a place in the history of that artifact” (232). In other words, by putting together an anthology, such collections call attention to a particular history and their role within it.

\textsuperscript{140} To date the predominant form of partition literature outside of India is overwhelmingly the diasporic Indo-Anglian novel. This preference for a particular genre and set of what Neil Lazarus terms “modal conventions” disguises the scope of the partition literary oeuvre, which is better represented by the partition anthology, extending to a myriad of genres and languages (“Politics of Postcolonial” 775). Anthologies in fact cover genres as diverse as drama, poetry, essays, interviews, autobiographies, testimonies, and songs.
anthologies lay stress upon India’s syncretic past, while simultaneously propounding a critical re-engagement with both the state and contemporary culture.

Academics and intellectuals play a prominent part in the public construction of a collective trauma in their role as anthology editors. Frequently the bearers of social capital and endowed with institutional authority, academics have long had an important role in the public sphere for advancing claims and dissenting from the state. In the case of cultural trauma, Eyerman argues that intellectuals function as “carrier groups…representing the interests and desires of the affected to a wider public” as they “mediate between the cultural and political spheres” (“Cultural Trauma” 62; 63). In their study of the Spanish civil war, Juanjo Igartua and Dario Paez contend that the symbolic reconstruction of the past begins with three main factors: firstly, the lessening of the painful memory of the past as time elapses; secondly, the “necessary accumulation of social resources” for “commemoration activities;” and, finally, the breaking-down of sociopolitical repression due to the (physical or social) disappearance of “those directly responsible” (84). Though Igartua and Paez’s framework cannot be applied to the Indian partition without some distortion, their emphasis on social resources and sociopolitical repression seems to me to highlight the importance of an intellectual intervention. In the case of the Indian partition, intellectuals have called attention to state repression and voiced the urgency of collecting testimony from an aging and ever-decreasing community of partition survivors.

According to Igartua and Paez, commemoration is only possible when the affected generation has the material means and power to accumulate social resources. In South Asia, commemoration has certainly been linked to material power, but action has rarely been taken by the affected generation. To begin with, a number of poorer social groups who experienced the violence of partition remained stuck within their caste status with little access to resources. For
groups who already have or who have amassed material and social power, partition continues to be taboo, or triggers memories that are too painful to dwell upon.\textsuperscript{141} In contrast, the intellectual classes and, particularly those who are second-generation, have stepped in to chronicle history, produce literature, compile testimonies, and assemble anthologies that function as forms of commemoration. Accordingly, intellectuals are not only instrumental in the voicing of cultural and collective trauma, but they can crystallize the very “nature of the pain” according to their interests (Alexander, “Theory of Cultural Trauma” 14). The academic intervention is, of course, not free of problems since their projects, and therefore their construction of a collective trauma, are subject to political and personal agendas, further involving attempts to account for or represent, at times patronisingly, certain groups over others. The following section examines some of the issues at stake alongside the achievements of anthologies that chronicle partition. Here, my interest is much shaped by an investigation of editorial intent, which is implied through the politics of selection, and the editor’s introductory material.

### A Brief Overview of Partition Anthologies

The first partition anthology in English reads more like a polemical exercise than an attempt at canon formation. Despite the inclusion of literary “greats,” such as Manto, Mulk Raj Anand, and Sahni, \textit{Writings on India’s Partition} (1976) is structured around the “blood-curdling experiences” of partition (9). Ramesh Mathur, who writes the anthology’s preface and

\textsuperscript{141} Feminist scholars have pointed out the prevalence of silence and how certain social pressures exist for female subjects not to speak about traumatic experiences, which, if revealed, could unravel the (carefully maintained) constituents of community/family, thus threatening the position of the subject within these structures. Hardgrove, for example, warns that asking women for testimonies of partition could “potentially mean asking them to invalidate their present status, a process of ‘informing’ on the actions of their husbands and their families in a way that would be both alienating and self-destructive” (2430). Das also talks of partition violence as “folded into everyday relations” through subtexts or an inner language operating in kinships. The orginary violence of partition changes the female subject’s life irrevocably; after partition, she begins a new life, but the inner language of daily life denigrates her by acknowledging the past and marking her as taboo (“Act of Witnessing” 220).
introduction, attempts to move away from the well-known “dominant personalities of the time” to focus, instead, on partition’s “real victims” (9, emphasis added). While there is genuine sympathy for those who underwent “general massacre[s], displacement…inhuman atrocities…and extensive loss of property;” Mathur’s main focus, as well as the target of his anger, is the opposition to partition prior to 1947 (29). Partition, he explains was a “political crime” only insofar that its suffering could have been averted by Congress leaders (16). Further arguing that partition’s “historical inevitability” was the result of long-term antagonisms between communities, Mathur struggles when he introduces the selection. On the one hand, he approves the narratives for their depiction of various traumas; but on the other hand, he lambastes them for their idealistic treatment of Hindu-Muslim relations (17). Listing the various kinds of violence portrayed in the stories, he, nonetheless, voices his disappointment with them because they fail to engage the long-term effects of partition trauma: “the permanent scars and imprints which have been left on the human mind” (18).

The trauma of Independence as depicted by Mathur is constructed as a singular trauma, linking the otherwise disparate regions of Punjab and Bengal, as well as the suffering of Indians and Pakistanis. But Mathur does not allow this sense of trauma to remain a dominant theme. Instead, he alleviates partition’s brutalities by the moral triumph of the Hindu nation, where Independence signifies

not freedom from the ninety year old British rule but…salvation from the subjugation and slavery of more than a thousand years. (11)

Partition, in other words, is overshadowed by the collective memory of an older trauma, what Pradip Datta has called “the trauma of the Muslim invasion of India,” the memory of a thousand-year domination by Islam (318). Scholars such as Giesen have shown that such
memories are not only imagined but also function as an “exculpatory narrative” that excises class and caste distinctions within and between different communities, while collapsing the heterogeneous development of material power in relation to such groups (“Perpetrators” 119). Thus, while Mathur attempts to convey sympathy for the “oppressed” Hindu nation by using loaded words, such as “subjugation” and “slavery,” he chooses to ignore the roles and responsibilities of Hindus and Sikhs (who are problematically aligned with the Hindu people) who also perpetrated violence. Moreover, in pinpointing “Muslim separatism or exclusiveness” in contrast to “the ‘live and let live’ attitude of the Hindu leaders,” Mathur is hard pressed to explain one writer’s emphasis on Hindu rites against defilement and impurity as the root cause of communal alienation, a theory which has been eloquently articulated by literature and oral testimony alike (13).

Mathur’s continued insistence on the Muslim as the outsider, aligned with “Arab, Turk, Lodi and Mughal rulers” rather than the Hindu people, betrays both his contempt for and prejudice towards a community he considers “socially and politically backward” (12). Such scholarship contains serious errors in both its homogenisation of complex group identities and its omission of a rigorously applied historical analysis. For example, Mathur disengages from an examination of either British “divide and rule” policies or their role in partition. In spite of these problems, the collective trauma espoused by Mathur, i.e. that of the Hindu as victim, must be considered in the context of Hindu nationalism and the move to memorialize partition as a way to legitimate (unprovoked) reprisals in order to “master” both the Hindu trauma and the

142 Das notes the level of initiation and retaliation of violence by groups who saw themselves as both victims and perpetrators (“Act of Witnessing” 218).
143 For example, see Shauna Singh Baldwin’s 1999 novel, What the Body Remembers and Butalia’s interview with Bir Bahadur Singh (Other Side 176). See also Mathur 28.
144 Mathur also foregoes an examination of different and syncretistic form of Indian Islam cultures, such as that found in Bengal, which would complicate and belie much of his argument. See Roy, “Being and Becoming a Muslim.”
hated Muslim subject (Datta 318). Consequently, Mathur sees no irony in rejecting “the restoration of humanism and propagation of communal harmony,” themes which are promoted in the anthology’s twenty-five stories (17). The dismissal of some of India’s best writers as well as the majoritarian view resonates oddly; however, in its interpretation of partition, _Writings_ marks out the malleability of the past, and thus is a cautionary reminder of the political uses of the past to consolidate a group’s identity.

The next body of anthologised work in English did not appear for over ten years but, like its predecessor, it is formatted around partition as an inherently traumatic “holocaust” (vii). Edited by Saros Cowasjee and Kartar Singh Duggal, _When the British Left_ marks a progressive turn in partition anthologies, a process identified by Joe Cleary whereby the historical recollection of partition constitutes an “essentially minatory function” (106). As Cleary notes, “partition is memorialised as an apocalypse in the past that serves as a warning against another apocalypse in the future if the region’s historic communal divisions are not overcome” (107). Cowasjee and Duggal attempt here to cultivate a literary field that responds to the existence of scattered partition writings, and their shared themes of horror and compassion. As professor of English at the University of Regina, Cowasjee is able to call attention to existing literary traditions in India, in order to challenge the narrow western perceptions of anglophone writing on India as well as to display the centrality of partition in Indian life. In the closing paragraph of their introduction, Cowasjee and Duggal register the breadth of partition narratives and, conceding their own inability to figure the heterogeneity of partition experiences within this single project, urge their readers to initiate similar anthologies:

Much of this extant writing covers familiar ground – the effect of Partition…on Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs…But what about the emotional trauma of the religious minorities such as Christians, Parsees and Jews? Though unaffected by communal frenzy, they too were victims of the partition of a country on a purely religious basis. How did they fit in
– in a Hindu India and a Muslim Pakistan? And how did they make their choice? Their lot too calls for expression, and so far nothing has been written about them. (x-xi)

This exercise is taken up by Cowasjee and Duggal themselves in their second anthology, which builds on the work of their first attenuated collection and expands their selection of mostly male writers.

Cowasjee and Duggal’s *Orphans of the Storm* (1995) responds to the history of high politics of partition, exposing the underlying cataclysmic violence that structured the “tryst with destiny…of the common people” (xi). In contrast to Nehru’s famous words (in which Independence figured as India’s tryst with destiny) that marked the transformative moment of political possibility, Cowasjee emphasises the social change brought about by Independence as deeply traumatic:

> The implementation of the plan with neither foresight nor preparedness led to a holocaust…[Overnight] indescribable violence broke out in the Punjab. Even by a conservative estimate, ten million people took to the road; a million did not make their destination. Trains packed with Muslim refugees, all of them murdered during the journey, arrived in West Pakistan…In turn the Muslims sent back train-loads of butchered Sikhs and Hindus with the message, “A Gift from Pakistan.”…Thousands were slaughtered on the way; an equal number fell victim to cholera and other diseases. (xii, emphasis added)

In depicting the millions caught up in the catastrophe, *Orphans* foregrounds what Peter Sztompka calls “traumatogenic change,” that is, the rapid collapse of civil political society and the substantial sense of tragic change and collective trauma (158). The 1947 partition here represents a period of crisis and moral chaos as communities lashed out against the disempowered and dislocated.

Having evoked the communal violence of partitioned Punjab and the inadequacy of the politicians, Cowasjee turns to the role of the so-called “Progressive” writers, once a “dominant force” in the political and social struggles of India (xiii). This interest overlaps with Cowasjee
and Duggal’s alignment with the Progressive Writers movement and their positions as both critics and writers. The All-India Progressive Writers’ Association, which was set up in 1936, was a diverse group of politically engaged writers “who shared the conviction that art, literature, and film could shape and transform the nascent nation state in progressive directions” (Gopal 2). Some of its members, such as Faiz Ahmed Faiz and Ahmed Ali, sought to create a new subcontinental literature that embraced Independence, while counselling religious harmony and socialism. For Cowasjee, however, the Progressives “were thrown off balance by the carnage…many of them had no words to express their disillusionment” (xiii). This shock, he surmises, was responsible for the Progressives’ inability “to explain the violence” and their deliberate recourse to the elaboration of “scenes of violence in the hope of conveying something of their sense of disgust” (xiii). But such an interpretation appears to reflect Cowasjee’s own fascination with the graphic violence of partition. In cataloguing the writers’ treatment of physical abuse, mutilation, rape, and abduction of their (predominantly) female subjects, Cowasjee explores the way such tales are “heart-wrenching” and “harrowing,” conjuring up “compassion,” though he faults the limitations of the short story genre in restricting “the scope for [an] in-depth psychological study” (xiii; xiv; xv).

The emphasis on finding compassion amidst the brutality of partition overlooks the deliberate development of a critical aesthetic by writers, a point that has been made by Priyamvada Gopal in reference to Manto’s powerful engagement “with the complexities and contradictions of [the] time” (Gopal 91). In foregrounding compassion, Cowasjee sets up what Lauren Berlant has called the special relation between spectators and sufferers in a bid to

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145 Cowasjee’s inability to give the writers any political agency is demonstrated by his commentary on the two-nation theory. Failing to understand that most writers foreground the one nation-ness of Hindu and Muslims as a critique of partition and the regional and cultural unity of heterogeneous groups, he wonders whether the two-nation theory was “too parochial a subject” for them or whether they were unable to keep up with the “ever-changing face of politics” (xvii).
set up a “collective [obligation] to read a scene of distress…as a claim on the spectator to become an ameliorative actor” (1). This affective affinity functions as “a social and aesthetic technology of belonging,” implicating the readers, at a safe distance, into the trauma of dislocation (5). The affective drive of this volume attempts to shape a constellation of traumas that are particularly framed around women’s experiences. In including only four female writers in a compilation of twenty-four, Cowasjee overlooks a fundamental gendered difference in the way partition violence was perpetrated and is portrayed, but also ignores the crisis of masculinity in relation to these partition atrocities. Collective trauma, as it is constructed here, articulates a traumatic, if uncritical, consciousness that reworks the trauma of the Punjab to involve emotionally the readers of the anthology, thus positioning them at an affective proximity to partition, while paradoxically alerting them to the event as an academic (and critical) subject “whose potentiality is far from exhausted” (Cowasjee xxi).

In contrast, Alok Bhalla’s three-volume anthology, Stories about the Partition of India (1994), marks a substantial step both in canon building and in the anthologisation of partition. Bhalla widens the partition literary field and consolidates a new canonical enterprise (“partition literature”). He also sets out to demonstrate that partition, “the single most traumatic experience in our recent history,” impinges on and insinuates itself in ordinary people’s lives (vii). In its emphasis on literary narratives as witnesses to partition, Stories illustrates an attempt to establish a shared relation between the “victimized group” and the “wider audience,” promoting the sense of a larger collective identity as the reader “symbolically participate[s] in the experience of the originating trauma” (Alexander, “Theory of Cultural Trauma” 14).

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146 See Gopal’s “Dangerous Bodies” chapter on Manto.
147 Bhalla includes ten stories that were published in When the British Left. This editorial strategy is part of the canonization process, whereby a “work gains pedagogical value” through its anthological frequency (Bloom 91).
148 Bhalla xviii; xxxiii.
Bhalla frames his anthology in the discourse of his personal experience of partition – “my childhood consciousness was scarred by the cruelties I saw during the riots of 1947-48 and the lamentations I heard,” (x) – but such emotional scarring, as Bhalla notes, is not relegated to the individual, rather is symptomatic of a larger collective:

Over the years, I came to realize that my recollections of those days were not private… Similar incidents were known to others…My own memories began to acquire a density and a detail from the narratives of a variety of different people. (xi)

The processes involved in claiming a collective trauma are evident here from the way memories about partition accumulate, creating “density” and “detail” of a larger traumatic experience. The collective formation of trauma is not only made up of the traumatic memories and the “anger and grief” of passers-by and victims, but also incorporates the “guilt” and “remorse” of the perpetrators (xv). The compilation of a collective trauma, manifested through the anthology’s stories and Bhalla’s memories of family and friends, contests the effacing of partition experiences in institutional, and frequently biased, discourses by “apologists of Pakistan” and their “bitter opponents” (xii). But though Bhalla willingly takes apart such “ideologies,” he himself does not explore the cultural construction of trauma (xiv); instead, his project sets out to conduct an ethical inquiry into this trauma and in doing so, offer a means to learn from, rather than a working through of, the past.

Emphasising the connection between literary hermeneutics and politics, Bhalla urges us to make sense of the past in order to overcome “anger and grief” and consequently “work towards a new civilised order?” (xv). For Bhalla, the way we “read these stories…will determine the kind of politics we choose to practice in the future”; consequently, it is surprising

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149 Bhalla, x. In arguing for a greater engagement with the literary discourses about partition, Bhalla also claims that this way we will understand the scope of violence and hatred, but also comprehend grief and lamentation and so discover “ways of living which could…redeem us” (xxiv).
that Bhalla abrogates any guidance for the critical reading required for these texts or, when he does offer literary analysis, it occasionally resorts to totalising, inaccurate representations, and dispenses with a nuanced attention to the stories (xxxiii).\footnote{For example, in his interpretation of Qasmi’s story “Parmeshwar Singh” (pp. xv-xvi), Bhalla lapses into essentialising modes that ignores the way different traumatic experiences interplay and, as a result, prevent the intermingling of different communities. Qasmi portrays the adoption of a Muslim boy by a Sikh man, who has lost his own son during partition. While the father (Parmeshwar) is genuinely fond of his new son, the boy remains homesick for his Muslim family and way of life. His life with Parmeshwar is riddled with uncertainty as the Sikh villagers do not accept him, and his new mother and sister repulse him. Eventually, Parmeshwar returns the boy to Pakistan and is accidentally shot at and injured by the armed guards patrolling the border. Bhalla sees the ending as triumph of communalism, with the boy, Akhtar, walking towards Pakistan “his true spiritual home await[s] him there” (xvi). But I would argue that story is far more complicated, and suggests no such triumph in its attention to multiple losses, traumatic memories, and the confusion in “taking sides.” Despite what Bhalla argues, Akhtar is not “an embodiment of Islam,” but emblematises the mix of cultures and an openness towards different religions (xvi). At the end of the story, Akhtar actually turns away from Pakistan in order to run “towards” his wounded surrogate father, Parmeshwar Singh, with “his loose and dishevelled hair streaming in the wind” (178). In this description, Akhtar appears more Sikh than Muslim and we see this ambivalence throughout the story, most notably in the way that he longs for his Muslim mother, but is simultaneously attached to his Sikh “father.” Bhalla also reductively describes Parmeshwar as a “caricature,” while his “wife and daughter are hysterical representatives of their tribe.” Hostile to Islam, “they are refractive Qasmi wants us to believe, of the ancient antagonism between the Sikhs and the Muslims” (xvi). But the story, in fact, explains the hostility of both women to Akhtar by their implied traumatization. They have lost a beloved (and only) son and brother, gaining one who resembles Akhtar, but who emphasises his difference by his nightly recitation of the Koran. It is this sound, in particular, that scares the women, since it hints at memories of Muslim atrocities towards the Sikh women during partition; consequently, the mother and her daughter hold Akhtar as a scapegoat for these crimes. Indeed, my reading of Qasmi is much in consonance with his status as a Progressive writer, a fact that Bhalla avers (though it does not influence his interpretation). Qasmi, as Bhalla admits, was the editor of “the progressive Urdu journal Savera,” and also the author of many “angry editorials against Partition” (xvi).} One possible way to read these stories is suggested by Bhalla’s organisational criteria, although this project is tainted by the taxonomy that comes out of Bhalla’s textual criticism. The division of the volumes into four themes – communalism; anger and negation; lamentation and consolation; memory – etch out the damage inflicted by ethnonationalist violence, moving across an affective arch that begins with rage but subsides into melancholy and reflections on the “sorrow of migration” (xxi). The last section, in particular, points towards memory as a way to remember suffering and help recreate a “vision which can counter violence” (xxx). For Bhalla, partition “has broken all the affective and communal bonds which had once existed between different communities” (xxxi). One way to restore the subcontinent’s shattered communities is a return to memories of a multi-religious and multicultural past, and in a similar way, the memory of partition’s traumas draws
upon this multiculture by pulling together the suffering of India’s multiple communities. If, in the words of the Urdu writer Intizar Husain, partition violence marks the failure of “our social, moral, and religious imagination,” partition narratives offer a way to mourn this loss, but they additionally affirm the possibilities of the subcontinent’s many communities (Bhalla xxix).

Bhalla’s endeavour to make partition “a central part of our nationalist discourse” emerges as a strategy to forestall further repression, thus breaking a cycle of communal violence (xi). He explains that the “memory of those days is branded so deeply in our souls that it still provokes us into irrational behaviour” (vii). But in branding communal violence “irrational,” Bhalla cultivates an idea of partition in a social and political vacuum. For Bhalla, partition violence is analogous to “madness,” something “inexplicable” that engenders “incomprehension” and “utter bewilderment” (xi; xxiv; ix). Such assessments, as has been noted by LaCapra, emulate the crisis itself and tend towards a mystification of the traumatic event (Writing History, Writing Trauma 106). The language around the “inexplicable” discloses both a fascination with the massive proportions of the trauma, and, as with much traumatic writing, invokes a crisis of meaning. Perhaps this sense of inexplicability and disorientation, in contrast to a critical analysis of the trauma, is better understood in relation to Bhalla’s own traumatised memory, from which he cannot distance himself. Nonetheless, the resulting effect is incongruous for, on the one hand, Bhalla demands official recognition of the collective traumas of partition; on the other hand, he refuses to appraise historically the manifestation of partition’s violence. In the evasion of its historical materialism, Bhalla’s partition transforms into a symbolic and mythic event, while communal violence, similarly disassociated from its cultural and economic moorings, becomes inherently more “irrational” and unpredictable.
In his engagement with the sufferings experienced during partition, Bhalla focuses on Mahatma Gandhi as a “figure of unification” to overcome communal antipathies (232). Jason Francisco has criticized this idealisation of Gandhian politics as resistance to communal violence.\(^\text{151}\) Certainly, Bhalla relies too heavily and uncritically on Gandhi, who as an ambivalent figure is an inappropriate model for a multicultural and secular India, more due to his adherence to certain Hindu religious orthodoxies, as well as his attitude towards women and Dalits than his political activism that culminated in his unifying, anti-oppressive concept of satyagraha (See Strand 979-980). In addition to Gandhi, Bhalla gives prominence to India’s first Noble laureate, Rabindranath Tagore. These two figures are easily India’s most famous but Bhalla’s admiration for past Hindu culture enmeshes uneasily with his complete lack of attention to contemporary Hindu nationalism. As Francisco points out, Stories was assembled at the peak of Hindutva activities and barely some two years after the demolition of the Babri Masjid Mosque (215). Despite his sincere efforts to posit partition as a collective trauma and thus prevent any further communal violence, Bhalla’s anthology fails to examine the way partition trauma continues to affect various groups. It is in his lack of a historical, materialist, and political analysis that Bhalla disregards how the manipulation of partitionist memories and the assertion of a dominantly Hindu culture in a particular political climate can lead to the legitimisation of exclusion and perpetuate significant suffering.

A two-volume work edited by Mushirul Hasan in 1995, *India Partitioned: The Other Face of Freedom*, breaks new ground in providing a corrective to Bhalla’s historical overview of Pakistan, and in representing the existence of a sizeable Indian Muslim culture. Hasan, a renowned Indian historian, lays out a history that details the complex and contested creation of

\(^{151}\) Francisco’s critique of Bhalla is one-sided when he critiques him for concentrating “his polemic on Pakistani historians who seek to justify Partition as an historical destiny” (215). In fact, Bhalla is careful to delineate his opposition to Pakistan’s “bitter opponents” (xii) and criticizes both communalist factions equally. See xiii and xiv.
Pakistan by Muslims. In contrast to the traumas of migration and displacement emphasised by Bhalla, Hasan’s approach registers the different kinds of trauma thrown up by partition. As an Indian Muslim, Hasan emphasises the traumas of alterity he himself experiences: the splintering, dispersal, and the alienation of Muslim communities in a Hindu-dominated India. As he points out:

How, then were the ill-guided Aligarh students to know what Pakistan would mean for the millions who would need to stay behind in India, how it would divide family and friends, how it would destroy the socio-cultural fabric built over centuries of close interaction. (I: 25)

The rhetorical action of the repeated “how” operates as a lament that subtends Hasan’s historical explanation, emphasising the many crises suffered by the Muslims as Hasan progresses up a scale that shifts from the individual to a larger socio-cultural and historical collective. Such rhetoric, as Ananya Kabir has noted elsewhere in Hasan’s historical work, attempts to separate victim from perpetrator in the fratricidal violence of partition (“Subjectivities” 248). As Kabir goes on to point out, Hasan’s discourse must be understood as the product of the complex position of the Muslim subject in India:

Hasan’s prose encompasses a range of problems inherent in all attempts to represent Partition: the imprisonment within particular subject positions, the easy movement into defensive default modes, the difficulty of coming to terms with memories of violence, and the temptation to externalize blame on to non-present third parties. (“Subjectivities” 249, emphasis added)

The subject position of the Indian Muslim, Kabir argues, “continues to be beset by tangible insecurities” because of the “orchestrated acts of violence” against them by Hindu nationalist groups, suspicious of Muslim allegiances to India over both Pakistan and a global Umma Islamiya consciousness (248). Since partition, these insecurities have been compounded by increasing economic disenfranchise, social exclusion, and national under-representation of
Muslims. Because Indian Muslims live as second-class citizens, scholars and journalists have suggested they are analogous with the African-Americans in the United States. Partition bears some measure of blame for this social division; the departure of a large middle- and upper-class component of Muslim society meant the disappearance of those qualified to hold political positions of power within the state’s institutional apparatuses. Unlike the African-American community, however, the Indian Muslim community remains poorly organised, with communities fractured along secular and religious lines, and existing Muslim leaderships seen as complacent and ineffective.

In the absence of a successful Muslim agenda of empowerment in India’s public sphere, cultural productions delineate the subject role and the case of discrimination against Muslims. For Hasan, attention to the plight of the Indian Muslims is an urgent matter that should not be ignored. In fact, he stresses the educational goal of his anthological project by encouraging readers to cross-reference with his edited historical survey of partition, India’s Partition: Process, Strategy, and Mobilization (1993). Consequently, his introduction to India Partitioned, offers a historical frame that locates the creation of “two warring communities” in the galvanizing propaganda from communal factions, that attacked those who were “liberal and secular-minded” (I: 22, 23). Noticing the cultural alienation caused to subjects once the “imagined haven” of Islam community materialized, Hasan implicitly lambastes those short-sighted Pakistanis who lacked the foresight to realize the damage they had inflicted on Indian

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152 See Ramesh. Ramesh also notes that despite the prominent position of public Muslim figures (India’s president, Bollywood stars, etc.), the 14.7% of India’s Muslim population not matched by a similar representation in the army, the railway services, the public administration, or its banking industry. Kutty Faisal also notes that Hindutva groups also lead economic boycotts against Muslim businesses in India and abroad. There are also dangers in comparing the Muslim community to African-Americans since they lack the coherence of a collective identity. African-American history appears as a more fitting analogy with the Dalit quest for civil rights

153 For example, M.S. Sathyu’s film Garam Hawa (1973), based on Ismat Chughtai’s short story, depicts some of problems for Muslims living in India, and the way they are ostracized from mainstream Hindi society as well as from their Muslim counterparts in Pakistan.
Muslims (I: 25). Despite his attention to the political and social factors that created the communal violence, Hasan occasionally slips into a dangerous determinism that posits people as the “hapless victims of a triangular game plan, worked out by the British, the [Indian National] Congress and the [Muslim] League” (I: 33). The emphasis on the populace as victims *en masse* contradicts Hasan’s historicizing effort to construe the past as a series of complex social, class, religious, and historical factors in which people operate as agents. Given Kabir’s earlier suggestions, Hasan’s view of the traumatized Muslim masses and his displacement of historical analysis, asserts his subject position as an unassimilable and anxious minority.

Though Hasan admits his selections are restricted to Urdu, Hindi, and English stories, his anthology strives to broaden the historical understanding of partition by including genres, such as interviews, eyewitness accounts and diaries. This way, Hasan seeks to underscore “the diverse and varied individual and collective experiences,” giving voice to Muslim, Hindu, and Sikh subjects, as well as other minorities who are usually excluded from anthologies, such as the Anglo-Indians, who “stayed on” after partition (II: 9). In exploring these multiple memories, *India Partitioned* registers an idea of distinct and varied traumas that are all held together by the frame of partition. But, a closer inspection of the anthology’s headnotes makes explicit that Hasan’s sources mirror a particular framework of power relations. All of the writers and witnesses belong to an educated middle- or upper-class elite and are, in fact, lauded uncritically by Hasan for their professional achievements and their political prominence. Despite his praise of histories from below, Hasan exposes a major gap in his presentation of trauma: the

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154 By Anglo-Indian, I refer to the white British citizens living and working in India, as well to as members of the Raj.

155 For example, Ganda Singh is a “doyen of Sikh history” (II: 27), while Mumtaz Shah Nawaz, poet, political activist and advocate for women’s rights, is described as “granddaughter of Sir Mohammad Shafi, a conservative Punjabi politician” and as a correspondent of Jawaharlal Nehru (II: 13).
histories of the peasants and lower classes (i.e., the majority of the Indian populace at the time) whose experience of partition and trauma has not been recovered.\footnote{Hasan places himself within the tradition of history from below, when he states that his choice of first person accounts reflected his “concern to locate the hitherto neglected theme of Partition outside the magisterial debates on Nationalism versus communalism” (II: 10). The influence of similar scholars is further suggested by his inclusion of the works of feminist Indian scholars, such as Kamla Bhasin and Ritu Menon, in \textit{India Partitioned}.}

The problems of representation, particularly in relation to the depiction of a broad and diverse collection of traumas, pose a challenge to any anthology that finds it has little space to broach the topic in depth. It is significant, therefore, that other anthologies take up Hasan’s field of inquiry, not so much to engage the important issues of caste and class or the diversity of traumas, but to explore more fully the cultural and collective trauma associated with the loss of Muslim culture in India and in Pakistan, as “its ‘syncretic’ character was developed into a ‘purer’ version of Islam” (Kabir, “Subjectivities” 250). At least two later anthologies follow from Hasan, situating and exploring the relationships between Muslims and India and acknowledging Urdu as a unifying and shared culture, in spite of the escalating political tensions between India and Pakistan (see Kumar and Siddiqui). Muhammad Umar Memon’s \textit{An Epic Unwritten: The Penguin Book of Partition Stories from Urdu} (1998) follows Hasan’s original search to understand the “collapse of mutual trust...[in a] multireligious society” (xvii). But in other respects, Memom also signals his differences in his move away from the “ideological underpinnings” of earlier anthologies to update our understandings of partition, both in terms of new, reworked translations of Urdu texts and his repositioning of partition as two, if inextricable, incidents, where the East-West Pakistani civil war and the creation of Bangladesh are recognized as partition traumas belonging to different Muslim communities in their own right.
The 1998 publication of Memon’s anthology also coincided with the production of another literary collection that focused exclusively on the trauma of exile for the Sindhi community. Anju Makhija, Menka Shivdasani, and Arjan Shad Mirchandani’s collection of Sindhi Partition poetry, *Freedom and Fissures: An Anthology of Sindhi Partition Poetry*, indicates a radical shift in the collective memory of partition. Moving away from a cultural memory of 1947 that is structured along a dominant Hindu-Muslim consciousness, the anthology foregrounds the importance of partition as a traumatic memory in the political constitution of minority groups that do not sit easily on either side of the cultural and communal dyad. With its emphasis on Sindh, the south-eastern province of Pakistan, *Freedoms and Fissures* foregrounds Sindhi culture as the product of a dynamic Hindu-Muslim syncreticism. The anthology testifies to the heritage and traditions of the Sindhis, thus invoking the legitimacy of this community. For instance, it places emphasis on the literary tradition of Sindhi poetry, dating it back to the sixteenth century, while articulating the unique hybridity of the Sindhi culture and its language, a fusion of Sanskrit, Persian, and Arabic words, which had been “absorbed for centuries” (xii) Accordingly, the poems stress the past communal harmony of Sindhi Hindus and Muslims, and the shared culture of “Sindhi Sufism… a harmonious blending of both Vedantic and Islamic cultures” (xvii).

The sharpening of communal differences, brought about by partition, consequently placed the Sindhi Hindu community at risk. As a Muslim majority province, Sindh was “completely conceded to the newly constituted state of Pakistan” (Kumar, “Testimonies” 209). While partition itself was experienced as a fairly quiet affair, the aftermath, which brought with it many incoming Muslim refugees (the Muhajirs), posed a very real threat to the Sindhi Hindu community. As Tai Yong Tan and Gyanesh Kudaisya adumbrate
The Sind government, while sympathetic to the local Hindu population, felt obliged to accommodate the incoming Muslim refugees. This led to inconsistent official policies that further unnerved the Hindus. The Sindhis experienced commercial discrimination and boycott…the political leadership showed itself to be unable to control the growing incidence of violence, especially after the serious riots which [had] erupted in Hyderabad and Karachi. (233)

In the face of this violence, the Sindhis migrated en-masse abroad as well as to India, mainly settling in Bombay where they had historical ties to the university. In losing their cultural and linguistic homeland, Sindhis experienced what Priya Kumar calls a trauma of dislocation that was “particularly evocative since Sindh, unlike Punjab or Bengal, was never partitioned” (208-9). It was never divided but it was affected by partition since it was moved from India’s to Pakistan’s jurisdiction. Kumar’s sympathetic recognition of partition’s traumas implicitly raises the irony of such traumas, since Sindh constituted a territory that never was divided. But, her phrase, the “trauma of dislocation” is perhaps misleading in that it doesn’t fully capture the sense of exile for a community that felt forced to leave after being subject to increasing discrimination, threats, and communal violence over which they had little control. The loss of their status, compounded by institutional humiliation, made it clear that, if they chose to remain, the Sindhis faced an uncertain and violent future.

The Sindhi grievance is reflected in the anthology’s nostalgic reflections on the past and its emphasis on feelings of estrangement, two main tropes, which are taken up by many of the poems. Arjan Shad’s poem “Blind Smoke” suggests that the psychological traumas of partition are far from forgotten. In his poem, his living, breathing existence seems merely perfunctory in contrast to the spiritual burden of exile: “Oxygen had kept my body alive/ but the soul’s wounds/ have sunk so deep” (17). Ishwar Anchal’s poem “Exile” is also a lament, depicting the solidarity of other historically displaced communities: “After so many years/ [I’m] still a refugee… like Jews, Yehudis, Palestinians,/ alienated” (39-40). Such a comparison suggests that
Sindh continues to exist in “only in the stubborn imagination of scattered and stateless” diasporas, such as the Jews of the Old Testament and the Palestinians (Cleary 198). But this analogy is clearly a questionable one since, firstly, it overshadows the disparate experience of Muslim Sindhis, and secondly, does not take into account the differences and historical outcomes between the two groups it cites. For Arjan Shad Mirchandani, poet and the writer of the anthology’s foreword, the Sindhi experience of partition is traumatic precisely because the loss of territory and culture brought about political disenfranchisement:

Being uprooted from their cherished land, where their forefathers had lived from time immemorial, was terrifying to say the least…Exile from one’s land is not just loss of home, it is a loss of shared history. (xiii)

In spite of such wistfulness for a lost “cherished land,” the condition of exile and nostalgia has superseded any “narrative of return” to the province of Sindh (Falzon 669). Here, the place of exiles, such as the pre-Israel Zionists or the post-Israel Palestinians provides a point of comparison to the Hindu Sindhi, who have not mobilized politically in the interests of self-determination. Referring to Pakistan’s intolerance of Hindus, Mark-Anthony Falzon suggests that, for Hindu Sindhis, partition, rather than any physical territory, forms a “common historical trajectory with its baggage of unifying Partition memories” for contemporary Sindhi identity (668).157

Nostalgia for a pre-partition “shared” Sindh alongside memories of loss and traumatic exile consequently play a role in extending what is essentially a Hindu Sindhi trauma to Muslim Sindhis (Mirchandani xiii). While they did not suffer as much materially as the Hindus, they also felt marginalised politically, and frequently clashed with the Muhajirs, particularly from the 1960s to the 1980s, the same period in which they embarked on a separatist movement for an

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157 Falzon also argues that Bombay plays an increasingly important role as a “cultural heart” for Hindu Sindhis in place of a Sindhi homeland (665).
independent Sindhi homeland, called Sindhudesh (see Verkaaik fn.4, 67-68). According to Mirchandani, “Muslim Sindhis in Sind [sic]…have been taken for a ride by communalists” and now reminisce about “the times when Sindhi Hindus and Sindhi Muslims lived as brothers in undivided India” (xv). Mirchandani further evokes a sense of collective Sindhi culture that continues to straddle communal divides when he states “even today, Sindhi writers in Sind (Pakistan) have very close links with Sindhi writers in India” (xv). Despite his claims, any notion of a contemporary shared Sindhi culture seems somewhat tenuous, considering the isolationist and often hostile relationship between India and Pakistan. To begin with, Mirchandani offers no evidence to support his claims; moreover, by foregrounding the syncreticism of Sindhi identity, he calls attention to the contemporary religious practices of Sindhi Hindus, which blend various teachings and rituals from Sikhism with mainstream Hinduism, but the role of Sufism no longer plays the prominent part it once did (Falzon 666).

Since partition, the Muslim component of Sindhi cultural hybridity has clearly declined. But although Freedom and Fissures includes the work of Muslim Sindhi poets and constantly gestures to their community in Pakistan, the collective memory of partition as given by the anthology is sutured overwhelmingly to the experience of Sindhi Hindus and their loss of economic power that came with their move to India. In contrast, the anthology seems to have little interest in the political trajectory of Sindhi Muslims: their conflict with the Pakistani government and the Muhajirs, for instance, is completely elided. As “penniless refugees” (xii), the Hindu Sindhis found themselves in a “state of shock” during their hasty migration to India (xiii). The memory of vulnerability is further compounded by the nostalgia for their past and prosperous position in society. In view of Falzon’s recent fieldwork on Hindu Sindhi culture, such nostalgia must be understood not as a process of “mourning for the loss of their native land
and…perpetual search for a substitute,” but rather as a more abstract concept that forms part of the Sindhis’ transnational and dispersed identity, qualities of a cosmopolitanism “which the primordial homeland has all but lost” (680).

As with many anthologies, *Freedom and Fissures* comes equipped with a didactic message that is linked to the fears over a younger Sindhi generation who are “alienated from their cultural moorings,” including the Sindhi language (xiv). In the face of shrinking Sindhi cultural institutions and language schools, the anthology voices its anxiety that the Sindhi community will either disappear or be fully assimilated, for “the Sindhi, bereft of his language, will have no mark of distinctiveness to show that he is a Sindhi” (xiv). Such a predicament, in particular, threatens the community of Sindhis in India that remain “geographically dispersed” and without “cohesive existence…divorced from the communitarian level” (xv). Here, the anthology asserts its goal in building a collective sense of Sindhi identity in India culture both by its collection of plural Sindhi voices and by emphasising the common characteristics of Sindhi – their “courage, hard work, and determination” (xv). This affirmation amounts to a mythic narrative of redemption and recovery, where the anthology construes the Sindhis as being somehow special – having an “inborn spiritual strength, which saves [them] from total extinction” (xiv). Urging that partition literature “be made compulsory reading in schools and colleges,” the anthology attempts to safeguard the place of a distinctly Sindhi trauma and, by extension, endow its culture, and particularly its recovery, with greater symbolic significance in India’s institutions and heritage (xvi). Consequently, in its evocation of a collective trauma of a marginalised culture, *Freedom and Fissures* is reminiscent of Salah Hassan’s assessment of political revivalism in anthologies; that is, in order to ensure the continued presence of Sindhi
history and community, rather than their disappearance, the text remains “overburden[ed]…” with a singular representative function” (“Canons” 298).

**Partition in the East: Bengal’s Trauma**

It is striking that amongst partition anthologies that focus on north and north-west India, none assert their trauma in relation to a specifically Punjabi identity. Often, the Punjab is taken to stand in for all of India’s traumas over partition. With the exception of the Sindhi anthology, none of the anthologies examined in (and outside of) this chapter can be categorized as having a regional politics. Because the 2003 appearance of a Bengali partition anthology *Mapmaking: Stories of 2 Bengals*, edited by Debjani Sengupta, attempts exactly that, it is of particular significance to an examination of collective trauma. This anthology presents a political bid for recognition by implying that partition is directly responsible for a collective level of damage on Bengal’s cultural identity. The anthology establishes a claim to victimhood in its insistence on the particular kind of traumas experienced by Bengalis that have not yet been acknowledged outside of its community.

