



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 3.0

Giuseppe De Riso

Memory and Negotiations of Identity in *Train to Pakistan*

Abstract I: L'articolo si concentra sul romanzo *Train to Pakistan* di Khushwant Singh per analizzare le negoziazioni identitarie tra gruppi etnico-religiosi differenti durante gli anni della Partition tra India e Pakistan, avvenuta nell'agosto 1947. Più in dettaglio, l'articolo proverà a dimostrare l'impatto, nell'economia delle relazioni sociali e delle pratiche violente descritte nel romanzo, delle "voci" che circolavano incontrollate lungo e attraverso gli allora ancora incerti confini che separavano le due nazioni nascenti.

Abstract II: This article focuses on Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* to analyse the negotiations of identity among different ethnic communities at the time of the Partition between India and Pakistan which occurred in August 1947. In particular, this paper will try to show the impact, in the economy of social relationships and violence in Singh's novel, of uncertainties put forward through the circulation of 'rumours' along and across the then still uncertain borders dividing the two budding nations.

This article intends to discuss Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956) as an opportunity to investigate the renegotiations of identity which occurred at the time of the Indian Partition in 1947. In particular, the following reflection will try to read Singh's novel to understand how enmity and an extreme degree of group violence become possible among people who had decades or even centuries of peaceful coexistence, people who were previously social intimates. The Partition of India represented a watershed moment in the history of the nation, one characterised by an extreme degree of mass violence between Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. It came after the previous Partition of Bengal of 1905, in the wake of the claims of political autonomy from Great Britain which had started spreading throughout the subcontinent with renewed strength since.

Central to this reflection will be Urvashi Butalia's (2015) observation that Partition, as an event which imposed previously non-existing borders between different communities living together, is better understood as a phenomenon based on a tension between remembering and forgetting. Even though for Pakistanis Partition represented the gaining of an identity as a nation, Butalia points out that neither did it come out of the blue, nor can it be limited to just a political resolution. On the contrary, it was the result of a tension between past, present and future whereby a complex interplay of memories interacted in a nuanced and layered process, "depending on the particular circumstances of the moment of remem-

bering" (Butalia 2015: 2). Butalia highlights a double perspective where conflicting interests were fought. For each of the communities involved by Partition, there were those for whom remembering their past was vital to walk towards the opportunity offered by the future. From this perspective, remembering is a way to keep alive a past that stretches its arm into the present and, as such, into the future of a given community's children. To others, however, the past was something best to be forgotten. In this view, forgetting becomes a way to cancel a history whose erasure allows a community to truly move forward. Remembering and forgetting seemed thus to converge both in erasing the future and setting up the stage for it. They could be one and the same, or two incompatible opposites. The duplicity in the way acts of remembering and forgetting were lived also allowed each of the two main cultures involved by Partition to see itself as oppressor or oppressed at the same time, depending on the perceived feeling that the birth of their respective nations represented an act privation or gaining for their own identity or culture.

The present essay indeed takes up Urvashi Butalia's suggestion to consider Partition as an event best understood as a battlefield of conflicting memories, paying special attention not just to one specific point of view, that is the acts of remembering and forgetting of one specific community. As an exemplary novel describing the brutality of violence arising between different ethnic groups living side by side, *Train to Pakistan* seems to be exceptionally useful in this sense. Singh does not focus on communities which were fierce enemies, but on groups which had actually been on good terms with each other for centuries. This article intends to focus on Singh's literary references to the effects of 'rumours' on the workings of collective memory. In fact, at the time of Partition countless rumours of acts of violence perpetrated by Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs to each other circulated uncontrollably through the population, spreading sentiments of fear which created a peculiar short-circuit in the relationship between past events and the future which legitimised violence in the present. In fact, what Singh describes in his novel is the deterioration of relationships which went from long-lasting brotherhood to suspicion, and then rapidly drifted to violence and the right to take the other's life. If, in the words of Stephen Cairns, Edward Said revealed the Orient "to be a representational chimera, a fantastical image projected from the Occident" (Cairns 2007: 52), here it will be discussed how similar subjective formations can pertain to a close other, for example somebody one spends time with in everyday relationships. Drawing on Butalia, Singh's references to rumour prove to be a potent literary instrument to investigate how the ways of remembering change the filters through which cultural memories are passed on.

