

SHADOW DYNASTIES



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ANU  
HIRSIAHO

## Shadow Dynasties

Politics of Memory and Emotions in  
Pakistani Women's Life-Writing

Academic Dissertation in Political Science

University of Tampere  
Department of Political Science and  
International Relations  
Tampere 2005  
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*Tampereen yliopisto*  
*Politiikan tutkimuksen laitos*

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*Department of Political Science and International Relations*  
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*"Sun of the World! Shed your illumination on us here;  
a strange light, like a shadow, has fallen on us."*

Mirza Ghālib

translated by Adrienne Rich<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Couplet in Ghazal XXI, in Ahmed (1971, 103).



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*The line that traces this plan is neither straight nor circular but a spiral that turns back and ceaselessly distances itself from the point of departure. What we are living today brings me close to what I lived seventy years back and, simultaneously, irremediably and definitely distances me. Strange lesson: there is no turning back but there is no point of arrival. We are in transit.*

Octavio Paz (1994, 5)

"Itinerary. An Intellectual Journey"

Drawing itineraries, imaginary and real, for future travels has always been the most pleasant activity I can think of. Little do I care that every time the original plan changes. In this opening chapter, it is my challenge to retrospectively re-construct the travelogue of a journey that I have been on for seven years now. It has taken me to various locations both geographically and theoretically.

Cities that mattered: Dublin, Jyväskylä, Odense, Copenhagen, London, Helsinki, Tampere, Lahore, Islamabad, Kampala, Toronto, Montréal.

Theoretical umbrellas that became important: materialist feminism, postcolonial literary criticism, theories on embodiment, space, time and memory, the ethics of encounters, theories on life-writing and storytelling.

Fields of study I thought I entered: feminist theory, South Asian studies, Islamic studies, literature, anthropology, political history, political theory, political philosophy, international relations.

Nomadism and interdisciplinarity are, then, the two certainties in the forthcoming story. Many of the theoretical shifts during the research process have been caused by places, my encounters with people in different locations, and the recent geopolitical changes on the world map. In other words, I have been forced to discard a lot of learning that once inspired me, because other kind of learning seemed more appropriate in the research context. But also my definition of the research context has been on the move, widening, narrowing, extending, shrinking, until it left behind a yarn that curled up to form a spiral. This is how the present study begins and ends.

The story begins from behind the scenes: what happened to me as I became interested in the political history of Pakistan and how I worked to make sense of three Pakistani women's texts. At the level of introduction, this chapter provides insights to "Pakistani Times" (always in plural and ever-changing), to the question of literacy and languages in the country, and to the idea of Pakistani women as autobiographical and political subjects. At the level of introspection, it is my plan to reconstruct a narrative from "contingencies" via "compositions" to "strategies".

By "contingencies" I mean the unexpected turns in our lives and histories that sometimes cause chaos and misfortune, and some other times are conceptualised as chance or luck, and by writing about contingency I begin with a "postmodernist" perspective to the philosophy of history, in which linear continuity of eras and episodes and direct causality between events are rendered obsolete.<sup>1</sup> "Compositions" refer

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<sup>1</sup> One of the researched, Sara Suleri, approaches the idea of contingency in her rather postmodernist narrative formulations of "Pakistani times". I became introduced to the concept's philosophy by Kari Palonen (2000) in his discussions with political thinkers such as Reinhart Koselleck (1987) and Quentin Skinner (cf Palonen 2003b). Later on, particularly the historical-philosophical ideas of Walter Benjamin (1968), Hayden White (1978) and Jonathan Boyarin (1993) affected the composition of this study. Amongst other thinkers approaching contingency, of particular use in the present study have been the feminist theorists Judith Butler

to the active, creative and labour-intensive work that research writing is and to the choices one is forced to make in order to proceed *somewhere*. No matter how much our research efforts may be initiated by unexpected events, remaining at the level of contingencies, trusting the moment and nothing but the moment, will not lead one to academic research as it is understood today.

