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Unsettling Silences: The Trauma of Witnessing in Manto's "Cold Meat" and "Open It"

One of the most haunting sections of the groundbreaking work *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, is found at the end of the first chapter of the book, "Education and Crisis." Here, co-writer Shoshana Felman reproduces a fragment from the response paper of one of her students from her "Literature and Testimony" course, which she leaves as the final word to the chapter:

Viewing the Holocaust testimony was not for me initially catastrophic – so much of the historical coverage of it functions to empty it from its horror. Yet, in the week that followed the first screening, and throughout the remainder of the class, I felt increasingly implicated in the pain of the testimony, which found a particular reverberation in my own life.

[...]

Literature has become for me the site of my own stammering. Literature, as that which can sensitively bear witness to the Holocaust, gives me a voice, a right, and a necessity to survive. Yet, I cannot discount the literature which in the dark awakens the screams, which opens the wounds, and which makes me want to fall silent. Caught by two contradictory wishes at once, to speak or not to speak, I can only stammer. Literature, for me, in those moments, has had a performative value: my life has suffered a burden, undergone a transference of pain. If I am to continue reading, I must, like David Copperfield, read *as if for life*. (Felman and Laub, 55-56)

Whilst I am aware of and agree with Veena Das's caution 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 103), in this case, the context of the Partition of India, I chose to reproduce this excerpt in framing my readings of Saadat Hasan Manto's two short stories "Cold Meat" and "Open It" for several reasons. Firstly, the significance of its arrangement within the text as the conclusion to a chapter crammed with words from experts of Holocaust writing such as De Man and Paul Celan, cannot be missed. We are told that the writer of these words is neither a Jew, nor an expert in Holocaust writing. The sensory, visceral construction of his sentences lingers with us like an echo, outlining the affective power of literature and film on its audience, and then proving its "performative value" by directing the ways in which we - as fellow non-Jews and non-experts in Holocaust and traumatic literature - are to regard the rest of the text - to resist being benumbed by the violent images that have now been emptied "of its horror" due to overexposure - and instead open ourselves up to being affected by it, to also *read as if for life*. We are also reminded that the traumatic consequences of the Holocaust, or any traumatic event of a similar scale, is not the sole responsibility of those who were directly involved in it. Ultimately, the goal of the ethical call is not to impose an all-encompassing frame through which we can arrange the experiences of someone else; but the ethical call is addressed to us, and it is finally about how literature and trauma affects us and compels us - as witnesses who were nevertheless not directly involved in the enactment and staging of the trauma - to respond to it. In fact, it underlines the power of these affects to be transferred to the listener or reader, and the liminal space of "stammering" - being in between speech and silence - that the ethical impulse of trauma thrusts us into, thus making us all "bearers of the silence" (Felman and Laub *xiv*) and unspeakability of trauma.

Secondly, the underlying eloquence of this “stammer” succinctly summarises and addresses almost all of the preoccupations of this paper: the pivotal role of literature as a medium for the transmission of testimony, the persistence and power of traumatic memory or narratives to grip us and intrude into the consciousness of our everyday lives, the capacity of literature to appoint us as witnesses, and then reframe and *transform* the ways in which we may view, read and *feel* our way through these traumatic narratives. In essence, these questions direct us towards the possibilities and limits of language, of form, of narrative that we stumble into as the text slinks between the realms of private memory and historical or public memory; the tension and interplay between words and silence, aesthetics and substance; “the twin demands” (Kabir 177) of forgetting and remembering; inclusivity and exclusivity and displaces them.

All of these questions are concentrated in the paradoxical role that witnessing opens up to us, which are staged and unfolded in the works of Saadat Hasan Manto’s short stories on the Partition of India, in particular “Open It” and “Cold Meat”. In exploring the ways in which the call to witness simultaneously pulls us into the space of that traumatic experience and forces us to remain on the edges of it – we are called to bear witness to these acts of violence, and yet at the same time, our capacity to witness is limited by only an observation of the outward manifestation of their consequences, I will ask and attempt to work through the following questions, all of which correspond to and expand upon the ones raised above: Is it possible for literature to bear witness to traumatic events effectively and integrate the psychological impact of the Partition of India within the structure and texture of the narratives? How is the reader, who is distanced from the immediacy of the trauma sutured into the act of bearing witness? How are we supposed to interact with, respond to or interpret the silences of the text? How are pre-existing frames of knowledge (i.e. from official historical accounts or even knowledge established through rumors) integrated into the gaps

that silence leaves out? How can the paradoxes of witnessing be seen as a replication of the same issues that undergirded that of the Partition?

In attempting to understand the ways in which Manto's short stories negotiate these dilemmas, I will focus on the formalistic choices that Manto uses in facilitating his narrative, paying particular attention to the ways in which he deals with the involuntary silencing as well as open denial of voices and stories that the characters have been subject to. Since the narratives we read are conceived out of real-life silences and bear witness to the character's process of losing their voices through trauma, the form of the narrations that we receive in "Open It" and "Cold Meat" also bears the scars of silence: through subsumed voices, gaps in the narratives, suggestion through repression, abrupt silences and the use of ellipses. This paper aims to examine the presence and significance of this range of silences that are weaved into the fold of the narratives, thus undermining and enriching them at the same time. Additionally, by tracking the intersection that is produced in the collision of Partition literature with trauma theory, I will look at ways in which Trauma theory enables and encourages us to listen to and read "through the radical disruption and gaps of traumatic experience" (Caruth 4) marked through silence in the narratives, and by extension, how the structure of the texts themselves comply with, engage and interrogate, challenge and go beyond the frames of reading that Trauma theory and reality offer us in order to reassess and extend our understanding of the phenomenon of trauma as well as its limits.

I will first move through a survey of the historical and academic conception of the Partition of India and its effects, and then tie them together with questions of testifying and testimony, as well as the paradoxes of witnessing before focusing on how Saadat Hasan Manto's stories magnifies these problems and draws them out. This will form a lens through which to help us read, engage with and apprehend the silences found in the text, as well as to navigate and breakdown a host of related issues expressed through the silences, including the

reliability of hegemonic authority, the fragility of gender relations and the patriarchal institution, and the senselessness of violence.

REMEMBERING THE PARTITION OF INDIA

In order to bequeath us with a sense of the magnitude of the trauma and the various complications attached to the questions of testifying and bearing witness, I will contextualize the short stories with a brief summary of the history of the Partition of India as it is remembered and acknowledged by official historical, ethnographic and literary accounts. Thus, I will be juxtaposing and interweaving two strands of evidence that bear testimony to the Partition of India: both academic and political information that have entered the realm of accepted knowledge and upheld as historical fact, as well as the more personal accounts culled from private memories that transcend the political and factual realm¹ to give shape to a personal meaning or value that we can integrate with our lives. These two strands are held in tension to gesture towards the kind of balance that is required for a more holistic, comprehensive understanding of the impact of the Partition of India.

