

Partitioned listening: sonic methodology and the archive after 1947

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A Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree
of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of the Arts London

December 2022

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Abstract

This thesis approaches the 1947 Partition – the division of the British Raj and the princely states into the independent nations of India and (East and West) Pakistan – as a sonic condition as well as an historical event. This approach furthers Madhavi Menon’s formulation of the Partition as a “condition within which we all labour” (2016), and so considers the production, reception and repetition of sound as vital labour within it. Given the contemporary archival memory boom that Partition is experiencing following decades of “silence”, this approach offers new and timely methodological paradigms for Partition studies, while critically expanding the fields of oral history, postcolonial studies and sound studies.

Following relevant strands of (feminist) oral history, political anthropology, analytic philosophy, fictive and testimonial outputs and assessments of colonial and archival knowledge production, my methodological framework – titled “partitioned listening” – is centred on the development of a creative audio research practice, included in this thesis as three “transmissions”. These transmissions are contextualized by my encounters with three aural archives: the 1947 Partition Archive, the Citizen’s Archive of Pakistan and the Bristol Empire and Commonwealth Collection.

Through my engagement with sound in many modes – listening to testimony, conducting interviews, and producing sonic work – I provide new critical insights into the forms and processes of the contemporary “postcolonised” (Asif, 2020) archival “regime”. (Azoulay, 2019) The inclusion of both sound and text in this investigation offers a multi-modal engagement with the sonic complexity and aural diffusion that Partition conjures. This experimental approach, which centres listening to and working with voices across time and space, reveals the wider challenges and possibilities that an engagement with listening as method offers for sonic/archival research after colonial rule and division.

Keywords: 1947 Partition, India, Pakistan, British empire, oral history, aural archives, audio research, listening, sonic methodology, sound art

Declaration

I hereby declare that, except where specific reference is made to the work of others, the contents of this thesis are original and have not been submitted in whole or in part for consideration for any other degree or qualification in this, or any other university. This thesis is the result of my own work. This thesis contains 47,302 words, excluding the bibliography and list of figures. Within the thesis are hyperlinks to three “transmissions”, or audio works, to listen to online – these works form my submitted practice.

Acknowledgements

There are many people who have played a part in this research, often in quiet, unintended or indirect ways, and I am beyond grateful for my friends, collaborators and kin, especially my loving parents Dr Salima Tariq and Dr Syed Muhammad Tariq and siblings Hadia, Syra and Usman. This thesis is dedicated to big nani, whose open-hearted passion for history and politics has influenced me deeply. I also extend deep thanks to Dr Francesca Savoldi, whose patience, curiosity and strong sense of ethics have enriched my work.

Professor Cathy Lane, my director of studies, and co-supervisor Professor Salomé Voegelin have been brilliant readers, advisors and listeners along the research journey. I thank Cathy in particular for her early support and guidance. I am indebted to my colleagues at CRiSAP, particularly Dr Lee Ingleton, Dr Louise Marshall, Dr Irene Revell and Dr Mark Peter Wright for the invaluable conversations and friendship, as well as cohort buddies Ana, Cannach, Judah, Kate, Sib and Tim.

I have been incredibly lucky to work with many people across disciplines and geographies, including Ego Ahaiwe Sowinski, Natasha Ginwala, Haajra Haider, Dr Onyeka Igwe, Abdellah Karroum, Sofia Lemos and the co-organising team at the 2021 Voices at the Margins? summer school (Aíne, Martha and Vansch). I am also deeply grateful to Dr Samia Khatun, Zahra Malkani, Professor Madhavi Menon, Dr Leyla Neyzi, Shahana Rajani, Fazal Rizvi and Professor Ather Zia, who have also been crucial to the development of my research thinking.

I thank Dr Annie Goh, Jenny Warren and the UAL End Outsourcing campaign for their radical ideas and comradeship. I remain in solidarity with outsourced cleaners who are still fighting to be employed directly and treated equitably by the University of the Arts London for their labour.

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Introduction

Hi/story

“History is defined as the discipline ‘that studies the chronological record of events (as affecting a nation or people), based on a critical examination of source materials and usually presenting an explanation of their Causes’ (The Editors of *Encyclopædia Britannica*). Originating in the ancient Greek term *historia* meaning ‘inquiry,’ ‘knowledge from inquiry,’ or ‘judge,’ it was borrowed in classical Latin to mean ‘investigation, inquiry, research, account, description, written account of past events, writing of history, historical narrative, recorded knowledge of past events, story or narrative.’ It developed into *stœr* (‘history, narrative, story’) in the late Old English period; *istorie*, *estoire*, and *historie* in old French; and history in Middle English. History came to mean ‘the branch of knowledge that deals with past events and the formal record or study of past events, esp. human affairs’ (*Oxford English Dictionary*) only in the 15th century. Unlike modern German, French, and most Germanic and Romance languages in which the same word is used to connote both history and story, history and story have become bifurcated in modern English.”

– Anjali Gera Roy, *Memories and postmemories of the Partition of India* (2020, 21)

My interest in the 1947 Partition, the bifurcation of ‘British India’ into the independent nation states of India and (East and West) Pakistan, comes at heart from an interest in my own story, and the stories I have heard from elders, family members and people of my own generation from the UK, India, Bangladesh and Pakistan.¹ As a second-generation British-Pakistani muhajir (“migrant”²) whose ‘roots’ are in present-day northern India, with other particularities and alignments too, I have slowly learned that ‘my’ story (history) – marked by my family’s past in Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and in my lifetime the UK, the Gulf and Europe – treads over many silences. This challenging realisation about my connection to some of Partition’s “historical geographies” (Gould & Legg 2019, 2) is maybe common to members of any “successful” diasporic minority group, particularly from an English-speaking class that has experienced western education and colonial assimilation over generations. The voices of this class, as I have found out, are heard most in the nostalgic, testimonial memory culture that Partition now yields.

This thesis considers the 1947 Partition as a “sonic” condition, an idea inspired by literary scholar and critical theorist Madhavi Menon’s description of the Partition as a “condition within which we all labour”. (Menon 2015, 121) I take the “we” to mean partitioned subjects, wherever we are located. The exploration of this condition – which for the purpose of this research is archival, political, historical and sonic, imbued with practices of speech, silence and listening – intends to provide methodological and creative insights for research in partitioned contexts, as well as sound studies, oral history, postcolonial studies and arts educational research more widely.

¹ The research presented in this thesis is focused on archival and testimonial histories in the UK and Pakistan and contemporary Indian history. This focus excludes connected partitions – particularly that of former East Pakistan, now Bangladesh, in 1971 – and multiple and specific conditions of violence against indigenous, displaced, low-income and lower-caste minorities that modern nationalisms still yield. I recognise that research about the many suppressed regions across the subcontinent – including Kashmir, Tamil Eelam, Assam, Chittagong Hill Tracts, Baluchistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and North West Frontier Provinces – is missing from this thesis.

² Derived from the old Arabic word for “migrant”, (which refers to the migration of the Prophet Muhammad and his followers from Medina to Mecca), muhajir in the Pakistani context means those Urdu-speaking communities who moved from India to Pakistan during and after Partition. Mostly settling in urban Sindh but not only, they are of various ethnicities and regional backgrounds, but are designated in the country as its own official ethnic group (the fifth biggest). See “Sindhis and Mohajirs”, *Minority Rights Group*, June 19, 2015.

At the time of writing this Introduction, the UK, Pakistan and India have marked the 75th anniversary of 1947, bolstering an expansive and consumptive heritage and culture industry, as discussed in Chapter Two, which bears witness to the partitioned past ever more publicly. Framed by this recent boom so dependent on recorded testimony – an important effect of Partition’s sonic condition – this research merges historical, archival and sonic-creative methods to approach the discursive, temporal and political separations embedded in Partition’s hi/story. My research engages with the blur, as well as bifurcation, of history and story as described by Roy above.

In 2016, when this research loosely began, Partition felt like a secret. On nearing completion of this doctoral thesis, it has become apparent through the launch of memory projects, museums and new archives that this “event” is marked on the memory maps of millions, including the descendants of those forced across great (economic, linguistic, psychological, social, sexual, territorial) distances. The proximity or sense of familiarity one feels with the stories one gets to hear of this past – which now feels more like an open secret – has produced critical openings and questions addressed in this thesis through my own listening, a listening that is necessarily intersubjective, doubtful, partial and unstable. Bringing in sonic methods to the study of Partition has then become a creative and political as well as academic exercise.

One way ashore

My inclusion of audio research in this thesis in the form of three “transmissions” has been influenced by my experiences in radio journalism, and later, radio art. I first engaged in radio art via the project *A Thousand Channels* (2015), commissioned for the travelling artistic public programme ‘Ancestors’, curated by Natasha Ginwala and aligned with the Venice “collateral” exhibition *My East is Your West* (2015).³ ‘Ancestors’ was composed of multidisciplinary events, screenings and

³ “My East is Your West: Collateral Event of the 56th Venice Biennale”, *e-flux*, May 5, 2016, <https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/29580/my-east-is-your-west-collateral-event-of-the-56th-venice-biennale/>. In 2016 I presented the project at the symposium “SGFA 2016: White Noise”, hosted by CRiSAP, UAL, which led to this doctoral research. “SGFA 2016: White Noise”, *Creative Research into Sounds Arts Practice*, <https://crisap.org/research/projects/soundgenderfeminismactivism-2016-white-noise/>. Accessed November 30, 2022.

workshops that took place in Lahore, Dhaka, Jaffna and Delhi, and aimed “to facilitate conversations that traverse a politically fraught region to deliberate its shared history, geographic affinity, cosmological knowledge and colonial legacies.”⁴ I was commissioned to produce “audio documentation” – mostly, for my part, from a distance, but with many collaborators including with the now defunct Karachi-based Tentative Collective in-person at ‘Ancestors: Architecture of Memory’ hosted by the (then nascent) Lahore Biennale Foundation. The episodes of A Thousand Channels followed the trajectories of the in-person events that took place in these four cities, of which Lahore was one, through remote and in-person conversations, field recordings, audio documentary, Internet rips and narrative collage. The events, like the tracks, involved many participants (artists, students, historians, performers, writers, curators) from across the subcontinent and further afield.

As a former radio and print journalist, the opportunity to engage in ‘audio documentation’, ‘radio art’, ‘audio research’ – or simply for some, ‘podcasts’ – came with a perhaps naive belief that sound was one of the few tools I had for exploring a historical geography I mostly could not access and had only just started to know. The burgeoning turn in the arts towards the politics of listening at the time also influenced the directions and themes my project took on.⁵ In Lahore, the audio of A Thousand Channels was installed in two sites of the city (simply, with mp3 players, headphones, and borrowed materials including a Bluetooth speaker and floor cushions). Sourcing, recording, convening, researching and travelling in the context of producing “public art” were complicated activities in Pakistan at the time, but more complicated was working with sound, with noise, with silence, with contesting voices: seeking out – to follow historian Ann Laura Stoler – “the political life of imperial debris, the longevity of structures of dominance, and the uneven pace with which people can extricate themselves from the colonial order of things.” (Stoler 2008, 193)

⁴ E-flux, “My East is Your West”

⁵ I refer particularly to the work of artist Lawrence Abu Hamdan. www.lawrenceabuhamdan.com. Accessed November 30, 2022.

The aural archives of Partition, maybe evidential of this “debris”, could be described as “hidden structures”, to use the artist-researcher Zahra Malkani’s framing. She writes in a piece of the same name:

Infrastructures configure time, they enable certain ways of inhabiting time and diminish others. Infrastructures are never finished, but they do end. Over time infrastructures collapse, decay, fall apart – subject to ruination or neglect, or rendered somehow obsolete. The capacity for decay is encoded in the materiality of infrastructures. Like all other elements it is subject to the force of time, to its calculations. As neoliberal time accelerates so does the inability of material life (our bodies included) to withstand it. Infrastructures are technologies to control time doomed by their own inescapable temporality. (Malkani, 2020)

The second iteration of A Thousand Channels was recently produced (largely during the COVID-19 pandemic) for the Sri Lankan interdisciplinary arts festival Colomboscope 2022: Language is Migrant,⁶ clips from which are “heard” throughout the thesis via transcription and contextual analysis. The name ‘A Thousand Channels’ was inspired by Edouard Glissant’s *Poetics of Relation* (“one way ashore, a thousand channels”), a book that had become key to my understanding of the research process – “Relation [...] not made up of things that are foreign but of shared knowledge.” (Glissant, 2010 [1990], 8) Considering sound as a kind of infrastructure, subject to the “force of time, to its calculations”, and considering what had been lost, decayed as well as sustained, entailed pragmatic approaches and methods, influenced by the formative and generative experiences of collaboration and sharing knowledge. A Thousand Channels was, crucially, able to take place across linguistic and territorial borders – probably the most imposing infrastructure that practitioners in the region face.

Research aims and questions

Since 2010, the growth of listening that has coincided with the production of Partition memory – particularly through oral history and aural archiving – has rendered it a rich and complex “limit case” for my critique and development of listening methods and practices that attempts to sense this history, uncovering new meanings from how it has

⁶ “A Thousand Channels”, *Colomboscope*. <https://www.colomboscope.lk/athousandchannels>. Accessed November 30, 2022.

been produced as well as what it produces. The term “limit case” is borrowed from the historian Gyanendra Pandey, who asks two pertinent questions that are still relevant today: “How have the communities and nations of the subcontinent employed the limiting case of Partition to construct and reconstruct themselves?^[7] Is it in the character of limit cases that their history is ever being told and retold, that they are constantly being reinvented – until a new limit case is found (for a new community)?” (Pandey 2003, 66)

The processes of repetition, or loops of memory, that Partition is subjected to have been central throughout my critical inquiry and audio research. Partition’s constructions and reconstructions are consequently approached in this thesis from a position of “rebellious” inquiry, i.e., reading and listening across and beyond disciplinary fields to try and uncover and understand these loops, working with and through them. As the human geographer Katherine McKittrick writes:

Connections. Reading across a range of texts and ideas and narratives – academic and nonacademic – encourages multifarious ways of thinking through the possibilities of liberation and provide clues about living through the unmet promises of modernity; method-making undercuts the profitable standardization of racial authenticities and disciplining practices. (McKittrick 2021, 48)

The inclusion of audio research within this thesis, presented as three ‘transmissions’, then promotes multifarity and experimentation over legitimacy or disciplinary authority. Embedded in a “politics without guarantee,” (Nagar, 2014)⁸ and so not seeking definitive answers but “clues about living through the unmet promises of modernity”, is necessarily a subjectively situated endeavour. This listening-centred approach also offers an opportunity to re-address what cultural historian Sukeshi Kamra, following Raymond Williams, describes as a colonial “structure of feeling”. (Kamra 2018, 205) Revealing the mastery of affective knowledge through analyses of

⁷ Two decades on, I would include diasporic communities in the UK and the US in this question.

⁸ “In a way, the ethics and methodologies of encounters, anecdotes, conversations and storytelling I am invoking through radical vulnerability, strive to achieve in the realm of research praxis, a politics of indeterminacy, or a politics without guarantee.” Richa Nagar, *Muddying the Waters: Coauthoring Feminisms across Scholarship and Activism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2014), 13.

short stories from the time and the Indian periodical press in 1947 – a “reproduction of the logic of empire” (ibid, 192) – Kamra’s idea of a “structure” of feeling, is useful in terms of investigating the (sonic) archival scaffolding that determines Partition in the present day. This means that listening, as a “feeling” practice as well as a disciplinary one, is integral as a method to be critiqued, explored, and put into practice.

As discussed in the next chapter, the proponents of western universalism and reason had an uneasy ontological relationship when it came to their colonial subjects in pre-partitioned India, who were outside of Enlightenment-forged concepts of universal rights and responsibilities. Tracing this uneasy ontological relationship through listening and aural archives in the present, I have depended on an unlikely theorisation of Partition by critical theorist Madhavi Menon, who reformulates what “universal” can mean for the investigation of this limit case. She writes:

If we are to break this endless cycle of ontologized partitions, then we need to think universally about what we may term partitions at all, refusing to make difference coherent, self-identical, or the basis for identity. Even as it acknowledges that differences abound, universalism does not gather them together as the foundation for partition. Instead, universalism is the realm in which the fact of social, cultural, religious, sexual difference does not take away from the reality that we are all different even from our “own” differences. As Alain Badiou suggests in his study of Saint Paul, “The universal is not the negation of particularity. It is the measured advance across a distance relative to *perpetually* subsisting particularity’ (*Saint Paul* 110, my emphasis). Particulars exist *and* they cannot be translated into norms or ontological identities. Universalism is a movement across partitions that does not privilege any one particular as a basis for ontology. Instead of dismissing partitions, it allows us to universalize partition as the condition within which we all labour.” (Menon 2016, 121)

Menon’s universalization of Partition as a “condition within which we all labour” has arguably Arendtian echoes: labour as enslaved by necessity, labour as the condition of life itself. Engaging with this labour while remaining indifferent to (but not ignorant of) to the institution and maintenance of difference in the postcolonial present, this thesis therefore takes as its primary research questions:

How far can the 1947 Partition be understood as a ‘sonic’ condition? Can audio research enhance our understanding of this condition through the postcolonised archive?

Thesis structure

Crucial to my framing of Partition as a (sonic) condition is the notion that instead of merely listening to difference – across myriad borders, physical and not – we listen *with* it, because, as “universalism insists [...] we already live divided lives”. (Menon 2015, 129) In order to investigate how far Partition can be considered a “sonic” condition, which entails a focus on its sonic “labour”, this thesis is structured according to three interrelated elements:

- A critical historiographical and archival overview of Partition, focusing on the labour of speech, silence and listening (Chapters One and Two);
- The justification and development of my methodological framework, “partitioned listening” (Chapter Three) that incorporates insights from oral history, sound studies and art;
- The presentation of audio and archival research (Chapters Four, Five, Six) that responds to and extends the critical insights of the above via three sonic “transmissions” and aural-archival encounter.

Rather than (re)write the history of Partition, Chapter One engages with its oral historical, feminist and anti-colonial historiography. As an interdisciplinary literature review that also extends to the relevance of fictive and fictional outputs over time, I emphasise the role of speech, silence and listening in this history, particularly through feminist and post-memory paradigms. This transversal inquiry critically grounds my investigation of Partition’s aural archives [Chapter Two] and unveils positions that provide the political impetus for my method-making [Chapter Three].

In Chapter Two, I introduce aspects of Partition’s “dissonant heritage”. (Svensson, 2021), contrasting it with the historical maintenance of the colonial archive. Outlining some academic initiatives, memory projects, archives and museums in India, Pakistan, the UK and the US, I include an introduction to the three archives focused on in this thesis: the 1947 Partition Archive, the Citizens’ Archive of Pakistan and the Bristol Empire and Commonwealth collection (Bristol Archives). I then rehistoricise the archive through a discussion of its own partitions and “silences”, via considerations of

recent anti-colonial historical scholarship (Asif, 2020; Azoulay, 2019) and critical archival studies (Anand, 2016) as well as discoveries about colonial secrecy and archival destruction (Cobain, 2016; Sato, 2017). This gathering of archival practice and theory provides a deeper understanding of my research context, particularly the temporal and discursive separations – the categorical differences – that the archive sets out and maintains. This provides the research context for my archival and audio research, for which listening methods and practices are central.

In Chapter Three, I set out “partitioned listening” as a creative and critical methodology, developed through McKittrick’s notion of “undisciplined” method-making. (McKittrick 2021, 19) I discuss my development of a “tentative listening protocol” that comprises questions about listening in order to evidence it [3.1], before introducing the idea of the “sonic text” [3.2], incorporating a discussion of (a few of) the problems of sonic translation, transcription and transmutation. This engages with insights from sound studies (Lane, 2017; Marshall, 2018; Stoever, 2016; Thompson, 2017; Voegelin, 2014), oral history (Francis et al. 2021, Portelli, 1991) and archival listening (Bhowmik, 2022; Hoffmann, 2015; Hoffmann & Mnyaka 2015), as well as art works by Huma Mulji and Shahana Rajani/Sonja Schönberger. These interconnected forays into listening, speech, representation and archiving further partitioned listening’s critical relevance as a methodological approach as well as creative practice.

Three ‘transmissions’ are presented in Chapters Four, Five and Six: *You trust your memories?* [4.2]; *We shall witness* [5.2] and *I hear (colonial) voices* [6.2]. In total they encompass around one hour of listening, and are accompanied by short texts/transcripts accessible in the links provided. Each transmission deals with testimony – oral historical, poetic, political, colonial – alongside discussions of three archives briefly introduced in Chapter Two. This entangling is a way of incorporating theoretical knowledge and practical, creative experience for the purpose of producing critical history, breaking away from disciplinary attachments that inhibit “disobedient” methods (McKittrick 2021, 44). Through the production, editing and manipulation of voices as “artefacts”, sounds found, stolen, recorded, lost and nearly lost, this body of work can be read and heard as a tentative restaging of the many separations –

territorial, ontological, racial – that Partition’s sonic condition has brought up.

In the Conclusion I make the case that situating Partition with its “sonic” condition, through audio research and a multidisciplinary scholarly framework, are valid and relevant for the field of Partition studies, as well as for critical South Asian and colonial history, sound studies and historical/arts education, while also providing insights for new critical and creative approaches to aural archives and oral history. Although this thesis does touch upon some of the historical and political stories of Partition, its main intention is to sound out the archival networks and relationships that drive the forces of public remembering and public forgetting. I suggest that it is my centring of Partition’s sonic labour that provides clues into the complexities of its condition. As Roy argues, “unlike history, memory is rambling, associative, corporeal, affective and intuitive.” (Roy 2020, 22) These broad delineations could be applied to sound, which rambles, associates, and is above all, felt.

Hearing voices: approaches

This thesis and the associated transmissions include many voices, past and present. This has entailed the development of a critical multi-modal framework that focuses on listening practices by multiple actors and institutions, across time and space, while also engaging in my own ethical concerns that relate to listening, re-listening and re-use.

My archival research has encompassed listening to oral history recordings from the Citizen’s Archive of Pakistan and the 1947 Partition Archive (Chapters Four and Five), and in the case of Chapter Six, re-using oral history recordings from the British Empire and Commonwealth Collection for the transmission *I hear (colonial) voices* [6.2], with permission from Bristol Archives. I had several conversations with three people associated with the work of these archives, each conducted and recorded with informed consent, with each interviewee receiving an outline of the project (either by formal letter or by email) and consent forms to sign.

Other research interviews included throughout the thesis involve people from other disciplinary backgrounds – art, history, and political anthropology – who like the archivists and oral historians speak from a range of geographical and political perspectives about their own experiences of listening. Some of these interviews are taken from my audio project *A Thousand Channels* (ii), and include relevant citations. This iteration of *A Thousand Channels* was supported through a research placement from AHRC UK tēchne in 2021, with production support from British Council Sri Lanka and EUNIC in 2022. The four full episodes that comprise the audio project are freely available to listen to online via Colomboscope festival’s website.

In terms of my approach to the audio research, the first two transmissions of *Partitioned Listening* [4.2 and 5.2] intentionally incorporate extra-archival voices (broadcasts, YouTube videos, performances, conversations) that have been gathered, edited, repositioned and repurposed. Oral consent was given by the friends and family whose words and work are included, and the transcripts of the transmissions (available in the links provided in each transmission) include relevant references for any textual or other citation heard. The translations of the lyrics of the poem *Hum Dekhenge* heard in *We Shall Witness* [5.2] into English and Roman Urdu/Hindi are written by myself after research into the many possible translations of the poem. The written translation of the performance clips of *Jana Natya March*, used with permission, relies on the original script of the performance that was repeated many times in 2020 in India, and so has differentiations from the recording.

Throughout this research journey, the relationship between sound, text and language has been taken as a perpetual challenge, and so I have aimed for transparency of the process wherever possible. My development of a multi-modal and multidisciplinary approach, as per my methodological discussion in Chapter Three, includes the development of a listening ‘protocol’ that is composed of questions to myself on my access and relationship to these myriad voices. As well as the standard ethical procedures followed, this protocol – and my interrogation of it – reveals the labour of instability, of ambivalence and of doubt that partitioned listening necessarily entails.

Chapter One:

A sonic condition

This chapter offers a partial critical historiographical overview of the 1947 Partition that surveys key themes driving my archival inquiry and audio research, so providing the theoretical ground for Partitioned Listening. It introduces the problem of treating Partition as a singular ‘event’ (Pandey, 2003; Khan, 2017; Shodhan, 2017), via approaches to communalist/colonialist forms of knowledge production and the role of fiction (Pandey, 2003/12; Akhtar, 2013; Saint, 2010; Satia, 2020). In 1.2 I discuss the turn towards feminist social historical perspectives (Butalia, 1998, Menon & Bhasin, 1998; Das, 2006), which marked a radical shift in Partition historiography towards testimony and the representation of women’s stories in particular. In 1.3, I trouble the limits of ‘silence’ (Dhawan, 2012; Limki, 2020; Zia, 2019) as expressed through testimonial research, particularly via political perspectives on women’s speech and listening from Kashmir.

These three sections introduce critical insights into the instability of Partition and its significations as history, violence, fiction and event, and its dependence on speech, silence and the restoration of speech. In 1.4, I situate Partition’s contemporary “post-memory” turn (Kabir, 2014; Malhotra 2017/22; Roy, 2020) alongside reflections about the contemporary British play *Silence* (Bhattacharyya et al., 2022), highlighting the ways in which such knowledges have started to enter and work through the archive, which will be focused on in Chapter Two.

1.1 Effects

From its earliest iterations, scholarship on Partition has been heavily concerned with the motivations and actions of its key political players, reliant on state records, official correspondence and public debates from the time. The 12 bounded volumes *Transfer of Power, 1942-1947* (1970-1983) detailing the full state correspondence between New Delhi and London has been a key resource since their staggered release. The intertwining stories, ambitions, motivations and destinies of those in power – Viceroy Wavell and Mountbatten, members of the UK Cabinet Mission, Jawaharlal Nehru, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Mohandas Gandhi and their families, as well as other senior figures of the Indian Congress and Muslim League (the two parties that dominate in mainstream work) are still the subject of major works (see e.g. Hajari, 2015), as well as documentaries, television specials and fictional series. In the UK, these tend to resurface on significant anniversaries of the event – with a 5 or 0 at the end.

Early historical scholarship in the UK, according to Dube (2015, 61), focused on policies and movements that led up to Partition – particularly on the differences between Hindus and Muslims – as well as investigations of Islamic identity in Pakistan and India. The greater focus on independence, according to historian and Subaltern Studies member Gyanendra Pandey, argues that historians of Partition had for a long time falsely consigned the resulting violence as a subject outside of the historian's remit, an “ephemeral deviation” to the path of progress, otherwise marked by heroic anti-colonial struggle. (Pandey 2003, 48-49) This kind of scholarship emerged at the time of sectarian violence in India in 1984 and the nascent entrenchment of Hindutvavaadi politics. Much of this nationalist literature aimed at justifying, as well as eliding, what was seen as an illegitimate and irrational “outbreaks” of mass violence, which “goes against “the fundamentals of Indian (or Pakistani) tradition and history, how it is, to that extent, not our history at all.” (ibid, 3) This disciplinary disavowal of violence changed in the late 1990s, a shift that had clear feminist implications, as explored in section 1.2.

Until the feminist turn, early post-Partition literature and fiction was some of the

only social history available, with works by Jan Nisan Akhtar, Ismat Chughtai, Faiz Ahmed Faiz [Chapter Five], Sa'adat Husain Manto and many others making visible the futility of marking identity according to religion, depicting Partition as a tearing apart of not just land and home, but of the self. Writer Tarun K. Saint highlights in particular the realism and revival of the Urdu short story form *afsana* as a “self-reflexive mode of testimony” which built on the precedents of socialist realism in the 1930s and 1940s. (Saint 172-4, 2010) The Urdu-speaking writers formed the anti-imperialist, left-oriented Progressive Writers' Movement (PWM) in 1936 inspired similar groups across independent South Asia and beyond thereafter, in other languages. Partition scattered the PWM, and the group dissolved in the 1950s.

Their writings were popular in middle-class, leftist circles, with their notoriety furthered by accusations of immorality and censorship. (Shingavi, 2014) Manto's short story “Toba Tek Singh”, about a patient in a lunatic asylum that engages in the belated exchange of Hindu and Muslim patients across the border, is still one of the most referenced short stories in Partition studies. The story, published in 1955 and written after the author's own stay in an “asylum”, depicts what oral historian Urvashi Butalia describes as “twilight worlds of blurred identities”. (Butalia 1998, 32) Historian Jennifer Yusin argues that the literary surges that took Partition as a theme in the 1950s, 60s and 1990s “do not seek to reduce Partition violence and its impact to a psychological response catalogued in the aftermath. More so than testimony, which asserts a singular and irreplaceable truth about an individual's experience and memory, literature transcends historical specificity.” (Yusin 2009, 458)

The assumed singularity of testimony that Yusin declares is challenged and opened out in section 1.3, using fictive narratives – this time theatre – as a channel to uncover the increasingly productive and blurry entanglements between Partition fiction and Partition truths. As oral historian and scholar Anindya Raychaudhuri writes, “the memorial legacy of Partition is one of trauma, pain, and shared suffering, but it is also always *productive*.” (Raychaudhuri 2019, 2) The capacity of Partition to generate narrative has been growing as time goes on, or to cite a *New York Times* review of Qurratulain Hyder's brilliant 1959 novel *River of Fire*, as time “runs in circles”. (Sriram,

2019) Through legends, philosophy, world history, nursery rhyme diaries, theatre songs, letters, classical citations and Urdu poetry, narrative and time for Hyder are phenomena that constantly prophesise, foreclosing the event of Partition repeatedly. Although an analysis of Partition's many channels of "shared suffering" is beyond the scope of this research, testimony's relationship with, to use anthropologist Nosheen Ali's term, "poetic publics" is central for our sensing beyond the history book or archive: a key motivation for the development of my audio research. In her work on Gilgit-Baltistan, an administrative territory of Pakistan, Ali focuses in on the role of the literary-poetic in contexts of disenfranchisement and intra-Muslim sectarianism. She writes: "This centrality of oral communication—and especially poetry—in the public spheres of many non-Western contexts requires us to rethink the emphasis on text and on the literate domain of formal education that dominates studies of the public sphere." (Ali 2019, 173) The transmission *We shall witness*, presented in 5.2, sounds out this idea, albeit in an Urdu-speaking cultural context.