A research composition is a concentrated effort of willpower, defining what we are doing and what we are not doing, and where we intend to go. How we can possibly, if ever, reach our once drawn goals is the level of "strategies". It may also include utopian visions enabling the process, no matter how unattainable. The process as a spiral, of course, implies that these three elements of research do not consist a progressive, linear model, but rather occur simultaneously, form illicit pathways, and bring about uncertainties at times when we thought everything was set and done. *We are forever in transit.*

## 1.1

### Contingencies

#### *Shadow dynasties*

*Food certainly gave us a way not simply of ordering a week or a day but **of living inside history**, measuring everything we remembered against a **chronology of cooks**. Just as Papa had his own yardstick – a word he loved – with which to measure history and would talk about the Ayub era, or the second martial law, or the*

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(1993), Joan Wallach Scott (1996) and Rosi Braidotti (1993), anthropologists Michael M.J. Fischer (1986) and Clifford Geertz (1968), and the political edge of cultural studies, Paul Gilroy (1993), Stuart Hall (1980,2002) and Fredric Jameson (1995). One of my less articulated aims is to hint at how thinking about time in terms of contingency does not have to be a Eurocentric preoccupation only, and what kinds of postcolonial implications the usage of the term may have.

*Bhutto regime, so my sisters and I would place ourselves in time by remembering and naming cooks./...*

*.../There is something nourishing about the memory of all those shadow dynasties: we do not have to subsist only on the litany that begins, "After General Ayub came General Yahya; after the Bhutto years came General Zulu Haq," but can also add; "Quayyum begat Shorty and his wife; and they begat the Punjabi poet only called Khansama; he begat Ramzan and Karam Dad the bearer; Ramzan begat Tassi- Passi, and he begat Allah Ditta, the meanest of them all."*

Sara Suleri

*Meatless Days* (1989, 34, emphasis AH.)

In May 1997, after submitting my MA thesis on Irish women's poetry, I was wondering whether to look for a "proper" job outside academia or to continue my studies as a PhD candidate in political science. At Seppo Hiltunen's second-hand bookstore by the Cathedral in Helsinki, I picked up a book with an alluring cover photo: a small girl drags a seemingly Indian lady clad in a creamy-white and golden dress by the hand. The lady stands still, serene and majestic, without a sign of irritation or impatience on her face. It looked like a wedding scene: the woman could be a bride and the baby a niece.

That the book, *Meatless Days*, was about Pakistan hardly impressed me then. I had been to Britain, had dinner at neon-lit curry restaurants in London and read the novels of Hanif Kureishi. I remembered a *Punjabi Shop* that sold fabrics, tea and incense sticks in my childhood hometown in Central Finland. As an undergraduate, I had not been focused on the Islamic world or South Asia, and was rather fatigued by the polarised Western media discussions on Muslim women's rights. But this book seemed different at the first glance, definitely worth the 15 marks' investment. I picked it up hurriedly to have something to read on a long train journey. Apart from the cover photo, the title seemed interesting enough for a puzzle. I was curious



to find out about vegetarianism in a conservative Muslim country.

Soon I discovered that the text was not exactly a vegan's cookbook but a literary autobiography by a well-known scholar in the field of postcolonial literature, of whose contribution I had been ignorant. Food was an integral part of her narration but politics was at its core, and the way she told her stories, as caricatured vignettes<sup>2</sup> of her closest kin and friends, cast an instant spell on me. I was emotionally captured by her writing style, her teasing play with Urdu words and Pakistani names, her intertextual subtleties and nostalgic childhood references. She invited me to her various childhood homes in the city of Lahore, into busy kitchens where amazing things happened. She made me wonder. These kitchens were immediate and intense sites of memory, where history seemed to frequently take over the private and the personal.

The first thing that struck me in *Meatless Days* was the term shadow dynasties: the way the children in Suleri's household talked about the changes of cooks as a kind of domestic political history, as if to mimic their journalist father's references to the changes of regime in Pakistan's national history. The way she weaved the domestic and the national as an intertwined narrative was a new discovery to me. *Meatless Days* was the most precise and elegant introduction I had ever got to a previously little-heard-of culture. I got inside the landscape and my senses were opened to taste, smell, touch and listen to a new historical context.