The partition experience in Bengal has only recently captured the interests of academics, who have noted the “striking…absence of the voices of East Bengal/ East Pakistan/ Bangladesh” (Feldman, “Feminist Interruptions” 168). Partition anthologies, as is the case with partition literature, overwhelmingly focus on the Punjab, either aligning the Bengal partition as a generalised trauma alongside the experience in the Punjab, or eliding it entirely. In *Mapmaking*, Sengupta positions the differences between partition in the East and West when she

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158 The Sindhi collection comes closest to articulating a regional politics. But one could argue that even this collection provides less an emphasis on territory and language, than on the uniqueness of Sindhi culture.

159 This shift is also reflected in the study of Partition in general. Many recent studies now aim to recover Bengali accounts of Partition as well as those from similarly marginalised groups, such as the Nagas, the Kashmiris, and the people of the North West Frontier Provinces. See Chatterji, *Bengal Divided*; De; Feldman, “Bengali State”; Samaddar; Talbot and Singh.
disputes Alok Bhalla’s claim that “all stories about the Partition have one theme in common, ‘the note of utter bewilderment’ in the face of ‘hatred,’” arguing that the Bengal partition involved a “metaphysical [hurt]…in the mind, the soul,” rather than a violent experience of being “torn-apart” (188-89). Additionally, Bengali narratives are conditioned by the prolonged experience of partition. As Sengupta observes, “the terrible cost of the Partition” in Bengal continues today in the “movement of refugees” (190). The elision of Bengali experiences in anthologies reflects a shift in the political role of Bengal in a greater Indian context. As Partha Chatterjee has pointed out, Bengal’s marginalisation is felt most keenly by the Bengal intelligentsia, who remember it as the centre of nationalist struggles; moreover, this group, once a formidable force in pre-partition India, now have little say over “the destiny of the country as a whole” (25).

As the first literary anthology to focus exclusively on the division of Bengal, Sengupta’s *Mapmaking* takes on a symbolic task in its remembrance of a distinctly Bengali trauma. This involves the attempt to consolidate solidarity among Bengalis divided by the political border and means grappling with certain political anxieties about the fragmentation of Bengali culture over the last fifty years, in relation to the epoch of Bengali culture (the renaissance of the late-nineteenth century, which culminated in the early 1920s) and Bengal’s regional disempowerment within the Indian state. In this section, I want to trace some of the anxieties and yearnings that permeate *Mapmaking* as it constructs a form of collective consciousness and presupposes the experience of trauma for a once-unitary region that has since been rift into two.

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160 Since writing this chapter, I have become aware of another anthology on Bengal, Radha Chakravarty’s *Crossings: Stories From Bangladesh And India* (2003). This is less explicitly a partition anthology because it does not always contain narratives about or related to partition; yet, the anthology frequently gestures to the common cultural ground and pre-partition past shared by East and West Bengal.

161 2003 also saw the publication of an academic anthology on the Eastern partition. *The Trauma and the Triumph: Gender and Partition in Eastern India*, edited by Jasodhara Bagchi and Subhoranjan Dasgupta. It combines literary, testimonial, and academic narratives that focuses on the trauma of partition in Bengal and details the oppression and human rights abuses in East Pakistan.
As with Bhalla’s anthology, Mapmaking is a project that emerges from the memories and postmemories of its editors. Sengupta, for instance, relays a second-generation consciousness that is enmeshed within her family’s recollections of trauma and nostalgia over a lost home in East Bengal, rather than a broader Bengali trauma of both East and West. The child of East Bengali migrants that came to Kolkata, Sengupta dedicates her anthology to her parents for passing on their “memories of East Bengal.” Though Sengupta avoids any other reference to her personal entanglement in partition, her dedication suggests that the other Bengal continues to function as an imaginary homeland, an affective site of desire and unattainability that haunts the East Bengali migrant generations. Ashis Nandy, on the other hand, who writes the anthology’s foreword, warns about nostalgic perspectives of “idyllic pastoral utopias that are routinely invoked [by] refugees from East Bengal” (qtd in Sengupta viii). But his understanding of partition too, is shaped by his childhood experiences of the 1946 communal riots in Calcutta.

In addition to this personal and affective dimension, Mapmaking situates itself within a Bengali intellectual tradition, as if to call attention to its legitimacy and the achievements of the Bengali intelligentsia in India and abroad. The anthology establishes the presence of a Bengali literary canon by its use of Bengali writers, filmmakers, and academics, such as Nandy.162 But perhaps more important is its theoretical position, marked by the anthology’s preoccupation with partition’s history from below, a theme that occupied the Subaltern Studies scholars.163 While all partition anthologies claim they embrace this historiographical position, Mapmaking sets itself apart by its selection of narratives that foreground class, social, and economic factors in the experience of partition, thus pursuing the original thesis of the Subalternist group – to

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162 For example, the anthology contains a story by the film-maker, Ritwik Ghatak, most famous for his partition film Meghe Dhaka Tara (1960).
163 Though Nandy is not associated with the Subalternist group, their most famous members are Bengali including its founder, Ranajit Guha, as well as Sumit Sarkar, Gayatri Spivak, Dipesh Chakrabarty, and Partha Chatterjee.
focus on the “unprivileged groups in Indian society” (Sarkar, “Decline” 400). This materialist approach reinforces the anthology’s espousal of a distinctly Bengali intellectual heritage, what Chatterjee has identified as a “particular political tradition” of the Bengali elite in radical and left-oriented politics (3).

Prior to any reading of the editorial commentaries, a subtle notion of a collective Bengali identity and the Bengali experience of partition is already suggested through the anthology’s organisation and its title. As the title, Mapmaking, implies, Bengal was carved up into two provinces within different nations, in spite of the residents’ shared cultural and linguistic identity. The reference to “mapmaking” resonates within Bengali colonial and postcolonial history, invoking the arbitrary nature of the Radcliffe boundary line in 1947 and the earlier colonial attempt at partitioning the province in 1905. Additionally, mapmaking refers to the 1971 division between Pakistan and its east wing, and the creation of a new Bengali Muslim state, Bangladesh. These allusions are made explicit in the organisation of the anthology, where the ten stories are subdivided into two categories: “Stories from India” and “Stories from Bangladesh.” The seemingly national division between the two sections is undermined by the presence of both Bengals within each; the stories in one section cross over from one Bengal into the other, problematising the (hypothetical) geographical and national oppositions as well as the finality of partition. Consequently, “Stories from India” describe refugees leaving east Bengal to cross into Indian west Bengal, but also depict post-independence Bangladeshi characters returning to their childhood homes in west Bengal. Similar crossings are made explicit in “Stories from Bangladesh.” The journeys here encapsulate the anxieties of fixing an identity that is sutured to a particular nationality, and that rejects a particular cultural and regional commonality. Dibyendu Palit’s story “Alam’s Own House,” set after 1971, raises such issues when Alam, in response to
the maxim “water and oil can never mix,” says, “But do we know which is the water and which the oil? Perhaps we’ll find both are water, or both oil” (80). Such uncertainty over identity and belonging complicates the finality implied by partition and new nationalisms.

In his foreword, Ashis Nandy identifies the extent to which partition trauma, its residual guilt, and its disavowal has permeated Indian, and particularly, Bengali society. Elaborating partition within a psychological frame of reference, Nandy argues that its horrors initiated a “cultivated aphasia” (Sengupta v) that has silenced even the “garrulous Bengalis” (viii). Though Nandy voices his reservations over the breaking of this collective silence, he also offers a strategy for recovery by confronting the self and “our secret passions” (viii). For Nandy, the stories of Mapmaking articulate trauma as a “pervasive melancholia that comes from a cramping sense of guilt” (viii). Partition represents the breakdown of civil order, “the collapse of a moral universe,” signifying a trauma so profound that even “our imagination of evil failed to cope with it” (i-ii). Though Nandy evades the subjective “I” of experience, opting for a more collective “we,” his anguished and elusive account of partition suggests, not the detached critical analysis of the academic, but the horror of an eye-witness struggling to make sense of the seemingly incommensurable gap between the rioting, mutilation, and arson carried out by the “ordinary, otherwise humane, people [who] had turned into brutal perpetrators of violence” (Gopal 101).

By positioning partition as a repressed event around which the social and cultural fabric of India is constituted, Nandy points to instances of its haunting return. For instance, the 2002 Gujarat riots constituted the “disowned part of the self,” the “fantasies of orgiastic violence that would exorcise old enemies once for all” (ii). In recognizing a link between partition’s recurring violence and the schizophrenic split within the self, Nandy addresses the dissonance and the

164 As part of a Bengali Christian minority, Nandy was also less at risk of being targeted by communal groups, but this does not make his experience of the horror any less valid. For an account of his experience, see Saint, Bruised Memories.
tensions between self and other, urging self-examination as a step towards what he has called elsewhere “the politics of awareness” (Time Warps 5). Inflected by a Gandhian mode of critical self-awareness and activism, this politics relies on the dialogic relationship between the self and the past. Nandy has argued that a re-examination of the past is “actually a prognosis of the future,” as it involves the mobilization of “the inner resources and technologies of the self to rework personal and collective biographies, to fathom the present resilience and future potentialities of our selves” (1-2). Mapmaking, with its array of stories about partition, can potentially enable this critical engagement between ourselves and our memories and stories of the past. The combination of textual practice and a willingness to evaluate ourselves in relation to the past comprises, at some level, a form of working through.

Nandy’s emphasis on repression and his explanation that Bengalis have constructed a “fragile, defensive shield of anti-memories,” a deliberate transition into silence, allowing for a process of forgetting and exoneration needs to be assessed within a larger historical context (ii).165 In the wake of partition, the rhetoric of independence creates what Giesen has called an “exculpatory narrative,” where a national rhetoric shifts its focus to the future and breaks with (the traumas of) the past (“Perpetrators” 119). The newly-minted citizens, whether perpetrators, bystanders or witnesses, could now reconstruct themselves as a national collective. In this way, the moral responsibility and culpability for “the sacrifice made by millions for a ‘homeland’” was simply eliminated out of the public domain (Sengupta iv). The lack of a working through of trauma subsequently means that its negative affects are passed onto future generations. As Nandy explains, the “past traumata of a collectivity” haunt not only the direct victims and the perpetrators, but also the following generations, which inherit without as much as an exchange of a word on the subject, the fears, the

165 As Nandy explains, silence is a way “to start life anew and contain bitterness, a way of repairing community life” (viii).
anxieties, tensions – often even the homicidal fantasies a genocide throws up. Unlike an unexamined life, which we are told it not worth living, an unexamined past has to be lived out over the succeeding generations.

Instead of saying that insufficient attention has been paid to the violence of 1946-48 in eastern India, we perhaps should focus on the enormous psychological energy deployed to ensure that inattention. (ix)

Nandy’s mission, however, is not simply to stress a method of working through that is limited to the individual; instead he insists on a political reading of the stories, by attending to their concerns around “the dominant ideas of governance and statecraft...mass violence and resistance to it at grassroots” (x). The emphasis here is on confrontation, so that the reader feels “uncomfortable in that cocoon” of silence, and is consequently provoked into finding out “their political and moral inheritance” (xi). What emerges from Nandy’s argument then is a foregrounding of the reader, in terms of his or her complicity in the state’s collective repression and, more significantly, in anti-state remedial activity; for, in discovering literary and personal resources for social and political activism, Nandy invokes a move beyond the current hegemonic order.

In contrast to Nandy’s call for action, Sengupta’s afterword expresses the melancholic reverberations around a collective Bengali trauma. Sengupta’s account, a scholarly overview, focuses on the literary tropes in partition narratives (the refugee colonies, the train stations) and offers a historical context of the divergent political developments following the division of the province. More prominently, Sengupta is concerned with exploring the collective memory of a Bengali identity as it emerges out of the “sameness of language, heritage, and culture” (189). Partition is construed as catastrophic for a Bengali identity, rifting it apart, even as the experience and memory of trauma draws the two parts together. For Sengupta, the shared culture of Bengal is analogous to the intimacy of shared bodily parts. Using Subhas
Mukhopadhyay’s poem “Ferrying” as her epigraph, Sengupta constructs her argument in relation to the poem. For Mukhopadhyay, the two Bengalis are “like the two pupils/of the eyes of Bangladesh;” Bangladesh here refers to the literal and unitary meaning of the word (the country of Bengal), but the poet also acknowledges its paradoxical splitting: “Bangladesh…on the other shore/ We have on this shore too – Bangla” (186). As Sengupta explains, Bengal experienced no “physical sundering” (188), since there was no radical schism between Muslim and Hindu; there still exists a unitary Bengali, made up of the self and its “greater ‘leaning on’ the other” and vice-versa (189). Bengal is a “landscape of the mind” that is “imprinted in the collective memory of Bengalis” (194). Though she acknowledges the improbability of territorial reunification, Sengupta urges her readers to gesture towards a united Bengal through small attempts to open a window or a door to our other self, to gaze at and recognize our face in the mirror. We persevere, in the face of all odds, to erase a little of that division that was born in 1947. By celebrating the narratives of each other we once again counter the impact of Partition in our lives. (195, emphasis added)

Sengupta’s inclusive “we” constructs both a common history and addresses a collection of fellow-Bengalis. But, Sengupta, a highly literate and English-speaking academic, belongs to a particular elite of the East Bengali Hindu diaspora that lives and works in Delhi, yet her narrative extends to a collective Bengali identity. Her memory of Bengal disseminates a melancholic and exilic longing for the “lost” other that is perhaps more specific to her own family’s experience. Mapmaking invites the reader to erase disparate cultural nationalities, and imagine their union along a shared sense of cultural characteristics that are opened up by the possibilities of partition narratives. In contrast, the stories of Mapmaking, which call attention to the inflections of class and socio-economic conditions, engage a collective trauma as the sum of constitutive traumas, affirming the diverse experiences of partition within Bengal.
The notion of a homogeneous and unified Bengali people, as with any reductive construction of a “civilization” or “culture,” is invariably predicated on the erasure of social and material differences, as well as the denial of historical change. Sengupta’s projected desire for reconciliation stresses the unitary nature of the Bengali culture but, in doing so, ignores the way communities were composed of overlapping structures of class and caste, and involved numerous heterogeneous political divisions and sub-groups. Both Muslim and Hindu Bengali communities must be understood as “multi-linear and multi-dimensional” (Roy 189). Partition’s fallout consequently affected different groups in widely divergent ways that are not evoked by Sengupta. Her focus on refugees from partition gestures towards (even as it doesn’t examine) other scattered communities of Bengalis, such as the Bangladeshi economic migrants and the Bengali refugees who were forcibly settled by the government outside of West Bengal. She also marginalises the existence of other partition victims, such as the Biharis and other non-Bengali Muslim migrants, who were caught up within the Bengal separation and the coalescing of two nation states.\footnote{Tan and Kudaisya draw attention to the Biharis in Bangladesh as “victims of the adverse circumstances imposed by partition…The estimated 1.3 million non-Bengali speaking Muslim refugees were given the omnibus label of ‘Bihari’, even though many of them did not originate from Bihar. This linguistic difference led to boundaries which increasingly became rigidly defined and the label itself came to signify an ‘outsider’ status” (240). Samir Kumar Das also notes that of the refugees who migrated to East Pakistan, over 2 and a half million Muslim evacuees returned by 1952 (122).} In contrast to the everyday struggles of peasants, workers, and tribals, partition posed a singular disaster for the land owning zamindaris and the well-educated, Anglicised bhadraloks.\footnote{For a better explication of the differences within the Bengali bhadralok, see Chatterji, Bengal Divided 4-5. Chatterji also provides here an overview of the variety of Hindu cultural groups (27).} Emigration from East to West Bengal meant the loss of material property, particularly ancestral homes, and positions of social power, in exchange for an insecure future in “an already over-crowded state in independent India” (Chatterji, “Right or Charity” 314). Yet, as Joya Chatterji reminds us in her work on partitioned Bengal, many of the bhadraloks had the education, if not the economic means and social connections, to mobilise politically and to
demand resettlement and rehabilitation. For the poorer and lower-caste Hindu minority that stayed behind in East Bengal, migration was not always an option, even when communal violence increasingly targeted them during the periods of Islamic radicalisation.

Such differences between and within communities are revealed by the stories of Mapmaking; Selina Hossein’s “An Evening of Prayer,” for instance, attests to these material conditions when she notes, “It’s the poor who suffer, either way” (163). The struggles for and assertions of power can be traced in a number of the short stories in Mapmaking. As one would anticipate of partition narratives, the themes of displacement and hardship continually recur constantly, but nostalgia is a luxury available to the elite rather than to the subaltern. These differences point to class tensions within the stories, such as the possibility or denial of social change and the attainment of aspirations to the detriment of others within the new societal order brought on by partition. Thus the university student, Alam, in Dibyendu Palit’s story, “Alam’s Own House,” is able to travel between the two Bengals by plane and his abstract postulations on partition reflect his sheltered and relatively insular life. In contrast, Manik Bandopadhyay’s “The Final Solution” and Pratibha Basu’s “Flotsam and Jetsam” raise the issue of class but compound it with questions of gender. The opportunity for exploitation and oppression, particularly of women in the throes of migration, was crucial for maintaining existing patriarchal social structures. Both stories trace the struggle of women within these configurations, but “The Final Solution” posits an uneasy solution. Mallika, the refugee forced into prostitution, finds that violence, the murder of her (upper-class) pimp, is the only means to break through class stratifications and gain liberation. The disturbance of class hierarchies allows Mallika to rupture the pattern of fate she would normally have accepted as intrinsic to her lower class status. Here, Bandopadhyay raises disturbing questions about the role of class and gender structures in

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168 See Chatterji, “Right or Charity?”
sustaining a patriarchal order and the enduring violence of class-based antagonisms. Perhaps most disturbing of all is his insinuation that, as much as it disrupted and displaced, partition also enabled the consolidation of hegemonic social apparatuses.

These sharp critiques of society do not, however, detract from an understanding of trauma, but instead uncover the traumas that emerge out of the power relations between individuals, and in relation to institutions. In these narratives, the agency of lower class characters are set up in terms of political possibilities, frequently in an analogy to the emergence of the new nation-state, only to be undermined at the very end. Trauma functions on multiple levels, undermining the desire for a unifying and nebulous collective suffering. Partition traumas, in this instance, are congruous with the uncertainties of dispossession, the upheavals of forced migration, and the loss of home, and a familiar geography. But, alternately, partition traumas relate to a sense of powerlessness, alienation, and estrangement that are not so different to the idea of an everyday, more mundane trauma, which E. Ann Kaplan has termed “quiet” traumas (1, see also 19). Many characters in Mapmaking find little or no emancipation in the new state, and many of them find their agency confined by the will of others, subjected either to the machinations of the state itself, or to multiple forms of exploitation. Their encounter with trauma stems not only from a sense of loss but also from experiences of humiliation, betrayal, rejection, abandonment, and everyday struggles to earn money. If, pace Nandy, melancholia can be said to be a prevalent theme, these texts have more to do with resisting a melancholic nostalgia for a pre-partition India in order to emphasise the quotidian experience facing destitute subjects. Melancholia, when expressed, does not only demonstrate longing and loss, so much as chronicle one affective accompaniment (along with others, such as shock, rage, bitterness,
shame, resignation) of a material process in which the subject is both locked into and struggles against.

Syed Waliullah’s “The Story of the Tulsi Tree” replicates the motif of expectant hope and the ensuing disappointments of migration that characterises the other narratives of the collection. Consonant with the themes of earlier anthologies, Waliullah’s story expounds the importance of creating an affective relation to the traumatic past. The story follows the usual trajectory of progressive partition literature in its contestation of the state’s partitionist rhetoric and its promotion of cultural reintegration, which is figured as a form of working through. However, in “Tulsi Tree,” the focus is on the low-class Muslim male labourers, who, as a group are doubly disenfranchised by their status as low-class and as refugees; they find that any attempt to reconnect to the past fails against the power of the state. Set immediately after the break up of Bengal, the story depicts the newly arrived refugees in East Pakistan in search of asylum. Finding a large empty house, they occupy it illegally but, after two successive visits by the police, the squatters are eventually evicted.

With partition’s communal violence marginalised to a background rumour, “Tulsi Tree” is concerned not with the large, dramatic traumas of violence, but with the traumatic reverberations of the everyday for displaced people, who are already marginalised within society. Waliullah’s focus on the development of a Muslim lower class community within Hindu domestic space, emblematised by the empty house and the Tulsi tree (itself a symbol of Hindu domesticity), dispenses with any nostalgic look towards pre-partition days. Accepting partition as an irreversible event, Waliullah examines the ways in which a new political society is enabled first, by the disruption of the state, via the chaos surrounding partition, and second, by the traumatic and cultural memories made manifest through the presence of the (Hindu) other.
When the refugees first see the house, it stands as a symbol of hope and yearning, a “veritable paradise” (111), away from the “filth and stench” of their past (112). The refugees break the lock on the house and set themselves up but their idyll is interrupted by the intervention of the police who, seeing that the refugees have nowhere to go, write up a report and leave. Amidst the turmoils of mass displacement, the law is “not at all clear about the matter of unlawful occupancy” (111). The house emerges as an obvious metaphor for an alternative political order, providing security and an “asylum” for the group (111). The narrative emphasises a new practice of communitarian relations, such as the sharing of tasks, collaborative cooking, and musical soirees, which are not invested in hierarchical tradition; instead, they are capable of radical social collective change. For the first time, the men feel they have shaken off their past, and in particular the diseases – “malaria, kalajor, and tuberculosis” – they had succumbed to in their former lives (112).

Noticing a withered tulsi tree in the courtyard, the men are unsettled by the reminder of the house’s displaced owners. The tulsi tree has a melancholic effect on the refugees who, stunned into “overwhelmed” silence,” find they cannot bring themselves to extirpate the Hindu symbol (114). The house is no longer a neutral and empty domain, but is haunted by the presence of its former Hindu occupants. For the refugees, the tulsi evokes rituals they have vaguely heard about, of “Hindu housewives pray[ing] to the tulsi tree, lighting the evening lamp everyday” (114). These memories prompt the men’s imagination of a “hand splayed with blood-red sindoor” cultivating the plant (114). Using their own experience of loss and migration, the men re-imagine the feminine Hindu subject:

the lighting of the lamp was never given up or halted even when people went through bad days, faced deaths in the family, or rejoiced the advent of happier times. …Where was she today – the housewife who had unfailingly lit the evening lamp year after year? …Did the woman go and seek shelter in the house of one of her relatives, in Baidyabati,
Lilooah or the Howrah railway colony? Was the red-bordered glossy black sari, hung out to dry in the sun, hers? How sadly the sari fluttered in the mild breeze! …But no matter where she now was, her odyssey completed or not, her eyes must grow moist, thinking of the tulsi tree. (114-15)

The apparition of a wealthy Hindu housewife functions here as an object of both loss and of longing. In this space of an exclusively masculine, Muslim community, the absent female body decorated with red sindoor is resonant of romantic desire and nostalgia for a particular, if imaginary, feminine domesticity.¹⁶⁹

Though the rituals and religious identity associated with this feminine body conjures up memories of “the innumerable instances of injustice and oppression at the hands of the Hindus,” the affective melancholic power of the housewife’s unknown story – her uprooting and her uncertain quest for sanctuary – forms a bond between her and the refugees, and their own recent memories of loss and migration (116). The figure of the Hindu housewife functions as a fantasy invested with the men’s desire, for both her history and her subjectivity are never revealed: she only exists insofar as she is perceived by the men. Indeed, we need to question the complicity of these men in upholding patriarchal discourses that silence and idealise women as the subject of the household. Yet it is also true that despite this participation, stories, such as “Tulsi Tree” create a connection that cuts across communities, caste, religion, and class that would be unlikely historically, considering the divisions created by space, wealth, and gender. Perhaps, as the story seems to suggest, such alliances are only possible within an impossible context, such that provided by the traumatic rupture of partition; at which point, only by their palpable absence, can the mourning for dispersed and similarly suffering communities allow for an empathic understanding to arise between the disparate classes of different groups.

¹⁶⁹ The red sindoor is symbolic of marriage; when they marry, Hindu women wear it in the parting of their hair, and stop wearing it once their husbands die.
If the “moist-eyed” presence of the housewife calls attention to her grief for a lost home, it also evokes a sense of guilt, “a form of an unease that accompanies a feeling of duty not done” (116). This guilt is manifest in the way the new occupants admit to themselves that they are “thieves,” building themselves a “comfortable life” on the basis of “knowing everything and acknowledging nothing” (118). Such anxiety over their new life is symptomatic of an awareness that the “new nation” is built on the forced dispersal of former communities and in competition with other “unlucky” refugees who they have “checkmated” in the process (109-110). Instead of repressing the pre-Pakistani past, the refugees begin caring for the tulsi tree as part of a tacit and unspoken duty in memory of the Hindu housewife.

But Waliullah’s utopic community comes to an abrupt end. The government requisitions the house in the name of some “semblance of civil society,” though this phase is especially ironic in the face of communal uprisings and violence (110). Waliullah questions the integrity of the police, by depicting their Head Constable as an “old fashioned being” (118). Existing apparatuses of power belie any triumphalist shift into a new regime, distinct from its colonial predecessor. In this scenario, Waliullah gestures towards East Pakistan’s experience as a colony of Pakistan, with the apparatuses of law and order complicit in human rights abuses in the consolidation of power. Only the vacuum of the interregnum allows for the emergence of new communities. In due course, the police drive out the occupants whose fate, like the Hindu housewife’s, is never divulged. The men are reduced to an impersonal array of paraphernalia, “an old string…bits of biris and cigarettes, a dislodged heel of a torn shoe,” from which their lives must be imagined (120). It is clear that the new Pakistani state offers little, if any, emancipation to the working classes and crushes the possibilities for imagined alliances across
religious differences. For Waliullah, the transition from British India to the new nation state was not accompanied by a reordering of class boundaries but instead, perpetuated social inequalities.

The last story in Sengupta’s anthology, Imdadul Haq Milan’s ironically titled “The Ballad of Sonadas Baul,” belies any reading of a collective trauma, that binds together a community in its remembrance of partition, and emphasises instead the traumatization of a character who faces the inexorable encroachment of age and poverty. The story concerns a day in the life of its eponymous character, Sonadas, an aging “fakir [who] begged for a living” (181). Set sometime in either post-partition East Bengal or in independent Bangladesh, Sonadas lives in the paddy shed owned by an upper-caste Hindu businessman, Gaganbabu. Without his benefactor, as Sonadas admits, he “would have died a long time ago,” yet such patronage inevitably comes at a cost (181). Made to obey Gaganbabu’s every whim, whether in the “intense” cold or in “the darkness,” Sonadas is torn between resentment and gratitude (176). For Gaganbabu is not easily typecast as the wealthy Hindu oppressor of poor Muslims, as is demonstrated by the willingness of other Muslims to buy his goods and accept his gifts, including nights with Alta, the local prostitute. On one such errand to fetch Alta, Sonadas returns to find Gaganbabu has unexpectedly sold off his rice hut (which doubled as Sonadas’ shelter), and is making ready to leave for Kolkata. The story concludes with Sonadas’ alternating sense of despair, weariness, and realisation that, somehow, he must fend for himself. As the strategically placed final story in the collection, “The Ballad” is a reminder both that dispossession can occur without migrating across borders and that, if partition’s repercussions were felt throughout Bengali society, regardless of religion, they were felt most poignantly by the poor and the oppressed.

Central to Milan’s critique of postcolonial statehood is his exposure of a community structured unevenly by capital, class, and gender relations, a system that has been uncritically
inherited from the colonial state. The accumulation of capital creates a complex network of dependency and exploitation into which the poorest, such as Sonadas, are implicated in their bid to earn a living. In return for the errands he runs, he steals “a few fistfuls” of Gaganbabu’s rice (177). When Sonadas is expected to relinquish his bed for the night to make room for Gaganbabu’s business associate and Alta, he takes his revenge upon the prostitute by secretly helping himself to a cut of her fee. If Alta is “just as unfortunate” as Sonadas, her impoverishment is also a side effect of bourgeois and patriarchal society in which the death of a husband signifies the loss of a breadwinner (178). Prostitution remains one of few options to supplement her income as a maid to feed herself and her mother. “The Ballad” consequently delineates the anxieties usually obscured within a hierarchical system that projects only the plight of the ruling classes. In the new nation-state, the asymmetries of power have not changed for the disaffiliated despite the epistemological shift in government and nationhood. The last image we are left with is Sonadas walking into the night with “tired steps… In this huge world, there were very few places for him to go” (183).

**In Conclusion**

In place of a singular collective trauma then, *Mapmaking* demonstrates that partition functions as an ambivalent and symbolic site that registers many competing traumatic losses as well as political possibilities. As Sengupta avers in her Afterword, partition brought with it numerous historical developments, such as Bangladeshi nationalism in East Pakistan, and the consolidation of West Bengal’s leftist government. Elsewhere, Partha Chatterjee had noted this paradox when he had pointed out that, despite the disavowal of partition by both West Bengal and Bangladesh, partition has enabled a distinctly *Bengali* form of social movements and
nationalist politics (45). But, if Sengupta celebrates a Bengali heritage, her resort to the collective trauma of Bengal discharges the accountability and the historical role of the Bengali Hindu bhadraloks in advocating partition. Today, we may construe the mass migration of Bengali Hindus as victims of partition, but this assertion deflects from view the active role of the bhadraloks against growing Muslim enfranchisement and the prospect of Bengal being ceded to Pakistan (see Chatterji, Bengal Divided 12). As a minority who had long held a position of superiority due to their wealth, class, caste, and access to authority under colonial rule, the autonomy of Bengal and the threat of Muslim rule signalled the loss of their political power and facilitated a desire for a Hindu homeland.\footnote{Chatterji further argues that as early as 1944, there circulated the idea, amongst the Bhadralok, that “partition might be preferable to Muslim rule” (Bengal Divided 231). The shift in power began when the Communal Award was implemented in 1932, leading to decreased Hindu (mostly Bhadralok) representation in Bengal’s Legislative Assembly. As Chatterji explains, the Award “gave them the prospect of perpetual subordination to Muslims” (15). This aversion was linked in no small part to a growing Hindu national communalism amongst the Bhadralok.} Clearly not all migrants were of the bhadralok class, nor were all bhadraloks Hindu nationalists. Nonetheless, the elision of this dark side of partition history from collective memory hampers any real effort at reconciliation and remembrance.

In the final instance, what emerges out of Mapmaking is a central concern of the oppression engendered by material conditions and experienced by those subject to the stranglehold of an exploitative social order. Mapmaking, more radically than previous anthologies, subverts the totalising calls made by its editors for the collective traumata of an entire people. It demonstrates that the differences of class frequently underwrite such claims of trauma, and therefore need to be examined critically. Modes of trauma, in other words, operate in relation to a hierarchical and gendered societal framework. The upheaval of partition was certainly responsible for the nightmares of communal violence, but attention to these cataclysmic and horrific events also hides both the existence and creation of quieter traumas.
based in the asymmetries of power. In offering competing views rather than consolidating perspectives, *Mapmaking*’s stories call attention to the way collective trauma rests on an erasure of historical and social divisions. Just as their diversity resists any attempt at editorial ownership, so the stories’ antagonizing views of the past adhere to Nandy’s prediction: that they intrude uncomfortably upon the reader. This discomfort, and the doubts they raise provide a crucial perspective in reminding us that while we should mourn the traumas of partition, we should also extend beyond any rumination over a petrified, collective trauma to consider its present socio-historical manifestations.
CHAPTER THREE

Memorialising Yugoslavia: Institution Building in the Literature of Dubravka Ugresic

The novels of Dubravka Ugresic offer an exemplary mode of what might be called an anti-partitionist consciousness. Born in Tito’s Yugoslavia and witness to its subsequent disintegration, Ugresic writes in response to this massive change and devotes much attention to questions of identity in the face of this collective dispossession. One concern that she repeatedly returns to is the ways in which one can re-member a country and a subjectivity that no longer exists in the material world. This chapter examines two Ugresic novels that attempt to reconstitute the past through the creation of new institutions and elaborates the significance of this endeavour both in terms of the political and ethical dimensions. While *The Museum of Unconditional Surrender* (1998) and *The Ministry of Pain* (2004) engage the past using antithetical strategies with divergent results, both emphasise the critical need to commemorate a rapidly disappearing past and disclose the costs of not doing so, in terms of perpetuating the ethnic divides of partitioned states and of disavowing the traumas of the past.

In her novel *The Museum of Unconditional Surrender*, Ugresic practices what I would call a materialist historiography, in the sense meant by Walter Benjamin and developed by his intellectual successors, Dominick LaCapra and Eric L. Santner. I argue that by placing Ugresic in this tradition of historical materialism, we can more readily apprehend how she reconstructs the collective memory of Yugoslavia. As the title of the novel suggests, Ugresic takes up the theme of the museum as a human institution that is the guarantor of collective memory and social history. But whereas museums tend to be physical structures, Ugresic emancipates the idea of a museum from its bricks-and-mortar formation. By investing a collection brought together by chance through refugees, exiles, and other diasporic figures, and infusing it with
historical meaning, Ugresic makes a new type of museum, an archive that is fragmentary, scattered, and embodied.

Institutions are a focal point of this chapter because, to paraphrase Edward Said, they endow humankind with history and meaning (The World 112). Ugresic finds that the cultural institutions, which once secured the idea of Yugoslavia through their production of traditions, have now been either destroyed or appropriated by ethno-nationalists. These new institutions, in turn, generate new histories and traditions that disavow Tito’s multiethnic Yugoslavia. If Yugoslav collective memory, like these of new cultures, are principally broadcast through institutions, Ugresic articulates a concern that institutions also project an ideal of collective memory that fails to correspond with reality. This projection has little to do with material actuality and so threatens the narrator’s search to retrieve a tangible history in Museum. Moreover, there is additional pressure for the narrator to re-member Yugoslavia before its lived experience is overwhelmed by the forces of amnesia and forgetting. The very real danger, perceived by Ugresic, is that like the country itself, memories of Yugoslavia will disappear and there will be “nothing left to remember” (233).

While Yugoslavia remains the focus of Ugresic’s novel, her recuperative project calls upon wider European experiences of partition and division. It is in Berlin, and not in the iconic Yugoslav city of Sarajevo, where this re-membering takes place. Searching for a methodology that will adequately articulate a collective Yugoslav memory, Ugresic turns to Europe’s city of museums, which is also, not coincidentally, the fulcrum on which European consciousness (a cosmopolitan vision similar to that of Tito’s Yugo-slav dream) was raised.

For a novel that is explicitly concerned with collective memory, Museum is a complicated, fractured novel that rejects an overarching teleological narrative, in favour of a
postmodern pastiche. The novel is made up of a series of short stories and sketches, some of which are written in the style of magic realism, and some of which appear autobiographical. It includes excerpts from a diary (written by the narrator’s mother), and a sequence of numbered, repetitive notes on exile, nostalgia, and the many museum and art exhibitions in Berlin. To give an idea of how this narrative looks, consider the following passage at the beginning of the novel that describes an unorthodox collection at the Berlin zoo:

In a glass case are all the things found in the stomach of Roland the walrus, who died on 21 August 1961. Or to be precise…four ice-lolly sticks (wooden), a metal brooch in the form of a poodle, a beer-bottle opener, a woman’s bracelet (probably silver), a hair grip, a wooden pencil, a child’s plastic water pistol, a plastic knife, sunglasses [etc., etc.] …

The visitor stands in front of the unusual display, more enchanted than horrified, as before archaeological exhibits. The visitor knows that their museum-display fate has been determined by chance (Roland’s whimsical appetite) but still cannot resist the poetic thought that with time the objects have acquainted some subtler, secret connections. . . .

The chapters and fragments which follow should be read in a similar way. If the reader feels that there are no meaningful or firm connections between them, let him be patient: the connections will establish themselves of their own accord. (xi)

Through this discontinuous narrative set across various times, Ugresic traces the exilic sojourns of her narrator and her encounters with displaced people in Berlin, New York, and Lisbon. Alongside the narrator’s reminiscences over her childhood are scattered her chance digressions with Yugoslav refugees, immigrants, and outcasts, and quotations from writers-in-exile, such as Miroslav Krleza, Vladimir Nabokov, Rainer Maria Rilke, and Viktor Shklovsky. What these people all have in common is their melancholic experiences and their feeling of estrangement as outsiders in Berlin. These many encounters suggest the reason behind the novel’s disorientating episodic structure: in tying her life-narrative to the insights of others, the narrator expresses the disconcerting experience of not having a home and the difficulties of piecing together a collective memory.
Written in the context of the Yugoslav wars and the disintegration of Yugoslavia, *Museum* conveys the sense of loss that accompanies exile and the impossibility of return.\(^\text{171}\) In her exile, the narrator attempts to make sense of the fact that

I had lost my homeland [and] had not yet got used to the loss, nor to the fact that my homeland was the same, but different. In just one year I had lost my home, my friends, my job, the possibility of returning soon, but also the desire to return. (140)

In addition to her feelings of bewilderment and loss, the narrator examines the problems surrounding the retrieval of history in the wake of a disappeared country and in her search for a vanished cultural identity. The break-up of Yugoslavia meant that the Yugoslav identity, a unique subject position that was simultaneously transnational and multicultural, ceased to exist. Moreover, any traces of a Yugoslav culture and history were systematically erased by the new states that emerged out of the Yugoslav wars. These new nation-states embarked on a revisionist mission, rewriting and disavowing Yugoslav culture and history in favour of more essentialist discourses. In recuperating histories from the fragments of the past, Ugresic’s narrator acknowledges the sheer arbitrary nature in the retrieval of such artefacts and simultaneously registers the way such histories are open to ideological appropriation by different groups. With such difficulties besetting the narrator in restoring a Yugoslav history, we must ask, is it even possible to remember the elusive past, let alone piece together an even more intangible collective memory? In my analysis of *Museum*, I explore the narrator’s predicament and examine the strategies, what effectively marks the narrator’s anti-partitionist consciousness, by which she is able to reconstitute an extinct cultural identity in a post-Yugoslav world.

\(^{171}\) The phrase “Yugoslav wars” relates to my preference to specificity over the more nebulous label of “Balkan” wars. As for the plural, here I defer to Tony Judt, who points out that, rather than understanding the conflict as a Yugoslav war (in the singular), it is more appropriate to call them “the Yugoslav wars, for there were five” (*Postwar* 674). Although, as Thomas Cushman and Stepan G. Mestrovic observe in *This Time We Knew*, even “war,” like conflict, is a contentious term, since it describes organised armies, rather than targeted destruction inflicted by paramilitary units and military forces against civilians (4).
The narrator’s task of recording a Yugoslav identity, both individual and collective, emerges as a complex endeavour that mourns a broken nation, while simultaneously reanimating it anew. In sifting through the past and collating together experiences of exile, Ugresic recalls a Yugoslav collective memory that is neither ethno-nationalist (i.e., singularly Croat, Serb, or Muslim) nor ideologically-driven by Tito’s socialist agenda; consequently, Ugresic’s project is timely, both in the face of current amnesia and in contributing to the voluminous literature on how people work through a traumatic social change. In scrutinising the narrator’s many forms of witnessing that attest to a Yugoslav life, we see that witnessing itself is subject to critique as an impossible, and thus failed, mode of recovery. In the postmodern present, the historical real is verifiable not through some kind of absolute and objective truth, but is captured through textual forms which are unstable and suspect, subject to appropriation and manipulation.

The narrator’s attempt to reconstitute a Yugoslav collective memory, it seems, is most effectively elaborated through the narrator’s engagement with human institutions and, predominantly, with the museum as a political and cultural tool. Museums are, of course, apparatuses that specialise in the organisation and presentation of knowledge; but they are also institutions of memory, constructing the material enclaves of collective memory, i.e., the material objects that make up part of a social history. In their function as producers and preservers of knowledge, they serve as powerful vehicles for the illumination and critique of ideologies. However, precisely because they are such potentially powerful instruments of ideology-critique, museums have also been traditionally dominated by hegemonic classes and groups, making it difficult to mount a sustained resistance from within their walls. To overcome this impasse, Ugresic explodes the notion of the museum as a brick-and-mortar edifice by re-
imagining its central imperative (to organise and present a collective history) with less fixed structures in mind. In this novel, we see how Ugresic’s museum does not exist as a physical structure but, instead, is fragmentary and constantly in flux, taking inspiration from unorthodox collections of historical records stored in Berlin’s many museums and art galleries.

