Beyond nationalism: The border, trauma and Partition fiction

Jennifer Yusin

Abstract
This article aims to rethink the trauma of the 1947 Partition of British India through the figure of the border. It is at the border that we can see how the present is as much constituted by the concentration of new realities that call for shifting frameworks of understanding as it is by past events that continue to haunt memory. It undertakes this task through a close reading of the trope of borders in Saadat Hasan Manto’s 1953 short story, ‘Toba Tek Singh’. Partition fiction serves as a fruitful ground for developing new approaches to that history because, in part, literature is uniquely situated between representation and theory, between what a text represents and how it represents. In Manto’s story, the border is embodied in its central protagonist, Bishan Singh, who experiences an ontological struggle between being and belonging that exceeds the particular historical, geographical, and national context of the Partition. I suggest that the division of British India signaled a unique rupture within the subcontinent in which the creation of borders became the defining traumatic event of that history. This article thus moves away from the familiar nationalist rhetoric that has otherwise dominated conversations about the 1947 Partition of British India. It focuses instead on the geographical border as a conceptual figure that is at once spatially and corporeally oriented to a collective identity that exceeds nationalist frameworks of reference.

Keywords
1947 Partition, border, identity, India, Pakistan, Saadat Hasan Manto, trauma

Saadat Hasan Manto’s 1953 story, ‘Toba Tek Singh’, ends with the haunting image of Bishan Singh, known to others as Toba Tek Singh, the name of his home village, lying dead, face down on a piece of nameless land between Pakistan and India. Knowing only

Corresponding author:
Jennifer Yusin, Department of English and Philosophy, Drexel University, 3141 Chestnut St., Philadelphia, PA 19104, USA
Email: jyusin@drexel.edu
that the 1947 Partition of British India resulted in the division of the Indian subcontinent and the creation of the nations of Pakistan and India, Bishan is unsure of the new location of his home village, and thus of his newly assigned national identity. As the story traces Bishan’s increasing disorientation that sends him into an existential crisis over his own sense of being and belonging, it seems as though the answer to the question of whether Toba Tek Singh is in India or Pakistan will resolve the protagonist’s troubled mind. But in the moment that Bishan, an inmate in a mental asylum, is about to be transferred to India because of his Sikh identity, he finally learns that Toba Tek Singh lies within Pakistan’s boundaries. In response, Bishan refuses to be transferred to India and eventually falls dead on the piece of land that is the border between the two nations. What is at once Bishan’s answer is also his failure to understand how his village could shift location without changing locality. It is also, more complexly, his inability to locate and understand himself in relation to a village that has suddenly become foreign by virtue of a historical event that forever changed the face of the subcontinent with new borders on a new map.

Much has been said about the 1947 Partition of British India. In the decades immediately following the Partition, scholarship tended to be oriented towards nationalist histories that focused on the triangulated politics among Britain, India, and Pakistan. These early accounts were important in forging dialogues about Partition history as a nationalist history but were later scrutinized for their conspicuous silence about the unprecedented level of violence out of which Pakistan and India’s independence was ushered. An uncomfortable silence shrouded dialogue about the Partition, and when the fiftieth anniversary was celebrated in 1997 the seeming official policy of silence continued to prevail over the wounds that persisted in collective memory and throughout numerous literary, cinematic, and artistic representations of that historical event. In the commemorative issue of *India International Centre Quarterly* celebrating the fiftieth anniversary, Krishna Sobti began to fracture that silence when she claimed that the Partition was ‘not so much a happening or historical event as living history’. It was, as Sobti continues, ‘easily the most massive experience of a kind that became an encounter between man and reality’ (1997: 55). Drawing more upon the continued experiential dimension of that momentous divide than the politics, Sobti implicitly articulates Partition history as a traumatic history in which the personal and violent experiences bear an undeniable epistemological and phenomenological importance in how we understand that history. As a ‘living history’ that was an ‘encounter between man and reality’, the Partition did not necessarily end at midnight between 14 and 15 August 1947, but was instead born at the doorstep of independence and in between two nations whose identities became inextricably bound to and constitutive of each other.

The fiftieth anniversary also helped to spark a resurgence of academic interest and dialogue that pushed beyond the familiar nationalist rhetoric and began to focus on the troubled experiential dimension of that history. The work of Urvashi Butalia, Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin was especially instrumental in arguing for the gendered nature of the communal violence experienced during the Partition. During the summer months of 1947, violence against women reached unprecedented heights in which sexual assault, murder, and abduction became a common experience among Muslim, Hindu, and Sikh women alike. Historians like Gyanendra Pandey turned to what he has called a
‘fragmentary point of view’ that combines evidence such as official government documents, survivor testimony, ethnography, memoirs, etc. in order to produce ‘richer definitions of the “nation” and the future political community’ (1991: 559).