Jill Didur weighs in on the significance of these two currents with a quotation from Di Paolantonio, who believes that “[t]he issue is not simply with remembering or forgetting, but rather with *how* the nation remembers to forget, with how, that is, the representations of a remembered past serve an imaginary coherence that remains closed to the other” (Didur 125). Whilst many scholars have engaged with issues of gendered violence towards women and the irreparable crack that the Partition of India has dealt on the communal relations of the people of India and Pakistan, each positing their own preferred group as the victimized Other, my paper will instead pursue questions that may be filtered from these gendered readings, but arise through the prism of historical memory. Historical memory, as Felman clarifies, involves not just notions of remembrance expressed through a “retelling, [or] a practice that seeks the recovery of what has been lost, neglected, or misplaced” (Felman and Laub 2), but

¹ By distinguishing the “factual realm” from that which the literary imagination fashions, I do not mean to suggest that the details which we receive from literary narrations of the Partition are not true, only that they often occupy a space of privacy that cannot be objectively verified, or cannot be packaged in a way that would serve the clinical interests of official history.

forces us into “a critical recognition or discovery that unsettles the very terms on which our understanding of ourselves and our world is based” (Felman and Laub 4). This practice is distinguished from the destructive gesture of breaking down or deconstructing reality, but enunciates the ways in which the texts may act as recuperative spaces that allows the traumatic memory to live alongside reality, functioning as:

a call to witness by disrupting ‘our’² understanding about ‘the past’ and its relationship to the present each time the reader engages in the act of reading as remembrance.” (Didur 130)

Essentially, the role of historical memory does not lie in aiding a process of forgetting, for to forget is to all too easily dismiss or dissolve the reality that proceeded from the trauma, but in helping us make sense of the debris of the violence. It is a recognition that remembrance is “not simply a matter of choice” but “a learning to live with loss, a learning to live with a return of a memory that inevitably instantiates loss and thus bears no ultimate consolation, a learning to live with a disquieting remembrance” that “continues to pose questions of what it means to live in the shadows of mass violence” (Didur 130).

In effect, historical memory forces us to bear witness to the difficult process of reconciliation. In and through the process of becoming witnesses, both the victim and listener will have his or her world shaken by the trauma of witnessing. Since every act of engagement with the text is an act of accumulation to our repository of memories, the constant re-negotiation of our existing frames of knowledge, the repetitive struggle to re-position it alongside our understanding of reality activates the trauma of being unable to come to a point of resolution in working out our pain.

² The quotation marks enwrapping this term is intentional, as Didur explains in her end notes: “I follow Mario Di Paolantonio in placing ‘we’ and ‘our’ in quotation marks throughout this chapter as a way of recalling ‘the boundedness of any particular “we” is never an accomplished and given fact, as contradictions and permeations cut through its illusory homogeneous image. Thus, the interface (the rhetorical encounter) between this illusory identification and metaethical language of the other does not take place *directly* in the empirical; rather it stages an *obligation in thought* –an encounter of the limits – that cannot be considered *purely* in constative or descriptive terms’ (177n7)

The mass violence that this paper finds its premise from had been building up since the 1930s and early 40s due to a mounting fear amongst the Indian Muslims that independence from the British would result in the enthronement of a 'Hindu Raj' who might be less sensitive towards their needs and rights. In response, the leader of the Muslim League, Mohammad Ali Jinnah put forward a request for a separate homeland for Muslims. The articulation of such fears naturally led to growing tensions between the Hindus and the Muslims, with small bursts of communal violence breaking out across India, hinting at the great catastrophe that was to come. Finally, on 14 August 1947, a date meant to usher in the ecstasy of liberation from British rule for India, the people found themselves inadvertently enslaved by a sudden eruption of inter-communal violence caused by the "delineation of arbitrary borders" (Alter 91) that took the form of rape, abduction, killing (Pandey 234) and arson. These borders were dissected according to the Two-Nation Theory, which claimed that Muslims and Hindus had "opposing interests" and "could not live together in one nation" (Kabir 178), thus leading to a call for the country to be split up into two distinct territories, with the Muslims relegated to a new nation Pakistan, and the Hindus taking up residence in India. As a result, a large operation of mass migration involving not just the Muslims and Hindus, but also the Sikhs, was mobilized. This process of displacement quickly spiraled out of control, fissuring into pockets of violent outbreaks across Northern India, particularly in the areas of Bengal and Punjab, leaving a million people dead; at least seventy-five thousand women raped and abandoned; about 12 million people displaced; countless homes abandoned or destroyed; properties, families, and cultures divided as new, often contentious national borders were drawn over older ethnic and linguistic identities (Kabir 178).³

³ Whilst these facts and figures were appropriated from Ananya Jahanara Kabir's article, "Gender Memory, Trauma: Women's Novels on the Partition of India", Kabir herself cites the following texts for the unearthing of these statistics: Veena Das's *Critical Events: An Anthropological Perspective on Contemporary India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996); Kamla Bhasin and Ritu Menon, *Borders and Boundaries: Women's Voices from the Partition of India* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1998); and Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India* (New Delhi: Penguin India, 1998).

As a natural result of this physical damage, the violence and communal division did not just inflict physical wounds, but also tore into the emotional and psychological fabric of the women's psyche. From her ethnographic work living amongst victims still reeling from the effect of the Partition, Das observed that many of these women, who were offered up as sacrifices and were physically violated but managed to escape the snare of death, had to bear witness to the devaluations of their own lives and identity, and "the possibility of betrayal coded in their everyday relations" (Das 73). To add another dimension to their suffering, the awareness that the disappearances and deaths of their fellow women were celebrated as symbols of "national honor" for their communities also precipitated what Ron Eyerman coined as a "cultural trauma", which he defines as "a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric, affecting a group of people that has achieved some degree of cohesion" (qtd. in Kabir 180). The impact of this trauma is also "twofold and contradictory" – one that simultaneously causes fissures in the "tissues of the community" (Kai Erikson, qtd. in Kabir 180) as well as activates the "reformation of collective identity and the reworking of collective memory" (Eyerman, qtd. in Kabir 180). In this sense, the Partition of India also has to deal with one of the chief questions that proceeded from the aftermath of the Holocaust: the dilemma of having survived an event that was meant to eliminate its own witnesses. This is a question that both "Cold Meat" and "Open It" take up, explore and twist in their attempt to reinscribe the collective identity and memory of a severed nation through the three different levels of witnessing that its structure establishes.