In building an alternative collective history from the memories and experiences of exiles, Ugresic’s critical practice resembles the historical consciousness evoked by Walter Benjamin in his powerful critique of the ideological and mythic uses of history in the present. Like Benjamin, we can see Ugresic “blast[ing] a specific era out of the homogeneous course of history” in her attempt to rediscover the Yugoslav multiethnic past (“Theses” 263). But chiefly, it is Benjamin’s *The Arcades Project* (1927-1940) that figures throughout Ugresic’s novel as a frame of reference. We see this not just through the similar experimental and fragmentary structure of both texts, but also in the way the narrator’s perambulations and practices elicit Benjamin’s iconic reading of both the nineteenth-century *flaneur* and the collector. In *Museum*, Berlin, specifically, plays a pivotal role, as Paris did for Benjamin, with entire archives of memory and experience hidden in the city’s topography. In a recent interview, Ugresic describes Berlin as a city, which is physically “built on bones and debris and ruins” (“An Interview”). These bones, debris, and ruins constitute the resources to examining the ideologies of partition and their traumatic histories. Here, I draw on the critical work of Santner and LaCapra to ponder Ugresic’s commemorative strategies as modes of working through. In uncovering histories that evoke and affirm a Yugoslav collective memory, we see Ugresic as pursuing a cosmopolitan vision of the past that counters the ethno-national politics of the present.
**Witness Anxiety and the Effacement of Collective Memory**

In “The Confiscation of Memory,” an essay that describes the post-Yugoslav process of cultural amnesia, Ugresic talks about the difficulty of comprehending “the true dimensions of other people’s loss,” and in particular the loss of a “difficult-to-grasp, many-faceted and complex thing as collective memory” (226). This fear is reiterated in *Museum*, when the narrator explains:

> But if the country has disappeared, then so has collective memory. If the objects that have surrounded us have disappeared, then so has the memory of the everyday life that we lived. And besides, memory of the former country is tacitly forbidden. And when the ban is one day lifted … There’ll be nothing left to remember. (233)

There is a palpable anxiety, as the narrator searches out ways to chronicle a collective memory that testifies to the trauma of the Yugoslav wars in the face of encroaching time and inevitable forgetting. The narrator’s job of witnessing becomes an urgent one because, as she herself notes, little evidence will remain that there once existed a unified Yugoslav culture. Consider the way the narrator identifies that, while the evidence of the war is “verifiable” through “television film, newspapers and photographs from 1991 to 1995,” this testimonial to the experience is temporary (194):

> Because soon the minefield will be covered in grass, new houses will spring up on top of ruins, everything will be grown over, [the reality] will disappear and shift once again into dream, story, fortune-tellers’ prophecies. …It is true that there will be people left, witnesses, who will [evoke] their nightmare experience as proof of what occurred, but…with time they too will be covered over with grass. (195)

This passage is reminiscent of Said’s notion of anxious witnessing in the sense that the narrator is greatly troubled as she struggles to testify to what Said termed “worldliness,” namely, “the turbulence of war, ethnic cleansing, forced migration, and unhappy dislocation” (xxi). Yet, in *Museum* anxious witnessing has been additionally transfigured into a kind of witness anxiety,
what I see as the anxiety felt by the writer-as-witness. Such an anxiety relates to the fluid processes of remembering and forgetting; after the death of first-person witnesses, *all* remaining memories and, by extension histories, exist as untrustworthy textual forms, susceptible to erasure if they do not fit the dominant paradigms and pursuits of the time.

But whereas all pasts can be (and have been) revised, selectively re-presented, or even eradicated we should consider the loss of a Yugoslav collective memory as an event that has serious political ramifications for the people of the former Yugoslavia and their future generations. First, we must acknowledge the significance of memory in advancing individual and group identity. As Peter Middleton and Tim Woods assert in their study, *Literatures of Memory: History, Time and Space in Postwar Writing* (2000), memory is the “foundation of personal identity” and “anything that damages it will threaten the self” (92). In other words, the destruction of a Yugoslav identity would hit hardest those people who conceived of themselves as Yugoslav, rather than exclusively as members of an ethno-nationalist group. Being Yugoslav meant a specific political stance that emphasised both the supranational and the ethnic. In view of Yugoslavia’s destruction and the emergence of homogeneous national groups (structured along religion, ethnicity, and language), multiethnic spaces like Bosnia pose a particular problem, since identities tend to be more fluid and hybrid because of ethnic proximity and intermarriage. The destruction of memories of Yugoslavia and the Yugoslav identity leave no recourse to embrace the multicultural regional self, since the self can only exist as Serb (aligned with Serbia), Croat (aligned with Croatia), or Bosniak Muslim (aligned with a religion, but no country since the Bosniaks do not have an ethnic state); in all these cases, we can see a

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172 What exactly is meant by a “Yugoslav” identity is explained by Sumantra Bose, who points out that ethnic identity was supplemented by a collective loyalty to a supranational and multiethnic federation: thus, those “who professed their primary identity to be Serb, Croat, or Muslim were also all Yugoslavs” (*Contested Lands* 116, Bose’s emphasis).
form of displacement, most obviously for the Bosniaks, but also for the Bosnian Serbs and Bosnian Croats since Serbia and Croatia are foreign places, complete with different customs, dialects, and accents (and the same alienation applies to the Croat Serbs and the Serb Croats). Second, in addition to this political and cultural displacement, we need to grasp the political consequences of eradicating a collective Yugoslav memory for all who saw themselves as Yugoslavs (and not just in the example of Bosnia). I believe we can find answers in searching out similar analogies, such as in the scholarship on totalitarian states that details the way states dictate history.

In his 2003 essay on memory and postmodernity, Eric Berlatsky uses Milan Kundera’s *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* (1996) to describe how the Czechoslovakian Communist government manipulated and effaced history in order to bolster its own power. This strategy had political implications since it served to stamp out any instances of the past deemed subversive that could give rise to governmental opposition. In such a case, where a state holds the monopoly on “official” history, individuals (and, by extension, the greater collective) begin to forget not only what their culture means but also the measures with which to resist the political and social oppression enacted by a hegemonic power. Here, personal memory and witnessing become particularly significant because they offer a “type of historical evidence,” providing “a counterbalance to the manipulatable documentary evidence of history” (Berlatsky 105). Outlining how such memories resist institutional histories, Berlatsky points out that they can help “ensure that a similar act of oppression never occurs again,” or at the very least, create “a political opportunity to topple, destroy, and provisionally replace the master narratives already in place” (104; 113).
Berlatsky’s analysis helps us appreciate the power of oppositional memories and the efforts of writers like Ugresic in the face of chauvinist ideologies. As with the destruction of a liberal political tradition in Communist Czechoslovakia, so the new states that emerged out of the Yugoslav wars consolidated their power through history-making. For an illustrative example, consider Franjo Tudjman, Croatia’s first president and its most controversial amateur historian, who rewrote the history of the Ustaše, the Croatian collaborators with the Nazi state, and literally changed the topography by renaming city roads and buildings to those of Croatian historical figures. The project of erasing a Yugoslav history was augmented by outright governmental intimidation in the process of creating an ethnically “pure” Croatian state. This alternative history could only be fully institutionalised after political opponents had been silenced or marginalised. In Museum, Ugresic’s narrator outlines the tragic repercussions of an ethnic nationalist official history, one that refuses to tolerate a multiethnic Yugoslav sensibility, when she learns how a mythic nationalism is turned into historical fact through the

forced eviction of hundreds…the arbitrary rule and police terror of the authorities…[the] mass sackings,… greed, insatiability,… war profiteering. I learned of houses and villages burned and their inhabitants turned out by force.

(211)

The institutional “cleansing” of the landscape (political, historical, and cultural) allows for the construction of new collective memories – ones that suppress or eradicate all opposition. Ugresic’s strategy of countering these new memories are enabled by her return to a Yugoslav past through memories, those of her own and of her friends and family.

In providing testimony, the narrator finds herself in the dilemma I referred to earlier as witness anxiety, when she realises how easily memories, supposedly captured through photos and texts, can be modified, reordered, relabelled, and thus remembered. On the one hand the
narrator concedes that a “photograph is also a memory” that releases a powerful affective charge as it relays the (family) history of a life lived (30); but on the other hand she wryly adds that compiling a photo album is an activity guided by the hand of the invisible angel of nostalgia. With its heavy, mournful wing, the angel of nostalgia brushes aside the demons of irony. That is why there are hardly any comic albums [or] ugly photographs. …It is in these most sincere and personal of all genres…that the scissors of censorship are most assiduous. (32)

The narrator gives us a number of examples that reveal the sites of personal memory as selective constructions of truth. From the narrator’s postwar photographs that “disclose the world of postwar shortages” to her mother’s constant rearranging of her photo albums, and the “verbal memories” that have ossified from childhood fantasy into adulthood fact, Ugresic explores the mutable boundary between fiction and historical reality (22; 19). Berlatsky observes a similar struggle when he writes that personal memory, like institutional memory is “itself an instrument of power and potential oppression” (114). But if the narrator fears about the unreliability of photographic documents and memories, she also is aware that “[l]ife is nothing other than a photograph album” and what “is not in the album, never happened” (25). Thus, in the fallout of the Yugoslav wars, Ugresic identifies two categories of refugees, “those who have photographs and those who have none,” one group clearly luckier than the other to have some tangible remnant of their former lives (5). In the face of social upheaval and the construction of a new collective history, “when the language and the country and the flags and the symbols all changed; when the wrong side became right, and the right side became wrong,” such memories remain the only, if utterly untrustworthy, testaments to a vanished life (22).

173 Though this is not the focus of this chapter, photographs play an important part in Museum. Indeed, a photograph – one that the narrator refers to constantly – is reproduced in the text. Photos are not only about different forms of history and storytelling, but they are used to illustrate the affective relationship one has with the (mediated and imagined) past.
Even as we acknowledge the fundamental instability inherent in the discursive field of textual and photographic memory, the contributing influence of photographs and text on memory persists. In a way, then, we can begin to talk about the “idea” or the “form” of the photographic collection or the autobiographical narrative as a (historically-continuous) institution. The photo album, for instance, exists as an enduring structure, loaded with meaning and cultural authority despite the mutability of its contents. In making this proposition, I am building on a humanist understanding of subjectivity. If, for instance, we accept that (collective) memory is a characteristic of communities and groups, then we must identify the institutions responsible for its cultivation and transmission. What I am proposing is that a cultural category like the autobiography or the photo album be considered as such an institution. At this stage the term institution requires some elaboration. Douglass C. North offers a useful starting point for grasping the breadth and complexity of institutions:

Institutions are the humanly devised constraints that structure political, economic and social interaction. They consist of both informal constraints (sanctions, taboos, customs, traditions, and codes of conduct), and formal rules (constitutions, laws, property rights). Throughout history, institutions have been devised by human beings to create order and reduce uncertainty in exchange. (97)

If there is any doubt that photo albums function in this way then we need only take up North’s suggestion, that institutions represent “customs, traditions, and codes of conduct,” and examine the way state-level violence during the Yugoslav wars attempted to destroy these modes of social practices by targeting cultural institutions. Particularly targeted were what Pierre Nora calls the “main producers of archives” and social histories, such as the institution of the family, the church, and the state (14). Nowhere is this clearer than in the narrator’s account of Bosnia, where ethnic cleansing is accompanied by the destruction of family albums and photographs in the bid to “annihilate memory” (5). In one anecdote, the narrator describes how Ratko Mladic –
the Bosnian-Serb general wanted for war crimes – gives an acquaintance five minutes to retrieve his family photo albums before destroying his house. This is seen as a special favour, Mladic’s gift of “the right to remembrance” to a friend, in his otherwise systematic extirpation of communities and their collective memory (5).

During the Yugoslav wars, the photo album emerges as but one casualty in a catalogue of targeted institutions. In her earlier essays on the break up of Yugoslavia, Ugresic called attention to the way the past can be rewritten through the deliberate destruction of institutions, such as “gravestones, libraries, churches, [and] monuments of cultural-historical value” (“Confiscation” 227). In another essay, she makes more explicit the connection between institutions, cultures, and collective memory; institutions were targeted in order to erode, if not efface, cultural norms and social practices. As she explains, the destruction of an “old truth” is achieved through the obliteration of “cities, ideological notions, bridges, criteria, libraries, norms, churches, marriages, monuments, lives, graves, friendships, homes, myths” (“The Culture of Lies” 70). For the new states, to risk leaving old institutions intact is effectively to leave memorials, tangible and public objects to disappeared collectives. In turn, a “new truth” can be set up through the establishment of new institutions (70). In a recent chapter added to his seminal study Imagined Communities, Benedict Anderson elaborates this insight when he explains that “institutions of power,” such as the map, the census, and the museum, can enable the “concretisation” of cultures (185). Anderson’s work explicates the ways institutions construct nations, but his metaphor of concretisation does not adequately capture their propensity to change. It is here that the work of Louis Althusser is especially productive, for it is he who insists that institutions are organic. Not only are they the repositories of ideology, institutions also mark the territory for ideological contestation. In the short history of
Yugoslavia, for example, the same institutions which supported the multicultural federation became the instruments of its dissolution.

It is because institutions have helped shape cultures that the narrator’s task of remembrance depends so heavily upon their potential as monuments and memorials. Yet the role that institutions play as memorials is ambiguous since, like textual forms, they can be appropriated to advance political causes. In his essay “What Some Monuments Tell us about Mourning and Forgiveness,” Vamik D. Volkan elucidates how monuments play a central role in consolidating chosen traumas but, this does not mean that the objective is always to work through grief, alleviate suffering, and prevent future atrocities. Instead, monuments can encourage the mourning “of objects that have been the target of our hate” (117). Mourning, in other words, is sometimes kept active in order to galvanize “feelings of revenge” (122). Volkan’s analysis reminds us how man-made institutions disseminate ideologies and epistemologies that, in turn, lead to the formation of the subject.

But the problem of ideological agendas aside, the role of the institution as an historical artifact – that is as something both shaped by and reflecting a particular culture – is further complicated when we consider that institutions do not exist as either a material entity or a material practice alone. This problem is underscored by John Rawls in *A Theory of Justice* (1971), where he points out that while institutions can be understood in a formal sense as a “public system of rules which defines offices and positions with their rights and duties,” they can also

be thought of in two ways: first as an abstract object, that is, as a possible form of conduct expressed by a system of rules; and second, as the realization in the thought and conduct of certain persons at a certain time and place of the actions specified by these rules. There is an ambiguity, then, as to which is just or unjust, the institution as realized or the institution as an abstract object. (55)
While Rawls limits his discussion to specific institutions associated with legal and political discourse, he nonetheless addresses two critical points that can be extended to an understanding of other institutions. First is the obvious point that I have been emphasising throughout: the way human behaviour, the codes of “conduct” are conditioned by institutions; second is the fundamental contradiction at the heart of institutions. For the institution exists as both an ideal and a material incarnation of that ideal. How might such a contradiction play into the idea of a collective memory? To return to the example of the law, we might consider Slavoj Žižek’s theorising of the parallax gap between reality and the ideal. For Žižek, the law exists as a “non-existence…an impossible Real, a void which nonetheless functions” (The Parallax View 39).\(^{174}\)

To explain further, I want to turn to several incidents in Museum where the narrator grapples with this contradiction and uses irony as a strategy to expose, as well as undermine, the “non-existent,” abstract, collective memory constructed by institutions. For instance, in her wanderings in Berlin, the narrator is given a tourist map of the former Yugoslavia by her friend, Richard. As Anderson has noted, maps must be understood as institutions, which survey and quantify places and people, anticipating not only spatial realities but enabling “the concretisation of [national] possibilities” (185). In constituting this physical national space, maps also give rise to the idea of stability and permanence of collective identities. Gazing at this map as a testament to Yugoslav identity, the narrator is overcome by feelings of nostalgia and sadness:

I gaze fixedly at the map, I trace the contours of mountains and rivers with my finger, I count the places where I have been… I sink into it inwardly to the point of exhaustion, the map, like good blotting-paper, absorbs a strong sense of loss. “I’m shipwrecked, I come from Atlantis,” I say.

\(^{174}\) Žižek is concerned with the gap between ideal and the “obscene superego supplement” that accompanies the law when he argues that a parallax view depicts two views simultaneously: the “dignified and impersonal Law…[as] guaranteeing our rights” and the Kafka-esque vision of the law as “the expression of a ruthless power” (Parallax 334).
“Ah well, some countries last as long as people…” says Richard.

… the country [on the map] looks like a child’s picture book. Look, the Lake of Bohinj, a sketch of a little skier on Kranjska Gora, look there’s the Postojna cave…! Near Sežana a tiny Lipizzaner is rearing up. There’s Zagreb Cathedral… Goodness, there’s Sarajevo and a mosque… Mostar and the old bridge… beside Vranje there are three little women in baggy trousers, by the Romanian border Gypsies with violins… Two little women in national costume stand in the sea by the island of Susak… Then north, to the little Slovenes climbing up Triglav mountains. Then east, to the inhabitants of Vojvodina harvesting their wheat… It is all so small and so unreal, as though it never existed. (99-100)

While the map reminds the narrator that Yugoslavia no longer exists, the microcosm depicted on the map does not present a real geography. Instead, the map parades a politically correct and even-handed collection of Yugoslavia’s multiethnic cultures, assembled as what Ugresic elsewhere calls Tito’s “socialist spectacles” of “state kitsch” (“Gingerbread” 50). The hyperbolic exclamations of enthusiasm that accompany the narrator’s description of the map (“Goodness,” “look,” “there’s” this and that), suggest an ironic, even parodic, commentary that undercuts the narrator’s sense of loss. To look at this map is not to find Yugoslavia, but rather to discern an ideal that is produced by state apparatuses: it is an “unreal” world which, like a “child’s picture book,” is made up of regional symbols and stereotypes, precisely because this Yugoslavia “never existed,” except either as a staged performance or as a state ideology (Museum 100).

In another episode, the narrator stumbles across an actual child’s schoolbook and grasps the centrality of educational institutions in projecting such ideals as they construct cultures and identities. Offering a happy portrait of socialist “Yugo-everyday life,” the schoolbook disseminates Tito’s supraethnic slogan of “Brotherhood and Unity” (76). The schoolbook depicts the harmonious meeting of different cultures and customs:

There are Serbs and Croats. They are brothers too. And When brotherly hearts unit – nothing can oppose their might! So my primer proclaims. …
In my primer the Homeland seems to have no borders….There is Filip from Slavonia and Frane from Dalmatia. …The names in my primer are Croatian and Serbian, Slovene and Macedonian, fairly distributed. (76, original emphasis)

As part of the educational apparatus, the schoolbook attempts to inculcate citizens with state ideology. But as with the tourist map, what we see here in the schoolbook is something that has never existed. It is, as Althusser has pointed out, an ideological representation of “the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence” (36). Reverting to a naïve, childhood perspective, the narrator exposes how her understanding of the world, and of her subjectivity, is shaped by the schoolbook. But even as she accepts that the pictures in some way concur or connect with reality, Ugresic introduces an ironic feminist voice that belies the schoolbook’s “passionate faith in progress” which is sutured to a patriarchal ideal: “People (men, I see only now) work cheerfully: pilots and tractor-drivers, doctors and miners. Women are only mothers. Or little girls” (75). Here, the intrusion of an adult voice undermines the idealised notion of a Yugoslavia built on the rhetoric of South Slav brotherhood unity by exposing its constitutive inequalities.

**Yugonostalgia: Absence and Loss**

The narrator’s strategy of subversion makes explicit the way institutional products project an ideal, incommensurate with material reality. This can be read as a critical form of nostalgia, known as Yugonostalgia that has emerged out of the former Yugoslavia. It is recognisable by a particular strain of black humour and irony.175 Yugonostalgia is generally understood as a political stance, one that expresses regret over the disappearance of Tito’s Yugoslavia (the *algia*

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175 For more examples of post-Yugoslav black humour, see Horton and Mikula. Volčić also calls attention to an online book called *Yugoslavia for Dummies* (28). The popularity of “yugo-kitsch” attests to the prevalence of this form of humour. For example, see <http://illyriangazette.blogspot.com/2005_11_01_archive.html>
in nostalgia means longing in Greek); but, simultaneously, Yugonostalgia ridicules it.\footnote{Ugresic notes in her essay “Confiscation” that Yugonostalgia is an inherently political practice (231). Volčič identifies three kinds of Yugonostalgia: revisionist, aesthetic, and commercial. Her focus is on the commercialisation of Yugonostalgia, such as the television reality shows that temporarily recreate a multi-ethnic Yugoslav “big brother” house (28-35).} In her study of nostalgia, Svetlana Boym describes Yugonostalgia as “a new kind of space that plays with the past and present,” that uses kitsch in order to “gently” mock “the dream of a greater patria while appealing to shared fragments of memory of the last Yugoslav generation” (55). In contrast to this definition, Zala Volčič offers a more complex assessment, arguing that there are several variants of Yugonostalgia, some of which exist for commercial gain, and that the critical, indeed utopic, potential of Yugonostalgia must be seen in its incompleteness. For Volčič, Yugonostalgia is “an unfinished project, whose unity was predicated not on what it was, but what it might become. Yugo-nostalgia [sic] is then, arguably, less a longing for a real past than a kind of longing for the desires and fantasies that were once possible” (27). For both these critics, Yugonostalgia as a variant of “working through” the trauma of a violently dismembered country is ambivalent at best, since such a project has potential, but is ultimately empty. For Boym, Yugonostalgia is “transient” with “no pretence of depth of commemoration” (55); while Volčič argues that Yugonostalgia “continues to divide and unite the former Yugoslav republics,” and risks mystifying and dehistoricizing Tito’s Yugoslavia (34).

Both theorists seem to be leading up to a point upon which Ugresic’s satiric portrayal of the tourist map and primer are founded. These two representations of Yugoslavia are not emancipatory, instead bearing evidence to a kind of entrapment, with no real solution or return possible. This form of Yugonostalgia resonates more with Susan Stewart’s definition of nostalgia as “a sadness without an object” that is not only “inauthentic because it does not take part in lived experience” but is also “always ideological: the past it seeks has never existed
except as a narrative, and hence, always absent that past continually threatens to reproduce itself as a felt lack” (23, emphasis added). Yugonostalgia, in other words, focuses on Yugoslavia as an object that must be understood as less a loss than as an absence.

In differentiating between absence and loss, as two elements that are distinct from one another, I am suggesting that if Yugoslavia’s historical disappearance is a fact of loss, we must also understand that absence relates to something that one never had to begin with. It is here where we encounter the Rawlsian paradox at the heart of the institution. My distinction follows on from LaCapra’s theorisation of loss and absence and his caution that we must not conflate the two because of the threat to the process of remembering and mourning. LaCapra notes that when absence is converted into loss, one increases the likelihood of misplaced nostalgia or utopian politics in quest of a new totality or fully unified community. When loss is converted into (or encrypted in an indiscriminately generalized rhetoric of) absence, one faces the impasse of endless melancholy, impossible mourning, and interminable aporia in which any process of working through the past and its historical losses is foreclosed or prematurely aborted. (“Trauma, Absence, Loss” 698)

In Museum, the narrator’s response to the fragments of remaining Yugoslav institutions is to emphasise their affiliation to hegemony and their production of an imaginary and ideological Yugoslavia, thus, desacralizing them as monuments to the past.

In spite of her rejection of state-appropriated institutions, the narrator does not dispense with institutions as a channel for recuperating a Yugoslav collective memory. She still considers herself a Yugoslav who is caught between the hegemonic ideologies of various institutions. As she points out, while institutions disseminate an imagined relationship between the individual and the conditions of existence, they also exist in embodied form. The schoolbook, for example,

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177 Ugresic suggests this much in her essay “Confiscation” where she notes that the “territory” of nostalgia “is absence” (230).
is real; it is not only a product of a particular cultural group and historical time, but is also shaped groups. The narrator concedes, when she explains that

the primer is a kind of passport for several generations. Several generations are a whole nation. I recognize that ‘nation’ of mine today. It hatched out of the primer… I always recognize my people, even in international airports, were, mixed up with others, they are harder to discern. …After all, we’re out of the same primer. (77)

In acknowledging that some kind of Yugoslav nation of “several generations” exists, the narrator repeats the fundamental point made by Giambattista Vico in *The New Science* (1725), when he remarks that by the means of human institutions (morals, economics, politics, physics) “man, in a certain sense created themselves [sic]” (112). In this Vican mode, scholars of Yugoslavia, such as Andrew Baruch Wachtel, Wolfgang Hopken, Robert Donia and John Fine have commented on way Yugoslavs produced themselves through institutions, which in turn constructed a Yugoslav history and society.¹⁷⁸ For Wachtel and Hopken, educational institutional apparatuses played a foundational role in mobilising a Yugoslav cultural and political identity that transgressed ethnic, religious, and national delineations. Even a new language, Serbo-Croat, aimed at establishing national unity was invented and promulgated in order to concretise a supranational Yugoslavia. Education, in particular, was crucial as a constitutive “tool and a weapon” since it fashioned a common Yugoslav identity and instilled

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¹⁷⁸ In fact, Donia and Fine focus not so much on socialist Yugoslavia as on the construction of a unique multireligious Bosnian culture that would later be seen as a microcosm of Yugoslavia. They point out this culture did not occur “naturally,” but that the Austro-Hungarian authorities played a prominent part in shaping it, particularly through the creation of the Sarajevo provincial museum. The museum, providing a romanticised view of Bosnia’s multicultural history, was instrumental in creating multireligious, multiethnic social practices and conduct. In actively constituting a *regional* Bosnian, multicultural consciousness, the Austro-Hungarian government was playing a strategic political card, by downplaying loyalties to competing religious ethnicities. In this process, the subsequent growth of different nationalities kept in check and the authorities faced fewer political upheavals and activism in the name of nationalist self-determination (96-97).
socialist values, further begetting a Yugoslav history, a Yugoslav literary, and a Yugoslav artistic canon in the populace (Wachtel 134).179

Institutions thus hold the key to finding something of this lost collectivity since, on the one hand, they have established and shaped it and, on the other hand, they have objectified it through historical artifacts, such as the schoolbook. But equally, as this chapter has shown, institutions also cultivate an abstraction, an imaginary Yugoslavia that is removed from reality; and, moreover, they are central in the revision, erasure, and denial of the category Yugoslav. The narrator consequently turns to institutions as a fundamental resource in retrieving a collective identity, since they have the potential to function as monuments and memorials to a history. But, in her task of remembrance, she steers clear of hegemonic state institutions and the official collective histories they have manufactured by breaking with the conventional understanding of institutions and, instead, rethinking the institutional structure imaginatively as a radical formation with a new form and new contents. This means that the contents of the new institutions set up by the narrator must simultaneously revisit the past, whilst also rejecting the histories produced by Tito’s Yugoslavia and by the new partitionist states.

One insight into understanding how this might work can be found in Santner’s study *Stranded Objects: Mourning, Memory, and Film in Postwar Germany* (1990), and specifically, in his explication of Walter Benjamin’s historical materialism in relation to the postwar generation of Germans who struggle with constituting “a viable legacy out of poisoned totemic resources” (*Stranded* 152). While Yugoslavia is undoubtedly different from Nazi Germany, we can nonetheless trace a similar dilemma for Ugresic who seeks to recuperate the “poisoned” past.

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179 In his study of textbooks from Tito’s Yugoslavia, Hopken emphasises how education was critical when it came to the “task of balancing out individual ethnic identities with the overall Yugoslav values” (83); but he also concedes that the slogan “brotherhood and unity” eventually lost its meaning, becoming an empty cliché due to its incessant repetition (89).
from its ideological framework, to reject the way the past, in effect a victor’s history, is used to bolster the present. For Benjamin, an emancipatory historical materialism begins with exploding the dominant, totalist history in order to retrieve the missed political opportunities of the past, thereby breaking with historical linearity and what he identifies as the history of the “ruling class” (261). Santner argues that Benjamin’s methodology of re-examining the past offers a way to break with the regressive nationalist politics of Nazi Germany. It is the seizing [of] those chances now, of constructing an alternative legacy out of the archive of symptoms and parapraxes [i.e. the “stranded objects” of the past that act as an unconscious reality haunting the subject] that bear witness to what could have been but was not. … By searching these signs of history-that-might-have-been in the documents of their own lineage, the postwar generations…may yet be able to unearth new resources of identification out of the unconscious layers of the history into which they were born. (153)

If we return to the narrator’s witness anxiety, described at the beginning of this chapter, the formation of institutions out of such “alternative legacies” offers not just a way to recall a collective memory of Yugoslavia, but also constitutes a move to speak for those ignored “witnesses” whose lives are ultimately transient, their testimony eradicated by the inexorability of time and forgetting (Museum 195).

In what might be seen as a literal manifestation of Santner’s “stranded objects,” the narrator develops a Yugoslav collective memory through the institution of the museum. The museum is significant because, as Susan A. Crane points out in Museums and Memory (2000), it sets up a collection that functions not only as a “repository of memory,” but also frequently forms the “basis of cultural or national identity” (4). For Crane, the museum performs the “task of preservation,” forging once ephemeral and immaterial memories into “physical form to prevent the natural erosion of memory” (9). Indeed, museums are instrumental in transferring individual experiences into public objects of collective memorialization and meaning. This
enshrinement of a collective memory offers historical evidence to the Yugoslavia the narrator remembers. But, like the education apparatus that helped create a Yugoslav culture, the museum is also a “profoundly political” institution, as Anderson reminds us, that can both consolidate its power by legitimating a particular (colonial in Anderson’s case) history (178). Tony Bennett’s Foucaultian analysis in The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics (1995) similarly views museums as vehicles of power that are “embroiled in the processes of governing – in the sense of being called on to help form and shape the moral, mental, and behavioural characteristics of the population” (21). The museum, as Bennett sees it, is vital in creating “codes of behaviour” (28), and inducting its visitors “into new forms of programming self aimed at producing new types of conduct and self-shaping” (46). Both Anderson and Bennett’s thinking contribute to an understanding of Ugresic’s museumizing imagination. For if her museum crystallises the memory of a Yugoslav culture, the politics implicit within the museumizing impetus suggest a move beyond memorialization and into the arena of (re)production, and the regeneration of a new Yugoslav community.

The Museum-in-flux

The narrator’s museum exists not as a physical structure, but rather as a fragmentary collection of literary vignettes, memories, stories, and encounters with refugees, and immigrants in Berlin. This way, the narrator takes up the museum’s organising principle, the imperative to form and communicate a collective memory, bringing into existence a new type of museum, a formation which is radically different from the state-centric, prescriptive version of the institution. But the narrator also refuses to spare the museum-as-institute and rethinks the category of museum by ontologizing it, identifying it as something that is bodily and material, perceptible and
ubiquitous. The narrator’s museum is embodied in memories, objects, in the random people the narrator writes of, and in the material text of *Museum* itself; these create and legitimate new forms of collective memory. Rather than resembling the ordered collection of a museum, the narrator offers us “the genre of collage,” a genre that is inherently “subversive” because it involves untidy elements that escape the narrator’s “control…disturb[ing] the construction of her personal history” (*Museum* 25). Collective memory here is not fixed, but fraught, fluid, and polysemic.

In documenting Yugoslav lives (both before and after the country’s break-up), the narrator provides us with a cultural archive, a record of a material life within a specific historical and cultural context. Reminiscent of the figure of the collector from Benjamin’s *Arcades Project*, the narrator sets out to collect narratives and memories, which function as *objets trouvés* evoking a mode of historical recovery. The accumulation and assemblage of objects create a methodology that Benjamin saw as “a new expressly devised historical system…a practical form of memory” (205). Through collecting, as Benjamin noted, one “takes up the struggle against dispersion…the scatter, in which things of the world are found” (211). By piecing together everyday objects and traces of histories, the fragments of a vanished past become anti-nostalgic codes with which to decipher the traumatic present in new ways, to see the present through the larger patterns of the past. It is in the objects of the collection, that the “true collector” can attach and thus access “the entire past,” of the now obsolete Yugoslavia (*Arcades Project* 207).

Unlike the coherent and unified historical narratives of hegemonic institutions, the very fluidity and fragmentariness of the narrator’s archive evades hegemonic appropriation. Prescribing to Rilke’s aphoristic view, that “the story of a shattered life can only be told in bits
and pieces,” *Museum* depicts a collage that evokes the traumas of mass displacement and emulates the highly political exhibitions of Berlin’s artists (*Museum* 107). The narrator pays particular attention to artists because of their function as political commentators on the creation of cultures and historical discourses. For instance, when the narrator discusses Ilya Kabakov and his “museum of the extinct Soviet epoch,” it is clear how her own project closely resembles Kabakov’s (37). His art pieces together the domestic and discarded objects from the everyday life of the ordinary Soviet citizen. Out of such collections Kabakov reveals “the complex permeation of the system, politics, ideology, media, culture, education, [into] the everyday and the personal life” (36). As the narrator notes, the life of the anonymous Soviet citizen is laid bare as a series of “‘facts,’ so terribly marked by the system” (37); but, this exhibition also resists full incorporation into the dissemination of Soviet ideology, “radically challeng[ing] official culture by the mere act of giving priority to ‘rubbish’ over the so-called great themes of art” (36). Similarly, the narrator’s museum of the bits and pieces of Yugoslav lives is a strategy that demands a critical, rather than a nostalgic, evaluation of the object at hand, such as the schoolbook or the tourist map, revealing it as a vessel that has been appropriated, politicized, and ideologized by hegemonic groups. Here, Ugresic’s museum plays with the idea of the many ways of recording and measuring history. From Kabakov’s collections of “rubbish” that narrate an alternate history, to the documentation of lives by height and weight, the narrator calls attention to new methods of remembrance that undercut nostalgic ideals and the dominant ideologies of present and past.

While Kabakov exposes the workings of the state and commemorates a vanished culture by reproducing the everyday life, other artistic sources provide the narrator with valuable insight into the construction of new institutions. For instance, the narrator is inspired by an artist,
known as Sissel, who is “obsessed with maps, measures, compasses” (98); Sissel explores the construction and representation of space and, more particularly, “her place in that space” (99). Using geographical maps of the world, Sissel “cuts seas out of the maps, cuts those seas up into little pieces, then sticks the pieces together again to form one surface,” this way following “her own inner sense of geography” (98). In her work, Sissel recreates the discursive spaces of the world as collages, creating new modes of knowledge while interrupting the dominant understandings of the world. There is an echo in the narrator’s practice of redrawing a Yugoslav map when she comes across a community of Bosnian refugees in Berlin:

Here refugees from Bosnia meet. They enquire after souls: who is from where, does anyone know what’s become of so and so, where is such and such now… They exchange news. They gather according to their towns and villages. …

Here, in Gustav-Mayer Allee, on Saturdays and Sundays, the country that is no more, Bosnia, draws its map once again in the air, with its towns, villages, rivers and mountains. The map glimmers briefly and then disappears like a soap bubble. (230)

Like Sissel’s artwork, the recreated map refuses to see identity as sutured to space alone. The Bosnian territory is momentarily brought to life through living and moving bodies. In contrast to museums filled with an archive of extinct or inanimate objects, the narrator produces a living institution, similar to what Dipesh Chakrabarty terms “a politics of experience” in his essay, “Museums in Late Democracies” (9). In her emphasis both on the everyday and on the diaspora that meets in renewed solidarity, the narrator fulfils Chakrabarty’s call for a new memorialising practice that is oriented towards “the realms of the senses and the embodied” over identity politics (9). What becomes evident is that human beings, exemplified by the refugees, immigrants, and exiles populating this novel, are themselves embodied historical and institutional artefacts, “walking museum exhibits;” resources from which a collective memory can be drawn (Museum 234).
The “walking” plays a more specific role, not just in developing a collective memory, but also in thinking through other traumatic histories. Sites of trauma, specifically those associated with the Holocaust, call attention to an affective and haunting history of loss. In encountering such histories, the narrator grasps their traumatic and melancholic dimensions, the byproducts of ethnonational violence that relate to the segregationist strategies experienced in Yugoslavia and in Nazi-era Berlin. The issue here is not only one of commemoration, of bearing witness to the “traces of former life” that would otherwise turn into “the sense of the absence of life,” such as to the Nazi’s mass extirpation of the Jewish community in Berlin, but also of paying attention to the recurrence of catastrophic histories (Museum 98). In the light of the Yugoslav war atrocities that targeted civilians – from the expulsion of undesired minorities, concentration camps, and mass rapes, to ethnic cleansing and genocidal practices carried out in Bosnia and Croatia – the memory of the Holocaust plays a significant role, subtending Museum, in order to articulate both the suffering of minority groups and the dangers of the drive towards an ethnically pure or homogenous state.180

Berlin: City of Spectral Archives

In this context, Berlin, as a setting that alerts us to traumatic pasts, is particularly significant. In Berlin the narrator becomes attuned to archives of memory and experience, since Berlin might be read as a historical site that symbolises Europe’s constitutive partition experience during the Cold War. Berlin is a city scarred by the experiences not only of the Holocaust, but also of the

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180Ironically, the memories of the Second World War and the extermination of the Jews were galvanised by the Israeli media to establish sympathy with the perpetrators, the Serbs. In this scenario, the complex political affiliations of heterogeneous ethnic group were reduced into the way they were perceived to have acted during the war, either as pro- or anti-Nazi groups. This view of the past was then superimposed upon the new political situation of the Yugoslav wars. Thus, all Croats and Muslims were demonised as Nazi collaborators, while the Serbs – the Chetniks – were seen as protectors of Jews, in spite of media evidence of Serbian atrocities. See Primoratz.
Battle of Berlin, the grisly conclusion to the Second World War, and the defeat of Nazi forces to the Russians, an event physically marked by Berlin’s Museum of Unconditional Surrender, from which the novel takes its name (Museum 221-24). Likewise, the iconic Berlin Wall, which also represents a substantial historical period, exists as a museum artifact. Now, “thin and dry as Jewish matzos,” pieces of the Wall are preserved, “put under museum glass” (222). Post-1989, Berlin is a city awash with refugees, immigrants, and exiles, many of who have fled from the Yugoslav wars. The link between Berlin and Yugoslavia is firmly established in the narrator’s portrayal of her friend, Christa, who is born in East Berlin and then exiled to West Berlin. Christa is a dislocated figure, “tormented by two nightmares [that] were both connected in a double knot. …The name of the first…was the Berlin Wall, and the name of the other…was none the less painful: home” (135). In her perpetual search for a home, the narrator contemplates the parallels between her own life and Christa’s:

I am in Berlin, I am pursued by two nightmares around which like large spools I am winding the taut threats of my life. The name of one is home, the one I no longer have, and the name of the other is wall, the one which has sprung up in my lost homeland. …In nightmare dreams, I build a home which is always destroyed anew (139).

But in the post-Cold War era, Berlin represents the dissolution of ideological divides and its multicultural landscape suggests the (re)creation of communities and communal recovery. To return to the story of Christa in the midst of her exile in West Berlin, it is precisely in such communities, among other outsiders, such as the “Turks, Greeks, and Yugoslavs, [that] she felt closest to her true homeland” (136).

But, most importantly, Berlin’s urban life functions as a resource for the museum that the narrator assembles. As this chapter has suggested earlier, Berlin offers multiple spaces where the narrator can view various “museums,” such as the glass case of Roland’s stomach
exhibited in the Berlin zoo or the displays of artists. Moreover, as the narrator points out, Berlin is the paradigmatic “museum-city,” not just because it contains many museums, but because of the physical and spectral traces of its history that are decipherable to the narrator (221). The narrator’s ability to comprehend these histories calls to mind Santner’s “spectral materialism,” described in his study *On Creaturely Life: Rilke, Benjamin, Sebald* (2006). Spectral materialism, according to Santner, involves an awareness of “the persistence of past suffering that has in some sense been absorbed into the substance of lived space, into the ‘setting’ of human history” (57). The narrator is not alone in having the ability to read spectral histories; she picks it up from the practices of artists in Berlin who bring to the surface what would otherwise remain invisible or haunted, fleeting instances of past lives and former communities.

