

Introduction: The Place of Partition

There behind barbed wire, on one side, lay India and behind more barbed wire, on the other side, lay Pakistan. In between, on a bit of earth which had no name, lay Toba Tek Singh.¹

*I*n our maps of the world the bit of earth with no name simply disappears. It folds into a black, impenetrable line. Let me begin with Ghulam Ali's story as a way of unfolding this history, drawing out lives from lines, untended margins from marked places.

Ghulam Ali was a subaltern officer in the British Indian Army, an *havidar*, who had been sent to receive technical training in artificial-limb making in Britain during the closing years of the Second World War. When he returned, he was posted at the military workshops in Chaklala, near Rawalpindi. On June 3, 1947, a partition of the Indian subcontinent was announced, concomitant with the coming end of almost two centuries of colonial rule, and a Partition Council began the exacting task of counting and dividing the vast machinery of colonial statecraft into two—everything from tables and chairs, weather instruments and military hardware, to railway engineers and office clerks. All those in government and military service were asked to choose which post-independence nation-state they wanted to serve—India or Pakistan.

Ghulam Ali “opted” for the Indian Army since his familial home was in Lucknow. But before post-independence maps could be drawn up that would show Lucknow in a new India and Chaklala in a new Pakistan, genocidal violence engulfed Rawalpindi and war broke out between the two nascent states over Kashmir. Prevented from returning to India, Ghulam Ali was forced to work for the fledgling Pakistan Army. Eventually in 1950 the Pakistan Army discharged him on the grounds that he had opted for the Indian Army. The limb maker was taken to the Pakistani border post at Khokrapar and, deemed to be an Indian, was “forcibly removed” into Indian territory. However, at the Indian checkpost he was not recognized as an Indian. He was arrested by the border police for entry without a travel permit, forced to serve a prison sentence, and was deported back to Pakistan in 1951 on the grounds that he was a Pakistani.

If lives can unfold, they can also unravel. Faced with dispossession, Ghulam Ali applied to the courts to be recognized as a Pakistani citizen, but was declared an Indian national in 1956. He then bought himself a Pakistani passport in order to cross the border and return to his familial home in Lucknow. There he applied for Indian citizenship, but despite appeals by his brother, the provincial government of Uttar Pradesh ordered him to leave the country in 1957. When he was deported by an Indian police escort to the Wagah border crossing, the Pakistani officials there in turn arrested him again and, considering him an Indian national, placed him in the “Hindu camp” at Lahore.

Ghulam Ali, barbed wire on either side of him, is that quintessentially Manto-esque figure: like Toba Tek Singh in Saadat Hasan Manto’s best-known Urdu short story of Partition’s “madness,” he invokes all the aporias of belonging in a cartography of nation-states. Where, indeed, is India? Where is Pakistan? Who is an Indian? Who is a Pakistani?

Perhaps the sheer magnitude of the catastrophic experiences of Partition in 1947 is enough to justify this study. Marked by genocidal violence, forced conversions, abductions and rapes in large parts of north India, as well as an unprecedented displacement of people, Partition has been called “a holocaust” of a tragedy.² And yet, by placing the events of 1947 at only the beginning of what I argue was a *long Partition*, this book asks us to stretch our very understanding of “Partition violence” to include the bureaucratic violence of drawing political boundaries and nationalizing identities that became, in some lives, interminable.

I came across Ghulam Ali’s story in a government file which I requested

because I had been “tracking,” in ethnographic fashion,³ Urdu-speaking north Indian Muslim families as they became divided between Delhi, India, and Karachi, Pakistan, in the years following 1947. Divided families are at the heart of this book, for it is through them, their oral histories in two cities, that I was forced into the archive; it was what E. Valentine Daniel calls “the drone of silence” in interviews, caught between “not-being-able-to-speak” and “ought-not-to-speak,”⁴ that drove me to read Urdu newspapers of the time, and tucked away, seemingly indifferent government records of both states.