Hyder "transcreated" (rather than translated) *River of Fire* from Urdu to English in 1998. This speaks to the productive capacity of practices of repetition – a theme that will be returned to throughout this thesis. While this radical fiction was being written, however, early western histories of Partition were taking a more narrow tack, particularly in their insistence on "communalism" as Partition's causal framework – 'communal' denoting the existence of inherent differences (rather than standard definitions of "communal" in English that imply community affiliation) between ethnic and religious groups in the British Indian colonies. Communal violence, a term still used in media reporting of violence in India and Pakistan today, is a category originally derived by "conservative colonialist writers" who believed that "nationalism, nationness, was a Western attribute, unlikely to be found or easily replicated in the East." (Pandey 2012, 2) According to Pandey, the term "communal" is still "reserved for the analysis of social and political conflicts in the 'backwards' parts of the colonial and postcolonial world." (ibid, 7) He points out how this idea was also taken up by Indian nationalist historians who, like their colonialist predecessors, accepted this construction of their own pasts. (ibid, 264)

Anglophonic history as well as ethnography, anthropology and ethnomusicology have played central roles in the long-term construction of this divided historical geography, which has been mapped and disciplined according to western notions of time and culture. Practitioners of these disciplines in British India sometimes worked as colonial administrators themselves. (Satia 2020, 144-145) Historian Abdul Azim Akhtar traces the origin of communalism (as a practice, if not a named concept) to the era of the British East India Company, which took over the declining Mughal empire in the 18th century as de facto rulers over large parts of the subcontinent until the Crown took over in 1858. According to Akhtar, the (Muslim) Mughals before them were syncretic – many married Hindus and celebrated their festivals, while Muslim saints blessed people of all castes and creeds. “Before the arrival of the British, Hindus and Muslims lived in harmony with each other.” (2013, 190) Though this view has become somewhat of a trope in Partition memory projects, the idea of “difference” in this context needs to be unpacked as a western, modern notion.

The colonial state, according to the political scientist Giorgio Shani, “facilitated the imagination of collective indigenous identities, including the Indian nation. It did this through the introduction of modern scientific techniques of classification and enumeration which transformed the political landscape of South Asia and continue to shape its politics today.” (Shani 2006, 29) These processes linger through the archive, as explored in 2.2, in spaces where the “twin strategies” of the Raj – a belief in liberal universalism (“Reason”) on the one hand, and the entrenchment of ‘racial’ particularity on the other – are mutually reinforcing.” (ibid, 35) The effects of this lengthy, bureaucratic and archival systematization bore and still bears medical and psycho-social implications. (Jain & Sarin, eds. 2018) If considering Partition as an ‘end’ to the operational logics of colonial rule, which subjected populations to “statistical and experimental methods that denied their individuality,” (ibid, 5) then the archive could be considered as a continuation of such logics. I further this claim in Chapter Two.

The Subaltern Studies collective, adapting Antonio Gramsci’s term “subaltern” for the postcolonial context, provided an important counterpoint to colonial histories of the subcontinent in the 1980s and 1990s. The collective published collections of essays

on Indian historiography, social analyses and leftist-Marxist perspectives on the societies of millions who had been short-changed by colonial modernity, including analyses of Partition. As critical theorist Gayatri Spivak writes, “‘subaltern’ in the subcontinental use defines those who were cut off from the lines that produced the colonial mindset, s/he did not emerge in the colonial cultural value-form.” (Spivak in Chaturvedi ed. 2012, 325)

In one collection, published around the time of US intervention in Serbia, Spivak comments on two essays – one by Satish Deshpande on the “ethereal politics of Saadat Hassan Manto’s staging of the Partition of India” the other by Qadri Ismail on “the forcible cohesion – rather than partition – of a coerced Ceylon [sic], out of two honourably separate ‘nations’”. (Spivak 2000, 308) Her intervention reveals the tricky problem of terminology and how this meaning of certain terms change over time. Focusing on the authors’ exploration of the term “‘ethnic cleansing’”, she argues that this term “is a different sort of business to ‘Partition’ or ‘genocide’, which is a term that was invented to accuse aberrant German Fascist anti-Semites, and by historical metonymy, to name this blot on the European past.” (ibid) Moving away from her infamous question “can the subaltern speak?”, I focus on her dismissal of language used to describe historical violence at a time of critical backlash within subcontinental scholarship 30 years ago that still remains provocative today. Key to my exploration of Partition’s “sonic” condition is the kind of terminology – including tropes, metaphors and associations to other events of mass violence – that persists, repeats, resounds. It also reveals how Partition, as *signifier* of violence, is stuck between – as Spivak writes of the encounter between Ulysses and the Sirens – the “misfiring of translation, between Enlightenment and colony.” (ibid, 313) The association she makes between “Partition or genocide” also reveals a certain troubling slippage in her own terms, a kind of slippage relevant to consider when addressing the singularity of Partition as an event in the memory turn of the present, explored in the next section.

Pandey’s argument for the construction of “a more layered account of the struggle against particular kinds of domination – and the institution of new kinds of domination, new contradictions, new subjects and new subject positions” (Pandey 2003, 52) enables

him to talk about three partitions instead of one – the Muslim League’s demand for a separate homeland in the Lahore Resolution in 1940; the splitting of the Muslim-majority provinces of Punjab and Bengal following Sikh, Hindu, and Congress leadership demands; and the mass migration of people in 1947. As he states, “any event that attains the status of ‘event’ (that is to say, of ‘history’) functions as metaphor from the start.” (Pandey 2003, 94) Given that there is now increasing knowledge about the complicities of the police (Gould & Legg, 2019), soldiers (Kidwai in Jain & Sarin, 2018) and organised militias (Khan, 2017) in the violence of Partition, here it is pertinent to cite Satia’s observation that during the colonial period, “the Indian subcontinent [was] no more riven by ethnic, linguistic, social and religious divisions than similar-sized Europe in the same period.” (Satia 2020, 190) Rather than being based on “ancient hatreds”, then, “the violence of Partition was grounded in modern, colonial notions of difference.” (ibid)

The historian Amrita Shodhan, like Pandey, argues for naming the many places and times that contributed to Partition’s making. She asserts that it “was born out of a situation that was both colonial and ‘post-colonial’, where a new elite was replacing the old colonial one. To decolonise this Partition is to recognise a complicity of the two.” (2017, 20) Considering these new expanded interpretations, particularly tracing the operational *longue durée* of the British empire and modern nation-building afterwards, have influenced the thematic focus of the transmissions ‘*You trust your memories?*’ [4.2] and ‘*I hear (colonial) voices*’ [6.2]. These works speak to the need to disrupt the archive’s normalisation of past violence, and the separation of empire and post-empire. Like Khan’s critique of Partition’s treatment as an “aberration”, Shodhan argues that common metaphors – ‘madness’, ‘wildfire’, and so on. (Shodhan 2017, 21) – which are receding in scholarship but linger in the archives that hold voices of the past, as will be investigated – “serve to explain the events as either irrational behaviour or an ever-present natural event, neither of which require investigation or explanation.” (ibid) The language that surrounds Partition and its aural/oral memory is a key concern for my methodology, though not merely as a semantic or lexical exercise.

The historian Vazira Zamindar (2007) also traces Partition beyond the

immediacy of the event, through its messy, bureaucratic and archival legacies as well as oral narratives. Her investigation of unresolved family divisions, property disputes, passports and challenged rights of movement and citizenship centres the making and unmaking of ‘Muslim’ citizens in Pakistan and India, and complicates the notion of “choice” that many faced between seemingly secular India and Islamic Pakistan – a choice complicated further still if we consider that many who crossed the Radcliffe Line were planning to one day return to their homes.⁹ Partition is then placed within “a history of state controls on movement and property that became instrumental in the making of two modern nation-states.” (Zamindar 2007, 234) As she writes:

What actually happened at Partition, and the way that Partition is rhetorically invoked and socially remembered, are tied to each other to produce Partition effects. In order to understand these Partition effects, we need to know a lot more about Partition itself, and at the same time we need to interrogate and move the very boundaries of how we write these histories.
(ibid, 239)

One of the motivations of this research is to move the boundaries of the writing of (and listening to) Partition – and the colonial histories it is embedded in – by questioning how it has been sounded, deepening our understanding of what Zamindar describes as the “rhetorically invoked and socially remembered”. In the next section, I focus in on the feminist scholarship of Partition that marked a shift towards social history, and the turn towards oral history as method.

1.2 Speech

In the late 1990s, Ritu Menon and Khamla Basin (1998) and Urvashi Butalia (1998b) redefined understandings of Partition with their focus on oral narratives of those who witnessed, experienced and survived it. This work is particularly important as it was the first time the history of abducted and “recovered” women brought across the Punjab border was discussed in academic work. In Menon and Bhasin’s *Borders and*

⁹ The governmental category of “muhajir” in Pakistan, as opposed to the figure of the “refugee” in India, “was consciously adopted to leave open the notion that while some *muhajirs*, such as those of Punjab, were to remain permanently in Pakistan, other *muhajirs* from the rest of India might return to their homes in India.” (Zamindar 2010, 48)

Boundaries, oral histories and memoir (both authors worked as social workers within the state recovery programme) are juxtaposed against the official archives of the Constituent-Assembly debates and Indian and Pakistani state memoranda. Their professional engagements with government programmes to return women to their “rightful” country – and the eventual “failure” of the wider project – produces a figure of the abducted woman that is “symbolic of crossing borders, of violating social, cultural and political boundaries.” (Menon & Bhasin 1998, 20)

The introduction reveals in detail the authors’ concerns about the ethics of writing about survivors’ experiences of kidnap and sexual brutality, the exploitation of their trauma and dignity, their silences, the places where “memory refuses to enter speech”. (ibid, 18) Deciding on “a combination of commentary and analysis, narrative and testimony” (ibid, 17), they expose the use of women’s bodies as weapons in patriarchal constructions of nationhood, honour and martyrdom. This is similar in approach to *The Other Side of Silence* (1998), in which Butalia weaves personal memories of Partition – a topic she arrived at while researching for a BBC programme in the 1980s – with testimonies collected slowly, for over nearly two decades. Her own family was divided after 1947, their secrets, histories of betrayal and emotional as well as physical separation unaddressed until her decision to interview her uncle in Lahore, present-day Pakistan, years after their estrangement. Butalia’s other interviewees include those were on the “margins” of Partition history in large numbers, particularly those of the scheduled castes. “Butalia’s other interviewees include those who were on the “margins” of Partition history in large numbers, particularly scheduled castes. “Harijans, Dalits, untouchables, by whatever name you call the protagonists of this history, have remained, in a sense, virtually untouchable even in the writing of this history.”” (Butalia 1998, 297) This erasure, she writes, was codified in 1946 in the Cabinet Mission’s interim plan for the transfer of power, which deemed it “sufficient to recognise only three main communities in India: General, Muslim and Sikh”. (ibid, 302)

Butalia’s approach to her interviews incorporated the doubts she had about following particular patterns in getting information about extremely difficult experiences, “that is,

there would be no fixed questionnaire, no chosen ‘sample’ of people, in terms of geography or class or any other category. I would simply ask people to speak about that time in their lives, and let the conversation take its own course, to flow in whichever direction seemed appropriate.” (ibid, 23) In common with Menon and Bhasin’s work, the edited transcripts in *The Other Side...* are interwoven with Butalia’s reflections, detailing how the interviews were arranged and conducted, introducing interlocutors, contextualising their meetings, and describing the limitations, difficulties and the silences of their shared conversations in situations where it was “extremely difficult to interview people alone.” (ibid, 23) This reflexivity and the move towards the intersubjective nature of listening to Partition testimonies countered the positivist, “high politics” histories surrounding Partition, bringing “memoirs and literature into conversation with historical scholarship”. (Dube 2015, 62). This work was also grounded in feminist activist publishing – Ritu Menon co-founded Kali for Women, India’s first feminist publishing house, with Urvashi Butalia in 1984. Sugandha Agarwal writes that both collaborated with feminist book fairs and publishers globally as well as locally, and “were interested in publishing books that grew out of India’s feminist movement of the time, addressing issues of ‘violence, dowry, deaths, media images, rape, safe contraception, the Uniform Civil Code (UCC), identity politics, the environment and feminism itself.’” (Menon 2011, 219, in Agarwal 2020, 8) As discussed in 1.4, the influence of this scholarship on later post-memorial and archival work on Partition has been stripped of its feminist politics, which centred co-creation and the co-production of political and social knowledge. This echoes laments by ‘first generation’ feminist oral historians in the US and the UK, who are at the same time critically revisiting this turn in the 1970s. Linda Shopes writes that “although feminist oral history’s emphasis on gender and women’s agency unquestionably was radical and subversive in its challenge of patriarchy, ultimately it did little to challenge class and racial hierarchies.” (Shopes 2011, 65), with burgeoning work by women of colour addressing “the complex intersection and simultaneity of race/ethnicity, class, gender and sexuality two decades later.” (ibid)

There remain some other paradigmatic limitations, particularly the parameters set by the burgeoning memory culture surrounding histories of the Holocaust in the

1980s and 1990s, through the work of sociologists and memory studies scholars such as Pierre Nora, Jan and Aleida Assmann, Maurice Halbwachs and James Young, who remain important within the field of Partition studies, and were influential for the key author in the feminist turn. Persisting claims of similarity between Holocaust and Partition in terms of memory production is also clear in newer post-memory work (explored in 1.4). In her recent book, for example, Aanchal Malhotra writes that memories from the Partition and the Holocaust “generations” are “transmitted to subsequent generations in similar ways.” (Malhotra 2022, 22)

In-depth analyses of Holocaust literature, and its comparison to Partition studies, is beyond the remit of this research, but given its great influence on the latter as will be explored, the production of 1947 as a catastrophic event is clearly impacted by 20th-century German history, particularly the onus on speech, listening and testimony in other contexts of mass death and violence. Very differently to the post-Holocaust era, in which a memory boom coincided with global financial, legal and territorial reparations for Jewish people, the lack of any real reparations after Partition means that any claims of testimonial “repair” is only partially useful or true. The anthropologist Veena Das writes that “the model of trauma and witnessing that has been bequeathed to us from Holocaust studies cannot be simply transported to other contexts in which violence is embedded into different patterns of sociality.” (Das 2006, 103) Cathy Caruth and other western literary theorists who interpret violence through ‘trauma’ similarly risk “a pathological public sphere brought into existence in a popular culture that seems mesmerized by stories of suffering and the spectacle of wounded and dismembered bodies.” (Das 2006, 101) More than the spectacle of trauma, this model has also affected disciplinary language in the subcontinent. Partition historian Pippa Virdee points out how there has been a “gradual shift in how scholars of Partition have since used language, turning the victim to a survivor, account to testimony, memory to remembrance, pain to trauma – that is, employing terms familiar in the field of memory studies of the Holocaust.” (Virdee 2022, 5)

As will be seen in my archival research and heard in the three transmissions presented in 4.2, 5.2 and 6.2, repetition is fundamental to the maintenance of Partition

as a singular history, while also holding potential to pluralise its terms and frames of reference. The work of Das and political anthropologist/poet Ather Zia are significant in this regard, in terms of the feminist epistemological potential *beyond* the paradigms of trauma and memory as western disciplines have established for contexts of “post-” violence – implying that violence has equivocally ended, producing “survivors” who must be healed after the event. In *Life and Words* (2006), Das’s interlocutors are witnesses of two politically and historically separate but emotionally interlinked moments – the 1947 Partition, and targeted sexual and physical violence against Sikhs in Delhi in 1984 after the murder of Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguard. Das, like Butalia and her peers, also spent time engaged in social relief work in resettlement colonies, in her case in the affected Sikh neighbourhoods attacked in 1984. (Das 2006, 12-13) She situates herself and her interlocutors as the inheritors of layered and repeated social breakdowns – Partition, as she states, created significant differences of wealth and income within kinship networks, depending on whether people had to flee or not. (ibid, 8) The Partition, a story heard largely through her own familial networks, in this context takes on among other analytic framings, fictional registers via Manto and Tagore, who respond “in sounds and senses of the Indian languages to the scenes of devastation” (ibid, 39) This evokes Italian communist oral historian Alessandro Portelli, for whom oral history is a space where “historical, poetical, and legendary narratives often become inextricably mixed up. The results are narratives in which the boundary between what takes place outside the narrator and what happens inside, between what concerns the individual and what concerns the group, may become more elusive than in established written genres, so that personal ‘truth’ may coincide with shared ‘imagination’.” (Portelli [1979], in Perks and Thompson 2016, 51)

Addressing violence committed on all sides, in kinship networks, against women¹⁰, the interlocutors in *Life and Words* counter official discourses of the female abductee (similar to Menon and Bhasin). Her interpretations of Wittgenstein’s philosophy of the grammar of pain (Das 2006, 39-41), Stanley Cavell’s ethics of responsibility, and explorations of the “illegibility of the state” through Derrida’s take on writing “occurring in a context that is never fully saturated.” (ibid, 163) Legibility, in *Life*

10

and Words, is found through the repetition and personal labour involved in ‘picking up the pieces’ after seismic violence. For example, the narrator Asha (ibid, 63-78) is a person who slowly overcomes, over time: widowed at a young age in Lahore before 1947, she lost family members and her home during Partition, becoming a burden to her new family afterwards, and eventually disowned for her second marriage (undertaken for survival) by her brother. She worked for decades to regain and reunite her shattered social life with the help of her first husband’s sister. Das writes that through the figure of Antigone, “the theme of the woman who finds voice when she is occupying the zone between two deaths is an important one in the Indian imaginary: it builds on but also separates itself from the gendered division of speech and silence in mourning laments.” (ibid, 62). Knowledge of the gendered subject, “though poisonous [...] is addressed through the everyday work of repair,” where accounts about Partition specifically take on “quality of frozen slides.” (ibid) Non-narrations, “forgettings” here are part of the ‘descent into the ordinary’, “through which victims and survivors affirm the possibility of life by removing it from the circulation of words gone wild – leading words home, so to speak.” (ibid, 220)

This kind of ethnography – which entails a certain level of intimacy, presence and trust to sustain over time – complicates Partition’s legacies as violence committed by and against people whose identities have been ‘unfixed’. Persecutors and those they persecute may (over time) change places; individuals that once set on each other can (over time) pursue common interests. Eschewing any kind of victim narrative, Das argues that Asha’s memories cannot be disentangled from the contexts in which they are produced, or ‘differently’ produced. She asks:

How does one render the relation between possibility and actuality, and further, between the actual and the eventual? If violence, when it happens dramatically, bears some relation to what is happening repeatedly and unmelodramatically, then how does one tell this, not in a single narrative but in the form of a text that is being constantly revised, rewritten, and overlaid with commentary? As in the case of Asha and her work of repairing, one may think of stories not as completed but as in the process of being produced. Though we often fall into the image of a story as if it were a text, one may better speak of some stories as an engagement in the everyday with creation of boundaries in different regions of the self and of sociality. The work of time, not its image or representation, is what concerns me here as I describe these processes. (Das 2006, 80)

I further this idea of overlaying, through and beyond text, in my discussion of methodology in Chapter Three. To try and unveil the work (or, labour) of time, rather than render or represent it, is where sound is a powerful resource and method, particularly when it comes to telling stories that listening, because of the long work of repairing, can never be “complete”. Listening is durational: it necessarily takes time, its temporal demands contingent on attention. Listening in the archive, as discussed in Chapter Three and through the transmission *I hear (colonial) voices* [6.2], makes added demands on not just our time but our urge to represent lost time, past time, in conditions of ongoing violence. If “Partition as a lifeworld... produces its own set of languages, symbols and silences,” (ibid, 80), we can take its (sonic) condition, the work of time within it, and the labour of speech, silence and listening that is part of this time, as dependent on norms that remain continuous, if hidden. This labour then extends beyond the words that have “gone wild”.

1.3 Silence

Silence is a word heavily associated with Partition, persisting in spite of the proliferation of speech and of oral history in the last decade or more, as will be explored in Chapter Two. In this section I delve into political anthropological and philosophical considerations of silence, particularly from the perspective of Kashmir, in order to complexify its role in Partition’s (sonic) condition – so, understanding silence beyond merely meaning lack of voice, missing agency, or unheard speech. This assessment is relevant to my critical inquiry into and creative usage of silence in my archival and audio research in Chapters Four, Five and Six.

In *Resisting Disappearance: Military Occupations and Women’s Activism in Kashmir* (2019), the poet and political anthropologist Ather Zia focuses on the voices and actions of women activists who are members of the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP). Since Partition, Zia writes, “Indian-occupied Jammu and Kashmir [IJK] has been caught in an ebb and flow of both visible and invisible forms of violence” (Zia 2019, 54) and has been too regularly reduced to the long-running dispute

between India and Pakistan over its territory – a binarism that “neglects the Kashmiri people’s aspirations for a sovereign nationhood that predates the partition of British India and the Princely States.” (ibid)

The activists, who are also known socially as “half-widows”, are continually resisting the state-enforced disappearances of their sons, brothers and in some cases husbands, repeating their claims to justice through testimony, personal archiving (5.4) and public protest. Telling their stories repeatedly to western, Indian and Pakistani journalists, academic researchers and NGO representatives as Kashmiri women produces what Zia calls an “affective politics of mourning”. (2019, 68), which at its heart lies the notion of *asal zanan* – “good woman”. (ibid) Zia argues that while making their disappeared loved ones visible, the womens’ silent sit-ins and tearful interviews – forms of repetitive and “performative” activism – sustain “social invisibility” on the part of traditional gender roles (ibid, 67-68). In essence, this everyday affective politics underlines how they “inhabit their gendered identities within the social and political discourse through embodied practices and dispositions.” (ibid, 224) Regarding Parveena, Zia’s friend and the leader of the APDP, “even though she is very talkative and can be argumentative in person, she avoids getting into confrontations or raising her voice in public, staying committed to appearing calm and demure.” (ibid, 85)

I centre Das’ and Zia’s work here to highlight how disciplinary western models of memory-making and to an extent archival memory-making cannot always make room for the complexity of women’s testimonial labour, especially when embedded in partitioned contexts where women stay with, rather than merely speak after, violence. They show how work cannot always follow disciplinary paradigms of insider/outsider, or trauma (silence)/end of trauma (speech). Zia describes her work, following Christine Walley, as

“an ‘intimate ethnography’ — not that my research community is my biological family, but they are ‘family-like.’ In Kashmir the legend goes that when people exchange information about their lineage, everyone is able to find a few relatives in common. As an always-present ethnographer, my research community began to treat me as though I belonged to ‘both an individual and cultural category’ (Okely 1992, 24).”

(Zia 2019, 19)

Zia points out the racist and othering genealogies of ethnographic work hitherto conducted in Kashmir, where standard disciplinary language cannot suit the context of its ongoing and violent occupation. “The three most frequently used words in Western ethnography [‘collaborator,’ ‘interlocutor,’ and ‘informant’] are all laden with what most of the Kashmiri population views as the ‘unethical enterprise’ of aiding and abetting Indian rule.” (ibid, 16) Such limits of language, within the context of women’s testimonial labour in particular, are symptomatic of everyday militarised life, ungraspable by disciplinary languages in other contexts. I note this here to trouble the fixed nature of these terms in interview-centred research, politicizing the very language in which scholars of the Global North take for granted.

When considering the challenging topic of speaking to women who have experienced violence, the conditions of speech become startker. The interdisciplinary scholar Rashné Limki focuses of the dominant reproduction of two figures – the “martyred” woman, and the abducted or “disappeared” woman. (Limki 2020, 776) Her analysis focuses on the Pakistani film *Khamosh Pani* (1957) and its main character Ayesha (formerly Veero), and oral accounts of a Sikh survivor of Partition named Bir Bahadur Singh, who as a teenage boy witnessed the mass suicides at Thoa Khalsa, today a martyrs’ site in present-day Pakistan. Singh’s testimony is taken from Butalia’s *The Other Side of Silence* – revealing of this book’s enduring influence – and her later interviews with Singh when they meet again in his native village.

Singh’s testimony details an infamous story (as we will hear again in the next section 1.4) of the murder of his sister, who moves her plait of hair to the side to be killed by a Sikh’s kirpan (sword) – a gesture of honour. We can contrast the notoriety of this story with the everyday labour of the APDP activists, who continually refuse disappearance: of their sons and fathers, but also of their own subjecthood, like the character of Ayesha/Veero in *Khamosh Pani*. In a recorded conversation conducted in 2021 for my project A Thousand Channels, Ather Zia spoke to me about a moment that highlighted the labour of this speech. I quote verbatim:

“So she saw me. I knock on the door, the son talked to me, the husband talked to me, and then they tried to invite me into the house. And she stopped. And she came out. She closed the door bang on my face and then saw, came out from the window and said, ‘I don’t want to talk to you, even if you’re a Kashmiri.’ She said ‘So many Indians come, make stor.. [sic] make these movies and make these documentaries. Even if you’re a Kashmiri I’m not going to talk to you. Because we’re done with this talking, what does talking do?’ Uh, ‘we have talked about our situation, we have talked about,’ she had talked about her son who had been killed. This had really provided her no respite because the killers had not been found, they knew who had taken their son, and who had killed him, it was a regiment of army that had once patrolled by their side and entered their home and took their son and then killed him and ... that, that’s, it was basically a custodial killing.

So she refused to talk to me. And I never again interviewed her. But I did get a chance to uh, hear her other interviews and see how she was talking. So that, she refused to talk to me. And I did not take offence. It was, for me it was no humiliation, for me it was just this manifestation of pain. And you know what? What was the most important piece of data [laughs] for me as a researcher in here? Is that she had shown her ire to a Kashmiri researcher. And whoever else was coming, she thought she *had* to speak to them because they were from Delhi. And that’s what her son told me. Because people coming from Delhi they are also seen as part of the occupying power, and she has to speak. So in that I felt a sense of intimacy when she was all angry at me and [laughs] she was admonishing me. I took that as an honour that she’s showing this ire, and she at least had me to show that to.” (A Thousand Channels, 2021b)

The refusal of this woman to speak to a (fellow Kashmiri) researcher is telling of this sometimes false equivalence between (the liberatory nature of) speech and (the oppression entailed in) silence. To have to repeat one’s testimony reveals a kind of futility of speaking of injustice again and again, the process rendered fictive (not fully “truthful”) and performative (behaving like the ‘good woman’, ‘forgetting’ what happened, etc). The “other side of silence” can therefore be understood as not merely an outpouring of speech, an incapacity of speech, but also and necessarily, a *refusal to speak in such conditions*. This troubles the idea that speech is reparative even further, to follow Dhawan, as “silence becomes non-violence, a rupture in the discursive violence. This does not entail a mere overcoming of all language for silence, but an interruption in the proliferation of discourses that produce violence.” (Dhawan 2012, 229)

This discussion of postcolonial feminist interventions in oral history scholarship, anthropology and philosophy, leads me to the “post-memory” turn of Partition, which

further deepens our understanding of the relationship between testimony, fiction and silence in its ongoing condition, and the shifts in terms of the kind of listening Partition now produces in scholarship.

1.4 Post-memory

This section introduces the historical “post-memory” turn in Partition history (Malhotra, 2019/22; Kabir, 2014; Roy, 2020) and its entanglements with fragmented archives of various types. I discuss how this turn has also shifted the terms of engagement away from the survivor, as “victim-as-witness” (Jayagopalan, 2016), to their descendants. This is relevant due to my personal interest in inherited stories about Partition, an event I have not experienced; secondly, when considering the political implications of both the *restoration* and *repetition* of speech as discussed in 1.2 and 1.3, a shift in listening practices can be uncovered. This shift in some instances has produced scholarship that is depoliticised, class and caste-blind. My survey of this post-memory turn is significant not only because of its influence on Partition’s archival landscape, and the silences it also holds as discussed in the next chapter, but its cross-disciplinary entanglements with it in many cases.

The term “post-memory” was developed by feminist and memory studies scholar Marianne Hirsch, and leans on concepts developed through her work on collective trauma across several generations of Holocaust survivors and autobiographical readings of works by second-generation writers and visual artists. In her own words:

The ‘post’ in ‘postmemory’ signals more than a temporal delay and more than a location in an aftermath. Postmodern, for example, inscribes both a critical distance and a profound interrelation with the modern; postcolonial does not mean the end of the colonial but its troubling continuity, though, in contrast, postfeminist *has* been used to mark a sequel to feminism. We certainly are, still, in the era of “posts,” which continue to proliferate: “post-secular,” “post-human,” “postcolony,” “post-white.” Postmemory shares the layering of these other “posts” and their belatedness, aligning itself with the practice of citation and mediation that characterize them, marking a particular end-of-century/turn-of-century moment of looking backward rather than ahead and of defining the present in relation to a troubled past rather than initiating new paradigms. Like them, it reflects an uneasy oscillation between continuity and rupture. And yet postmemory is not a movement, method, or idea; I see it, rather, as a structure of inter- and trans-generational transmission of traumatic knowledge and experience. (Hirsch 2008, 106)

Through this framing, particularly “defining the present in relation to a troubled past rather than initiating new paradigms”, we can look to the recent post-memory turn

in Partition scholarship, and instances where the affective, psychological and temporo-spatial complexities of Partition are amplified by those who did not live the event. The “uneasy oscillation between continuity and rupture” can be gleaned from critical investigations into the *act* of bearing witness to witnesses, which also in Partition’s postmemory turn includes objects.

The oral historian Aanchal Malhotra is a key figure to discuss this shift in emphasis, particularly in terms of its signification of a critical move away from feminist modes of listening-research and acknowledgements of listening’s limits and responsibilities, as surveyed in 1.2. Malhotra’s book *Remnants of a Separation: 21 Objects from the Partition of India* (2017) was produced out of her associated project ‘Museum of Material Memory’¹¹, a digitised collection of heirlooms, collectibles and objects of antiquity salvaged by those who moved during Partition. It includes research conducted in collaboration with The Citizens Archive of Pakistan [see Chapter Four], and is so entangled with the archive directly. After achieving mainstream, global success with the book, she published a follow-up, *In the Language of Remembering: The Inheritance of Partition* (2022), whose interviewees are middle-class descendants of Partition survivors, and one former British colonial administrator.