Richer definitions of the ‘nation’ have indeed burgeoned as a result of the turn to the role experience plays in our conceptualization of that history, but scholars like Jill Didur (2006) and Sukeshi Kamra (2002) have deepened our understanding of the impact of the division by turning to Partition literature and trauma studies in order to talk about the ways in which that history resonates beyond its particular chronology as a collective traumatic experience. This is but a small sampling of the significant, interdisciplinary body of work that makes up what has now come to be called Partition studies. While Partition studies has, on the whole, radically shifted our approaches to an historical event that continues to reverberate in the social and political lives of Indians and Pakistanis, Partition literature continues, for the most part, to function in a secondary role to hegemonic evidence in historical analysis.

For those scholars who approach Partition studies as literary critics and turn their attention to close readings of now well known literary works such as Bapsi Sidhwa’s *Cracking India* (1991), a nationalist rhetoric still seems to prevail as they explore how the stories of individual traumas become allegories for the trauma of the nation, and visa versa. The importance of the inextricable relationship between the individual and the collective that literary critics have articulated in their work cannot be understated, but the rubric of the nation continues to be the popular lens through which Partition fiction is read.

Indeed, the birth of two new nations cannot be fully divorced from any discussion about the Partition, and it is not my intention to deny the role of the nation as a defining and crucial aspect of Partition history. I am, however, interested in pushing Partition studies beyond its current limits in order to rethink what we mean when we talk about the trauma of the Partition. In this paper, I aim to move away from the familiar discourse of independence and nationalism and focus instead on the geographical borders drawn to separate India and Pakistan. In contrast to the story of the Partition as an epiphenomenal event of independence, I argue that the history of the Partition is a history of borders in which the border became and continues to be the central site of trauma for that history. Rather than conceive of the border as a division between national spaces or as the site of traumatic violence, migration, and displacement, I conceive of the border as a conceptual figure for understanding how the cartographic reconfiguration of the land simultaneously became the traumatic reconfiguration of individual and collective identities.

In part, the drawing of geographical borders in these two regions meant the institution of new governments, the creation of the new nations, and thus the creation of new national identities. And yet the borders, which were drawn to establish new homes, did not, as Bishan’s confusion regarding the location of his home village conveys, necessarily make it clear where home was, where the new nation began and ended, and thus who was who under the new national banners. Instead the borders became the painful scars of trauma inscribed into the landscapes of neighboring nations whose identities became complexly and inseparably bound to each other.

The undeniable realities of communal and gendered violence, abduction, migration, and displacement that colored the summer of 1947 have formed a
foundational framework of empirical reference points to which we may turn when we begin to approach a particular contextual understanding of the Partition as a traumatic experience. Literary, historical, and anthropological discussions alike inevitably turn to the violence, migration, and displacement as the referent for what we mean when we talk about the trauma of the Partition. As much as we may draw upon certain empirical realities as the referent for what we call ‘traumatic experience’, referential understanding is always complicated by the nature of trauma as the sudden and unexpected confrontation with an event or events that are overwhelming and life threatening in nature. More specifically, the traumatic event occurs too suddenly for consciousness to mediate the experience. As a result, consciousness fails to locate the event within a past that has passed, thereby relegating the experience to an inescapable present that confounds identity and cannot be fully comprehended. Trauma is thus, as Cathy Caruth has famously argued in Unclaimed Experience (1996), most fittingly thought of as an enigmatic absence paradoxically made present precisely in the failure to understand.

In his corpus of work on trauma, Dominick LaCapra argues for a distinction between what he calls ‘structural trauma, or the condition of possibility that generates a potential for trauma, and empirical forms of historical trauma’ (1998: 195). Associated with historical trauma is a specific, empirically known event locatable within a past. For LaCapra, the ‘event in historical trauma is punctual and datable. It is situated in the past. The experience is not punctual and has an elusive aspect insofar as it relates to a past that has not passed away – a past that intrusively invades the present’ (2004: 55). Structural trauma also presupposes a clear empirical event that serves as the referent for the wounding but has more to do with its abstract quality that LaCapra identifies as the ‘existential-transcendental’ (1998: 195), which that often emerges as ahistorical or transhistorical in, for example, the endless repetition of traumatic nightmares that haunt the traumatized person in their waking and sleeping hours. In other words, structural trauma has more to do with the experience of ‘a past that intrusively invades the present’ and is thus often figured as profoundly devastating upon conceptualizations of identity, memory, and experience, and their attendant interrelatedness.