Moving between memory and record, I recover here a remarkable history of how, in the midst of incomprehensible violence, two postcolonial states comprehended, intervened, and *shaped* the colossal displacements of Partition. It was through the making of refugees as a governmental category, through refugee rehabilitation as a tool of planning, that new nations and the borders between them were made, and people, including families, were divided. The highly surveillanced western Indo-Pak border, one of the most difficult for citizens of the region to cross to this day, was not a consequence of the Kashmir conflict, as security studies gurus may suggest, but rather was formed through a series of attempts to resolve the fundamental uncertainty of the political Partition itself—where did, where could, “Muslims” like Ghulam Ali belong.

The *Muslims* I speak of here does not refer to a people constituted by shared beliefs or religious practices, for certainly Muslims in South Asia are linguistically and culturally very diverse. Instead it refers to a constructed category of community and political mobilization that emerged under colonial conditions,⁵ and which was to become substantially transformed through the years of the long Partition. There are many contested histories of how the idea of Muslims as a separate political community came to be mobilized as part of the Pakistan movement; how the neologism *Pakistan*, evocatively coined by a Punjabi Muslim student at Cambridge University in 1933 amid numerous “fabulous place-making” exercises, led to the actual “moth-eaten Pakistan” in 1947.⁶ It is not my purpose here to add to these studies to understand why Partition happened,⁷ but rather to clarify, with a focus on north Indian Muslim families, the post-colonial burden of this political partition.

When the All India Muslim League invoked “Pakistan,” it did so on behalf of a nation of “Muslims,” even though many Muslims did not support the Pakistan movement, and yet others would be simply left out of a state drawn from regions where Muslims formed an enumerated

majority. Furthermore, those who did support the Pakistan movement included Muslims of regions like Delhi and Uttar Pradesh who could not be part of its territorial claims. As David Gilmartin points out, the “two-nation theory,” the basis for the Muslim League’s Pakistan demand, was “a fundamentally non-territorial vision of nationality,” and “for most Muslims the meaning of Pakistan did not hinge primarily on its association with a specific territory.”⁸

However, as the Muslim League and the Indian National Congress agreed to the denouement of partition and transfer of power to two territorially distinct postcolonial states, nation as community had to be transformed into nation as citizens of two states. This task came with questions and attendant ambiguities for both emerging states. Where did Hindus and Sikhs belong who resided in the territory now Pakistan? Did they belong to an Indian nation or could they become citizens of Pakistan? And where did Muslims belong who resided in the territory now India? Could they be citizens of India and yet part of an imagined Pakistani nation?

It is at this point that historiography of the subcontinent blurs into a mapped silence as “1947” becomes a threshold. Most histories of the region as a whole end at this “moment of arrival,” as nationalism achieves its celebrated goal of statehood, or thereafter sever into studies of distinct nation-states, as if in this “moment of rupture”¹⁰ “India,” “Pakistan,” and their borders simply emerge fully formed. This book sits at this threshold, and sutures severed histories to bring together disparate “facts” of genocidal violence and mass displacement, refugee rehabilitation and resettlement, controlling movement of people and the making of citizenship, to show how they were mutually constituted parts of a single history. These “facts,” if recovered in archives on any one side of the divide, would have capitulated to a marginal history on the borders of nation. Instead, my cross-border research elucidates the centrality of the dialogic between two states as they marked national difference in the midst of historic chaos.

Michel-Rolph Trouillot’s comment that “[h]istory is messy for the people who must live it”¹¹ is important to foreground, not only for ordinary people caught in the chaos of their times. The mass of ideas of what Partition meant do not fold neatly into our paradigm of sovereign nation-states. From the “hostage theory,” which proposed that the Indian state could “safeguard” Hindus and Sikhs in Pakistan by the hostage treatment of Muslims in India,¹² or the Congress leader Sardar Patel’s

insistence that citizenship in India be conceived so that Hindus and Sikhs in Pakistan were not aliens to it,¹³ or the Bengali Muslim League leader H. S. Suhrawardy's address to the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan, where he argued that continuing to live in India did not conflict with his being a member of Pakistan's legislature¹⁴—the record is littered with ideas in which relationships between citizen and state, nation and territory are nebulous, even for leaders of the time. Thus the years following 1947 are extraordinarily important, for in a whirlwind of people on the move they reveal how these relationships had to be crafted, and at what human cost.