Mano Majra, the fictional hamlet in which *Train to Pakistan* is set, is a tiny village situated on the Indian border, half a mile away from the river Sutlej, with about seventy families of mainly Sikh and Muslim religions and only one Hindu family, Lala Ram Lal's. The first section of the novel, "Dacoity", highlights the calmness and peaceful life of the village. Mano Majra is described as a peaceful hamlet which had not yet been consumed by the flames of communal hatred ignited by Partition, which were already spreading throughout the subcontinent. Sikhs, Muslims, and Hindus had all been living peacefully together for centuries. The late coming of violence was possible because life there was characterised by

indifference towards independence, even though it was the most important political event of the time. Villagers even ignored the fact that the British had left the region and that the country itself was being divided in two. In this respect, Mano Majra (which originally gave the title to the novel)¹ seems almost to reflect Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's notion of "unity in diversity" (Manavar 2001) that he considered an essential trait of Indian culture. What mattered, to the villagers, was solidarity among them, the defence of mutual trust, and being faithful to their roots: "For them truth, honour, financial integrity were 'all right', but these were placed lower down the scale of values than being true to one's salt, to one's friend and fellow villagers" (Singh 2016: 54)².

The story is occasioned by the murder, in August 1947, of the Hindu moneylender Lala Ram Lal, who is executed in his home by a group of dacoits, or bandits, led by Malli. On their flight, the killers drop some bangles in the courtyard of Juggut Singh, one of the villagers also known as Jugga, who is thus arrested for murder and "dacoity" (or banditry). This incident is a prelude to the violence and horror to follow, foreshadowing the imminent disaster. The police mishandling of the case combines with the anxiety, generated by the rumours of the gruesome killings, of the people moving in search of security all around the village, such that the Sikhs of Mano Majra start to suspect and fear the Muslims with whom they had never had any problems before. The apparent suddenness of this process is a main point in the novel. Singh relates the mass migrations of the hundreds of thousands of Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs whom Partition had made foreigners in their own homes, the ones in which they had lived for generations. Almost instantly, new power and land negotiations transformed long-time friends into potential enemies and the familiar lands in the Northern Frontier into a dangerous territory for them. Singh's reference to rumours of reported violence right at the beginning of *Train to Pakistan* represents not only a historical clue that is useful in providing the reader with a context, but also shows his deep understanding of the fact that the announcement of Partition itself had been a spark potent enough to cause a dark imagination to be ignited. When rumours about such a proposal started to circulate uncontrolled among people throughout the continent, previous stories and prejudices about rivalling ethnic groups, and whose effects had already been felt during of the partition of Bengal while remaining latent in the decades following it, were suddenly reactivated to strike an imaginary in which potential enemies could be literally created overnight even in those places where different communities lived in harmony and brotherhood.

In *Train to Pakistan*, it is Singh's ability to describe the complex functioning of the uncertainty generated by rumours that makes the novel a very meaningful document to grasp the progressive disintegration of mutual trust among Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims, their otherwise incomprehensibly meteoric lapse into selfishness and cruelty. From a literary point of view, it is my contention that this conclusion has a foundational role in the economy of Singh's novel in its entirety, one which points directly to the link identified by Arjun Appadurai between "indeterminacy and brutality in the negotiations over the ethnic body" (Ap-

¹ As reported in Surendran 2000: 74.

² The version of the book from which all the quotes presented in this chapter are taken is the electronic one available on Google Play. Full bibliographical references are listed in the bibliographical section.

padurai 1998: 910). Rumour create a special circumstance of uncertainty capable, to use Arjun Appadurai's terminology in "Dead Certainty", of rapidly precipitating the ethnic body into frameworks of identity and categories which supported and legitimated communal violence (Appadurai 1998). The novel's main point of interest for the present reflection consists precisely in its ability to describe how the seeds of fundamentalist communalism and violent reprisal, tacitly encouraged by government forces, unsettled the peace and collective harmony in the village.