Given the magnitude of carnage involved, it is thus surprising that the dominant official discourses of state and communities employ an almost indifferent, dismissive attitude in their own responses towards the violence of the Partition of India. According to Michael Jauch, they "show a tendency to silence those voices that could be a danger to their legitimizing ideologies, which like to portray Indian history in uniform developments with

causal interconnections. In this way, both the state as well as the communities avoid relating to the suffering of Partition in any way other than by speaking about a “short period marked by the ill-minded violence of a face-less mob” or by “an outburst of underlying conflicts between Hindus and Sikhs on the one hand, and Muslims on the other.” (Jauch 194)

A consideration of Manto’s short stories then, which has ignited considerable controversy in the courts of law, especially with the five charges of obscenity that has propelled “Cold Meat” into the realms of infamy, helps us discern a tumultuous relationship between Manto’s voice of resistance and the state’s voice of suppression. Just as his writing carves out space for the interplay of silence and words, his narratives threaten the hegemonic authority of the state as they unify both the marginalized victims with the elites whose powers are continually displaced within the texts.

MANTO'S AESTHETICS: THE AUTHOR AS A WITNESS

One of the central concerns of this essay is in evaluating the significance and effect of Manto's oeuvre on the modern understanding of the Partition of India: How might Manto's short stories – written in the heat of Partition – provide us with crutches with which to regard the communal violence? What was so powerful about this first instance of violence that compels future habitants of these traumatic events to reach back and *recall* the recordings of them in order to shape their responses to what they see? As a witness who was himself paralysed by the sudden madness and incomprehensibility of the Partition, how might a writer respond with a clear-minded vision of the events? How does one formulate an “aesthetic and a politics that could engage powerfully with the complexities and contradictions of [the] time, an epoch marked both by buoyant hope and gut-wrenching disillusionment” (Gopal 91) and go beyond the “inadequacy of numerous [historic] narratives on independence and partition” (Hasan 2667)? In this section, I investigate both the forces and philosophical ideas that have shaped Manto's aesthetics, as well as the implications these notions cast on our authority as witnesses.

As an author, Manto has the privilege of being the bridge between the victim and the reader, thus initiating three levels of witnessing that are necessary for understanding the continuous impact that trauma holds over a generation of people. He speaks for the victim, rearranging and translating his first-hand accounts of witnessing into a coherent form – impossible as it is – that preserves these traumatic memories for the consumption of readers across generations, who are then required to respond to the material that he or she bears witness into. By assembling this community of witnesses, Manto also invests himself with the power to decide how the Partition of India will be remembered and received in the popular imagination of the people.

Manto's short stories enjoy a popularity that is disconcerting to the state precisely because they reflect an "ambivalent response to the question of national allegiance," refusing to infuse themselves with a sensibility that "veer[s] towards the romanticization of the pre-Partition experience" (Didur 9). Joshi suggests that part of Manto's importance may lie in the fact that he was "alone in grasping the fragmentation of 'truth' during his times," accurately discerning that it is impossible for literature to "perform a balancing act like the legendary scales of justice" (Joshi 142). In fact, since every "act of remembrance is always partial, incomplete and fragmentary", literature's responsibility is to "portray a slice – however thin – of life viewed through the eyes of its protagonists," and that conflicting versions of "truth" must be "recounted in their one-sidedness" (Joshi 142). His remarks define the significance of literature in helping us reach a form of totality in our understanding of the Partition of India. Since literature is released from the burden of delivering justice for all parties, and necessarily involves a degree of biasness, it is thus the best medium through which to transmit these stories in a way that does not undercut or dismiss the complexities and selfishness of the human struggle, but lets the human experience become enriched by it. Thus, the form of Manto's short stories, with their fragmentary, self-contained, sparse nature, are the perfect device for which to transmit the consuming madness, energy and disruption that characterized the Partition of India. It may even be seen as a model that imitates the mechanism of trauma in that it acts as spurts of breaks or interruptions in our consciousness, speaking to us in ways that jolts us out of our comfort zone, just as trauma enacts a "breach in the mind's experience of time, self and world" (Das 4).

Manto is unique in that his stories are not lined with any self-deprecatory remarks or appeals or self-reflexive gestures to either outline his limitations as a writer or the limitation of his language or story. He is merely consumed by the task of telling, rehearsing and regurgitating the stories of the people, laying out the details before us in all their sparseness,

thus imbuing his words with polysemic properties that simultaneously clutter and clarify their meaning. By refusing to entangle the voices of his characters with that of his own authorial voice, Manto moves beyond resisting the political tendency to draw “religion or a particular community as a reference point” in order to “bear witness or to offer solace” to “those who suffer” (Bhalla 3120). In fact, by allowing his authorial voice to retreat as far back as possible into the foreground of the narrative, he avoids controlling or intruding into our response to the text, thus allowing us to be surprised by the contradictions, struggles and growth of the multi-faceted characters and the implications of their words and actions. The responsibility of bearing witness is then deflected upon us as we are drawn into a space of solidarity with the characters. As such, there is no space for comfort or distance in Manto’s stories. There are no excessive words to insulate us against the sharp edges of his words. His texts seem to be deliberately provocative and divisive, pushing the boundaries of meaning that we have been conditioned to assign to categories of gender expectations and racial stereotypes, and refusing to provide us with any closure. It is in this trauma of dislodging and re-figuring the modes of signification that govern our understanding of the world that we are compelled to be open and transformed by each encounter of reading.

In an essay entitled, “The Pleasures of the Senses”, Manto confesses that he does not consider himself a “so-called reformer or a philosopher of character” but firmly believed that “[h]uman beings are not born with any bad inside them” (Manto, “Tribulations of the Shining Sun” 80). Thus, in the wake of the senselessness that possessed everyone, his stories attempt to chart the perversion of this human nature, and it is this that we are forced to bear witness to: the silent, often unacknowledged and unknowable transition from purity to perversion that humans can undergo over the course of their lives, or when under immense social pressure, as illustrated through Ishar Singh in “Cold Meat”, and the eight young men in “Open It”. Hence, even though Manto produced a substantial body of work that was punctured, invaded and

haunted by accounts of violence, his main purpose in doing so was not just to tell “stories of violence.” Instead, he was more concerned with making an “inquiry about the survival of our moral being in the midst of horror” (Bhalla 3128), as well as the derailment of it in attempting to respond to the struggles and conflicts and upheaval that shook both the people’s understanding of human nature and the ways in which the Partition had shaken their relations to and with each other.