Delhi and Karachi became the two capitals of the post-independence states, and although the two cities were dramatically different before independence, it is Partition itself that binds them together. According to the colonial census of 1941, Delhi had a Muslim minority population of 33.22 percent, while Karachi had a Hindu population of 47.6 percent,¹⁵ and although the enumerative power of the colonial census is unmistakable, it does not capture the enormous cultural significance these religious communities had for the two cities.

Delhi has been described as an “Indo-Islamic city” since it was the seat of power for Delhi sultanates and various Mughal rulers, including Shah Jehan, the builder who left his monumental mark on the geography of the city.¹⁶ When Sayyid Ahmad Khan, the nineteenth-century reformer, sought to uplift *ashraf* Muslims around the time of the Revolt of 1857, he wrote an architectural-cum-genealogical history of Delhi as a Muslim city par excellence.¹⁷ As the city became the colonial capital at the beginning of the twentieth century, many important modern institutions for Islamic learning, for Urdu language, and for pro-Congress and pro-Muslim League nationalism among Muslims all came to be centered here.¹⁸

In September 1947 genocidal violence from the Punjab spread to the capital city, and most of the city's Muslims were forced to leave their homes and take refuge in camps and wherever they could. By the time the 1951 census was taken 3.3 lakh Muslims of the city had left on the trains to Pakistan, and almost twice the number of Hindu and Sikh refugees had arrived from the Punjab.¹⁹

Most of the Muslim refugees of Delhi and north India arrived in the city of Karachi. In comparison to Delhi, Karachi had been a small, sleepy port city that served the Sind hinterland, and was largely tied to Bombay and the Malabar coast for its mercantile links. However, as Sind's provincial

capital, its highly educated Sindhi Amils and other Hindu communities were essential parts of Sindhi culture and literature, and the region's proud Sufi traditions.²⁰ As the city's status underwent a dramatic change, from the periphery of British India to being declared the federal capital of the Pakistani state, almost its entire Hindu population had left the city by the census of 1951, despite comparatively little violence in the city, and the city's population as a whole had tripled with the arrival of Muslim refugees from north India.²¹

The complete demographic transformations of entire cities and their urban cultures as a result of Partition's massive displacements are now being accounted for in the growing scholarly attention to Partition's memories.²² Yet these resettled geographies conceal the completely unsettled character of the first days and years of flight, and the ways in which the combined interventions of the two states shaped them.

Transfer of power took place from colonial rule to national rule in what was a crisis, a state of emergency. Both postcolonial states were formed from a divided albeit unchanged colonial structure of governance and had to restage the modern state on behalf of the nation. Thus their response to this crisis was crucial to establish legitimacy.²³ Both states responded almost immediately by setting up parallel Emergency Committees of the Cabinet to bring "law and order" in murder-cleaved Punjab and Delhi, as well as the Ministries of Relief and Rehabilitation to "manage" the well-being of the millions displaced. It is here that the figure of the "refugee" emerges to carry the scripted and rescripted labor of postcolonial governmentality.

Some 12 million people were displaced in the divided Punjab alone, and some 20 million in the subcontinent as a whole, making it one of the largest displacements of people in the twentieth century, comparable only to the nearly contemporaneous displacements produced by the Second World War in Europe.²⁴ The comparison with Europe is significant, since the rather well-documented social history of "refugee rehabilitation" there has been considered formative in the later drafting of international refugee laws and the establishment of international organizations for the management of refugees. From the European experience, it has been argued, the refugee emerged as an identifiable social and legal category that could then be studied in the subsequent burgeoning fields of "refugee studies" and "migration studies."²⁵ The subcontinent's experience of displacements, of the making of refugees, has largely gone unexamined not

only because of its peripheral location to the postwar international order, but also because in the region's nation-bound historiographies these refugees have been presumed to have seamlessly folded into two new nations; although two sets of refugees were produced, Hindu and Sikh refugees were displaced to become Indians, while Muslim refugees became Pakistanis.²⁶ But this was by no means a straightforward process; it was a debated, contested, and fraught historical process of negotiation between two states, in which ultimately there was no consensus on the national status of the "Muslim refugee."