As Singh cares to point out right at the beginning of narration, the only certain fact of rumours about episodes of violence, circulating uncontrollably among people, was that both Hindus and Muslims killed, establishing a vicious circle where rumours about suffered violence were used as justification to place the blame on the enemy and legitimate the use of force as a logical reaction. The influence of rumours ignited and sustained communal violence during each and every aspect of its unfolding for its unrecognised talent for victimisation. Singh foregrounds the fact that the rapid deterioration of bonds between Sikhs and Muslims was determined by the psychological pressure of rumours describing unverified episodes of violence and physical abuses, never once specifically reported by Singh himself or through narration, that gradually increase intolerance and a desire for private or collective revenge within the members of one community towards the other. For example, in reminding the reader of the riots that plagued Calcutta at the time, Singh makes it so that the reader is disturbed by an aspect only obliquely hinted by the author: the fact that they ignited on the simple suggestion of a division between India and Pakistan. Mistrust was often, as was the case in Mano Majra, not on specific episodes or occurrences of violence, but on generic rumours about it, whose uncertainty made it all the more menacing and terrifying, capable of turning a known friend into a potential enemy:

Rumours of atrocities committed by Sikhs on Muslims in Patiala, Ambala and Kapurthala began to spread. They had heard of gentlewomen having their veils taken off, being stripped and marched down crowded streets to be raped in the market place. Many had eluded their would-be ravishers by killing themselves. They had heard of mosques being desecrated by the slaughter of pigs on the premises, and of copies of the holy Koran being torn up by infidels (Singh 2016: 102).

Singh's bitter acknowledgment consists only of the realisation that brutality sprung indiscriminately from both sides: "Muslims said the Hindus had planned and started the killing. According to the Hindus, the Muslims were to blame. The fact is, both sides killed. Both shot and stabbed and speared and clubbed. Both tortured. Both raped" (1). Singh's reference to rumour intercepts its presence in Indian social imaginary in a historical frame which, for the sake of this argument, we will limit to the ninety years that led to India's independence from Britain. In fact, already since the Sepoy³ rebellion in 1857, and the Par-

³ The term 'Sepoy' was used to indicate the native troops of the British army in India. The East India Company had started recruiting among natives since 1667, while the British government started training Indians to fight with their weapons and strategies.

tition of Bengal in 1905, the subcontinent had been plagued by the circulation of rumours. In the case of the Sepoy revolt, the Hindu and Muslim soldiers in the British army rebelled when a voice spread throughout India that the British were surreptitiously trying to convert Hindus and Muslims to Christianity with the introduction of the Enfield rifle which, to be loaded, required the biting of greased cartridges that the soldiers suspected were covered with fat either from the cow or pig. A sacred animal for Hindus, the former, and an unclean one for Muslims the latter, this rumour nurtured a resentment that was so strong as to sustain violent uprisings which lasted for about two years. About half a century after that, the haunting spectre of rumours which the British had failed to acknowledge fuelled the Partition of Bengal. Indeed, rumours aimed at increasing malcontent towards the British, and Europeans in general, as exploiters of the country circulated uncontrollably with the complicity of the elite classes, who made no effort to confute any of them hoping that the masses of uneducated and superstitious people would be slowly burning with hatred towards the British (Fraser 1979: 11).

As Urvashi Butalia's (2015) noted, at the time of Partition different powers used all means necessary in order for certain stories to resurface or be suppressed to serve their own ends. For example, the so-called "Head Scare" rumour was diffused by a Bengali pamphlet distributed in Calcutta stating that a sacrifice in human heads was required for the construction of a bridge near Howrah. Any person found walking in the streets after 9 p. m. would be sequestered and beheaded. Absurd as it may seem to some, the rumour was potent enough to keep workers at the mills near Howrah clear of the illusory dangers of the streets and in the perceived safety of their homes. At the same time, other baseless rumours, accepted by some local newspapers, spread the panic by maintaining that Russians were preparing to invade India, or that Bengali boys were being mysteriously kidnapped to be sent to Mauritius, the tea gardens in Assam or other places (this latter rumour was also known as the "Kidnapping Scare"). Rumour is the *fil rouge* connecting all the main conflicts which shaped the identitarian and cultural landscape in the subcontinent at least from the Sepoy Revolt, reaching its climax with the Partition of 1947.

