



## Abstracts for the Workshop

# “Rethinking Contemporary Legacies of Partition – Cultures of Memorialization, Popular Politics and Cross-Border Ethics in South Asia”

on 29 and 30 June 2017

### Evening Lecture on 29 June 2017:

**Gyanendra Pandey** (Emory College of Arts and Sciences)

The Unarchived Histories of Nation-States: Reflections from the Indian subcontinent

In recent times, 19<sup>th</sup> century notions of one language, one culture, one history in one nation have reappeared in many countries: from India and Turkey to Britain and the USA.

Focusing on the Indian subcontinent, I ask what histories these new/old moves elide. What contradictions – and possibilities – in the making of modern society, citizenship and democracy do they suppress?

### Workshop Lectures on 30 June:

**Vazira Zamindar** (Brown University)

South Asia in Dark Times: A Minority Report on the Nation Form

Bhimrao Ambedkar’s 1940 text *Thoughts on Pakistan* has made a comeback in recent years, providing validation to many across the political spectrum on the necessity of Partition, despite its catastrophic human consequences. A re-reading of the text elucidates the “problem” of minority in the nation form, and the significance of European experiments and failures in the inter-war period to Indian thinking, and the “travelling” ideas that paved the way to Partition.

**Mukulika Banerjee** (London School of Economics)

National Amnesia and the *Khudai Khidmatgar* Movement

Remembering the story of the *Khudai khidmatgar* movement today has become more urgent than ever before. The world has changed radically since the first edition of my book *The Pathan Unarmed* was published in January 2001. Then, the name “Pathan” or “Pashtun”, being the largest population group in Afghanistan and the North-West Province of Pakistan (now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) was little known outside the sub-continent or beyond circles of old British officials and some historians and anthropologists. So, a first book by an academic based on interviews with elderly revolutionaries that discussed the Pathans’ non-violent movement against the British in the 1930s and 1940s appeared to have niche interest at best. Nine months later, however, the Twin Towers in Manhattan were

felled and the US invaded Afghanistan to pursue al-Qaeda. The Taliban, born during the earlier war against the Soviets in Afghanistan, revived and fought the new invaders, and very soon, the Pashtuns, who dominated the Taliban, had become well-known throughout the western media.

Suddenly then, the Pashtuns were once more stereotyped and essentialised – as they had deliberately been by the British - as violent and uncontrollable and as religious fanatics. More generally, the “shock and awe” strategy after 2001 encouraged similar anti-Muslim rhetoric and actions from London to Moscow.

The *Khudai Khidmatgar* movement had been however been completely written out of Pakistan’s nationalist history and therefore could not be produced as a counter-narrative against the growing trends of Islamophobia and essentialism. Yet as Pakistan and India mark the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of independence, a new more self-confident generation is curious about its own history and the story of the *Khudai khidmatgars* fills an important gap in the creation story of the nation, and will help young Pakistanis learn, own and tell this story in various ways for future generations. And in the contemporary climate of Islamism and Islamophobia, with the risks and temptations of radicalised young men desperate to believe in a cause, the lesson of the success of non-violence among Pashtuns is certainly one to spread and ponder.

This paper will reflect on the processes of nationalist historiography, its amnesia, and the repercussions of forgetting.

**Pippa Virdee** (De Montfort University)

Divided Oral Histories: A Gendered Dimension

For the past fifteen years, I have been collecting oral histories from the survivors of Partition. They allow the researcher to delve into hidden histories and uncover stories which usually remain outside the official documentation. These often marginalised voices also include the significant other: women. Through oral accounts and newspapers this paper will highlight the ways in which women played a pivotal part in the nation building project in Pakistan. Little is written about them as government accounts, biographies, autobiographies all remained focused on high politics and the “great men”. Yet by moving our focus away from these over-analysed histories we can see other parallel histories too.

**Michel Boivin** (CNRS, Paris)

Partition and Authority in the Jhulelal’s Tradition of India: The Case of the Thakurs

This presentation addresses the issue of authority in a religious tradition which was transferred from Pakistan to India after partition since 1947 onwards. In Sindh, the tradition of Jhulelal or Daryapanth (The Path of the River) is related to the Indus River, locally known as Sindhu. Interestingly, Jhulelal was worshipped both by Hindus and Muslims, whose rituals were shared in a number of circumstances. According to the official narrative, Jhulelal himself asked his cousin Pugar to head the Daryapanth and after him, the religious authority was transmitted to his descendants known as the Thakurs. While all the Thakurs migrated to India after Partition, a shifting of the authority occurred. Since then, they appear to have been marginalized in the tradition, although they still preform the main rituals, but in domestic spaces rather than in public spaces such as temples. The main purpose of the presentation is to decipher how the shifting of authority was related to

Partition: in other words, it will question if Partition had an impact on the exercise of authority among Jhulelal's followers.