This history of a long Partition unsettles this national closure given to Partition's displacements, by recovering the contingency in which people left their homes in Delhi and Karachi, as well as their numerous attempts to return to them in the ensuing years. Therefore it is with purpose that I use the word *displacement* and not *migration*, to describe the momentous movements of people at this time. The word *migration* came to imply both a movement with the intention of permanent relocation as well as a voluntary exodus, and acquired bureaucratic and juridical meaning in attempts to control, legislate, and ultimately fix these displacements—to produce, with some force, bounded citizens of two nation-states.

In Delhi, for instance, Muslim refugees emerged in the capital in crisis and boarded trains to Pakistan, not necessarily to "migrate" but primarily in search of refuge. In the city's unraveling geography, the Indian state's interventions in the violence were exceedingly important. As Muslim homes became occupied by Hindu and Sikh refugees from the Punjab, the perception that the rehabilitation of "non-Muslim refugees" in need of housing and shelter was pitted against that of "Muslim refugees" profoundly shaped the Muslim exodus.

Path-breaking writings on programs to recover women abducted in the Punjab violence have shown how the two states "fixed" nationality onto religious community with the Indian state attempting to recover and rehabilitate Hindu and Sikh women and the Pakistani state attempting to recover and rehabilitate Muslim women. These writings show how women themselves resisted this national inscription, and many wanted to remain a part of their abductors' families.²⁷ But the Punjab was an exception with far-reaching effects. In the case of Punjab, both the Indian and Pakistani states agreed to a complete "transfer of populations" on the basis of religious community, but there was no such agreement on the rest of the Indian subcontinent. This resulted in the Pakistani state's vehement

opposition to the Muslim exodus from Delhi, even as it was unable to deter it, for it argued that Delhi's Muslim refugees were Indians and should be rehabilitated by the Indian state.

In parallel fashion, in Karachi, Hindu houses became a similar source of contention as the Pakistani state tried to house its government there and manage the rehabilitation of Muslim refugees pouring in from Delhi and other parts of north India. Here, despite attempts by M. A. Jinnah, a Karachiite by birth, and Sindhi Muslim politicians to retain this important religious community, the Sind Congress strenuously tried to persuade the Indian state to include Sind's Hindus in its planned evacuation and rehabilitation schemes originally designed for the Punjab. With riots in the city in January 1948, the Indian state eventually formally agreed to include "our people," Sind's Hindu refugees, in its planning for rehabilitation. In turn, the Pakistani state not only was ambiguous about Muslim refugees arriving from outside Punjab, but also formulated "muhajirs" as a governmental category to classify Muslim refugees such that it left open an imagined *muhajir* return to India.

This fact that, in the Indian subcontinent, the figure of the refugee was marked by religious community, and that these people were considered as forming two distinct and opposed sets of refugees, had enormous implications for the entire rubric of refugee rehabilitation and its relationship to the making of the Indo-Pak divide. On the one hand, there were "Muslim refugees" and "Hindu and Sikh refugees," who were also referred to as "non-Muslim refugees."* This differentiation is also evident in Urdu newspapers where the word *panaghirs* or *muhajirs* was used for Muslim refugees, and *sharanatis* for Hindu and Sikh refugees.