It is not my intention in this paper to deny or ignore the historical specificity of the Partition by focusing on trauma and the related experiences that made that event unique as a referential rupture or as an impossible absence. Nor is it my intention to claim that the nature of the trauma of the Partition necessarily results in an ahistorical or transhistorical understanding of that division. Fixating upon the psychoanalytic convention of the repetition compulsion in which the past intrudes upon the present as an ungraspable and difficult presence perpetuates endlessly negative repetitions and articulations of the status of life after trauma. The preoccupation with the past as indefinite and incomplete compounds the problem of reference by returning to trauma’s essential impossibility, and it is important to remember that, at least in the case of the Indian Partition, trauma creates as much as it erases.

The new nations and national identities that were born at midnight between 14 and 15 August 1947 are an integral and defining aspect of the Partition, and the trauma associated with that newness is as much about how to cope with a present rooted in different empirical realities as it is about the past experiences of communal uproar. In
this paper, then, I am interested in thinking about how the border becomes the site of a referential potential that emerges from trauma, how it creates a spatiality that does not divide nations but rather joins them into a traumatic figure, represented by and embodied in Bishan, that is at once Pakistan and India – into a figure that needs a new and different name than those granted under the national banners.

The bewildering confrontations with the self and land that we see in Bishan are not just an indication of what trauma encodes about impossibility and failure; it is also, I would contend, an occasion in which we can see how geographical borders refigure the referential rupture of a past that has not completely come to pass into the referential potential of the present that bears a new identity that cannot be adequately named under the Pakistani or Indian national schemas. For it is at the elusive site of the border that we can see how the present is not simply the manifestation of past memories that haunt us, but also the concentration of new realities that call for shifting frameworks of understanding. It is thus, as I argue, through the figure of the border that we may begin to see how the history of the Partition is both structural and historical, and how, in particular, it transcends its unique context as a nationalist history and becomes a history of borders in which the geographical borders drawn to separate and establish India and Pakistan also become the site where the self and the land reconfigure the subcontinent into a geography of trauma that does not distinguish between national identities.

Unlike other disciplines within Partition studies, literary criticism only seems bound to nationalist discourse out of habit rather than necessity. And Partition fiction serves as a fruitful ground for developing new approaches to that history because, in part, literature is uniquely situated between representation and theory, between what a text represents and how it represents. Stories like Manto’s ‘Toba Tek Singh’ are interested in the confusion that lies between knowing and not knowing and how that confusion reveals a kind of cartography of the mind that tells us as much about Partition history as does the hegemonic rubric of the nation that pervades other discourses. Through a close reading of the trope of borders in ‘Toba Tek Singh’, I aim to move beyond the notion of the border as a site for the confrontation between geography and national imaginaries by rearticulating the border as a conceptual figure that is at once spatially and corporeally oriented around identity. Like the fated protagonist of Manto’s story, the trauma of the Partition lies on the border, on the stretch of land between nations that, though it cannot be named, creates its own cartographic reconfiguration in the collective psyche of the subcontinent. As I will argue, Bishan becomes, as he lies face down on the land between Pakistan and India, the figure for the border who heralds the past into a present context that bears the name Toba Tek Singh – a name that is at once Pakistani and Indian.

‘Toba Tek Singh’ opens with the Indian and Pakistani governments agreeing, two or three years after the Partition, to exchange their respective mental asylum inmate populations on the basis of religious affiliation. Through this mutual transfer, the Muslim inmates in the asylums in India are to be sent to Pakistan and the Hindu and Sikh inmates in the Pakistani asylums are to be sent to India. After government officials put the transfer order into motion and fix a transfer date, all of the Hindu and Sikh inmates in Pakistan are transported to the border with India. What happens to those inmates, as the story continues, remains unknown. But in Lahore, a city granted to
Pakistan with the Radcliffe Award on 17 August 1947, news of the transfer trickled among the inmates and sparked debate about the nature of Pakistan. ‘What is Pakistan?’ asks one inmate to another. ‘A place in India,’ the other inmate responds, ‘where they manufacture razors’ (1999: 566). Although many of the inmates ‘had some idea of what was going on and knew something about Pakistan . . . [a]ll they knew was that there was a man, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, who was known as Quaid-e-Azam, and that he had founded, for the Muslims, a separate country called Pakistan’ (1999: 566). The inmates could not ascertain any specific details or answers from the newspapers and their confusion grew into a collective disorientation. ‘They could not figure out whether they were in Pakistan or India, and if they were in Pakistan, then how was it possible that only a short while ago they had been in India when they had not moved from the asylum at all’ (1999: 567)?