Malhotra writes that within her own family, “it has taken years to exhume these details through gentle and continual conversation.” (Malhotra 2022, 738) Most of the interviewees in both books, analogous to the oral history collection of the Citizen’s Archive of Pakistan, cross religion and region but are all from privileged backgrounds – in *Remnants...*, several narrators tell tales how Partition impacted their large houses (Malhotra 2017, 97/161) and servants (ibid, 62-64) The emphasis on material objects in the book – a pashmina shawl, an elaborate piece of jewellery – through albeit moving and detailed accounts reveals a historiographical turn in Partition studies towards more palatable (but still emotional) storytelling. The focus on old objects with great sentimental if not financial value is an obvious boon to museums in the subcontinent, as discussed in one case in Chapter Six. Compared with the difficult feminist oral histories that preceded this material turn, Partition here is fed by the simplicity, the exclusivity,

¹¹ *Museum of Material Memory*, <https://museumofmaterialmemory.com>. Accessed 30 November 2022

of sentimentality, nostalgia and object-driven “historical” value. Historian Pippa Virdee posits that this approach to oral history “operates in a comforting echo chamber, and her disconnect from the complexities of the political landscape, including how Partition impacted differing groups and regions, highlights the limitations of an uncritical exploration that focuses on nostalgia and increasingly cliched stories of loss, displacement, and pre-Partition communal harmony.” (Virdee 2022, 9)

In *The Language of Remembering*, most of the 24 chapters are inspired by emotions – love, loss, grief, hope, belonging, etc. – that frame the interviewees, who are descendants of those who experienced Partition. In the chapter titled “Memory”, following a sharing of old university documents and later, painful revelations by her grandmother, Malhotra writes:

I have often considered whether [my grandmother’s] memories of Partition have somehow transferred to me. Whether, through the tenor of her voice or the frailty of her touch, through the details she provides and the silences she recedes into, I can feel part of what she feels. Obviously, I cannot feel with the same acuteness or accuracy, but some form of transference has allowed this memory to be shared and perceived deeply across generations.” (Malhotra 2022, 458)

In her first book, Malhotra defines material memory as “the ability of an object or a possession to retain memory and act as stimulus for recollection”. (Malhotra, 2017, 4) In the follow-up she extends this definition. After discussing the arbitrary division of objects between the states of India and Pakistan for the nations’ still fragmented archives, she writes:

[N]aturally, if the impact of this brutal dissection remains on people and land, then objects too hold its memory. Their surfaces, no matter how inanimate, absorb the narrative of division and migration. They remain mute spectators to history. (ibid, 491)

Although Malhotra’s work is illuminating as well as impressive given its geographical and cultural breadth, the material memorial turn must be critiqued in its role for the exhibit-i-fication of Partition, as described in the next section, that privileges objects as “mute spectators” through which one’s own “hegemonic listening” (Dhawan

2012) can be imposed upon – in the sense that objects are then made legible as subjects to “hear” as so many voices remain excluded. Virdee points out that “during Partition, millions fled, unable to take along any nonessential material objects, in contrast to the experiences and artifacts documented by Malhotra.” (Virdee 2022, 9) This critique is telling of how the poor, lower castes, sexual minorities, and the ill and dispossessed, are written out of Partition’s story.

Contrary to the earlier and critical oral historical efforts discussed in 1.2 – which tried to present alternative interpretations to establishment histories, delving into self-reflexivity as well as the use of language itself – this newer style of oral history has produced a sort of insular nostalgia on the part of privileged classes, whose intersubjective exchanges with each other are devoid of self-reflexivity beyond tropes of generational silence and inherited trauma. Historian Anjali Gera Roy argues that “the sanctification of testimonial mnemo-narratives as more authentic modes of remembering the past in the memory turn of the present often takes place without a rigorous engagement with the process of memory.” (Roy 2020, 62) Following Paul Ricoeur, she deems testimony as the “beginning of everything” – “it is through testimony that declarative memory manifests itself.” (ibid, 66) This affirmation occurs again through Western philosophical lenses – via Ricoeur, Giorgio Agamben and Jacques Derrida, whose analytic philosophy is situated firmly in the establishment of the Holocaust’s memory turn.

In *In the Language of Remembering*, Malhotra interviews the oral historian Kavita Puri – author of *Partition Voices: Untold Stories from Britain* (2019) and the BBC radio series of the same name. Puri speaks to Malhotra about working on the book and series, and the inclusion of her dying father’s story within the project. She says:

“You know, my father died so soon after I interviewed him. When I listened to the recording again – and I usually don’t listen back, but I had to for the book – I could hear how his voice sounded different, like he had already left this world. It was completely unbearable.” (Puri in Malhotra 2022, 487)

As discussed further in 2.3, “listening back” is most often conducted for the purpose of written transcription. Even so, transcription is not deemed by the authors as

an important part of the process. As Malhotra writes in the acknowledgements, many of her interviews were transcribed by three other people, revealing an outsourcing of aural attention – an interesting position for an oral historian to take. Though time is certainly an important factor for those undertaking such mammoth interview and research projects – considering specifically the kind of temporal endurance needed to listen to hours and hours of audio – with transcription services common and often necessary. Within Partition studies, however, this provides a clue to the shift, away from feminist work in the 1990s and afterwards whose primary concerns related to listening to speech and silence, and the challenges of such listening.

I bring this up to ask: if the testimony gathered *is* so important, then why not listen back to it ourselves? And what happens when we do make that time to listen back to (and through) recordings, engaging in testimony beyond the onus of documentation? Anindya Raychaudhuri (2019), whose work on Partition explores the connections between oral history, cinema and fiction, acknowledges that when listening back to recordings, “it is fascinating how often ‘real life’ ends up intruding, reminding me that the interview is hardly a pristine space. Captured on my machine, along with the questions and answers that constitute the interview, are also other voices, other conversations, repeated exhortations to eat, traffic noises, and the ubiquitous fan.” (Raychaudhuri 2019, 6) This issue of “noisy” recordings, and the resonances of intersubjective exchanges, will be returned to in depth in Chapter Four, via oral history in the audio essay *‘You trust your memories?’* [4.2].

Sceptical about the synonymity of experience and knowledge that is assumed by dominant Partition memory work, Roy argues that “survivors, like historians, transmute experience into coherent narratives in the process of remembering, sharing and retelling their experiences that become fixed through their repetition over the years.” (ibid) This evokes Das’ observation about Partition testimony taking on the “quality of frozen slides” – fixed in their absences and limitations, closed and foreclosed almost as images. After seeing the contemporary British play *Silence*, I was struck by these questions of repetition more viscerally. In keeping with what Roy outlines as the dominance of “triumphalist” acts of recall, the blurring between the fictional and the real in the play

reflects a key concern throughout my presented audio research [Chapters Four–Six].

In *Silence*, seven actors repeat and act out snippets of real Partition oral history interviews conducted by British Indian journalist Kavita Puri. Puri herself is perceptibly represented by narrator/journalist Mina, who is trying to pitch her (mostly white) editors an article: the ‘untold’ story of Partition by those who experienced it. Adapted for the stage by four authors — Sonali Bhattacharyya, Gurpreet Kaur Bhatti, Ishy Din and Alexandra Wood — in a co-production with Tara Theatre, the plot follows Mina’s journey as she listens to elderly Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs about what they have witnessed, and their descendants, who are grappling with the silences in their loved ones’ speech. Two scenes in particular exemplify Limki’s critique of the re-presentation of the ‘subjugated’ woman in Partition narratives. The first brings us an elderly woman, sitting on a chair on the corner of the stage, who does not speak for several minutes. The woman’s daughter and Mina patiently wait for her to speak. The woman’s continued silence is finally ended by her daughter deciding to end the interview. After she consoles her mother, Mina faces the audience and launches into a series of monologues detailing the violence faced by women “of all religions” during Partition – the branding of their skin, the inhabitation of their bodies.

The second scene, also short, is a relayed fragment of a well-known Partition story told hauntingly by a man who is now the mayor of Lewisham, south London. He describes, stammering slightly, the tale of a young girl who moves her plait aside to be killed by a sword – a story, as discussed in 1.3, which appears as testimony in Butalia’s work, and one that Limki suggests is so prevalent precisely because it reveals the willingness of some women to “self-martyr”: they would rather be killed than live in dishonour. The story of the girl who moves her plait aside – obviously repeated by one of the interviewees in Puri’s *Partition Voices* project and so able to enter into the world of the play – is heard here through the speech of a man who has heard the story somewhere else. The multiple transformations of this testimony validate Limki’s arguments that “the inclusion of women – specifically their ‘martyrdom’ – institutes them as just another object of Partition discourse. Their stories cannot alter, or indeed reassert, the political signification of the event already otherwise established.” (Limki

Mina is listening silently in both of these scenes, as are two different mixed race young adults, the grandchildren whose expressions of “post-memory” within the play include one re-enactment of a grandparent’s Partition experiences as a child. As compelling as it might have been if Mina had been portrayed more realistically as a journalist/oral historian – recorder and notebook out, asking questions, interjecting, talking about herself – her role as a “mute spectator” throughout the play, her complete silence, is significant. As opposed to the critical and political positions that “partitioned listening”, as will be laid out in Chapter Three, occupy, we can maybe understand her listening as simply passive, neutral, and apolitical.

The idea that these stories on stage are beyond graspable, and the idea that here a kind of one-way listening is itself enough for the silences about Partition to be broken (again), renders Mina’s responses to the oral histories unnecessary – although she does later express emotional responses to what she has heard towards the end of the play from her father. When we hear the character’s voice played back through the interview recordings with her father (and here we are reminded of Puri’s admittance in real life that she wouldn’t have usually listened to this recording), when he is finally ready to tell his story, she keeps wanting to stop the tape. After this emotive ending, photographs of the narrators in Puri’s project – the original testimony-bearers whose voices, in the form of raw audio recordings, are now held in the British Library sound collection – are projected onto banners lowered over the stage.

Throughout *Silence*, the ‘subjugated women’ speak without being named. This namelessness is perhaps a dramaturgical device – connecting violent realities across time and space, fact and fiction, through fragments of speech, while also protecting the identities of the original speakers (even though, their identities are technically in the public domain given their acquisition by a national library). Watching the play, I was reminded of Veena Das’s reasoning that “some realities need to be fictionalised before they can be apprehended,” (Das 2006, 39) and whether or not that is actually a “good” thing. The anonymity of the two women in the play reveals, even and especially through

fiction, the limits of not only representation of their experiences, but also the limits of the *restoration of their speech*.

Before Puri's *Partition Voices*, there had not been such an extensive oral memory project dedicated to British Asians before. Partition here then becomes the gathering point – the origin story, the reason to speak and listen – for a diverse and sizeable part of the British population to become nationally archived according to one condition: “the notion of trauma as bearing witness to some forgotten wound.” (Das 2006, 102) This trope – Partition's unforgettability as an originary wound – could be applied to much of the archival memory work being undertaken at the moment. Pushing the boundaries of how Partition histories are written, as Zamindar argues, means to push the “boundaries” set upon these histories, and that means to consider the ongoing forms and processes that transmute testimony for the purposes of memorialisation.

In *The Language of Remembering*, Malhotra speaks to a fellow oral historian/interlocutor who had conducted many interviews in Indian-occupied Kashmir with “Hindus and Sikhs who had, in the months following Partition, fled the areas of Kashmir that now fall across the border – Mirpur, Kotli, Dadyal, Muzzafarabad, Bhimber.” (Malhotra 2022, 595) The history and politics of Kashmir, meagre in Partition's memory landscape as it is, is not discussed in the book outside of cultural trauma of listening to Hindus and Sikhs, with a clear focus on individualist tales of survival. The connections between her interlocutor's father – who worked for the Indian army – the denial of the plebiscite mandated by the UN in 1947 (which has still not happened) and the ongoing violence against citizens of this region are completely absent in the authors' contextualisations.

Beyond the kinds of repetition and insularity that post-memory symbolizes of and for particular identity groups, dependent on accounts of individual experiences over the collective, we can turn to Ananya Jahanara Kabir's idea of “post-amnesia”. She defines post-amnesia as “a symptomatic return to explorations of places lost to the immediate post-1947 and post-1971 generations through a combination of psychological and political imperatives.” (Kabir 2014, 26)

Her concept of post-amnesia – influenced by but different to “post-memory” in Hirsch’s formulation – is an exercise in understanding a sprawling community of memory that does not disavow “cultural trauma”, but rather, purposefully remembers beyond its usual oral historical and narrative forms, crossing broader times and spaces. Exploring her family history and their mental maps across Pakistan, India and Bangladesh entails a “deconstruction of the narrative through a focus on the material, the ephemeral, and the non-textual” (ibid, 20) – here defining the material object more as a “relic” than the “mute spectator” of Malhotra’s artefacts. This is for her is a “necessary step in the search for emotional and political resolutions of crises arising from the collective trauma of displacement and resettlement.” (ibid)

Kabir’s exploration of the “entire gamut of cultural production” (ibid, 32) shared by all three nations including music, poetry, literary texts, terracotta statues, archaeological sites, photographs, maps, blogs, all connect with her own personal story, with very little mention of religious identity. This produces an expansive auto-theory of Partition that situates historical violence across time and space, but through the force of “imaginative capacity”. (ibid, 33) As she writes:

Partition’s post-amnesias braid the politics of memory with the poetics of place, where the latter is manifested through vernacular histories of food, spirituality, music, craft traditions, and accents. Post-amnesia’s retrieval of lost places dialogues with paradigms of secular modernity inherited in the wake of decolonization. Re-situating contemporary South Asian subjectivity within a matrix of regional and inter-Asian connections, post-amnesia imagines the layering of national belonging, inevitable in the modern work, with affiliations deriving from pre-modern economic and cultural histories of (South) Asia. (Kabir 2014, 26)

This approach is significant in terms of the *temporal*-discursive nature of Partition’s condition, that for her spans from 7th-century Buddhist pottery to contemporary Facebook posts. This in a way thwarts the fixity of generational memory, while the “Asian matrix” – as anyone with a large and scattered extended family knows – produces multiple affiliations and competing memories and desires, particularly when like the author’s own family they are located in Pakistan, India, *and* Bangladesh. At the

“emotional centre” of Kabir’s post-amnesia, or what we can also call post-forgetting, is East Pakistan, which fits outside the temporal-political and historical models imposed on the “Partition generation,” particularly in the archives, as will be discussed in 2.1. Kabir’s enablement of “post-amnesia” also troubles the idea of insider/outsider listening, which facilitates the “mute spectatorship” of cultural trauma in post-memory work.

This introduction to some of the scholarly work of imagination, of transmutation, of triumphalism, brings up challenging ideas of how (audio) testimonies rather fit an “artefactual” purpose, not unlike the objects that Malhotra centres in her hit first book. The movements of *Partition Voices* (2019) in particular – from written to radiophonic to archival to theatrical – is an example of how these post-memorial forms and processes, with the help of the archive if not archival dynamics, help us to unveil – rather than represent – the work of time, its labour, entailed in the restoration of speech and the social practice of testimony in Partition history.

1.5 Chapter conclusion

Writing two decades after the publication of her ground-breaking book, *The Other Side of Silence*, Urvashi Butalia states that historians are now “much less reluctant” to admit to the importance of the oral narrative as a source, “stretching and expanding the boundaries of what we call history.” She asks, “How can we, as people interested in a particular history at a particular time, discover the multiple narratives of that history so that we may in some ways – to borrow a phrase from Henry James – get ‘a sense of the past’, a feel of it, rather than simply an account of it?” (Butalia 2018, 268/9) Gaining this “sense” of the past, as this chapter has explored, has meant to understand the role listening has played in Partition history, and how it has manifested over time.

This chapter has therefore traversed a wide critical historiography into some of Partition’s discursive and temporal separations, to understand it as a circumstance that is both over and becoming (Kabir, 2014; Menon, 2015; Pandey, 2003/12; Zamindar, 2007); and contingent on practices of listening to ‘testimony’ over time through

Partition's limits: of silence (Butalia, 1998; Das, 2006), of representation (Limki, 2020), of narrative (Malhotra, 2022; Roy, 2020) and of speech (Dhawan, 2012; Zia, 2019). Writing about Partition's condition through this testimony-focused literature, particularly leaning on feminist historical and political anthropological thought and the influences of fiction and storytelling, has necessitated crossing multiple disciplinary fields – an approach that is also embedded in my audio research practice, as discussed in Chapter Three and represented by the three transmissions presented in 4.2, 5.2 and 6.2.

If the Partition *can* be understood as a sonic condition, one “within which we all labour” (Menon 2015, 121), then this literature review has exposed not only the labour of listening – its challenges, its strengths, its failures – that has been central to the making of this history at least in textual forms, but also the critical foundations on which to approach the new, resurgent archives of Partition that depend on people's spoken words, or speech, and the representation and restoration of such speech through different modes of disciplinary listening. Considering the *restoration of speech*, an idea developed in 1.4, as a critical challenge for the partitioned archive, the next chapter encounters its recent manifestations (Svensson, 2021; Virdee, 2022) through the genealogies of colonial knowledge production (Azoulay, 2019; Asif, 2020) and destruction (Cobain, 2016; Sato, 2017), as well as the power relations that archiving oral history necessary entail (Dodd, 2021; Raychaudhuri, 2021). This is to ask in particular what it is that the archive is doing, what it says it is doing, and what it has done to the history (story) of Partition as it engages increasingly with testimony as historical evidence.

Chapter Two:

The archive

Archiving, rather than working in and on archives, redefines terms of engagement. Instead of expending energy on countering authoritative inscriptions of state and institutional command, archiving seems to be offering an imaginative rethinking of political praxis. The challenge is directed at what constitutes custodial control, guardianship, access, medium, rubrics of order, digital coding, entry requirements, a pedagogy of use. All are in question, not necessarily by the same practitioners nor all at the same time. Still, they are all premised on turning away from colonial regimes of truth and their epistemic, political, and bare aesthetic foundations. (Stoler 2022, 571)

2.1 Absence/abundance

The extant oral archives of the 1947 Partition are part of a global landscape, held as part of museum, library and independent collections across the world. They have wide geographical reach, given the mass movement of people after Partition and the scale of the (increasingly digital) work being done to preserve witnesses' stories before they pass away. This forms a heritage landscape that suits different purposes, from providing material for research and advocacy to exhibitions and museal display.

The collection, digitisation and curation of testimony is in some cases ongoing, with collections travelling as part of exhibitions or amassing various digital repositories. The material, produced between oral historians and interlocutors for the purpose of being archived, can form collections that hold up to in some cases thousands of hours of audio material, meaning that this thesis cannot aim to be fully representative of

Partition's ongoing oral archival turn. However, Partition's many aural archives and the complexities and variations found within institutional practices and processes provide a rich opportunity to address the burgeoning role that testimony plays within it as these practices and processes are continuous. Some of these processes are highlighted via my three case studies that hold oral histories connected to Partition: the 1947 Partition Archive; HQed at Stanford University, USA [Chapter Four]; the Citizen's Archive of Pakistan [CAP], based in Karachi, Pakistan [Chapter Five], and the Bristol Empire and Commonwealth Collection [BECC], formerly of the defunct British Empire and Commonwealth Museum, UK [Chapter Six]. These projects have been chosen because of the scale and impact of their collections, capacity of access, and my own (geographical, identitarian, linguistic) connections to their material. The archives vary in form and scope, with different protocols of testimony collection, data-gathering and cataloguing. To varying degrees, all three archives have been founded on the collection of oral histories, as discussed in further detail in the respective chapters. My engagement with these archives and the audio research that has developed around them aligns with Lindsey Dodd's formulation of an "oral history assemblage" in which "heterogenous elements come together: interviewee, interviewer, a research project, utterances, an assertion of the self, a storytelling, a flow of mind-images articulated as memories, public discourses, temporalities, gestures, emotions, places, objects, institutions and more." (Dodd 2021, 38) Following Deleuze and Manuel DeLanda's work on assemblage, this perceives "history and oral history as dynamic, contingent, open-ended processes situated inside everyday realities." (ibid) The oral historian's self-insertion in the illumination of stories of two girls in second world war France then extends the archive as an "affective space" where "we listen in place". (ibid, 39)

A critical listening to testimony destined for and listened from within the archive also sheds light on how narratives of historical events in partitioned territories are shaped by listening, in circumstances where more often than not, formal written records do not exist or are hard to access, as discussed throughout this chapter. As explored in 1.1, the durational dispersal of millions of people after 1947 was not documented for any state archive outside of the minutes and memoranda of high politics at the time, meaning Partition has "developed its own self-contained

historiography” which “links back to the availability of particular kinds of archival material” (Gould & Legg 2019, 4). As much of this has been driven by oral memory and its exigencies in the present, Partition’s assemblages also “give [...] a way to evoke the sense that the past, the story and the interview were always on the brink of being, or having been, something else.” (Dodd 2021, 46)

For historian Vazira Zamindar, it was the hush of oral histories collected with divided families between Karachi and Delhi that “forced [her] into the archive; it was what E. Valentine Daniels calls the ‘drone of silence in interviews, caught between ‘not-being-able-to-speak’ and ‘ought-not-to-speak.’” (Zamindar 2007, 3) This complex speechlessness led her to seek out Urdu newspapers of the time and indifferent government records, if they could be found – she was told by archivists in Karachi, Pakistan, to go to look for the records she needed in India. (ibid, 16) She later discovered in Delhi that documents relating to evacuee property on both sides of the new border were destroyed in the 1960s. (ibid, 130) “The other side of silence” here has a distinctly archival, and therefore political, dimension. The challenges Zamindar faced perhaps speak to why research on 1947 has been increasingly dependent on quotidian witness accounts and diffused oral reflections (despite their own “drone of silence”) rather than the discovery or re-engagement of written and material sources – although this does happen.¹²

This dual challenge is particularly relevant to investigations of the forms and processes of Partition’s archives as they have been developing since 2010, and the myriad spaces, virtual and real, they occupy in the present. (Svensson, 2021; Virdee, 2022) Be it in a national museum or a YouTube video with tens of thousands of hits, archives – and not-quite-museums, not-quite archives – have been integral to Partition’s public resurgence. Among other innovations, augmented and virtual reality technology and film are receiving large-scale institutional support and enabling cross-border collaborations that centre messages of reunion and hope, as well as public

¹² For example, Ayesha Jalal’s still important work on Muhammad Ali Jinnah relied on the same India Office Records as British historians but produced an alternative interpretation of his motivations, anxieties and strategies in the lead-up to Partition. See Ayesha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985)

education.¹³ There is therefore a dynamism at play through the digitisation and curation of testimony, with sound recordings “travelling”, re-recorded and re-staged as part of (temporary/outdoor/public) exhibitions, plays etc. or through shared academic and cultural initiatives that are usually initiated by institutional actors in the US or the UK. This notably includes the 1947 Partition Archive’s collaboration with Stanford University, which in 2017 acquired 4,000 of its recordings.¹⁴

Political scientist Ted Svensson places two institutions at the heart of Partition’s new “heritage landscape” (Svensson 2021, 217): the 1947 Partition Archive, which started collecting oral histories in 2010, and has now amassed around 10,000 oral histories recorded with witnesses from 14 countries in over 36 languages¹⁵ [Chapter Three] and the Partition Museum in Amritsar, which hosts 14 audio-visual galleries whose purpose are to voice the “silenced in the pages of history”.¹⁶ Forming only part of a constantly expanding archive, a selection of nine can be viewed on its website. This is common to many of the bigger archives which prioritize audio-visual material, an issue returned to in 4.4. The archives produced out of “Partition voices” then vary: increasingly museal in tone and agenda from the outset, some adopt the role of state archives, as will be discussed in Chapter Five, while others, like the 1947 Partition Archive [Chapter Four] are rhizomatic networks, crowd-sourcing the voices of ‘survivors’ and witnesses that are mostly kept hidden away until opportune moments for funding or exposure. The verification and security processes (permissions from the interviewee, who can withdraw any second of the audio at any time) also makes access to recently recorded interviews a lengthy and arduous process. Many of Partition’s aural archives in the UK, as explored in Chapter One, are sourced from journalists, oral

¹³ Project Dastaan, a peace-building initiative, incorporates interactive VR experiences to reconnect those who moved during Partition to see their places of birth via virtual reality. Its recent film *Child of Empire*, which was on display at the British Film Institute and SOAS Gallery in August 2022, follows the stories of two men from the Partition generation – an Indian Hindu who migrated from Pakistan to India, and a Pakistani Muslim who made the opposite journey. Each share childhood memories of their experiences while playing a board game. Five years earlier, the National History Museum in Pakistan unveiled its virtual reality train carriage, the first VR exhibit in the country.

¹⁴ *Stanford Libraries*, “70 years later, tales from the world’s largest refugee crisis find a home at Stanford Libraries”, August 11, 2017. <https://library.stanford.edu/node/122490>.

¹⁵ This figure was taken from Rumela Ganguly, oral historian and communications manager at the 1947 Archive, in her presentation for the online panel “Museums and Partition: South Asian Perspectives”, *Museum of British Colonialism*, October 11, 2022. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UvQx32JIJGY>.

¹⁶ *Partition Museum*, <https://www.partitionmuseum.org/>. Accessed November 30, 2022.

historians and broadcasters.

Rather than attempting to write a comparative study of these archives, I have tried to understand the role and character of testimony as constitutive of their work, and what oral historian Anindya Raychaudhuri defines as the archive's imposition of an "extraneous orderliness to a fundamentally disorderly [Partition] interview". (Raychaudhuri 2021, 79) He asks, "to what extent is the disorderliness of multiple perspectives allowed to exist within an oral history archive and to what extent is it dominated and flattened out by my curatorial voice?" (ibid, 74) This is a problem that is centred and sounded out throughout the three transmissions presented in 4.2, 5.2 and 6.2. The inclusion of BECC, a colonial oral/history collection, in particular is indicative of my interest in what Anjali Roy describes as the abundance of South Asian witnesses to Partition in contrast to "the absent colonial administrator." (Roy 2020, 79) In the last two years, particularly since the 75th anniversary, there is now a resurgence of archival efforts to memorialise Partition from the perspective of white British citizens. Two recent AHRC-funded research projects initiated by the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, are leading in the move towards digital technologies – particularly virtual reality and crossover live events. The 205 interviews in its own oral history collection were compiled by the broadcaster and historian Andrew Whitehead for the BBC World Service radio series "India: A People Partitioned" (1997; 2000) and his later work on Kashmir, 1947.

Raychaudhuri has previously noted that the hitherto lack of public acknowledgement of Partition in India came from a sense of preserving the stability of the nation-state. A decade ago, he felt that:

If the horrors of historical and contemporary Hindu–Muslim conflict were to be given public, official recognition, then the superiority of the Indian nation-state (based on its apparently secular ideals) would be difficult to sustain. Put another way, if these institutions of nation-building such as museums and schools were to include a comprehensive account of Partition, they would have to acknowledge the historical and contemporary presence of Hindu–Muslim conflict, thus questioning to what extent Indian public life could be described as secular. (Raychaudhuri 2012, 179).

The events of Delhi 1984, the Babri Mosque demolition in 1992 and the Gujrat pogrom in 2002 all implicated right-wing Hindu nationalists, including current leaders of the BJP, India's ruling party since 2014 under Narendra Modi. In 2021, Modi – the first Indian leader to have done so – officially marked a day of remembrance: the “Partition Horrors Remembrance Day.”¹⁷ This shift reveals the terms in which Partition is sanctioned as history in the present day.

Given that Partition is also becoming increasingly accepted as part of British history, it is relevant to trace its genealogies in the UK. Raychaudhuri notes a key project – in 2007, on the 60th anniversary, an online archive of collected oral testimonies was created as part of a multi-institutional collaboration that included the Imperial War Museum in London, which served “to remind the reader of the inclusive, tolerant, multi-cultural, and benevolent nature of the British state.” (ibid, 80)

Historian Isha Dubey writes that such archival endeavours in the subcontinent could not have taken place earlier because of the “complicated nature of the lived memory of Partition and the murky terrain of guilt and victimhood it embodies. Hence, a generation once removed from the immediate temporal proximity to the events of 1947 but still with inherited memories of it, was perhaps in a better position to be the mediators and gentle facilitators of the remembrance of a difficult, traumatic past.” (Dubey 2021, 528) At the same time, archives’ curatorial decision-making power means they can “actively and consciously distance themselves from questions of politics and its entanglements with the modes of remembrance and erasure in the present.” (ibid, 525) If a memorial or museum or archive “felt impossible” for decades, they are now plentiful, indicative of the need for revisiting and re-inscribing what the Partition archive says it does, and what it does. This issue is complicated by the increasing phenomenon of testimony being used as digital content, which proliferates singular, standout fragments of story – a little like the play discussed in Chapter One. This means that the definition of the “archive” is stretching to include fictional and digital productions.

¹⁷ Mohan, Archis. “‘Remembrance Day’ opens old wounds for trifling political gains,” *Deccan Herald*, August 22, 2021. <https://www.deccanherald.com/specials/sunday-spotlight/remembrance-day-opens-old-wounds-for-trifling-political-gains-1022268.html>

Pippa Virdee in her research on digital memory and Partition cites Anna Sheftel's and Stacey Zembrzycki's critique of the exploitative nature of the digital world, arguing that it is "rooted in competitive private industry, which thrives on selling us products and commodifying everything from how we communicate with our loved ones, to how we read the news and absorb information, and even how we make decisions." (Virdee 2022, 11) Although it is beyond the remit of this thesis to delve into how Partition has undoubtedly become social media-fied – harnessed greatly by contemporary digital memory projects and archives who depend on platforms like Facebook and Instagram to disseminate their work – its effects cannot be ignored. Because of this digital turn, Virdee continues, "interviews therefore turn into data, and both researchers and their readers often extract only what they want and not what the project may need. Searching in this fashion can reduce engagement, limiting an end users' perspective and essentially creating a self-essential to this endeavour, making interviews searchable by fragment." (ibid)

The searchable fragments, in their multitude, then have the effect of hiding the bigger picture. Kaur writes that "even as the project of maintaining oral history and the memorialization of Partition continue to attract great currency outside of academia and in the public sphere, it remains confined to the narratives of upper-caste survivors". (Kaur, 2017) Historicising Partition as an event through the aural archive then arguably helps to stage a politics that privileges the experience of violence and trauma (of some), and frame these experiences as inevitable formations set by the archive's own fragmentation processes. Sparse scholarship on Partition and Dalit histories have revealed the affective "blind spots" of the post-1947 rehabilitation process, which privileged those who came from better-off backgrounds and higher caste standings (Bandhopadhyay 2009; Kaur 2017), and this has also been redressed with the superb online journalism-archival project People's Archive of Rural India [PARI], which is multi-lingual and centres "subaltern" stories.¹⁸ Given that the most vulnerable refugees (and people who did not or could not move), for example single women, the old and

¹⁸ *People's Archive of Rural India*, <https://ruralindiaonline.org/en/>. Accessed 30 November 2022. Partition in this archive is framed through voices who participated in the freedom struggle.

infirm, lower-caste people, etc. were excluded from state help at the time, the structural privileges that Partition history is couched in is then a logical effect, although oral history has been a way to start to undo this, albeit in ways that negate the complexities and ambiguities of say, interviews conducted in other languages, or “archival and academic conventions” related to attribution (Raychaudhuri 2021, 79/see also 4.4). At the same time, like PARI, there is a growing move towards the independent archiving of people’s stories across the Global South. We have seen that in many cases that oral reflections have been key to historical justice – the Truth and Reconciliation Commission after Apartheid in South Africa, as an example, or the testimonies of descendants of Kenyan victims that bolstered the discovery of hidden British colonial files relating to the cover-up of the Mau Mau massacre, discussed in the next section.

By revealing some of the ways in which we are guided to listen to stories of Partition this research attempts critical history, as I understand the term, by investigating the power relations that can be delineated from testimonial labour. With sound as a critical aspect of these forms and processes, it provides a way into the “hidden structures” (Malkani, 2020) of the archive that are themselves embedded in colonial forms of knowledge production. If institutions that have taken on Partition’s memory mantle “fail to bring about a critical reappraisal of the event” (Svensson 2021, 217), the increasing acceptance of oral history as archival material provides an opportunity to understand the role of the archive as it has developed as a partitioning institution, before recording technologies and even before the archive itself, as discussed in the next section.