He also writes, in a prefatory essay on “Cold Meat” which is chronicled in *Manto Adaalat ke Katghare Mein* (Manto in the Dock of the Law) of one of the questions that emerged from the arbitrary dislocations that had taken place:

Will Pakistan’s literature be different? If so, then in what way? Who will be the owner of all that was once written in undivided Hindustan? Will this be divided too? Are not the basic realities and problems that Pakistanis and Hindustanis face one and the same? (Manto, “Manto in the Dock of Law” 95)

In a few sweeping sentences, Manto captures the concerns that the Partition of India engenders through a vision that stretches across the past, present and future. Instead of dressing up his stories in the rhetoric of reactionary discourses, Manto brings to his narrative vision a prophetic astuteness that recognizes the connections that each epoch bears on the other. This sensibility pervades the basic foundation of his texts, allowing him to construct a textual world in which “[t]he whore, the pimp, the street bully jostled for place with those who fought for freedom” (Daruwalla 119), gaining its logical consistency and verity from the pillars of physical, emotional, psychological and chronological displacement.

The result of this rumination is clearly seen in the narrative strategies of Manto. In “Cold Meat”, for instance, instead of employing a Hindu or a Muslim in the role of the plunderer and rapist to stoke fire to the already damaged racial relations between the two, he casts Ishar Singh, a Sikh man in this role instead. This gesture, although provocative in its

own way, also serves to restore the dignity of the Muslims and Hindus, explicitly pointing out that the responsibility for the violence of the Partition of India lies not just on the shoulders of the two major races, but that all inhabitants of India and Pakistan played a part in perpetuating and extending it.

Another factor that distinguishes Manto from his contemporaries is the unique focus of his writings. Even though the damaged and plundered bodies of women lie in the foreground of each story and provide the impetus for much of the action and development of the texts, Manto resists adding on to the already heaving collection of stories aiming to champion, or speak for the cause of the oppressed women. Instead, both “Cold Meat” and “Open it” feature male characters as the main protagonist and victim, and he devotes equal space to the exploration of the psychological and emotional damage that both the women and men – who are often only chided or implicated for their roles in violating the women’s bodies – undergo. This subversion and diversion from the dominant discourses that are privileged by feminist ethnographers and other historians and academics, is precisely what makes his stories so intriguing, refreshing and chilling. By opening up the space of his narratives to the truly marginalized, he undermines the subaltern impulse and unwittingly installs himself as the perfect spokesperson, or witness bearer of all the silences that arose from the Partition of India. At the same time, this also enables him to fill in the spaces of silence surrounding the experiences of men and the production of historical knowledge that has been paralyzed because of its often one-sided focus.

All these different points converge to suggest that the aims, posture and aesthetics of Manto’s writings consists of uprooting the ideology that maintains and legitimizes these divisions, and then building them up again by appealing to the notion of a common humanity.

FROM PRIVATE SPACE TO PUBLIC REALM: THE CALL TO WITNESS

In a world that “seems mesmerized by stories of suffering and the spectacle of wounded and dismembered bodies” (Das 101), it is a daunting task to craft traumatic narratives that could encapsulate the scale of human suffering involved, reproduce the emotions that “exist privately in the stories told and retold inside so many households in India and Pakistan” (Butalia 3) and absorb and transmit the “shocked silence” (Bhalla 3120) that often followed this recognition of violence, without resorting to the construction of a “pornography of violence” (Daniel, qtd. in Gopal 89). Since “the traumatic extremity” of the event as well as the lack of specific details “disables realist representations as usual” (Caruth 105), this requires the wielding of a creative arrangement of words and the use of “indirection and circuitous” strategies “that leave untouched the central horror” (Howe 34) of the violence depicted. In “Cold Meat” and “Open It”, Manto bravely traces the breakdown of language and allows the silence residing between the textual and spatial gaps, as well as the assumption of prior knowledge (i.e. through circulated stories, it is common knowledge that women who are missing are likely to have been abducted and raped) to help us fill in the blanks left by these gaps.

Many critics, including Gopal, have cited and argued that Manto’s “brand of realism does not have the power to incite emotions and passions” even though he suggests that “this realism *is* itself an influential speech act inasmuch as it will change prevalent sensibilities by boldly making reference to the actually existing” (Gopal 95). Whilst I agree that his language may not be emotionally charged, it nevertheless clearly invokes and engages us with “an aesthetic of the senses” (Jauch 191), thus appealing not just to our minds but hearts and senses and spirit as well. Such moments are stamped all over “Cold Meat”, where the attentive gaze of the reader is trained upon the graphic details of Ishar’s cold, sweaty palms, or his blood-drenched beard and chest (Manto, “Kingdom’s End” 22) which is used to draw

us into an almost unsettling rapport with the characters.

“Cold Meat” dramatizes Ishar Singh’s struggle in forgetting and remembering, as well as confessing his traumatic encounter with necrophilia to his lover, Kalwant Kaur. On the surface, the text stages an intimate session between Ishar and Kalwant, but it is their conversation that takes center stage as Kalwant attempts to confront Ishar about the reasons behind his sexual failure. It is at this point that Ishar’s communicative powers also fail him, resulting in a testimony that is studded with ellipses as Ishar recounts his crime of killing “six men with that kirpan” (Manto, “For Freedom’s Sake” 139) which Kalwant had so mercilessly plunged into his neck.

Through the use of ellipses, Manto leaves us with hints about the incompleteness of Ishar’s confession, implying that he is hiding a secret that is too traumatic to express. However, Cathy Caruth writes that:

the transformation of the trauma into a narrative memory that allows the story to be verbalized and communicated, to be integrated into one’s own, and others’, knowledge of the past, may lose both the precision and force that characterizes traumatic recall. The danger of speech, of integration into the narration of memory, may lie not in what it cannot understand, but in that it understands too much. (Caruth 154)

Hidden in the core of this idea is the suggestion that in forcing Ishar’s testimony to fit into some form of coherence that we can apprehend and expound and explain, we recognize that these testimonies “are neither simply reflected, but are reinscribed, translated, radically rethought and fundamentally worked over by the text” (Didur xv), and that to do so is to reappropriate the testimonies of these survivors and to merely move them away “from the experience of shock” as Kevin Newmark puts it, (Caruth 154) fitting in its place frames of reading or references that sometimes minimize the enormity of the trauma instead.

But for Ishar, these ellipses bear witness to the shock that continues to linger on in his mind, for as Caruth points out, it is the excessive revelation that comes with his traumatic recall that affects and unsettles him. Manto withholds the name of the corpse from us, referring to her only as an “unknown rival” (Manto, “Kingdom’s End” 22), a “luscious fruit” (Manto, “Kingdom’s End” 23) that Ishar later discovers to be “a corpse...a lump of cold flesh” (Manto, “For Freedom’s Sake” 140) to emphasize the dehumanizing process that the girl undergoes in the hands of the men. The irony implied here is clear: it is in beholding the consequences of the senseless actions he was participating in that simultaneously awakens him to his own humanity and unstrips him of it (as seen through his sexual failure), causing him to question what it means to be human.