In the midst of this disorientation, we meet Bishan Singh, the story’s central protagonist. Little is known about him except that he is an elderly Sikh man who grew up in a small village named Toba Tek Singh, and that his family had brought him to the asylum 15 years ago after he suddenly and unexpectedly went mad. Since his arrival at the asylum, Bishan has remained standing, refusing to lie down to sleep. After news of the Partition and the transfer reaches Bishan, he begins to inquire about the location of the people from his home village. In order to answer this question, one must know whether the newly-drawn border locates Toba Tek Singh in India or in Pakistan. Since no one can answer this question, Bishan, who has come to be known as and called Toba Tek Singh by the guards and inmates alike, becomes increasingly more disorientated and agitated by the unknown whereabouts of his home village.

On the day of the transfer, Bishan and his fellow inmates are transported to the Wagah border, where Indian officials meet them. Chaos between the inmates and Indian and Pakistani officials prevails as the refusal to be transferred sparks discord among the inmates themselves. When it is Bishan’s turn to cross the border, he once again asks: ‘Where is Toba Tek Singh? In Pakistan or in India?’ (1999: 572). Upon hearing the Indian official’s response that his village is in Pakistan, Bishan runs back to the line of inmates and refuses to be transferred. Attempting to guide him back to the transfer point, the Pakistani officials assure him that ‘Toba Tek Singh is in Hindustan now – and if he’s not there yet, we’ll send him there immediately’ (1999: 573). Knowing that Bishan is an otherwise harmless old man, the Pakistani officials allow him to remain standing to the side as they continue transferring the other inmates. But before dawn emerges,

a piercing cry arose from Bishan Singh who had been quiet and unmoving all this time. Several officers and the guards ran towards him; they saw that the man who, for fifteen years, had stood on his feet day and night, now lay on the ground, prostrate. Beyond a wired fence on one side of him was Hindustan and beyond a wired fence on the other side was Pakistan. In the middle, on a stretch of land which had no name, lay Toba Tek Singh. (1999: 573)

That Bishan is known by the name of his village immediately suggests that the story foregrounds individual identity as constituted by, or at least deeply tied to, land. Not surprisingly, a number of scholars have commented on this crucial aspect of the story and
observed the ways in which that confusion and ambiguity about the location of the village Toba Tek Singh becomes a critical factor in Bishan’s process of trying to reorient his own identity. This process for Bishan is dependent upon the locality of his home, and later to a cartography that determines a new national imaginary that, despite his past, claims him as part of India by virtue of his Sikh identity. Ultimately, however, Bishan loses his ontological struggle for being and belonging as he collapses to his death, face down on a nameless stretch of land in between Pakistan and India, and thus without an identity under the new national schemas produced by the Partition.

The textual ambiguity between Toba Tek Singh the man and Toba Tek Singh the place is part of what makes Manto’s story particularly compelling for a discussion about the trauma of the Partition as steeped in a past that bears an ungraspable psychic resonance and in a present that demands new contextual understanding. Bishan’s increasing disorientation that emerges from his inability to locate the place he once called home is an important allegory for the profound confusion that was actually felt among Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs alike. Such matters of identity were no doubt complicated by the Wagah border – the India-Pakistan border in the northwestern Punjab region – which was somewhat arbitrarily drawn, and Manto’s story makes painfully clear that the drawing of this particular border did not resolve or end opposition but instead precipitated an enduring historical, political, and cultural rupture in the subcontinent.

In the summer of 1947, the subcontinent experienced unprecedented levels of communal disorder that claimed approximately one million lives and displaced approximately twelve million people. When, in August of 1947, the lines between India and Pakistan were drawn by a British lawyer named Cyril Radcliffe on a map, regional disputes over which villages and cities would be awarded to which nation had already reached an unparalleled level of violence – a significant portion of which was specifically aimed at women – and rioting. The announcement of the Radcliffe Award on 17 August 1947, which determined the precise boundaries between the two nations, did little to quell those disputes. As a result, the Wagah border became, from the moment of its cartographic inscription, a continuous, spatial representation of the Partition.