The fundamental power of rumour has been described by Veena Das who, drawing on Jacques Lacan, maintains that rumour can achieve such a powerful "persuasiveness" because of its unverifiability: "its lack of signature, the impossibility of its being tethered to an individual agent" (Das 1998: 125) makes it all the more easier to be accepted by a single individual as well as an entire group of people as genuine truth. In the case of the Partition of 1947 it proved especially effective in creating a "fantasmagoria of shadows" (125) which could give each religious community a strong and deeply felt impression of being an "endangered collectivity" (125). It is important to highlight that the pivotal character of this indeterminacy is temporal first and foremost. Anonymity and unverifiability made rumour one of the most efficacious ways to spread and give strength to acts of retaliation by justifying destructive actions as a rightful reaction to a previous history of violence suffered at the hands of a rival community, a precedent which was always and necessarily outside the realm of verifiability and, consequently, in a condition of chronological unrecoverability. The past is displaced and projected into a state of synchronic presence, to form a temporal circuit of blame based on a fundamental paradox which legitimised each community to

perpetrate violence against the other precisely in the strength of the impossibility to state with absolute certainty who had struck first. Brutality could thus proceed in an infinite loop made possible by references to an always preceding, chronologically unrecoverable event of violence which resonated at the same time inside and outside of history, both participating in the processes of cause and effect among historical events, and alien to them. This condition has been once again discussed by Butalia in her addressing the question of 'distance' with regard to the ways in which history is handed down to us. The path leading to the past, she maintains, is characterised by an onion-like structure for which there is no true end to it. Memories have no definite boundaries between them, no clear shapes, limits, contours separating them: such that "the more you search, the more there is that opens up" (Butalia 2015: 3).

Simultaneously, the reactivation of an undeterminable past in the present produces the disjunction and backward movement of the prospect of a future threat. Brian Massumi has discussed the working of perceived danger as "what comes next" (2002: 26) and, as such, it has no definite location, limit, reach, scope or magnitude. Threat's essence, for Massumi, consists in the uncertainty of its "potential next" (2010: 76) being worse than one could cope with, of spawning other threats following the one feared in the immediate future. Threat is from the future in that it generates a surplus of danger that cannot be consumed (that is, which one cannot put an end to) that "runs forward back to the future" (Massumi 2010: 73), self-renewing itself. The power of rumour thrives on this recursive temporal movement for each involved religious or ethnic group in order to produce a twofold process of victimisation. The diffusion of an unverifiable past story of violence calls, of course, for vengeance to settle the score with the rival community. At the same time, violence is also required to prevent future threats which may derive from an unaddressed wrongdoing. Such threats are all the more "real" as they are virtually endured for being founded on the potential of the story contained in the original rumour.

The affective dimension that has arisen by rumours of atrocities makes it so that the less localisable in time and space of the threat, the more powerful is the feeling of fear it originates: "Fear is the anticipatory reality in the present of a threatening future. It is the felt reality of the non-existent, looming present as the affective fact of the matter" (73). The distortion brought about by rumour bends and twists historical continuity between past and future, so that with the ethnic conflicts arisen by rumours what was at stake was not just the defence of a community's past, but the holding up of its future as well. One has to keep in mind the idea, first put forward by Stuart Hall (Bell 1999), and later picked up by Appadurai, that the identitarian category commonly referred to 'ethnic' is not only something deriving from a marked past, but above all a "project", the projection of a community towards a future: "Remembering Partition means recalling the dark side of Independence, a moment of loss, a moment when the country was divided and that which was lost was immeasurable – for it was not only homelands, and families, and material things but much more that could not be articulated, sometimes not even named" (Butalia 2015: 2). Ethnic and religious violence is spearheaded in the interaction between vengeance and appeasement, colouring it with a double quality which makes it at the same time both an act of revenge

ensuing from previous violence, and pre-emptive of future violence, or, as Appadurai aptly synthesised, “let me kill you before you kill me” (Appadurai 1998: 922).