In a text where the marks of silence are so explicitly and visually engraved upon the aesthetic skin of the text, it is surprising that the text is also bursting with verbs signifying noise. Kalwant Kaur is described throughout the text as speaking “in a sharp voice” (Manto, “Kingdom’s End” 18), screaming (Manto, “Kingdom’s End” 19, 22, 23), exploding after every interval of silence (Manto, “Kingdom’s End” 19) – particularly in moments when Ishar Singh is struggling to piece his testimony together. This alternation between the state of painful silence and the brutal reactions of Kalwant Kaur, amplifies and heightens the tension of the story, preparing us for Ishar’s climactic yet stunted admission that he had raped a corpse. It is here, as the text is stretched to its breaking point, that the ellipses struggle to hold together the syntax of one short sentence alone: “Forget it...listen...there was a girl...very beautiful...I picked her up...” (Manto, “For Freedom’s Sake” 140).

This flitting back and forth between the need to get his testimony out and the urge to bury it, to forget it, displays signs of the ethical dilemma described by Schreiber and Wietz, which Cathy Caruth cites in her book *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*:

Elie Wiesel has said many times that silence is the only proper response but

then most of us, including him, feel that not to speak is impossible. (Caruth 154)

Ishar's loss of rationality and movement between eloquence and silence also brings us back to the notion of the "stammer" that I quoted in the first part of the paper – that liminal space where language and silence wrestle with each other in order to produce a narrative appropriate to the retelling of trauma, and where words have the power to enliven and enliven trauma, personifying it in ways that testify to the ways in which it works beyond the limits of our understanding. Whilst this stammer symbolizes a moment of weakness and vulnerability for the survivor, these spaces of silence also empowers the reader to become co-producers of its meaning through a "creative act of listening" that involves the "refusal of a certain framework of understanding" (Caruth 154). Ironically, the slow assault that the text performs on our senses through its oscillations has an effect akin to having a knife slit into our bellies and then drawn out and repeated ad infinitum until we become so numb we are driven to the point of becoming "colder than ice" like Kalwant and Ishar as we reach the denouement of the text. And yet at the same time, it is the rough, fractured texture of the narrative that helps retain the authenticity and rawness of the confession. Additionally, it is precisely the refusal to integrate his testimony into speech that preserves the shock of it, enabling it to affect the reader as well. Through this short story, Manto effectively allows us to become witnesses to the often difficult but dynamic relationship between a victim of trauma and the listener/witness bearer as the listener strives to understand the actions and thoughts of the victim who grapples with his inability to find language to reach into that space in his memory that he has yet to be able to comprehend.

In throwing out his confession, Ishar Singh forces both Kalwant Kaur and the reader to become witnesses to his crime. His articulation of such a private memory places it in the realm of public space, thus making it the responsibility of those who are drawn to listen to it

as well. However, even though Veena Das has posited that it is possible for us to feel the pain of the other through a work of imagination, Jill Didur suggests that the goal of the writer and reader should not be to empathize with or “understand” the experience of the Other, but to “recognize the gap within and between the Other’s experience” and one’s own. (Didur 138). This understanding is affirmed by the complication that the paradox of witnessing and listening holds out to us – in becoming witnesses of *someone else’s* trauma, we can never fully possess them because the limits of memory necessarily represses, restricts or obscures the expression of complete truth, even from the victim himself.

This notion of secrecy and unknowability is perhaps one of the deadliest characteristics of trauma. In “Cold Meat”, when Kalwant first prods Ishar to reveal the cause of his distraction, he claims, “There’s nothing to tell” (Manto, “Kingdom’s End” 21), but the enormity of the secret which he held within his grasp was written all over his body language, threatening to betray him. Finally, he confesses, “There was only one thing I hid from you” (Manto, “Kingdom’s End” 23), and yet this “only one thing” was so powerful that it dismantled everything. This is symbolic of the ways in which trauma and the violence of the Partition exposes the possibility of betrayal and both “solidifies the membership of a group at one level” and “has the potential to break the most intimate relations at another level” (Das 73) at the same time. In pulling Kalwant for example, into that space of witnessing, Ishar “solidifies” their relationship; however, in unearthing his betrayal to her, this gesture also simultaneously breaks “the most intimate relations”, obstructing the fulfillment of the one act that was supposed to unite them. By the time we reach the abrupt ending, then, and Kalwant places her hands on Ishar’s as an act of empathy to feel his pain, “colder than ice” is not just symptomatic of the cold rush that enveloped him, but more significantly, of the severed sense of intimacy and warmth between himself and Kalwant Kaur. The phrase “colder than ice” also gestures towards an emotion, a feeling that cannot be encapsulated in one word, but can

be felt only through bases of comparison. In suggesting that this emotion brings us to the limits of language, it implies that this is a feeling that also goes beyond the human experience, thus hinting of death. In some ways, this may not be a completely inaccurate description of Ishar, for his spirit is now dead.

Apart from the trope of silence, we see Manto also playing with the idea of trauma as being simultaneously unifying and divisive with the kirpan. Bound at once by his burden to place his traumatic memory within the realm of comprehension and his inability to flesh it out with details, it is no surprise that Ishar's "hand holding the kirpan was shaking" (Manto, "For Freedom's Sake" 135). Here, Manto hints that the kirpan is literally the site of projection or a trigger for the trauma, for it is at the moment that the kirpan pierces through his skin, inflicting a physical wound that caused blood to splutter out "of the deep gash like water out of a fountain" (Manto, "Kingdom's End" 22) that his emotional trauma is released. To add to this irony, the object that he used to annihilate and "silence" forever the voices and lives of six men is the same one used against him to extract a confession. This confusion and irony is further extended in the triple role that Ishar assumes as a ruthless murderer, a witness of trauma and a victim, giving rise to a crisis of identity that forms the driving force of the story. Manto himself revealed his intention to depict complex characters like Ishar who are simultaneously murderers with a "single-minded dedication" to kill men, but still found room to feel "remorse" and shed tears and had "some human feelings left" (Hasan 2666). By humanizing Ishar and demonstrating the fragility and instability of human identities, especially in the face of trauma, Manto seems to invite us to interrogate the hasty ways in which we pass judgement on the characters of people based on one or two isolated incidents, and questions our tendency to condemn murderers and rapists as heartless "monsters". Just as Ishar has to confront his own identity crises, the parameters of our witnessing are also called into question: are we called to make judgements or merely listen to what is being said? What

might be the appropriate response to such a confession?