Svensson points out that in the cases of the Partition Museum and the 1947 Partition Archive, the “collected narrations of personal experiences – in which the interviewer’s participation, voice and identity are muted – are turned into discrete items in an online repository or museum exhibition. The drawback is not solely that the intersubjective, co-creative dimension of oral history is lost, but that the interviewees’ intrinsically imperfect and malleable recollection of the past is downplayed.” (Svensson 2021, 221) With reference to the oral testimonial landscape in which he works in post-apartheid South Africa, Sean Field argues that “[i]t is precisely that oral histories are not

recovered but are created *through inter-subjective dialogues* that requires theorising and needs to be thought through.’ This intersubjectivity renders the idea of oral histories being “collected” like “artefacts” for the archive difficult for him to conceive (Field 2008, 177/181).

The idea that co-production, not recovery, is key to oral history’s value is revisited in Chapter Three. At the same time, the archives encountered for this research rarely if ever centre the co-production of the interview, save for leaving the oral historian’s voice in the recording occasionally, an issue explored through the audio research presented in Chapter Six. By revealing some of the ways in which we are guided to listen to stories of Partition this foray into archival sounds is in essence an investigation of power. With sound as a critical aspect of these forms and processes, it then provides a way into the “hidden structures” of the archive that are themselves embedded in colonial or colonized forms of knowledge production. If institutions that have taken on Partition’s memory mantle continue to “fail to bring about a critical reappraisal of the event” (Svensson 2021, 217), the increasing acceptance of oral history as archival material is one channel in which we can sense this problem. This is a key driving factor for this research, and the reason why a deeper consideration of the genealogies of the archive, especially its development as a partitioning institution, even before the archive itself existed as a physical institution, is crucial to the development of partitioned listening as a methodology.

At minimum, an acknowledgement of the complexities, variations and repetitions within archival institutional practices provides an opportunity to address Partition through its testimonial – sonic – ‘labour’. Focusing on testimony destined for the archive can also shed light on how narratives of historical events in partitioned territories are shaped through listening *after* recording, in circumstances where more often than not, formal written records are partitioned themselves, as evident in Zamindar’s accounts of her research. This focus on the long labour of the archive, and the temporal scopes it institutes, demarcates and limits, provides the opportunity to witness it critically in the present, as it is being formed, and to question and investigate the processes that lie behind what it includes or excludes.

2.2 Annihilation

The historian Ariella Aïsha Azoulay sees the archive as more than just a physical building holding items of historical interest and value. She argues that the archival “regime” took shape long before it manifested as bricks and mortar, “a few centuries after millions of people in different places were already forced to embody imperial archival categories, part of a growing and unstoppable ruling operation of classification, tagging, and naming of different groups to form a human index.” (Azoulay 2019, 164) Like the Cabinet Mission’s designation of a ‘General’ other in its classifications for a future India in 1946, mentioned in 1.2, we can see how archival epistemes, maintained by “colonial common sense” (Stoler 2009, 23) are integral to keeping history as a discipline of “plausible stories” that do not question “the violence that provides its practitioners with the building blocks that render the stories plausible – worlds shredded violently into legible pieces to compose historical narratives.” (Azoulay 2019, 286)

Through this critical definition of history, itself a partitioning discipline, the recent drive to tell many different plausible stories of Partition can be understood as dependent on fragments of speech, also perhaps “shredded violently into legible pieces”. Producing oral history for and through the archive then has to succumb to certain norms and forms of knowledge production that, like archives themselves, put “events, objects, and people are in their ‘right place’ – temporally, spatially, and politically.” (ibid, 168) Through this we can also understand the archive as a site where one’s labour – as an oral historian, interlocutor, archivist, or listener – shares categorical space with the labour, lives and bodies exploited by colonialism over time. In the imperial archive, Azoulay writes,

“the names, tags, types, and categories varied. They could designate a group of people by the services and labour expected of them, by their status within a local system of exploitation, by the name of the continent on which they lived or from which they came, by the name given to them by Europeans, and, most often, by exploitative measures that determined how much of what they have or who they are could be levied from them. In general, they were classified by the extent to which they could be instrumentalized and exposed to violence while still continuing to toil and labour for others. The name or category itself is less important than the differences instituted between them. Because this

classification system came to order social life” (Azoulay 2019, 164)

Azoulay’s approach to the imperial archive – suggesting a long history of classification and human indexing before its physical existence as an institution that preserves the past – is also useful in the sense of the ruptures of knowledge that Partition has been subjected to, particularly through the destruction, concealment and removal of historical records, which form the starting point for the transmissions presented in Chapter Fours–Six. As narrated in *‘You trust your memories?’* [4.2], in August 1947, bonfires of burned records raged outside the British Indian government buildings as the Partition plan was formalised and the new countries of India and Pakistan became officially independent. At the time of Partition, “one Colonial Office official noted that ‘the [local] press greatly enjoyed themselves with the pall of smoke which hung over Delhi during the mass destruction of documents.’” (Cobain 2016, 118) Four months later, after the British announced plans to withdraw from Palestine, a correspondent in Jerusalem also noted the burning of colonial files there. (ibid, 121)

The violence, chaos, uncertainty and political blunders of Partition are well documented, but this documentary destruction is less referenced in Partition studies: it is however discussed in research that investigates colonial secrecy as a wider historical phenomenon during British decolonisation (Cobain 2016; Sato 2017). As historian Shohei Sato describes, during this period Britain should have theoretically handed over every document in its 37 former dependencies to each of the new independent governments, but many were “deemed too sensitive or inconvenient to be passed on”. (Sato 2017, 712) Under the clandestine and widespread Colonial Office programme Operation Legacy, which officially began after Partition, colonial officials were advised to destroy any documents, anywhere, that would embarrass the British state. (Cobain 2016, 118-121)

This archival erasure is key in historian Manan Ahmed Asif’s research that traces, along the pre-European period, how “Hindustan” became “India” through Europeanized history. His argument is that “as post-colonized historians we have inherited the colonial episteme, but we are also inheritors of a deep archive of history writing that stretches from Juzjani to Firishta to Muhammad Habib – from the

thirteenth century to the twentieth.” (Asif 2020, 225) In an interview with an Indian newspaper, he extends his definition of “post-colonized” that centres the dynamic of archival access:

Scholars get grants and go to Rampur and London and Berlin, read these manuscripts and they write the book. What I mean by post-colonized is that the condition of postcoloniality is in the dispersal of this manuscript. When we visit these archives, we cannot write that out of the story. (Asif 2020b)

Asif’s re-inscription of Indian history through its indigenous historians via close textual analyses is very different to my exploration of Partition’s condition in the present. However, his framing of the problem of “dispersal” resonates, particularly evoking the “post-amnesia” frames of Partition through Kabir’s work as discussed in 1.4. We can then understand Partition as a condition of archival fragmentation, opacity and lack. He writes:

Colonisation refuses the colonised access to its past. By imposing a colonial language, it retards the capacity of indigenous languages to represent reality. It claims that the languages of the colonised lack ‘technical’ or ‘scientific’ vocabulary. It removes the archives, renders history as lack, blurs faces and names. Thus, the colonised face a diminished capacity to represent their past in categories other than those given to them in a European language, or provided to them in an imperial archive. (Asif 2020, 4)

As discussed in 1.2, the historiographical shift in the 1990s followed decades of almost no social history of Partition. This lengthy silence has been formed through the gaps left in the official records as much as the scholarly interpretations of collective “trauma” as outlined in section 1.4. In centring the terms of access to evidence, and the removal of anything not deemed technical or scientific enough, Asif asks a deeply pertinent question relevant to the partitioned archive: “What is the past that remains visible after the annihilation of one’s present?” (ibid, 204) – a cross-temporal pursuit for that which remains, or what Stoler calls “imperial debris”. (Stoler 2008, 193) This question can be adapted for this research: what is the past that remains *audible* after the annihilation of one’s present? And what kind of audible evidence are we talking about here? How does the archive affect or guide our listening to oral histories, ethnographic recordings, and survivor testimony after annihilation? This question provides space to

not only speculate on what was lost, but how sound and sonic methodology can be useful in expanding our terms of understanding of lost pasts beyond manuscripts and objects.

As a British citizen, I have greater access to archives and libraries than researchers based in India, Bangladesh and Pakistan. At the same time, much of that ‘history’ is kept inaccessible. The 2011 case concerning the Migrated Archives of the UK’s Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and the anti-colonial Mau Mau Uprising (1952–1960) – also referred to as the Mau Mau Rebellion, the Kenya Emergency or the Mau Mau revolt – revealed the scale of this erasure, and notable for the work of oral history in the fight for reparative justice.¹⁹ The case, brought by descendants of the victims of the massacre of Kenyans forced the FCO to admit to secret holdings of records, revealing a cover-up that had so far only been acknowledged by the elders and their communities seeking justice. (Cobain 2016, 107-9) With documents proven to be missing from the UK National Archives, the FCO was forced to disclose the existence of a high-security building a few miles north of London. In 2011, “the government admitted that Hanslope Park was holding a total of 8,800 files, containing hundreds of thousands of documents from thirty-seven former colonies.” (ibid, 112)

Archivist James Lowry describes Kenya’s destroyed and removed archives as entering a specific conceptual state, which “as imagined records became a myriad of possibilities, secrets, stories and truths.” (Lowry 2019, 194) This material, first removed from Kenya and removed again from the UK National Archives, is still shrouded in affective ambivalence, “with the suspicion that more records [...] might exist in some forgotten corner – a suspicion only supported by the circumstances of the ‘discovery’ of the migrated archives.” (ibid, 195) Similarly, Partition can be approached not only in terms of the identitarian and historical violence its archives fix, but also through the imaginaries they generate: like in many other cases of partitioned territories, abandonment as well as destruction is key to this framing. Circumstances of accident,

¹⁹ Calatayud, Jose Miguel and Phil Moore, “‘We are the Mau Mau’: Kenyans share stories of torture,” *Al Jazeera*, May 5, 2016. <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2016/5/5/we-are-the-mau-mau-kenyans-share-stories-of-torture>.

dismissal and administrative abandonment are central to the silences produced by the archives of the postcolonised world. A dated paper on the National Archives of Pakistan explains that, for example, during the Partition, a “calculated formula ensured that what were previously British resources – everything from buildings to guns to horses – were divided equitably [between India and Pakistan]. Archives, however, were not included in the process.” Records left by the British were either “burned, lost, or sequestered into one of the provincial archives.” (Slavin 1991, 221)

This erasure is ongoing, as we consider the wilful state concealment of other types of records that would shed light on Partition. In May 2021 it was publicly revealed that access to the hitherto secret Lord and Lady Mountbatten papers held at the University of Southampton archives in the UK are being blocked for release by ministerial veto. The costly and lengthy process to try and access the papers is so far looking futile.²⁰ As the last Viceroy of India, the Governor General of Pakistan and India for the first two years after 1947, and chief architect of the 1947 Partition plan, Mountbatten is a crucial character in the “high politics” history that is still important to Partition studies today. It is therefore imperative that Mountbatten’s papers are released, not just for what they contain, but because of the distribution of knowledge their concealment blocks. As Michel-Rolph Trouillot notes, “historical narratives are premised on previous understandings, which are themselves premised on the distribution of archival power.” (Trouillot 1995, 55)

Oral history should then compel us to revisit the official archives, rather than give up on them. It is here that sonic methodology can at least trigger responses, if not the “right” answers, to the challenges that aural archives in partitioned contexts offer for research. In the next section, I consider the specific temporal challenges and opportunities that oral history and the archive offer for the study of Partition’s sonic condition.

²⁰ See for context Jon Ungood-Thomas, “Anger over ‘grotesque abuse’ of £600,000 case to keep Mountbatten papers secret”, *The Guardian*, November 7 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/nov/07/anger-over-grotesque-abuse-of-600000-case-to-keep-mountbatten-papers-secret> and Haroon Siddique, “Cabinet Office blocks publication of Lord Mountbatten’s diaries”, *The Guardian*, May 15 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/may/15/cabinet-office-blocks-publication-of-lord-mountbattens-diaries>. Both accessed November 30, 2022.

2.3 Out of time

How much time does history take? The artist-researcher Shaina Anand, one of the founders of PAD.MA, or the Public Access Digital Media Archive²¹ argues that archives are “apparatuses which engage our experience and perception of time.” (Anand 2016, 9) If we understand archives as spaces that collect “lost” time, she writes, this underestimates the archive’s own temporal conditions, falsely viewing the “experience of time as somehow being external to the archive itself. It loses sight of the fact that the archive is also where objects acquire their historical value as a result of being placed within an apparatus of time.” (ibid)

Given that the “value” of oral history or testimony can be framed very differently to an object-artefact, we can think about time in the aural archive and time in Partition oral history as integral to the sonic labour that produces history/story. To try and unveil the work (or, labour) of time, rather than render or represent it, is where sound can be a powerful resource and method, particularly when it comes to stories that can never be “complete”: because of the ongoing contingencies of violence, patriarchy, and colonialism that persist, but also because of the capacity of listening, an activity that is durational and necessarily takes time, contingent on attention. Listening in the archive, as will be discussed in Chapter Three and explored via the transmission *I hear (colonial) voices* [6.2], makes added demands on not just our time but also on the urge to collect lost time, past time, in conditions of ongoing not-hearing. Following Dilip Menon’s concept of the “‘paracolonial’ or the existence of multiple temporalities, as opposed to postcolonial national desires that look always to the future, Partition, Dube argues, can be seen as a space between “rupture and continuity”. (ibid) This is, like Azoulay’s assessment of the limitations and curtailments normalised by archival timelines, or Asif’s conception of “postcolonised” history, reflective of the possibilities of Partition itself, an event seemingly on the “cusp” of history.

If “Partition as a lifeworld... produces its own set of languages, symbols and silences,” (Das 2006, 80), as Veena Das writes, we can take its (sonic) condition, the

²¹ PAD.MA, <https://pad.ma/>. Accessed 30 November, 2022.

work of time within it, and the labour of speech, silence and listening that is part of this time, as dependent on norms that remain continuous, if hidden. This positioning helps to frame the annihilated, pre-existent *and* post-colonised archival contexts discussed in 2.1 and 2.2 as part of the same continuum, and provides critical openings for “partitioned listening” as a methodology and practice. This cross-temporal archival condition could facilitate what colonial historian Ann Laura Stoler describes as a “move away from treating the archive as an extractive exercise to an ethnographic one.” (Stoler 2009, 47). Despite the differences between the (destroyed and extant) colonial archive and the (restored) partitioned, postcolonised archive, we can then understand them as part of the same archival “regime”, as Azoulay argues.

A largely cited motivation for contemporary Partition projects is at first a coherent one; that the Partition generation’s stories are to be lost forever if not recorded, and so we are told: time is running out to hear them. This differs from some of the listening-centred feminist work discussed in Chapter One, which reveals a contrasting temporal position – time does not run out, but goes on and on, implicating the listener in a sonic artefact that bears multiple temporalities: past, present and future. This inherent resistance against progressive time, A to B, recalls the oral historian Alessandro Portelli, for whom telling a story “is to take arms against the threat of time, to resist time, or to harness time. That a tale is a confrontation with time is the attempt to carve out a special time in which to place the tale – a time outside time, a time without time.” (Portelli, 1991, 59) Focusing on the archive’s instrumentalization of (oral historical) time then provides opportunities to be, as Jayashree Vivekanandan puts it in her introduction to the special issue on chronicling the histories of India, “meaningfully inaugural and inventive” (Vivekanandan 2021, 488) when addressing its labour, a key factor in the development of my audio research, which is experimental at its heart. Rather than running out of time, through this approach, I can work with sound that holds many times at once.

As explored further in Chapters Four–Six, testimony must undergo certain processes to become archivable, and this depends variously on the archive’s own “protocols”. The processes involved in these protocols, be it recording, filming, verifying,

editing, etc., can also be understood as inherent to Partition's sonic condition, within which there is also a labour of time. My understanding of the sound recording as an "artefact", an idea discussed via the research of Louise Marshall in the next chapter, then holds distinct temporal positions at the same time: a thing formed out of a present (in oral history, through co-presence) that holds historical meaning about the past, preserved for the future – a preservation that implies a status of becoming evidence. Given that my broader research has encompassed conducting interviews, visiting archives, listening to recordings, "borrowing" recordings, making my own recordings, writing scripts, and audio production, I have then tried to disrupt time as it is fixed in the archive, and (English) text as it is fixed in the disciplinary production of knowledge. This means to not only acknowledge and analyse the archive's categorisations, but work with them, understanding the archiving of sound through sound, jarring the "progressive temporality" (Azoulay 2019, 167) that gives it such authority. Azoulay writes:

To engage with the histories and modalities of the archive from outside the position it shapes for us as citizens or as scholars requires unlearning its latent progressive temporality. Time lines consist of milestones in the form of wars, conquests, revolutions, constitutions, laws, establishments, institutions, foundations, and inventions, initiated and imposed by imperial powers. They operate as shutters, slicing the commons into pieces, closing and sealing moments by fixing them in time. (Azoulay 2019, 167)

Partition's post-memorial archives then trouble standard ideas of "evidence" in a context where survivor testimony, within the archive or museum, occupies the category of evidence. We can compare this assumption with the arguments of philosopher Sybille Schmidt, who writes that survivor testimony is "less considered as a source of evidence, as testimonies traditionally are in historiography and the law, but bearing witness is considered as an act of moral value. The figure of the survivor witness is invested with a special moral responsibility", harbouring "both an epistemic and an ethical aspect, the interplay of which produces social practice". (Schmidt 2010, 262)

Survivor testimony, considered a social practice, is then "not a form of evidence like any other, since testimonial knowledge is not based on observation but on assurance." (ibid) This assurance – or promise, or guarantee – that testimony provides

is then integral to its authenticity, and therefore its value as evidence. Intervening in the debate of the ‘assurance view’ via Agamben and Derrida, Schmidt spots within this complex definition an “ethical and political explosiveness: if testimony is not evidence, then the witness is always in a precarious position. His testimony can never amount to proof; it can always be doubted and denied.” (ibid, 267) This ambivalent politics of assurance, which always implicates the listener, is central to the first transmission presented in this thesis, ‘*You trust your memories?*’ [4.2]. Less concerned with the “truth” of testimony itself, this work centres the act of listening to testimony and the “truth” assumed from its status as such, which in the end, is produced out of our own labour of listening and trusting.

2.4 Chapter conclusion

This chapter has surveyed the restoration, reconstruction and dispersal of Partition’s archives as well as the colonial archives that are missing, hidden and destroyed. This dual framing has allowed for the uncovering of the contra/dictions that archives, as fixed institutions that institute fixity, convey over time. Positioning Partition through its archival genealogies and contemporary resurgence has allowed for the production of critical limits and openings for “partitioned listening” as a methodology and practice – introducing the notion of trust and the shaky definition of evidence that are produced through listening to testimony.

Though in-person archival fieldwork has at times felt out of reach during the pandemics, listening in and beyond the archive to investigate the (sonic) labour that it provokes and engages with has helped me to understand some of the forms and processes that shape the state, the condition, of Partition as it has moved from archival absence to abundance. If access to the (written) record has been made impossible because of the wilful destruction or obfuscation of information, reports and data in the archives of the past, as reflected on in 2.2, then oral narratives – meaning the creation of meaning through narrative forms of social experiences – take on an even more distinctive role when investigating “the intertwined relationship between collective memory and collective oblivion”. (Sato 2017, 713)

In some way, the 1947 pall of smoke over Delhi produced out of the burning of (future) archives can be understood as marking the “annihilation of our present” (Asif 2020, 204). This is deeply symbolic of the sense of obfuscation that surrounds the histories of Partition specifically, and colonization’s pasts more generally. However, this moment also triggers a new paradigm, one in which history can be pluralised and extended beyond linear frames of reference, expanding and troubling ideas of artefactual “evidence” through listening. Positioning Partition within its archival genealogies and contemporary output has then produced critical limits and openings for “partitioned listening”, as further explored in the next chapter, as a methodology and practice where what is read and what is heard are in continual relation to each other.

Chapter Three: Partitioned listening

This chapter develops “partitioned listening” as methodology and creative practice building on the critical positions developed in Chapter One and the archival contexts and conceptualisations explored in Chapter Two. Through several emerging themes – particularly the restoration of speech, the representation of women’s ‘trauma’, and the “partitions” ingratiated with the archive itself, I have revealed the need for new approaches, away from visual, linear-temporal or material memory that embraces the terms of Partition’s sonic complexity. In 3.1, I discuss my 2019 development of a “tentative listening protocol” that comprises questions that lead into a discussion of listening and disciplinary agency [3.2]. I then introduce the idea of the “sonic text” [3.3] that provides space for multiple modes of method-making. My discussion of (few of) the problems of sonic translation, transcription and transmutation incorporates insights from sound studies (Lane, 2017; Marshall, 2018; Stoevers, 2016; Thompson, 2017; Voegelin, 2014), oral history (Francis et al., 2021; Portelli, 1991) and reflections on artworks by artists Shahana Rajani & Sonja Schonberger and Huma Mulji. Through these channels I introduce partitioned listening as a political, experimental and evidential framework that seeks knowledge and engages in creative practice.

3.1 Evidencing listening

In this section I discuss the disciplinary creation and contexts of a listening ‘protocol’, produced in 2019. It deals with listening in two modes – to archival testimony, and to those who work with it. Originally titled by myself as ‘tentative’, the protocol and related vocabulary was originally written in 2019 as part of a series of online workshops on “evidencing listening”, initiated by the project Listening Across Disciplines II (LxDII) with the centre for Creative Research into Sound Arts Practice (CRiSAP), UAL.²² The protocol was listed on the Platform for Listening Protocols and Vocabularies in 2021 – a “‘prototyping’ space to learn from LxDII’s work”. The platform shares protocols written by researchers across a range of disciplines, including sound arts, sound studies, urban design, biomedical sciences, acoustic ecology, speech synthesis and glassmaking. This developing interactive digital platform intends to answer two initial questions: “How can the use of ‘protocols’ establish and legitimise listening as a reliable research methodology across disciplines? In what ways can a protocol retain critical and creative vibrancy?”

Given the importance of listening and its labours through Partition, I remain sceptical about the idea of protocoling. This is mainly because of the terms “legitimise” and “reliable” which beg the question, legitimate and reliable for who? This is why my tentative protocol is shaped according to a malleable (i.e., they can change, and do change, over time) set of questions to myself that aren’t necessarily answered. The questions, presented in relate to two situations of listening: to recorded testimony, and to “live” testimony. Fig.1 lists the original protocol as published on the Platform for Listening Protocols and Vocabularies:

²² Listening Across Disciplines <https://www.listeningacrossdisciplines.net/protocols/> Accessed 30 November 2022

1)

How did I access this recording?
Who am I listening to?
Where and when was this recorded?
What do I recognise in their story, and why?
What don't I recognise?
What language are they speaking? Is it their first language?
What can I recognise as gendered, racialised, colonial in their speech?
What terms, words or metaphors are being used for 'Partition', violence',
'the event'?
What silences occur, and when do they occur?
What noise occurs?
Who recorded this person speaking, and why?
Who is asking the questions?
When do they ask questions? What are those questions?
Where am I listening to this?
How do I feel about what is being said, and when?
When do I feel uncomfortable/comfortable/excited/bored, and why?

2)

Why am I talking to this person?
What authority do they have?
Why/how did they gain this authority?
How do they describe their work?
When do they express doubt/sympathy/anger... difficult emotions?

Fig.1 'Tentative' protocol, Syma Tariq, 2019.

Although the platform indexed my contribution under the category "Radio Journalism", I in fact produced this protocol after oral/historical and archival fieldwork. Interestingly, two researchers categorised under "Sound Studies" consider podcast production in their own protocols. This categorisation, or indexing, perhaps validates my early reluctance to share it publicly, as again, fixity is instituted through the index. The original "tentative" protocol (the word "tentative" is taken out by the platform editor on the website) was intended as a model that can work, change, reduce, expand, in a range of research practices that involves listening to others and to recordings of others, involving a consideration of circumstance as well as agency ("How did I access this recording?" "Why am I talking to this person?").

Given that so much of “partitioned listening” as a methodological framework is centred on listening with, alongside, others across time and space, while also engaging in an approach of “co-citizenship”²³, ‘reliability’ and ‘legitimacy’ are not my primary goals. Rather, I highlight the infallibility, the instability, that listening necessarily involves within and through the archive. This also acknowledged by the project:

There is an intrinsic paradox in our aim to organise the unrepeatable and contingent practice of listening into protocols, which are frameworks for ensuring repeatability and reliability. Protocols by their very nature reduce processes into articulable formulas and steps. Sound’s knowledge when it is not reduced to data and semantic reference, refuses such an organisation.²⁴

As philosopher, composer and LxDii lead researcher Salomé Voegelin writes, “it is not the certainty of each discipline that allows transversality, but the disciplines’ ephemeral in-between, which grants access to their interdependencies and lends a (thinking) device for an entangled working, from the relational logic of sound.” (Voegelin et al. 2022, 231) Theories of listening that focus on the relationship between sound and the medium of sound – or as in the recent ontological turn in sound studies, the relationship between sound and one’s reception of it – can still, as Marie Thompson writes, “ignore sound’s relationship to the social world,” (Thompson 2017, 278) keeping listening’s political possibility separated from the means of its own (relational) production. In sound studies in particular, there remains a need for a re-historicisation and re-orienting of the discipline’s own attachments to legitimacy as a science that assumes individual expertise. Thompson argues that the disciplinary “separation of auditory culture and sound studies thus marks a distinction between ‘narrowband’ and ‘broadband’ interests: where the former prioritises situated knowledges, practices and histories, the latter is interested in the foundational, the abstract and the general.” (ibid, 270) This is revealing of the disciplinary anxieties that listening to other people in scholarship produces. As composer and professor Cathy Lane states in her audio paper,

²³ “Asking “what is an archive?” with a Palestinian companion is part of my attempt to make our actions—his in 1948, mine today—coincide in space and time, even though he is still forced to live outside of the body politic of which I am a part.” (Azoulay 2019, 166)

²⁴ Listening Across Disciplines <https://www.listeningacrossdisciplines.net/protocols/> Accessed November 30, 2022.

“in sound studies we do so much listening: to the environment, to other species, to objects, to other forms of matter. But so little of that listening is to people.” (Lane, 2017)

Voegelin writes that listening’s power lies in “show[ing] us the world in its invisibility: in the unseen movements beneath its visual organization that allow us to see its mechanism, its dynamic and structure, and the investment of its agency.” (Voegelin 2014, 3) Investigating sound’s mechanism and agency is to try and understand how it works or how it labours, to “visibilize” the conditions that sustain it, while also addressing a very real lack in methods for listening, in the case of this research context, to people, be it on the recording or on or off the record. This means our questions need to go beyond aesthetic and semantic, at the same time treating these aspects as ethical forces. This is also important in terms of addressing what Thompson calls a “modest white aurality” in sonic philosophy, which “amplifies Eurological sound art and, in the process, muffles other sonic practices; it amplifies dualisms of nature/culture, matter/meaning, real/representation, sound art/music and muffles boundary work; all the while ‘invisibilizing’ its own constitutive presence in hearing the ontological conditions of sound-itself.” (Thompson 2017, 277). This is echoed by the persisting white “monoculture” in experimental sound and music fields, as explored in an essay by *Wire* publisher Tony Herrington.²⁵

In my research context, listening necessarily crosses time and space, in the sense that when someone listens to a recorded interview between two people, relationality moves beyond the prescribed dialogic form, allowing history to cross into other time-spaces; another dimension perhaps. There is much written in oral history theory on listening within the oral history interview itself (see Abrams, 2016; Thompson & Bornat, 2017) and on the curation of the recordings for the online/offline archive (Boyd, 2016; Mackay, 2007). However, there is very little work on the expectations of listening to testimony after it becomes what can arguably be described as an “artefact”. At the same time, emergent research on listening to archives, particularly colonial ethnographic recordings, provides more speculative and embodied insights into archival listening.

²⁵ Tony Herrington, “White out! Tony Herrington calls time on the monoculture that is the experimental sound and music industry”. July 2020. <https://www.thewire.co.uk/in-writing/essays/white-out-tony-herrington>.

Cultural scientist Anette Hoffmann has for example documented the impact of close listening to colonial acoustic archives in Germany that are under studied outside of ethnolinguistics and ethnomusicology, disciplines deeply rooted in colonial knowledge production and extractive cultural practices that figure recordings as “collectible, dissectible, reproducible, stable” (Hoffmann & Mnkaya 2015, 158). This close listening “makes audible that archived sound files at times speak in ways that are contrapuntal to the object status attributed to them by the recordists and in archival documentation.” (Hoffmann 2015, 3) The recordings of colonized subjects, or the “disembodied voices” that she listens to are “much like ethnographic objects in the museum, stored in a way that disconnected them from a body of knowledge, or theorising, or poetry (or all of these).” (ibid, 7)

The Phonogramm-Archiv and the Lautarchiv, which hold recordings of colonial subjects used for human zoos and colonial prisoners of war, Whereas the Phonogramm-Archiv utilised colonial networks to commission missionaries, travellers and researchers for recording in the colonies, “ethnographic work on the Phonographische Kommission [the recordings of which are held in the Lautarchiv] capitalised on the opportunity of the presence of POWs in German POW camps, especially of the colonial soldiers of the Triple Entente, and the captives’ subaltern position in the camps.” (ibid, 144) This allows the authors to trace a similar “set of moves and strategies made possible by the politics and Orientalist forms of knowledge production, of European imperial states.” (ibid, 145) Eschewing the recovery of narrative or subjective agency, the identities of the speakers – the sound sources – remain hidden, and so: “the gap is unsettling (is it real?), and since voice is indexical to the existence and a former physical presence of a person, we, as listener wished for the absent (indexical) complementary: an image. Or at least for an account of the person who left the trace.” (ibid, 142)

Considering research that listens to archives of recordings of people held in situations of incarceration, one cannot help consider such incarceration as part and parcel of the colonial archive’s condition. The “gaps” – created out of the sound archive’s partitioning of the subject from their own subjecthood – echo Asif’s assertion that the colonial archive “renders history as lack,” while Partition’s memory turn delivers the

human subject as “a free-floating agent disconnected from the realm of ‘politics’.” (Kaur, 2017) It is through a situated listening that maybe other channels become accessible out of these enforced and violent separations. Singer and researcher Moushumi Bhowmik focuses on two archival recordings: one of a man, Keramat Ali from Mysensingh, Bengal, held at the POW Halfmoon archive in Berlin, and the 1934 recordings of two men by Dutch ethnomusicologist Arnold Bake around Bengal. Bhowmik, an artist and field recordist with the long-running project The Travelling Archive²⁶, expresses a familiarity with Bake through his recordings and the places in which he recorded. At the British Library in London, where his recordings are held, she attempts to listen to the “‘uncatchable’ that the phonograph tried to catch and preserve”. (Bhowmik 2021, 1001) Here the colonial acousmètre is extended through her own subjectivation:

Listening is not just about listening to the sound of a specific recording; when I know the *where* and *how* of a recording, when I am familiar with other sounds that surround a recording, then all that knowledge transforms my listening, and I can see the sailors and stokers huddled around this big and friendly white man with a machine and a lovely smile, and who could speak Bangla. I can feel the heat in the aft, the sweat on the stoker’s face, the grime in the oilman’s hands. There was hardship on the ship, but life was hard back at home too. They were sailing away from home, but they were sailing with a piece of home in their hearts. (ibid, 1013)

Here, the indexical pursuits of archival listening make way for more embodied, speculative approaches. Bhowmik’s “critical proximity”, to use artist-filmmaker Onyeka Igwe’s term, unleashes new political and methodological understandings of how to come close to the “artefactualised” voices of the past while remaining aware of the condition in which they were produced.