The work of artists, such as Christian Boltanski, Shimon Attie, Jochen Gerz and others, provides the narrator with a key frame of reference in building monuments and making material and persistent the spectral memories of a traumatic past. Boltanski, the narrator tells us, is “one of the greatest archivists, biographers and reconstructors of anonymous human lives” (231). Using cardboard boxes, Boltanski fills each one with “the photographs and souvenirs of anonymous people, these endless archives of ordinary mortals,” so endowing them with “the right to a prolonged life” (232). In another installation called “The Missing House,” Boltanski located a space on Berlin’s Grosse Hamburgerstrasse, where a house had been destroyed in the Second World War. Using the walls of the neighbouring buildings, he puts up “plates with the names and occupations of the former occupants. Most of the former occupants were Jews killed by the Nazis” (231). Boltanski’s memory work details the occupants’ lives, marking exactly where they lived, but further includes the information of the new occupants as the Jews were deported or left. In this, it contributes to the narrator’s project of building a museum as it
reconstructs the traces of past traumas and individual lives into the present. Like the narrator’s museum, Boltanski’s work demarcates both a physical and virtual space, a memorialization which becomes pertinent in the work of mourning when we remember that, in the Holocaust, many victims’ bodies continue to be missing, incinerated or buried anonymously in mass graves. Santner’s study of creaturely life is particularly apt for reading this interplay of the physical and the virtual because he actually turns to the example of Boltanski’s “Missing House” installation in order to develop his notion of spectral materialism. For Santner, Boltanski’s “archive of absence” is critical in demonstrating how a traumatic history can become visible through spectral materialism as a critical practice that reanimates the vanished world of the once real (53). But perhaps more compelling and valuable is Santner’s assertion that the affective melancholy of Boltanski’s work “becomes infused with the curiosity and rigor of historical research” (53). For Santner, it is this scholarly attention to historical specificity that leads an understanding of the conditions of political violence and opens up an ethical relation to its faceless victims, similar to what Judith Butler has termed “wak[ing] to the precariousness of the other’s lives,” thus allowing for a course of grief and mourning (Precarious Life 139).

The work of art exhibitions are public memorializations then, creating symbolic sites of loss that call upon the viewer to participate as witness and mourner. As the narrator points out in the work of the artist Jochen Gerz, the aim is to create a “an unusual monument” by inscribing the memory of the dead onto the physical space of the city (224):

Having discovered that 2146 Jewish graves in Germany had been destroyed, Gerz and [his] students stole paving stones from the main square [and]…inscribed the name and number of a vanished Jewish grave on the bottom of each square, and then put them back in their place. The main square in Saarbrücken acquired a new name: The Square of the Invisible Monument. (224)
The square, transformed into a public site of testimony, sanctions a form of remembering that mourns the city’s disappeared communities and its traumatic history. Another installation, entitled “Projected Restoring,” created by the artist, Shimon Attie, similarly stresses the importance of revisiting the past as part of the process of recognising loss. Attempting to insert “fragments of past life into the visual field of the present,” Attie’s project superimposes photograph slides from different times of Scheunenviertel, “the once famous Berlin Jewish quarter” (164):

The visitor gradually noticed that he was turning from an observer into a voyeur, a witness in which in the blank windows of an abandoned building in Oraninenburgstrasse the past suddenly came to life. This hologram effect – past life penetrating and eating away the surface of the present like a damp patch – filled the observer with painful disquiet. It suddenly seemed that forgetting was another form of remembering, just as remembering was another form of forgetting. (165)

If the scene above conveys a form of testimony, it also implies complicity – the transformation into a voyeur – as Attie’s viewers, born years after these historical events, either confront or become conscious of the loss of a Jewish community; in effect, they grasp the way society easily forgets and obliterates traces of the past. The intrusion of the past into the present that generates the feeling of “painful disquiet,” suggests a variation of LaCapra’s “empathic unsettlement” (Writing History xi). In provoking this response of uneasiness to past traumas, Attie’s art reminds his audience the need for an ethical response to past traumas. To return to LaCapra, we can see Attie’s work as emphasising “the hauntingly possessive ghosts – of traumatic event” that “in various ways, effect everyone,” imparting with “force and insistence…[the] processes of working through” (xi). This process is linked to new generations and to the creation of a new collective consciousness that remains vigilant to the atrocities of the past in order to prevent their recurrence in the future.
It is such productive artistic visions that offer strategies of remembering, reminding the narrator to view history as a discontinuous site from which she can retrieve the past and locate its archives in the present. While Berlin incorporates polysemic histories, these are not always evident or obvious to its inhabitants. Instead, like the artists preoccupied with the past, the narrator is attuned to “the most various interconnections” between histories and places, paying careful attention to the way the former presence of communities is transformed and hidden over time (Museum 161). Walking through Berlin’s streets, the narrator describes her sense that “[l]ayers of time pile one over the other,” as disparate histories and disappeared lives cohere together (221). Berlin provides what the narrator calls “a secret topography” that offers evidence to the city’s pasts (138). Consider her reaction to Berlin’s biggest (and artificial) hill, Teufelsberg. In a portrayal that suggests the reversal of forgetting and evokes an earlier scene on witness anxiety – the reference to the grassy mound that threatens to hide the evidence of the Yugoslav wars – the narrator sees through Teufelsberg’s grassy surface, under which “pulsate[s] 26 million cubic metres of rubble from the ruins of Berlin, collected and dragged here after the Second World War” (159-60). If “Teufelsberg is like a walrus that has swallowed too many things,” then “Berlin is [also] Teufelsberg, a walrus which has swallowed too many indigestible items” (160-61). Like Boltanski and Gerz, the narrator finds herself attuned to the spectral traces of the past:

That is why one has to tread carefully in Berlin streets; without thinking, the walker could step on someone’s roof. The asphalt is only a thin crust covering human bones. Yellow stars, black swastikas, red hammers and sickles crunch like cockroaches under the walker’s feet. (161)

This compression of time is central to the notion of spectral materialism, where the “living and the dead, the past and the present” fuse together in “one, inseparable life” (Museum 160). In
seeing and accumulating these objects of the past, the narrator’s virtual museums spring into being, monuments of material pasts that have long since vanished. What we see is the narrator’s ability to construct a legacy from the buried past, by creating a literary and historical archive. In *Museum*, the novel in its material form constitutes a historical artifact, bearing evidence to a Yugoslav collective memory. In the context of the 1993 establishment of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTFY), Ugresic’s literary project pertains to the collective efforts towards justice not just because the novel responds to revisionist accounts, but in the way it provides a public recognition to Yugoslav culture and the traumas suffered. In doing so, it promises its readers imaginative sites where oppositional politics can be carried out and future communities can be established.

*The Ministry of Pain: Yugoslav Refugees and Institutions*

Although written ten years later, Ugresic’s *The Ministry of Pain* takes up the *Museum*’s concern with the importance of an institutional framework for sharpening the relationship between ethics, politics, trauma, and memory. Written during the trial of Slobodan Milosevic, and incorporating scenes from the lengthy proceedings of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTFY), *Ministry* suggests that some of the difficulties of working through trauma are related to the constraints of existing institutions. Alongside the ICTFY and the efforts of the international community to deliver justice, *Ministry* also examines the development of alternative institutions created by individuals to deal with the shattered past, such as a virtual museum, compiled of Yugonostalgic memories, and the “Ministry of Pain,” a code of behaviour that exposes the self to pain in a bid to overcome trauma. But, whereas *Museum* depicts the way institutions can be constructed to remember a collective identity,
Ministry makes a bleaker prognosis, exploring instead the problems of institutions in managing what might be understood as a pan-European trauma economy. By trauma economy I refer to the way certain traumas are “recognized” by state institutions, a recognition that confers status to its victims. Once conferred, the victim-status becomes a form of (social) capital, which designated individuals can then trade upon. The most obvious form of this trauma capital is, of course, refugee status. Consider, for example, the consequences of the government of the Netherlands’s decision to grant refugee status to citizens of the former Yugoslavia. These refugees are officially recognised as victims of a trauma and this secures not only their right of residence but also authorizes and legitimises certain activities. In granting this status, the government of the Netherlands can be said, in a way, to be “paying” their debt, for their culpable role in the disintegration of Yugoslavia and the mass violence perpetrated during the Yugoslav wars.181

Like Museum, Ministry is concerned with securing a collective Yugoslav memory through the establishment of an alternative museum, described as “a virtual…‘Yugonostalgic’ museum” (55). But in this case, the new museum only calls attention to the incommensurable traumas suffered by different Yugoslavs and the difficulties of reconciliation and closure. In other words, it appears that Ugresic has lost her optimistic faith in the capacity of institutions. Faced with institutional insufficiencies and failures, the novel turns instead towards more individual, personal, and immediate notions of justice and catharsis through the ministering of pain, which offers the characters temporary relief and escape from guilt. Yet, the standard psychoanalytic reading of such ministering acts is to locate the masochistic impulse as a

181 This culpability can be measured in many ways but it should be clear that I do not mean to suggest that the Netherlands was solely responsible for the Yugoslav wars. Instead, this culpability could be understood in broader terms as one nation’s guilt or self-reproach for having failed to live up to the standards of international humanitarianism, and intervening to stop the violence. See chapter Four for more detail.
symptom of trauma that implies the impossibility of healing. Hence, the novel suggests that, without institutional reform, we see not only the perpetuation of injustice, but also the impossibility of mourning and of suturing together the broken multi-cultures of the former Yugoslavia.

Set in Amsterdam, *Ministry* introduces Tanja Lukic, a visiting lecturer in the Department of Slavonic Languages and Literatures at the University of Amsterdam. Tanja and her partner, Goran, originally left Croatia after he was forced out of his university job for being a Serb. They first emigrated to Berlin but, when their marriage fails, Goran leaves for a university job in Japan, while Tanja finds work in the Netherlands. The novel opens with Tanja teaching a class on Serbo-Croat to a class whose students are, with one exception, themselves all expatriate Yugoslavs. Together, they attempt to reconcile themselves to the concept of a lost home and its repudiated culture. In must be noted that, strictly speaking, Tanja is neither a war victim nor a refugee but rather a member of the growing class of itinerant cosmopolitan university academics. Nevertheless, in her we can trace vicarious trauma as well as the trauma of exile, caught up as she is in the “awful, painful, bloody mess” of the Yugoslav wars (135). Simultaneously, Tanja wonders whether she had “subconsciously turned the misfortune of others into an excuse not to return” (14). Her awareness of the out-migration of refugees and ex-Yugoslavs during the wars calls attention to the way the institutions of nation-states are key in processing asylum seekers. As Tanja explains:

> Europe was teeming with former Yugos. The wave of war émigrés numbered in the hundreds of thousands. Hundreds of thousands of recorded names, names of people with legal refugee status. Sweden had accepted some seventy thousand, German three hundred thousand, Holland fifty thousand. As for the illegals, their number was legion. We were everywhere. And nobody’s story was personal enough or shattering enough. Because death itself had lost its power to shatter. There had been too many deaths. (23)  

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182 The quote above goes on to say that this “bloody mess” ties Tanja together with the “hanged man and hangman, victim and victimizer, guard and prisoner, judge and defendant…” (135).
Here, the influx of traumatised refugees has become normalised as a mundane reality to the point that their trauma is not seen as a moral claim but is considered inadequate – not “personal…or shattering enough.” Equally, the hospitality of states is also contingent on how “shattering” the trauma of refugees is perceived. The Dutch authorities, for instance, “were particularly generous about granting asylum to those who claimed they had been discriminated against…for ‘sexual difference,’ more generous than to the war’s rape victims” (17). But Tanja’s acerbic commentary, like her self-awareness, also illustrates the other side of this equation; refugees who climb onto the “bandwagon in droves” and acquired numerous passports, see asylum as a “national lottery” that offers not only a solution to victims, but also an “opportunity” to others who are not (17-18). What is clear is that in the messiness of war, and the ongoing process of reconciliation, “mental institutions, prisons, and courtrooms became part of everyday life” (13). This point is particularly pertinent to those whose lives are dependent on these sovereignties: the immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers.

If institutions are part of the everyday societal fabric for Yugoslavia’s refugees, they also offer hope, including, in particular, ways to rethink cultural identity, to break with the past, and move into new futures. Consider the story that Tanja hears about a refugee, in exile with her family, who finds out that the German authorities plan to deport all Bosnian refugees. Persuading her doctor to get a “false referral to a psychiatric hospital,” the refugee is presented with a way to break from her old life and start anew (13):

Her two-week stay [in the hospital] was like a breath of fresh air, so bracing, so redolent of freedom that she decided not to return. And so she vanished, disappeared, changed her identity. Nobody knew what had happened to her, and she never went back to her family.

I’d heard dozens of similar stories. The war meant great losses for many, but it could also be a reason to slough off an old life and start from scratch. In any case, it radically altered human destinies. (13)
As we see in this anecdote, the ability to “slough off an old life” is achieved not through following the established course of conditions set up by institutions, but by exploiting institutions. Whereas one institution will attempt to exert control over peoples’ lives, the manipulation of another will offer an extraordinary opportunity to escape. The Bosnian refugee is able to counter the failure of the German nation by entering its institutional spaces, utilizing them unconventionally to retake control of her life. In such radical acts we observe how the latent agency of everyday institutions can be reactivated and deployed by the dispossessed, allowing them to ingratiate themselves in new communities and at a new level of control.

**The University Asylum: The Pedagogy of Yugonostalgia**

The story of this unnamed Bosnian woman accomplishes a function in this novel similar to that by the tale of Roland, the walrus in *Museum*; each anticipates Ugresic’s larger project. Here in *Ministry*, the Bosnian woman’s exploitation of the asylum (using a mental asylum as a means to secure political asylum) metonymizes the work done by Tanja and her students in the university. On a very basic level, it should be obvious that the students are using their university status as a way to defer returning to the new nations that have sprung from the former Yugoslavia. But more significant is the way Tanja uses her pedagogic authority to transform the class into a forum where she and her students can explore, discuss, and perhaps even work through their trauma. Technically, this is supposed to be class on Serbo-Croat literature, but for Tanja and her students it becomes a site of therapy, in which to explore “a subject that officially no longer existed” where formalist structures are abolished, grades are immaterial, and the class members “absolved of play-acting” the roles of teacher and student (40; 39).
The university setting here is crucial, not only because it reminds the reader of the formative role played by pedagogical apparatuses in constructing the idea of a Yugoslavia and its subsequent discourse of Yugonostalgia. It also foregrounds the ethical obligation of the intellectual to initiate new forms of community amongst traumatised individuals; Tanja explains that “The house was in ruins and it was my job to clear a path through the rubble” (40). At the same time, Ugresic is careful not to suggest that this job can be completed by an arbitrary intellectual. Instead, Tanja’s urge to help her students is energised by her own experience, both in terms of her personal sense of dislocation and of Goran’s self-pitying bitterness. Attuned to the imprints of collective trauma on other Yugoslavian war émigrés, who “vainly sought the coordinates of space they had left behind them,” Tanja recognizes that despair, insecurity, and humiliation hold together the community of suffering ex-Yugoslavs (24). She diagnoses her students as “[c]onvalescents…people recovering from an illness or trauma of some kind” (61). Yet, she is also deeply sceptical of nostalgic attachments to what she calls the “herd” of Yugoslav refugees that stretches out to include a nebulous Slavic solidarity (26). In particular, she empathizes with her students’ ambivalence about their collective identity of “common misfortune” (25). Tanja is sensitive to the way her students are caught between the various identity categories imposed upon them from the outside by cultures, institutions, and nation-states:

The break-up of the country, the war, the repression of memory, the “phantom limb syndrome,” the general schizophrenia and then exile – these, I was certain, were the reasons for my students’ emotional and linguistic problems. We were all in chaos. None of us was sure who or what we were, to say nothing of who or what we wanted to be. At home my students resented being typecast as Yugonostalgics, that is, dinosaurs, but they felt little affinity with the pre-packed retrofuture of the newly minted states. And here in Holland they were stigmatised as “the beneficiaries of political asylum,” “refugees” or “foreigners,” as “children of post-communism,” “the fall-out of Balkanization,” or “savages.” (57-8)
It seems strange, therefore, that Tanja should choose the resented Yugonostalgia as a way to overcome the misery of exile. But this is precisely what occurs as Tanja and her students catalogue and store their “everyday life in Yugoslavia” within a “‘Yugonostalgic’ museum” thus, as in Museum, contributing to an alternative form of institution-building (55). The students collect and share their personal wistful and humorous anecdotes in their efforts to create a virtual museum. It is this Yugonostalgic collection, one geared towards a joyful and comedic critical appreciation of the Yugoslav past that forms the central motif in the classroom for memorializing and celebrating a lost Yugoslavia.

Yugonostalgia, as I have explained earlier in this chapter, exists as several versions. The variant that Tanja strives for can be understood as a concept that “opens up many possibilities for coming to terms with the Yugoslav past and its tragic consequences” (Volčić 34). But equally, Tanja’s Yugonostalgia is an ironic reappropriation of existing forms Yugonostalgia that both “salvages what [the students] don’t want to forget” but also mocks this past (57). We can contrast Tanja’s Yugonostalgia with other less humorous forms that other characters revert to in their nostalgic recreation of the past. Consider for instance, Tanja’s in-laws, who had once “hated Tito,” but now have “decided to rehabilitate him” and have a picture of him hanging up in their pantry (105). Tanja’s father-in-law has always resented Tito ever since he made an inappropriate political remark that resulted in his detention in a labour camp. Yugonostalgia, seen in the poster of Tito, symbolises a form of wish-fulfilment, one choice when there is a lack of options, that contrasts the stability of the past (rewritten as a sepia-tinted history) against the confusion and hostile politics of contemporary life: “Clearly they preferred the Tito years to the current situation, though they didn’t dare say so out loud, just as there had been many things they didn’t dare say during the Tito years” (106).
As a teacher, who constantly engages her own sense of alienation, Tanja struggles with the responsibility of guiding her students, helping them to find an answer to her question: “What should [Yugoslav] people who have moved to another country do?” (236). Yugoslonostalgia offers a partial solution, helping the students to “come to grips with [their] past” and “make [their] peace with it” (59). As a culture of remembrance, Yugoslonostalgia is used by Tanja as a pedagogical practice that shares collective experience and offers a mode of working through. In this it resembles what Roger Simon et al, in their work on pedagogy and historical trauma, have called a “memorial pedagogy” (3). For Tanja, this form of ironic Yugoslonostalgia is an act of “political subversion,” with which comes the “right to remember” (57). It is a “most viable testimony to the existence of a Yugoslav life,” carrying a therapeutic dimension in the act of re-establishing authority and contesting the silencing of voices from the past (50). The aim of Yugoslonostalgia is to create what might be understood as a safe space in Tanja’s classroom to reconstruct “a territory that belonged equally to us,” that “would hurt us all as little as possible” (Ministry 57).

But here, I want to emphasise that Yugoslonostalgia, as I have suggested in my analysis of Museum, can also be a highly ambivalent and uncritical practice, deriving from a fantasy that is incommensurate with lived life. This is something that Tanja grapples with and she frequently illuminates her conflicted feelings about its use within any ethical pedagogical model. For instance, consider the anxiety prompted when her students resuscitate Yugoslav codewords, “word[s that were] used by Yugoslav children in the fifties and early sixties,” such as “comrade,” in the classroom. These words are signs of another time, in currency with a generation that belongs neither to the teacher nor her students. Tanja worries that the shibboleth is “not so much a word as the tinkle of a Pavlovian bell” (15). Her concern is that, for the
students, the term is deracinated, separated from the conditions of everyday life out of which it emerged and is therefore unassociated with any meaningful memory or experience of the term’s usage (15).

This uncertain register of meaning makes Tanja ever more anxious about her authority as a teacher and she confesses that “stimulating the memory was as much a manipulation of the past as banning it” (58). For example, although Tanja tells her students that Serbian, Bosnian, and Croatian are dialects of one language, rather than three separate languages, she later reminds herself that Yugoslavia’s multiethnic language is really her experience of the past, rather than theirs (41). At the same time, she admits that the source language is not autochthonous. It too is artificial, because it has been created by institutions: “backed by an army; it too had been manipulated, polluted by a heavily ideologized Yugo-speak” (42). As Tanja concedes, to recall the past is also to expose it as a fantasy construct:

Perhaps by stimulating memories of the past I would destroy its halo. Or perhaps my attempt to reconstruct the past would end in no more than a pale imitation, thus exposing the poverty of the ‘baggage’ we deemed so powerful. (63)

Tanja’s dilemma relates here to the difficulties in using Yugonostalgia as a viable resource for a collective identity. In evoking mythicised or aggrandised memories of the past, that past is revealed is elusive or deficient. Yugoslavia ceases to be a definite rallying point or a symbolic site of identification. In turn, the precariousness of such a legacy (that is more fantasy or ideology than fact) threatens to undermine the small Yugoslav community fostered by Tanja.

The insufficiencies of Yugonostalgia become apparent when we consider how, in its conventional form, it implements a singular narrative of collective identity that both evades critical reflection on the Yugoslavia’s break-up and cannot be reconciled to the diverse experiences of suffering by ex-Yugoslavs. In this sense it fails as a putative “memorial
pedagogy,” since, as Roger I. Simon et al. emphasise, such a practice of remembrance “must 
find a way to initiate a continual unsettling and an interminable asking of pedagogical questions 
regarding what it means to be taught by the experience of others” (6). The point of this 
unsettlement is to pass on a traumatic history to a community, which amounts to learning from 
the mistakes of the past. In contrast, Tanja desires to create a comforting space that avoids any 
encounter with the traumatic and divisive past through a nostalgic return to Yugoslav life. As 
she admits: “I had offered [my students] the painless territory of the past, trying to protect them 
as parents protected their children and children their friends” (134-35, emphasis added). In the 
middle of a Yugonostalgia group session a student named Selim calls attention to his personal 
experience of trauma, and in doing so Tanja describes how he both perturbs the community and 
challenges their rosy view of the Yugoslav past:

“What about Omarska?”
The room was suddenly still. I flinched.
“Do you want to talk about it, Selim?”
“What’s there to say? It’s the only virtual exhibit I’ve got. The Serbs slit my dad’s throat 
there.” …
I’d been picking my way through a minefield from the start. We all had our war 
memories, and losses like Selim’s were immeasurable. (55-56)

Selim’s reference to Omarska, the Bosnian concentration camp run by the Serbs, insistently 
recalls the insurmountable atrocities carried out during the Yugoslav wars and communicates 
the uneven, disparate experiences of this war. Such memories of trauma drive a wedge through 
the community of Yugoslav students not just by reminding them of the distinctions between 
perpetrators and victims as well as different kinds of victimhood but mostly, by stressing the 
impossibility of finding “common ground” for the expatriate Yugoslav students (59). In fact, the 
very word “expatriate” locates the problem: there is no patria to be ex from. We can see an 
ethical failure in this project of a nostalgic return to the past: Tanja’s celebration of Yugoslavia
made whole again mourns one kind of nebulous and collective loss (the break up of Yugoslavia) whilst simultaneously disavowing the psychological wounds inflicted in the face of persistent trauma and by the contemporary political situation.

Selim’s comments illustrate how Yugonostalgia provides a legacy that denies the possibility of mourning. Yugonostalgia, instead, functions as a tactic of repression, creating a cocoon of self-protection, and offering refuge in the consoling fiction of the past. In a later revelation Tanja confesses: “I had forgotten about the war during the course of the semester. So had the students” (127). Zala Volčič has called attention to Yugonostalgia as cultivating denial when she asserts that it can serve as “an avoidance mechanism” that fails “to raise crucial political questions about the destructive aspects of nationalist discourse, the divisive memories of the wars of the 1990s, and the framing of the grief they caused” (35). In terms of mourning, this becomes problematic, since the collective body that practices Yugonostalgia wards off traumatic memories instead of working through them. For the wars’ victims, the situation is particularly bleak since they face a collective silence over the traumatic events of the past; moreover, this legacy of silence has serious consequences for notions of justice because Yugonostalgia allow various social agents “to continue to deny responsibility for the wars and their aftermath” (Volčič 34).

The unfeasibility of Yugonostalgia as “group therapy” becomes more explicit in the novel when a series of interruptive events, including the suicide of a student, result in the disciplining of Tanja by the departmental head (159). The first warning sign appears in the anonymous note Tanja receives written in the defunct Serbo-Croat language. Addressed to “Yugobitch,” the note uses the clichés of socialist Yugoslavia in order to undermine everything that it stands for (181). The dangers of Yugonostalgia are recounted when one of her students,
Uroš, drunkenly sings a Yugoslav song, which was once an anti-war poem against the Nazi occupation, but had since been “turned into its opposite,” to shore up the nationalist politics of Slobodan Milosevic (89). Uroš’s revelry highlights the way Yugonostalgia can quickly turn into arsenal that destroys romantic nostalgia while propping up the ideologies of ethno-nationalism (89). In the meantime, anonymous complaints reach the Departmental Head that Tanja’s classes are “chaotic” and a “waste of time” (158). Faced with this “denunciation,” Tanja is forced to treat the institutional space as a proper class. She discourages personal contact with her students and the class shrinks to less than half its original size (164).

But it is the suicide of Uroš that drives home the dangers of repressing the traumas of the war. Uroš kills himself while his father, “suspected of war crimes,” was “under interrogation at the Hague Tribunal” (124). Uroš’s death imparts massive guilt for Tanja who, feeling she has failed as a teacher, is thrown back into “the fray, the nightmare” of the past and the war (127). Consumed with guilt, Tanja finds she cannot “concentrate on anything, the thought of Uroš’s death having taken over like a migraine” (129). In the face of this proximate death, Tanja is subjected to secondary trauma and a newly unsettled state of mind that suggests her helplessness in failing to prevent Uroš’s suicide. She awakens to the overwhelming traumas and spate of suicides suffered by her fellow Yugoslavs in the aftermath of the war and experiences a form of “pain pounding in [her] temples” (136). As though to expunge her feelings of guilt, Tanja begins to seek solace in the “the consolation of self-humiliation” in order to make this psychic pain disappear (136).
The (Im)possibilities of the International Criminal Tribunal

One opportunity that promises to satiate Tanja’s “hungering for absolution” presents itself in the form of the international tribunal at The Hague, allowing her to confront the suffering of the Yugoslav wars, which she had been avoiding so far (140). Tanja and her student Igor visit the ICTFY, to see for themselves the workings of justice and the trial of Uroš’s father. In view of her failed experimentations with Yugonostalgia, the international tribunal represents for Tanja the hope of an institutional response to the Yugoslav wars. As Laurel E. Fletcher and Harvey M. Weinstein have pointed out in their essay on justice and reconciliation, many diplomats, legal scholars, and human-rights activists frequently conceptualise international criminal courts as “the centrepiece of social repair” (578). In his comparative study on tribunals, Gary Bass has argued that international courts, such as The Hague, are crucial for reconciliation, not only because they differ from previous conqueror’s courts, like Nuremberg, so preventing retributive justice, but also because in establishing official acknowledgement of war crimes, they counter denials that such events ever took place.\(^{183}\) The ICTFY also offers what Tanja sees as a “longer and more meaningful process” of reconciliation, in contrast to “the overnight divorce” of the new Balkan states (Ministry 42). Like the lengthy historical construction of a single Serbo-Croat language, Tanja talks about the building of bridges and roads, metaphorical symbols for the rebuilding of a fractured community, also involving “a much longer and more meaningful process than their overnight destruction” (42). International criminal tribunals are “meaningful” in the sense of coming to terms with or alleviating trauma because they exhume the past in an

\(^{183}\) Bass 302-5. The denial of atrocities is prevalent in the aftermath of the Yugoslav wars, most particularly, in reference to the Bosnian war. Bass points out that Bosnian Serb President, Radovan Karadžić, denied the executions at Srebrenica in 1995; Bass also notes that there is much scepticism about atrocities in Europe. For instance, some groups claimed that media footage of Bosnian prisoners at the Trnopolje concentration camp was faked; also, the magazine Living Marxists maintained that Bosnian Muslims bombed themselves in order to turn the international community against the Bosnian Serbs.
attempt to pursue justice for the victims. Consequently, they carry a great deal of symbolic currency because their reappraisal (i.e., the gathering of evidence from witnesses, the detailed investigation and prosecution of perpetrators) constitutes a public act that identifies the traumas suffered and, through justice, promotes reparations thus “mending” the traumatised community. Unlike Yugonostalgia, the ICTFY is a public institutional arena. The very emphasis that the ICTFY places on traumas and mass violence denotes a mode of working through that both promotes public awareness and foregrounds issues of social accountability.

Yet, it is impossible to read Ugresic’s novel, published some ten years after the ICTFY was set up, and not be aware of that tribunal’s failings. Established in May 1993, at the height of the Yugoslav wars, by the United Nations Security Council, the ICTFY has been dogged by its costly, lengthy, and ineffective trials. Despite charging over one hundred and twenty-six defendants (many of whom are still awaiting trial), the ICTFY is known more for its failure to arrest suspects, most prominently its senior figures – Radko Mladic and (until 2008) Radovan Karadžić – indicted for war crimes in Bosnia. The ICTFY is also identified with its inability to convict Slobodan Milosevic (who died in custody after four hundred and sixty-seven days of trial). Tanja’s visit to the ICTFY presages these failures and subjects to scrutiny the idealism of the tribunal. Arriving at the ICTFY, Tanja is struck by the building’s resemblance to “Yugoslav socialist architecture of the sixties and seventies;” heralding the “ideals of the radiant future, internationalism, and justice for all” (137). This uncanny resemblance to a political ideal now considered dated, if not defunct, suggests that these goals are somewhat misplaced, not

184 See Melvin for more details. The figures for the Milosevic trial are from a talk given by Ian Reid who works at the ICT. See also Bass who gives an excellent overview of the problems of the ICTFY including, the fears of a nationalist backlash in response to what is seen as “the spectacle of foreign-imposed trials” (285); the problem of the ICTFY’s focus on individual justice, thus “exonerating many of the guilty” (300); the politicization of trials set up by nations in response either to the ineffectiveness of the ICTFY (e.g. Bosnia) or because they refuse to acknowledge its legitimacy (e.g. Croatia and Serbia: in fact, Bass notes that Serbian local courts have charged NATO leaders, “including Clinton, Blair, Albright, Chirac, and Cook with war crimes” (310).
because these goals in themselves are not righteous, but rather because the parallel with a state’s ideological politics undermines their credibility.

Indeed, many scholars have attacked the premise of the ICTFY for its aspirations to represent internationalism in a world where the idea of cosmopolitan justice is possible only so long as it does not conflict with the interests of the dominant nation states. Tzvetan Todorov, for instance, argues, “the project for international justice has a utopian aspect, since it claims to impose the rule of law without concerning itself with the balance of power. It is dangerous to take refuge in that illusion” (Golsan 316). The external façade of the ICTFY certainly replicates this utopian aspect. But, on the inside of the building, this utopia is undercut as Tanja finds herself watching the “endless, tedious stringing together of details that made no sense whatsoever to us” (139). She is both underwhelmed by the tribunal and by the prosecution of Uroš’s father, a man “with an eminently forgetful face” (138). If this recalls Hannah Arendt’s commentary on Eichmann’s trial and the agents of the Holocaust as “terribly and terrifyingly normal,” Tanja’s unease further critiques not so much the mundane normalcy of embodied evil, as the way the legal structure of the institution instigates a disengagement from pain and trauma (Arendt 276). In the courtroom, crimes are abstracted into a bureaucratic production that is nothing other than a formalist ritual of legal documents, performed by the defendants, judges, lawyers, clerks, and spectators. In this process, affect dissipates within bureaucratic and legalistic procedure; notions of pain, trauma, and guilt are displaced as the “evil [is transformed] into a mechanical plot line, as mechanical as any other” (139). In this setting, the absence of amnesty means that agency, guilt, and responsibility are pushed into the background. Instead,

185 Todorov however does advocate internationalism from below rather than from above.
186 It might be productive to contrast (briefly) the ICTFY with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in South Africa, where an offer of amnesty was made to perpetrators in exchange for a public, full disclosure of their involvement. In this way, the TRC tried to differ from the highly formalist *in camera* proceedings of other state
culpability can be explained away as duty, thus exculpating all those “who had destroyed the country” (139); but alongside the “leaders, politicians, generals, soldiers, crooks, murderers, Mafiosi,” Tanja includes a more complex and fuzzier set of people, such as “liars, thieves, villains and volunteers” (139).

The weakness of the ICTFY is not relegated to its failure to prosecute successfully Tanja’s list of Yugoslav offenders (who are palpably absent from the proceedings). Nor does Tanja criticise the setbacks and the difficulties faced by the ICTFY in indicting suspects, a point made elsewhere by scholars. Instead, she focuses on its moral authority, finds it flawed, and concludes by asking whether this undermines the very basis that empowers the court to prosecute, demarcate, and judge perpetrators vis-à-vis victims. To return to a point Todorov and other critics have called attention to, Tanja exposes “the selective justice” of the ICTFY where certain (western) nations and organisations, such as the United States and the United Nations, in positions of economic power, consider themselves neutral and immune from prosecution for similar crimes (Golsan 316). Watching the men in the dock, Tanja considers the wide range of those complicit in the Yugoslav wars, many of who will never be tried:

I wondered how things stood with the hundreds of thousands of nameless people without whose fervid support there could have been no war. Did they felt guilt? And what about that herd of foreign politicians, diplomats, envoys, and military personnel who had

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187 See Bass, de Bertodano, and Meron. Bass, for example, talks about the ICTFY’s lack of funding and Meron on the lack of cooperation from Serbian, Bosnian Serbian, and Croatian authorities. The problems of collecting evidence and finding suspects in Bosnia have been particularly detrimental to building up a case. Meron notes that suspects have been sheltered and hidden, while sites of massacres have been deliberately obstructed. Moreover, “Witnesses, even victims, have withheld their testimony from the tribunal’s investigators…[due to] the fear of reprisal (Meron 3).

188 See de Bertodano, who points out that while some countries have been tried for mass atrocities, others – such as those responsible for mass murders during the Vietnam war, the regimes in Cambodia, Chile, Uruguay, and Iraq – have not been held to account (indeed there are many more nation states one could add to the list). For de Bertodano, this “is often seen as a sign of cynicism in the international community, a sign that the UN is unequal in its treatment of equally culpable governments and dictators for reasons of economics, politics and apathy” (410).
stamped through the country? Not only had they been liberally paid; they had earned the epithet of saviour to say nothing of promotions in the UN or whatever institutional hierarchy they chanced to represent… Did they feel guilty? They too were only doing their duty. Just like the sniper on the hill who gunned down the woman in the streets of Sarajevo. Just like the foreign photographer who took the woman’s picture (though it never occurred to him to call an ambulance) and won a prize for the best war photo of the year. (139-40)

The Yugoslav wars, and the Bosnian war especially, to paraphrase Benjamin Disraeli, represent a career to many. The questions of western culpability and western opportunism remain unanswered, particularly in the face of mass media interest in the break up of Yugoslavia and its wars.\textsuperscript{189} For example, in their study on the Western response to the Yugoslav wars, Thomas Cushman and Stjepan G. Meštrović denounce the West as a “voyeur… a silent witness to some of the worst atrocities and crimes against humanity to occur in Europe this century” (3).\textsuperscript{190} In demanding justice, Tanja implicitly suggests that Western nations be put on trial not only for their double standards, but also for their exploitation of this war to serve their careerist ends.

The ICTFY disappoints Tanja since she, recalling the great historical instances of retributive justice at Nuremberg and Eichmann’s trial, had expected to “see instant punishment meted out” (142). Instead, she sees her experience as “a flop” and leaves feeling “empty-handed” (142). Her student companion sympathises, saying that “The Hague is no Nuremberg” (142). But simply because it fails to meet the criteria of those courts of revenge, it does not follow that the tribunal is without a purpose. When she leaves the court, Tanja compares her feelings to “leaving a funeral at which one wasn’t quite sure who was being buried” (142). This

\textsuperscript{189} Most critics call attention to the UN’s one-sided arms embargo that prevented the newly independent republics, such as Bosnia, from arming themselves whilst leaving the JNA (Yugoslav National Army) arsenal and manpower untouched in the hands of the Serbs. See Cushman and Meštrović, and Rieff, Slaughterhouse. Chapter Four of my thesis engages with the media interest in Bosnia.

\textsuperscript{190} Cushman and Meštrović argue that the West “actually abetted genocide...by allowing the perpetrators to proceed with a guarantee that they would not be punished” (1-2). This refers both to the UN arms embargo, effectively guaranteeing Serbs – who had control of the JNA – little by way of serious resistance, and to the way that Western leaders treated Milosevic, and even Mladic and Karadžić as peacekeepers.
simile is revealing because a funeral functions as a symbolic mourning ceremony that laments the death of an individual. To feel confusion over whose funeral it is suggests not only an inappropriately farcical edge to an otherwise solemn occasion, but also denotes how the practice of mourning becomes difficult or even impossible since you do not know whom you are mourning for. Moreover, the prospect of achieving an informed public commemoration of trauma remains elusive, though the formalistic aspect of the ICTFY’s ceremonies, its “exorbitant rigmarole,” remains (143). The empty legal rituals of the court are suggested by Tanja’s vision of a miniature Hague Tribunal “the size of a matchbox,” reduced into insignificance, with “tiny judges in tiny gowns, tiny defendants and witnesses, tiny counsels for the defence and the prosecution, miniature surrogates simulating a life in which right and wrong exist” (236). We can either read the ICTFY through Tanja’s eyes in two main ways: either it constitutes an idealised version of real life that also posits a misplaced hope, or it suggests a grand spectacle of disingenuous pretence. In both senses, the contrast with “actuality” is stark, which, as Tanja notes, is far bleaker, with “no right people and wrong people, no good people and bad people; [instead] there is only the mechanics of it all, the operation” (236).

Tanja’s perception of the courtroom as a “miniature surrogate,” a simulation of a life (and indeed a simplification of it) in which certainties exist more forcefully than in real life, is reminiscent of Jean Baudrillard’s essay “The Precession of Simulacra” (1994). Baudrillard argues that simulation represents the world of the hyperreal, a world full of references but devoid of a real that might serve as a referent. Instead, simulacra, substances “without origin or reality,” overtakes the real (1). It might be helpful to think about the ICTFY courtroom is a hyperreal space, a theatrical podium that presents a “play of illusions and phantasms” (Baudrillard 12). As Tanja comments, you need “passes” to get in, like “for a movie” and the
court communicates much of its proceedings through technological filters (127). Thus, the spectators in the court sit behind a thick glass wall, and wait for the shutters to go up before the hearings proceed. The spectator area offers several television monitors from which the proceedings can be viewed and provides headsets with which to hear the different translations of the action. It is a mark of the hyperreal that Tanja finds the television image proves “more reliable than the live proceedings” (138). But the reality behind the glass wall, like the “unreal” polyglossic babble of multiple translations she hears, inspires “no more confidence than the ‘real’ reality: both of them – the one that churned out lies... and the one that promised the truth... were equally fantastic” (138). This impression reinforces Baudrillard’s claim that simulation is “the radical negation of the sign as value” so that even the real outside of the simulation is not real; instead “the whole edifice of representation itself [must be understood] as a simulacrum” (6).

This hyperreality draws in the spectator not just so that they are compelled to watch – Tanja and Igor find they are “glued to the TV screen” – but so that they become complicit, “accomplices” of the “perverted reality” constructed by the court (140). As Tanja explains:

In a world thus mediated – and mediated so many times over – everyone was guilty. Crime was unreal. Everything was unreal. I felt that it would take no more than a single click of the mouse to do away with the judges, the defendants and us, the spectators. One blissful, conciliatory delete. (140)

In this scenario, we are reminded of the virtual dimensions of reality. Implicitly, Tanja alludes to different ways of avoiding the “reality” of the Yugoslav wars. Firstly, there is the international broadcast and mediation of the war, which allows the spectator both to consume the war as entertainment and also switch off the news or internet, thus disconnecting from its reality. Tanja recognizes the “sense of relief” that this departure from reality offers (235). In an earlier scene,
she visits the “virtual” house of Anne Frank on a computer monitor and is haunted by its resemblance to her nightmares of leaving her home. The Escape button offers a real escape to a virtual world; as Tanja explains, “I no longer had anything to fear: escape was always an option” (235). Secondly, television functions as a distraction from the war. It is an “anaesthetic” that offers an escape from a nightmare situation (99). Tanja’s mother, for instance, submerges herself in “cheap soaps,” into a “TV stupor” in her “categorical refusal to confront reality” (99).