Soon I was reading *Meatless Days* intensively together with my favourite Irish writer, Eavan Boland's autobiography *Object Lessons* (1995). The two texts seemed to form a fascinating dialogue between them about colonialism, historical amnesias and women's resistance

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<sup>2</sup> A vignette (Old French: little vine or decorative vine-patterned ornament) is a short, well-written sketch or composition which shows precision and delicacy, or a section of a longer work (Cuddon 1998, 971, Beckson and Ganz 1990, 297). The term has a visual connotation, as it is used also in photography, book illustrations, journalism and the new media.

to male-stream nationalisms. The first instances that, in my reading, wound up the texts together were both women's desperate attempts to find dead female relatives' graves on almost surreal graveyards. Here is Sara Suleri looking for her mother's and sister's graves in Lahore at Miani Sahib graveyard:

*...I was surrounded by a city that I could not read. There were no signposts, and as though desperately late for a dinner, I went on in blundering optimism, certain that each forking path would take me where I belonged. But the hillocks were too similar, and I could not find the ones I wished to find.*

(Suleri 1989, 87.)

And here is Eavan Boland looking for her grandmother's grave in the village of Termonfeckin, north of Dublin:

*I was certain, in some more rational parts of my mind, that her headstone was indeed here. She had been too much loved and noted for it not to have been. But the fact was that I could not find it*

(Boland 1995, 22).

For Boland, whose grandmother died soon after her own mother's birth, the historical sense of loss is more devastating than for Suleri, who leaves the withering roses on a stranger's grave and decides from then on to bless the memory of the two women's love rather than the monument. The difference in terms of the span of memory is that Boland mourns a woman she has never met, whereas Suleri lost her loved ones in adulthood. Suleri's dramatic personal history does not leave space for reviving memories of people she never encountered; Boland's somewhat gentler narrative extends farther back in Ireland's history. Boland carries in her body "a small, abstract wound" (1995, 23), whereas Suleri thinks of her mourning body as "living testimony that you most grievously are dead.(1989, 88)"

Boland is in her displacement deeply disturbed by her dead grandmother being tossed outside history, without a name or memorial, whereas Suleri can only find temporary stability of meaning in living bodies. Pakistan as a nation-state is constantly on the verge of collapsing, its frontiers are under siege, about to become rewritten, and in this situation of chronic uncertainty, it is the living body that has a greater probability to survive than versions of political history, or even graves. Memories of the once lived bodies of the beloved women must then become a part of her "body's steady landscape" (87) instead of being revived on ritual visits to monuments.

The historical comparisons between colonial India and Ireland started to feed my imagination towards new dimensions: religious wars, divide and rule, dispossessions, violent, arbitrary carvings of a nation, emigrations, the love-and-hate relationship with the imperial mother country, displaced statues of the Queen Victoria. Sometimes I started reading from London, then juggled between Dublin and Lahore. Inauguration of the Muslim League 1906. Morley-Minto reforms 1909. Easter Rising 1916. Khilafat movement 1920s. Rise of the Muslim League 1930s. Irish Constitution 1937. Lahore Resolution 1940. De Valera and Jinnah. Yeats and Iqbal. Statesmen and male poets. Male imageries for a nation. Sometimes even articulations of Indo-Irish solidarity<sup>3</sup>. Different pigments, different histories but the same oppressor. I imagined collaboration – a common concern. But where did the women stand in all this? Did women have an active role in these national – and sometimes also transnational – orchestrations?

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<sup>3</sup> A lot has been written particularly on radical anti-colonial Irish women activists in India, who in their youth were exposed to Irish nationalism and later shifted continents to champion the cause of Indian independence. The writings of Annie Besant, Margaret Cousins and Sister Nivedita were a source of inspiration to me at the early stages of the research process. For a general introduction to the theme cf. Jayawardena (1995).

## Women's times

Within a few weeks after impulse-shopping *Meatless Days*, I was writing my first postgraduate research plan, titled as *Shadow Dynasties and Women's Times*. Writing about temporalities, both public and private, that women situate themselves in, women's multiple reactions to the ways their countries' histories have been written and taught, and their own conceptualisations of what constitutes historical time was for me an attempt to opt out from the kind of totalising concept of women traditionally inhabiting a cyclical, non-linear temporality that Julia Kristeva outlined in her much debated essay "Women's Time":

*As for time, female subjectivity would seem to provide a specific measure that essentially retains repetition and eternity from among the multiple modalities of time known through the history of civilizations. On the one hand, there are cycles, gestation, the eternal recurrence of a biological rhythm which conforms to that of nature and imposes a temporality whose stereotyping may shock, but whose regularity and unison with what is experienced as extra-subjective time, cosmic time, occasion vertiginous visions and unnameable jouissance.*

(Kristeva 1986, 191.)