3.2 ‘Re-existence’

Having reached gradual legitimacy in the west since 1948 – with the institution of the Columbia Centre for Oral History Research in New York – and since the 1960s in the UK with the growth in social “histories from below” (Thompson & Bornat, 2017 3-5), oral

²⁶ *Travelling Archive*, <https://www.thetravellingarchive.org/>. Accessed 30 November 2022.

history is now undergoing critique because of its onus on individualism. “Most eurocentric oral history” according to oral historian Hilary Francis in a collectively written paper, is rooted in “extreme individualist approaches,” (Francis et al. 2021, 265) structured by the historian-narrator dynamic within the standard interview – closing down oral history to other forms of listening, speaking and bearing witness. In the South Asian context, this oral turn has developed since the late 1990s as influenced by subaltern studies to a degree, but largely through the Holocaust paradigms of oral history and memory work, as detailed in Chapter One.

The issue of “decolonising” oral history is grounded in unlearning temporal separation too. A uniting factor in this work is a refusal of closure of past injustices, or rather, emphasising the effects that past injustices still have on present socio-economic life. Insights from a collaborative (mainly online) project in 2019 between researchers and activists in the UK and Ecuador provide key perspectives on this disciplinary shift in the Global South. “Accompanying Afro-Ecuadorian women living in the province of Esmeraldas as they interrogated and articulated their history and heritage,” (Francis et al 2021) the project – delayed by Covid-19 – produced a wide-ranging conversation between all participants on oral history’s “decolonisation”. Researcher Sofia Zaragocin writes that the project recognised that “the oral history of Black Afro-descendant communities [was] inseparable from a connection to place and territory”, which necessitated a greater investment in “a school of Latin American decolonial thought that sees communities’ struggles for land rights as the common factor that shapes their different ways of life.” With each step of the process “debated, discussed and agreed by consensus”, the participants “distanced [them]selves from oral history as ethnography and moved towards a dialogue between oral history and the work of *re-existencia*.” (ibid, 272/3)

This idea of *re-existencia* differs from the “restorative” listening that seeks to reconstruct lost pasts that is increasingly, in the case of Partition’s oral turn, disconnected from the politics of the present. Juana Francis Bone, of the art and activist collective Mujeres de Asfalto, says on participating in the project:

We share painful memories that keep being repeated, and I’m not sure we will

heal them in 100 or 400 years. This burden has not allowed us to grow as we should. We are in the middle of a decade that hurts because so many of us die because of the government's neglect. At times like this, I would say that collective memory sustains us. I'm here in Esmeraldas and yesterday we drove through most districts. The level of poverty you see; people have no opportunities, and this deficit is also a painful burden, of exclusion. But at least you have the memory of resistance, you know that you can free yourself and others, because the history of Esmeraldas is not about enslaved Black people, but precisely the opposite, it was a territory of free people. That's the motor for thinking about a different society. (ibid, 270)

This refusal of, but engagement with, oral history – without marking a distinction between theory and praxis, past and present – places displacement and deterritorialisation at the heart of (collective) testimonial labour. This entails a resituating of oneself across disciplinary separations, and forging new ways out of them – a central desire for *Partitioned Listening* as a body of creative work, that within its limited scope addresses various modes of listening. Although I am not able to speak about Indigenous and Black oral community cultures, it is clear that historical injustices persist in the present because certain types of knowledge, through certain models of listening and certain networks of transmission, are blocked and delegitimised by disciplinary consensus that ignores present urgencies.

So what happens when we try and train our listening in other ways, even beyond the noise around and outside of the recording, accounting for “exhortations to eat” (Raychaudhuri 2019, 12) but also incomprehensible noises, to other languages and other decibels, to the many pauses, distortions, vibrations and contradictions in the story we are listening to: and that are present in our own listening? If my tentative protocol does “retain critical and creative vibrancy”, it is through a questioning of my own position – however it is categorised – away from certain assumptions of the restorative potential of listening as method.

3.3 The ‘sonic’ text

In McKittrick’s methodological terms described further in this section, “flipping the script” (2021, 170) means in this research context to consider listening with Partition as

also listening without: without access to voices, or the “other side”, or archives, or burned records, or to the lost and silenced. After all, without all these things history can and does still proliferate. In an audio track featuring a conversation about her book *Australianama: The South Asian Odyssey in Australia* (2018), that also interweaves songs and poetry in multiple languages, historian Samia Khatun speaks of the responsibility of the Anglophonic history book in suppressing other ways of knowing. In her own work of imperial history, the discovery in a mosque in a remote Australian mining town of a Bengali text of Sufi poetry (“Kasasol Ambia”, or Qisas al-Anbiya in commonly transliterated Arabic) that was mislabelled as a Quran led her to other ways of knowing, and crucially, hearing:

“The thing that was exquisite about this text was it was unlike any other written history book that I had ever come across because it was meant to be performed. So, it was poetry, um, it was in verse form, and every single section starts with the beat um or the particular pattern in which you’re supposed to perform it. So it’s a text that’s supposed to be performed to large groups of people, so it’s actually a text that is meant to be encountered through sound. So the majority of people are going to hear these verses of poetry and they then will see the incredible exquisite imagery. What really blew my mind was this particular technology of being able to *hear* poetry and then *see* imagery, it’s as technical and specific as film today. And you know we’ve kind of lost the literacy or we might think we’ve lost the literacy, but I guess as I started to read the book, as I started to sink in to its imagery, I started to see how this sense of hearing, that sense of comprehension, that sense of understanding stories, narratives from the past is completely and utterly accessible to us. It’s actually an illusion that those things are gone. They are completely within us, they live within us, you just have to focus in upon this particular strategy of accessing the past, um, you know. And it helps if you have a Sufi text that’s going to give you a step by step guide almost how to do it!” [sic] (A Thousand Channels, 2021a)

Dubey writes of the state of memory studies in South Asia that “even with the vast methodological expanse available within the field, there exists a certain predominance and imperialism of Western or European frames.” (Dubey 2021, 522) These frames include the models and vocabularies imposed by Holocaust studies; justifications for nationalism, particularly concerning Bangladesh and histories of 1971; and, as critiqued in Chapter One, the “catharsis and closure” that Partition testimonies supposedly provide. (ibid) I would add another Western frame is the primacy of written, English text – an ironic claim for this research to make, but it must be made nonetheless, particular given Khatun’s call for stories that “cross the partitions between

sleep and waking, rousing the wild, spectacular possibilities for all else that human existence is – beyond the narrow forms of life cultivated by the matrix of colonial-modern institutions.” (Khatun 2018, 182)

Given that oral historians – even from the Global South – make so much about speaking, silence and listening, the centrality and focus on text-oriented outcomes then seem at odds with this concern, silencing the (sonic) relations of those called upon to witness history, limiting the engagement with what researcher and journalist Louise Marshall describes as their “invisible and unsounded worlds”. (Marshall 2018; 94) Inspired by oral historian Svetlana Alexievich’s oral histories of Soviet women who participated in the first world war, Marshall conceives the idea of a “sonic artefact” through her interview research with under-represented western women composers. For her this artefact is actualised through the sonority of the exchange:

In privileging the sonority of my meetings with my five composers, I have been led to theorise in greater depth the sonic nature of that encounter and how it – properly theorised in terms of the sonic artefact – might yield a greater understanding of what occurs in an encounter. This methodological bundle points to the fact that no interview method can ever be hermetic. Its boundaries are always porous, because people are porous in terms of their psychic formation and in relation to what psychoanalyst Edith Lecourt identifies as a sonic identity, in which a person owns and recognises their own boundaries through the existence of sonorous phenomena. (Marshall, 2018)

Sonority here is more than a phenomenon received, but mutually encountered and co-created, “porous”. This insight allies with the first thing that should make oral history different, according to Alessandro Portelli, which “tells us less about *events* than about their *meaning*”. (Portelli 1991, 50) Listening to persecuted Black union workers in Harlan County, Kentucky, USA and striking factory workers in Terni, Italy, his work ‘corroborates’ speech and radical history through sound, more than just interview practices, which as Marshall argues are never hermetic. From the velocity and rhythm of speech to dialect and intonation, Portelli argues that speech moves language beyond the “segmentary traits (graphemes, syllables, words, and sentences)” (ibid) of writing. Oral history can therefore be a counter-point to middle-class speech (“which imitates the “monotone of writing” (ibid, 51)) as well as a way to co-produce knowledge. His

concerns with orality and time, the “ratio between the duration of the events described and the duration of that narration” (Portelli in Perks & Thomson, 2016, 51) then create a critical space in which to explore the temporal relationships produced when sound meets the archive, as explored in 2.3. As detailed in my ‘vocabulary’ listed on the Platform for Listening Protocols and Vocabularies, I (tentatively) define “artefact” in the context of my research as a voice or voices recorded deemed to be a source of knowledge that should live on, like any physical artefact in a museum, library or archive. Like all artefacts, speech becomes so out of power dynamics and temporal urgencies (here we can consider the importance given to Partition on its big ‘5’ or ‘0’ ending anniversaries, or the idea that “time is running out” to hear survivor stories), which work to ascribe archival value that endures temporally. In an oral narrative, following Portelli, several years can be covered in a matter of minutes, whereby a single moment can be devoted many interviews over several days in its retelling. This contrasts with the given-ness of archival time lines which decide that time can and does run out – and when it does, history is delivered.

Portelli admits that the control of the interview still lays firmly in the hands of the oral historian, who chooses who to interview, the questions to ask them, and the interpretation they give to the answers. Crucially, the representation of this story is singularly authored, as written text. The transcription – or to use Hyder’s formulation, “transcreation” [1.1] of history into text can then help to open the story up to other knowledge paradigms. The use in my audio research of transcription and indexing is reflective of their role and functions in aural archives. Francis Good, former head of the Oral History Unit at the Northern Territory Archives Service in Darwin, Australia, has illuminated in detail the strategies, methods and techniques involved in oral history transcription, which vary wildly. She highlights two principle concerns that arise: “the loss of ‘information’ by selective editing of language used by interviewees, and the fear that the distinction between primary and secondary sources is muddled or simply ignored.” (Good 2016, 459) Her first concern is concerned with techniques; cutting out words like ‘like’, ‘you know’, ‘of course’; correcting the interviewee’s grammar; erasing repetitions. The imperative of readability in this case has the effect of side-lining the audibility of the interview. This follows oral historian and transcription critic Katie

Moore views on the ‘verbatim’ transcript, where “pauses, hesitations, part- and whole-word repetitions, frequent exclamations such as ‘all right’, ‘really’, etc. are all fertile ground for analysis and potentially valuable inference of meaning.” (ibid)

Good’s second principle concern brings up the idea of a (hierarchical) separation between “primary and secondary sources”, which to “muddy” suggests a renouncement of legitimacy and reliability, ultimately undermining oral history’s own credibility. As the oral historian Michael Frisch critiques, the “path-defining conventions” of oral history that paradoxically set it apart from standard historical research has also involved “ignoring and avoiding the oral dimensions that defines and names the field itself.” (Frisch 2008, 221-2) Extending Frisch’s argument that “cultural assumptions” about oral history research and practice “are not changing nearly as fast as are the tools that alter our relationship to audio and video data,” (ibid, 232), Alexander Freund points out that researchers had largely been “reluctant to use other people’s interviews” and seldom take the time to listen to them (Freund 2009, 26). This has created a blind spot within oral history methodologies to deal with the complexities of use, re-use, interpretation and re-interpretation – which again would involve a lot of labour-intensive listening, as well as an ethical repositioning towards these ‘sonic’ texts.

The oral historian Joanna Bornat, who writes of her experiences re-using interviews of South Asian elders in Australia for a research project in 2000, states that the original interviewees “had given their interviews in good faith to help illustrate the history of geriatric medicine. We were interested in those accounts but were searching the data in order to make a new set of interpretations. Would [Margot Jeffrey, the original oral historian’s] interviewees have been happy to participate if they had been aware that we were seeking to problematise their worldviews with an investigation that considered cultural difference, even racial prejudice?” (Bornat 2013, 31) These complexities led to them involving Jeffrey and approaching a ‘stakeholder’ model of archiving that built in data and analysis-sharing into the process from the beginning.

The complexities that arise from re-using audio material echo the notion of the remix in sound or music practice. The remix can be viewed as a way to muddy and ignore value categories in (archival, oral historical) knowledge production – adjoining content and

interpretation, rather than separating them. The input of McKittrick and her methods of “remix and mash up” that reconfigure text on the page, “within the story, and in extant of the story” is then central to partitioned listening. (McKittrick 2021, 170) This remixing and mashing up – sonic endeavours, but not only – interrupts and reimagines and re-inscribes new stories by:

- inventing with found objects;
- breaking free of old associations;
- engendering new contexts from old histories;
- flipping the script;
- learning to speak in new forms;
- noticing how the sound of thought becomes legible;
- producing work at the edge of new meanings;
- taking an idea and folding it in on itself.²⁷

Through McKittrick’s consideration of the discipline of human geography, where “the knowledge that is documented and collected and listed is tied to a legacy of colonialism, extraction, and cataloguing,” (ibid, 179) we can think about how Partition is disciplined by archival categorisations of testimony, bearing witness to violence, displacement and trauma through many sources, that stay silent in many languages, across archival and historical geographies riddled with loss and absence. (Re-)producing sonic contexts where boundaries (national, religious, identitarian, disciplinary) are overwhelming in their contra/dictions, an approach that leans on the remix and the mashup helps to undo some of these separations. In working with method-making through a consideration of process-driven research, one can “compulsively move with curiosity (even in frustration) rather than applying a set of techniques to an object of study and generating unsurprising findings and outcomes.” (McKittrick 2021, 51)

In the spirit of the remix, this editing of language, the sampling of oral history, the transmutations between voice, listening and text can be uncovered. Jennifer Stoecker-Ackerman’s formulation of the “sonic colour line” via the 1845 memoir of

²⁷ McKittrick, *Dear Science...* (2021), 170.

former American slave Frederick Douglass, a celebrated work that was always intended to be read by white audiences, is a useful example. Arguing that race is mediated through aural signifiers as well as visual, that “the shift towards visual and written modes of knowledge increasingly marginalised sound as emotional, unstable and unpredictable — qualities long associated with blackness (and femaleness) — even as sound continued to perform significant labour for the dominant culture.” (Stoever-Ackerman 2011, 21) These issues relating to the transcription and transformation of subjugated voices, the “misfiring of translation between Enlightenment and colony.” (Spivak 2000, 313), have clear archival legacies. While listening in the archive, as Hoffmann & Mnyaka write, “different, culturally specific modes of storing converge and ‘overwrite’ each other. In this way, story-ing as a practice to envelope historiology may enter the archive.” (Hoffmann & Mnyaka, 2015)

Conversely, we can think about the “sonic text”, away from modest white aurality, as a mode of overwriting standard modes of historical storage. In her analysis, Stoever builds on the work of, among others, Fred Moten and Elisabeth Alexander, compared Douglass’s representation of his Aunt Hester’s screams from physical abuse with the 1991 footage of the beating of black motorist Rodney King by four LAPD officers that was made public. This juxtaposition allow us to see how certain “sonic colour lines” are drawn – the 1991 footage “was deliberately ‘stripped of a soundtrack’ before being shown to the all-white jury.” (Alexander 1994, 98 in Stoever-Ackerman 2011, 21), while the phonography of Aunt Hester’s screams in *Narrative...* are amplified “through and beyond the viscosity of the written word.” (ibid, 20) Here, the parameters of legibility – protecting or not protecting white “ears” from Black pain – provides clues into how sonic knowledge becomes through text, hegemonically and rebelliously.

3.4 Illegibility

The usefulness of the idea of the “sonic text” to research grounded in listening has precedents in the feminist/oral history, fictive and post-memory practices discussed in Chapter One. Labouring through silences and erasures in order to understand how the story is *restored* brings up the dilemma of legibility, complicated further by the

recognition that I cannot assume that my listening – to testimony, to people – is the “right” type of legible. Rather, partitioned listening as a methodological framework assumes that what I am listening to is always relational, un-fixable, and unstable, so a listening that is a result of a co-production of meaning that extends beyond the rational or the semantic, but that still must submit to certain conditions. In the limit case of Partition, these might include the labours surrounding the production of the figure of the subjugated woman, or the mapping of memories of the communal riot – labour subjected to the reverberations of *time*, felt all the time, through processes of repetition.

Although the three transmissions presented in the following three chapters rely much on narrative – text scripted and read aloud – I follow Kabir’s proposal, discussed in 1.4, of also centring non-narrative (or “illegible”) forms in the study of “Partition effects”. (Kabir 2014, 26) Her examination of the use of written script, “both readable and unreadable” (Kabir 2009, 487) within Pakistani visual arts in public spaces shows how it “has borne the weight of pre-colonial hierarchies, colonial modernisation, anti-colonial identity politics, and post-colonial struggles over that layered inheritance.” (ibid, 488) Illegibility here is not only, and much more than, a Partition issue, but also an issue of post-colonized language.

The artwork entitled *Mera ghar* (‘My Home’) (2009) by formerly Karachi-based artist Huma Mulji was part of the Indo-Pak public art project *Aar-paar* (‘Crossing Borders’). Plastered over the city’s Three Swords monument, the posters incorporated the phrase “mera ghar” in 17 different scripts, representing the written forms of languages historically spoken in Karachi including Gujarati, Kutchi, Sindhi and Urdu. As Kabir writes, “this proliferation of scripts at the margins of representation visualises the “‘broken links’ that ‘fascinate’ [the artist], precisely because they are unreadable to her generation. When spoken, however, their versions of mera ghar all yield more or less the same sound and are thus comprehensible across a spectrum of linguistic communities.” (Kabir 2009, 486)

Like the perceived “impossibility” of the demand for a Partition museum a decade ago as discussed in 2.1, it is perhaps impossible today to imagine a cross-border public

art project between India and Pakistan. This borderisation is particularly marked by continual wars on language. As well as the Urduification enforced on East Pakistan and the resistance of the Bangla language movement that preceded the independence of Bangladesh in 1971, languages within West Pakistan's borders were immediately delegitimised in 1947 when Urdu and English were made the national languages. Sindhi, Balochi, Keraiki, Punjabi, Brahui, Pashto, Hindko and Pothwari and Pahari, and other derivations and dialects, were forever rendered secondary, not legible by or for the new nation state. On the other side of the Radcliffe Line, the contemporary Hinduisation of India has in recent times rendered Urdu – most notably in its famous literary and spiritual home, the capital city Delhi – politically and socially unviable.²⁸

As historian Ayesha Jalal puts it, “the role of language as principal site of differential identity formation in north India and the Punjab has been more readily acknowledged than satisfactorily delineated.” (Jalal 2001, 86) Considering the role of languages, lost and found, buried and escaped, re-written and re-sounded, Kabir turns to Huma Mulji's work, *Mera ghar* as a gestural “remediation” of script – an attempt, as Kabir describes it, to figure out “an inheritance of loss barely understood”. (Kabir 2009, 498) The question of language in my audio research is a fraught one – as an “Urdu-speaking” Pakistani who does not speak Urdu fluently, as a British citizen and English “native speaker”, my ability to “decolonise” Partition's condition through its resurgent archival turn is incredibly limited. At the same time, my access to colonial forms, norms and processes of knowledge production offers ways into testimony in the wake of colonial violence in the neocolonial present, particularly in pursuing understandings, following McKittrick again, of “how the sound of thought becomes legible”.

Another artwork that illuminates these questions of legibility is Shahana Rajani's and Sonja Schönberger's audiowalk, *I would always dream of my house – stories of displacement* (2016).²⁹ The artists – Pakistani and German respectively – write that:

²⁸ Zoya Mateen, “Why Urdu language draws ire of India's right-wing”, *BBC*, May 16, 2022. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-61199753>.

²⁹ *Goethe-Institut Pakistan*, “Audiowalk–Stories of Displacement” <https://www.goethe.de/ins/pk/en/kul/mag/20807676.html>. Accessed 30 November 2022

“Long before meeting in Karachi in 2015, both our artistic practices focused on uncovering the human dimensions of war and violence. We became interested in the escape and expulsion stories of our grandparents’ generation, to make visible how experiences of war continue to cast their shadow on the present. The collecting of oral narratives became our way to document and understand experiences of dislocation, of suffering and trauma, of painful regret and nostalgia for loss of home.” (Rajani & Schöberger, 2016)

While Schönberger interviewed people in the US and Germany who lived through the second world war and the Holocaust, Rajani collected stories of refugees who had arrived during the 1947 Partition in Pakistan’s biggest city and first capital. In Berlin, the audiowalk took place in HAU 2 with a recommended route towards the Elise-Tilse Park. In Karachi the audiowalk took place at Quaid’s Mazar, the tomb where the first leader of Pakistan (Muhammad Ali Jinnah, also known in the country as Quaid-e-Azam, or ‘great leader’) is buried. Until 1958, the site of the mausoleum was home to Karachi’s largest informal refugee settlement, who were then displaced in order for it to be built.

From her side, Rajani did not choose Partition as her first subject for the audiowalk. She had originally proposed to Goethe-Institut Pakistan, who funded the project, to conduct interviews with people in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, a former British colonial frontier zone with Afghanistan and strategic site in the imperial games of the 19th century. Since 2001 this zone has been one of the main theatres of the “war on terror”, fixed as a site of perpetual militancy. This has caused the internal displacement of millions, with thousands of civilians disappeared or killed because of drone strikes in the region, which started in 2004 with relative impunity and ended officially in 2018. As Rajani told me during a Skype conversation in July 2017, this was far too controversial a topic, so she suggested working those displaced from the 1971 Bangladesh War instead – an idea that was also vetoed. Partition it had to be. As she said to me, “because we’re all connected to Partition, it feels [comparatively] easier to talk to people about it.”³⁰

The audiowalk was conducted simultaneously on the same day in both Berlin and Karachi. The audience, wearing headphones attached to mp3 players, could listen to

³⁰ Shahana Rajani, interviewed by author, Zoom, July 13, 2017.

testimonies in English, Urdu or German. The four tracks – an hour long in total – made clear dispossession’s long legacies, the afterlives of the “momentary ruptures” that create lasting displacement and deterritorialisation. Shahana told me that working-class people and migrants in particular were still living through Partition, because those who had lived in Quaidabad when the shrine to Muhammad Ali Jinnah was built on its grounds were removed far away, cut off from their home yet again. The sad irony is that the creation of this site for the departed “father” of Pakistan left many of his new citizens without a place to live.

Reading the (English) transcription and listening to the (Urdu) recording of one interview conducted with Hamid Bano, a person displaced to the Korangi refugee camp (other interviewees were sent to Milar; both are miles away from Quaidabad), I was struck by the emotional and linguistic disconnection I felt between the two formats, particularly towards the end of the interview:

“So many leaders have come and gone over the decades, they all heard our story, but no one did anything about it. Just kept shuffling our homes. When a persons heart pains, shouldnt they speak up? And those who hear these voices, shouldnt [sic] they be responsible to do something in return? To have empathy, to share our pain, help us out. Arent we all human beings?

You know I am going blind these days, but I don’t mind it. I have seen too much in this world anyways. As my vision darkens, I sit inside all day, close my eyes and recall the face of my mother. The softness of her eyes – I can picture it so clearly. I keep picturing my brothers and sisters in the field with me, all of us playing together. I imagine another parallel life, all that could have been had I not left Narnaul, had my family not been killed, had Partition not happened. I can go on hours without opening my eyes. That is why I know I will be okay when I go blind.

I would tell you more but my head is spinning now. You have to excuse me.”³¹

I was also struck by the visceral anger and pain expressed by Bano in the recording, stripped of that familiar sense of nostalgia common to the kinds of interviews publicly shared by the Citizen’s Archive of Pakistan [Chapter Three] and the 1947

³¹ Hamida Bano interviewed by Shahana Rajani and Anam Soomro in Korangi, Sindh, Pakistan, in December 2015. Courtesy of the artists

Partition Archive [Chapter Four], where politics are not mentioned. Here, the difference between text and speech is in tonality, not only lexicality. As AM Kanngiesser writes:

Tone is a trickster of speech; the intervention of intonation may contradict or subvert the words spoken, it can express unexpected or seemingly unwarranted sarcasm, humour, irony, irritation, joy. Like accent, intonation can be codified, its contribution to the meaning of what is said can be picked up by the listener and absorbed into the dialogic exchange. The intonation of the utterance can act powerfully to shape the rhythm of communication, and the relations of cooperation, power and alliance between speakers. (Kanngiesser 2012, 342)

Despite landing on Partition as a third and final choice for the project, almost begrudgingly, Rajani said it was still a transformative experience – her interviews led her to understand Partition’s enduring marks on present-day communities outside of the highly nationalist accounts of independence in Pakistan.

One of the tracks in the audiowalk, which included four testimonies played on loop, involved the interview transcripts being translated and transformed into scripts, re-narrated for the piece by hired actors, mostly young. Listening to the stories of elderly Muslim refugees read aloud in German-accented English felt uncomfortable to the artist, although she was unsure why. It is at this perhaps minor point of discomfort that we can pinpoint an opening, a critical possibility, that finds other ways to not just simply do away with translation or writing altogether, but to disrupt the “hegemonic listening” (Dhawan 2012) that these processes must succumb to – so entering the discomfort, acknowledging the disconnect, which become clearly audible. This processing, re-mediation through sound, is where the potential of audio research – a multi-modal reading, writing, listening, translating, editing, sounding, re-sounding – lies.

This multi-modal approach is also informed by a conscious decision to not be overly concerned with audio production whose main aim is to “sound good”. Producing sound that sounds good necessitates quiet spaces, expensive equipment, professional training, and crucially, access and time. Given that the three transmissions rely to a great degree on “unofficial” sound sources – such as internet rips and downloads or iPhone recordings – as well as decayed archival tapes, conversations in noisy

environments, etc., I have yielded to the materiality and less than perfect nature of the sounds, manipulating them more through narration than ‘mastering’, in both the technical and general meanings of the term. This evokes Raychaudhuri’s list of intrusions – “repeated exhortations to eat, traffic noises, and the ubiquitous fan” – that speak to what it means to record in tricky sonic environments, particularly in the Global South. Krogh Groth and Samson write:

in the audio paper, sounds and soundscapes become frameworks in which language performs. Recorded sonic environments, the aesthetics and materiality, serve as a contextual situation in addition to the tone, physicality and timbre of the recorded voice. Such contexts support the narration or operate on their own, in contradiction to the presented statements and arguments. (Krogh Groth & Samson, 2017)

McKittrick’s call to invent “with found objects” can be thought through my audio research presented in the form of the three transmissions, sonic spaces “in which language performs”, be it through songs on YouTube; decayed tapes from colonial archives; digitally compressed files; Internet Archive, etc. *‘You trust your memories?’* [4.2] and *We shall witness* [5.2] were produced during the peak of the pandemic lockdown in 2020, with *I hear (colonial) voices* [6.2] produced during a time of limited access to physical archives in 2021. The nature of the audio material that was then at my disposal – the material on my phone, the soundfiles in my hard drive – then came into question: of authenticity, credibility and archivability.

3.5 Chapter conclusion

This chapter has introduced partitioned listening as a methodology and creative practice through the exploration of four broad ideas: evidencing listening, “re-existence”, the sonic text and illegibility. I investigated the challenges and opportunities of trying to shape or unshape listening as a “multi-modal” research methodology, relying on critical insights from sound studies, oral history, aural archival research and the arts. The openings created from listening and reading across disciplines then sets up my practice of audio research – working with sound and text together – developed as an endeavour that is inventive, re-inscriptive and re-mediative.

This proposition opens up Partition to other methodological paradigms, beyond individualism, cultural trauma and “eventness”. In their work of “unsettling” visual anthropology in higher education in particular, Ethiraj Gabriel Dattatreyan and Isaac Marrero-Guillamón write of the ways in which they “foreground the different ways (or “modes”) in which meaning and sense are produced in the classroom and in conversation with visual anthropology’s archive.” (Dattatreyan and Marrero-Guillamón 2021, 269) The strategies of disruption and redirection they unpack “include sonic displacements, figure-background reversals, and redactions,” beginning with “a close engagement with modes of perception rather than relying on rational critique.” (ibid) We can think back to Butalia’s question, highlighted in Chapter One – how do we get a sense of the past, rather than an account of it? It is in this sensing that we can trouble the rationality that drives accounts of Partition, particularly through its archives and what they deem to count as “history”.

Destabilising the terms of listening can therefore help to move away from merely the healing and closure testimony provides, and the ethical validation of those who archive, display, listen to these stories. Noting how such paradigms of witnessing have emerged in Chapter One, here we can view the politics of memory as inseparable from the disciplinary attachments and histories in which it flows. This is particularly relevant to the study of “restorative” testimony, which provides supposed healing, closure and authentication not only for the witness, but also increasingly for witnesses of witness. This has revealed a politics of listening that cannot be separated from the disciplinary attachments and colonized histories in which it sits, and so entails a refusal of the position of the “historian who arrives after the events are over, that is, after the violence was made into part of the sealed past, dissociated in time and space from where we are.” (Azoulay 2019, 286)

Though working with this complex and heavily-themed topic through multiple modes produces a kind of disciplinary anxiety – is this sound art? Is this journalism? Is this oral history? – a politics of invention can then emerge, “learning to speak in new forms”, or “breaking free of old associations”. Given the history of western disciplinary

hesitations to listen in other (academic, non-scientific, non-western) languages, partitioned listening also provokes the production of what Savransky calls “alter-realism”, that is, a “realism that takes the risk of asserting the reality of what is deemed improbable, implausible, marginalised, suppressed, irrelevant, even scandalous, and seeks to draw out its possible implications for the transformation of what is considered credible, reliable and serious.” (Savransky 2017, 22) Sensing, as an in-credible, unreliable tactic, has proven to be a transformative tool for the transmissions and encounters detailed in the following three chapters.