Of course, when framed in such terms, it becomes apparent that this kind of process only ends up adding fuel for new violence. Implicit in the threat contained in rumours is what the body “might” actually perform. As a self-fulfilling prophecy, the linguistic threat of rumour thrives on its fundamental incompleteness to establish and affirm that future in which it would be performed. In this sense, Judith Butler notes, rumour as threat “is still an act, a speech act, one that not only announces the act to come, but registers a certain force in language, a force that both presages and inaugurates a subsequent force” (Butler 1997: 9). That is, in announcing an act to come, it also presages or forecasts a subsequent force of pre-emption, in the attempt to crush the very chance of expectation. Again in Butler’s words, the threat of violence: “initiates a temporality in which one expects the destruction of expectation and, hence, cannot expect it at all” (9). Appadurai laconically summarises this crucial point by observing that:

[...] uncertainty about identification and violence can lead to actions, reactions, complexities, and anticipations that multiply the pre-existing uncertainty about labels. Together, these forms of uncertainty call for the worst kind of certainty: dead certainty (Appadurai 1998: 922-923).

In the period of Partition, stories of different massacres and killings of innocent Sikhs, Muslims and Hindus began to circulate uncontrolled, setting in motion a deadly process which called for indiscriminate vengeance. Such rivalries gave occasion to innumerable episodes of violence and conflict especially in the northern part of British India. Sikhs and Hindus were directed towards the east, where people of the same religion were predominant, crossing on their voyage the Muslims going in the opposite direction for the same reason. They all hoped to find shelter, as well as the protection and security which Partition had taken away from them.

It must not be forgotten that the Partition and the creation of two independent nations was basically a sudden process; only seven years passed from the proposal of an autonomous state for the Muslims of the subcontinent and the creation of Pakistan (Pandey 2004: 2). Actually, Pakistan was born a day before India, at midnight on 14 August 1947. The nation whose birth had been decided as a consequence of the proposed birth of India, actually came into the world first. In a sort of paradoxical timeshift, it seemed that it was India coming out of the ‘dream’ of Pakistan, not the contrary, as many within the Indian political elites predicated. As a consequence, suddenly millions of people could not be certain of their new home. Of course, incredible confusion ensued since millions of people found themselves overnight on the wrong side of the still blurry border between India and Pakistan, giving rise to what Sumir Sarkar has defined the biggest mass migration in less than nine months.

Sir Cyril Radcliffe drew the lines of the border in the arch of three months on the map of India, splitting the regions of Bengal and Punjab in two nations: India was thus flanked by East and West Pakistan. The boundaries between the two states were made known only two days *after* the proclamation of independence (Pandey 2004: 2). Consequently, the na-

tion-states as political entities came into being before the citizens could be aware of the new territorial frontiers surrounding them. India and Pakistan were born before they had a land where citizens could actually live. On 15th August India and Pakistan were, for almost anyone living in them, borderless countries, they coexisted as twins in a common womb: a pure zone of virtuality. For just one day, they were one and the same.

In the two days after 15 August 1947, in which the two nations overlapped, an imaginary zone of pure potential was created, one in which any Muslim, Hindu or Sikh could potentially be a citizen or a refugee. In the months following Partition, at least 16 million people had to leave their homes as refugees to reach zones where either their co-religionists were the majority, or to emigrate to the U. S. and the U. K. in hope of finding protection. In the process of relocation, people did not know where exactly they were now, if they were in India or Pakistan. For the same reason, they were not sure where they had to go anymore, which directions they had to take. Partition was a disorienting, confusing, bewildering event in which people were losing their bearings.

Similarly, during the Partition of 1947, manipulated rumours were made to cut across ethnic lines to turn each community into the target of unjust or cowardly executed violence, thus nurturing sentiments of victimisation and revenge. Different strands of rumour combined to create a sense of vulnerability through the setting up of an imaginary world in which the whole social order was seen as precarious, about to collapse, corrupted by a massive conspiracy on the part of an oppressive community. This was valid even though it may have been the supposedly offending community, the one on which violence was actually unleashed. In fact, according to Veena Das, one of the characteristics of the relationship between fear and communal violence was the reversal of roles for which the one fearing also considers itself as a victim, even if it may be no less oppressive or aggressive.