“Open It” builds on some of the questions put forward by “Cold Meat”, but addresses them in different ways. The short story, which also bears the title of “The Return”⁴ under different translations, is set against a backdrop of calls for the recovery of the “abducted women”, who were geographically displaced during the mass migration between borders. These women were either separated from or deliberately abandoned by their family members as they were transported by special trains or on foot from one country to the other. They were rumored to be subject to “rape, abduction by men, and other forms of violent disruption”, or were integrated within their new communities through marriage (Jauch 192), and were placed at the center of a tussle between India and Pakistan as they delineated the boundaries of their new national identities. Under the guise of correcting the displacement of these women in order to restore normality, the “Abducted Persons (Recovery and Restoration) Act” between India and Pakistan was put together in 1949. The act, which defines the abducted women as “possessions of the state”, and the abduction itself “as a violation of the religious sentiments of the community” to which the women belong (Jauch 193) was instituted to facilitate the exchange and return of these abducted women to their respective communities.

“Open It” begins with a general, almost mechanical description of the journey of “the special train” from Amritsar to Lahore, in which “[m]any had been killed on the way, a lot more injured and countless lost” (Manto, “Kingdom’s End” 50). Unlike “Cold Meat”, our attention is not divided between two characters, but the narrative zooms in on the point-of-view of only one character, Sirajuddin. Sirajuddin is introduced to us as just regaining his consciousness, “lying on bare ground”, his loneliness and isolation from the understanding of his surroundings sharply contrasted against the “screaming men, women and children” who

⁴ The version translated by Khalid Hasan and published under the *Kingdom’s End: Selected Stories* (2007) by Penguin entitles “Open It” as “The Return”, and “Cold Meat”, “Colder Than Ice”. In this essay, I make reference to both versions, as the different translations bring out aspects of the original text that are productive to the central concerns of my argument.

were rifling through the crowd of people looking for their loved ones (Manto, “Kingdom’s End” 50). “Open It” does not contain as many signifiers of silence as “Cold Meat”, but instead directly weaves the silence that Sirajuddin encounters into the narrative of the text. We are told that he seemed to be in such a state of shock that he subconsciously encloses himself in silence. Even though “the camp was filled with noise...he couldn’t hear anything” (Manto, “For Freedom’s Sake” 131). He then begins to get away from the crowd in order to “think clearly” about the whereabouts of his wife and daughter, Sakina. There is an almost cinematic quality to the way his mind works that is just as haunting for the reader as it is for Sirajuddin: he recalls “in a flash - the sight of his wife’s corpse with all her entrails spilled out” (Manto, “For Freedom’s Sake” 131). This image is so graphic and consuming that he becomes “senseless” and could not recall “where and when” his daughter “Sakina had become separated from him” (Manto, “For Freedom’s Sake” 131).

This sense of helplessness and confusion that overtakes Sirajuddin echoes the idea put forward by M. J. Larrabee, S. Weine and P. Woolcott (1999) in “The Wordless Nothing: Narratives of Trauma and Extremity”:

the arrival of trauma - the unexpected death of a healthy life partner, for example - undercuts the usual, slashes unspoken assumptions to shreds, and attacks the very meaning of one's life, even as the trauma experiencer sometimes continues the motions of everyday existence. (Larrabee, et al. 120)

For Sirajuddin, the effect of the grip of trauma over his consciousness preceded his understanding of it and even erased, momentarily, his sense of self and his memory of the events that led up to this moment of confusion where everything “did not make sense” (Manto, “Kingdom’s End” 50) to him. Instead, he felt like he was “suspended in space” and sealed, separated from any anchors of reality. Manto fills up the textual space with language that clearly aligns us with Sirajuddin’s emotions, thus giving us an insight into his mind and

making us feel, along with Sirajuddin, the exhaustion and incomprehensibility faced by victims of trauma. Clearly, Manto believed that the violence of Partition did not just throw people into confusion regarding their identities or nationalities, but this confusion also extended itself to challenge even the reliability and coherence of their memories, thus forcing them to retreat both into a space of silence from and before the world.

Veena Das also offers us a helpful frame through which to understand Sirajuddin's psyche in her interpretation of Freud's theory on trauma. She writes:

It is the surprise of waking that repeats the unexpectedness of the trauma. And as such the trauma is not only the repetition of the missed encounter with death, but the missed encounter with one's own survival. It is the incomprehensible act of surviving – of walking into life – that repeats and bears witness to what remains ungrasped within the encounter with death. The repetition of trauma, therefore, is not only an attempt or an imperative to know what cannot be grasped that is repeated unconsciously in the survivor's life: it is also an imperative to live that still remains not fully understood. (Das 80)

This notion of the surprise, of the shock of having his eyes catch the sun (Manto, "Kingdom's End" 50), of waking up from his 'death' to the world, jolts him into reliving "the unexpectedness of the trauma" (Das 80). As he proceeds to scan through his mind to solve the mystery of his whereabouts and the absence of his family members, conflated memories of the previous day are shuffled out as a sequence of shots: "A succession of images raced through his mind. Attack...fire...escape...railway station...night...Sakina" (Manto, "Kingdom's End" 51). Instead of punctuating each clue with the pointed bullets of dashes that would indicate a sense of urgency, Manto uses ellipses to connect these different words together to illustrate the slow, laborious process of traumatic recall. He also presumes historical knowledge on the part of the reader and appeals to our powers of association to fill

in the gaps created by his ellipses in order to create meaning.

Even more so than in “Cold Meat”, the ellipses in the text indicate Sirajuddin’s anguish in his realization that all the “[o]ther details were missing”, for these missing details indicated all the questions he had in his head for which “[t]here were no answers” (Manto, “Kingdom’s End” 51). In desperation, Sirajuddin asks himself: “Had he brought her as far as the railway station? Had she got into the carriage with him? When the rioters had stopped the train, had they taken her with him?” (Manto, “Kingdom’s End” 51) His silence was not one of the difficulty of forgetting or shaking off the knowledge of a memory that one would rather repress, but of the struggle to remember something precious which he had forgotten, reminding us of the reckless nature of trauma in devouring our lives from us.

In terms of narrative sequence, “Open It” also reflects the disjointedness of trauma. As days are absorbed and enfolded into the text, separated and indicated only by the space that divides a new paragraph from the previous one, Sirajuddin finally comes across eight “young men armed with guns” and a truck, who claim “they brought back women and children left behind on the other side” (Manto, “Kingdom’s End” 51), and beseeches them to help find his daughter Sakina. After this scene, we too are thrown into confusion as the narrative progresses. The reader is already given access to the point where the men find Sakina and try to bring her back, but when they meet Sirajuddin again, all they do is give him a promise that they will find her, in spite of the fact that they had already found her, thus raising suspicions about what they had done to Sakina.