Chapter Four:

'You trust your memories?'

4.1 Introduction

The iPhone is on an armrest between us, the mic end pointing towards him. He sees me tap record – I think he does anyway. The noise of dinner prep and the kids and the clamour are overwhelming and overwhelmingly familiar. My khala's calls to the table overpower nana abu's quiet voice, his quiet laugh. When he starts to talk about Allahabad in 1948, I know we won't have enough time.

The “transmissions” presented in the following three chapters are intended as an integral part of the thesis rather than just listening “breaks”, in some way evidencing my listening, an issue discussed in section 3.1. The inclusion of these transmissions in this thesis, with sound and text and voice and time all in relation, has aided the evaluation of Partition's complex “condition” that necessitates working within a “politics of indeterminacy, or a politics without guarantee.” (Nagar, 2014, 13)

While working on the transmissions presented in the next three chapters, it has become clear that looking out, or listening out, for Partition obliges considerations about listening in multiple directions and agencies: whose, where, why and when. Unstable listening, evidenced through interwoven dialogic and sonic artefacts, has become part of that process, through an approach to testimony as loosely definable

material, situating it more as a bearer of historical context and sonic time-space as well as artefactual content. This approach relates back to Schmidt's definition of testimony, discussed in 2.3, as holding twofold functions: epistemic and ethical. (Schmidt 2017, 259-60)

'You trust your memories?' came out of a working process which, rather than translating sounds into words and words into theory, made space for an unstable listening that does not adhere to the archive's fixing of time and space, as discussed in Chapter Two. It engages in a type of listening that is close and attentive, guided by questions, in some cases protocols, as outlined in 3.1, acknowledging Dhawan's assertion that in any case, discursive violence is "inevitable". (Dhawan 2016, 48) Invoking Shaina Anand's demarcation of the archive's limits – the "burning library" (Anand 2016, 81), the story (history) begins:

It's August 1947, and a fire is raging in Delhi. Much else is unfolding – Indian independence, the birth of Pakistan, Partition. This fire isn't engulfing mosques or temples, nor does it affect village homes or commercial bazaars.

It isn't the doing of mob rule, mob violence, communal violence, communal riots or Hindu-Muslim riots – although these official terms likely littered the many pages now curling up in flames. The bonfire of documents is so big that the smoke hangs over the city for days.

Evidence of 200 years of colonial rule is burning. (Tariq, 2020a)

‘You trust your memories?’

The transmission in the above link includes an audio track 27:19 in length and an accompanying written transcript. It is recommended to listen to and read this work on a desktop computer, with headphones.

4.3 Sounding shattered pasts

Partitioned Listening was originally conceived and produced in strange but also serendipitous circumstances. In lieu of an in-person presentation at the symposium “Sonic Continuum” at Nottingham Contemporary, UK, which was cancelled because of the pandemic lockdown in March 2020, I was instead commissioned to make two audio pieces for *Contemporary Journal 3*, the online iteration of its transformed public strand.³² Making the first two, in two separate lockdowns, became an exercise in listening through “the archive” while being far removed from it. Making several trips to several archives in Europe and Pakistan was not possible: rather, I had to make do with what I had and what I could source on my own.

In ‘*You trust your memories?*’, a few sonic narratives connected to Partition are heard, gathered from my own recordings and material taken from online archives, family members and friends, and an invited reader. The beginning and the ending of the BBC documentary “India: The Brightest Jewel”, originally aired in 1977, and a friend’s post-memorial “tour” of a gurdwara in Karachi, Pakistan, the site of a massacre in 1947 (recorded by myself in September 2019) were both sitting in my hard drive. I had also recorded my late grandfather’s account of what he witnessed during riots in Allahabad, India in 1948 on the same trip to Pakistan. Amid these sounds, a partial tale, littered with citations, is central to the piece: the deliberate destruction of the colonial record across the retreating British empire, starting with a bonfire of documents in Delhi in August 1947. A reading by Madhavi Menon of a fable she had written about Partition and Universalism, recorded on her phone in not-yet locked down Delhi, bookends this unstable story.

Shahana Rajani’s recorded tour of the remains of a gurdwara (Sikh place of worship) destroyed by a partition massacre in Karachi, Pakistan, has, in comparison to an account of gathering personal witness testimony detailed in the next section, the safety of access to speech. For Veena Das, whose work was discussed in 1.3, speech lies in the register of the everyday, negotiating violence all the time, and this is pertinent

³² “Sonic Continuum” *Nottingham Contemporary* <https://thecontemporaryjournal.org/strands/sonic-continuum>. Accessed November 30, 2022.

even when we as listeners have not directly experienced this violence. Das's consideration of the role that suffering and testimony play in the making of political community as well as history, and how people occupy the same place of devastation again and again, leads her to a conclusion – evoking again a multi-temporal situatedness – that “communities of resentment are much more likely to be created when the stance towards suffering is a prophetic one.” (Das 2006, 212)

Archival annihilation becomes a crucial prophecy in my story. I narrate the details of this destruction to enable speech to be considered as a “deceptive counterpoint” to this condition of erasure, drawing on Dhawan's ideas on hegemonic listening, discussed in 1.4. The clamour to collect Partition stories in the 1990s through feminist academic work [1.2], and later from the 2010s onwards in the archive as described in [2.1] followed long periods of “silence”. My narrative framing in *‘You trust your memories?’* suggests that this silence stems from the disappearance of historical records as much as it does from collective trauma.

Listening to her tour, it is clear that Rajani has given it several times before, the velocity of her speech indicating her reading from scripted notes. Early on, her voice brimming with facts, dates, other people's memories and her own, she is interrupted by the guardian of the building. The conversation that also introduces the three of us attending the tour – which switches to Urdu and is not transcribed – is left in the piece rather than edited out, revealing (to Urdu speakers, but also not) our positionality as listeners. This recording is not intended nor suitable for an archive because of its scripted nature, its lack of authentic personal witness, and its dearth of image and documentary evidence – archival conditions further discussed in the next section. Worlds of identitarian violence are carried through the story retold, but also the terms and tropes that are heard by us third-hand. Its intimate forms render unstable the dialogic categories thrown out in the story we are listening to – ‘riots’, the ‘mob’, ‘Hindu-Muslim violence’ as colonial tropes and terms have resonated elsewhere in the piece, non-vocally as well: the steam train rolling in, its hoots announcing British temporal regularity as a bearer of progress and modernity: the master's clock.

Referring to one oral history interview he conducted in India, Raychaudhuri speaks of the historical and cultural imaginaries of what he terms the “trainspace”. (Raychaudhuri 2019, 104) From colonial times until the horrors of Partition, “the image of a moving train, full of dead bodies is one that circulates widely through cultural texts of many different genres.” (ibid, 111) He speculates on the possibility that his interviewee’s own evocation of the trainspace in his oral memory was influenced by the image from the film *Gadar* (2001). (ibid, 110-13) This blurring of (oral) history and story is then heard – the hoot of the train that we hear near the beginning of ‘*You trust your memories?*’, a marker of progress, is in the end turned into a lament, illustrated by the narrator who intones: “It was perhaps ironic that the railways, which had helped to unite British India, now carried its people apart.” In the same clip, the thin voice of Lord Mountbatten, the Raj’s last viceroy, is heard, described as “charming”, before an outdated and incorrect estimate of Partition’s death count. These contra/dictions, left in transmission, accepts a colonial view of the past as legible, even charming, in a situation of instability and doubt; and so surface questions of our own relationship with legibility. This partitioned listening again centres the nature of this relationship between listening and history, of the parameters of trust that shift according to who is speaking, and what is sounding, and with whose image.

The title of the transmission, ‘*You trust your memories?*’ is a question I ask my maternal great-uncle, nana abu, within the piece. This link intentionally forces together personal memory and critical positioning, incorporating doubt, like the tentative listening protocoling discussed in 3.1. Given the time it has taken for personal memory, and oral history, to be taken seriously as an historical source, the cementing of trust – the “assurance” (Schmidt 2010, 259-60) of testimony – is integral to Partition’s historical recovery, through the cementing of particularity and individualism. As discussed in the Introduction, Menon’s theorization of particularity as universal sets up the idea of “difference” as undesirable. Her history of the Urdu language through Bengali novelist Rabisankar Bal’s 2014 book *Dozakhnama* provides insights into the main narrator of the novel’s incapacity to speak Urdu, and depends on a translator to understand the work of two of Urdu’s most prominent writers (Ghalib and Manto – see 1.4) who face off across time, space and realities. Ghalib and Manto’s longing across the

India-Pakistan border are indicators of the universal that cannot be ontologised by Partition. The enforced and ongoing schism of Hindi and Urdu, as mentioned in 3.2, belies the fact that they were previously “one” language, “Hindustani”. Urdu was a word first used in the 19th century to identify the language of Muslims, in parallel to their exile from Delhi after the 1857 mutiny. Again, the fictional register – rather than an etymological one – becomes important for partitioned listening: the creation of one language and one “nation” into two languages and two nations is for Menon a crisis of universality. “In a universal world... there is no room for a norm or an antinorm because of the universal impossibility of normativity. What stands in the way of fulfilling normativity is a stubborn queerness that insists instead on desire exceeding identity, crossings outnumbering borders, and particulars outweighing ontologies. (ibid, 136) This refusal of identity politics is necessary because “[i]f anything, the categorisation is the problem, not our challenging of it.” (ibid, 3)

This critique aligns with Azoulay’s critical formulations of the archive and its classifications of social life, detailed in Chapter Two, where “the name or category itself is less important than the differences instituted between them.” (Azoulay 2019, 164) Partition’s own categorical statuses are in the piece rendered fabulous by the tale of its uneasy relationship with Universalism, “neighbours, though never good friends.” Menon’s fable, a drama of ontological binarity and identitarian f(r)iction, is placed at the very beginning and end of the piece, marking an uneasy beginning and uneasy ending that intentionally destabilizes our listening to everything in between. As Menon writes, her conception of universalism is queer precisely because it “does not set itself up in opposition to the norm; instead it refuses both norm and antinorm alike as being too restrictive and pandering to a universe of particularities.” (Menon 2015, 136)

The production of this first work, through fable, oral history, archival testimony and critical citation, has created a space for questioning the fallibility of what we hear, and how listening unstably or infallibly affects our relationship with the past/s. Partition’s (aural) infrastructure of memory here then occupies the same cognitive space – a space filled with listening – as the (destroyed) colonial (written) record. Knowing that there is so much we do not know, and cannot possibly know, Partition is rendered

fictive, taking on multiple modes of perceptibility that still bring us into the visual frame – through description, but also background sounds, intended or not.

Even though *'You trust your memories?'* is undoubtedly about the oral traces of the event of Partition, it renders images all the time – through tropes and stereotypes, but also noise and literal silence. As described in the next section, the visibility of Partition memory plays out in one of the most prolific archives that collect testimony worldwide.

4.4 The 1947 Partition Archive

Throughout this research, the ongoing work of the 1947 Partition Archive (hereafter referred to as 1947P) – headquartered at University of Berkeley, California, USA – has been prolific. Engaged in different activities and public programmes since its formation in 2017, the archive has undertaken many free online talks (e.g. the regular Sunday Stories sessions streamed live on Facebook during the pandemic with invited scholars); sponsored fundraising runs; and open recruitment calls and training sessions for “story scholars” worldwide.³³ The scale of the outreach of this archive reflects its status as a global reference – over 9,800 oral histories recorded with witnesses from 14 countries in over 36 languages and dialects have been preserved, including digital copies of antiquated photographs, documents and images of personal objects of historical value gathered from personal collections. This material has been compiled by over 600 Citizen Historian volunteers, over 150 Story Scholars, and 200 “community-based digital archivists”.

The difficulties brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated the issues of access to archives in an already borderised research landscape. In the case of the 1947 Partition Archive, this is why I have included reflections of my listening at oral history workshops/citizen historian training sessions conducted online, where the training of the oral historical ear takes on specific instructive forms and variations. I attended

³³ 1947 Partition Archive <https://www.1947partitionarchive.org/>. Accessed 30 November, 2022. See its social media for updates on public activity.

several workshops and talks held by the archive between 2019 and 2022. Even though its oral history material is not accessible fully online, I still managed to gauge a sense of what was important for them to collect through two particular encounters: my attendance at a training workshop for future “story scholars”, and my interviews with former 1947P oral historian Ritriban Chakroborty in 2021. I had come across him during one of the archive’s online public talks, where he was speaking about the difficulties in conducting interviews with Partition witnesses. The visual priorities of the archive in both my interviews with him and my experience of the workshop became apparent after further investigation.

Chakroborty spoke to me about an encounter with one potential interviewee in 2020. The geographical area of his research lays in West Bengal, and the informal camps and communities that have remained there since 1947. The formerly porous border – with many Bengalis from Bangladesh (formerly East Pakistan) crossing it to settle in India – is rendered concrete again due to the institution of the National Register of Citizens and the Citizenship Amendment Act in 2019. What follows is our exchange, directly transcribed from our conversation on Zoom, about why many of his interviewees did not make into the 1947 Partition Archive as intended.

RC: So anyway, many of those interviews, obviously very few, many of those interviews I did not submit to the [1947] Partition Archive. It happened that uh, I started the interviews, I conducted everything, and then when I was about to ask the interviewee to sign the release form, then he, you know, uh, then her, he or she, you know, denied to, uh you know, sign the release form. So for obvious reasons I could not submit those interviews. So and, also there were also cases where that I found that, again in Bharashat, I interviewed a person and when I started, uh, you know when I started asking him a few questions about his citizenship and where is he from, suddenly he became very alarmed and er, and he uh [phone buzzes on the desk] called a few guys and then actually the interview suddenly stopped. Because probably, that is my hunch, that he is probably an illegal immigrant from Bangladesh. So that was obviously, another reason. And I have heard that he was taking names of Awami League³⁴ and many others. Probably was one of the reasons was – obviously I will not [give you] his name – but that was one of the reasons because I was really afraid that they, because I have seen that many guys came and with mit.. much coercion, and it was very, ah, scary. And they asked me to

³⁴ A left/centre-left political party in Bangladesh.

stop the interview because otherwise, because some problems might.

Can you hear me? Um.

Can you hear me now?

Yeah, OK. Yeah I can hear you.

Yeah it is alright now. OK yeah.

So I had to stop the interview in between, yeah. OK yeah.

ST: OK. And just in terms of that um... that interview in particular where guys turned up – is that what you said – during the interview itself were there any sort of problems or issues? Or was it only when you asked him to sign the form? I'm just wondering like, how the interview went, you know, in terms of the questions you asked him, his answers...

RC: Well in that case it didn't really go until that release form, because I had to finish up in between. And it was like, I was asking him – it was a semi-structured questionnaire – and I asked him about, does he remember anything about his homeland, what does he mean by homeland, etc etc? And then uh, also, I asked him that, that do you still often go to Bangladesh? So that really, uh... these kinds of questions really antagonised him, I do not know why, but it was uh, I conducted this interview at a shoe shop, and he was a shoe shop owner, and there was a lot of noise going on and I don't know whether the atmosphere might have, the surrounding situation might have influenced the scenario or maybe the... I don't know really what went wrong. But this much I'm sure, that these questions and his identity as an illegal immigrant, maybe, that might have, rather his apprehensions of what might happen if I submit the interview. Since I'm recording everything, I can... can you hear me? Again something is happening here.. [technical problems]

ST: Has this happened with other interviews there? In terms of this apprehension, refusing to sign the form, can you see a pattern, or can you deduce different reasonings for different people?

RC: Whether I can see a pattern, that obviously needs to be analysed, that needs a longer research. But yes I have seen a lot of refusal, and there were cases where the interviewee didn't even let me enter the house because he thought I was asking for chanda³⁵ or something like that. And many even thought that uh, there is no reason to talk about Partition after so many years, what's the need, etc etc, very straightforward answers, I have received – whether this is going to help them now. Many of them actually you know, are affected by the present situation, I mean many.

So uh, probably he was assuming that something might happen since I was

³⁵ Charity donations

recording, and... it's not really that, that I was you know [pauses] there were many cases, I have seen that when I am holding the camera in front of the interviewee's face, that was making them very conscious about it. But I was not really doing that in his case. But uh, so there was no point in him being conscious of his recording or something like that. But either way, he was becoming very conscious because of the questions that I was asking – it was the same question that I asked uh for, every interviewee but probably it was because of his identity and his apprehensions of what might happen, that might have led him to stop the interview, maybe.³⁶

Chakroborty's interlocutor's refusal to speak – for different reasons to Ather Zia's Kashmiri interviewee as discussed in 1.2 – is a means for them to prevent their own subjugation; their voice, in their specific political context, would have literally given them up. My conversation about this encounter with this particular oral historian on Zoom made me realise later that he could also be implicated if he was known to be talking to me about the context in which he was working. A month before our interview, an arrested academic and political activist in Delhi – still imprisoned in Assam because of his speeches against the CAA – was deemed in police evidence against him to have been “radicalised” by his research on Partition.³⁷ It is here that Partition's condition is revealed in its complex dance of speech and silence, contingent on the politics that, in the case of this specific oral history, is violently identitarian.

Historian Ravinder Kaur (2017) gives two potential reasons behind the 1947 Partition Archive's failure to draw connections between the identitarian violence of the past and of the present. First, acknowledging this link would mean “recognising the inherently political and contentious nature of the violence – the political patronage, police complicity, the organised operators on the ground, the otherwise decent people who decide to overlook brutality, and delayed justice in court rooms” (Kaur, 2017). Second, by keeping the narrative ‘apolitical’, the archive can avoid the tricky questions of the exact role of the state and its institutions in the violence. As has been theorised by Azoulay in her critique of the “archival regime”, which is necessarily exclusionary (as

³⁶ Ritriban Chakroborty, interviewed by author, Zoom, September 14, 2020.

³⁷ See for example Bhadra Sinha, “Sharjeel ‘radicalised’ by books he read for thesis on Partition, Delhi police chargesheet says,” *The Print*, September 20 2020. <https://theprint.in/india/sharjeel-radicalised-by-books-he-read-for-thesis-on-partition-delhi-police-chargesheet-says/506598/>.

discussed in 2.2), and exemplified in this case by Chakroborty's own testimony, interviews with undocumented peoples are necessarily excluded from the archive. On the one hand this is logical in the bureaucratic sense, as of course a person needs to be who they say they are, and of course that means some sort of proof of identification. On the other hand, considering the complex identitarian politics that govern partitioned territories in the subcontinent, these people's identities are constantly shifting – one day they belong to India, the next day, with the institution of a new government or a new law, they don't. Capture for an archive, then, is one way in which the “non-subject” is fixed and excluded.

4.5. 'Easy' listening

The title of this transmission, *'You trust your memories?'*, is a question I ask my maternal great-uncle, in a short oral history interview I conducted with him, which we hear in the piece. The inclusion of this intimate recording echoes a stance of “critical proximity” adapted and developed by artist filmmaker Onkyeka Igwe in her research on colonial film and bureaucratic archives in Nigeria and the UK. (Igwe, 2020)

Intentionally entangling dance, touch and sound to recover women's performative anticolonial resistance, her term “nods to critical distance, the way of knowing championed by Western positivist empiricism. The critical in critical proximity attempts to place historically illegitimised ways of knowing alongside hegemonic knowledge frameworks in the same value chain.” (ibid, 45) A few months after I recorded nana abu's (short) story, I attended the online citizen historian workshops held by the 1947 Partition Archive in late 2020/2021. My intention to become a story scholar, and to submit the full recording excerpted in *'You trust your memories?'* to the archive, quickly fell flat, as it did not meet the archive's conditions – it was not recorded in a quiet room, it was not filmed, it did not follow the timelines required for the Partition story (see Fig.2). For Chakroborty, his failure to collect interviewees for the 1947 Partition arose from interlocutors' refusal to show identity documents, to be filmed, to speak of their birthplace (and in some cases, a combination of all three). His experiences, which clearly reveal the consequences of oral history “rules” for the archive, were in my mind during the first training session.

As we hear in the transmission, nana abu describes a Partition riot, which he witnessed as a six-year old in 1948 in Allahabad, present-day India. The recording was made at his house amid the chaos of a multi-generational, multi-national and multi-lingual family visit just before dinner time. The accompanying text to the piece – a verbatim transcript of what is vocalised amid the din – does not transcribe the sonic disruptions of the kids, cousins and aunts fully. Nana abu tells his story humorously, despite the violence it contains, while the day to day is overheard in differing languages and accents and noise.

Svensson writes that “what is missing in the case of the 1947 Partition Archive is the important facet of recognising how the interviewer and interviewee jointly mediate and generate representations of the past” (Svensson 2021, 220). Through the workshops, I gained insight into this mediation, where participants were mostly instructed how to photograph and film interviewees in a bi-directional manner (it is preferred to not have other people in the room). There were interesting points made about the positionality of the interviewer – ie to be conscious of national, ethnic, gendered, ableist biases – but little was said on how to conduct the interview beyond these three slides:

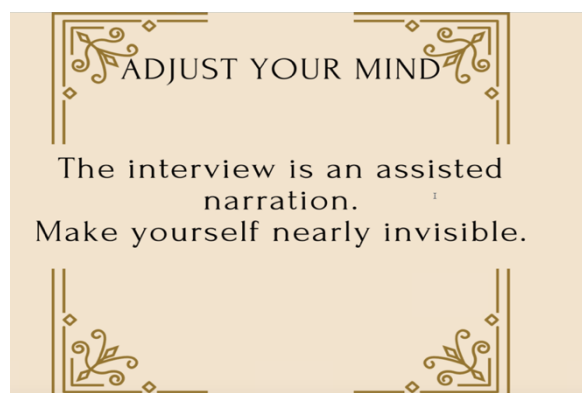
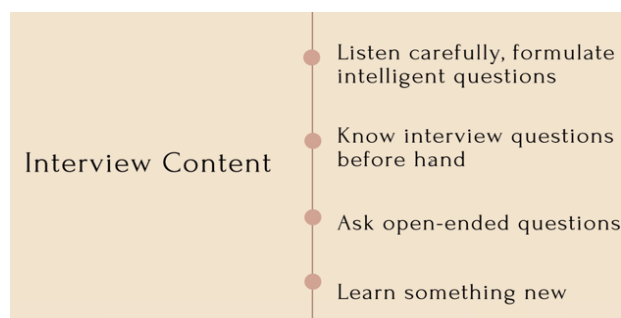


Fig.2: Slides taken from the citizen historian workshop held by the 1947 Partition Archive, 16 October 2020

The rest of the workshop was geared towards visual documentation – so how to frame the speaking subject, examples of good and bad lighting for filming, the quality of the room (always a domestic space) and the insistence that even if the conversation gets emotional or difficult for the interviewee, to keep the camera rolling. In the same conversation with Chakroborty, he admitted that the pressure to film interviewees meant that he did not want to work with the archive anymore. The urgent aspirations of archives such as this to collect stories manifest in activity that is as efficient and as

visually impactful as possible. This has the effect of centring those who are safe enough to be visibly identifiable.

In my interview with my great uncle, I wanted to know if he encountered any British people during Partition. My question, “Did you see any British at that time? Police, soldiers, people?” heard in the piece is one I have not heard in Partition testimonies I have listened to, but this was intentional – Allahabad was historically a chosen city by the British, who declared it as the capital of India for one day, the day the Crown took over sovereign rule after the 1857 mutiny, mentioned in *‘You trust your memories?’* as a turning point for colonial governance and subjugation in British India. I wanted some evidence of this sense of abandonment on the recording. I did not make myself invisible, and I did not conduct the interview in the form of the chronology that is favoured: pre-, during, and post-Partition. Rather, I asked about other people who could or could not have been there.

Veena Das argues that as a collective phenomenon, rumour – which exists without an author in the public realm – represents an especially productive moment in the “actualisation” of memory (Das 2006, 102), linking the individual to the collective. In her own work, fragments of speech are “bristling with words not fully stated, performative gestures, and a whole repertoire of culturally dense notions that surround the utterances.” (ibid, 65) It follows here that the political possibility of listening to (fragments of) speech, after Voegelin, partly lies in the refusal of cartographical representation and mapping, becoming “a practice of walking and listening, doing and redoing. There is no measure, there is no map, just the present materiality unfolding in our ears – hearing our own geography.” (Voegelin 2014, 25)

In the virtual performance “Walking as Alibi: Dreams of Cynthia” (2022) the artist Pallavi Paul revisits her 2017 film *The Dreams of Cynthia / Cynthia ke Sapne*.³⁸ Opening up the filmic as a “porous field of actions”, it pulls in the artist's own voice and presence, confronting the uncanny dualities between speech and writing,

³⁸ Pallavi Paul, “Walking as Alibi: Dreams of Cynthia.” *Colomboscope*, November 11, 2021, <https://www.colomboscope.lk/pallavi-paul>.

sound and words, safety and violence, past and present. In the original film, Cynthia is imagined “as a literary character, a measure of time, a form of experience and a landscape.”³⁹ The lives of two people are born witness to in the film – an executioner, and a trans artist – whose lives are intertwined through an informal history of labour, violence and death. The non-fiction imagery in the work, which is a kind of remix, visually and sonically refigures recent state responses to Covid in India and the farmers’ protests in 2020-2021. At the beginning of her performance, Paul reads out a ‘letter’:

“This is not the first time that I work with letters. I like working with letters because they soothe the throb of language. They save words from being digested by the ravenous hunger of speech. Each word spoken has to dive from the edge of the tongue and cross the precipice of silence to enter the world of more worlds, of other sounds. And sometimes, this is done so fast, in such quick succession, that words cannot hold onto one another. Atomised they float, alone, unique, untethered from the world of their conception.” (Paul, 2021)

Such reflections on the relationship between walking, listening to words and ‘mapping’ sound against the “ravenous hunger of speech” are pertinent to the different sonic devices and extra-/archival voices gathered together in *You trust your memories?* – with none sitting easily on their own. The possibility of them rendering ‘the truth’ remains insecure – the warped sitar from the BBC programme, the nonchalant laughter surrounding a witness account of murder, my younger relatives’ clamouring. These juxtapositions hold power in their “critical proximity”, to follow Igwe again, which “allows for the body, with all of its baggage, to function, be recognised and be valued as archive.” (Igwe 2020, 52) Inserting my great uncle’s voice allows for our resonant bodies, among others in the family living room in Bahria Town, Islamabad, to take up space through history that exceeds it. Six months after speaking to nana abu, and after I had told him I intended to return for further interviews about his experiences as a prisoner of war during the 1965 Indo-Pak war, he passed away.

³⁹ “Contour Biennale 8”, Gujral Foundation. <https://gujralfoundation.org/show-item/contour-biennale-8/>. Accessed November 30, 2022.

Chapter Five:

We shall witness

5.1. Introduction

While ‘*You trust your memories?*’ renders audible the complexities of “witnessing” Partition through the juxtaposition of various historical tracks, oral memories and critical narrative, *We shall witness* addresses Partition’s condition through the trajectories of the (sonic) fragment and its copies. Following on from the doubts cast on speech, listening and the (destroyed) archive in the first piece, it moves away from the physical archive altogether, but still engages in sonic-archival modes of remembrance.

The work listens with three versions of Faiz Ahmed Faiz’s revolutionary Urdu poem ‘Hum Dekhenge’ (1979) (translatable to “We Shall Witness” or “We Shall See”), and the repetitive refrains of performance group Jana Natya Manch’s 2019 Hindi protest-performance Hum Bharat Ke Log (“We the People”). The latter is an interactive public performance recorded in 2019 in Delhi that asks simple questions of its (protesting) audience about their national, Indian, identity.

According to Jennifer Dubrow, the now iconic poem-song ‘Hum Dekhenge’ had a sparse textual and performance history, and was even taken out of an edited collection by Faiz himself – meaning the written poem would ordinarily have been little known. (Dubrow, 2020) The poem, written in 1979, was also censored in the poet’s lifetime – a specific verse was permanently excised from Faiz’s complete works, *Nuskha-e-Ha-e-*

Wafa. (Thomas, 2019) This history of Hum Dekhenge's interruptions is not surprising – the poem not only targeted the power and corruption of the contemporaneous Pakistani dictator Zia ul Haq and his military regime, but Faiz's use of Quranic language and metaphor in the poem deliberately rubbed up against the harsh and conservative Islam that the regime enforced on Pakistani society. In 'Hum Dekhenge', Faiz connects Qayamat, the Islamic day of reckoning, to a people's revolution:

Hum mehkoomon ke paaon tale

Under our feet – the feet of the oppressed –

ye dharti dhar dhar dharkegi
the earth will shake

aur ahl-e-hakam ke sar oopar
and on the heads of our rulers

jab bijli kar kar karkegi.
lightning will strike.

This piece of audio research is not about the historical event of Partition. It does not reflect directly on the oral historical concerns of the archive as I have faced them so far in this thesis – testimony in this case arises in the form of recovered collective experiences, rather than dialogic exchanges. The work does not mention the event/s associated with the 1947 Partition, but is based on a poem written in the 1970s, which is turned into a song, which is turned into a protest song, which is turned into something else. It takes the idea of “partitioned listening” at a literal level – orienting versions of the “same” sonic artefact heard on different sides of one border in the same space, at different times. This splitting and re-joining through sound problematises the division of Partition as we hear it.

'Hum Dekhenge' drew me in a time when a deep feminist revolutionary spirit was felt both in India and Pakistan. In India, this manifested through the women-led resistance against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) at many occupations, including the most famous site, Shaheen Bagh in Delhi. The CAA amended Indian law to accept Hindu, Sikh, Jain, Parsi, Buddhist and Christian illegal migrants from

Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan who entered India before 2014 – but not Muslims. Sri Lankan Tamils in India, Rohingyas from Myanmar and Tibetan refugees are also not mentioned in the bill.⁴⁰ Resistance against the CAA coincided with the updating of the National Register of Citizens, which at the time targeted Assam, a region home to 14 million Muslims, and a region often targeted for harbouring “foreigners”, or non-citizens, because they arrived before 1971, a cut-off year different to the rest of the country.⁴¹

Because of COVID-19, the CAA protest sites that mushroomed across India were shut down by police in early 2020. While I was working on this transmission, the politically and socially intersectional Aurat March (Women’s March) also burst forth in several cities in Pakistan, visibilizing the fight for multiple issues, particularly sexual rights and khwaja sira/transgender rights, in an unprecedented manner. For its third and largest iteration, tens of thousands of women had taken to the streets in Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad, but also in smaller cities like Quetta, Multan and Sialkot, and faced heavy public backlashes including legal threats. The production of *We Shall Witness* coincided with the biggest Aurat March to date; their use of the slogan *mera jism mera marzi* (my body, my choice) fostering widespread and hostile media coverage in Pakistan, and inspiring national and international solidarity, including from within India.