Singh deftly plays with his characters in how they rely on rumours and the creation of stereotypes to decode each other and prevent or survive dangerous situations. As previously anticipated, the first section of the novel does not directly deal with Partition, to focus instead on the theft and the consequent superficial action of the police in handling the case. Confronting the sub-inspector on the state of the village, among Hukum Chand's (the local magistrate) first preoccupations is the presence of "bad characters" (19) in the village. Jugga is the only one mentioned by the sub-inspector. He was the son of the dacoit Alam Singh, hanged two years before after having been convicted of dacoity with murder. Juggut Singh's name had thus been registered with number 10 and labelled as a 'bad character' (Surendran 2000: 80). So, when Jugga is arrested for the murder of Lala Ram Lal, the apprehension is motivated only in part by the bangles that the true culprits had thrown in Jugga's courtyard. After all, both his father and grandfather had previously been hung for dacoity. Little did it matter that they had never robbed the residents of their own village. Nor that Jugga did not allow Muslims to be ill-treated due to his being in interreligious love with Nooran, whom he, after being released from police custody, learnt had left for the refugee camp while being pregnant of him.

Continuing their dialogue on the situation in Mano Majra, the sub-inspector tells Hukum Chand that the village had somehow managed to escape violence. Chand, a Hindu,

reveals then his bias by going on to comment on the state and reasons for the anomalous peace in Mano Majra. He notes that whereas Muslims behave in a vindictive way around the part of Amritsar, killing “man for man, woman for woman, child for child” (17), Hindus do not participate to the stabbing game, even though they are not scared to fight and do not back out of confrontation when necessary. Instead, Sikhs in Mano Majra “have lost their manliness” (17) because they live in peaceful coexistence with Muslims, “as if nothing had happened” (17). He suspects that they allow this for the money they get from Muslims in their village.

This insistence on the construction of stereotypes and prejudices, as noted by Gyanendra Pandey (2013), plays on the historical workings of rumours during Partition. For example, at the time Sikhs were described by Muslims as not worthy of being treated as human beings, since they were imagined to be creatures of madness and demonic possession, lacking any kind of human subjectivity (Das 1998: 125). Conversely, Hindus and Sikhs were united by an all-around hatred of all Muslims. Such hatred came from stereotypes cemented by drawing on stories of their past to construct a common enemy against whom actively organise with violent actions (Pandey 2004). The creation or reinforcing of stereotypes made it so that historic prejudices received a new lease of life. The way fear inspired by rumour appeals to stereotype to hijack the past points to a relatively recent problem in Cultural Studies, one concerning memory, and especially the relationship between remembering and forgetting. Veena Das, for example, has discussed how the Sikhs, always known to be friends of Hinduism, were made to pass as instruments of Islam. In the economy of forgetting, Appadurai notes, when the labels of everyday life become uncertain, unstable, indeterminate and socially volatile, people and communities give shape to tailored pasts to beget a clash of temporalities. Instrumental erasures and removals conveniently mobilise history to make “violent action [...] become one means of satisfying one’s sense of one’s categorical self” (Appadurai 1998: 922). Merits of the feared ethnic community are temporarily forgotten or distorted in an act of remembering which draws on past stories only to construct an enemy threatening to erase one’s own future. In *Train to Pakistan*, the retroactive force of stereotypes (founded on the mingling between generic rumours and facts) lethally wrests open the unfinished stories of the past to have trust torn apart by resentment and hate in the present.

One of Singh’s literary achievements with *Train to Pakistan* appears to be his registering of the invisible workings through which, historically, rumours proved to be sufficiently potent to put different communities one against the other through victimisation and role reversal. In the novel, most of the Sikhs confess to be angered at the rumours of the violence their coreligionists had had to endure at the hand of Muslims in Pakistan, while the Muslims are shocked by the Sikh uprisings in the surrounding villages. Eventually they decide to leave the village for Pakistan. The Sikhs, however, cannot bear the thought of their leaving unscathed and plan to stretch a rope across the bridge under which the train would pass, so as to kill the Muslims sitting on its roof. The extreme sacrifice of Jugga, who manages to cut the rope at the cost of his own life, succeeds in protecting his beloved Nooran, the daughter of a Muslim weaver, and save the lives of those on the train too. Singh chooses to make love,

not political resolution, the only possible way out of the hatred ignited by Partition. It is the passion of a bandit, the 'dacoit' Jugga, the 'bad character' which ultimately saves the lives of hundreds in Mano Majra, not the work of the 'main' character Iqbal, who had been sent to Mano Majra specifically to control the situation, not even the police. While the novel is mainly a tale of 'male' conflicts and interests, thus not offering too much of a purchase to consider the gendered aspects of Partition or the lives of women, Singh's decision to solve what may at first appear a 'public' matter through a 'private' relationship between a man and a woman, highlights the deep imbrication of public and private which Jill Didur (2007) denounced in the power relations active in the nationalistic, religious and ultimately patriarchal discourses which regulated the violence erupted during Partition.