The notion of the border as a conceptual site or dynamic entity in which history, geography, and ideas of the nation intersect is not necessarily a novel thought and one would be hard pressed to find scholarship in Partition studies that conceives of the border as a simple geographical demarcation. For the most part, however, the border is still thought of in terms of the familiar discourse of the nation, and although its complexity is not denied, it remains within a framework of understanding that implicitly reiterates the nationalist rhetoric that has otherwise dominated discussions about Partition history. In his article ‘Of Territorial Borders and Test Cricket: Exploring the Boundaries of the Postcolonial State’, Bede Scott argues that ‘[i]n “Toba Tek Singh”, for example, the border clearly facilitates nationalist ideologies of divergence’ in which the Punjabi identity, which was regionally based, was superseded by Muslim, Sikh, and Hindu identities (2009: 29–30). Although Scott diverges from other readings of Manto’s story by interrogating what, in particular, the story reveals about the nature of the border, his reading circulates around the claim that ‘rather than facilitating non-coercive international movement, [the border] becomes a repressive mechanism of the state’ (2009: 25). Broadly, Scott’s article aims to examine the temporal dimension of the border, how
the border seems to exist outside of the very historical moment it engenders, and the pivotal role it plays in both Manto’s story and in the 1955 India-Pakistan test cricket series. For Scott, then, the nature of the border reveals something specific about Indo-Pakistani relations, and thus returns us back to the nation as our primary lens through which we examine the Partition.

While I agree that the border plays a pivotal and irreplaceable role in conceptualizations of the nation, in my formulation the border also becomes a trope for understanding the nature and meaning of the Partition as a traumatic experience that produces new reference points that are not exclusively turns towards the past. For as I see it, the border exists not in between two nations but in between knowing and not knowing, between a geographical reality that binds together two nations and an inconceivable abstract that inscribes itself into a cartography of the mind that cannot clearly distinguish between the self and the land, and thus between identities. And it is the moment of Bishan’s tragic death that best represents how the border is at once concrete and elusive, and how the border is as much bound up with the unknowable space that forever occupies memory as it is with the land that constitutes identity.

Throughout the story, Bishan’s individual identity is systematically erased as the textual ambiguity between Toba Tek Singh the man and Toba Tek Singh the village replaces his name. In the process, Bishan experiences a profound ontological challenge in which his being becomes wrapped up and constituted by the question of belonging – a question that is itself caught up in another ontological struggle between geography and cartography. The tragic irony of Toba Tek Singh the village, and of cities like Lahore that were at the epicenter of this struggle to reconcile land with individual and collective identities, is that the location of the village never actually changes. The map of the land changes as new borders are drawn and thus Toba Tek Singh is swept under a new national banner without actually moving. Toba Tek Singh, in other words, is at once in Pakistan and India – for it is the present cartographic reconfiguration that locates Toba Tek Singh in Pakistan and it is the past memory that suspends it in India. The geography of the village is the same as before the borders are drawn but the process of nation-building and mapmaking results in a new, unalterable conceptualization of the meaning of that geography. Thus Bishan and others like him are carried away in the tide of shifting ideologies as they become the victims of a land simultaneously wounded by the empirical as it transcends into the abstract and by the abstract as it crashes into the land.

What makes Bishan’s death especially painful and poignant is the haunting position in which the officials discover his body. After having stood for 15 years, Bishan, in death, lies face down on a piece of land that, as the story says, remains nameless. Although Bishan’s name changes, it is his face that remains steadfastly unchanged and able to be seen in his unrelenting commitment to standing. For Bishan, his face becomes the landscape of his identity, the one empirical marker that signifies him as Toba Tek Singh in the crowd of inmates awaiting transfer. Like the land itself, his face is at once an empirical geography and an abstract representation of what makes that particular visage identifiably unique. The moment that Bishan’s face joins the land, no longer able to be seen by those around him, the process of his erasure ends, and thus the ambiguity between Toba Tek Singh the village and the man ceases to exist. It is the precise instant
in which there is no difference between the land and the man, between geography and identity; for they become one in the same, a spatial, corporeal entity defined by virtue of its irreversible tie to the other. The land becomes Bishan’s face and Bishan’s face becomes the land; and thus the nameless stretch of land acquires the new name of ‘Toba Tek Singh’. Together, Bishan and the land coalesce into the figure of the border that becomes the site for the collision among history, geography, and an identity that cannot be fully named under national banners.