The production of all three transmissions involved sourcing, recording, sharing and listening across multiple spaces and time zones – often during pandemic lockdowns – collaborating with people from different backgrounds and locations. This audio research not only reflects but deepens some of the big questions this thesis addresses – how to listen to history when archival evidence has been destroyed, been made inaccessible or failed to enter the archive at all, as discussed in 2.2 and 4.4; how to listen when history is marked by systemic silences *through* an outpouring of archival speech,

⁴⁰ Oxford Human Rights Hub, “Communalisation of Citizenship Law: Viewing the Citizenship (Amendment) Act 2019 Through the Prism of the Indian Constitution”. November 6, 2020. <https://ohrh.law.ox.ac.uk/communalisation-of-citizenship-law-viewing-the-citizenship-amendment-act-2019-through-the-prism-of-the-indian-constitution/>

⁴¹ Rajeev Bhattacharyya, “Assam Awaits Supreme Court Ruling on Citizenship”, *The Diplomat*, December 7, 2022. <https://thediplomat.com/2022/12/assam-awaits-supreme-court-ruling-on-citizenship/>.

as discussed in 3.2 and 4.3; and how to interrogate colonial categories of time and event through listening, as will be discussed at the end of this chapter and Chapter Five. In the process of making *We shall witness*, juxtaposition and collage were also deployed as key tools: the fragmented, multi-directional and ‘versioned’ sonics of resistance past and present then form another kind of archive.

5.2 Transmission II

We shall witness

The transmission in the above link includes an audio track 24:10 in length and an accompanying written transcript. It is recommended to listen to and read this work on a desktop computer, with headphones.

5.3 Hum Dekhenge: a 'now' sounding other nows

The first time I encountered the song-poem Hum Dekhenge was in London in January 2020. My mother was playing a YouTube video on her phone – in it, protesting women were sitting on the ground at Shaheen Bagh, Delhi, India, loudly singing the lyrics, drumming and clapping. I was already familiar with the writer of the poem, Faiz Ahmed Faiz, and the radical details of his biography – from his agitation and imprisonment in Pakistan to the Afro-Asian writers' publication, *Lotus*, he edited when in exile in Beirut, Lebanon. His poem on the 1947 Partition, "Subha e Azadi", encapsulates with brutal subtlety the displacement of one's soul within the movements of historical 'progress'. But I had not heard Hum Dekhenge before, and with an initial delve into the poem's con/texts, was surprised at the centrality of Islam in what I registered as, at first listening with my mother, an Indian feminist protest song. Most notably, as Dubrow writes, is the invocation of the Persian Sufi Mansur Al-Hallaj's famous exclamation, "An ul-Haq" translatable as "I am God" but also "I am Truth" – a Sufi critique of authority that "invokes a fundamentally mystical way of perceiving and understanding God." (Dubrow 2020) This invocation in the poem by Faiz was, as I discovered, also a criticism of the government of military dictator Zia ul Haq at the time it was performed in 1986, against Sharia-inspired religious laws (hudood).

The poem's resurgence in India in 2019-20, particularly its anthemic status at Shaheen Bagh and other women and queer-led occupation sites, occurred in the context of the resistance against the National Register of Citizens (NRC) and the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), both Islamophobic laws initiated by the BJP government to tie citizenship to religion, rather than residence, as explained in 5.1. Though Islamophobic in intention, these laws radically refigured the citizenship of millions of others through a rising far-right nationalism.

The first rendition heard in *We Shall Witness* is performed by singer Iqbal Bano at the Al-Hamra cultural center, Lahore, Pakistan in 1986 – 39 years after Partition, two years after Faiz had died, two years prior to Zia ul-Haq's death, and 34 years before the institution of the NRC and CAA in India. The performance, widely accepted as legendary largely because of this recording, took place at the Faiz mela, a

regular celebratory event run by the foundation set up by the poet's surviving relatives. These events were open to the public, "attended by workers, peasants, trade union activists, students, teachers, men, women, children and everyone in between." (Hashmi, 2019) The recording we hear of Bano is actually the second time she performs "Hum Dekhenge" on that night, because of the overwhelming response of the audience to the first (unrecorded) rendition and their demands for an encore. As Faiz's grandson remembers of that night, authorities raided the homes of organizers and participants afterwards, looking for any recordings to obliterate. Some of these copies eventually made it into India. As referred to in *'We shall witness'*, students singing lines from Hum Dekhenge in 2019 were reported to the police, as some believed the song not just to be anti-establishment, but anti-Hindu'.

The public recitations of Hum Dekhenge in the context of the CAA/NRC protests across the country interrupt narrative hegemony as it had been ordained over time, a symbolic act that revealed the fragility of historical dichotomies – communist/Muslim, faithful/faithless, Urdu-speaking/Hindi-speaking, India/Pakistan. Against the order of the present and the inevitability of the past, this gathering together of different versions of Hum Dekhenge, like Menon's "condition" as explored in the Introduction, coheres around incoherence.

At pains to interrupt Bano and her band, as well as the audience's fiery response to its anti-establishment verses, I make brief vocal interventions during the instrumental breaks – setting the scene but also asking broad and open questions of the status that this event – as a metaphor, as collective memory, and a condition – holds. These questions are implicated in the sonic and political situation of this performance:

What makes an event, an event?
Does an event exist if it doesn't end?
Does an event exist if there are no witnesses?
Does an event exist if it is not archived? (Tariq 2020b)

Through the second rendition of Hum Dekhenge – the Delhi protest clip extracted from YouTube – right after the fiddles of Bano's band fade out, we cross time and space, across the border and across to other sonic forms of political resistance. This

version, with its drumbeats and ringtones and background hum of agitation, captured on a smartphone mic that was likely thought of as secondary to the recording of visual footage, is spatially and temporally displaced from the “original” context, but aligns with it politically. Hum Dekhenge’s cry against tyranny – already embedded with its projected imagination into the future (“we shall witness”) – is circulated and brought forth, out of time. Against archival modes of collection and Western enclosure, its fragments provoke our understanding of this time as “made up of disturbances, of a bundle of unforeseen events, of more or less regular fluctuations and oscillations.” (Mbembe 2001, 16)

The third and final rendition of Hum Dekhenge we hear in *We Shall Witness* is in the form of a slowed down performance by artist Fazal Rizvi performed outdoors, his voice and harmonium addressing the sky and what sounds like a single crow – perhaps evocative of the crows heard, symbolising death, in ‘*You trust your memories?*’ As oral historian Siobhán Mchugh writes regarding the use of oral history on the radio, “these affective sounds subliminally colour how we hear and how we understand the cognitive content of the (oral history) material. The birdsong might evoke early morning, and with it, a sense of calm; the sounds of cattle lowing create a mental picture of open space, in which context we absorb the ranch-hand’s words. But no two listeners will have exactly the same mental picture when they hear a sound because sound itself is subjective.” (ibid, 191) Again, *Partitioned Listening* as a series of works aligns with partitioned listening as a methodology that is questioning rather than didactic; implicated in the production of memory, rather than instructive of it.

Generated through the subjective and temporal fluctuations of these three versions of the song, this work brings up Salomé Voegelin’s conception of “sonic possible worlds”, conceived as “private life-worlds that we negotiate: mine through yours and yours through mine, generating a contingent actual world in which we share but not always equally or lastingly and that produces not a singular but a possible actuality – one slice of many slices of what the real could be.” (Voegelin 2014, 33)

With slow finality, contrapuntality with and against the decades that have been

chronologised as well as the 25 minutes of the audio essay's length becomes, to adapt Rasheedah Phillips' conception of time, "the subjective duration of 'now' interacting with other nows." (Phillips 2018, 45) The testimonial attributes of the lyric verse in Sufi music in the Indian subcontinent, like Nosheen Ali's exploration of Gilgiti "poetic publics" (Ali 2019, 173-6) are relevant in this regard. Maria Cizmic points out that music – "through its formal compositional elements, through embodied performance, through reception, through repeated contexts of performance" – performs a testimonial function. (Cizmic 2011, 4) In this final rendition, we have also already heard the sounds of the harmonium before we were led to this point. We have heard the words already and we have heard the political power of their utterance too. Ethnomusicologist Maria Cizmic among others has remarked on music's mobility (ibid, 25) and malleability to mourning rhythms (ibid, 156). Rizvi's audible slowing, his resistance to time, is reflected in the direct translation in the transcript of "hum dekhenge" as "we shall see" rather than "we shall witness" (both are semantically valid).

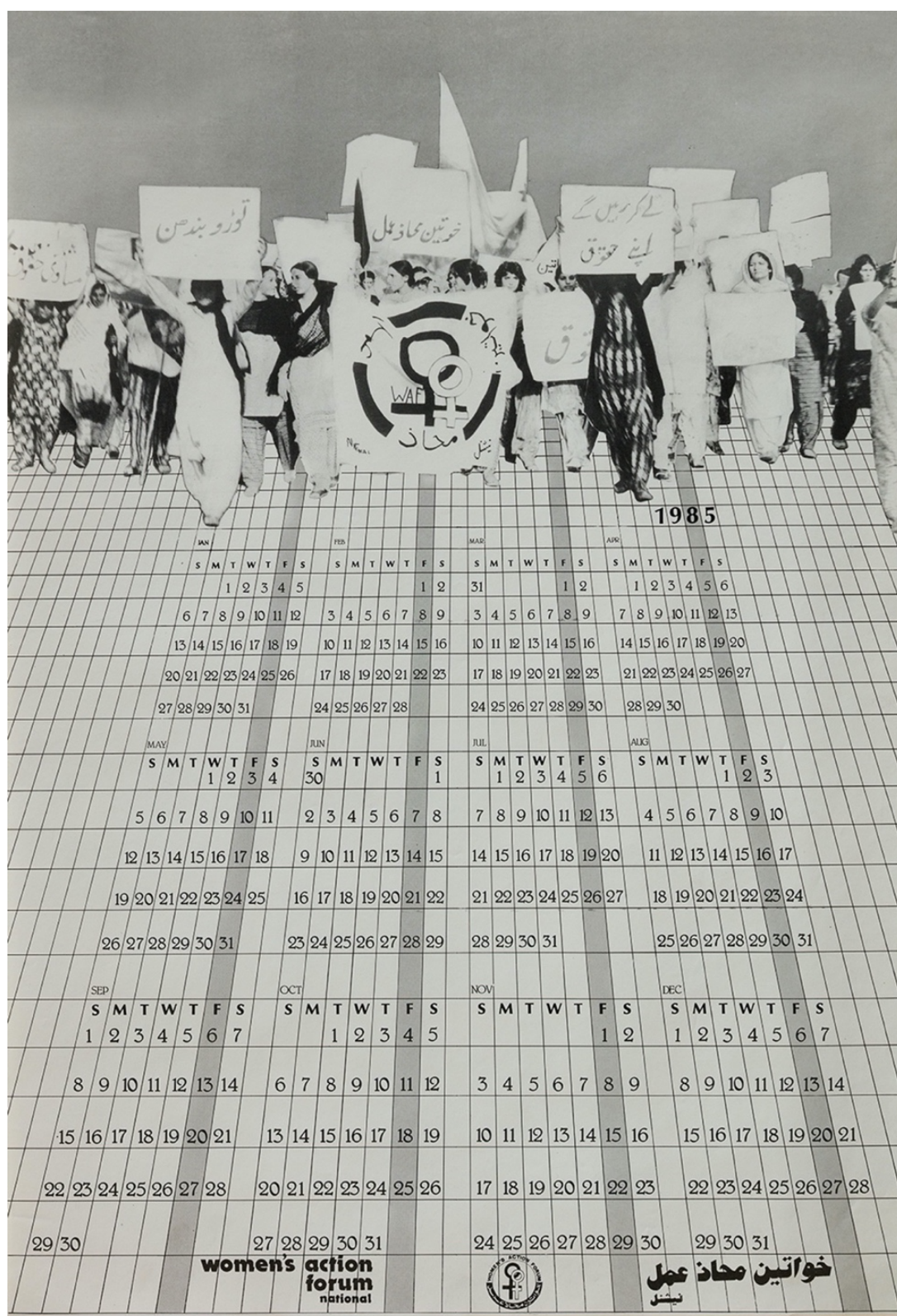


Fig.3: Lala Rukh, Women's Action Forum Calendar, 1985. Offset print, 61.5 × 40.5 cm.
Copyright: Documenta Halle, Kassel

5.4 The Citizen's Archive of Pakistan

The Citizen's Archive of Pakistan [CAP], which began as an oral history project founded by the film director Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy, is the main organisation behind the National History Museum of Pakistan in Lahore, which opened its doors in 2017. This followed the regular 'Museum on Wheels' initiative that travel the country, as well as a shared initiative between oral history collections in the US. Its ongoing Oral History Project is not only central in terms of providing material for these museal initiatives, but it is also foundational to the archive's existence: the collection of stories from the "Partition generation" was the main motivation for its creation. According to its website, CAP has, since its launch, "focused its attention on the tradition of oral storytelling in Pakistan, emphasizing the importance of such narratives in a dialogue on national identity."⁴²

When I visited CAP's Karachi HQ in 2019 it had three rooms high up in the shabby "Al-Makkah" tower block on the side of a highway. A team of around 10 oral historians, including senior oral history manager Aaliyah Tayyebi, work there with two scanner-technicians who upload and digitise the material that is collected by and donated to the archive. The "archive" itself is a massive hard drive, contained in a futuristic-looking machine called RAID – a storage system commonly used by businesses to store huge amounts of data. Everything is on there, according to Tayyebi: digitised photographs, photographs of donated objects, and audio and video recordings.

There is no searchable database of the archive that is publicly accessible, online or in the office itself. On my first visit, I was confused to find a single laptop waiting for me, with two files open – a Windows Media Player file and a Word document of the "transcript" of what was on that file. The audio file was a 15-minute clip of a longer interview with an elderly woman who had moved to Rawalpindi, present-day Pakistan, from Jhalander, present-day India, during Partition. The interview was recorded in Urdu, but I was able to understand the basics of what she was recounting, particularly as I had the transcript in English in front of me to help me along. It was not a true

⁴² *Citizen's Archive of Pakistan*, "About us". <https://citizensarchive.org/>. Accessed November 30, 2022.

transcript in terms of what I assume to be usual oral history transcription – rather than being a script of what was said in the interview verbatim, it was a two-page collection of notes that marked out whatever was deemed noteworthy by the transcriber, (a note would typically read, for instance “[13:18] Talks about marriage, children”).

The clip mainly contained what CAP refer to as PIQs – personal interest questions – a small segment where the interviewee was speaking about the sacrifices made by Muslims for Pakistan, as well as a point about how everyone – Hindus, Muslims – should live in harmony. As I was listening, I thought about why CAP had chosen this particular clip for me, and I also thought about the importance given to the migrant story within Partition studies. Much of CAP’s collection of stories have also migrated; to the Lakshmi Mittal South Asia Institute at Harvard University, which will apparently be available on an online Harvard Partition Portal one day. I was also surprised at how much Urdu I understood, and noted some utterances in English: ‘atom bomb’, ‘train’, ‘role’ (“Aurat ke role hai” – a woman’s role is such).

In terms of the labour entailed in collecting these stories – which also involves recruiting interns and oral history assistants – Tayyebi had a lot to say. “Because oral history as a discipline is not taught anywhere in Pakistan⁴³ we’re not looking at people who are skilled oral historians, but we are looking at people who are social scientists and come with a research background. Er, people who have worked with secondary tier research and who have an idea about qualitative and quantitative data collection. And then training for doing oral history interviews is taught on the job, like anywhere else.” New oral historians at CAP are encouraged to sit in on interviews two weeks after starting. All of the oral history interviews take place outside of the office – usually in the interviewees’ homes or offices. Regarding the interview methods used, Tayyebi said in our first meeting: “The pattern that we follow is the same as followed worldwide.” I didn’t manage to follow this up until our second conversation, which took place as a WhatsApp voice call around six weeks later. She explained:

“So I follow this pattern from the archives association of British Columbia. It’s a

⁴³ This is not entirely true. For example, the Lahore University of Management Sciences has a well-established oral history programme.

practice called ‘Oral History from Theory to Practice’, it is a total of seven lectures that I have. There are seven modules in it, starting from introducing oral histories and ending with how to create an archive. So whenever I have a new team that joins in I introduce this course to them, and we do it in-house and it kind of gets us.... um... it gets us number one to look at oral histories and the process of interviews as an academic as well as historical ones so some specific um areas that we look at is, ke, what are the social purposes of oral history and how do they defer from mainstream history? Are oral histories similar to autobiographies? Oral histories break through the barrier of historians and audience and how does that happen? How do transcriptions transform an oral history. [It felt like she was reading these questions from a document to me over the phone]

To look at oral history not just as flat historical data but look at it as a multi-layered one. How oral history tells us less about events than about their meanings. You know like, um... so and then most importantly what is the relevance of having oral sources, how do you uh validate it as a research how do you validate is as a data, how do you validate it as a solid source of looking at uh.. historical um datas itself. And um then how to look at oral histories objectively, what are the competences that make up oral histories. Things like that. So basically introducing oral history at the Citizens Archive of Pakistan as a... as a sub branch or as an offshoot of the association of, of, oral histories in the world. To not look at the work that we’re doing in isolation, but to look at it as a larger body of work that is being done by a lot of people across the people from whom we can learn from and whom we can teach to.”⁴⁴

CAP have always found their interviewees using a “ripple effect” method, starting with immediate members of CAP staff’s own informal social network. Anyone can contact CAP through their website or one of their social media platforms if they want to be interviewed, or if they know someone who wants to be interviewed, but according to Tayyebi, the “ripple effect” has been most effective for the collection of stories for the archive. The specific demographic typology of the collection – predominantly middle-class Urdu and English speakers – reflects the socio-economic circles that the archive is embedded in. The people who get to speak are already known by CAP staff – in one way this is a good way of ensuring trust between interviewer and interviewee. Partition scholarship has often strongly depended on the sharing of experience within close or familial networks, and many writers working on Partition often use their own relatives’ testimonies as stepping-off points at the very least. However, this mode of sourcing testimony is arguably exclusionary on the part of a national “citizens” archive in a

⁴⁴ Aaliyah Tayyebi, interviewed by author, telephone call, November 17, 2019.

country where those who speak Urdu as a first language as well as English – the elite – are in positions of institutional power. As explored in 3.3 via Huma Mulji's work *Mera Ghar*, the linguistic diversity of the country, past and present, has been flattened by the primacy of Urdu and English in public life.

CAP is officially an NGO, sanctioned by a central state apparatus deeply concerned with nationalism and patriotism. The Oral History Project had conducted over 3,000 interviews when I spoke to Tayyebi in 2019 – each recording roughly lasts between 45 minutes and an hour. Tayyebi – who has headed the project since 2014 – insisted in our first conversation that anyone who wants to properly study this archive has to go through at least 10% of this material; around 300 hours of listening. Although I did not have access to any material in the archive, my time spent talking to the Oral History Manager was illuminating of certain processes. My later visit to the National History Museum, which opened its doors to the public in May 2018 and is supported by the Punjab government and the Lahore Parks Authority (it is located in the touristic park of Lahore which is also home to the Minar-e-Pakistan and the Lahore Fort) was also useful in understanding the archive's work, as discussed in 6.5.

According to Tayyebi, as seen in the excerpt of our first interview, all the material in the National History Museum “stems from the [CAP] oral history project”.⁴⁵ This does then provide big clues into what CAP see as important moments in Pakistan's history (the Lahore Resolution 1940; 15 August 1947; the Indo-Pak War 1965). The next exhibit was a long, detailed timeline that snakes along several walls, outlining key moments or events that are illustrated by newspaper articles, photographs and a few audio clips. These range from significant moments in the birth of the nation to the deaths of important people, Pakistan's success in various international sporting events, involvement in international affairs and more besides. These dual institutional processes can be countered by Mbembe's formulation of time, cited by Bernard Keenan in *We shall witness* – not a series, but an interlocking, of presents, pasts and futures.

Remixing and mashing up are methods that trouble the notion of time as a linear

⁴⁵ Tayyebi, interview.

succession, and history as a progressive series of events that can be remembered as such. Returning to the idea of repetition, as discussed throughout this thesis and explored particularly in *We shall witness*, partitioned listening as a broad practice must also deal with repetition as it manifests through postcolonised forms of knowledge production.

5.5 Mimicry

The appropriation of what Tayyebi implies are global standards in oral history-making evokes what theorist Homi Bhabha refers to as a kind of “mimicry” revealed in postcolonial knowledge formation. Repetition, he writes, is “one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge (Bhabha 2004, 122). We have (repeatedly) seen this issue of repetition come up in Partition history – the coherent narrative reverberations over time [1.4]; tales of female martyrdom and transmuted violence [1.3], and the constancy of certain imaginaries, be it the ‘riot’ or the “trainspace” [4.2].

If we extend Bhabha’s understanding of mimicry as the fixing of the colonial subject, a ‘partial’ (or particular) presence, here the voices in the archive are also necessarily incomplete. This line of thought evokes Ted Svensson’s call to “mark out and delineate attempts at totalisation, at fullness and fixity” in Partition research. (Svensson 2013, 2) He notes via S. Mahmud Ali that, as the first postcolonial states outside of Europe, India and Pakistan “had no existing form or archetype to imitate.” The “two-state” division also meant that “Punjab and Bengal were cut in half, the Princely States ceased to exist and communal and national identities emerged as key ordering principles.” (ibid, 58) We can then understand the problem of mimicry as one of geographical as well as temporal scale.

As well as interviews about 1947 as an event of mass migration, much of the material that the Citizen’s Archive of Pakistan holds relates to what Tayyebi referred to in our first interview as “nation-building” – memories relating to the early years of Pakistan. During our second conversation, we spoke more about the pre-interview

process, which facilitated the direction of the interview, guiding the topics to be discussed. This process reveals the terms and conditions of the archive's categorisations, across time, with limited space:

AT: When we started the project the idea was to try and bring a better understanding to the people of, especially people of our country about their history. So we looked at um mainstream historical events that had been recorded in [*our history?*] and we opened them into questions and categories, politics, economics, industry, education, um, then we had entertainment, um, hospitality, food and beverages, all of these sub-categories that are part and parcel of a social structure of a society. Then we looked at the areas we wanted to cover and we knew that we wanted to start with Partition and we wanted to come all the way up to 1980, 1990, and all the major events that happened in Pakistan during that time we opened up our questionnaires to those categories. A lot of hard work went into the questionnaire itself.⁴⁶

This pre-interview questionnaire seems to be an important component of the archive's work, and "covers South Asia at large and Pakistan in particular", working "as a manual for our interview questions". At the same time, Tayyebi said, it is not intended as prescriptive: "The idea of going and collecting an interview does not mean that you have a list of questions that you are going to be asking. The way oral histories work is that it is more of a monologue where you are just a listener and the delivery is done by the narrator."⁴⁷

Like the 1947 Partition Archive's instructions to stay "invisible" during the interview, as shown in Fig.2, CAP is also careful to remove the presence of the oral historian in the outcomes of its work. Curious about this position, I expressed my interest in seeing the questionnaire document she was referring to. She responded:

"So I would not be in a position to share the questionnaire with you because it's the property of the organisation and it is a research tool that hasn't been published yet. So, um, I don't think I can share that with you."⁴⁸

After explaining that any material I take from CAP would not be shared, she

⁴⁶ Tayyebi, interview, CAP, October 24, 2019.

⁴⁷ Tayyebi, interview.

⁴⁸ Tayyebi, interview.

agreed to send sample questions (never received) and reiterated: “This is information pertaining to the structure of the project right and that is something that is privy to the organisation.” Whatever is on the questionnaire, its role as institutional “manual” contradicts the publicly stated goal of CAP to “focus on the oral tradition of storytelling in Pakistan” – which should include traditions, diverse, ancient and practiced in many languages and terrains, through multiple faiths and (endangered) oral traditions. By drawing up a list of questions that are tied up with the idea of a “mainstream historical event” or “major event”, the CAP reduces the potential scope of its own pursuits of oral storytelling, rendering the collection of testimony as a schematic exercise.

Though publicly acknowledging the role colonialism has played in damaging the pursuit of history in Pakistan⁴⁹, the CAP’s alignment to nationalism can be considered this alongside Azoulay’s call to unlearn imperialism’s “progressive temporality”. This progression of time – through the archive’s exchanges of access and hierarchical labour as well as processes of ordering and categorisation – is complicated by oral history’s temporal and political challenges, as discussed in section 2.3. Despite CAP’s adherence to strict time lines in the collection of testimony – similar to the 1947 Partition Archive as explored in 4.4 – as well as its museum displays, the scope for veering off topic and out-of-time is allowed for (“we sometimes have several sessions with the same person”) – but the interviewees are always followed up with by the oral historian (“In our first chat we discussed X, Y and Z... we’d like to talk to you about Y.”) It’s almost like the archival collection of testimonies needed to fill certain quotas of talking points – particularising sonic artefacts in relation to their adjacency to an event. While *‘You trust your memories?’* and *We shall witness* face the postcolonised archive as an idea and an ideal, through both the limits and potential of speech, silence and listening, the next and final transmission places the listener directly within the colonial archive.

⁴⁹ In a talk held by Asia Art Archives, curator at the National History Museum Sophia Balagamwala brought up questions of the museum’s relationship to coloniality, and asked what kind of archive is needed to present empire in the museum. “Inter-Archives Conversations #3 | Narrativising the Archive”, October 5, 2021. <https://aaa.org.hk/en/programmes/programmes/inter-archives-conversations-3-narrativising-the-archive>.

Chapter Six:

I hear (colonial) voices

6.1 Introduction

The final transmission, *I hear (colonial) voices*, thinks through and works with oral history recordings indexed under the category “Partition” in the catalogue of the Bristol Empire and Commonwealth Museum oral history collection, held at Bristol Archives, UK. The work uses five audio files from the collection with permission, but only the voices of the oral historians asking the questions. They are heard alongside narrations of my encounters in the archive with photographs and letters belonging to colonial soldiers. One motivation for cutting out, or silencing, the answers of the respondents to the oral history interviews in the audio was to sound out the dynamics of power present in the past institution of the (failed) empire museum.

The piece centres oral historical reasoning, rather than the interviewees' accounts of their own subjective experiences. The implications of this intentional silencing of the testimony itself – which I have heard but that the listener of the transmission has not – is in some way an act of counter-censorship: a way to speak back to the colonial archive's indexing and institution of differential categories and the ontologisation of colonised peoples. Framed through my own listening to and editing out of the voices from the oral histories I have obtained with permission from the archive, the audio includes my own personal narration in an almost diaristic style, documenting my limited visits in 2020 and 2021. The forging of a sonic-archival “genre” is inspired by blackout poetry as well as the practices of censorship and redaction of written texts, be it letters sent from political prisoners to the censorship of the Mountbatten Papers, mentioned in 2.2. This redactive method, following Dattatreya and Marrero-Guillamón, is an attempt to explore the parameters, the partitionings, of “citizen” and “non-citizen” within the archive, which aligns with Azoulay's framing of it as a regime. (Azoulay 2019, 16-17) Prompted by the journal issue's theme of the “encounter”, I was also struck by the meaning of the word in other Englishes⁵⁰; in India, Pakistan and Kashmir, “encounter” refers to a (legalized) extra-judicial killing by the police. It is therefore rendered, as the editors of the issue of *World Records* which published this transmission write, “another word that silences experience through the historical debris of language.” (Millan et al., 2022) This bind of language and law is noted in the accompanying written text.

⁵⁰ I borrow this term from the writer Arundhati Roy (“*sociolects* is perhaps the correct word, but I'll stay with *Englishes* because it is deliciously worse”) who in her brilliant W. G. Sebald Lecture on Literary Translation, delivered at the British Library in London on June 5, 2018, approached the idea of English as an “alien” language in India, the politics of translation and the nonsensical idea of authentic “native” languages. Arundhati Roy, “What is the Morally Appropriate Language in Which to Think and Write?” *Literary Hub*, July 25, 2018. <https://lithub.com/what-is-the-morally-appropriate-language-in-which-to-think-and-write/>.

I hear (colonial) voices

The transmission in the above link includes an audio track 13:46 in length, a written essay and textual transcriptions of my narrations in the audio track. It is recommended to listen to and read this work on a desktop computer, with headphones.

6.3 The British Empire & Commonwealth Museum collection

The palimpsestic nature of the archive is also part of its “regime” – the rewriting of its own past also affects ours, the progressive temporalities in its own timeline – as well as the timelines embedded in its documents and artefacts – also affect our own understandings of time. We can think again through Azoulay’s work of “potential history”, which considers that the “institutional time lines” of the archive are as lasting and as strong as the borders drawn on colonial maps. Such time lines mark “wars, conquests, revolutions, constitutions, laws, establishments, institutions, foundations, and inventions, initiated and imposed by imperial powers. [Archives] operate as shutters, slicing the commons into pieces.” (Azoulay 2019, 167) I was interested in the Bristol Empire and Commonwealth Museum Collection [BECC] held at the Bristol Archives, not only because it holds under-studied oral histories relating to Partition (and colonial India more broadly), but also because of its own institutional timelines.

Similarly to the Citizen’s Archive of Pakistan, the BECC’s collection of oral histories in the 1980s and 1990s was a gateway for museal ambitions. The resulting controversy surrounding the museum in the 2000s pertained not only to the financial state of the project, but the ideological connections between those involved and a highly sensitive topic – empire – launched into the public domain for the first time. When the British Empire and Commonwealth Museum finally opened in October 2002, it courted enough criticism to prompt its in-house historical advisor, Katherine Prior, to write an article in its defence. In the piece for the magazine *History Today*, she explains that the museum’s founding trustees had been planning an institution dedicated to the history and legacy of empire since the 1980s. The Temple Meads railway station building in Bristol, a city with deep historical ties to empire – from Cabot and slavery to West African trade and Afro-Caribbean migration – was a “felicitous” choice for such a museum. Around £4 million was raised to restore the Grade 1 listed building, but there was less success in getting public funding for the museum’s permanent galleries. Backing for the museum from Sir Jack Hayward, a property developer, and Lord Baker of Dorking, former Tory home secretary, moreover “damaged the project in the eyes of many in the British museum and academic world.” (Prior, 2002)

On November 23, 2007, the museum announced it would be moving its core operations to London in 2008. Three years later, the Museums Association announced that the director of the museum, Gareth Griffiths, had been dismissed pending a police investigation into the unauthorised disposal of museum objects.⁵¹ In March 2012, the museum announced that the planned move to London had been cancelled and that it would instead give its collection to the City of Bristol to display at the Bristol City Museum and Art Gallery at a future date. The Old Station, which had previously housed the artefacts and recordings, was also given to the city. The unauthorised sale of hundreds of items from the museum's collection was then the subject of a BBC One *Inside Out* programme on 10 December 2012, and the museum went into liquidation in 2013. The collections were transferred to the care of Bristol Museums, meaning that its collections – including the oral histories – were moved to the local, publicly owned Bristol Archives.