Reading the courtroom scene as a simulacrum, we can better understand Tanja’s ensuing sense of unreality and her experiences of emotional numbness (Ministry 32; 234).\footnote{Some of Tanja’s students also suffer from numbness. For instance, Uroš writes to Tanja that he is doing her Serbo-Croat Literature course in order to “recover from a shock” and “come back to life,” suggesting a level of trauma and deadness (31). Later, after reciting a Yugoslav poem, Uros also emulates Tanja’s desire for pain when he “slammed his head against the table” (90).} Whereas Baudrillard argues that the hyperreal is a condition of everyday postmodern life, we see here its effect on a single person, as Tanja’s trauma, her loss of affective agency, is a direct product of her sense that nothing is real. In one scene, evoking the matchbook-sized tribunal, she describes life in Amsterdam as “living in the largest doll’s house in the world, where everything is simulation, nothing is real” (234).\footnote{See also Ministry 81.} This description aptly describes Tanja’s internal state; quite simply, Tanja does not feel real because she cannot feel: “the batteries in my internal control mechanism had gone dead” (226).

Psychologists and scholars have called attention to numbing as a symptom of trauma, particularly post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Numbing refers to a form of disassociation as the traumatised person withdraws from life, consciously or subconsciously attempting to deny or shut down their emotions and memories related to trauma (Gregory, “Venturing” 233; Herman, \textit{Trauma and Recovery} 43-45; Smelser, “Psychological Trauma” 42; van der Kolk and McFarlane 9, 12). Taking up Freud’s theory that trauma involves the tendency “to avoid and to
relive,” these scholars have pointed out that dissociation is also accompanied by the repetition of trauma “in the form of unwanted thoughts, nightmares, or flashbacks” (Smelser, “Psychological Trauma” 53). This also manifests itself at the “behavioural level” leading to the victim’s “strong compulsion to …relive some aspect of [the trauma]” (53).

While Tanja complicates the category of trauma victim – in comparison to her students, her “experience of the war was infinitesimal,” she nevertheless exhibits symptoms of trauma that are linked to her feelings of survivor guilt (meaning not just coming out unscathed from a potentially traumatic situation but also finding herself in a relatively comfortable situation abroad), loss, and personal failure in relation to Uroš as well as her sense of disorientation in Amsterdam (56). Throughout the novel, Tanja describes experiences that suggest trauma. She finds that her sleep is frequently “interrupted by an oppressive but nondescript pain, a painless pain” (169) and troubled by recurring nightmares (213; 243). At first, Tanja embraces the numbness she feels as a powerful “self-induced anaesthesia” (33). But, in her recurring feelings of guilt and her desire for humiliation-as-consolation, Tanja seeks out affect associated with different kinds of pain as though compulsively attempting to relive, or at least, experience the trauma of others.

Two incidents of pain, in particular, haunt Tanja because they arouse strong feelings within her, waking her up from her deadened condition. In one incident, Tanja “witness[es] a scene that pierced [her] like a knife” (80). Here, she sees an old woman coming toward her moaning and with her arms flailing: “She seemed to be rehearsing a list of insults gathered over a lifetime. Even though I could not understand them, they penetrated me to the quick. It was the combination of the shrieks and the dead, papier-mâché face that did me in” (80). In the other incident, Tanja is robbed on a train by a group of young boys. She is startled when one of these
boys turns to her and releases “a long, piercing cry of hate” (234). To her, this cry is “as unexpected and powerful as an electric shock;” cutting through her as “bare and sharp as a knife,” the “hate-driven scream” reverberates in her ears (234). Both scenes are tellingly described as piercings, perforating Tanja’s numbed state (80). Acknowledging that this sensation is both “moving and dreadful” (234), Tanja concludes that pain is the “[o]nly one thing [that] was real” (140). Pain is “the speechless, useless and only true witness” that offers a way to assuage her guilt, her traumatised state, and her sense of loss (140).

Faced with the institutional failures of her Yugonostalgia museum and the ICTFY, individualist notions of justice and catharsis are suggested through a new institution: the Ministry (and the “ministering”) of Pain. While the Ministry of Pain is the name given to the pornography factory at where Tanja’s students work, pain as a motif is prevalent throughout the novel. The opening chapter begins with Tanja describing her compulsion towards self-harm: “out of the blue, I’d be overcome by a desire to bash my head into the glass and do myself harm” (9). But, at other times, Tanja is not so self-aware about her inclination towards self-harm. Here, the infliction of pain functions as a kind of Freudian “repetition,” the unconscious acting out and reliving of trauma.193 For instance, after she is “denounced” by her students to the head of the department, Tanja is frightened to notice a deep “long scratch on the back of [her] hand” which she cannot remember inflicting (198; 161). A vague memory resurfaces, reminding her that she had “sat for a while…and run [her] hand back and forth over the radiator ribs” though she cannot remember how long she had done this in order to “inflict such a wound on

193 van der Kolk and McFarlane throw out Freud’s suggestion that this “compulsive reexposure… to situations reminiscent of trauma” leads to mastery over the trauma (10), instead arguing that “repetition causes further suffering” though understanding this drive towards further trauma “remain[s] among the greatest challenge of psychiatry” (11).
[her]self” (161). Pain functions as an extreme therapy, a perverse method to deal with trauma that overcomes the overwhelming sense of unreality.

In many ways, Tanja’s self-mutilation is reminiscent of Žižek’s all-too-brief theorisation in *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* (2001) of female “cutters” who practice self-harm by cutting their bodies. Building on Lacan’s notion of the Real and Baudrillard’s theory of the hyperreal, Žižek argues that the activity of cutting signifies:

> a desperate strategy to return to the Real of the body. …Far from being suicidal, far from indicating a desire for self-annihilation, cutting is a radical attempt to (re)gain a hold on reality, or (another aspect of the same phenomenon) to ground the ego firmly in bodily reality, against the unbearable anxiety of perceiving oneself as non-existent. (10)

The body is construed as a site of the Real, that is, as one of the few realities left in today’s hyperreal environment. For Žižek, cutters illustrate a much wider pattern of the virtualisation of everyday reality, where the strategy of cutting can be read as an analogy to the terrorist events that serve “to awaken us…from our [ideological] numbness” (9). In making such claims, Žižek has been taken to task by critics, such as LaCapra, who disparages his theorisations of structural trauma as reductive, pointing out that Žižek fails to specify historical traumatic incidents (that involve agency and choice) in conceptualising a civilizational trauma within everyday postmodern life (*Writing History, Writing Trauma* 84). Despite these problems, Žižek’s reading of self-cutting nonetheless is suggestive for explicating Tanja’s use of pain to bring her back into significance. Research into cutters, such as the clinical work of Bessel A. van der Kolk, has also noted how self-destructive behaviour frequently stems from this experience of numbness itself: the “subjective sense of deadness and disconnection from others…is also quite a dysphoric experience … [self-harm] restores a feeling of being alive”

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194 As with Baudrillard’s notion of a pervasive hyperreality, Žižek suggests that numbness, the result of “Virtual Reality” is a widespread phenomenon experienced by the masses (*Welcome* 12).
Pain, for Tanja, is not geared towards self-destruction or death, but towards the opposite: it is a *reassurance* that signals an “assertion of reality itself” (Žižek, *Welcome* 10).

In the novel, pain is presented in multiple and contradictory ways; it indicates trauma, but also signals a desire both to control trauma and to come out of the traumatised state. At some level, Tanja’s desire for pain stems not just from lack of affect but also from her feeling overwhelmed and powerless. Pain offers a mode of agency that wakens the self to reality. As van der Kolk notes, self-destructive acts provide a “method to regain control over [the victim’s] problems with affect regulation;” that is to say, pain provides relief to traumatic hyperarousal, and to negative affects, such as fear, disappointment, and isolation, as well as serving as a solution to pervasive numbness (188). In the context of the ICTFY and its impotence, pain becomes particularly significant as a force that wields a level of control. Tanja’s frustration with the tribunal leads her to fantasize about pain as a retributive and destructive force that can be transferred from the source of individual suffering and inflicted upon the guilty parties, thus reversing the dyad of helpless victim, powerful perpetrator. To return to the scene of the tribunal, Tanja imagines justice enacted by the shattering force of collective trauma, except, in this case, the pain is redirected away from the victims:

What would happen, I wondered, if all that pain came together [into an Oskar Matzerath]…scream? I pictured the glass wall [of the ICTFY] shattering into thousands of tiny slivers. …I pictured that piercing, ear-splitting voice shooting the grey potato head of Uroš’s father into the air, sending all the heads of all the blood-drenched murderers flying through the air, bursting their hardened eardrums and callous hearts…

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195 The concept of a revenge fantasy has been described by Judith Herman as one form of resistance to mourning that appears as “a fantasy of magical resolution” to trauma, in which the power balance between victim and perpetrator is rectified or reversed, forcing the perpetrator to acknowledge his/her wrongs to the victim (189). Often “the mirror image of the traumatic,” Herman sees the revenge fantasy as having “the same grotesque, frozen, and wordless quality as the traumatic memory itself” (189). Though it symbolises the desire to rid oneself of shame and pain, the revenge fantasy in fact only emphasises the victim’s “complete helplessness” (189). Herman views the revenge fantasy as a form of entrapment and argues that rage must be converted to righteous indignation in order to work through trauma.
For Tanja, this scenario remains in the realm of the fantastic. What we see instead is how pain ultimately represents the ongoing displacement of real justice against perpetrators not only in the sense that it continues to afflict the victim, but also because it becomes the ultimate aim of the victim. Pain is an expression of self-mortification that attempts both to atone for collective guilt (though it cannot) and, paradoxically, to ease the psychological suffering of the individual through the release punishment offers.¹⁹⁶

Tanja’s search for pain culminates in a scene where Igor handcuffs her to a chair and leaves cuts on her wrists as a symbolic gesture of the “invisible handcuffs that would bind” Tanja to Igor, thus consolidating her part (and membership) within the traumatised community of students (210). Igor punishes Tanja for “torturing” the students by “forc[ing them] to remember [what they] were yearning to forget,” while evading “the statistics and topography of destruction” (202; 205). Calmly recounting his aggressive fantasies to hurt Tanja, Igor describes his desire to “break you, smash you, knock something out of you” to get a “shred of sympathy, a flicker of compassion, anything” (207). In this, Igor echoes Tanja’s own violent attempts to feel again, to bring herself back into life. Throughout, Tanja listens numbly, longing “to knock my head against that wall …[and] wait for the pain to pass” (203).

But Igor’s tactics appear to work. Once he leaves, Tanja finds a release in “a mighty scream, the scream Igor must have been trying coax out of me the whole time” (207). In this scene, a critical turning point in the novel, we see how Tanja begins to see Igor’s perspective as the solution to dealing with trauma: to accept her new home as “a country of forgetting, a

¹⁹⁶ This idea resonates with Virginia L. Warren’s theorisation of masochism in a non-sexual sense. Warren sees masochism as a way to relieve guilt (106). In general, however, I have deliberately stayed away from the term “masochism” because of the connotations of the original term (i.e. coming out of Leopold Sacher-Masoch’s practices) and the way it has been theorised in relation to sexual pleasure that occurs during physical punishment. Indeed, Gilles Deleuze argues that masochism desires punishment because its purpose is “to resolve guilt and the corresponding anxiety and make sexual gratification possible” (91, emphasis added).
country without pain.” (202). In echoing this view, Tanja posits forgetting as a bleak solution to the overwhelming problem of trauma in a world where atrocities occur: “There is no such thing as mercy, no such thing as compassion; there is only forgetting; there is only humiliation and the pain of endless memory” (210). But an effort towards forgetfulness is contradictory for, though Tanja longs to forget, pain is doubly inscribed: not only on the body, through the scars left by Igor, but also on her subconscious, through her nightmares. Each site represents her desire for pain’s powerful affect to persist. In obsessively cleaning her apartment for several days, Tanja’s hands become “red and swollen,” forming “one big wound, the skin peeling off in tiny flakes to reveal my three bloody stripes” (217). To an extent then, like the nightmares, these bodily reminders of trauma function as “memento[s] of pain” and humiliation, suggesting the ambivalent dynamic inherent in the attempt to forget, since the trauma continues to exist insistently within such (im)material testimonies of loss (172).

The solution Tanja takes up to deal with her dilemma reiterates this ambivalence, through a twinned emphasis upon forgetting and pain. She finds a level of peace and safety in a relationship with Igor. But this safe space is created by their silent companionship as much as their “intoxicati[on]” with the present, which allows them to feel “the pure extract of nothing to remember and nothing to forget” (250). This tactic of repression and denial represents a bold move, questioning the efficacy of modes of working through. But what becomes clear is that in their resistance to working through, both characters manifest the symptoms, in fact, one of the main defences produced by trauma, the “actual forgetting, denial, [and]… unwillingness to contemplate” the source of trauma (Smelser 53). In refusing to confront both the memory of trauma and repressed secrets of the trauma itself, there is a suggestion that a part of that person

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197 The idea of markers on the body as testimonies of loss owes much to J. Edward Mallot’s essay on the Indian partition. In my reading of Ugresic, however, I would refute Mallot’s positive assertion that bodily memory functions as a subversive “narrative weapon” that helps in the mourning process (175).
is denied. We would do well to keep in mind Alexander’s caution that “Trauma will be resolved, not only by setting things right in the world, but by setting things right in the self” (“Theory of Cultural Trauma” 5, emphasis added). An apt metaphor in the novel exemplifies the inevitable resurfacing of the repressed past, as we see in the “cracking…peel[ing], reel[ing]...and twisting” of the wallpaper in Tanja’s apartment, which bursts to reveal taboo scenes hidden beneath: “a frieze of pornographic images, an amateur collage of homosexual fantasies” involving young boys and coprophilia (217; 216).

Overwhelmingly, the novel’s epilogue suggests that the deliberate effort towards forgetting is not a healing solution, but the only one possible in the persistence of institutional failures. Igor, for instance, illustrates how forgetting is itself a symptom of trauma. He is diagnosed with “post traumatic syndrome” that comes in the form of a “dissociative fugue” (246). This condition is highly symbolic; its ability to “trigger total black-out[s]” makes it synonymous with forgetting (246). Under this condition, people “have no idea who they are or where they’re from. And when they go back to their former lives, they have no idea what they went through in their fugued-out condition. It is a completely crazy lost-and-found disorder nobody’d ever heard of before” (246-47). As a new disease, the dissociative fugue underscores new forms of trauma that are linked to the loss of a collective identity. Alongside forgetting and avoiding all ex-Yugoslavs, Igor simultaneously attempts to work through what we might see as survivor guilt. His decision to do manual labour is a form of “penance” that attempts to atone for traumas perpetuated in Yugoslavia (249). Igor believes that

by the sweat of his brow he is restoring a certain equilibrium, that for every wall he builds here one will rise out of the ruins there, in the villages of Bosnia or Croatia or wherever it may be needed. (249)
This “equilibrium” provides a sense of reparation and justice; but it fails to provide any collective restitution. Instead, it demarcates a futile fantasy that displaces notions of collective responsibility onto the individual, the traumatised victim himself.

At the end of the novel, Tanja reflects on her native tongue as a “maimed” language that can only be experienced as “a stammer, a curse, a malediction” (242). While this suggests a loss that cannot be recovered, Tanja embraces a strategy of forgetting that she sees as the only option to allow healing to take place. Shocked to realise that she can no longer remember the names of the people “who so played with our lives” (248), Tanja explains that

Every loss seems to have been taken care of in real, ironic, or grotesque terms – yet taken care of nonetheless. Wounds have healed properly for some, poorly for others – yet healed they have. Even the scars are fading….The dead and disappeared have yet to be counted, many of the perpetrators are still at large, much rubble has yet to be cleared, many mines defused, but the dust has settled. (247-48)

Time is the great healer, though there is no promise of justice. The Hague Tribunal symbolises an ever-growing memory that provides no possible resolution. Instead, “the mounds of paper [are] growing; the videotapes of the proceedings could cover the length and the breadth of the land that is no longer” (247). Yugoslavia is well on its way to being a simulacrum as the real Yugoslavia disappears. The novel’s bleak vision suggests that without institutional reform, only time and pain-as-individual-penance allows the characters to come to terms with the past. In this, the novel suggests an ethical failure: the impossibility of mourning and of suturing together the broken multi-cultures of the former Yugoslavia, except through pain and suffering.

But if there is any possibility of hope, it is precisely in those “fading scars,” psychic and bodily, that we can trace the traumatic residues of multicultural Yugoslavia. Whereas Igor’s pain links him closer to an imagined rebuilding of Yugoslavia, Tanja struggles with a fitful
angst, a “Balkan litany,” that rises spontaneously and disturbs her forgetfulness (250). This litany, the traumatic, dark underside to Yugonostalgia, spews forth pain and hate, articulating the traumatic history of Yugoslavia in “Croatian, Serbian, Bosnian, Slovenian, [and] Macedonian” (250). Tanja’s recitation of rage and hate, that covers the last four pages of the novel, also suggests despair, cursing each group with “agony,” “pain,” “death,” “darkness” and “misery” (251-54). In these fits, Tanja runs to a deserted beach in order to “cast [these words] to the winds…where they dissolve like Alka Seltzer…leaving no trace” (251). Tanja’s screams recall the image of the old woman bearing suffering and cursing in pain; but trauma is reiterated here through a memorial practice that releases rage, without fuelling retaliatory violence. Instead, the raw pain is soaked up by the Dutch landscape, “absorb[ing] everything” (251). While this concluding episode indicates the impossibility of moving on from a personal tragic history, it also emphasises the importance of purging this “secrete[d]” litany (250). In the absence of structures that promise to ward off pain, rage, and hatred, Tanja’s litany identifies the suffering of the Yugoslav people and cries out for some kind of memory to this pain. In spite of the emphasis on forgetting, the last line of her litany, “May you leave your bones behind,” suggests a plea that invokes not only the evidence of this suffering, implicit of the mass graves unearthed in Bosnia, but also calls out for justice and remembrance (254).

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198 Ugresic notes that this fact is lost in the translated version of her book. See “An Interview with Dubravka Ugresic.”
CHAPTER FOUR

Graphic Testimony and the Bosnian War: Representation and Responsibility

The 1992-1995 Bosnian war is generally acknowledged to be the bloodiest of the Yugoslav wars, responsible for displacing two million people, with estimates of over 150,000 civilian casualties.\(^\text{199}\) For the most part, the war is identified less with these numbers, than with the ideas and symbols it (re)introduced to the Anglo-European understanding of conflict, encapsulated in the phrases, “ethnic cleansing”, “genocide”, and “rape warfare.” The public focus on traumas taking place in “Europe’s backyard,” as one author put it, has tended to overshadow the postwar aftermath, understood as the period following the 1995 Dayton Peace Agreement and the forced ethnic partition that imposed peace.\(^\text{200}\) The international political and military involvement, first, of the United Nations (UN) and, later, of NATO, has contributed to the complexity of the Bosnian war, described by Quintin Hoare, director of the London-based Bosnian Institute, as “undoubtedly one of the most misunderstood of modern history” (Hoare and Malcolm 127). In an effort both to unravel these misunderstandings and flesh out the legacies of the event, there has been a proliferation of academic (particularly in the area of international relations), journalistic, and cultural discourses produced around the war, even as it recedes further into the past.

With so much diverse work – and some of it fairly contentious – examining the politics and historical underpinnings of the Bosnian war, it is not my intention to supplement this

\(^{199}\) The figures for displaced peoples have been taken from the United Nations High Refugee Agency. See <http://www.unhcr.ba/press/2004pr/210904.htm>. The estimated casualties of the war are taken from Gregory Kent, who suggests the death toll was “at a minimum, 150,000 souls” (2). Yet, earlier assessments were much higher. For instance, in his 2002 study of the war, David Bruce MacDonald suggests 280,000 casualties (264).

\(^{200}\) This is the title to Mark Almond’s 1994 study of the Bosnian war.
abundant corpus. Instead this chapter is concerned with the issue of representation in cultural discourses about conflict and partition; more specifically, it considers the way representational modes can be employed strategically to critique a prevailing or hegemonic epistemology of trauma. There is little doubt that the ever-increasing number of testimonial accounts, published in English, about the Bosnian war, in the form of autobiographies, fiction, video, film, and literary collections, are important in testifying to the atrocities of the war. But, bearing in mind Bosnia’s current position as a partitioned state that is dependent on a vast foreign military contingent for political stability, questions need to be asked, not only about how such testimonies circulate in an international system, but also how they, and their Anglo-European readers, are situated within the uneven patterns of global power as well as in relation to each other.

This chapter examines the work of the American author-journalist Joe Sacco, not only because his focus on postwar Bosnia offers a useful entry point for discussing such issues but also because of his chosen representational mode. Unlike most testimonies about Bosnia, which are usually text-based, Sacco’s compilations are presented in a comic book format, adding to the growing archive of visual testimonies about the war. This work has emerged out of Sacco’s many visits to Bosnia. Critics, noting his training as a journalist, have described Sacco’s work as a form of war correspondence, labelling it “graphic journalism,” “graphic reportage,” and “comics nonfiction.” What distinguishes Sacco’s work from the mainstream media, however, is not only his adaptation of newspaper journalism, but also the way his comics make visible their

For an overview of the work produced, see Quintin Hoare and Noel Malcom’s 1999 critical bibliography, which covers over three hundred and forty books published on Bosnia since 1990. Another excellent resource that demonstrates the voluminous size of scholarship on Bosnia is the Bosnian Institute, set up in 1997 in London, UK.

Aside from Joe Sacco, other graphic novels and comic books include Andersson and Sjunnesson; Hermann; Kubert; T.B.C. There are also numerous photo-essays about the war, such as Eric Stover and Gilles Peress’s 1998 joint collaboration on mass graves. See also photograph collections by Grant; and Stoddart and Thain. An alternative visual history of the war is presented by Sarhandi and Boboc in their collection of anti-nationalist posters put up during the Yugoslav wars.
own material conditions of possibility by including their author as well as his subjects and objects of analysis. Consequently, Sacco’s comic genre seems particularly well suited to calling attention to the representational issues and power relationships around the war. Originally commissioned by Art Spiegelman in 1998 to do a six-page piece on the International Criminal Tribunal in The Hague for the magazine Details, Sacco has been increasingly preoccupied with the Former Yugoslavia. Of his six full-length comic books, three focus exclusively on Bosnia.\footnote{Though he has documented political violence and war across different contexts, Sacco’s most common topic is the Bosnian war. I have chosen to examine two of his three books, because they offer a more in–depth examination of the war in Bosnia. The third book, War’s End: Profiles from Bosnia, 1995–96 (2005), incorporates two shorter narratives “Soba” and “Christmas with Karadzic,” which had initially been published separately. Sacco has also spoken of his desire to produce another book that will give the Serb perspective of the war in Bosnia, in order to reflect the time he spent on the Serb frontline (see Sacco, “The Art of War” 80).} Clearly, Sacco sees a need to return to the site of war, using his experiences in Bosnia alongside testimonial accounts of the Bosniaks (as the Bosnian Muslims are known) to demonstrate the “scars” left by the war and put across “some idea of the scale of what had happened there” (Safe Area Goražde 126).

The two comic books I focus on, Safe Area Goražde: The War in Eastern Bosnian 1992–95 (2000) and The Fixer: A Story From Sarajevo (2003), (hereafter Safe Area and The Fixer), put into pictorial form the oral testimonies by local witnesses to the Bosnian war’s political violence.\footnote{Sacco rejects the term “graphic novel” as being too literary, instead calling his work “comics” (Faber; see also “Interview with Joe Sacco”). Sacco does not make clear why he prefers one term over the other, but an answer is suggested by Hatfield, who contrasts the term “graphic novel,” with the emphasis on the novel, “as the very byword of literary merit and respectability” vis-à-vis the more radical and “pejorative connotations” of the comic book (5–6).} At the same time, these books constitute a response to the West’s media coverage of the war, where the lives of people were truncated, reduced to clichés and soundbites, thus contributing to the overall misperceptions about Yugoslavia.\footnote{For example Vida Penezic notes that many North Americans view Yugoslavia as the Communist East within the dichotomous framework of the Cold War, pitting America as free and progressive against the Communist bloc (cited in Hesford 134). In their study, Bennet, Flinkinger and Rhine also call attention to the American public’s lack of understanding about the conflict (ctd. in Kent 228).} Indeed, as Sacco is not afraid to show, the testimonies play a significant part in shaping his knowledge and checking his
presumptions, making him aware of his own position of power (as an international visitor) vis-à-vis the locals. By representing the ways in which testimony is transformed into news, Sacco explicitly challenges the politics that make invisible the manoeuvres of capitalist and neo-imperial practices and stifle questions about the degree of responsibility Western readers and viewers bear towards those people whose trauma they vicariously consume.

Sacco’s inquiry into the prejudices, motivations, and practical limitations of Western newsgathering reveals a component of a larger system that I will be calling the trauma economy. By trauma economy I mean the social structures in which we perceive, speak about, and develop our understanding of trauma. Functioning in the age of global capitalism, the trauma economy comprises many complexes of political, material, ideological collective, and private interests that transform a traumatic experience into a product, with a certain and fluctuating value. As a critical concept, the trauma economy illuminates both why and by whom particular experiences are deemed traumatic. It does this, I propose, through a process of de-contextualizing, which helps explain the selective focus on trauma as well as the occlusion of certain traumas within some cultures. In other words, apprehending the trauma economy and its circuits of communication offers a way to confront and measure power as it inflects mediations of trauma.

This chapter is organized into three sections. The first will sketch out the discourse of what is called “Balkanism,” which can be understood as the construction of Orientalist misinformation about the Bosnian war and the Former Yugoslavia. Following from this, the second section proposes a theorisation of the trauma economy and considers its special pertinence to Bosnia, where the discourse of Balkanism not only legitimised a skewed interpretation of the 1992-1995 war but also crafted it into a product fit for Western consumption. The third and most substantial part of this chapter turns to Sacco’s comic books
and explores their focus on the asymmetric political and economic powers that structure the relationship between (represented) traumas and their consumers. Sacco’s interest in the war and the ensuing international intervention reminds readers of the political uses of testimony at a time when Bosnia is fast receding from public attention. In portraying local testimonies, Sacco facilitates the particularization of space and revises the dominant understanding of the war. Yet, in using a comic genre that inherently calls attention to itself as a non-realistic mode of representation, Sacco also problematises testimony. Indeed, his work reveals the tensions underlying the production of traumas and notions of the Truth as we see by his inclusion of testimonial accounts, which either resist their appropriation or “deliver” to his expectations, making them unreliable at best. This last section also explores the consequences of Sacco’s self-reflexive critique – his positioning as a self-aware participant in the trauma economy – for the reader, particularly in the way that Sacco advances a popular, and yet alternative, model of political education in relation to the unresolved issues around the war in Bosnia and its ethnic partition.

**The Balkan Imaginary**

In *Imagined Communities*, his study of the emergence of a nationalist consciousness, Benedict Anderson famously identifies the important task of “cultural artefacts” in producing a sense of nationhood and national solidarity (4). He singles out the role of print technologies, such as the novel and the newspaper, in cultivating the widespread awareness of a national community within space and over time. The powerful imaginative function of print technology in facilitating a national consciousness, as described by Anderson, also extends to other forms of collective consciousness outside of the nation. While perhaps more fleeting and fragile than the
national imaginary, these other political communities can be temporarily consolidated by cultural narratives, even as they are disseminated to discrete audiences. What cultural discourses say about communities not only tells us something about the way cultures perceive themselves in relation to others, but also foregrounds the way these representations underpin entire vocabularies of conceptualisation.

Within the context of the Yugoslav wars, cultural narratives such as the media reports and testimonial accounts played a significant part in representing the conflict, by turns, legitimating or invalidating the self-determination of Yugoslav “subnationalisms”; and, by contra, bolstering the supranationalism of the European Community. Consequently, these representations have a political role in the context of Bosnia’s 1995 partition. When the international community proposed partition as a solution to end a particularly brutal war, the opponents as well as the proponents of partition could utilise these representations to support their arguments. Following the staggered declarations of independence by Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia, the Yugoslav Army (JNA) responded by embarking on a series of escalating military interventions, leading to the bloodiest war to have taken place in Europe since the Second World War. This fact, along with the war’s geographical proximity to European centres, generated substantial media interest and mass coverage of the event in the international press. As many scholars have since observed, a key thematic emerged, where the hostility of the Yugoslav wars was comprehended as part of the uniquely violent Balkan culture. While we must acknowledge that the media is neither a homogeneous nor a static entity, and that many reports called attention to the suffering in Bosnia once the situation became significantly worse, a quick survey of newspaper accounts published in English in the early 1990s reveals a predominantly pejorative view. In 1991, for instance, around the time of Croatia and Slovenia’s secessions,
*Reuters* characterised Yugoslavia as a federation that “has been torn by violence and conflicts since it was created in 1918.” Similarly, *The Times* of London called attention to the region’s “warring history” (“No to Balkanisation”), while the otherwise cautious *Washington Post* warned that, “evenhanded appeals for reason and calm…does little to cool murderous passions rooted in historic and deep mutual hatreds” (Hoagland). Tabloids, such as Britain’s *Daily Mail*, assumed a shriller tone, voicing their opposition to those proposing international military intervention, for fear that the “savage” nature of the Serbs would render “any ‘peacekeeping’ troops, whether of the EC or the United Nations…entirely impotent.”206 Such opinions were corroborated publicly by numerous politicians and military personnel,207 though perhaps few could rival the notorious assertion made by Britain’s best known military historian, John Keegan, who claimed that the Yugoslav wars were “a primitive tribal conflict, of a sort known only to a handful of anthropologists,” and compared the Bosnian Serbs to “the Yanomano, one of the [most] primitive and savage tribes known” (cited in Gallagher 106).

Responding to the dominant interpretation of the Yugoslav wars as a “vortex of ethnic passion,” Slovenian philosopher and Lacanian, Slavoj Žižek, criticizes this understanding as a projection of racist fears, that simultaneously asserts a sense of superiority: “the old-fashioned, unabashed rejection of the Balkan other (despotic, barbarian, Orthodox, Muslim, corrupt, Oriental) in favour of true values (Western, civilised, democratic, Christian)” (“You May!”).208

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206 See Casey. See also Borowiec, whose editorial in *The Washington Times* stated that Yugoslavia was an “artificial term” applied to “the most unstable country in the Balkans.” A similar view continues to be propounded by right-wing newspapers. To take one provincial example, Connecticut’s local paper, *The Republican-American*, as late as 2006, describes Yugoslavia as inhabited by “feuding secessionist movements” and warns that Yugoslavia (like Iraq) “is a nation torn by many very old, irreconcilable ethnic and religious divisions” (Malley).

207 Malcolm Rifkind, the British Foreign Secretary in 1995, was one such figure who was willing to pull out British troops, should the situation in Bosnia become too dangerous; he also rejected a proposal to re-establish military control of Srebrenica after the massacre there. See Gallagher 106.

208 In this essay, Žižek writes sympathetically about the Balkanizing of Yugoslavia. Yet, as Dušan I. Bjelic has shown, in his other writings, Žižek pathologizes the Balkans along a similar racism, thus simultaneously
Žižek is describing what scholars call the discourse of Balkanism; that is, an imaginative view of the “Balkans” as a threatening space of “despotism.” Historically, it is a charge that has been levelled at the region by travellers from western Europe (see Hammond xii). Balkanism here is the product of the Western gaze, what Žižek refers to as an “imagined cartography” and so structures the way “the West” perceives its relationship to “the East” in superior and condescending terms. My use of quotation marks relates to Neil Lazarus’s contention that when speaking about signifiers like “the West” or “the East,” we are dealing with ideological, rather than geographic, categories (“Fetish of ‘the West’” 44). Indeed, as Žižek points out, the Balkans have no real geographical referent, since they are always somewhere “down there” on the periphery of Europe (original emphasis). The Balkans is always a nebulous space in south-east Europe, where all regional and cultural distinctions and differences have been subsumed.

A fuller development of ideological cartographies is suggested in Derek Gregory’s *The Colonial Present* (2004), where he theorises “the production of imagined geographies,” a phrase that he borrows from Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1994). Gregory’s imagined geographies denote a flexible perception and construction “of the other as other” (4; 28). Consequently, the Balkans functions as an floating signifier, upon which anxieties, fears, as well as desires of the West – which also includes some of the states in south-east Europe themselves – can be traced. Balkanism, as scholars have observed, is clearly an ideological fiction, a contemporary form of prejudice, applied to what are considered the peripheries of Europe. Like Orientalist discourse, Balkanism reveals what Said called patterns of dominance that describe “a relationship of power…of varying degrees of a complex hegemony” (Said, *Orientalism* 5). Following Said,
Gregory reminds us that an imagined geography misrepresents reality, reinforcing simplifications as well as distortions about a place. Ultimately, it signifies the consolidation of imagined differences, and bolsters an “Us” versus “Them” mentality between sets of people.

Imagined geographies not only shape the knowledge about different cultures and spaces; they also signal the important role of social collectives and “the way in which understanding is complicit with power to produce concepts such as the ‘Orient’ or the ‘West’” (*Orientalism* 347). The media’s use of negative stereotypes to depict the collapse of Yugoslavia had a two-fold effect. At one level, they ensured the demonization of the Balkans. And, at the same time, as Žižek has already noted in reference to “civilized” Western values, the media’s Balkanist discourse helped concretize the international community’s perception of itself in moralist and positivist terms. This legitimated the international community’s ambivalent and belated intervention in the war, while also shoring up a sense of benevolence in its pursuit of a humanitarian goal.

In *Imagining the Balkans* (1997), Maria Todorova historicizes Balkanist discourse within the context of the Yugoslav wars in order to point out that the denigrations of Balkanism had re-emerged as a fairly new phenomenon, and were aligned with strategic and political objectives:

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210 The phrase “international community” is somewhat nebulous, gesturing to the European Community, but mainly encompassing the major economic powers of the United Nations, such as the US, the UK, Germany, France, Austria, and Canada. Yet, in the context of Yugoslavia’s break up, the “international community” is really a short hand for the triumvirate powers of the US, UK, and France. According to Ben Cohen and George Stamkoski, the UK and France dominated the UN agenda and made the key political decisions in regards to the Yugoslav wars between 1991 and 1995 (6). The US took over towards the end of the war with its role in NATO bombings and the Dayton peace agreement. Yet, Russia too was an invisible force within the international community, that shaped action, or lack thereof, towards the Serbs, who were close Russian allies.

211 The link between a Balkanist discourse and a reluctance to intervene is made clear in Gallagher, who identifies the links between the negative representation of the Balkans and the ensuing Western response. By setting up the Balkan “eruptions of internecine warfare...as culturally determined and historically recurring,” the violence was perceived as “beyond remedy from outside,” and initially quelled criticisms of appeasement and the will towards intervention (106).
the charge of “Balkanness” was on the whole not hurled on [Tito’s Yugoslavia 1945-
1991]. In fact, the Balkans as a geopolitical notion and “Balkan” as a derogation were
conspicuously absent from the vocabulary of Western journalists and politicians. … The
new wave of utilizing “Balkan” and “Balkanization” as derogative terms came only with
the end of the cold war... and the accompanying attempts of separate Eastern European
nations to enter the privileged economic or security clubs of the West. The unfolding of
this process coincided with the violent destruction of Yugoslavia. (136)

As Todorova and Žižek both note, in the juxtaposition against a Balkan other, the international
community bolstered its Enlightenment and cosmopolitan ideals, emphasising both “the utopian
notion of the European Community itself” (“You May”) and the “rational, liberal, and
predictable polity of the West” (Todorova 137). Furthermore, as Abdul R. JanMohamed
observed in his study of colonial stereotypes, Manichean oppositions provide blanket insurance;
whatever their actions in Yugoslavia, the Western nations could always exculpate their failures
since the Balkans was construed as an essentially wild and despotic place.

The mainstream media’s denigration of the “Balkan” wars did not, however, go
uncriticized. With a rapidity unseen in prior wars, collections of literary writing and testimonies
were published, often with the stated intention of balancing the debate about the Yugoslav wars
and educating an Anglophone audience by offering an alternative perspective. Focusing mainly
on the crisis in Bosnia, these writings put forward accounts of the wars from the viewpoints of
those affected as well as of individuals from the international community, such as the
journalists, UN workers, and human rights workers who were stationed there.212 Furthermore,

212 These accounts can be divided into single-authored narratives, multiple testimonial compilations, and multi-
authored anthological collections, which include testimonial accounts alongside scholarly writings, (for example,
Rabia Ali and Lawrence Lifschultz’s 1993 anthology, Why Bosnia? Writings on the Balkan includes the writings of
professors, journalists, nobel peace-prize winners, poets, and playwrights). Among the single-authored works, we
can count émigré authors, such as Dubravka Ugresic and Slavenka Drakulic. Others include Elma Softić’s Sarajevo
Days, Sarajevo Nights, Zlatko Dizdarević’s Portraits of Sarajevo, Vladimir Arsenijević’s In the Hold, and
Semezdin Mehmedinović’s 1992 collection of poems Sarajevo Blues. Compilations of testimonies include Seada
Vranić’s Breaking the Wall of Silence: The Voices of Raped Bosnia, Radmila Manojlović Žarković’s I Remember
Sjećam se: Writings by Bosnian Women Refugees, Zdenko Lešić’s Children of Atlantis: Voices from the Former
Yugoslavia, and Julie Mertus et al, edited collection, The Suitcase: Refugee Voices from Bosnia and Croatia. But
once the Balkan crisis had become a recognized “world event”, it attracted the attention of
significant literary figures and public intellectuals who wrote from outside of Yugoslavia about
the war. This body of texts set out immediately to confront and overturn the stereotyped view
of the Balkan regions that they felt was being expressed through mainstream media outlets,
countering the belief that the war was a primordial ethnic conflict, presenting instead
testimonies and life-narratives that spoke to the shock of the wars, their misrepresentation
abroad, and the desire for peace. The editor of one such collection, Balkan Blues: Writing Out of
Yugoslavia (1995), speaks for many of these texts when she lambastes the media, for having
given

the impression that the atrocities to which the television cameras bore witness were caused
by ancient ethnic hatreds. These hatreds, so the myth would have it, burst out raging once
the straitjacket of communism had been loosed from the Balkan psychopath. This is a
myth. (Labon viii)

In offering this perspective, the editor implores the reader to re-evaluate the popular
understanding of the war. In the same spirit, the American public intellectual Cornel West,
writing the “Foreword” to the testimonial collection, The Suitcase: Refugee Voices from Bosnia
and Croatia (1997), emphasizes the need to “move from the searing headlines about the people
to the courageous voices of the people” (xv). In this juxtaposition, West calls upon the audience
to reconsider the war in view of authentic and courageous testimonies and so prevent the

testimonies were also written by a number of media reporters, some of them by award-winning journalists, such as
of non-fiction and fictional accounts of the Bosnian war can be found in Hoare and Malcom.

213 Susan Sontag is perhaps the most famously invoked (and maligned) international author. Other public
intellectuals include Jean Baudrillard, Alain Finkielkraut, Christopher Hitchens, Michael Ignatieff, and Elie Wiesel.
The multi-authored collections are notable for being compiled by members of the international community. Whilst
some are scholarly compilations, others are by literary writers, such as In the Heart of Europe: Poems for Bosnia
(1998), by the Northern Irish poets Nuala Ni Dhonnchaill, Chris Agee, Harry Clifton, and Bernad O’Donogue. See
also Ken Smith and Judi Benson’s anthology, Klaonica: Poems for Bosnia (1993), which includes poems by
Czeslaw Milosz, Joseph Brodsky, and Andrew Motion.
world’s “complacency” to the “the plight and predicament of refugees from Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia” (xv).

The “searing headlines” were not simply the product of a “Western” bias and chauvinism that shaped ways of thinking about the Balkans. To assume otherwise, that Balkanizing discourse is a set of idées fixes, is to deny the vitality that is the source of its strength. Like any Orientalist discourse, Balkanizing depends on a dynamic tension between traditional stereotypes and contemporary events: established metaphors are applied to interpret novel conditions and in so doing are themselves altered. This signals the importance of the journalists who were present at the actual site of war, speaking to “the people” and beaming their reports home daily via satellite. Susan Moeller has discussed, for example, the immense influence of these reports in the United States where “the media is often the sole source of information on international affairs” (261). And, considering the prevalence of disinformation and misunderstandings about the wars, it must be asked, how and why did on-site reporters develop their particular version of events? In answering this question we are furnished with a robust example of how an historically-long Orientalist discourse like Balkanization intersects with and is adapted by the present hegemony. More specifically, the media reports emanating from Yugoslavia in the 1990s show Balkanism operating under the conditions of global capitalism in support of that hegemony’s asymmetries of power. Chiefly, this has to do with the way news is created by the mass media. Noam Chomsky has repeatedly drawn attention to the aggressive profit-seeking objectives of corporatised “media giants” (Herman and Chomsky 8).