The idea about women's extra-subjective cosmic time, perhaps experienced beyond language and the baggages of male-stream History or notions of "culture" or "ethnicity" that only unnecessarily divide women is tempting for any newcomer to Women's Studies. I had worked on the essay vigorously as an undergraduate, fascinated by the possible radical opportunities of feminist resistance at the deepest socio-symbolic level. But "cosmic time" was only something that I could play with in my personal diaries. It was a fantasy into which I could momentarily tune myself into, but I could not find in Kristeva's formulation any use for research about other women's lives, in my own or other cultures.

Studies in semiotics and psychoanalysis were challenging for a while, but the lonely work in libraries with specialised topical dictionaries to unfold sentences did not promise much in terms of feminist struggle. I was still struggling. Soon I discovered that my primary curiosity and passion as an aspiring scholar was neither for concepts such as *jouissance* or *fort-da* game nor for feminist theory's inner essentialism wars but for women's voices in different cultures and across cultures, their articulations of subjectivity through the mediums of literature, arts and political activism. It was as if I had taken refuge from feminist theory in "country studies", never completely erasing feminist theory's profound impact on me but rather taking the liberty to apply it somewhat more lightly than before.

Kristeva was explicitly searching for an articulation for the temporal experience of European women, a common "trans-European temporality" (1986, 193) and found in the history of European feminist movements three attitudes towards the conception of linear temporality in Western civilisation. These attitudes, or levels of experience were to a great extent generational. The first feminist generations' task was to articulate women's separate needs and interests from those of men's, and "women" remained as a unified group asking for liberation. The second wave was more interested in differences between and amongst women, and flirted with separatist impulses to re-write "herstories" without men. In the third wave of feminist thought, there is a tendency to think of sexual difference also as a constant negotiation inside individual women, and the notion of differences is extended from analysing the mere effects of gender towards multiple identifications. The historical outline of Western European women's movements as analysed by Kristeva has been brilliantly extended by Rosi Braidotti (1993) in her theory of "nomadic" female feminist subjects.

In these formulations, we remain inside Europe. Kristeva has been elsewhere criticised for insensitive and ahistorical representation of Chinese women, and so remains a favourite target of objection for postcolonial feminist critics (cf. Harlow 1987, Spivak 1994, Lowe

1993). "Women's Time" is a metropolitan Eurocentric text that does not try to cover gendered temporalities in other cultural spheres. Curiously, the text has belatedly travelled into postcolonial theory in the works of Homi Bhabha (2001), who formulates his idea of the third space as the site of articulation of resistance and cultural hybridity for diasporic intellectuals, writers and artists. But in both Kristeva's and Bhabha's formulations one cannot avoid a certain atmosphere of hasty sweep. Bold, inspirational theory often works like this: by providing us imaginary and poetic sustenance, it may alienate us from historical exactitude.

Fortunately or unfortunately, the early immersion into Kristeva's works turned my interest towards microhistorical feminist writing that uses individual women's "traces", archive documents and autobiographical materials, as starting points (cf. Steedman 2002). From the Frech feminist icon, I then wanted to ask: whose Europe was she theorizing on? Where did she stand vis-à-vis the cosmic time of unnameable *jouissance* and the awesome time of feminised resurrection cults in Christianity as a Bulgarian emigrant woman? Would women on the edges of Europe, in Bulgaria or Finland, be able to locate themselves and their struggles within her metropolitan time-map? How could she write about something as abstract as temporality as a shared life experience without hearing women's voices? And why, in order to understand ourselves and the world, should we remain at the level of civilisations? In "Women's Time", I found "eternal" icons and myths of femininity but not a single woman in flesh and in action. Without the presence of living voices, breathing words through analysis, theorizing on women's subjectivities seemed hollow. I also discarded the concept "civilisation" from my active vocabulary.