The British Empire & Commonwealth collection contains many audio recordings of interviews with and photographs, letters and ephemera belonging to “colonial servants” – officials, administrators, soldiers, police officers, civil servants and their spouses – who were in British India at the time of Partition/independence. The mostly English voices speak of their own encounters in British India to five oral historians – listed at the beginning of the catalogue index – who were working towards the institution of the BECC. Currently, the collection is subject to a renewed appraisal of its colonial material, in keeping with the decolonial turn towards archives seen in the UK and other former empires. BECC archivist Nicky Sugar told me during a short conversation in 2020 that:

“As a museum of the Empire and Commonwealth it is important to present the whole story from every point of view. In the immediate future we will be concentrating on collecting stories from indigenous people who lived under British rule – at present these interviews make up approximately 20% of our collection. We have made an appeal on the BBC World Service, both for any existing archives and for new contacts. We have already had an encouraging response, and hope eventually to set up Oral History projects overseas. We will

⁵¹ Steven Morris, “Row erupts over British empire museum's 'lost' artefacts”, *The Guardian*, December 10, 2012. <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2012/dec/10/row-british-empire-museum-artefacts>.

also be initiating new projects in this country.”⁵²

At an event organised by the research project Museum of British Colonialism and the newspaper *Informer East Africa* in January 2020 at the Africa Centre in London, Sugar had discussed new plans for the collections, including exhibitions and callouts for more ‘decolonial’ researchers to work with its material, particularly as part of its British Library connected year-long digitisation project, completed in 2021, called Unlocking Our Sound Heritage.⁵³ Although this is to be lauded, it is important to note that one condition that surrounds the public access of oral historical material held at BECC – as (not) heard in *I (hear) colonial voices* – is that those speaking in the recordings do not implicate themselves as problematic to our ears. In a blogpost, museum studies student Kate Robertshaw, who conducted a placement with the BECC collection, writes:

One of my main duties has been to review each audio recording for sensitive information before it is released online. Oral histories are very personal accounts, so it is important that any information that could compromise an individual’s right to privacy is flagged before a decision is made as to whether or not it should be made publicly available. This includes information such as health conditions, defamatory statements, political or religious beliefs. Although we have a responsibility to make as much material available as possible for the public to engage with and learn from, we also need to safeguard those who generously donated their voices to the collection. (Robertshaw, 2021)

The history and historical interpretations of the BECC collection are important, given that dynamics of uncertainty and shifting values ascribed to its material are often hidden by the permanence, the stability, that archives evoke more generally. This also echoes the issues of re-use discussed in 3.4. These stories reveal unstable and at times unethical ways in which archival institutions institute themselves. They are not detailed in *I hear (colonial) voices*, but do provide the critical background into the compositional techniques and methods used – destabilising, disordering, “re-mixing and mashing up” as a way to render the “absent colonial administrator” in Partition histories (Roy 2020, 79) as absent-present. Connected to Partition through this very absence, the transmission also manifests through literal silences. Like the absence of the destroyed

⁵² Nicky Sugar, interviewed by author, Zoom, September 15, 2020.

⁵³ “Unlocking our Sound Heritage”, *British Library*. <https://www.bl.uk/projects/unlocking-our-sound-heritage>. Accessed on November 30, 2022

records discussed in Chapter Two, here we can transform the lack of answers – the lack of witness, the lack of ‘sound’ – through redeployment, an idea explored in the next section.

6.4 Redeployment

A central feature of colonial discourse, to return to Homi Bhabha, is the concept of ‘fixity’ in the ideological construction of otherness. “Fixity, as the sign of cultural/historical/racial difference in the discourse of colonialism, is a paradoxical mode of representation: it connotes rigidity and an unchanging order as well as disorder, degeneracy and daemonic repetition.” (Bhabha 2004, 94) We can understand the colonial and postcolonised partitioned archive through this paradox – its systematising and hijacking of the other and its repeated dis/ordering of their time and space. That is not to say that archives should be done away with, as there remains other modes of refiguring and re-inscription. As Achille Mbembe asked in a 2018 public lecture, “what in the archive can be redeployed for this situation we are in? Even the archives of those we are against?” (Mbembe, 2018)

Gyanendra Pandey’s “ethnography” of a colonial archive (2012, viii) through its documentation of a mob attack (“riot”) on a mosque in Banaras in the early 19th century (ibid, 39-45) is useful when considering the practice of redeployment. Tracing how this attack was reported, rewritten and re-historicised by colonial administrators as a “riot” over time, the archive solidifies typecasts of Muslims, Hindus and Rajputs through conflict, justifiable out of one event that still has a hazy history. Through the repetition of these ethnic particulars and colonial tropes, “the history of Banaras becomes the history of India.” (ibid, 29) Historian Shahid Amin’s archival research on Chauri Chaura, the site of an altercation between peasants and colonial police in 1922 – 25 years before Partition – traces another example of how violence in colonial India not only becomes written, but predestined by the colonial archive. (Amin, 2004)

One of the last questions we hear in *I hear (colonial) voices* concerns the interviewee’s experiences in Kenya, shortly before the piece ends – the second tape, in which he speaks about his experiences during the Mau Mau uprising, was not included

in the piece. My decision to engage with the BECC's recordings was however partly influenced by the networks and connections revealed in these stories that visibilize the scale of empire thinking and post-imperial statecraft – connections not necessarily clear from the catalogue index, where Partition and Kenya are “obviously” separate. This connection opened up a possibility out of the limits of Partition as “British” or “Indian” history, a singular event that supposedly ensnared ordinary British citizens (many of whom redeployed to other colonies).

My engagement with letters and photographs – visual and textual material given so much primacy in historical research – also reveals the abundant quality of such material in contrast to the lost and burned files of 1947, as heard in *'You trust your memories?'* [4.2]. Partitioned listening here not only becomes a literal practice – partitioning the voices of the interviewee and the interviewer via the removal of one and the amplification of the other, splitting them – but also the partitioning between the abundant colonial archive in the west, and the “empty” or lost archives elsewhere. This allows us to consider testimony not only as a practice of “filling the gaps” of silenced histories, but also supplementary to the archive's “colonial common sense”. (Stoler 2009, 23)

The combining together of these different archival ‘tracks’, borrowed and reperformed intentionally, also goes some way to address the temporally loaded question asked in 2.2, following Ahmed Manan Asif: what is the past that remains audible after the annihilation of one's present? Intentional redactions are a partial response, facilitating a manipulation of the audible history we have been guided to hear, tracing “structures of feeling” (Kamra in Jain & Sarin 2018, 194) forged by archival destruction, as explored in *'You trust your memories?'*, or its threats, as heard in *We Shall Witness*. It also produces a monumentality of memory that is assured, guaranteed, by the presence of testimony in the postcolonised museum, which redeploys it for curated, visually designed spaces.

During the eight years preceding the launch of the National History Museum in Lahore, curatorial team and research designers at CAP carried out visits to the British

Museum, the Albert and Mary Museum and the British Library in London, the Polin Museum of Jewish History in Warsaw, Poland; the House of Terror in Budapest, Hungary (known for its collections on fascist and authoritarian regimes of the 20th century) and the Smithsonian Museums in Washington D.C. According to a 2019 newspaper report, CAP also plans to collaborate with the Sindh regional government on a new “history museum and cultural centre” in Karachi.⁵⁴

While walking through the museum one oral history recording on display – via headphones hanging from a wall – made me stop for quite a while. The woman on the recording detailed her memories about listening to Muhammad Ali Jinnah speak at the announcement of the Lahore Resolution in 1940. Though histories of listening are important (and here Isabel Alonso’s upcoming work on post-Partition radio audiences is due to be an important contribution), the rousing speeches of the high politics of the past, memorialized through the listening of ordinary people, is a big move away from “breaking” the silences of the past. After looking around the rest of the room, I made the connection between the person speaking on the recording, as the daughter of the architect of the Minar e Pakistan monument. A scale model of the tower, which is in the same park as the National History Museum, was on display. This is somehow an extension of the materiality of oral memory discussed in Chapter One. This sense of monumentality struck me later, when I visited the monument right after the museum.

In the museum’s Partition section – right after a virtual reality experience in an old Pakistan rail carriage – the lines of solitary headphones on the walls give way to an altogether different mood. A room, slightly darkened, is occupied by several old vintage suitcases mounted on plinths. The suitcases are displayed opened to reveal tablet screens, a single object (a watch, a piece of jewellery), and attached headphones. On the screens, one can choose a migration story to watch/listen to, through the modes of transportation that the storyteller has taken – train, boat or by foot. Each of the narrators, like all the stories you could hear on the headphones in the museum, had been interviewed by CAP oral historians.

⁵⁴ “History museum, cultural centre to be established in city”, *Dawn*, November 1, 2019, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1514093>

Here, however, the stories take the form of animation, or re-enactments by live actors. Because there was no information about the person speaking – just their name and the year they were born (similarly, we do not know who the accompanying objects belong to) – it was impossible to know anything about the person speaking unless they had a title that offered a clue – Captain, Lieutenant, etc. As speculated on with the play *Silence* in 1.4, the anonymity of these histories are perhaps intended to protect the interlocutors, and the familiarity I felt with their stories – have I heard this before? Was this in so and so’s book? – enhanced the feeling that oral histories are propped up – literally – by objects and technology that depoliticize, supplementing the “free-floating human subject, disconnected from the realm of politics”.

Pippa Virdee argues that the resurgence of British-centred histories of Partition, discussed in Chapter Two, works to “convey equality among human suffering, without making reference to the unequal nature of colonial relationships” and “does tremendous disservice to the story of empire, which did not operate on any parity or neutrality.” (Virdee 2022, 10) While this view is justifiable, at the same time, this is also an interesting space to approach new “genres” of Partition history that write in new interpretations, particularly those of the imperialized self.

6.5 Genre

Alessandro Portelli’s definition of oral history as a “composite genre” (in Chamberlain and Thompson 1998, 23) has been useful to my thinking about the narrative emplotment of Partition through audio research. Defining genre as a “verbal construct shaped by shared verbal devices – whether conventionally established or not” (ibid) Portelli makes two assertions: that oral history is both a genre in its own right, and also contains genres within it. (ibid, 24)

Portelli’s analysis brings up examples of how genre plays a role in the shaping of oral history, and vice versa, through process, form, content and context. Ronald J. Grele effectively summarises Portelli’s properties of genre as:

the involvement of the historian in the creation of the document and the consequences of that involvement, the context of the creation, its orality, the intersection of the private and public, the existence of a public audience and the knowledge of that audience on the part of both parties in the interview, the particular grant of authority on the part of the interviewee, the dialogic text, the limits of the encounter, and the performatory aspects of that encounter.” (Grele, 2000, 169-170)

In the transmission, my focus on reading letters, looking at photographs and searching the catalogue – visual and textual material that is given so much primacy in historical research – reveals the abundance of such material in contrast to the lost and burned files of 1947, as heard in *‘You trust your memories?’* [4.2]. In situations of ongoing erasure, the making of one’s own archive then becomes an act of contestation. The collective punishment instilled by forced abduction and disappearances in Kashmir, as Ather Zia writes, have brought about a different kind of “archival resistance” (Zia 2019, 153) specific to living through continual cycles of settler-colonialism. The personal documents and artefacts gathered and privately guarded by the activists of the APDP, a movement introduced in 1.3, are hidden away, largely ignored by police bureaucracy (if they are ever accepted as evidence). In this condition, “the archive appears as a central motif of countermemory, of loss, and of a subaltern power” (ibid, 149), and “an outside memory, a presence personified, a subversive museum sometimes filled with artifacts that the government itself has endorsed, like memos or decrees or reports, or media write-ups.” (ibid, 163) This evokes Kamra’s conception, following Raymond Williams of a colonial “structure of feeling” (Kamra in Jain & Sarin 2018, 194) that is forged by hegemonic silences, as explored in *‘You trust your memories?’*, and archival coercions, as heard in *We shall witness*.

In the last transmission, the institution of my own silences then amplifies the archive’s own limits. One of the reasons the interviews were removed from the recording was to protect living descendants, a fulfilment of the archive’s protocols of protecting people’s voices, and the views they hold, from being heard in posterity – exemplified by Robertshaw’s blogpost cited in 6.3. But this method is also a way to refigure the story, sonically re-instituting the archive as a space in which a listener is located and part of, as well as a site of fictive truths. The ‘silenced’ answers reconcile with and fall out from the

archive's physical environment, the categorisations of collection's catalogue index which I read out, and the deteriorations and fake replications of the digitised oral history cassette tapes which reveal my own partitioned listening. These sonic elements, alongside the shuffles of the archive recorded on my iPhone, situate oral history as potentially complicit with hierarchical and colonial forms of knowledge production – one of its genres. The introduction to the piece, which overlays the start of each cassette tape, attests to how “the first person who speaks in an oral history interview is usually not the interviewee, but the interviewer” (Portelli 1991, 9) – a dynamic that reverberates in the collection of voices that the piece polyphonically situates at the start.

My repetitions of certain terms in both India and Pakistan's archival logs – the groupings in the catalogue titled “see also, Pakistan”, “see also, India” – trouble the archive's equivalence of sameness, the crossover divisions. This indication of the erasures within the archive itself is an attempt at “folding an idea in on itself”, “entering its lists”. (McKittrick 2021, 170/168). As well as referencing the specific collections I have accessed, this reiterates the authority of the archival index, citing it, making it “findable”, but also centring it as part and parcel of its labour. Repetition here emerges in stark contrast to the flattening of history that repetition can also create, as explored in Chapters One and Two, restoring the possibility of past encounters determined by archival and imperial ordering.

Near the beginning of *I hear (colonial) voices*, I read out a selection of the BECM catalogue index, *Voices and Echoes* (1999), which lists all the oral histories held in the archive to date. Inserting my selection of archival categories that mark my pursuit of Partition in the colonial archive is subjective and revealing of a certain complicity, while at the same time also turning away from the “colonial regimes of truth” that shape in. (Stoler 2022, 571) In Chapter Two, I theorised the archive's authority through the taxonomical and temporal scopes it institutes. Sheftel and Zembrzycki, without advocating for the doing away of indexing completely, argue that interviews are nonetheless antithetical to the archive's structural forms. The problems of indexing emphasize the importance of searching for “patterns, connections, silences, and other hard-to-index material” (Sheftel and Zembrzycki 2017, 102) in listening-research. This

evokes the indexical pursuit in the colonial ethnographic archive (Hoffmann & Mnyaka 2015), the accountability of the archive, and its institution of closure.

Towards the end of the work, after en/countering testimonial rationalizations and erasures, a ruined piece of audio is heard, followed by fictionalized sounds of tape being “rewound” three times. Then follows an assertion:

It’s clear that this particular tape is decaying, becoming warped. As soon as the people on it begin to speak about the differences between Indians and the British, between Hindus and Muslims, the innate differences between them — the differences, so we are told, that led to Partition— I stop being able to understand. (Tariq, 2022)

My professed lack of understanding is implicated here in three modes – sonic (the tape is literally decayed and warped, and therefore difficult to hear); epistemic (I mistrust her questions and their validation of differential knowledge) and ethical (I morally dispute the answers of the narrator, not heard). It is here that sonic methodology reveals itself as a way for multiple forms of meaning-making through the act of “hearing voices” that extends beyond oral history, sound studies and archival listening as singular pursuits.

While writing the text that accompanied the piece for *World Records*, I was engaged in the work of Spanish artist Dora García through my work with Colomboscope and A Thousand Channels. I was able to participate in her collaborative project “The Hearing Voices Café”, through which García has utilised repetition as a conceptual and convivial artistic practice.

The project is activated through café situations where one hears many voices – as it happens in cafés – but via critical collective discourse from and about “voice hearers”, their medicalisation and exclusion from “rational” public life.⁵⁵ This revealed the ambiguity and malleability of the expression “hearing voices”, and the implications of this expression as it had come about – ethically, epistemically, socially – over this

⁵⁵ *The Hearing Voices Café Colombo*, 21-30.01.2022. <https://hearingvoicescafecolombo.wordpress.com/>. Accessed 30 November 2022

research journey. In Colombo, Sri Lanka, where the café took place in January 2022, the frames of the project changed. The café was hosted in an open tea pavilion in a public park. The daily sessions, among other topics of conversation, parsed among other themes the genocide in Tamil Eelam and historic pogroms, enforced disappearances, constitutional, psychiatric and spiritual rights and political feminism, via talks, readings, performances and jam sessions. As written in the project notes, the polysemic nature of the phrase “hearing voices” “underlines the political load of dissent from the norm, and the relation of this dissidence, this non-normativity, with creativity. In many cultures, voice-hearing is a precious gift, a connection to the underworld, the spiritual, the ancestors, and a form of communication with the departed.”⁵⁶

⁵⁶ *The Hearing Voices Café Colombo, 21-30.01.2022.*

Conclusion: You, We, I

Overview

Throughout this thesis, “partitioned listening” has been developed and refined as a creative methodology and practice that approaches the 1947 Partition as a “sonic” condition. After inciting critical considerations of the role of speech, silence and listening within the labour of Partition’s history-making and its contemporary archival landscape, I grounded partitioned listening within the exploration of four broad ideas: evidencing listening, re-existence, the ‘sonic’ text and illegibility.

As partitioned listening is focused on listening with, alongside, others (within and without the archive, across time and space), adopting Katherine McKittrick’s modes of method-making that reconfigure text on the page, “within the story, and in extant of the story” (McKittrick 2021, 170), registers of fiction and “alter-realism” (Savransky 2017, 22) have been central to the narrative and sonic methods that form the transmissions presented and contextualized by my archival encounters in Chapters Four, Five and Six. Reconsidering Partition violence beyond making it “into part of the sealed past, dissociated in time and space from where we are” (Azoulay 2019, 286), the transformation of “credible” or “reliable” history through these registers has provoked insights into the nature of the relationship between our listening and testimonial histories, and of certain parameters of trust, legibility and imagination that this history evokes through the sonic. This approach has been sounded out creatively, implicated in rather than being didactic about memory production, while offering ways of sensing Partition’s archival, memorial, poetic labour intersubjectively and affectively.

Working out what partitioned listening is/could be/should be has been critically embedded in listening in many modes: conducting interviews, visiting archives, listening to and reading testimony, “borrowing” recordings, transcribing, writing scripts (and a thesis), as well as producing audio research with variant material and means. Overall, these different methods have contributed to a multi-modal framework that has not only helped to strengthen understandings of Partition as a “sonic” condition, but

also about the potential and limitations of listening as a method and practice. Contextualized by Partition's contemporary aural-archival landscape and the discursive, temporal separations that still persist in its history, my investigation has offered insights into the listening that might be required in this context: how we can protocol it, evidence it, write it, sound it, train it, transcribe it, archive it, undiscipline it, translate it, repeat it, etc. This approach has centred narrative and more-than-narrative sound through modes of remix and invention, which has helped to express the many entangled relationships between Partition 'story' and 'history' without providing definitive answers on how exactly we should listen. In the next section, I outline the specific insights of this thesis and of the audio research. I end by addressing some of the limitations and other openings that have come up during the research journey, offering grounds for further inquiry.

Contributions of the thesis

Chapter One outlined scholarly perspectives on communalist/colonialist forms of knowledge production and feminist, oral historical and anthropological listening in colonial and partitioned 'India'. This partial historiography revealed some of Partition's testimonial challenges, silences and inclusions, which invoke the production of "Partition effects". (Zamindar 2007, 239) Through an analysis of the effects of silence, speech and the restoration of women's speech in particular, I addressed Partition testimony through the entanglements between narrative, fiction and archive, as well as the influence of Holocaust studies. The shift towards post-memory, object memory and the non-narrative possibilities of "post-amnesia" (Kabir, 2014) were explored as critical openings to the expansive forms of memory-making that Partition provokes, and the types of listening it is entwined with. Centring the processes of listening on the part of scholars from a variety of fields including Partition studies, philosophy and political anthropology, this chapter provided deeper understandings of Partition as a potentially "sonic" condition, which entails necessarily sonic labour. This provided critical and historiographical ground on which to approach the aural archives.

In Chapter Two, I introduced the three archives encountered for this research, and surveyed the development, reconstruction and dispersal of Partition’s “dissonant heritage” (Svensson, 2021) that has been entangled with public memory globally. This survey, particularly of projects connected to the UK and North America, includes reflections on the power relationships between oral history and the archive (Dodd, 2021; Raychaudhuri, 2021) followed by a genealogical account of colonial archival “spatial and temporal regimes” (Azoulay 2019, 163) and reflections on the British empire’s missing, hidden and destroyed archives and the imaginaries this can produce. These framings, building on the considerations of the conditions set upon the restoration of speech in Chapter One, provided critical understandings of some of the contra/dictions of 1947, where notions of “silence” can then be extended to and explored within the archive’s temporal and political frame. The connections made between the qualities of absence, abundance and testimonial “assurance” then opened up Partition to other methodological paradigms, which necessitated a rethinking of listening and its roles in the context of a resurgent archival-memory boom.

In Chapter Three, I introduced “partitioned listening” as a creative methodology and practice, my main contribution to knowledge. Discussing the possibilities of “evidencing” listening through a research-specific protocol, I first discussed critical gaps and openings in oral history, sound studies and audio and artistic research that engage with listening as a method. I discussed the political implications of sound, text, “artefacts”, legibility and the aural archive, the latter further contextualised by indexical and speculative approaches. (Hoffmann & Mnyaka, 2015; Bhowmik, 2022) This offered insights that adjoined disciplinary sensibilities and experiences, following the possibilities of method-making proposed by Katherine McKittrick (2021) that accommodate Partition as a process where sound and text are in continual relation with each other. Building on the various types of ‘silence’ explored in the first two chapters, the framework accommodates auditory sensibilities in the unpicking and unravelling of colonial and nationalist claims to modernity through the archive’s fixing of time and space. This is “put into practice” in Chapters Four–Six.

In the subsequent three chapters I presented my creative practice in the form of three ‘transmissions’ followed by accounts and reflections about three archives, introduced in 2.1. The first, *You trust your memories?* [4.2] incorporated personal testimony and public history, beginning with the destruction of knowledge starting with a fire in Delhi in 1947, discussed in Chapter Two. Within the thesis, this transmission met critical understandings of my (remote) encounters with the 1947 Partition Archive, particularly its onus on visibility and identification in oral history interviews in a context of draconian citizenship laws. These insights were gleaned from interviews and my own training by the archive, whose limitations also revealed some of the ways in which my own conducted oral history cannot fit the archive’s terms. Reflecting on Madhavi Menon’s fable that bookends the transmission, I discussed the instability of listening that this work evoked, one that does not adhere to colonial forms of knowledge production, the archive’s fixing of time and space, or the redemptive nature of oral history (speech, listening) after violence.

In *We shall witness* [5.2] I worked through the trajectories of the (poetic, political) fragment and its copy, via Faiz Ahmed Faiz’s poem *Hum Dekhenge*. Also facing a (threatened) archive, memory here is shown manifesting as repetition across borders, “partitioned” listening becoming so quite literally. Chapter Five then further discussed the repetitions – or mimicry – embedded in the practices and protocols of the Citizen’s Archive of Pakistan, and its oral history work. This revealed the types of progression and linearity – in exchanges of access and hierarchical labour as well as processes of ordering and categorisation – that jar with some of oral history’s temporal and political forms.

I hear (colonial) voices, differently to the first two transmission, then situated partitioned listening directly within the archive, and a collection of British Partition testimony and personal photographs, letters and ephemera belonging to colonial “servants”, held by the Bristol Empire and Commonwealth Collection. Flipping the script of Partition, its “absent colonial administrators” are then made present through their absence, meticulously cut out of the audio that details their experiences of colonial India and of the events of 1947. Contextualized by a parallel history of this collection

(and its failed museal ambitions), I then considered Achille Mbembe's proposition of archival redeployment and returned again to the possibilities offered by repetition in listening-centred research, following the critical insights from Chapter Three. This approach to aural archives, "even those we are against" (Mbembe, 2018), was considered through the polysemy of the term "hearing voices", via artist Dora García.

The exploration of Partition – which for the purpose of this research has been archival, political, historical and sonic, imbued with practices of speech, silence and listening – has provided methodological and creative insights that can extend to research in other partitioned contexts, as well as sound studies, memory studies and arts education. Throughout this thesis I have engaged practically with artist filmmaker Onyeka Igwe's concept of "critical proximity", most notably by including my own voice and sonic labour alongside my written, academic arguments. Embedding audio alongside the written thesis has provoked research in which sound and text have been in continual relation with each other, and has revealed certain entanglements that have been central throughout this research journey, be it my own personal proximity to Partition, listening's proximity to the production of oral/aural history, and the archive's entanglements with testimony.

This sense of proximity, beyond the voices that guided me into and through and outside of the archive, have produced other unexpected relations, particularly when the first two works [4.2+5.2] started "travelling". Since 2020, *You trust your memories?* and *We shall witness* have been listened to variously in workshops for 11 and 12-year-old girls at Hopscotch Womens' Centre, London; graduate courses at Indus Valley University and Habib University, Karachi (curating, communication, media) and Simmons University, Massachusetts USA (oral history). The first piece has also been included in an online archival resource produced for HKW Berlin's Anthropocene curriculum.⁵⁷ The pieces have been shared as part of lectures and listening sessions, including at the Archives and Education Research Institute Congress 2020 (which took place on Zoom) and "Society 5.0", a symposium held at the Institut Sen Bendaya in

⁵⁷ Anthropocene Curriculum, "Seminar: Archiving", HKW, October 31, 2020. <https://www.anthropocene-curriculum.org/project/the-shape-of-a-practice/the-shape-of-a-practice-seminars/seminar-archiving>.

Bandung, Java, Indonesia in 2022.

Having been heard in so many contexts, the dissemination of the audio research has extended the contributions of this research beyond its initial intentions. Though starting with the 1947 Partition, this exploration of sonic method-making and storytelling – that doesn't guide how to listen per se – has allowed for the contradictions, limitations and affective knowledges that Partition, as a “condition within which we all labour” (Menon 2015, 121) to be revealed across and beyond disciplinary fields. This was particularly profound at a time where a resurgence of pandemic listening – for me, like for many, mediated by online video conferencing, podcasts and messaging apps – also fed a spirit of sonic sharing. The parallel digital turn that was already happening in Partition archiving and scholarship, and the hundreds of online conversations and listening sessions that contributed to *A Thousand Channels* have been integral to the development of partitioned listening as a practice, especially as the capacity for in-person fieldwork and recording was severely limited.

These limitations were due to obvious reasons (isolation, quarantine, travel restrictions, access to technology, as well as health and personal challenges) but also institutional closures, delays in digitization schemes, and reduced access to archival material. This emphasised the fragility and inaccessibility of so much of sonic history, but also the lack of attention given to the thousands if not millions of sound files that are still not being listened to. This insight can maybe assist practice-based research in other partitioned/diasporic contexts, where scholars working in the Global North can share material, resources and crucially spaces for shared listening and discussions of shared listening to occur. It also unveils some of the practices that archivists, oral historians and practitioners can deploy when dealing with archival contexts where sound and memory are not only intertwined, but almost become the same thing.

Limitations and openings

Among my pre-pandemic research plans included shadowing oral historians training with the Citizen's Archive of Pakistan in Karachi, many of whom were students, and visiting the South Asian Oral History Collections at the Institute of Social History in

Amsterdam, Netherlands, which holds interviews about the Telengana peasant uprisings, Srikakulam, the Bangladesh Liberation War and Pakistan in various languages.⁵⁸ My intention in both cases was to engage in a shared listening, so accessing and listening to audio material with others (artists, researchers, witnesses, people) of any generation who had connections to the recordings or the contexts of their production.

I have also developed an interest in two other archives: the Lok Virsa's (Folk Museum) ethnographic sound archives, held in its library in Islamabad, and the Constantinos A Doxiadis archives in Athens, Greece. Doxiadis was the chief urban planner of Islamabad, the new Pakistani capital in 1960, as well as many resettlement colonies and housing in Karachi.⁵⁹ Though these two archives demand completely different lines of inquiry – the latter containing no soundfiles at all but transcripts of Doxiadis' Dictaphone – they both felt connected, particularly as I gradually understood how Indigenous communities, in the development policies of the nascent and contemporary Pakistani state, have been left behind in the processes of nationalism after Partition. In Doxiadis' archives, I looked at reams of meticulously transcribed notes, alongside drawings, air and land photographs, many of which contained “empty” landscapes ripe for building. The richest documentation of his work conducted in Pakistan, which was supported by the Ford Foundation and the UN, were the transcribed fieldnotes. Transcribed in his office in Athens, they are typed out in first-person, with rare glimpses of emotive description and sonic story. The original Dictaphone recordings are unfortunately not in the archive, but I was amazed at the quality and organisation of the written material, from all over the world (Doxiadis worked on many development projects in the US, Africa and Asia).

⁵⁸ *International Institute of Oral History*, “Guide to the Oral History Collections at the International Institute of Social History”. https://iisg.amsterdam/files/2018-01/iish_guide_south_asian_oral_history_collections_2008.pdf Accessed 30 November, 2022.

⁵⁹ *Lok Virsa*, <https://lokvirsa.org.pk/> and *Constantinos A. Doxiadis Archives*, <http://archive.doxiadis.org>, both accessed 30 November, 2022. My research at the Constantinos A. Doxiadis Archives was facilitated through the British School at Athens Arts Bursary and Residency, a joint initiative by Research at Camberwell, Chelsea Wimbledon, University of the Arts London, spring 2020.

Doxiadis' segmentation of the Pakistani settler-refugee population (that kept arriving decades after 1947, and kept facing displacement, as Shahana Rajani and Sonja Schönberger's work discussed in 3.3 attests) has a clear connection to the folk museum thousands of kilometres away in Islamabad, where the "empty landscapes" in the photographs are home to songs, voices, languages and dialects. When I visited Lok Virsa a few months after the residency in Athens, I accidentally walked into its library (not realising there was one) after watching grainy videos of "tribal" communities in the museum, particularly musical and dance performances from Sindh and Balochistan. None of the videos on display had any sound, title or names.

As metaphors go, this separation of sound and subject in Pakistan's national ethnographic museum – more than Doxiadis' abundant/absent private archives – felt visceral. This provokes an opening out of the possibilities of encountering dispersed material that speak of (or silences) the same territory within different archives. "Partitioned listening" as a practice can be extended, away from the singularity and "solo-ness" that academic work and disciplinary listening can entail, towards connecting and shared sensing as mentioned – provoking collective listening across disparate postcolonized contexts, where protocols, text and sound can be worked on together through myriad archives. This provides a particular opening for researchers based in countries that, as mentioned in the Introduction, face extreme borderisation and barriers to accessing materials held in countries that do not give out visas easily, if at all. "Partitioned listening", forged out of an urge to understand historical division through sonic method-making, then produces other opportunities for connection.

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