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214 Intellectuals and journalists failed to explain Yugoslavia’s history adequately without lapsing into relativism and Orientalism (see Cushman 1997). Part of the problem was the circulation of propaganda from Belgrade, which meant that the international community were unsure who was responsible for the wars and believed that “all sides” in the Yugoslav wars were equally to blame (See Bouris 3-4). See MacDonald, whose book focuses on the skilled “propaganda war” between Serbs and Croats (266), and who assesses the way the Holocaust was “manipulated in the service of nationalism” (265). He also briefly considers the way western academics were drawn into victimization propagandas and how they propounded these views (266-68).
The centralisation of the media has also meant a lack of resources and a diminishing network of journalists to cover remote as well as local locations.\footnote{For details of the business pressures under which contemporary newspapers operate, see Nick Davies’s \textit{Flat Earth News}. Davies calls attention to how, under the “logic of commerce” (62), i.e., the cutting of costs to increase profit margins, journalists no longer investigate stories, but instead produce “churnalism” (59). Not given the time to make contacts, gather news, and check facts, they are reduced to recycling material from other sources and pressured to provide “breaking news” stories as speedily as possible to beat other news media agencies (70-73). Staffing levels have also been cut across regional and international areas (68).} As the media has become increasingly reliant upon advertising for revenue, so the competition to find and deliver the latest newsworthy item dictates the framework in which the reporters operate.

In his essay, “Media Plenty and the Poverty of News,” Daya Kishan Thussu alludes to the pressure facing journalists, when he explains that “news is a commodity” in a deregulated and competitive market, where certain information is rarely reported (54). Thussu’s focus on poverty helps explains why some news is recounted over others. He points out that, while poverty is a pervasive and ongoing event, its historical and socio-economic reach and complexity cannot be explained simply. This poses a problem in a medium where space is utilised for advertising revenue. Moreover, to report on poverty in any considerable depth risks using too much information, and potentially putting off a mass audience. In contrast, information that can be quickly conveyed is more marketable since it is more likely to captivate readerly interest. This fact is established by Moeller’s study of the media’s response to catastrophe, which details the way news is manipulated by media groups in order to emphasise “dramatic moments, not thoughtful analysis” (18). Moeller points out that the media is part of the entertainment industry, essentially producing drama in the form of soundbite sensationalism that will sell: “staccato bursts of news, hyped and wired to feed your addiction” (10).

In such a context, the media’s focus on crises and disasters suggests the monetary value of tragedy and drama, since reporting catastrophes or violent spectacles elicit strong interest and
feelings from their readers. In an industry governed by the cliché of “if it bleeds, it leads,” mediated traumas are undoubtedly part of an economy. Moeller points out as much when she identifies suffering as “infotainment – just another commodity” (35). But in detailing the commercialisation of the media and the way suffering is packaged and sold to an audience, Moeller only evokes one, albeit important, part of an economy, that I identify as a trauma economy, where suffering is vested with value in order to be “sold” to consumers. In fact, the trauma economy extends well beyond the mass media to incorporate numerous buyers and sellers, producers and consumers, some at the level of the victim, and others at an institutional and state level, that mediate, transform, and invest trauma variously. This I see as mimicking (though not exactly replicating) the social process theorised by Karl Marx in Capital (1867), where, under a capitalist system, a material object attains meaning and economic value as it passes through various exchanges between people; in the bid to increase the value of trauma, those who are traumatised are left by the wayside, exploited, poorer, and ultimately, forgotten.

Trauma and Economics: the Trauma Economy

As a prelude to my examination of Marx and his relevance to an understanding of the trauma economy, I want to broach the more general theme of economics in relation to trauma. I am certainly not the first to link representations of trauma to the capitalist economy. The exploitation of trauma for material profit has been suggested outright in studies such as Norman Finkelstein’s controversial The Holocaust Industry: Reflections on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering (2000) and in the quip that there is “no business like the Shoah Business” (Miller and Tougaw 3). There is also the emerging business of “thanotourism,” the visiting of war zones or the sites of genocide as a spectator searching out authentic experiences of trauma. Thanotourism
ranges from the extreme, such as the desire to experience an ongoing conflict, with little real empathy for those trapped under such conditions (see Dauphinée, 47-53) to the more conventional idea of memorialization visits to sites of historical atrocities, amongst which we can count visits to the killing fields of Cambodia or the concentration lager tours undertaken by young Israelis. By its very existence – and putting the intentions of the tourists to one side – thanotourism confirms that money can be made from trauma.

Scholars responding to the mass production of books, institutions, and businesses around traumas like the Holocaust have gone on to examine how trauma intersects with socio-economics, in order to explain the apparent preoccupation with some traumas over others (Butler; Tal; etc). In noting a “hierarchy of suffering,” critics do not focus on the economic alone but, rather, refer to it as one category within an interconnected complex, which incorporates, above all, the dynamics of geo-political power as well the stratifications of race, gender, and class. In her historical study, *Trauma: A Genealogy* (2000), Ruth Leys has called attention to the uneven theoretical development of trauma and, in her introduction, links the ascendency of certain diagnoses of trauma with particular interests, some political and pecuniary, while others are understood as reactionary, against earlier psychiatric assessments. In one example, Leys, following from other scholars, points out how the legal codification of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as a medical category in the DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manuel of Mental Disorders) enabled recognition for Vietnam combat veterans as well as compensation for traumas suffered.216 For Leys, the labelling of PTSD onto the suffering of disparate groups, such as the Vietnam veterans as well as the Vietnamese victims of combat, has the dubious effect of “collaps[ing] distinctions between victims and perpetrators, or simply

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216 Leys refers to Ian Hacking’s work in apprehending the constructionist ethos that “invented” PTSD. PTSD tends to be a major focus of study for many scholars engaged with the social processes by which this trauma has became legitimate. See also Trimble; and Young, *Harmony*. 
between victims and others” (8). According to Leys, “the concept of trauma has become *debased currency*” as it is applied equally and simplistically across a substantially different stratum of experience (2, emphasis added). Whereas Leys is interested in investigating the historical emergence of theories of trauma, her utilisation of a financial metaphor is a useful reminder that trauma as a concept is not only socially produced and disseminated, but is also *valued* or *devalued* according to sociohistorical and political contexts.²¹⁷ At the other end of the scale to “debased” trauma, we have its elevation, in what Dominick LaCapra calls transvaluation: the way that trauma is “sacralized or transvalued into the sublime” (History in Transit 115). Like Leys, LaCapra’s language suggests a world constituted by economics, from which even trauma cannot be disentangled. The growing sense that some traumas are a resource, evoked strategically for political or financial reasons (or “by lawyerly fiat” as Leys argues), makes it more urgent to assess how trauma is transformed into a commodity and how this is connected to material repercussions for affected communities (Leys 8).

Marx’s theorisation of commodities under capitalism provides a useful framework for unifying these previously separate valuations, comprehending trauma in terms of its fungible properties as part of “a relation constantly changing with time and place” (126). According to Marx, a metamorphosis takes place first when an object becomes a commodity and, again, when it transforms into capital, at which point it becomes profitable “surplus-value” (251). At the beginning, the object is imbued with value only when it is transferred to others as a commodity, for whom it holds particular “social use values” (131). As Marx’s term “exchange-value”

²¹⁷ This is also true of subjectivities formed by traumas; for instance, Alain Finkielkraut in The Imaginary Jew talks of the immense moral value attributed towards a post-Holocaust Jewish identity, what he calls the inheritance of “a suffering to which I had not been subjected... the identity of victimhood” (7). In The Future of Negation, Finkielkraut describes post-Holocaust Jewish identity as “value: as the gold standard of oppression, as the paradigm of the victim,” an identity that confers currency, which other groups can use to gain political recognition (101, original emphasis). However, Finkielkraut examines less the way Jews use this discourse and more the ways that the discourse of genocide and victimhood have been appropriated, allowing a new contemporary form of anti-Semitism to flourish.
indicates, the value of a particular commodity “is realised only in exchange,” suggesting the necessity of circulation (177, emphasis added). If in circulation, the exchange-value somehow becomes independent from use-value, then surplus value or capital has been created (263).\textsuperscript{218} In other words, the meaning of capital emerges out of its social relation to groups, such as the labourers, the buyers, and the traders and their perception of worth. There are of course limitations to applying a Marxist analysis to trauma; to begin with, trauma is neither a tangible object nor, initially, a product of labour. Yet, as I will show, Marx’s critique remains relevant because it helps us comprehend the capitalist relations and the modes of production in reference to trauma. Through Marx, we can account for the ways in which trauma accrues in both social and economic value under a capitalist system, as well as conceive of the forms of exploitation that occur in a trauma economy. As with Marx’s theory where the worker becomes alienated from his product of labour, a similar alienation occurs in the disjuncture between the traumatised individual and his or her trauma, now uncoupled and in an autonomous form as capital. One consequence of the trauma economy is the effective devaluation or marginalisation of the traumatised individual in relation to his trauma. Under global capitalism, such patterns of exploitation are normalised. Likewise, the trauma economy’s ability to distort the conceptualisation and awareness of trauma has grave ethical implications about notions of social and political accountability.

In his writings on the Bosnian war, Jean Baudrillard gestures towards Marx’s Capital when he links a global capitalist order to commodified forms of suffering. In a 1993 essay “No Pity for Sarajevo,” Baudrillard writes of his anger at the international response to the Bosnian

\textsuperscript{218} In his “Synopsis of Capital,” Engels says “If, in commodity circulation, the exchange-value attains at most a form independent of the use-value of commodities, it suddenly manifests itself here as a substance in process, endowed with motion of its own, for which commodity and money are mere forms. More than that, as original value, it is differentiated from itself as surplus-value. It becomes money in process, and as such, capital” (57).
crisis, and particularly, the Bosnians’ “harass[ment] by the media and humanitarian agencies” throughout the war (81). Singling out Susan Sontag for critique because of her decision to stage *Waiting for Godot* – Beckett’s play about suffering and existentialism – in Sarajevo in the middle of the war, Baudrillard accuses her of condescension and “self-pitying self-indulgence” (80). For Baudrillard, Sontag is a symbol of something much greater; she is one of many “harmless and powerless intellectuals [who] exchange their misery with those who are miserable” (81). Sontag’s act of humanitarianism has no political agency because, according to Baudrillard, it has already been co-opted by a “New World Order” (81). *This* is the subject of Baudrillard’s scathing essay and he turns his attention to one outcome of the New Order’s global politics, where “distress, misery and suffering have become the *raw goods*” circulating in an age of “‘commiseration’” (82; 81, emphasis added). Here Baudrillard illuminates his ongoing concerns with the hyperreal (what he terms the “spectral war”) and the misplacement of the Real – in this case, the misplaced sympathy for the Bosnians in the face of the international community abetting of genocide (81).219 But the Marxist overtones of his language demands a different reading, one that suggests the meaningful relationship between trauma and the capitalist economy, where “*raw goods*” as commodities can be traded for hard currency by those who know how to extract their value.

As Baudrillard’s essay demonstrates, the Yugoslav wars, and the Bosnian war more specifically, sharpened into focus the logistics of the trauma economy. Much of this is to do with the proximity and the visibility of the conflict, particularly as it intensified, so that the Bosnian war existed as a *guerre du jour*, represented daily in the media, as opposed to conflicts occurring in “distant” spaces like Rwanda or Somalia. Indeed the celebrity of the Bosnian war

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219 Referring to the genocidal attacks against the Bosniaks, which occurred under UN protection, Baudrillard identifies the New World Order as a politics made up of “white fundamentalism, protectionism, discrimination, and control” and, ultimately, “ethnic cleansing” (“No Pity” 83).
makes a critical evaluation of its current marginalisation all the more imperative. For the audience in the international community, the spectacle of Bosnia’s violence (beginning with the siege of Sarajevo and ending with the iconic photographs of emaciated Bosniaks held in the Omarska concentration camp) as well as the growing reports about massive population displacements galvanized a sense of horror and belated guilt in the face of ethnic cleansing. These broader affective responses are also accounted for within the trauma economy. Consider, for example, the characters of Dubravka Ugresic’s *Ministry of Pain*, discussed in detail in Chapter Three. These exiles and victims of the Yugoslav wars take advantage of the trauma economy to trade on their trauma, thus securing forms of social capital within other countries.\(^{220}\) The Netherlands, in particular, became a major host country for Yugoslav refugees because of its sense of culpability in relation to the failure of its peacekeepers to protect Srebrenica. In the Netherlands, the Srebrenica situation has touched a national nerve and has even been described as a “Dutch trauma” (Ruigrok 8).\(^{221}\) While this characterization evokes Leys’s point about the plasticity of trauma as a concept, it also suggests a psychological factor at play in the acceptance of refugees, through whom the nation can somehow mitigate its own trauma. The act of conferral (of migrant status) is analogous to Catholic indulgences that “pay” for absolution of complicity in relation to the war and its atrocities.

Like the capitalist system, of which it is a part, the trauma economy is widespread, but its material impact is perhaps most palpable to those who rely on it as a means to generate income: namely, those living under devastated conditions or within a post-conflict space. Any such space has to deal with its own traumas, whether generated by natural catastrophes or

\(^{220}\) One major problem created by the trauma economy, as Ugresic has made clear, is that those exploiting their status as traumatised are not always *de facto* the true victims of the war.

\(^{221}\) Ruigrok suggests that the Dutch government’s resignation from power in 2002 was the culmination of this “national trauma” (7). Initially, the Netherlands saw the war as an opportunity to bolster their political standing in the international community and so pushed very hard for intervention in Bosnia.
political violence; but equally significant are other structural factors, such as a plummeting economy, high unemployment and, most especially for conflict and postconflict sites, the attenuation, if not the absence, of the rule of law that allows the trauma economy to establish itself uniquely as a fiscal reality, alongside other wartime economic necessities, like the black market.\(^{222}\)

To give examples of its diversity, we can identify trauma economies in places such as New Orleans – whose traumas were also highly publicized through the international press. Today, four years on from the devastating storm, “Hurricane Katrina tours” are advertised prominently in hotels and public squares. In Bosnia, a major component of the trauma economy could be seen in the media’s presence and the buying and selling of information during the war (which comprises a focal part of this chapter); additionally, we can see it in the peculiar trauma tourist industry that has flourished in its postwar setting. In her study of the ethics of researching political violence, Elizabeth Dauphinée writes about her everyday encounters with such an economy, during her research work in Bosnia. She notes that the war has “coded” the perception of places and people, and consequently Bosnia has become a career for scholars (such as herself), who wish to study and be in proximity to traumatic sites and experiences (1-2; 44).

Outside of this rarefied group of travellers, Dauphinée also describes the commodification of war trauma, indicated by the organised tours offered to international visitors, who seek out the destruction of war, evidenced by its various markings, such as the ruined buildings or the bullet holes throughout the city. These tours also cover NATO operations where it is possible to buy a souvenir coffee mug, with the Cyrillic inscription of

\(^{222}\) Scholars have noted that the instability of post-conflict states has generated criminal economies and increased trauma. Consider, for example, the growth of the sexual trade and illegal trafficking in Bosnia to service the large contingent of international military and peacekeeping groups. For more on this economy, see Andreas, 128-32, as well as the work of journalists and academics, such as Nicola Dahrendorf and Mary Kaldor. While the trauma economy is not about tangible “goods,” like sex workers and relates to the way traumas are mediated and sold, it is an economy that intersects with such shadow or criminal economies. In Sacco’s *The Fixer*, for example, Neven organizes (and boasts about) “arrang[ing] whores for journalists” in exchange for his fifteen per cent cut in Deutsche Marks (7-8).
NATO’s purpose in the Balkans, its “Peace Stabilisation Force” (49). For Dauphinée, these events are troubling: they perpetuate an image of Bosnia as an “abnormal society,” and reduce it into “a metaphor for violence, destruction, and poignant – or repellent – human tragedy” (49). But Bosnian locals actively participate and extract value from trauma in this system, as Dauphinée wryly notes, when she comes across “the casings of artillery shells for sale on street corners as flower vases” (45). Dauphinée is reluctant to explore what this economy may or may not mean to the local. Instead, she expresses her concern with the complicity of researchers and scholars in bolstering thanotourism and is wary of the way that issues of appropriation, representation, voyeurism, as well as the power relationships with subjects shape the “epistemological and ontological commitments that inform most fieldwork” (53). In her conclusion, Dauphinée elucidates a possible response to the difficulties faced by the field researcher that involves establishing one’s authorial presence, while conceding the “problematic authority” of this position in relation to subjects and notions of authenticity (53). As I will demonstrate with Sacco’s comics, such self-consciousness is indeed one way to address the trauma economy and to raise the uncomfortable notion that one is not merely a reader, but that one is implicated within such a system.

**Joe Sacco and the Trauma Economy**

The idea of trauma as a part of a transaction-exchange or a commodity is depicted quite literally in Joe Sacco’s comic books. Like Dauphinée’s focus on the relationship of the researcher to her subjects in conflict spaces, Sacco is similarly concerned with questions of power and exploitation since the presence of a trauma economy shapes much of the interactions between locals and international visitors. Sacco demonstrates that traumas have a fiscal value for
journalists, who are searching out (potentially career-making) “raw goods” to market to their consumers back home, as well as for the local individuals, who are trying to make a living, in the war zone. As traumas thus circulate, from the local individual to the journalist, and then outward to a mass audience, they accumulate in both monetary and social value. The market fascination with trauma (particularly in a “new” trauma that elicits an audience’s interest and sympathy) translates into a wider readership for news broadcasters and consequently represents a much higher value. Whereas Sacco’s comics explore the interrelated social and fiscal aspects of the trauma economy, their focus is chiefly on demarcating the limits of trauma and victimhood within the bounds of this economy. As sociologist Luc Boltanski has made clear, “the spectacle of distant suffering” (i.e., the media footage of people suffering thousands of miles away) offers no guarantee that traumas will be acknowledged as a form of lasting or institutionalised social capital, as opposed to evoking a temporary pity (xv).

One way to understand the accumulating (or the dwindling) value of trauma is suggested in Jeffrey C. Alexander’s essay, “Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma,” which examines the social construction of cultural memories in the context of collective traumas.223 Focusing on what he calls the “trauma process,” Alexander describes the social development that leads to the legitimation of collective traumas. In the “trauma process,” traumatised “carrier groups” must have “the resources, authority, [and] interpretive competence to powerfully disseminate these trauma claims” at home and abroad (27). Alexander reminds us that unlike the psychic trauma of an individual, cultural trauma is a social product, “a socially mediated attribution” (8), which

223 Alexander’s essay has been critiqued by Hans Joas for its “polemical” tone and its “social-constructivist approach” (367-68). Indeed, Joas rightly notes that traumas can be subjectively understood and experienced. Faulting Alexander’s derogation of psychological and experiential conceptualisations of trauma, Joas notes that traumas do not always constitute an objective fact and asks, “Is it no traumatization because it has not been constructed as such?” (369). Joas is correct to pick up on these nuances; however, I feel he builds his essay on Alexander’s careless use of the word “trauma,” which I see as referring to culturally mediated collective traumas, rather than psychic traumas per se.
is defined and constructed around “‘claims’ about the shape of social reality, its causes, and the responsibilities for action” (11). Such claims are about achieving public (and, overwhelmingly, sympathetic) recognition of a trauma; as Alexander notes, many claims are about “a demand for emotional, institutional, and symbolic reparation and reconstitution” (11). Here exists an overlap between the trauma economy and the trauma process. In both, we can trace the development where individuals and groups invest trauma with social capital or value. As a cultural trauma disseminates in the public sphere, so particular meanings become attached to it. If the group carries out “successful meaning work,” so the trauma increases in value (12); as the claims of a particular group are accepted by the greater public, so the trauma achieves cultural and historical integration, ultimately, gaining formal status in society, resulting in commemoration in myriad cultural and governmental forms.

In elaborating his theory, however, Alexander is at a loss to explain why some significant atrocities fail to become commemorated as collective traumas, particularly in the “the non-western regions of the world,” where some of “the most terrifying traumatic injuries” have occurred (24). Initially, he suggests that the victimized group has failed because of their “inability to carry through what I [call] the trauma process,” a dubious assertion that suggests the victims are somehow to blame (26-27). The main problem as Alexander sees it, is that the traumatised “carrier groups…have not emerged with the resources, authority, or interpretative competence to powerfully disseminate these trauma claims. Sufficiently persuasive narratives have not been created, or they have not been successfully broadcast to wider audiences” (27). At least, Alexander concedes that the “authority” and “competence” of these groups, like the

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224 Psychic trauma refers to the shattering or devastation of the (usually individual) self. In contrast, the “claims” of cultural trauma begin with a “master narrative” that represents the nature of the pain, identifies the victim as well as the perpetrator and assigns responsibility (Alexander, “Theory of Cultural Trauma” 12).

225 Alexander’s non-western traumas include the Rape of Nanking, China, Rwanda, Cambodia, and Guatemala.
creation of “sufficiently persuasive narratives,” are at the mercy of external factors, such as the “uneven distribution of material resources and the social networks” that would allow the trauma process and the “cultural classification of trauma to be firmly set in place” (21; 24). But even here, his theory touches only superficially on the very material effects of global capitalism and its various economic, corporate, and political powers in relation to the social construction of cultural trauma as well as the reception of these traumas by the “wider audiences” of the west.

Within these frameworks of power, a trauma process becomes contingent not only on various institutions and communities, but also on the ability of such organizations to emerge successfully. To crystallize, such organizations would be of either of a hegemonic class, be implicated within this politico-economic class or its ideology, or have the ambition and motives to be accepted within this class. The trauma economy deals with these systems of dominance, providing a theory that openly declares the economic and political interests at stake in representing and classifying traumas.

Sacco’s two comic books, *Safe Area* and *The Fixer*, engage with the uneven representations of and responses to the traumas of the Bosnian war. Attentive to these asymmetries as a consequence of the trauma economy, Sacco highlights the ideological process by which certain traumas are recognized, made public, and become more meaningful over others. Sacco’s inclusion of a comic character of himself in his books as a journalist at work in Bosnia uncovering thus-far marginalised histories, reminds his readers of the ethos that structures good journalism, described by those in the profession as a “journalism of attachment” (Calcutt 178), which aims to “de-mythologise and politicise” (180-81). Yet, his emphasis on

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226 The term “journalism of attachment” refers to a manifesto, created by Martin Bell. Bell, a BBC journalist, criticised the neutral stance taken by reporters during the Yugoslav wars, as producing “bystander” journalism (Luckhurst 168-69). For Bell, a journalism of attachment “is aware of its responsibilities; and will not stand neutrally between good and evil, right and wrong, the victim and the oppressor” (8). Up to this point, journalists
the media’s interest in spectacle and his own role as a temporary visitor and professional listener who actively seeks out testimonies (though he frequently fails to secure information), marks the shift from commemorative and journalistic ethics to testimony as commodity. By showing testimony as an “end product,” subjected to mediation, re-presentation, and commodification, Sacco pursues uncomfortable questions about his (and his readers’) interest in the testimony he procures. Implicit in his work is an insistence that commemoration in itself is not enough. Instead, Sacco confronts the problem of implication in his representation of violence and demands that his reader must evoke his or her own positions (of power, of privilege, of desire) in relation to both the testimony of trauma and its witnesses.

If Sacco usefully reminds us about the modes of production and representation that make testimonies available, he also recognizes the divergent roles of agents involved in this process, including witnesses, journalists, artists, observers, and readers. As with his emphasis on the uneven construction of trauma narratives, Sacco brings into focus the international community’s ongoing involvement in Bosnia. As Sacco shows, the Bosniaks’ calls for international assistance, both for protection (since they were under an arms embargo and could not easily protect themselves) and to stymie the military attacks of the Serbs, were disregarded and then dealt with belatedly and ineffectively. From the limits of humanitarian intervention and the imposition of an unwanted ethnic partition, to an irresponsible attitude to spaces perceived as “distant” and irrevocably despotic, Sacco gestures towards a range of complicity. Like the traumas it both represents and responds to, the involvement of the international community is

focused on giving a balanced view from all sides, thus creating equivalence between victims and aggressors (see Sadokovitch’s analysis of the U.S. news and Kent’s chapter on “Moral Equalisation” in reporting, 251-337). Indeed Radovan Karadžić took up numerous PR opportunities, to give a highly distorted Serbian version of events in interviews on the UK’s Channel 4 News and Newsnight. Since its conception, however, a journalism of attachment has been criticised for being politically partisan. Mick Hume, for example, argues that a journalism of attachment creates emotional reporting, and “achieves the opposite of what its advocates claim. Far from raising public understanding of the horrors of war, [journalistic] reports mystify what conflicts are really about” (15).
kept at arm’s length. Political philosopher Michael Ignatieff has cogently described this type of intervention as “empire lite” (22), whose exercise in nation-building is “always looking for the exit” rather than identifying and implementing long-term local solutions (25). As a point of comparison consider the massive and costly reconstruction of Europe in the aftermath of the Second World War, where the international community expended great effort to rebuild economies and civic institutions. While Ignatieff’s concept cannot be fully equated with the bald colonial projects of the nineteenth century, it nonetheless describes a form of imperial hegemony that can be identified tactically as well as culturally. By foregoing the efforts of this institution-building in Bosnia, empire lite has only bolstered ethnic nationalism and encouraged the unchecked growth of criminal activity in the Former Yugoslavia, in some ways, instantiating the very fears associated with the Balkans imaginary.227

These complex issues are initially hidden from view in Sacco’s comic books, since both texts appear to place an emphasis on the experience of the war for Bosniaks rather than on the presence of the international community. Safe Area engages with the war from the perspective of a small town in Eastern Bosnia, while The Fixer examines its development within the iconic city of Sarajevo. The two books are further differentiated from each other by their emphasis on different stages of the war. Safe Area looks at the two-year siege of Goražde, the civilian attempts to deal with wartime deprivations as well as the incidents of ethnic cleansing by Bosnian Serb separatists;228 in contrast, The Fixer examines the dynamics of what has been

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227 See Andreas on Bosnia’s criminal economy. Misha Glenny also offers a compelling assessment of the far-reaching and unanticipated effects of economic sanctions against Serbia. Mainly, the effects have been badly felt on many of the nations surrounding Serbia and relying on that nation’s trading routes, spawning a “smuggling and criminal machine that had few if any parallels in history” (McMafia 19-20).

228 A Note on Ethnic Affiliations: for the rest of this chapter, I refer to the Bosnian Serb separatists as Serbs to indicate their affiliations (and financial/military backing) by the Milosevic’s government in Serbia; this way I also hope to differentiate from Bosnian Serbs loyal to Bosnia. In this chapter, I refer to the latter group as Bosnian Serbs, but they are in fact Bosnians or Bosniaks (because they see themselves as Bosnians and do not place emphasis on the Serbian part of their identity). Unfortunately, Bosniak no longer refers to a regional identity,
described as “the siege within the siege” (Andreas 8). Sarajevo’s three and a half year siege by the Serbs, beginning in 1992, created a black market economy from which Bosniak paramilitary groups profited. Sacco details the rise of this class of Muslim warlords, their contribution (heroic and criminal) to the war, and their various power struggles during the war, as well as their ethnic cleansing of non-Muslim civilians within the city. To summarise each novel briefly: Safe Area follows Sacco’s four-month long visit to Goražde. Introducing readers to the town’s rubbled, ruined, and bullet-scarred setting, Sacco’s text interweaves eyewitness testimony of wartime Goražde with his own autobiographical experience as a visiting journalist seeking information in the city’s postwar aftermath. Sacco’s comic character has arrived in 1995, a significant time for Goražde, when the war is coming to an end and an uneasy peace is being negotiated abroad in Dayton, Ohio. At this time, Goražde is a tiny Muslim enclave in a landscape that has elsewhere been ethnically cleansed by the Serbs and its future is precarious. For Sacco’s character, who knows very little about this political situation except that the town had been designated a “safe area” by UN troops Safe Area illustrates his journey in historical understanding. Through the locals, Sacco learns about the war-torn reality of this supposedly protected area, and Goražde’s abandonment by the UN, once they felt that “the battle for Goražde had endangered [UN] peacekeepers,” leaving the town under attack (Goražde 186). The many testimonies, recounted in Safe Area, describe these events, beginning in April 1992 and finishing in late 1995. Amongst other contexts, they recount the growing ethnic segregation, Serb atrocities, and the struggle for survival as Goražde is placed under siege.

culture, or even citizenship. It has come to mean Bosnian Muslims (in general scholarship) and consequently this is how I use the term myself to forestall confusion. Sacco uses the term “Chetniks” to distinguish between separatist Serbs and Bosnian Serbs (The Fixer, 32). For example, Neven – who self-identifies as a Bosnian Serb, despite the fact that his mother is Muslim – in The Fixer announces, “I couldn’t fight against Serbs. I can fight against Chetniks” (78, Sacco’s emphasis).
As with Safe Area, The Fixer also introduces us to Sacco’s comic character, who is now revisiting Sarajevo in 2001. The text depicts Sacco’s reminiscences of his earlier visits to the city as a journalist during the war, back in 1995, and fleshes out his ambivalent friendship with Neven, a local Sarajevan “fixer” who, as the name implies, “fixes things” for journalists (5). For a fee, Neven has taken Sacco under his wing, showing him around Sarajevo and providing him with contacts and stories of the war. Mostly, The Fixer addresses Neven’s experience of the war, first, as a sniper for one of the Bosniak units (run by the warlord Celo), which was later denounced as illegal by the Bosniak government and, subsequently, as a fixer for foreign visitors, setting them up with anything they need, from access to battle scenes to local prostitutes. The text looks back to 1995 as a time that marks both the end of the war and Neven’s career as a fixer. The central perspective is provided by Neven’s own position as a Bosnian-Serb, loyal to the multicultural ethos of Bosnia, but in many ways a self-proclaimed “Last of the Mohicans” in an increasingly ethnically homogenous and intolerant postwar Muslim Sarajevo (74).

In both these texts, the visual medium of Sacco’s work is instrumental to his critical assessment of the trauma economy: the long form comic book as a genre raises the issues of representation, mediation, and audience. Comics, in the form of books and short strips, have traditionally been considered “pop” art, in both the popular and populist sense of the term. But, now, and especially for the comic book, which more recently has been rebranded as the graphic novel, the genre is attracting the attention of both “highbrow” institutions – for example, Art Spiegelman won the 1992 Pulitzer Prize for his graphic novel Maus (1986) – and academic scholars, who celebrate the genre’s ability to engage with serious cultural and political themes. The comics documentation of Sacco’s journalistic work is pertinent since it draws attention to
the cultural mediation and thus gestures to the way historical truths are produced: as one scholar observes of Spiegelman’s *Maus*, “[c]artoons defined themselves against the aesthetics of photographic reproduction or *realist representation*” (Doherty 74, emphasis added). This argument is reinforced in the 2006 special edition on graphic novels in *Modern Fiction Studies* where the editors argue that the graphic or visual narrative is “a form that also always refuses a problematic transparency, through an explicit awareness of its own surfaces” (Chute and DeKoven 768). In other words, Sacco’s use of comics to depict postwar struggles— in contrast, say to the written, spoken, or visual reports of the press— incessantly remind us that realities are subject to a politics of representation.\(^{229}\) Moreover, like the comic book itself, particular forms of mediation (where cartoons are associated with mass, “low” culture, whilst the graphic novel is considered a higher form of culture) call attention to the relations of domination within culture, against other existing modes of representation, like the novel.\(^{230}\)

As mentioned earlier, Sacco includes himself as a character and narrator-observer in his comic novels, thus adding another layer to the self-reflexive genre of his texts. This strategy recalls Spiegelman’s *Maus*, where the author-in-the-text enacts the role of the vicarious witness to the trauma of the Holocaust. Assessing Spiegelman’s authorial presence, Froma Zeitlin argues that this “mediating figure…emphasizes the process itself of reconstructing the past as filtered through the consciousness (and complicity) of a belated witness in the fusion of then and

\(^{229}\) But this does not mean that every graphic novel contains a self-critical dimension. To offer a contrast, consider Joe Kubert’s 1996 graphic novel *A Story of Survival: Fax From Sarajevo*. Kubert’s novel focuses on the fax correspondence between a Bosniak family in Sarajevo and an American Jewish family in New Jersey, thus highlighting the parallel lives of two families, one caught up in war, and the other helpless, but also enthralled. Kubert depicts this Bosnian family in a wholesome American apple-pie light (perhaps to make them seem culturally familiar to his audience?) and views the war through naïve optimism. His redemptive ending— where the family ends up leaving for the US —replicates the American immigrant narrative as a simple and optimistic story, leaving aside the plight of other less fortunate Bosnians, stuck in partitioned Bosnia.

\(^{230}\) In his study of comics, Hatfield notes that the term “graphic novel” only appeared in the 1970s and was used to market and legitimise comic books to a new and affluent audience (29). Hatfield also goes on to say that the term is used loosely to cover disparate comic material (30).
now” (176). Sacco’s comic character presents a similar figure, calling attention to his mediating presence, in this case quite literally as a member of the international media representing the story to an Anglophone audience. A journalist whose work places him on the peripheries of the war experience – as an outsider, a spectator, and a belated witness driven by the need for information – and in proximity to the local community – as a guest, who is effectively “embedded” for with a host family – Sacco reveals his own participation in this trauma economy. And indeed, the presence of Sacco-as-character throughout his comic books continually reminds the reader of his involvement in and the selective practice of collecting, representing, and relaying (translated) information to an international audience.

In making visible the different standards applied to various collective traumas, Sacco critiques the vicissitudes of trauma across local and international spaces. In other words, we must recognize that trauma is fundamentally mutable. Through mediation it obtains different values and importance across different spaces, depending on who is traumatised and what the trauma is. But precisely because the trauma economy is complex, exploitative, and uneven, modes of agency, however fleeting and constrained, become possible. We see this in the paradoxical revival of the Bosnian economy during the war, when hotels and restaurants can charge high prices to international visitors who frequent the war-zone and when the locals, like Neven in *The Fixer*, can sell their stories (5). But the media interest in the war also prompts locals to profit off trauma in questionable ways. At one end of the scale is Sacco’s depiction of the local businesses as well as their international clientele, who remain essentially a protected and privileged class apart from the besieged Sarajevans. For example, Sarajevo’s visitors tended to stay at the Holiday Inn, the only functioning hotel in the city. Unsurprisingly, the Holiday Inn
is also Sacco’s destination when he first arrives in Sarajevo. Taking up two pages, *The Fixer* shows a panel of Sacco’s character walking to the Holiday Inn (Figure 1).

Everything around him – buildings, houses, cars – signals the rubble and destruction of war. The windows of two nearby high-rise buildings have been shattered. These buildings appear unoccupied, whilst houses, like the burnt-out cars next to the hotel, are empty shells. Yet, the hotel looks oddly intact: no windows are broken and there is little sign of grenade or sniper attacks. This seems curious as a page later we learn that the hotel was practically on the frontline (15). In his remarkable study of the siege of Sarajevo, Peter Andreas actually singles out the Holiday Inn for attention to comment both on its “deliberate non-targeting” by the Serbs and its ability to house the massive media presence and feed its guests in lavish style (74). Andreas speculates that the hotel must have participated in the black market largely controlled by the Serbs, in order to obtain smuggled goods for its guests at a time of acute food and fuel shortages. Amidst war conditions, the Holiday Inn somehow made a large media contingent possible. And, in turn, Andreas points out, the media attention on Sarajevo made “the city a showcase for humanitarian action,” which had an ironic effect in promulgating the trauma economy since it “conveniently substituted for a more decisive and aggressive response to [ending] the war” (72). In other words, by prolonging the siege with little to fear from the international community, the Serbs could continue their destruction of the Bosniak community, while also making a very large profit off both the besieged residents and the international visitors, who “supplied the black market with hard currency” (Andreas 79).

Sacco’s representation of the undamaged Holiday Inn amidst the debris of a desolated cityscape raises questions about the intricacies of the trauma economy and its direct relationship to illegal profiteering. In contrast to his subtle gesture at the way hotels can function in a
Figure 1 “Walking to the Holiday Inn” (*The Fixer* 12-13).
warzone, Sacco also offers us explicit anecdotes about the way the locals turn the trauma of the siege into hard currency. One citizen in Safe Area attempts to sell Sacco and a fellow-journalist, Serif, amateur video footage of “unspeakable things” (120): the effects of Serb bombing, “animals split open, children sheared in two by anti-aircraft cannon, legs getting sawn off without anaesthetic” (120). While Sacco and Serif can barely look at the screen, Serif nevertheless concedes: “she could use such a tape for Turkish television” (120). This footage is only rejected when the local names “a figure so outrageous that it seemed to disgust Serif as much as all those full-color images of the dismembered and the disemboweled” (121). In characters like Serif, we see that the reaction of detached voyeurs to traumatic spectacle is essentially schadenfreude, a combination of horror and the squeamish pleasure of entertainment in another’s (anonymous) pain. The commodification of trauma here (by the local Bosnian as well as the media) is clearly problematic and Sacco’s work raises the question of whether any form of solidarity and empathy is possible under the conditions of the trauma economy.

One problem of the trauma economy is that it covers an uneven multitude of traumas, calling to mind Leys’s description of trauma as “debased currency.” Echoing Leys, Sacco invokes the case of Paula Jones to indicate both the diversity of definitions of trauma as well as the cynical appropriation of the term for individual gain. The Jones scandal broke in 1994, two years into the Bosnian war. In Safe Area, one of the Bosnian locals, Riki recites its details to an astounded Sacco:

Paula Jones, who was 24 then, sued President Clinton for $700,000 for allegedly violating her civil rights by making unwelcomed sexual advances toward her…I have memorized it from “Time” magazine when I was on the battle-lines. (99)

The gravitas of sexual harassment to one side, Riki’s reading matter under battle conditions raises the irony in the contrast between the differing violations of “civil rights.” As Leys
suggests, we need to approach the designation “trauma” with some caution, not only to discern what counts as trauma and who counts as victim, but also to avoid inadvertently dismissing particular traumas or discrediting those who suffered through traumatic events.

The Fixer further examines this hierarchy of trauma, in order to highlight the fetishisation and the transvaluation of particular traumas over others. On a page-sized panel that shows an image of two high-rise buildings on fire in Sarajevo [Figure 2], Sacco evokes the role of visual narratives in making iconic the trauma of the 2001 attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York (35). In this panel, in contrast to the unscathed lower stories of the building, we can see thick black smoke pouring out of the upper portions of the tower blocks. In a post 9/11 environment, (remembering that The Fixer was published in 2003), it is hard not to see a parallel between Sacco’s panel and the powerful image, disseminated by the media, of the World Trade Centre attacks. Sacco’s picture recalls the vulnerability of the Twin Towers in the moments following the plane crashes. The image recaptures the towers seconds after impact, evoking the helplessness of the victims caught in the buildings and the spectator’s moral outrage at the unprecedented act.

Sacco’s comparison between 9/11 and the violent attacks on the civilian population in Sarajevo implies a moral equivalence. Yet, by juxtaposing these traumas, Sacco reveals the inherent contradictions in the way hegemonic powers respond to the threat of war and acts of terror within their own geopolitical civic space in contrast to those occurring in less

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231 As Hariman and Lucaites note, the image of vulnerability was quickly replaced in public discourse with photographs that represented not a national defeat, but collective resolve and recovery. See their chapter on “Performing Civic Identity.”

232 The collective moral outrage over September 11 had much to do with the status of the World Trade Centre as a civilian (and therefore innocent) target, but also because nature of the attack was construed as unprovoked. As Chomsky and others have argued, this view of US innocence is a construct that distracts attention from the role of the US as a hegemonic international power, and its various, self-interested foreign policies in other political regimes. As well as dehistoricizing, it further decontextualises the attack itself: first, by the public focus on the World Trade Centre to the exclusion of the non-civilian attacks on the Pentagon and the White House as military targets; and, secondly, by overlooking the World Trade Centre as a symbol of US hegemony and capitalism. Such symbolism does not justify the attacks, but it calls attention to the US’s position of world power and its realpolitik manoeuvrings in an international context. See Gregory on the construction of “us” versus “them” responses to 9/11 (20-24).
Figure 2 “Sarajevo’s Twin Towers” (*The Fixer* 35).
powerful states. Emerging from the gap between what might be termed a hegemonic trauma, like 9/11 and the Bosnian traumas, we see the very different approaches to victimhood, and interpretations of what constitutes a justifiable response to violence.