**Raphaela Kormoll** (Durham University)

Rethinking the Legacies of Partition through Everyday Practices:

The (Re-)Production of India-Pakistan Relations through the CDP and Social Action in the Punjab Borderland

The Partition of the sub-continent in 1947 that led to the creation of two separate states – the Union of India (later Republic of India) on one side of the new border and the Dominion of Pakistan (later Islamic Republic of Pakistan) on the other – was accompanied by ethnic cleansing, with most casualties, violence and migration taking place in the Punjab. The consequences of partition are still widely felt and resented, leading to a seemingly intractable conflict. But the focus is on the Kashmir region now. Beyond partition studies, there is little talk about the Punjab and the way in which Punjabis are dealing with this legacy of partition today. Transporters, traders, custom officials, security personnel, civil servants, politicians, diplomats, etcetera constantly produce and reproduce relations between India and Pakistan through their everyday practices. Building on the work of sociologists like Pierre Bourdieu and Luc Boltanski, this presentation will explore how discursive practices in the Composite/ Comprehensive Dialogue (CDP) and social action in the Punjab border(land), and in particular at the Attari/Wagah border-crossing point, since 2003 (re-)produce relations between India and Pakistan. The focus is on the economic and the security fields, which are both important in the dialogue and have been identified as key to peace and conflict between the two states. The presentation will in particular be based on a textual analysis and empirical examples elicited during ethnographically informed field work in India and Pakistan (2015-2017). It seeks to contribute to a better understanding of cross-border relations in the Punjab and to the literature on South Asian borderlands, and presents an alternative way of thinking about relations between India and Pakistan.

**Philipp Zehmisch** (LMU)

Struggling with Partition: Cross-Border Ethics and Social Aesthetics of Resistance

Many Indians and Pakistanis tend to believe that Partition violence and displacement was a process in which the national Self was attacked by a supposedly homogenous religious Other. This omnipresent, reifying, and simplistic narrative of enmity contributes to a wide-ranging historical "amnesia" and justifies as well as fuels religious discrimination, communal conflict, and warmongering. Opposing the foundations of this misconception, civil society actors on both sides of the border seek to reinterpret the contested discourse on Partition and its aftermaths. They actively work for a reappraisal of the past with the aim to critically redefine hegemonic notions of nationalist identification and consciousness, and to improve demotic relations between India and Pakistan in the present. My presentation explores the activist motivation, political scope, and social aesthetic of resistance implied in such alternative cultures of memorialization. These are both inspired *by* as well as an outcome *of* a historically reflexive, philosophical, and activist stance that may be coined "cross-border ethics".

**Anne Murphy** (University of British Columbia)  
Partition in the Punjabi Literary Imaginary

Punjabi language and literature were simultaneously fractured, thwarted, and enabled in new ways by Partition. With Punjabi speakers now divided by an international border, Punjabi found belated state support in India, after a protracted and highly politicized fight for that status; in Pakistan, in Tariq Rahman's apt words, any "effort to teach Punjabi [has] floundered on the rock of cultural shame and prejudice" (Rahman 2002: 401). This paper will consider the place of Punjabi writing as a kind of ethical intervention across the border that divides Punjabis with special attention to the work of contemporary Punjabi language writer Zubair Ahmed. We see in Ahmed's stories the resonances of the political and linguistic movement for the Punjabi language that he has been so active within: his focus on deprivation, his embrace of the memories of pre-Partition Lahore and the names that marked it, his attention to loss and to memories that both consume and evade him. To speak of the phantoms that haunt Ahmed's Lahore in Punjabi is to embrace a language of dissent, and to write through Partition itself. If Aamir Mufti is correct in seeing an "exilic consciousness" at the core of the Urdu literary, with a "unique relationship... to the crisis of Indian national culture that is marked by the figure of the Muslim," Punjabi's literary place in Pakistan is configured in a similarly contingent mode to the idea of a national project (Mufti 2007: 243, 211). Ahmed's stories call attention to the affective dimensions of that experience of contingency.

**Virinder Kalra** (University of Warwick)  
Punjabi Theatre as Border Crossing Performativity

In the library of Punjab University in Chandigarh, the books that travelled from Lahore, via Simla to take their place in the newly made campus in the 1960s are marked by their red binding. The part of the Lahore museum that is now in the Chandigarh Museum and Art Gallery also carries multiple inscriptions to signify its journeying. This division of material culture has been accompanied by a continuity of exchange in terms of literature, music and film which in the digital age is intrinsically border less. This article explores the practice of theatre, which is by necessity, materially located in its initial performance but also connected to texts which are free to circulate. Border crossing of theatre texts and troupes has created and sustained a dialogue that waxes and wanes with the political currents but nonetheless provides a basis for arguing for a (post) post-partition approach to considering Punjabi cultural politics. Through the practices and connections between groups such as Lok Raqs, Ajokha, Rang Manch and Suchetak Rang Manch and how they connect to the Indian People's Theatre Association, the cross fermentation of political theatre is demonstrated working through borders as a site of creativity rather than confrontation.