### *Cultural literacy*

In the last century, despite my protest to Julia Kristeva, I was interested in the whole Muslim cultural sphere and its relationship to secular

history-writing as opposed to Qur'anic revelation. I wanted to know all Qur'anic political concepts and their relationship to the Western history of political concepts. I was also interested in the whole Indo-Muslim history starting from the year 93/711 AD, the first Arab invasion on the coast of Sind. I learnt a skeleton of basic ideas, but unsurprisingly, could not develop any interpretation of my own, because of my complete reliance on translations and history textbooks.

The notion of cultural literacy is one cornerstone and starting point in the present study. In an imperfect world and cultures in constant flux, the anthropological notion of cross-cultural translation is becoming ever more problematic (cf. Asad 1986, Visweswaran 1994, Spivak 1992), but in order to make meaning of the world's complexity we must however engage in reading and (re)writing, or, as suggested by Stuart Hall (1980), encoding and decoding.

In the beginning of the project, I saw cultural literacy first and foremost as a comprehensive knowledge of history, disregarding in which language and where the study materials were published. In a study on life-writing originally published in English, I was not initially motivated to study Pakistan's official language, Urdu, or the writers' other native languages, Sindhi and Bengali. In the course of the project, my stance to language learning has changed dramatically, but the preliminary lessons particularly in Urdu and Arabic will perhaps affect the future research projects.

My relationship with the Urdu language is at the moment optimistic. I knew from the beginning of the project that it would only be realistic for me to learn to master it through the immersion method. The materials available for foreign students are not inspiring enough for self-study, and teachers have been hard to find at the Western universities I have worked in. I have gained a taste for the language during my stay in Pakistan, through my ongoing contacts with Pakistanis and through films and music. My active skills are at the moment at the basic tourist level, but I understand spoken Urdu more than I think I do. I am motivated to learn the language if I can learn it through

everyday life in Pakistan, first for purposes of daily interaction, and possibly later for searching for new texts.

Although written knowledge of Urdu would have given me access to materials I now cannot reach, I do not regret the fact that I have concentrated on studying history and translated literature before the language. In terms of studying the ideological foundations of Pakistan as an Islamic state, knowledge of Arabic seems also necessary. By the end of the research process I have started to learn modern standard Arabic in a classroom, in order to one day become literate in Urdu that uses the Arabic alphabet and to become more fluent in the usage of political and religious concepts of the Muslim world.

What can be known of Pakistan without first hand access to Urdu and other local language sources, and what can be known of Islam without a good knowledge of Arabic are questions I want to bring into public debate at a meta-level through the publication of this monograph. I have been patiently spoon-fed with new words by my South Asian friends, and living experience through human contact is the only way I can learn.

The question of cultural literacy is also a juggle between Islamic influences and the greater South Asian cultural continuum. The texts I was reading offered a wealth of references in both dimensions. How much knowledge of the history of Islam, then, would be required from me? Primarily, I wanted to deal with the texts' entanglements with feminist movements and the post/colonial history of Muslim women's political mobilisation in South Asia. A full immersion in Islamic concepts would make me forget my point of departure: women's histories and writing. I could not deal with metahistory<sup>4</sup> at the expense of

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<sup>4</sup> The history of Islam is one of the multiple "metahistories" in the present study. Hayden White (1971) defines metahistory as each society's conceptions of what it means to think historically, and considers the contemporary definitions of "historical consciousness" as "a specifically Western prejudice by which the presumed superiority of modern, industrial society can be retroactively substantiated" (White 1971, 2).



women's lives and voices. The lesson was, however, probably necessary to learn: studying the history of Islam in general, and its temporal dimensions in particular, has given me the historical, contextual resources selectively used in the present study. Gaining cultural literacy in this "encyclopedic" sense has been the most pedantic and painstaking – but also satisfying – process since that fateful day in 1997.

Contrary to Sara Suleri's policy of non-reference and non-translation (see ch. 5), the present study includes a glossary of unfamiliar terms to Western readers. My policy is to freely translate key concepts the first time they appear in the main text. The untranslated terms can be found in the glossary.