Singh's primary concern is the fact that in the social production and circulation of hate, the reversal of the images of perpetrator and victim is frequent, depending upon the perspective from which the memories of traumatic events and of everyday violence are seen and re-lived (Das 1998). Rumours are exceptionally effective in allowing such a reversal, due to the impossibility of placing the blame on somebody; or, in other terms, for their power to create the conditions for each community to feel entitled to place the blame on the other. To Singh, this duplicity is the real cause which turned any ethnic group into a victim and executioner at the same time, with the consequent obliteration of longstanding solidarities. Singh makes visible the tremendous effect of Partition on the people of Mano Majra, adversely affecting communal relationships among Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. He registers how the tensions which underlie apparently peaceful social practices and interactions, the bureaucratic patterns and political agendas all interacted in the transition which transformed India from a colony into a nation, a shift that was both urgent and dangerous.

Through rumour, Singh helps the reader understand how rural India, which was not generally plagued by communal violence, ended up being swallowed up in a swirling climate of violence. The Partition brought with it rumours which were potent instruments for the creation of insecurity. In fact, when Banta Singh, the Lambardar of the village, questions the actual benefits of Independence for the people, he laments the lack of security and protection which independence had meant for the weak: "But what will we get out of it? Educated people like you, Babu Sahib, will get the jobs the English had. Will we get more lands or more buffaloes?" (48). Freedom means little to the villagers if it brings death and mass destruction to the common man, instead of economic security granted by more land and more farm animals. Adding that: "The only ones who enjoy freedom are thieves, robbers and cut throats", he goes on to conclude that nothing is going to change for the poor: "we were slaves of the English, now we will be slaves of the educated Indians or the Pakistanis [...] We were better off under the British. At least there was security" (48-49).

The uncertainty which the Lambardar refers to reverberates on different levels. For example, the change of frontiers and the consequent flows of mass migration and dislocation posed the problem of the number of people moving or settling in a certain area. Or, in clearer terms, the question of who could be trusted, of how many potential enemies were moving around a certain place and might be possibly preparing to bring about a violent action against a given community.

This situation in the novel is represented through the unsettling character of Iqbal. A so-

cial worker belonging to the district of Jhelum, with long experience abroad, Iqbal had been sent to Mano Majra by the Communist party to somehow contain the bloodshed of Partition. In fact, the village was a place of strategic importance due to its closeness to a bridge. Singh strives to create an aura of scepticism around Iqbal, insisting on the feelings of suspicion which Iqbal's appearance and good behaviour had arisen in the people of Mano Majra since his arrival by train. But the main source of distrust and anxiety in his fellow villagers was Iqbal's own name, since it was one of the few shared among the three communities living there. He could literally belong to any community, which made it impossible, somehow paradoxically, for anyone to trust him. He could not be placed with certainty in any reassuring grid; framed neither as friend, nor foe. A difficult situation for everybody around him which is, eventually, exploited by police forces to cover up their shallow course of action for having hurriedly arrested him as a suspect for the murder of Lala Ram Lal. In fact, he is forced to show his sex to prove his religious affiliation. Iqbal's circumcision is used as an inescapable body mark, the visible "proof" that would allow the police to make Iqbal's arrest justifiable, or at least plausible, on the basis that he was probably (not certainly) a Muslim.