There is a spatial gap at the end of the paragraph in which the “young volunteers” (Manto, “For Freedom’s Sake” 132) whom Sirajuddin had enlisted to help find Sakina succeed in their mission. It is interesting that Manto feeds us with scraps of information that establishes their benevolence, informing us that “All of them were kind of her” (Manto, “For Freedom’s Sake” 133) and also that “[a]t the risk of their lives, they had driven to Amritsar,

recovered many women and children and brought them back to the camp” (Manto, “Kingdom’s End” 51), and then deconstructs that image of them by painting Sakina’s discomfort in her nakedness, as if signaling towards Sakina’s understanding of the fate that awaits her as she “vainly” tries to avoid it (Manto, “For Freedom’s Sake” 134).

The silence and empty space that thinly adjoins Sakina’s efforts and the abrupt passing of time in the next paragraph gnaws at us, leaving us wondering, perhaps quite effortlessly, about the nature of the violation that Sakina was subjected to. Manto’s deliberate decision to resist representing her trauma in vivid details “seeks to redirect the gaze of the reader/researcher away from women’s bodies and sexuality (the site surveilled by community and state)”, steering us away from prejudicial, “totalizing discourses” (Didur 13) of the horrors that have taken place and forcing us to confront the atrocity of the act objectively instead. In fact, Manto’s stories dismantle so many presumptions about the Partition, human nature and conventional “truths” that the only certainty we are allowed to hold on to is that everyone – regardless of race or religion or nationality, as reflected in Manto’s decision to cast Sakina’s rapists from within the same community and thoroughly expose their hypocrisy, neutralizing the claims made by hegemonic historical accounts that the abductions and rapes of women were performed by members of opposing communities – is capable of evil.

Another way to read the silence that Manto enshrouds us with in his censorship of the interactions between Sakina and the eight men is that this silence is a silence of mourning or respect. By marking out this space of silence and censorship for us, Manto resists re-enacting these performances of violence, rightfully limiting our possession of the testimony. In light of the fact that most of the women have become so desensitized by the brutality inflicted upon them that they are as “lifeless” as Sakina and have lost their identity, becoming only “the body” (Manto, “For Freedom’s Sake” 134) that is so “bestialized in her conditioned response” (Gopal 111) that she automatically pulls down her garment and opens her thighs in

response to any sound (Manto, “Kingdom’s End” 53), this strategy serves to deflect the uncomfortable pressure on women to speak about their experiences when they would rather stay silent and “forget” the past.

Whilst this mode of unspeakability has led many feminist academics or advocates to prescribe a need to speak up for these women and hence appropriate their testimonies, Manto acknowledges the impossibility of this and never chooses to speak for the female victims. Instead, by resisting the impulse to reinscribe these spaces of silence with words, his narratives also reflect the active silencing that is imposed upon the female victims by either their families or the state. Urvashi Butalia remarked in *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India*, that in the process of harvesting testimonies on the histories of “violence, rape, murder”, the men “seldom spoke about women” whilst “women almost never spoke about themselves”. In fact, the women often “denied they had anything “worthwhile” to say” or “simply weren’t there to [be spoken] to” (Butalia 100). Shail Mayaram points out that, “communities themselves impose silences on the transmission of memory as a strategy enabling the remaking of inter-subjective existence” (Eds. Amin & Chakrabarty 161), thus suggesting that the engineering of silences are important in the repression of memories, in denying or reducing the reality or scale of the atrocities, in order to reinvent an acceptable version of history that describes only the “generality of Partition” (Butalia 3).

As such, this necessarily means that even though Trauma theorist Dori Laub asserts that every survivor has “an imperative need to tell and thus to come to know one’s own story” (Caruth 63), they are denied even the basic right to own their story, as seen through Manto’s reduction of the female characters into generic references such as “a young girl/woman.” His description of his daughter is surprising in its lack of specificity: “Big eyes, black hair, a mole on the left cheek” (Manto, “Kingdom’s End” 51), and even when the men find Sakina and she admits to being Sakina, the text never names her, calling her instead “a

young girl” (Manto, “Kingdom’s End” 52) or “a young woman” (Manto, “Kingdom’s End” 53), thus suggesting that she had already been stripped of her personality at the moment that she was divorced from her father, who interesting also refers to his dead wife only as “her mother” (Manto, “Kingdom’s End” 50-51). In this regard, Manto’s narratives comply with the traditionally conceived attitude towards women, but only to serve to highlight it, to make clear the absurd consequences of denying them a voice and the conflicts it incites with the state’s goal to remake “intersubjective existence” – since their attempts only end up divesting them of any form of subjectivity. The voices and perspectives of the women are filtered through those of the men, setting up another barrier in our witnessing attempts, but also truthfully reflecting the unspeakability of their experiences and the difficulties confronting us in view of these silences. Thus, Manto exploits the weaknesses of his storytelling technique in order to exhibit these realities, forming within his narratives an oblique appeal towards the opening up of public spaces “in which society could confront the event, in which it could hear from women the nature of their experiences or from men a defence or acknowledgement of the forces that led them to commit such unspeakable crimes” (Didur 12).

In spite of the obvious limitations that Manto’s aesthetics presents us with in perceiving and regarding the traumatic experiences of the women themselves, the frame of reference that he offers us through the eyes of the men does succeed in enlarging our perspective on the subject of trauma and uncovering the anxiety and trauma that the victim’s family members also experience. Since they were expected to view the violation of these women’s bodies as a source of shame and a loss of “patriarchal honour” (Gopal 112), many family members were encouraged to repress or deny any display of emotions. Manto defies this typical response via “Open It” in two ways. Firstly, upon discovering that he had no answers to all the questions he held in his mind, and therefore could not place where he had left his daughter, Sirajuddin “wished he could weep, but tears wouldn’t come” (Manto,

“Kingdom’s End” 51). This public admittance to his underlying emotions demonstrates the ways in which a patriarchal society built along the lines of masculinity inhibits any expression that would facilitate the processing of trauma.

Secondly, he also enwraps Sirajuddin’s excitement and joy at the recovery of his daughter with exclamation marks and words like “shouted” that emphasize the quality and depth of his emotions. Unfortunately, his child-like elation does not conceal the tinge of sadness that encircles his words; it is a sadness that only the reader and the doctor who “breaks out into a cold sweat” (Manto, “For Freedom’s Sake” 134) can identify, a sadness that strives to look beyond the natural circumstances: Sirajuddin is so consumed by his enthusiasm that he cannot fully grasp the changes that have taken place within himself and his daughter, or the traumatic memories that will continue to haunt their lives.