### *Teamwork and fieldwork*

In the beginning of the new millennium, I joined a research team. I could not believe my luck. Ours was a multidisciplinary *feminist* research effort on postcolonialism, transnational lifestyles, the negotiation of welfare contracts and political agency in African and Asian societies.<sup>5</sup> My new colleagues were indeed talking about *women's lives*; a part of me was still insisting on talking about temporality in general and different "isms" in particular until I realised the study was lacking tangible argumentation. The Minna project has been the nursery in which I have grown as a researcher by listening to other women's fieldwork stories from Tanzania, Kenya, Zambia, Yemen, Palestine, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Japan and our domestic immigrant communities. The stories have sustained me and often resulted in asking questions otherwise. In particular, the project has made me elaborate the question of cross-cultural encounters, which is what every member does for her living at some level. More generally, it has given me courage to deepen the postcolonial literary background, new research contacts and funding to realise my plans to work in Pakistan.

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<sup>5</sup> For the Minna project's wider agenda, please refer to: [www.minnaproject.net](http://www.minnaproject.net)

In the winter of 2001, I spent two months in Lahore doing "literary fieldwork", meeting local feminists, gathering more literature and, most importantly, living in the cultural context of the Pakistani urban, educated upper middle-class/élite whose history the primary material narrates. The importance of this stay cannot be exaggerated. I learnt more about the contexts of my study walking in parks and sipping *chai* in people's houses than I could ever imagine learning in archives.

The first visit left me with a deep sense of belonging and confidence to go on writing despite the physical distance between Helsinki and Lahore. I planned to spend the last year of my project writing up the final script of the thesis together with my children in Lahore. Enthusiastic e-mails bounced back and forth about the coming arrangements, until a plane crashed on two towers in faraway New York and Pakistan suddenly became re-named as a major terrorist recruitment base.

I ended up finishing the text in multicultural Toronto. The choice not to return to Pakistan to complete the thesis was the hardest one made during the PhD journey. Knowing that my Pakistani friends kept on living their everyday lives in the midst of the tightened security situation did not seem to give me the ethical possibility of opting out. On the other hand, knowing that many Europeans, Americans and Pakistani Christians had been severely attacked by the time that I had to make up my mind, it did not seem fair to put my children at risk.

In many ways, the present study is not only about past eras and the interpretations three women have given to them, but also about my present interaction and emotional investment with a country, a city and some of its inhabitants.

Before September 2001, I conceptualised my relationship with Pakistan as an intellectual interest in the Indian end of the Islamic world and as an ongoing negotiation of the terms of solidarity between the affluent North and the impoverished South. Outside the

immediate research context, as an occasional activist, I was also thinking how my intellectual debt to South Asia could be paid off by some concrete measures. Being on the receiving end of the relationship felt somehow parasitic.

After September 2001, my basic question remains the same but has gained new, more acute and painful layers. Worry, shame and guilt have been more recurring themes since then, and after having travelled through the canons of postcolonial literary theory and the critique of Orientalism, I am now particularly forced to negotiate my relationship to the rhetorical construction of the "West" more precisely than ever before.

Yet timelines keep changing. It is no longer only the three women's changing temporalizations in the past that I try to grasp but also the rapidly changing ones of our own time. The new millennium has brought about the urgent need to read and analyse literature as a global citizen, an exercise in which political judgment counts even more than precise cultural translations. This mode of reading is resistant to the binary internal/external, or as Tuija Parvikko (2003, 211) puts it in the light of Hannah Arendt's philosophy: *"(i)t challenges the politically correct view, according to which one cannot judge the world from the outside, as it suggests that in the contemporary world, characterized by contradictory tendencies toward globalization and the pluralization of political differences, all judgments are external judgments."*

Although the events in faraway New York once affected the practical arrangements of the present study, and resulted in a brief personal process of displacement, it was not the decisive moment that affected the research setting. The questions asked from the texts I was reading remained unaffected by the new war on terrorism. Neither did I become overnight a Western specialist on Islam in South and Central Asia. What first seemed like a global crisis after which "nothing will ever be the same again", soon turned out to be rhetorical warfare between politbüros.

The state of emergency as a personal experience weaned itself sooner than expected, as independent news became available and we were urged to see the wider continuum of imperial interests behind it all. We were told to be in a state of high alert in all times. Yet somewhere at the fringes of Euroamerica, life rolled on and we still heard other voices, read other stories than the panicky news headlines. Who were "we"?