When the arrival in the village of the "ghost train" brings into the city 1,500 corpses of Sikhs (who were killed by Muslims in their voyage to sought-after salvation), Singh concentrates even more on those processes through which everyday life gets transformed. Soon the villagers cannot contain their anger towards the Muslims in the village. Mutual suspicion becomes the order of the day, slowly eroding the original feelings of brotherhood. Rumours that similar things had happened and were happening in other places, too, make events precipitate. The uncertainty nurtured by rumours allowed latent distrust and scepticism to resurface and corrupt even solid relationships. Ultimately, the Sikhs chose to punish the innocent Muslims of their village for the uncertainty their presence had brought to their lives by taking part in the ambush of the train leading them to Lahore. Fears activated by the combined action of rumours and uncertainty allowed for the voluntary turning of longtime friends into potential enemies deserving of payment for the actions generally attributed to their ethnic group, but which they had never committed.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Allport, Gordon Willard & Leo Joseph Postman. 1948. *The Psychology of Rumour*. New York: Henry Holt & Company.
- Appadurai, Arjun. 1998. Dead Certainty: Ethnic Violence in the Era of Globalization. *Development and Change*, 29: 915-925.
- Bell, Vikki. 1999. Historical Memory, Global Movements and Violence: Paul Gilroy and Arjun Appadurai in Conversation. *Theory, Culture and Society*, 16, 2: 21-40.
- Burton, Antoinette. 2003. *Dwelling in the Archive. Women Writing House, Home, and History in Late Colonial India*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Butalia, Urvashi. 2015. *Partition: The Long Shadow*. New Delhi: Zubaan Books.
- Butler, Judith. 1997. *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*. New York-London: Routledge.
- Cairns, Stephen. 2007. The Stone Books of Orientalism. P. Scriver & V. Prakash eds. *Colonial*

- Modernities: Building, Dwelling and Architecture in British India and Ceylon*. London-New York: Routledge, 51-65.
- Daiya, Kavita. 2008. *Violent Belongings: Partition, Gender, and National Culture in Postcolonial India*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Das, Veena. 1998. Official Narratives, Rumour, and the Social Production of Hate. *Social Identities. Journal for the Studies of Race, Nation and Culture*, 4, 1: 109-130.
- Didur, Jill. 2007. *Unsettling Partition: Literature, Gender, Memory*. New Delhi: Pearson Education India.
- Fraser, Andrew. 1979. *Government and Politics in Bengal*. Delhi: Mittal Publications.
- Manavar, Twinkle B. 2001. The Theme of Partition in Kushwant Singh's Novel *Train to Pakistan*. Jaydipsinh Dodiya ed. *Contemporary Indian Writings in English*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers, 28-33.
- Massumi, Brian. 2002. *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*. Durham- London: Duke University Press.
- Massumi, Brian. 2010. The Future Birth of the Affective Fact. Melissa Gregg & Gregory J. Seigworth eds. *The Affect Theory Readers*. Durham: Duke University Press, 52-70.
- Pandey, Gyanendra. 2004. *Remembering Partition. Violence, Nationalism and History in India*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Pandey, Gyanendra. 2013. *A History of Prejudice: Race, Caste, and Difference in India and the United States*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rao, V. Pala Prasada, K. Nirupaand Rani & Digumarti Bhaskara Rao. 2004. *India-Pakistan: Partition Perspectives in Indo-English Novels*. New Delhi: Discovery Publishing House.
- Seigworth, G. J. & Melissa Gregg eds. 2010. *The Affect Theory Reader*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Shaikh, Firoz A. 2009. *Partition: A Human Tragedy. A Critical Study of Novels on Partition of Indian Subcontinent*. New Delhi: Sarup Book Publishers.
- Singh, Khushwant. 2016 [1956]. *Train to Pakistan*. Gurgaon: Penguin Books India.
- Surendran, K. V. 2000. *Indian Writing: Critical Perspectives*. New Delhi: Sarup & Sons.

Giuseppe De Riso is researcher in English Literature at the University of Naples "L'Orientale", where he also completed his PhD in Cultural and Postcolonial Studies of the Anglophone World with the dissertation "The Body Expanded: Agency, Representation and Affect in Tridimensional Videogames". He is also editorial assistant and webmaster for *Anglistica AION*, an interdisciplinary journal of the Department of Literary, Linguistic, and Comparative Studies of the University of Naples "L'Orientale". He published two books: *Affect and the Performative Dimension of Fear in the Indian English Novel: Tumults of the Imagination* (Cambridge Scholars 2018), and *Affective Maps and Bio-mediated Bodies in Tridimensional Videogames of the Anglophone World* (Tangram Edizioni Scientifiche 2013). He also published on post-colonial literature and digital media: "Bodily Remediations in Geetanjali Shree's *The Empty Space*", "Of Smoke and Mirrors: Tribal Women in Postcolonial India" and "Gaming Gender: Virtual Embodiment as a Synaesthetic Experience".

gderiso76@gmail.com