What sends Bishan into his greatest revolt is the answer to his unrelenting question: ‘Where is Toba Tek Singh?’ (1999: 572). When the Indian official at the border tells him that it is in Pakistan, Bishan immediately runs back towards Pakistan and refuses to cross the border. Arguably, this is Bishan’s most lucid moment, for it is clear that he simply wants to remain in the same location as his home. Yet the Pakistani officials interpret this act as an act of madness and try to comfort him by telling him that ‘Toba Tek Singh is in Hindustan now’ (1999: 573). The reiterations that ‘Toba Tek Singh is in Hindustan now’ signal the first and only moment in the story when the ambiguity between the village and the man dissolves, and location and self are distinctly separate. It is clear that the Pakistani officials are referring to Bishan the man in their attempt to quiet his revolt, but mention of the word ‘now’ temporally punctuates the inescapable fact that Bishan has arrived at the border two or three years after it was drawn during the Partition, which means that the only Toba Tek Singh able to be ‘in Hindustan now’ is the man. Sadly, Bishan cannot grasp this new cartography that does not literally relocate his home. Just as the new fact of Toba Tek Singh’s location in Pakistan remains entirely mysterious and enigmatic to Bishan, so too does his newly assigned Indian identity remain equally inconceivable and impossible. The Partition has rendered Bishan entirely foreign himself, suspended between a past that was known through memories of his village and a present that lies not between India and Pakistan but in both places. And as Bishan’s face merges with the contours of the ground, geography and corporeality merge into an amalgam that becomes the new face of the Indian subcontinent – an amalgam that straddles both national identities.

If Bishan’s death tells the story of how the borders drawn during the Partition become dynamic entities for the confrontation between national spaces and identity, then so too does it tell the story of the failure to name and understand the relationship among the people, land, and identity exclusively in nationalist terms. The final and haunting image of Bishan lying dead face down on the ground implicitly renders him, despite the passage of time, as yet another victim of the profound quandary of national belonging and social suffering that exploded as a result of the construction of new national consciousnesses. Yet the ontological struggle for being and belonging that sends Bishan crashing down onto the land becomes more than a polemical struggle for those displaced and marginalized by the Partition.

It is also an allegory for how the trauma of the Partition was as much about the very creation of new identities and geographies – a creation that reaches its most profound confusion at the site of the border – that cannot be neatly accounted for by references to past events under which the Pakistani and Indian national banners were raised. Those new identities, represented by and as Toba Tek Singh, are as much rooted in an
intrinsically different present moment as they are in the past and the tendency towards a totalizing discourse about the Partition in which we are constantly looking backwards runs the risk of implicitly articulating that the subcontinent can never recover from the events that befell the land in 1947. Bishan’s death is no less tragic or any more redemptive because of my emphasis on the creation of new identities that exist outside of the usual national identities. But the moment that Bishan dies face down on the land, Toba Tek Singh breaks from its past referents and becomes the new name of and thus the referent for the figure of the border. Though it is a break that emerges from trauma as a remnant that is just one part of the wounded cartography of the subcontinent, it is nevertheless a break into something new, into a new identity that exceeds the nationalist rubric and becomes the collective face of the subcontinent.

Notes
1. See Ashis Nandy (2003) for an interesting account of this silence.
2. It should also be noted that the wave of communal violence in the 1980s and 1990s in India played a role in the resurgence of interest in talking about the Partition insofar as comparisons to Partition violence were drawn.
4. See also Pandey (2001).
5. See, for example, Deepika Bahri (1999), Jill Didur (1998), and Ambreen Hai (2000).
7. For a more detailed definition of the traumatic event and its impact on the psyche, see in particular Chapters 2 and 3 of Sigmund Freud (1961 [1920]). See also Cathy Caruth’s well known engagement with Freud’s seminal work on trauma and traumatic neurosis (1996), in which she takes up the relationship between trauma and history and expands upon Freud’s consideration of trauma by articulating how trauma is always about something prior and how history is always already inscribed in the individual. In Caruth’s formulation, history is rethought along non-referential lines and thus resituated ‘in our understanding, that is, at precisely permitting history to arise where immediate understanding may not’ (1996: 11, emphasis in original).
10. Most interestingly, the Partition is performed at sunset every day at the Wagah border crossing in a ceremony called ‘The Lowering of the Flags’. Richard McGill Murphy has written wonderfully about this in a chapter titled ‘Performing Partition in Lahore’ (2001).

References


**Biographical note**

Jennifer Yusin is Assistant Professor of Postcolonial Literature and Theory in the Department of English and Philosophy at Drexel University. Her research focuses upon South Asian and postcolonial history and literature, psychoanalysis, trauma, and ethics.