On the other hand, both postcolonial states conceived refugee rehabilitation not as a religious duty, but rather as a universal and rational program for the development of the nation as a whole.²⁸ Bhaskar Rao's *The Story of Rehabilitation* (1967) is a testimony of the new Indian state's epic efforts to rehabilitate refugees as part of a larger vision of national development. In an Indian Constituent Assembly debate on rehabilitation efforts of the government on November 29, 1947, for instance, the need for "planning" and a "scientific" approach to rehabilitation found wide

*Throughout this book "Muslim refugees" and "Hindu and Sikh refugees" or "non-Muslim refugees" should be read in quotation marks as constructed categories that shaped and were shaped by this history.

consensus.²⁹ Nehru argued before the Assembly that “the refugees . . . have to be looked after and they must be made proper citizens of India.” A parallel paradigm for rehabilitation is evident in the *West Pakistan Gazetteer* of 1959, which announced that “the Government of Pakistan from the very outset realized the importance of development . . . The schemes for the rehabilitation of refugees are difficult to separate from the general development plan for Pakistan.”³⁰ In keeping with this view, refugee rehabilitation figured prominently in the first Five-Year Plans of both states.³¹ This universal framing of refugee rehabilitation projected a universal figure of the refugee as its central subject, who, through the discursive and institutional regimes of rehabilitation, was to be made into a citizen of the nation.

How was the marked refugee on the ground reconciled with the universal refugee of planning? In the initial conditions of emergency and relief work, the differentiated categories of “Muslim refugees” and “non-Muslim refugees” is evident. However, as institutions of rehabilitation became established on firmer footing in government, these categories of the marked refugee were self-consciously replaced in the universal language of legislations and policy as “displaced persons” and “evacuees.” While the shift in categories was by no means consistent, in all Indian refugee rehabilitation programs and legislations the “displaced person” included specifically those displaced from their homes in Pakistan³² and therefore encompassed only “non-Muslim refugees.” In turn, the term “evacuees” in Indian legislation referred to those displaced from their homes in India and therefore differentially encompassed “Muslim refugees.” The exact reverse was true of the Pakistani definitions of those categories. Thus when the universal figure of the refugee was invoked as “our people,” it only referred to those encompassed in policy and legislation as “displaced persons.”

The category of “evacuees” was particularly important because it suggested that this was a group that was departing, or had departed, and their homes, lands, and businesses came to be classified as “evacuee property” which was to be used to rehabilitate “displaced persons.” In this economic equation, it became important that those considered “evacuees” did indeed leave, although the term “migration” used to describe their contingent departure was laden with ambiguities. In important respects the classification of evacuee included much more than refugees, for a certain amount of uncertainty accompanied who was leaving their homes and

why. Indeed, in some economic calculations, all religious minorities were assumed to be “evacuees,” and with the creation of the supplementary classification of “intending evacuee” in evacuee property legislations on both sides, the wide-ranging effects of these legislations could include entire religious communities. The institution of the Custodian of Evacuee Property can be squarely placed in a comparative history of the mid-twentieth century, particularly given its chilling parallels with the Israeli equivalent, which makes evident its silenced effects in “emptying” the land and creating significant internal dispossession.

The logic and rationale of planned refugee rehabilitation as critical to economic development provided both states with almost complete political justification for treating these two sets of refugees, initially within their own territories, differentially. Economic rationalization provided the logic for the agreed “transfer of populations” in the Punjab and became central to the notion that Muslim refugees from elsewhere in India could not be accommodated, that they were an economic liability, for both the Pakistani and the Indian states.

Economic and scientific rationality of planning for the nation not only provided the bureaucratic, legal, and technological functions of the state with legitimacy, but also, as Partha Chatterjee has argued, “provided the political process a rhetoric for conducting its political debates.”³³ Thus, while the Indian National Congress claimed a secular platform to represent an all-inclusive “Indian nation,” and a significant number of Muslims were part of the Congress, the postcolonial Indian state was able to push out and dispossess Muslims with substantial political legitimacy as it bounded a new nation for the well-being of “our people.” In the case of Pakistan, which was claimed ideologically to “safeguard” the interests of all Muslims of the Indian subcontinent, including those who would remain outside its territory, excluding Muslim refugees from India was also a significant ideological compromise of its very premise. Although the Pakistani state classified Muslim refugees as *muhajirs* to invoke the Prophet Muhammad’s historic flight from Mecca to Medina, refugee rehabilitation was not undertaken as a religious duty. Despite ideological differences with the Indian state, the Pakistani state shared with it the paradigm and logic of the developmental state. As a result of this logic, from its inception the Pakistani state argued that it could simply not accommodate all the Muslim refugees that might want to come to Pakistan from India, and eco-

nomic rationalization provided it with a legitimate need to draft limits to its nation. The technologies of permits and passports were therefore not mere documents that led to Ghulam Ali's arrests and incarcerations by both states, but were ostensibly neutral and bureaucratic modes for producing limits to the ideological nation.