To return to *The Fixer*, we must evaluate what happens when Sacco transposes the image of New York on September 11, 2001 onto the context of the Bosnian war. Sacco’s panel is set in 1992, at the beginning of the siege of Sarajevo and, tellingly, Sacco inserts a small caption that states: “Who will defend Sarajevo?”(35). As we discover, prior to Yugoslavia’s break-up, Bosnia had been ordered to return its armaments to the Yugoslav National Army (JNA), which were then placed “into the hands of the rebel Serbs,” leaving the Bosnian government to “build an army almost from scratch” (36). The analogy between 9/11 and 1992 Sarajevo sets up a stark contrast: Sarajevo’s empty landscape and its defencelessness vis-à-vis the assertion of international solidarity with the U.S. and the quick U.S. military response to the act of aggression. Since *The Fixer* follows the story of Neven and his involvement in the Bosniak armies that defended Sarajevo against the Bosnian Serb nationalists, the text constantly reminds the reader about the difficulties of living under a prolonged siege with weapons and food shortages. Perhaps most poignant about *The Fixer* is Sacco’s concern to depict the many atrocities and hardships of the four year-long Sarajevan siege: thus, the reader sees not only “a city that is cut off and being starved into submission,” subject to bomb and sniper attacks, but also the Bosniak punishment of intellectuals and artists, as well as their retaliations on the Bosnian Serb civilian community in Sarajevo (53). In contrast, 9/11 has attained immense cultural capital, because the international press consolidated and legitimated the event’s

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233 9/11 is a hegemonic trauma in the sense that it has been elevated to prominence only because of the political and economic status of the US, as well as the US public’s view of the trauma and their relative insularity from the understanding the consequences of US hegemony around the world (see fn 280).

234 For example, Neven describes patrolling the suburbs of Sarajevo as “suicide actions” involving “14 men with six rocket-propelled grenades between them” facing half-a-dozen tanks (*The Fixer* 55).
symbolic power, by representing, mediating, and dramatizing the trauma so that, as Žižek writes, the U.S. was elevated into “the sublime victim of Absolute Evil” (Welcome 137). In an essay on the events of September 11, Neil J Smelser points out that it was a trauma “marked by a certain simplicity” in that its “traumatic ingredients were fused, telescoped, and undifferentiated” (“Epilogue” 280, original emphasis), in the sense that “the victim and the guilty were so immediately and unequivocally established in the public mind” (282). September 11 was constructed as an exceptional event, in terms of its irregular circumstances, and the symbolic enormity both in the destruction of iconic buildings and in the attack on U.S. soil, in a way that overshadows perhaps all recent international traumas and certainly all other U.S. traumas and sites of shock. Sacco’s portrayal of Sarajevo in relation to September 11 reminds his audience of the cultural imperialism that frames the news and other such public narratives, and the designation of trauma in particular.

Clearly, what one culture considers intensely traumatic may appear less so in the context of another. And, inevitably, hegemonic traumas take precedence and displace other traumas. Even if we were examining comparable traumas, the problem lies in how we are able to differentiate between traumas. At this point, it is useful to return to Derek Gregory’s idea of imagined geographies and the ways in which ideological constructions of space interrelate with perceptions of trauma. Gregory cautions about comparative methodologies when he argues that

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235 See Keith Tester’s analysis of the news coverage of September 11, 2001, which ascribes the “moral enormity” of the event to the global saturation of televised images, related to the “moment” rather than the results “of atrocity” (189, original emphasis). For Tester, the drama and uncertainty of the “news-gathering” rather than the “storytelling” eventually televised helped create a compelling narrative that galvanised solidarity around the world (194).

236 Clearly 9/11 superseded recent national traumas (such as the 1993 immolation of David Koresh’s Branch Davidians in Waco, Texas, the 1995 bombing of a government building in Oklahoma City and the 1999 Columbine High School shootings), except perhaps Pearl Harbour. As Smelser notes, comparisons were made with the Japanese attacks on Pearl Harbour though “most people refused to compare September 11 with anything, uniquely shocking and horrible as its immediate effects were” (“Epilogue” 265). The danger of fixating on World Trade Centre attacks as an epic and national trauma have been suggested variously by critics such as Žižek, Butler, and Anne Cvetkovich.
there is “something distasteful about “cherry-picking among…extremes of horror;” but he also
goes on to say that traumatic events “produce different responses in different places” to which
we must remain vigilant (27).

*The Fixer* explicitly undertakes this complicated task of comparing trauma, by situating the Bosnian war within a larger global network of mediated reports about conflict and disaster. Sacco’s portrayal of postwar Bosnia as a place that has receded from the international spotlight but whose catastrophe is still palpably felt by its residents reminds readers of the vicissitudes of imagined geographies. If we are to follow Gregory and understand imagined geography as a methodology for ordering the world, then we come to apprehend its ideological function as Sacco portrays the ways in which the international community gradually detached from Bosnia, turning its attention and attributing greater significance to those other traumatic events that perhaps better suited prevailing hegemony. Sacco prompts his readers to be aware of how such detachments occur within a trauma economy, where discourses of representation selectively portray political violence and, in doing so, re- and devalue the traumas of war.

In what follows, I consider how Sacco’s texts offer an opportunity to resist the hegemonic version of the imagined cartography of the Balkans, produced in Bosnia during the war and its aftermath. As Sacco’s character interacts with Goražde’s residents and attends to their experiences of the crisis of war, he increasingly becomes aware of the ways in which he (like the reader and the international community) projects his pejorative understanding of the Balkans onto Bosnia’s inhabitants. Indeed, Sacco begins his texts with his comic character in the position of the naïve Westerner, ignorant of the details of the war and the different groups involved, but certain about the merits of the international community’s intervention (*The Fixer* 17). Sacco’s character is central to his authorial strategy to opening up a view of Bosnia’s
history and its traumas that gradually unsettle and educate his readers, initiating a critique of the ideological and cultural work of the trauma economy. In reassessing the Bosnian war, Sacco exposes the racist narratives that serve to construct not only the Balkan east, but also its western antonym. If imagined geographies construe Bosnia as a space of ethnic despotism, then we, in the west must also confront our own disingenuous posturing as “merely observers, neutral, benevolent and righteously dismayed” (Žižek “You May”). Sacco’s comics work against such imagined cartographies and their construction of otherness, identifying the practices in which he and his readers are complicit.

**Self-Reflexive Critique**

Political awareness begins when readers confront their ignorance of and detachment from the Bosnian conflict. Sacco’s comic character is an outsider, the temporary “guest of the Bosnian war,” who is privy to the experience of war through its stories, accessed through the translations of his hosts (*Safe Area* 130). Empathy is cultivated when the reader, in effect, witnesses the war though Sacco’s interlocutive narrator, learning about its “harrowing” details and the atrocities perpetrated on civilians (228). Yet, on the other hand, the reader is also forced to recognize her detachment and her inability to relate fully to such experiences. Like Sacco’s comic character who lives in a “world...[of] certain privileges” allowing him a speedy exit “gratis” when he so desires it, the reader is in a position of relative freedom and empowerment in contrast to Bosnia’s citizens (130). On learning about Goražde’s cultural isolation in Serbian territory, Sacco exclaims, “We were cut off” before ironically reminding his readers that, in fact,

> *They* were cut off to be more precise. As for me, don’t you worry. I was privy to exclusive exits, all clearly marked. If the noose got tight again, I could flash my UN-issued Blue Card and get out of here and back to Sarajevo... back home to mommy if things really slipped back to unthinkable (7, original emphasis).
This constitutive inequality is made clear throughout Sacco’s texts, from his emphasis on peripatetic journalists, in search of a quick story, to the UN and NATO diplomats and generals, at once arrogant about their objectives and dismissive of the plight of the Bosnian inhabitants (165). And by signalling towards such inequities, Sacco reminds us there is an inherent cowardliness in assuming the safety and value of these “international” lives over Bosnian lives.

I want to segue briefly to a discussion on the genre of the autobiographical graphic novel that I think highlights the unique way Sacco implicates his readers in narratives of violence. Building on the work of Marianne Hirsch, Gillian Whitlock considers the graphic novel as a discourse that provides a serious and progressive meditation on the prevalence of a traumatic visual culture. According to Whitlock, this has much to do with the reader as an active participant within the narrative. The accessibility of visual narratives, together with the “unique aesthetics of the comics as sequential art,” compels the reader’s involvement as “a collaborator, engaging in an active process of working through” (968; 969-70). In other words, Whitlock suggests that the hybrid genre of the graphic novel, which integrates visual images with text, is fundamental to the reader’s self-critical engagement with the product at hand (i.e. the comic book itself). Whitlock’s theories seem to me to point towards the self-reflexive strategies at work in Sacco’s graphic narratives. Sacco initiates an unsettling empathy in his critique of the media, the spectrum of traumas in the war, and his focus on the marginalised postwar lives of Bosnian people.

The narrative of Safe Area begins at the point in history when peace talks are in process, but no one yet knows the outcome. The future of Goražde, as the narrator explains to us, “was by no means clear” (1) and, consequently, Goražde is flooded with international visitors – mainly journalists and UN workers. As part of this contingent, Sacco’s character initially takes
for granted his own position as a privileged outsider and Sacco shows his cartoon character in an ironic light, as one who has little consideration for the locals. Like the other journalists, Sacco’s character eagerly anticipates the news around the impending partition plans, including the trading of Goražde to the Serbs. For Sacco’s character, Goražde is merely a spectacle, a potential scoop about an ethnic conflict, rather than a real place populated with real lives that involve complex and multiple religious, and cultural affiliations. In short, the beginning of _Safe Area_ deliberately reproduces a Balkanist discourse. Strategically aligning his readers with an outsider’s perspective, Sacco sets up a divide, an Us and Them mentality, a boundary marked from the vantage point of the western agent (such as the UN convoys and the journalists) as he perceives the collective of Othered victims. In initially playing to the (contemporary) reader’s assumptions about the Balkans and the Bosnian war, Sacco demonstrates the uncritical insularity and prejudices still prevalent in the international community, some five years _after_ the war. This becomes clear after reading through Sacco’s text, replete with its informative testimonials and historical overviews.

The opening Balkanist perspective of _Safe Area_ is encapsulated by a panel on page four that introduces us to Goražde [Figure 3]. The significance of this panel is suggested by its size—it takes up an entire page—and also by its reproduction as the book’s cover image. In it, Sacco depicts Goražde’s main boulevard, the road and buildings marked by shell explosions and bullet holes. Here stands a large group of people waiting on both sides of the road as the UN relief convoys and foreign journalists drive into the town. The reader, whose perspective converges with that of the unseen convoy, is looking down at crowd. The crowd is a blurry,
Figure 3 “Welcome to Goražde” (Safe Area Goražde 4).
mute collective, that fades out into indistinguishable features at the end of the boulevard, a mass of bowed and poor-looking people, set apart only by their conventionally Eastern-European fur hats, headscarves, and the marks of war, such as the occasional crutch. At the bottom of the panel is a caption that reiterates the international community’s weary attitude to this small town: “‘I wish Goražde would go away,’ I heard one American correspondent say…” (4). To this unnamed journalist, the Muslim enclave of Goražde is simply a cartographical aberration, jeopardizing the prospects of a peace settlement with the Serbs. Rather than signifying a meaningful local community that, despite the odds, has held out for two years against the far better armed Serbs and has, somehow, absorbed tens of thousands of displaced persons from Eastern Bosnia, Goražde functions as a symbol. For such journalists, Goražde’s geographical position, in the middle of Serb-controlled territory, is an inconvenience, unnecessarily complicating the proposed partition of Bosnia. As Edin later informs Sacco, the international community, “including National Security Advisor Anthony Lake…[want] to make the map even simpler by swapping Goražde for Serb-controlled suburbs of Sarajevo” (208, emphasis added).

After this opening, Balkanized, frame the remainder of Safe Area comprises a course of what we might call de-Balkanization. Certainly, Sacco uses his own experience amongst the locals to reduce the detachment and indifference represented in the book’s opening. Through interactions with the individuals – frequently characterised by their hospitality, their desire for normalcy, and especially, their foibles, their all-too-modern interests and desires – Sacco troubles his earlier stereotypes of an othered population. As political commentator Christopher Hitchens writes in the introduction to Safe Area, “Sacco seems to be saying, will you turn away from the extermination and dispossession of those who are so much like your own unlovely

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237 Under the Yugoslav Federation, Gorazde had a population of 18,000. During the war, its population swelled to over 50,000 (see Horwell).
self?” (ii). But in case this all too “human” portrayal of Bosniaks fails to touch his readers, Sacco uses testimonial and historical narratives to provide a detailed context about the Bosnian war. The complexity of information put forward here provides a corrective to any reductive understanding of the Bosnian war.

Sacco’s inclusion of maps, in particular, disables the imaginary and abstract geography of the Balkans, instead, concretising Bosnian space as a specific entity. Maps are important because they form another version of testimony and historical authority, transmuting the personal narrative of testimony into a public discourse. For instance, both Safe Area and The Fixer use maps to illustrate the history of Yugoslavia and to establish the sites of battle and the frontline of sieges during its break-up. Safe Area’s maps are particularly detailed. They plot out the topography of Eastern Bosnia and the location of its towns, and are further supplemented with statistical information on the pre-war, multiethnic constitution of these places (19-20). Such figures put into perspective the impact of the Dayton Accords and the partition of Bosnia for the reader, showing us that Eastern Bosnia (unlike other parts of Bosnia that included Croat minorities) was predominantly populated by both Bosniaks and Serbs and that the Bosniaks formed the majority. The consequences of partition and the handing over of Eastern Bosnian territory to the Serbs means that land taken by force effectively remains in the hands of the victors, legitimating the dispossession and ethnic cleansing of the Bosniak population. Moreover, as forms of documentation usually considered within an objective and official capacity, maps lend credence to the accompanying testimonies in the novel, asserting that, yes, such and such place actually exists and eyewitnesses have identified these places as sites where atrocities were carried out.238

238 As a contrast, consider Norma Khouri’s fraudulent autobiography Forbidden Love about honour killings in Jordan. In Jordan, Khouri’s testimony could not be seen as legitimate from the very start because of its significant
While Sacco’s maps speak to Bosnia’s multiethnic history [Figures 4 and 5], we must not forget that maps have frequently been enlisted as a tool in the construction of imagined geographies, to return to Gregory’s phrase. For Sacco, however, the imagined Balkan geography is at its most forceful when articulated within the cultural and discursive sites of the international community, such as that of the news media. The international press was instrumental in relaying information about the Bosnian war to the world at large. But the media also commodified the trauma and reinforced east-west oppositions in their representation of the war. So while it remains true that the opening of Safe Area places the reader into a position that uncritically accepts Western representations of the Balkans, the “Prologue” of Sacco’s comic book takes a more cautious tone, alerting the reader to the elusive and unreliable rhetoric of “Truth” as well as the role of mediators who construct such truths when representing events. The “Prologue,” a two-page comic strip, depicts Sacco and his Bosnian friend, Edin, sitting in a dark, smoky café, waiting for news about the peace negotiations in Dayton. In the corner of the opening panel, a man sits with his back to the reader, in a hat and trench coat, evocative of American comic-book detectives. This character invites himself over to Sacco’s table and in the style of film noir, faces the reader, the hat shadowing his face, as his story is narrated by the overhead caption:

He said he’d lost millions of deutschemarks at the beginning of the war, but he didn’t mind because he was living in a ‘town of heroes’… He said that he alone knew the Real Truth about Goražde…in fact, he’d written a book called ‘The Real Truth About This Town’

geographical errors, suggesting that the author was unfamiliar with Jordan and Amman. For more details, see Anna Broinowski’s excellent 2007 documentary, Forbidden Lie$. 
Modern Yugoslavia was fashioned out of the wreckage of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia after World War II by the Communist resistance leader Josip Broz, better known as Tito.

Of the six Yugoslav republics constituted by Tito, Bosnia was the most ethnically diverse. It contained large populations of Croats, Serbs, and Muslims. Each of these ethnic groups has a particular history and cultural background, but they are all South Slavs and speak essentially the same language. Their chief distinguishing characteristic is religious. Croats are Roman Catholics; Serbs and Orthodox Christians; and Muslims are generally descended from those Slavs who converted to Islam during a 500-year Ottoman occupation.

Goražde is in the Drina Valley in Eastern Bosnia, where villages and towns were populated predominantly by Muslims and Serbs.

Figure 4 “Maps of Bosnia” (Safe Area Goražde 19).
More than half a million people lived in the Drina Valley, according to the 1991 census. Of these, 51.7 percent were Muslim, 44.4 percent Serb.

In Gorazde's administrative district, the population was 70.2 percent Muslim, 26.2 percent Serb.

Figure 5 “Map of Eastern Bosnia” (Safe Area Goražde 20)
Presenting himself as *the* authority on Goražde, the mysterious man proceeds to tell Sacco that “if [he] were a real journalist…who sought the Real Truth, [Sacco] would visit him” for information, which, we presume, is available for a certain price (ii). After the man leaves Sacco tells us “I never visited that man. In fact, after that evening I avoided him completely” (ii).

If Sacco’s rejection signifies his suspicion of the “Real Truth,” his stylised depiction of the man already hints at the ways in which reality and fiction overlap, implying that we remain critically vigilant to representations of reality. Critics and reviewers have called attention to the verisimilitude of Sacco’s graphic Bosnia; but however accurate these gritty depictions of Goražde and its inhabitants are, the text pushes us to acknowledge its mediated frame of reference. For instance, in contrast to the other characters, Joe Sacco’s comic character is notably unrealistic. One reviewer describes him as being “the most cartoony character in [the] stories,” with “blank” glasses, “exaggerated” facial features, and “rubbery” limbs. Similarly, the *film noir* stylistic feel of the Prologue reminds its readers that their access to wartime memories in *Safe Area* is only possible through Sacco’s mediation of other peoples’ experiences.

Before I turn to these testimonies and stories, it is important to acknowledge that the mass coverage of the war by the international media was integral to a concept of a “Real Truth” to a Western audience who relied on such sources to find out what was happening in Bosnia. In their work on the media and the Bosnian war, scholars, like Stjepan Meštrovic and Gregory Kent have described the intense mass media coverage, while others, like Susan Moeller, have

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239 See Horwell; Rieff, “Bosnia Beyond Words”; and Tanner.
240 See Sacco, “The Art of War”.
241 In her analysis of the media coverage of the Bosnian war, Moeller talks about how instrumental the media were in shaping public opinion since, “the media is often the sole source of information on international affairs for Americans”(261). Focusing on the UK, Kent argues that television coverage of the war “was the most influential medium” for any understanding of the Bosnian crisis (2).
called attention to the fickleness of these media reports. Using the example of the death of an American journalist in Sarajevo, Moeller explains that such an event created a shift in perspective and renewed focus on “the plight of the cities…away from the story of the [Serb detention] camps and the plight of the thousands still held there hostage, tortured and abused” (271). Ironically, any media attention paid to Bosnia, however skewed, displaced coverage from other sites of political violence, such as in Rwanda, where a genocidal war was underway.²⁴² Sacco picks up on both the points made by Meštrovic and Moeller in order to convey how in this trauma economy, there exists a hierarchy, where some traumas are more saleable – because they have more appeal to a western audience – by the media. Through this logic, Goražde’s status as a small rural city means it is considered obscure and so it is marginalised and “cut off from cameras” (126). While Goražde and other areas of Eastern Bosnia were fenced off from international scrutiny, cities, such as Dubrovnik and Sarajevo received disproportionate interest, operating as “media-magnet[s]” whose suffering was broadcast around the world (144). When the international media show up in Goražde, the locals are ecstatic because of “all the promise our outsideness implied,” raising expectations that news of their situation will be broadcast across the world (24). But Sacco’s captions undermine these expectations, at once mimicking the excitement of the locals, while reiterating the prevalence of capitalist market forces, like the demand for convenient, concise (rather than in-depth or extended) coverage, and the rapid turnaround to “fresh” stories, to prevent the inevitable compassion fatigue: “Goražde! Which was getting CNNed! NPRed! BBCed! But its proverbial 15 minutes were ticking away! Pretty soon no one was gonna remember Goražde! Gora-wuh? Huh?” (6).

²⁴² Moeller points out that the Rwandan genocide did “not command the same prominence or number of column inches or time on the news…as the Serbian siege of the ‘safe haven’ of Goražde that demonstrated the farce of the U.N. presence in Bosnia” (223). Clearly, while Goražde only received a limited amount of media coverage, its European location ensured it would receive far more attention than horrific events in Africa.
Under the constraints of global capitalism, the media makes little effort to unravel the historical and political complexity of the conflict. The journalists’ reports on the war are brief, commensurate with the amount of time they are allocated to their fieldwork. “Most journalists,” Sacco tells us, “blew in with the U.N. convoy in the morning…and blew out with the U.N. convoy in the afternoon” (130). He explains how the demand to create newsworthy stories within a short timeframe means that journalists resort to manipulating the locals to create “some quickie action,” such as “throwing candy at kids to capture the predictable mad scramble” (131). Other journalists express a particular agenda, wanting to see “damaged buildings,” much to the surprise of the locals who see “damaged buildings everywhere” (217). What becomes clear is that the majority of these journalists are not concerned with grounding Goražde’s plight within the war’s history, let alone a longer history that goes back to the Tito’s Yugoslavia and the Second World War. If Goražde is considered too inconsequential on an international level to be “covered” in any depth, it is also dismissed within its own national space. In this sense, Goražde suffers a double marginalisation, for it is not only part of Bosnia’s war on its eastern front, and thus relegated to further down the scale of the “uncivilised” Balkans, but it is also a provincial town, the rural other to Sarajevo, the most prominently featured city during the war. Ironically, Goražde suffers this stigma in relation to Sarajevo by the city’s inhabitants, who “weren’t so concerned about the fate of Goražde and its ‘country’ people” (108). By aligning Goražde with the “‘primitivism’ of the eastern Bosnian refugees, filling their proudly cosmopolitan city,” the Sarajevans self-Balkanize their own geo-political space (108).243

In these different scenarios and (mis)representations, the concept of a “Real Truth” remains an ironic theme. While it undermines the media’s coverage of the war, showing how Truth is selectively assembled, there is only the affirmation of the elusiveness of a “Real Truth,”

243 This form of internal Balkanism has been described as “nesting Orientalism” by Milica Bakić-Hayden.
given so insistently in the Prologue to *Safe Area*. Sacco’s attempts to record life in Goražde, nevertheless, speak to his desire to comprehend a complex series of events, which would account for the failures of the UN-designated Safe Area, as well as explain Goražde’s ability to survive in the face of abandonment. Embarking on a detailed inquiry into the facts, Sacco wanders through the town in the search of answers: “Why? Because you are still here… not raped and scattered… not entangled in the limbs of thousands of others at the bottom of a pit… Because Goražde had lived and – how?” (15). But rather than a singular “Real Truth” manifesting itself, Sacco discovers numerous truths, that introduce many traumas and also position trauma incongruously alongside the everyday, the banal, and the comic. Through Edin, who “seem[s] to know everyone,” Sacco meets locals of all ages and professions at their homes, in cafes, and in bars (15). Through these social interactions, Sacco picks up scraps of testimonies, histories, and stories about the Goražde (post)war experience that are overlooked by the mainstream media. These testimonies pose a response to the privileging process shaped by the trauma economy. In representing the testimonies, Sacco provides a distinctive voice not only to local experiences of trauma, but also to the grim postwar predicament of what Edward Said called “the forgotten people and places of the world, those who don’t make it on to our television screens” (“Homage” iv). These testimonies remind us of the asymmetries of economic power, long after such spaces have ceased to be of international interest.244

244 The self-reflexive witnessing of Sacco, shown in his depiction of testimonies, complements the work on witnessing described by Hesford, and Kaplan (especially her discussion of Tracey Moffatt’s film work in *Trauma Culture* 130-35) that attempts to overcome vicarious and empathic suffering, by foregrounding the role of the spectator. Sacco’s work differs in its emphasis on the spectator’s economic implication.
Bosnian Testimonies

We can view Sacco’s engagement with the traumas of the Bosnian war as an attempt to do what E. Ann Kaplan describes as “translating” trauma for a mass audience by “finding ways to make meaning out of, and to communicate, catastrophes that happen to others” (19). But while such translation can enable an empathic response from an audience who would otherwise remain distant to suffering, Sacco takes care to foreground the complexities of the war and his own role as war journalist in his texts, so that no simple empathetic identification with the victims is possible. Instead, as I have outlined earlier, we might see the kind of empathy crafted by Sacco as a self-critical practice.

The testimonies of the Bosnian war reproduced in Sacco’s texts are significant in their own right: as witness accounts to the trauma of ethnic cleaning they add to the growing repository of evidence on the war and complicate certain interpretations of its events, including those that cast the conflict within a Balkanist frame of reference, as a civil war that was the inevitable culmination of ethnic hatred. Most importantly, however, these testimonies, along with the narrative-frame provided by Sacco’s character, provide a new understanding of the Bosnian war. They convey the increasing complexities of the war, evoking the (unintended) consequences of the international community’s intervention, which prolonged and even worsened the effects of war. The testimonies thus designate a counter-response to the “sound-bite” aesthetic of the international media in their coverage. Even as they reject their appropriation as spectacle for an audience, the testimonies call out to the reader, evoking the role and responsibilities of the listener (whom they address via Sacco’s character). The listener, rather than being a “co-owner” of the trauma, as trauma theorist Dori Laub would say, instead is utilised as a forum for testimonies to be heard and where the survivor’s agency can be asserted.
via witnessing (58). Moreover, the testimonies call attention to the partitionist mentalities engendered by the war and so reveal the problems facing Bosnia, and most especially, whether its multicultural heritage can be recovered. In his compilation and study of Bosnian war memories, psychiatrist Stevan Weine argues for the relevance of testimony, suggesting that it should play a vital part in the postwar state in terms of justice and “peacemaking” (*Testimony* 70). Fearing that the current preoccupation with state-building in Bosnia has merely entrenched ethnic divisions, Weine stresses that, “far too little attention [has been] paid to the collective nightmares of Bosnians and Herzegovians and their struggle over culture and historical memories” (70).

*The Fixer* and *Safe Area* engage a multiplicity of speakers and memories, and so accumulate archives of collective memory. These accounts reflect upon the *realpolitik* interests that shaped the war as well as the profound consequences of political violence (in the guise of ethnic violence) upon individuals. Structured around the various testimonies of local Bosnians, the two texts speak to the ongoing traumatisation of Bosnia’s inhabitants. While both relay a postwar narrative, they are each punctuated by smaller testimonial digressions that place the individual experience of atrocities within a historical frame. Though these individual testimonies are relatively short, in sum they make up the bulk of the narrative. For instance, in *Safe Area*, Sacco dedicates almost half of his entire book to local testimonies and draws much of his character’s understanding of the war from Edin, his local guide and translator.245 There are nine testimonies in all, ranging in length from a single page to a more substantial twenty-five pages. Both *Safe Area* and *The Fixer* literally mark out the testimonies by a solid black frame about a centimetre thick (unlike the rest of the text’s narrative), adding a tone of *gravitas* and alerting the reader that they are now entering a different kind of (mediated) text [Figure 6].

245 Of 227 pages, 93 are black-framed testimonies.
Figure 6 “Edin’s Testimony: the White Death” (*Safe Area Goražde* 140).
The insights of this collective testimony are, to an extent, pedagogic, seeking to document the historical background of the war and explain the political aims of various international, national, and local actors. Unsparing in their detail of violence, destruction, and deprivation, the testimonies nevertheless highlight the multiple and, at times, ambiguous interethnic relationships throughout Yugoslavia’s history and during its break-up, belying any reductive label as a conflict involving warring ethnic factions.\textsuperscript{246} While the international media conflated the Bosnian war with specific and now notorious traumas, such as the protracted siege of Sarajevo and the massacre at Srebrenica, these testimonies include references to them, while looking beyond such media focal points. This way they remind us that events like Srebrenica were not the exception, but rather one part of an orchestrated sequence of attempts aimed at eradicating the Muslim community. The Bosniaks were initially the victims of Serb aggression, but given the inability of the Bosnian government to defend its people, a new and autonomous class of armed Bosniak groups emerged in Sarajevo’s power vacuum. \textit{The Fixer} deploys testimonies that identify the corruption and criminality of these factions; run by warlords and mercenaries, their loyalties were often ambiguous.\textsuperscript{247} Sacco includes some testimonies that speak to the retaliatory traumas perpetuated by the groups and their role in the mass killings of Bosnian Serb civilians (94-95). Other testimonies, particularly in \textit{Safe Area}, depict the everyday struggle under the conditions of war. The fact that the media neglected such experiences recalls

\textsuperscript{246} In fact, scholars argue that ethnic labelling did not exist locally before the war and that ethnic identity is a fluid and mutable phenomena (for instance, see Kent 68-73). Kent also notes that, when referring to the efforts of the Bosnian government, “the only legitimate, legally constituted force operating the country” (256), the media preferred religious/ethnic terms, such as Muslim.

\textsuperscript{247} \textit{The Fixer} shows how one Bosniak warlord, named Juka, ends up working for the Croatian government and the Bosnian Croats, “reportedly aid[ing] in the cleansing of Muslims from Mostar” (71). Like the Serbs, the Croats were (albeit to a lesser extent) responsible for ethnic cleansing operations (see MacDonald 220-45, and especially 240-41, which details Croat detention centres for detaining and terrorising mainly Bosniak prisoners). The idea of a Greater Croatia, advocated by the Croatian president Tudjman, like his 1991 plans to divide up Bosnia with Miloševic, tend to be overshadowed by the press in their focus on the Croat’s later strategic alliances with the Bosniaks against the Serbs.
the trauma economy, where the everyday “quiet” or “mundane” trauma has little value, in contrast to a spectacular trauma (Luhrmann 158). In one doctor’s testimony, Sacco depicts the panicked influx of patients during the shelling of Goražde, and futile attempts to operate on patients, in spite of medicine shortages and power cuts. In another witness account, Edin describes the “White Death,” a dangerous all-night trek through the mountains during the winter to procure supplies. After the UN failed to deliver supplies, civilians could choose to travel this twenty-six mile route to the neighbouring town for food or face starvation. As Edin explains, even this trip brings no assurances since the risks were high so that “[s]cores died of exposure… Others were killed by landmines and in ambushes” (136).

The “White Death” trip illustrates the palpable material repercussions on Goražde, when their traumas and vulnerability are ignored by the outside world. Sacco’s success in obtaining testimonial accounts from the local community is precisely because of the media’s urban bias that ignored or marginalised rural towns, such as Goražde, throughout most of the war. This is particularly ironic if we consider that rural areas tend to bear the brunt of wars – as indeed was the case with Bosnia where “some of the worst atrocities were taking place, including the mass execution and expulsion of Muslims from towns and villages and the setting up of concentration camps” (Andreas 38). Consequently, Goražde’s inhabitants welcome the journalists enthusiastically as “guests from outside,” who will relay their stories – and their despair – to the world (24). The interaction with reporters like Sacco who have agency and who are able to cross battle lines under UN protection, offers the promise that testimony will circulate within an international community of listeners, and thus become meaningful in its address as well in its anticipation of a response.
The testimony of Rasim, an old man from Višegrad, makes precisely this appeal. Sacco’s inclusion of this testimony is significant because Višegrad, like Srebrenica, stands for the genocidal atrocities of the Serbs, yet it is “one of hundreds of forgotten names,” unknown outside of Bosnia (Vulliamy, “Butcher.”). Višegrad, once made up of over two-thirds Muslims, was the site of an orchestrated pogrom, resulting in the disappearance of over 14,000 Muslims (Vulliamy). In Rasim’s witness account, we can see the symbolic power of testimony as the personal voice attests to his survival and demands justice, emphasising the personal as the site of memory, which provides historical evidence to the war. In eight pages of drawn testimony, Rasim repeatedly states the words “I was an eye-witness” and “I saw,” performative acts that substantiate the historical atrocities, describing the murder of around three hundred Bosniaks and the disposal of victims’ bodies into the Drina River (109; 110; 111; 114; 115). In a special issue of Discourse on “The Future of Testimony,” Anne Cubilié and Carl Good examine testimony, with an emphasis on its “very grounds of possibility” and “testimonial effects” (8). We can situate Rasim’s account within Cubilié and Good’s assessment, since his testimony is clearly “a response to trauma, a response which evokes – and ventures – the possibilities of language, literature and ethical community in a resistance to effacement from juridical, literary, psychic and cultural fields” (7) By sharing his memories with Sacco, Rasim addresses an international audience, and gestures towards these possibilities of change and justice, a form of agency LaCapra describes as going “beyond witnessing” resulting in an appeal towards “more comprehensive modes of political and social practice” (History and Memory 12).

Sacco reminds us that such appeals for justice must also include individuals and groups that have been demonised. In both texts, Sacco includes testimonies from the Bosnian Serbs, presenting a viewpoint that has largely been marginalised in the media and in testimonial
literature. This perspective elaborates the problems of defining the war in any absolutist ethnic terms and, in doing so, indicates some of the complexities and difficulties of a future restitution that is structured along ethnic lines. Most Bosnian Serbs did not face the same level of danger as the Bosniaks; yet, many also suffered greatly from the war. In Sarajevo, many of them were provoked, attacked, abducted, and even killed by nationalist Bosniaks (*The Fixer* 67; 77; 96). Yet, though they were of Serbian heritage, or partially Serbian like Neven in *The Fixer*, they did not identify with the Serb separatists and frequently fought for the Bosniak army. Rasim’s account, in fact, draws attention to the dilemma of the Bosnian Serbs in Goražde, who despite fearing the armed Serb paramilitary outsiders, are aligned with them by the Bosniaks. Rasim’s testimony, in contrast, speaks to the strength of multicultural communities since his survival is dependent on the assistance he receives, firstly, from a Bosnian Serb neighbour and, secondly, from a Bosnian Serb friend that enables him to escape the Drina River massacres. *Safe Area*, in fact, devotes a chapter to the Bosnian Serbs and describes how this Goražde community became the retaliatory targets of displaced and “angry refugees from places like Foca and Visegrad” (157). These Bosnian Serbs, though loyal to a multicultural Bosnian state, “were murdered and harassed, especially during the ’94 [Serb siege] offensive,” according to one eyewitness (158). Once evacuations were permitted, many of the local Bosnian Serbs left Goražde for their own safety. But, even then, their affinities do not lie with Serbia; instead, as Liljana, a Bosnian Serb who continued to live in Goražde tells Sacco, “I would have gone, not to Serbia, but out if I had known it would be like this” (159, original emphasis).

Of all the testimonies used by Sacco, those depicting the predicament of the Bosnian Serbs most starkly demonstrate the tautology perpetuated by partition: in the wake of ethnically targeted violence, there is an escalation of partitionist mentalities. The schismogenic behaviour
of Bosnian ethno-cultural groups does not bode well for any multiethnic future. As Dr. Begovic, one of Sacco’s key witnesses, explains, many Bosnian Serbs would have chosen to stay in Goražde, now part of the Croat-Muslim Federation of Bosnia, but for their new minority status and the postwar conditions of distrust, “given their greatly reduced number… the tense atmosphere and the future uncertainty” (Safe Area 159). In a double-page spread, entitled “Can you Live with the Serbs Again?” that takes up the theme of interethnic community, Sacco presents eleven opinions from Goražde. These Bosnian locals give voice to the conflicting realities brought about by the war, while reflecting upon their experience of living in multicultural, secular Yugoslavia. For some, particularly those who lost family, the war marks an irrevocable change within Bosniak-Serb relations, leading to a rejection of trust and friendship with the Bosnian Serbs. Others recognize the difference between separatist “Chetniks” and “loyal Serbs,” those who “were in the same situation” as the Bosniaks (161).

Overwhelmingly, the cross-section of opinions expresses doubt and fear, despite rationalisations that such feelings are a product of the war. As one man explains: “I’m suspicious of [the Bosnian Serbs]. I can’t help it. I don’t have the same feelings for them I had before… I can’t feel comfortable with them again” (160). Another tells Sacco that he would like to hear the Bosnian Serb perspective: “But generally, I don’t want to see the people who’ve done this for another 20 or 40 years. They’ve shattered my life and I can’t put the pieces together again” (161). This last comment in the montage leaves us with the problems related to the immediacy of the post-war and post-partitioned present. The lack of a temporal distance combined with the rawness of feeling around the recent traumas, suggests the difficulties of the task ahead, of working through the war experience and coming to terms with the past. Indeed, we can infer that the work of mourning and exploring the legacies of the war is, for the moment,
best left to outsiders, like Sacco who have the necessary detachment and self-awareness, to recount and evaluate this traumatic past responsibly. As Edin makes clear by the end of the book, rather than actively forgetting or actively remembering the past, he “wanted to get on with things” (227). This desire to preoccupy himself with daily life offers Edin one kind of refuge. Removed from the trepidation, suffering, and violence of the Goražde siege, this refuge re-enacts a normalcy at odds with the traumatised inhabitants and devastated buildings of Bosnia’s post-war setting. But, in the absence of another solution, it gestures towards a way to make up, albeit, gradually and never completely, the “hole in [Edin’s] life almost four years long” (227).

One striking aspect about the Bosnian testimonies is the prevalence of silence and Sacco’s admission of his frequent failure to record witness accounts from the residents of Goražde and Sarajevo. Silence – in relation to violence – supposedly indicates the difficulties of relating a trauma as something that overwhelms language and representation, and so suggests the problems ahead, the impossibility of any short-term solution, of coming to terms with a deeply traumatic past. Sacco demonstrates that for some survivors, this breakdown of language attests to violence, since talking about trauma is deeply traumatic in itself, in recalling (and forcing the survivor to relive) suffering. In one incident, a woman finds she cannot speak to Sacco about what happened and “shak[es] so hard she had to sit down against the wall” (Safe Area 106). While her story is not divulged at this point in the text, her physical reaction hints at atrocities. Indeed, as readers, we wonder what happened and we think about the gendered forms of violence perpetrated on Bosniak women by the Serbs, such as rape warfare. But while Sacco indicates these war crimes happened, he does not elaborate on them (117-29); this way, the reader’s curiosity is never fulfilled and the trauma thus resists any incorporation.

248 Laub 64. Primo Levi in The Drowned and The Saved, also refers a mute class of survivors (as well as those who did not survive), who he sees as the “true witnesses” in their inability to talk about trauma (83).
If such silences simultaneously invite and foreclose the desire of the reader to hear about traumatic experiences, Sacco further calls attention to silence as an explicit negation of his request for stories about the war. In Sarajevo, he finds widespread, deliberate resistance to his efforts to gather testimonies. Wishing to uncover the city’s “terrible secrets,” Sacco finds his “research has stalled,” as locals either refuse to meet with him or cancel their appointments (The Fixer 3). The suspiciousness and hostility Sacco encounters in Sarajevo is not surprising given the mass media presence during the war, which seemed more interested in the drama of war than in providing help to the city’s besieged residents. In Goražde, Sacco asks refugees from Eastern Bosnia about their experiences, but some simply don’t want to talk, whilst others, he observes, talk “reluctantly…[and] only to a point” (106). Even Sacco’s good friend, Riki, an otherwise loud character who spontaneously bursts into song, will not divulge his time during the war, so that “as many times as [Sacco] asked, he remained reticent about his experiences in combat” (Safe Area 26).

Silence is a mode of resistance to communicating the past that gestures towards the ongoing traumatization of the Bosnians. Yet for some survivors, silence subversively asserts agency. In the refusal to conform to Sacco’s requests, the Bosniaks reject the voyeur’s fascination with them as victims. Sacco’s ability to go beyond eye-witness accounts and depict the refusal to talk denotes a recognition of his own intrusive, vicarious, and transitory role as an interlocutor from outside and shows the reader the limitations of his attempt to disclose and record these people’s lives. By revealing the processes of mediating trauma, Sacco demarcates the ethical problems of approaching traumatised people as “sources,” from which their experience can be lifted and packaged into easily consumable reading. In the commodification of traumatised people and experiences we can see what feminist scholar Kelly Oliver, in
Witnessing: Beyond Recognition (2001), has identified as the pathology of “oppression and domination” where “subjectivity is conferred by those in power and on those they deem powerless and disempowered” (23-4). By representing (and inadvertently commodifying) the silences, Sacco exposes and inverts Oliver’s pathology between subjects, so that the reader becomes aware not only of this matrix of power, but also of her uncritical assumption of power in such a relationship.