Veena Das writes of this second moment, which is worth quoting at length:

In giving a shout of joy and saying “My daughter is alive,” the father does not speak to give voice to a scripted tradition. In the societal context of this period, when ideas of purity and honor densely populated the literary narratives as well as family and political narratives, so that fathers willed their daughters to die for family honor rather than live with bodies that had been violated by other men, *this father wills his daughter to live even as parts of her body can do nothing else but proclaim her brutal violation*. In the speech of the father, at least, the daughter is alive, and though she may find an existence only in his utterance, he creates through his utterance a home for her mutilated and violated self. [...] In the background of such stories, a single sentence of joy uttered by old Sirajjudin transforms the meaning of being a father. (Das 47)

His shout of joy is the proclamation of the unconditional love of a father, whose unconventional response to the sight of his daughter causes the doctor to react in nervousness. But as Das puts it, his use of speech to give life to his daughter occurs “not at the moment when her dishonor is hidden from the eyes of the world but at the moment when her body proclaims it” (Das 48), with her prostrate body stretched out in a posture that leaves no space to the imagination as to the brutality that she has been subject to. In writing this bewildering conclusion, Manto’s humanist vision offers us a glimmer of hope and redemption that history and the state cannot provide us with. Holding on to the words of the eight men, who promised him that “[i]f your daughter is alive we will find her,” (Manto, “Kingdom’s End”, 51) he overthrows the sense of shame that is meant to accompany the rediscovery of her body and instead celebrates the recovery of it even though the body has been emptied of life. It is in this moment that Sirajuddin redefines and restores the role of a father in a patriarchal society, one that is unbridled by social expectations but is instead governed by pure love. The presence of Sakina’s body also provides Sirajjudin with a tangible reminder of their relationship, thus allowing him to reclaim his sense of self.

“Cold Meat” is also replete with other examples demonstrating the ways in which the Partition of India shook the established mode of social relations. In allowing Ishar Singh’s voice to subsume that of his victim’s, Manto proves that the ‘gendered’ violence that takes place has the power to affect both men and women. However, in a gesture that deftly demonstrates the complexity of Manto’s technique, even as Ishar attempts to appropriate her voice, it is the rape victim who ends up stripping him of his masculinity, thus problematizing conventional representations of gender roles. According to Gopal, this is the premise that led to the trials for “Cold Meat”, stating that:

The state’s interest was less, it would seem, with the text’s engagement with sex and sexuality in themselves than with its critique of the role of masculinity

and male identity in relation to violence. The charge of ‘obscurity’ functioned, in fact, as a point of condensation and displacement for a host of other concerns related to gender, cultural identity and moral authority. (Gopal 104)

By deliberately undercutting the “imaginary coherence” maintained by the State, Manto offended the cultural elite who appointed themselves as the sole determinants of right and wrong, thus unstripping the patriarchal state of its vested authority and destabilizing their power. However, as witnesses with access to two sources of information – both the fictional and the political - the state’s anxiety over Manto’s representations lays bare the fragility of their power - one that is ironically established through the Partition of India and now called into question by representations of it – and underlines the power of fiction to shape our perceptions of the world.

Finally, as “Open Meat” provides expression for how “the perpetrator of violence undergoes a trauma of his own” (Gopal 105), Manto shows us that trauma transforms not just the victim of violence, but also those who inflict it and are forced to come face-to-face with the limits of their humanness. Having established the idea that both males and females are susceptible to the grip of trauma, Manto goes on to suggest that whilst Trauma theory is often focused on the traumatic experience of the survivor, the effect of their experience can also be transmitted to other members of the community as well, including the reader. His careful characterization of Kalwant Kaur, noting the psychological effect that Ishar’s fear has over her escalating temper – at first, she “[loses] her patience” (Manto, “For Freedom’s Sake” 135), then she “was boiling with rage” (Manto, “For Freedom’s Sake” 138), “pounced on” Ishar with his kirpan like “a wild and demented creature”, started “screaming (Manto, “For Freedom’s Sake” 139) and shaking him “violently” (Manto, “For Freedom’s Sake” 140), and lastly, when she realizes the nature of Ishar’s confession, she “was shaking with rage” (Manto, “For Freedom’s Sake” 140) – and revealing that an atmosphere that is soaked in the

silences and weight of trauma can trigger random, senseless and brutal acts. It is especially significant and ironic that the story ends with a gesture that *asks* for sympathy and understanding as the text itself empties Kalwant Kaur of her humanism, thus effectively undermining the power of the narrative, thwarting our attempts to pull the victim out of the mental and psychological torture that he or she is undergoing, and again reasserting the all-consuming, transformative effect of trauma.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this paper, I have emphasized the ways in which Manto continually displaces the attempts of the characters to find any closure from or solidarity in the sufferings of the victims, and by extension, also displacing our expectations of the texts and the characters. How then are we, as readers and witnesses, to respond to the tensions that these texts inflict upon us? Unlike the characters or the authors, we have no real control over the development of the text, thus enchainning us in an excruciating space of helplessness and frustration. We instinctively long to respond to what we read, but are paralyzed by the textual boundaries that separate us from the characters and the depth of their pain. Whilst the ethical framework that accompanies our acts of witnessing makes explicit the limitations of fiction, these barriers also mirror and replicate the difficult conditions that also disrupt the possibility of achieving any form of empathy with survivors of trauma in real life.

However, in spite of these limitations, Manto's effort to memorialize and represent the horrors of the Partition of India has not been entirely unproductive. His ability to seamlessly balance his economy of details within the aesthetic structure of his stories allows them to combine and reflect the complexity of feelings, moods and opinions that plagued the people of India and Pakistan in the aftermath of the Partition. He also creates and reproduces the silences of his stories in such an honest and sensitive manner that it manages to capture the nuances found in the different kind of silences – the silence of lack of information, the silence of oppression, the silence of trauma, the silence of respect, the silence of confusion, the silence of resistance, the silence of power and powerlessness, the silence of exclusivity and repression – as well as the traumatic experiences that the survivors of Partition violence were subjected to.

In doing so, Manto's stories manage to transcend their context and speak to people more generally about issues pertaining to the instability of human nature, and the ways in

which literature can transcend the categories of gender, race, religion and nationality and help recover and restore the voices of the oppressed and forgotten. By creating an alternative history that focuses on the incommunicability, and hence, the unbearable atrocity of the violence that took place during the Partition, Manto relieves himself from the responsibility of assigning blame, acknowledges the indiscriminating and unpredictable grip that evil has over people, and offers solace to the victims of trauma in a way that retains the human emotions and fear found at the heart of their traumatic experiences without compromising on the respect and privacy that these women needed. However, it is inevitable that such a non-committal position “merely maintain[s] an uneasy equilibrium between two uncomfortable choices while denying the problematic implications of either” (Mendel 608). Whilst Manto’s short stories celebrate the possibilities that fiction carries into our understanding, they are also self-aware of their limits and the ways in which fiction confines us to a safe space that is severed from reality, and this is the painful conclusion that we are left with: no amount of words can erase the violence or redeem these acts of violation. We are only called, as witnesses, to acknowledge them, to bear them, to remember them, and to protect future generations from the recurrence of such senseless violence.

(10820 words)

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