Histories of technologies to control the movement of people in Europe and North America have shown how they were fundamentally tied to the making of citizenship through the marking of "insiders" and "outsiders."³⁴ However, these technologies to regulate movement emerged in divided South Asia to control ongoing displacements of a long Partition, and to fundamentally resolve disputes over where Muslim refugees belonged. Thus drafting limits to new nations was not as simple as fixing citizenship onto religious difference, since not all Muslims could become Pakistanis, and some Muslims wanted to remain in or return to their homes in India. Thus marking "insiders" and "outsiders," always an ambiguous process, became nearly impossible without any representable limit with which to construct this national difference. Thus one could argue that the highly surveillanced and particularly unique forms that the Indo-Pak border took were an outcome of its function as both an international border and an "internal border,"³⁵ marking citizens from aliens but also producing questions of loyalty and legitimacy as it marked suspect/disloyal citizens from putatively natural ones.

In an essay evocatively titled "Can a Muslim Be an Indian?" Gyanendra Pandey recovered the angry debates that emerged in India in the aftermath of 1947 on Muslim loyalty and belonging. This book historically situates these debates on loyalty and citizenship through not just the discursive, but also their institutional sites on two sides of the emerging border, to make visible the power of modern states to limit and produce bounded nations and the margins within them.³⁶

The first part of this book, chapters 1 and 2, unfolds histories of violence and displacements in Delhi and Karachi around 1947, recovering the conditions of contingency in which people left their homes, and the role of the two states in the making of the dual figure of the refugee. The second part, chapters 3 and 4, examines the emergence of permit regulations in 1948 and transformations in evacuee property legislations respectively, as they shaped displacements both across and within new borders. The permit system was instituted by the Indian government to stem the return of Muslim refugees back to their homes, and led to the formulation

of citizenship provisions centered on a definition of “migration,” while evacuee property legislations on both sides changed the definition of the “evacuee” to create massive displacements and internal dispossession. Both institutions and their effects are part of the region’s histories, histories which have been silenced into margins by being deemed insignificant and through conscious erasures. These chapters thus unfold the emerging shapes of two nation-states from these very margins.

The third part of the book, chapters 5 and 6, examines the shift from permits to passports in 1952, a technology to mark distinct national identities and give closure to Partition’s ongoing displacements. The shift to passports was introduced by the Pakistani government to stem the continued “illegal” flow of Muslim refugees into Pakistan and thus produced considerable debate on the legitimacy of making Muslims in India into “foreigners” in Pakistan. On the other hand, the contingencies in which the passport emerged meant that classifications of nationhood produced numerous “undefined” and stateless people such as Ghulam Ali who became caught in the limin of new national borders. I trek through an array of political debates, bureaucratic paper trails, and court cases on permits, evacuee property, and passports that went on through the 1950s, some into the 1960s (while some national identity and evacuee property cases continue to this day), to account for this long Partition.

In “India” and “Pakistan” we live in the shadows of this long Partition, and it is by placing its history alongside other histories of a twentieth century, marked by all the violence of making modern, “ethnically cleansed” national identities, that we can interrogate the postcolonial world that we are forced to inhabit, and from which meanings of culture and identity continue to be contested.

WRITING ON THE BORDER

Many histories of the making of national borders have been centered on geographic borderlands, tracking the ways in which a mesh of relationships and ethnic diversity came to be displaced and disciplined by institutions of the state.³⁷ This history is not about a geographic borderland, and a considerable distance separates the cities of Delhi and Karachi. Instead the border it traces is one which cut through ordinary middle-class households like Mirza Salim’s, captured in an exceptional 1973 film,