Faced with the silence of the Bosnian communities, Sacco’s character becomes dependent on interlocutors. These locals, such as Edin in Safe Area and Neven, in The Fixer, play a vital part in elaborating the story and traumas of the war. Indeed, without their input, Sacco would have no story to relay to his audience. Only with Edin’s help, Sacco is able to put the “pieces of the story together” (16) including not only “the pieces that were visible”, but also those that “were hidden away” (16). Edin, an engineering student who is trying to complete his PhD thesis, becomes Sacco’s personal guide, introducing him to the different histories of Bosnia and Yugoslavia, taking him to meet and talk to the locals, translating their stories for him, and even putting him up at his family home because of Sacco’s disgust at the hotel’s “war-zone racket!” profiteering (33). Edin’s desire “to stay busy” (17), indicates a level of co-dependency in his relationship with Sacco, an aspect that is recognized by Sacco, when he notes of Edin: “we were his guides, too, reintroducing him slowly and sweetly to his old planet” (17). This is less a testament to Sacco’s abilities as a counsellor, and speaks more to Edin’s desire to talk about the past, and so make sense of the “radically contradictory historical realities” of his experiences, first under Tito’s Yugoslavia, then during Yugoslavia’s violent disintegration, and
finally, in the uncertain *interregnum* of the post-Dayton epoch (Weine, *When History is a Nightmare* 163).

In *The Fixer*, the relationship between Neven and Sacco reveals a shifting power balance as each character becomes dependent upon the other at different points. Neven’s eagerness to talk to Sacco, as one reviewer has suggested, “give[s] purpose to a life in a postwar limbo” (Thompson). But additionally, Neven’s role as someone *paid* to talk complicates and compromises the notion of testimony as bearing (truthful) witness because Neven’s testimony, in this case, is also a commercial transaction. For, if Sacco is a professional listener, so Neven is a professional fixer. When Sacco runs into him in 1995, Neven is looking out for ways to make money off the few foreign journalists remaining in Sarajevo in order to eke out a living under the devastated economic conditions. Yet Sacco for Neven is small game with “not much meat on [his] bones,” a sign of the changing times and gloomy economic prospects in the war’s aftermath (19). Neven’s career as a fixer was reliant on the trauma economy and on what Sacco terms the “flashy brutality of Sarajevo’s war” (51). Even Neven admits as much without any sense of irony: “When massacres happened,” Neven once told me, “those were the best times. Journalists from all over the world were coming here” (49). In 1995, Sarajevo risks being overlooked – “the nightly news will drop Sarajevo entirely,” Sacco notes, because “Sarajevo no longer does what Sarajevo did best” (49). And while this leaves Neven owing money and “completely broke” (59), it also means his prospects have much improved since Sacco’s appearance and the promise of a regular income.

For readers expecting details about victimization by the Serbs and the harsh experience of life under siege, Neven’s testimony proves a shock. Unsparing in his portrayal of the war’s

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249 Weine goes on to say, that survivors tell testimonial accounts to help them reconcile these different periods, and understand better their own Bosnian identities, “without totally subjecting them to the political order of the day” (*History* 163).
criminal elements, Neven chronicles his participation within various Bosniak paramilitary factions in besieged Sarajevo. These figures helped defend Sarajevo; yet they were also criminals, thugs, and war-profiteers, who worked independently of the Bosniak government and who controlled the black market, smuggling arms and people, extorting money from local Sarajevans, and orchestrating the targeted looting and killing of “enemy” (i.e. non-Muslim) communal groups. As Neven describes one particularly notorious warlord to Sacco: “He steals from everyone…soldiers, civilians, the U.N.” (70). Neven’s testimony offers a critical lens to reappraise the war, since Sarajevo’s siege was all too often framed by what Andreas calls “victim narratives” that served media interests to create outrage and condemnation (12). In contrast to the highly visible “center stage” of the siege – that is, the simplified account of the war that concentrated on shelling and sniper fire – Neven’s testimony dramatizes the criminalisation of Sarajevo and “some of the most important action [which] took place backstage, away from the cameras” (Andreas 10).

Sacco never allows his readers to forget that Neven’s testimony is part of a transaction, in exchange for hard cash and this renders his word suspect. Throughout The Fixer we can never be sure that Neven is a reliable witness. Certainly, Neven is able to introduce Sacco to his “grizzled old comrades” and their bloodthirsty tales of battle (25). But his stories about his past have the whiff of bravura about them. He has told Sacco that, during the war, he was considered a government threat (11), and that, prior to the war, he frequently “mixed up with some tough guys” (22), and even dealt arms to the Palestinians (23). He is proud of his military exploits during the war, particularly one incident where he helped destroy four tanks (34), and he suggests that, had he more acquaintances like himself, he “could have broken the siege of

\[250\] Such victimization of course did indeed exist because of the graphic and dramatic nature of the siege, involving the shelling of civilians in public spaces, such as the marketplace bombings in February 1994.
Sarajevo” (25). Neven’s heroic self-presentation is consistently undercut by other characters, including Sacco, who ironically names him “a Master in the School of Front-line Truth” (note the capital T here), and even calls upon the reader to assess the situation. One Sarajevan remembers Neven as having a “big imagination” (97); others castigate him as being “unstable” (61); and those who have also fought in the war reject his claims outright, telling Sacco, “it didn’t happen” (62, original emphasis). Consequently, Sacco’s comic character himself is no longer certain what really happened. Against the backdrop of Sarajevo’s “awful silence” (11), Sacco observes in a tone that mixes delight with uncertainty: “Neven is a godsend to me, too. Finally someone is telling me how it was – or how it almost was, or how it could have been – but finally someone in this town is telling me something” (100, emphasis added). Here, we can trace a shift from a version of a past reality into the fantasy of a reality. At a certain level, Neven’s mythmaking reflects back to the international community a counter-version of mediated events and spectacular traumas.\(^{251}\) Even Neven’s attempts to get an account of his experience of the wartime “action against the 43 tanks” is rejected by a British magazine on the basis that they “don’t print fiction” (34). Echoing Neven’s self-aggrandisement, Sacco adopts a hyperbolic tone that registers a suspension of belief: “it is he, Neven, who has walked through the valley of the shadow of death and blown things up along the way” (33).

Before dismissing Neven either as a fraud or as someone prone to exaggerating his ordeals, Sacco also takes care to foreground the complexity and ambiguity of his claims. In a move that emphasises the self-consciousness and self-referentiality of the text, Sacco’s character appeals to the reader as somebody who might see a way out (or not) out of conflicting narratives:

\(^{251}\) See Sadkovich and also Ruigrok, who describe the superficial international press coverage and the lack of background contexts. They also note the emphasis on ethnic cleansing, as well as on international military and diplomatic activity.
Dear Reader, put yourself in my shoes. You recall how salty warriors greeted Neven in the street. You recall, too, what those around you have been saying:

“He’s a little crazy, but a nice guy.”
“I don’t like guys like that, but he’s a tower of information.”
“The way he talks makes it sound like he’s killed hundreds of Chetniks. I bet he’s killed no one.” (62)

No obvious answer is offered by Sacco’s character. Throughout the text, however, there is a refrain that accompanies Neven’s testimonies, telling the reader to “put yourself in Neven’s shoes” or “put yourself in my [i.e. Sacco’s] shoes” (11). To put oneself either into Neven’s shoes or Sacco’s shoes is a way to break out of the testimonial mode to ground oneself in the economic relationship between the two. After all, Sacco is in Sarajevo to discover its “terrible secrets” (3) and Neven is “the pro” (87), the expert not only in extracting money and coffee out of Sacco, but in providing the goods, the secrets desired by Sacco (19; 21; 24; 34; 59; 87; 91).

The reminder of the trauma economy ushers in a scepticism, which destabilises the authority of the text, calling attention to the text as a representational mode, built upon other representations and mediations that have emerged out of the business relationship between Neven and Sacco. But this is not Neven’s fault alone. For Sacco too is complicit, bound up in an interdependent relationship that helps gratify his feelings of insecurity, ignorance, and guilt. With Neven, Sacco observes that he acts “like a teenager on his first few dates – a little enthralled, a little infatuated, maybe a little in love, and what is love but a transaction” (24, emphasis added). In his review of The Fixer, Michael Faber reads into this relationship “a fraternal, even homoerotic charge” between two opposites: Sacco, “the impressionable, weedy westerner” and Neven the hardened war veteran, who “boozes, chain-smokes and reminisces about battles and betrayals” (Faber). Not only is Sacco ignorant about the muddled realities of the war and its major players but he also wants to hear Neven’s shamelessly daring and dirty
account of the war, however unreliable. Thus, despite his economic dependence, Neven dominates the relationship in terms of his war experience. Having never experienced war first-hand, Sacco mocks himself for his sheltered life and his cowardliness in relation to the war; as he explains, “I am vulnerable...It is war, for Christ’s sake, and now that I’ve got myself into it, I need a hug, a support group, someone to carry me gently over the rubble” (24). Neven is the “Master [who] has found a Pupil” (25), and he plays on Sacco’s inexperience and his isolation in Sarajevo, giving him “an essential piece of journalistic equipment – a tape recorder” for which he asks, “nothing in return” (20, emphasis added). This reminder that a price has not been asked evokes the way, at almost all other times, Sacco’s relationship with Neven is overdetermined by money. Realising this, Sacco mocks himself for his gratitude to Neven for spilling the beans: “This conversation is costing me 100 dm, but does not begin to fill the crater of my obligation to Neven” (9). At other points, Sacco reminds us that he too is a “professional,” whose job it is to obtain all the details (17). In fact, we can see from the following commentary that, rather than Neven exploiting Sacco, the exploitation appears to be mutual:

But I would be remiss if I let you think that my relationship with Neven is simply a matter of his shaking me down. Because Neven was the first friend I made in Sarajevo. In his way he’s taken me under his wing. And, incidentally, he’s travelled one of the war’s dark roads, and I’m not going to drop him till he tells me all about it. (21)

The subject of “friend” in the middle of this commentary is quickly replaced by the word “drop” in the very last sentence, underscoring that, despite the appearance of mutual benefits in the trauma economy for locals as well as the international visitors, it is the locals who stand to lose out. Having sold their traumatic “raw goods,” the Bosnian locals find the trauma economy
consolidates the international nexus of power and privilege, and is already forgetting about 
Bosnia’s traumas.

To be sure, Neven’s testimony is a “consumable” product of the trauma economy, but 
the tale it reveals demonstrates the moral ambiguities of those caught up in a war, and the few 
opportunities for individuals attempting to improve their lives while coping with lawless 
conditions and an ineffective government. Given a limited choice to struggle to survive in “a 
city that is cut off and starved into submission” or defend Sarajevo (53), Neven opts for the 
latter and his decision makes him both a patriot and a criminal. A member of the “Green 
Berets,” as the scattered cells of the Bosniak army were initially known, Neven becomes a 
sniper, fighting under Celo, one of Sarajevo’s warlords. This affiliation leads him towards other 
more questionable activities, such as the expropriation of goods and property for the army. But 
Neven justifies his participation in criminal acts as someone who has earned “privileges” for 
bravely defending the city, even though those rewards are stolen from the people he is 
supposedly protecting, “often non-Muslims” (52). Neven’s work also involves coercing locals, 
“any man out of uniform,” to dig trenches next to enemy lines (63-64). The traumas of this work 
are acute, as Neven knows. He tells Sacco the story of a Bosnian Serb civilian who “simply 
disappears” when he is forced to dig trenches (65). The Bosnian Serb’s work exposes him to 
snipers, he witnesses fellow workers get shot, he is frequently beaten, the trenches are filthy, 
and he is given little food (65). In revealing this story, Sacco produces a paradoxical effect. The 
story positions Neven as victimiser; but at the same time, the fate of the trench worker, selected 
because he is a Bosnian Serb, points towards the ascendance of ethno-nationalist politics; the 
repercussions of which are already implicit in postwar Bosnia, as hinted throughout the text 
about Neven’s own victimization as a part of a disenfranchised citizen class.
If the war was dangerous, its impact was particularly palpable for minority groups, who suddenly found their ethnic identity a dangerous liability, whatever their politics. Though Neven fought with Celo for the Bosniaks, even this wartime career turns out to be precarious. Asked by Sacco if he profited from the war, Neven responds, “You saw my apartment. Does it look like I enriched myself?” (54). We learn that Neven was forced to leave the Green Berets because he advertises himself as a Bosnian Serb (as opposed to a Chetnik) and, consequently, his loyalty is placed under suspicion (78). As his unit leader, Celo, explains, not unkindly, having Neven working for him was “costing him two people” – one prepared to shoot him if he deserted, and the other to protect him, “in case somebody tried to kill [him] on this side” (77, original emphasis). In postwar Bosnia, Neven’s position is even more insecure. For a start, there are fewer Bosnian Serbs left; and, Neven’s identity has morphed into an ideologically loaded term. Derided as a “Chetnik” in a bar (75), Neven fears for the future of Bosnia as a “Muslim state” (76). In 2001, it seems that Neven’s fears are realised. As Sacco finds out, Neven is renting an apartment, he is “busted” and no longer lives in his aunt’s apartment (98). Asked what happened, Neven explains that a “politically connected bastard” had seized his aunt’s apartment whilst he was away from the city for two days (102). When Neven takes him to court to claim back his inheritance, he is “accused of fighting for the other side” and, ultimately, loses his apartment (103). Refusing to answer Sacco’s question about whether his “Serb background prejudiced his claim,” Neven nevertheless raises the hapless thought that to think about it would mean that he “threw away four years” during the war and has been left as a penniless “fool” (103).

If we are still unsure about the veracity of Neven’s story, there are other indicators that gesture towards the state of political affairs in the new Croat-Muslim Federation of Bosnia. In
1994, the government holds “closed-door military trials” in Sarajevo against the soldiers of warlords (93). A few are found guilty, though “none are given a sentence of more than six years” (96). The other warlords remain prominent figures, despite serving some time in prison (96). The posthumous fate of one warlord, Musan “Caco” Topalovic, once the leader of the “famed defenders of Sarajevo” offers a discomfiting look at the re-production of ethnic and partitionist politics (90). *The Fixer* reproduces two excerpts from the 1994 military tribunals, “Testimony of Asif Alibasic” and “Testimony of Samir Seferonvic,” which were printed by *Dani*, a Bosnian magazine at the time (94-95). Providing eye-witness evidence to the mass murder of Bosnian civilians at a place called Kazani, these testimonies identify Caco as giving the orders for these killings. When Caco is killed as, rumour has it, he “was a dangerous witness for Izetbegovic [the Bosnian president” (90). Caco’s body is initially buried “in a secret location,” but then it is:

reinter[red] in Sarajevo’s main military cemetery in November 1997. His public funeral is attended by thousands, including Bakir Izetbegovic, the son of the president. It seems Caco is being rehabilitated. (93)

In spite his role in war crimes, Caco is co-opted by the government, buried in state and championed as a military hero in Bosnia’s war. Nationalist propagandas are thus produced; more disturbingly, these actions send a contradictory message, where retaliatory persecution and murders against minority citizens in a state, which still professes to be multiethnic, can be written out of history and thus quell further inquiry.

Against this new institutional narrative, Neven’s story, as a series of unstable discourses, foregrounds the uncertainties of all histories. More specifically, Neven’s experiences also iterate how individuals can quickly become casualties of greater forces, whether political power,

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252 Adding to this, is Neven’s certainty that Caco “was framed” by the government for his crimes (93).
the war, partition, or the trauma economy. We can view Neven as an opportunist, someone, whose decision to become a fixer, tapping into trauma economy as a way to make a living, gives him a certain amount of agency. But, his livelihood, like his agency, is nonetheless constrained, subject to powers beyond his control. As Sacco suggests, “the war moved on and left him behind…. The truth is, the war quit Neven” (76). In 2001, when Sacco meets up with Neven, we encounter not the brash Neven of old, but a pasty-looking forty-year old man, who feels “nervous without any reason” and takes pills to prevent his “anxiety attacks” (100). Neven further divulges that he has always had trouble dealing with the war and “had started drinking really heavily once the shooting stopped” (99, original emphasis). More recently, his actions during the war lie heavily on his conscience, despite his efforts to contain his bad memories and “stash them deep” (100). *The Fixer* leaves us with an ironic fact: Neven, who has capitalized on trauma, is now left traumatized and without capital.

But in its last pages, *The Fixer* offers a coda to Neven’s testimony. In the last page of the comic, we see Neven parting from Sacco and walking off into the distance [Figure 7]. Sacco presents his readers with a birds-eye view that spirals higher throughout the successive panels until Neven has disappeared into an indistinguishable figure walking along the streets of Sarajevo. Such a perspective recalls the reader’s own geographical distance as well as the emotional distance suggested at the beginning of *Safe Area’s* opening, except now there is the knowledge that Neven’s story is one of many about the war’s effects. In addition to this perspective, Sacco offers yet another competing narrative that supplements Neven’s testimony:

I go and see someone who knew Neven well, someone whose opinion I trust. I ask him about Neven… He tells me one or two stories about Neven that take me aback… that make me feel like I didn’t know the half of what Neven was about… that I’d barely traced the edges of his secrets… But, I ask my acquaintance, what about Neven’s wartime heroics? What about-? “Everyone was surprised, when he turned out to be a fighter for Celo,” he says. “I heard from very good sources that he was unbelievably
courageous. From the very beginning he was throwing himself into action as if he wasn’t aware what could happen to him.” (104-5)

Figure 7 “Neven” (*The Fixer* 105).
In this commentary, Sacco closes with a surprisingly sympathetic portrayal of a morally ambiguous man. This act of generosity has a two-fold effect. At one level, it reminds us that, despite his faults and his criminality, Neven is also a (lesser) victim of the war. As Marx would say, Neven did not make his own history as he pleased, but under circumstances existing already, given, and transmitted from the past. On another level, Sacco’s vindication of Neven redirects the reader’s attention to the vicissitudes of the trauma economy. In this act, which simultaneously appropriates Neven as his subject, while redeeming him to his readers, Sacco pointedly differentiates his project from those of his journalistic colleagues. But perhaps more importantly, this scene confirms what has all along been Sacco’s purpose in relating his experiences in Bosnia and anthologising testimony through such a self-conscious medium of communication. The fact is, without the power of authorship, Sacco’s benediction would mean nothing to Neven. But because Sacco’s text is written for consumption in a Western audience, because it too is produced for circulation within the trauma economy, its final scene compels the double-reading.

**Pencil Power and Political Education**

By foregrounding Bosnian testimonies in his comic books, Sacco validates their traumas and concerns and so both complicates and revises the dominant understanding of the war by the international community. Through his involvement and his desire to recover wartime experiences, Sacco exposes the operations of the trauma economy, and how it diminishes and commodifies crises and traumatic experiences. Unable to take on, let alone resolve, the greater workings of the trauma economy, Sacco’s achievement is making it visible, by exposing his own complicity in it. By articulating the struggle against commodification, Sacco also
demonstrates forms of testimonial defiance that confound both his and his readers’ expectations. In particular, the self-critical narratives within both comic books, call upon their audience to reflect upon their own positions, as voyeurs and consumers of trauma.

If Sacco’s comics convey the extraordinary complexity of the Bosnian war, they also draw attention to the power relations that operate behind the scenes. As Sacco demonstrates in his work, the trauma economy not only relegates Bosnia to the margins, but also removes from view Bosnia’s political stasis, seen by its ethnonational cantonments (much of it a product of ethnic cleansing), mass unemployment, the difficulties faced by minorities, such as Neven, as well as the general sense of distrust, ill-feeling, and animosity of the Bosnian people. In a partitioned Bosnia, where the postwar period remains inextricable from an enduring memory of trauma, Sacco seems to suggest that to turn away now would signal a victory for the trauma economy and its play of imagined cartographies. But in representing the dilemmas of the people he has met and to whom he is indebted, Sacco also reminds his readers of their material reality and the very material effects of political interventions from the international community. And, in linking the discursive with the material, Sacco gestures towards the political potential of his texts. This is a significant endeavour if we recall the powerful distortions of the media, in which the “West” is uncritically portrayed as a force for good, and where war appears to have an overwhelming logic, one that numbs the reader’s connection to the sufferings of individuals.

In the context of contemporary conflicts, like Afghanistan and Iraq, Sacco’s critique is both relevant and astute. In engaging with representative discourses and enabling a critical appraisal of their work, Sacco also calls to mind the more recent problems of memorialization practices, where “Bosnia” is invoked to signify what Tony Judt has called a “moral memory,” a lesson to be taught about the atrocities of genocide (Reappraisals 4). Like “Auschwitz,” or
“Rwanda,” “Bosnia” no longer signifies a complicated past that is even remotely attached to a present, but instead exists as a dehistoricized symbol or label of trauma. In contrast, Sacco elaborates the historical nuances, drawing the reader into the text as witness and participant. His creation of a self-reflexive sensibility, especially, suggests new possibilities in response to trauma as the reader looks critically at his or her own cultural frameworks and subject positions of power.

Here, I want to turn to diasporic Bosnian writer, Aleksandar Hemon, whose cogent model of literature echoes much of Sacco’s own strategies and is suggestive of what these possibilities might be. Responding to a question about the media’s role and their use of photography in numbing emotion to the Bosnian war, Hemon talks about the dangers of “the technology of remembering and witnessing” as a system that stores “records and memories outside of human beings” and thus, removes the past and history away “from people’s lives.” In contrast, he says, testimonies are “experiences” and “personal memories…that are continuously a part of people’s lives.” As an alternative to this “objective” technology of remembering, Hemon argues that fiction or fictitious images – provided that they shed the pretense of being “true” – open, at least potentially, a space for participation, emotional or otherwise. One should think of fiction – not just writing, but all imaginative practices – as a space where people get together to talk about things that matter to them, not as a space where a genius artist lectures “little” people, telling them what is true and what isn’t. Fiction can also subvert the claim of those technologies to be representing “truth” by producing “truth” itself and then pointing at the quotation marks.

I think Hemon touches on two concerns that are reiterated in Sacco’s work. First, the postmodern awareness of truth and truth-making is a form of critique, where Sacco can corroborate a particular history as one form of representation, against others, which he can undercut as no less fictional than his own. The second point is that as a “space for participation,”
Sacco’s comics demonstrate collaborative involvements, as is clear from the translators and multitude of oral narrators included in his texts. In addition to their presence, the text is also a public site in its demands upon the reader, and its refusal to let trauma of this magnitude be assimilated or forgotten. An important part of Sacco’s politics is that his text connects to those “little” people, whether as witnesses or as readers.

Finally, this last point is worth revisiting on its own merits. In contemplating the social and political practices of Sacco’s work on the Bosnia war, we must not overlook the generic significance of the text itself. For it is the comic form’s popularity, accessibility, and wide appeal, particularly to a young audience, that makes it a vital pedagogic resource of cultural democratisation. Historical and political awareness, in other words, is more likely to come out of popular culture. Already, the educational possibilities of the comic book have been recognized by artists as well as scholars and institutions. In his analysis of Spiegelman’s *Maus*, LaCapra goes as far as to speculate whether “the conjunction of image and word provide a more effective medium of transmission than the use of word alone?” (*History and Memory* 173). To my surprise, a much more optimistic reaction is suggested in *The Economist*, revealing its hidden radical centrist roots, when it discerns the extent of Sacco’s contribution through a break with tradition, as well as in the energising powers of comic reportage. Responding to Sacco’s texts, *The Economist* predicts a drastic societal transformation. As they see it, Sacco’s “pencil power” has the capacity to politicise an entire generation. Specifically, it is the “comics and caricature” medium that presents this collective opportunity, “thus reaching out to an audience that might never otherwise be roused by politics, anarchy or foreign wars” (*Economist* “Pencil Power”).

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253 In Germany, a graphic historical textbook, *Die Suche*, illustrated by Eric Heuvel is used to promote historical awareness about the Third Reich and the Holocaust, suggesting the public level of recognition now given to graphic narratives (see Smee).
CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Public Domains, Literary Circuits, Multidirectional Memory

In this thesis, I have demonstrated that the violent rupture of the partitioned state is deeply and disparately felt across history, and often as a series of traumas. These partition traumas not only shape identity, but also galvanise subjects towards modes of political reform. While partition literatures never articulate a unanimous, nor a broadly consensual resolution to those traumas, nor even a shared definition of what these traumas are, this study has elaborated the central role of affects within those cultural narratives in provoking peculiarly critical perspectives on and reactions to the violences of the post-partitioned state. Such affects are specific and situated: they circulate within certain sites, settings, and practices, through particular exchanges and interactions. This thesis identifies a broad array of powerful feelings – including melancholia, nostalgia, longing, love, and despair – that function affectively insofar as they catalyse a diversity of responses, from hope and utopic aspirations to self-doubt and attempted self-annihilation. Throughout the partition literature considered in this thesis, there is the shared sense that such affects are transformative, generating new ways of thinking and feeling about the world.

In bringing together India and Yugoslavia’s traumatic partitions, more tensions than confluences seemingly emerge. But the shared and special significance of their partition narratives (along with their fears and anxieties) can be located in the very act of writing. To begin with, the partition subject is constituted discursively; and an anti-partition consciousness is articulated and produced through the text. I have shown how, in the attempt to represent the violence of partition, literary works must necessarily engage the complexity of partition’s legacy and its manifold traumatic expressions. This we might identify as taking up the task of
validation in the sense that such traumas are not only narrated and recognised, but that their associated grievances and sorrows are also legitimated.

Across these works there is the shared concern with memory work – the excavating and reimagining of the contested past – an imperative act, because from such resources future politics must be reconstituted. But this scrutiny of the past also leads to the disclosure that the burden of partition was most seriously felt within politically, economically, socially, and psychologically vulnerable communities. The awareness of these differences has a profound impact upon the characters and narrators (as well as upon the reader who, as in the case of reading partition anthologies may be initially attempting to reconcile such traumas). As I have sketched out in the novels of Ghosh, Ugresic, and Sacco there is a degree of self-consciousness in relation to subjects who have been caught up in the immediacy, rather than the secondary or after-effects, of trauma, a point which serves to emphasise trauma’s incommensurabilities and its disjunctures. In the writerly attempt to document partition and to counter partitionist politics of exclusion, there is the added dilemma that while political estrangement must be accounted for, it is not an all-encompassing feature of partition; instead, it is felt variously at the intersections and hierarchies of class, caste, and gender.

As my work has thus far revealed, the self-aware and unsettling practice of anxious witnessing helps engage these complexities, by keeping in check the inbuilt assumptions of the elite as well as raising the vexed issue of solidarities across these stratifications. Anxious witnessing refuses to accept worldliness as a normative condition. Instead, it alerts us to the materiality of violence and the ongoing power of the strong against the weak. At the same time, anxious witnessing is textually reiterated: partition narratives provide us with an imaginative,
immediate context, where the experiences of partition violence are urgently conveyed to those ensconced away from such atrocities.

The critical task of anxious witnessing can be located in this endeavour: the anxious witnessing of partition narratives seeks to enunciate suffering, inform readers, and so produce forms of readerly responsibility. In his work on Charlotte Delbo, the traumas of the Holocaust, and the Algerian war, a literary critic, Michael Rothberg reminds us that, “if testimony and documentation are to have a politics and not just an ethics, they must be oriented toward the creation of publics, toward circulation and not just exposure” (“Between Auschwitz and Algeria” 184, emphasis added). Accordingly, Representing Partition demonstrates how partition literatures initiate such public domains by opening up, in however provisional or modest a fashion, an imaginative and participatory space for individuals and collectives estranged by partition’s exclusivist logic, including those readers affected by the text at hand. In this diverse community, we see not only the consolidation of an anti-partitionist consciousness, but also a foundation for an oppositional politics that addresses partition’s structural inequalities.

An implicit utopian dimension is suggested by the attempt of partition narratives to reach and politically inform, if not radicalise, a wider audience. This is perhaps most explicit in my chapters on Ghosh and Sacco. Yet it is also apparent in my chapter on partition anthologies that the call to commemorate partition is magnified when articulated collectively. As my research shows, the issue of genre is relevant, for (at least in the case of partition anthologies) it places trauma within an institutional, scholarly frame and brings traumatic memories of partition to a new readership. My study does not provide a full reckoning of the ways in which genre shapes either the transmission of affect or the representation (and reception) of trauma; it merely points towards genre’s indisputable significance within trauma studies.
Partition narratives illuminate how knowledge, subjects, and institutions can be reproduced and reconstituted. For example, the growing number of partition anthologies suggests that earlier work has spurred the intelligentsia to cultivate their own comparative enquiries. Equally significant are the ways in which fiction writers use the institutional capacity of literature to critique the ideology of social institutions. We can see how Ugresic’s novels attest to the creation of archives that corroborate the existence of the narrator’s Yugoslav subjectivity and that depict the crises of the Yugoslav wars, contrary to the revisionist rhetoric of Croat ethnic nationalism. At the same time a novel like The Ministry of Pain delimits the difficulties and problems of extra-national public bodies, such as the International Criminal Tribunal in offering social justice through international law. Despite legal structures like the ICTFY, Ugresic prompts us to ask whether law can be truly international or truly just, when such institutions remain deeply implicated within the asymmetrical political and economic dominance of certain nations. The mass media, in a different sense, can also be understood similarly as an “institutional arena” (Giesen, Triumph and Trauma 141). And as I have shown in detail in my analysis of Sacco’s graphic novels, the media’s role in dramatising, framing, and reconstructing the narrative of the Bosnian war has a prescriptive effect. In constituting a particular imaginative geography of Bosnia, the lines between (a Western) “Us” and (an anonymous) “Them” are demarcated and consolidated. This reiterates a partitionist mentality that annuls empathy, compassion, and unsettlement.

254 The rise of new organisations and social movements facilitated by internet technology, such as during the recent Iran presidential elections, are a contrast to the traditional and highly corporatised mass media, which I am referring to here. Whether these new medias constitute institutional forms remains to be seen, not least because of governmental ability to compromise and similarly utilise these virtual forums; nevertheless, the potential of new medias lies in their efforts, however miniscule, towards creating and growing a body or social movement. My thanks to Sneja for reminding me about these alternative medias.
Describing and revisiting the different traumas of partition helps disrupt categories of representation. To return to the idea of validation, partition literature partakes in the social and cultural processes that help transform the private traumatic encounter with partition into a public narrative about partition’s traumas and its meanings. This concept of “cultural trauma” is foremost an issue of representation (though other issues of economic power and cultural clout are not far behind) as events are – to paraphrase Jeffrey Alexander – coded, weighted, and narrated (“Social Construction” 204). In rewriting histories and representing traumas that have hitherto been excluded or marginalised, partition narratives help build new frameworks that have the potential to reshape (elite) public politics. This is particularly important, as Gregory Kent has noted in his research on Bosnia, in relation to the critical issues of “aggression and genocide…[that] have been ‘organized out’ by the politically dominant” (422). As Kent argues (albeit referring specifically to the media), the issues of selective representation or misrepresentation has severe implications “for the limited participation model of democracy” since political accountability can only occur in a context where, first of all, the “political reality” of the historical trauma and their circumstances are fully revealed and, secondly, where such representations shape knowledge and “attributions of responsibility for political affairs” (422).

But representation is always a thorny issue. Here, I want to return to the question of fear that I raised alongside the significance of partition narratives. The writing of trauma, an act that attempts to translate an experience of extreme suffering for an audience, is in many ways inextricable from a sense of insufficiency. The challenge for partition narratives is to somehow convey partition’s horrors, yet acknowledge the problems of representation, particularly in relation to “translating” experiences into a textual medium, as well as to the confines of language. Writing about his fieldwork collecting oral narratives, Alessandro Portelli has
emphasised this inadequacy when he states that, “death, mourning, and loss are unspeakable experiences, both in themselves and in the intrinsic limitations of language: it is uncertain whether any experience can be truly told” (143, original emphasis). One object of my study has been to show how partition literature is simultaneously animating and confining. Even as partition narratives attest to new models of political community, they remain limited, trapped in a discursive form, which is always partial and always mediated. Against this intrinsic and debilitating feature of material texts, the authors I examine harness metafictional strategies that resist the traditional forms of authority associated with the novel and hierarchies of canonization. These self-reflexive frames emphasise the texts’ artificial discursive structures, at once a provocative gesture towards new forms of memorialization, while prompting awareness of historical (re)construction.

Reflections on Comparative Frameworks

This project points towards the kind of avenues that might be opened when postcolonial studies are brought into conversation with trauma studies. It seems to me that the benefits of this theoretical synthesis lie in the unexpected and, surprisingly, common insights within the range of cultural implications and reactions towards partition, as expressed by the people caught up in its aftermath. The conversation between these two already multidisciplinary fields illuminates some of the connections between the otherwise dissimilar traumatic histories of India and Yugoslavia – for instance, the renewed engagement with cosmopolitan politics; the emphasis on class and the hierarchies of displacement; the force and power of institutions; the importance of affects and the role of other historical traumas in shaping an ethical response and initiating inquiry; literature and cultural narratives as the political and aesthetic catalysts that stimulate
these sorts of inquiries as well as their affective drive, facilitating what some might call the “politics of hope.”

In concluding this thesis, it strikes me that the links between different histories of partition violence help prove a theoretical concept that I have only become aware of recently. In his scholarly writings, Michael Rothberg has delineated the idea of “multidirectional memory,” a concept that emphasises encounters between the memories of disparate traumatic histories. Focusing on the heterogeneous memory of the Holocaust in relation to other instances of political violence, such as within anticolonial struggles, Rothberg describes multidirectional memory as “a process in which transfers occur between events that have come to seem separate from each another” (“Work of Testimony” 1243). The juxtaposition of traumatic memory means that not only can one historical event illuminate the horrors of another but also more significantly, the linking of “different histories of oppression to each other” helps establish moral, ethical, and political visions, where “coming to terms with the past necessitates coming to terms with the present in a public setting” (Traumatic Realism 269). In other words, a multidirectional memory offers a “productive dynamic that occurs in the acts of juxtaposition, comparison, and analogy” (“Work of Testimony” 1244). This dynamic manifests itself variously: at some level, the memory of extreme violence is a source for alliances, informing solidarity to and amongst other oppressed groups in the present. Additionally, as Rothberg notes, the “articulation of that [traumatic] memory may also serve as an allegory for what cannot be publicly spoken or for what the public does not want to hear” (“Work of Testimony” 1243). Thus, the collective, public knowledge about a particular trauma (Rothberg’s prominent example is the Holocaust) helps enable and legitimate testimonies about other historical atrocities.
Rothberg’s theory of multidirectional memory resonates with the approach taken by many of the partition scholars and writers examined in this study. Much of their thinking can be characterised as multidirectional as they attend to a collective memory that is at once “an interplay between different pasts and a heterogeneous present” (Rothberg, “Multidirectional Memory” 132). Coincidentally, Rothberg’s particular choice of an historical event to elaborate his theory, the Holocaust, is also in fact a point of reference for many of the authors and intellectuals considered in this study. Indeed, at times it is a central concern because the Holocaust offers an analogy of sorts to partition. The predominance of the Holocaust, as a collective and well-publicised trauma, has prompted South Asian editors and scholars to consider new ways think about the Indian partition experience. In a slightly different vein, a writer like Ugresic uses the trauma of the Holocaust to spur her inquiry into the atrocities of the Yugoslav wars. The scattered Holocaust archives in Berlin allow her to revisit the trauma of the Yugoslav partition and so overcome her witness anxiety, by rethinking an institution that responds ethically to the dilemmas of the past. Moreover, the multidirectionality of traumatic memory is evident in the work of scholars, most obviously, Sumantra Bose whose academic work into the Bosnian partition is deeply inflected by postmemory, the personal history of his anticolonial, activist family in Bengal. As he remarks in his autobiographical essay, “The Partition Evasion,” such memories were a source of inspiration and revelation when writing his study of divided Bosnia: “I noticed striking parallels between the political and human sagas of the crises in India in 1947 and Yugoslavia in the early-to-mid-1990s, and extensively used my knowledge of India’s partition.”

Multidirectional memory opens up new possibilities, suggesting the ways that the partition narratives studied here can be further cultivated and inaugurated; as an inherently
dialogic process, multidirectional memory applies their lessons to larger social and political crises, including those of other partitioned societies as well as in relation to state repression. The traumas of the Indian and Yugoslav partitions, in other words, might help us reassess relations of power and subjectivities outside the scope of this study. As the cultural life of the political, partition narratives contribute to a rethinking of current debates on separated communities and partitionist politics. When giving papers at conferences, I am frequently asked to comment on the case of Israel and the Palestinians as an example of a political crisis deemed intractable and hopeless, which has been consecrated by partition and to which the proposal of ethnic separatism (in the form of two states) appears a possible solution. While not an expert on this complex and troubled history, my comparative analysis has been suggestive in understanding the seeming irreconcilable existence of the Israeli and Palestinian peoples and the clash of their traumatic histories. My focus on institutions emphasises the cultural nature of such antagonisms, illuminating the way sets of beliefs can be inherited or invented. My study has shown that partition literature destabilises assumptions about accepted discourses on polarised identities. To recall Ugresic’s attention to museums and her schoolbook primer, institutions have the capacity to build communities, reshape subjects, and even reconstruct ethnicities. It remains significant that generations of Palestinians and Israelis are institutionally segregated and their cultural and political views are consequently legitimated and perpetuated. The potential of social institutions, over time, to overcome these mutual exclusions by establishing an alternative set of values and beliefs is tremendous; but equally important, such institutions, as with cultural narratives, can begin at a marginal scale, an incremental step towards the realisation of an anti-partitionist consciousness.

Indeed, a few decades ago, as Tony Judt points out, the situation was more grim: “Israeli law forbade all contact with Palestinian representatives, and denied the existence of any willing Arab interlocutors” (“An Alternative Future”).
Partition’s Aftermath and the Role of the Intellectual

Intellectuals – those scholars, writers, journalists, and activists – have a large part to play in the transformation of a collective consciousness. But if my study begins with the ethical obligations of intellectuals in relation to trauma, it may seem that it ends on a note of misgiving: in the instrumentalisation of trauma, the integrity of such ethics are called into question. Indeed, as the last chapter of my thesis indicates, scholars are neither neutral nor exempt; even academic work is implicated in the cultural commodification of trauma, as suggested by Elizabeth Dauphinée’s self-reflexive critique of her research in postwar Bosnia. By extension, my work, too, can be said to participate in the trauma economy, since I labour to extract the social capital of academic prestige from the subject of partition trauma; moreover, the increasing topicality of trauma studies allows for this capitalisation. While I, as an academic, am not directly exploiting victims, there still remains the uncomfortable suggestion that, however obliquely, I am profiting from trauma.

I say this as part of a conscious effort to contend with some of the problems of researching and writing about trauma. Not least, there are political consequences for the commodification of trauma, against which the notion of accountability must be measured. It is not my aim to reconcile the opposition between mindful working-through and expedient commodification. Instead, I have taken my cue from LaCapra, who frequently returns to the difficulties of approaching trauma as a scholar. For LaCapra, the “hesitant, tentative” judgement of the unsettled historian is key (Writing History 197), because only this way is an ethical interpretation possible that combines “the varying modes of empathy and critical distance” (199). The “critical, self-questioning forms” put forward by LaCapra, “enable a different understanding and practice of writing history” (194). Informed by LaCapra’s attention to self-
awareness, self-questioning, and critical empathy, I hope this thesis has demonstrated a hermeneutics that, on the one hand, foregrounds some of the discrepancies between ethics and commodification and, on the other hand, also registers where they may crossover or interact. One possible response to these tensions lies in a self-reflexive and disconcerting stance that acknowledges my own relation within the trauma economy. This stance, it seems to me, is suggestive of anxious witnessing, where unease inhibits closure, resolution, and a satisfied conscience in a job well done. The scholar who recognises this dimension of the trauma economy, who must reflect seriously on the possibility that she is benefiting from the trauma of others, is engaging with this unsettling truth and so is made anxious. This anxiety is precisely what prevents the depoliticisation of research and what makes anxious witnessing profound: in bringing attention back to partition and its subjects, this thesis reminds the world that the wars in Yugoslavia happened, that Bosnia’s partition is ongoing, that the effects of India’s partition are still felt, and that structural economic and political conditions both screen and initiate debate about these traumas.
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