Finding comfort in the prophetic words of Walter Benjamin on the tradition of the oppressed, it seemed necessary to ask for whom the emergency was really an emergency, and for whom it was just another imperial catastrophe. Benjamin (1968, 257) writes: "*The current amazement that the things we are experiencing are "still" possible in the twentieth century is not philosophical. This amazement is not the beginning of knowledge – unless it is the knowledge that the view of history which gives rise to it is untenable.*"

In the twenty-first century, who continues to be amazed?

## 1.2 Compositions

### *First lesson: contrapuntal readings*

My initial plan was to collect a body of Irish and Pakistani women's autobiographies, and try to find texts that would somehow "speak together" across continents through the common experience of British colonisation. The little knowledge I had of postcolonial theory gave me an impetus to move on with the massive project, as I was fond of Edward Said's (1993, 78–9) idea of contrapuntal reading. Said's method is to look for continuities and ruptures between earlier, imperialist texts and the later postcolonial writing that cannot be detached from its imperial history. One should widen the context of one's reading to the text's "pre-history", look beyond the obvious to map the

sources of the narrative's main ideas, concepts and experiences. "In reading a text, one must open it out both to what went into it and to what its author excluded. Each cultural work is a vision of a moment, and we must juxtapose that vision with the various revisions it later provoked. (Said 1993, 79)"

Instead of reading the texts of the coloniser and the colonised together, possibly from different periods of time, as Said suggests, I toyed with the idea of contrasting the texts of the white European colonised and the brown Indian colonised from the same historical conjuncture (20th century nationalisms and the rhetorical constructions of modernity). The idea kept me occupied until 1999, when I realised Pakistan had made a *coup* in my research agenda. I was certainly still interested in Irish women's writing, but my South Asian studies starting from the scratch had swallowed all my time and energy for two years. I had come up with five Pakistani "key texts" – a fully occupying textual universe as such – and decided to leave the idea of readings between ex-colonies until later.

### *The texts' locations*

Apart from *Meatless Days*, two of the four other "key texts", Benazir Bhutto's *The Daughter of the East* (1988) and Tehmina Durrani's *My Feudal Lord* (1993), were widely available in Finland, even as translations in Finnish. The other two much less known and older texts, Begum Shahnawaz' *Father and Daughter. A Political Autobiography* (1971) and Begum Shaista Ikramullah's *From Purdah to Parliament* (1963) were found on a research trip to London's Fawcett Library in 1998.

What has been found and where is, of course, indicative of the kinds of texts Western publishing houses and institutions consider as important or representative of Pakistan. Chandra Mohanty's concerns in "Under Western Eyes" (1984) on the totalizing gaze of European scholars on "Third World difference" can be easily extended to the world of publishing and even libraries. And it is not only a question of

the biased, top-down views of the publishers and librarians on "what the people need" but also a matter of what the people want to read. "Difficult" literary novels and autobiographies from distant countries demand a lot of work from their readers. Practitioners of postcolonial theory in metropolitan universities do not often make a big enough market, not at least for struggling alternative presses.

Political autobiographies often sell due to the author's extratextual merits, but what happens to texts written by previously less known women is a different story. In the realm of other kind of life-writing emerging from the countries understood as the Third World, it is mostly sex and violence that sells in Europe. Better yet if this is connected to a "detrimental tribal/feudal/religious practice". I find one of the key tasks of postcolonial literature and theory to challenge such totalizing assumptions of the Third World difference and its exotic marketability in the West.

Most of the recent bestselling novels by women from Asia and Africa published in the Western mainstream publishing houses have stunned me by their accurate historicity and emotional impact, but even here the logic of media sexiness prevails. As a travelling bibliophile, it is sometimes disappointing to find the same South Asian "media darlings" being sold with exactly the same strategies in all countries, but one also often becomes positively surprised. Lesser known South Asian women writing from different diasporic locations have produced a large body of exceptionally fresh writing within the past twenty years, often under academic or local "grassroots" presses.<sup>6</sup>

*The Daughter of the East* was a product of Benazir Bhutto's highest political moment, and the power of her image as the "saviour" of her country in the Western media in the late 1980s also served as a marketing strategy for her autobiography. The book is a monument

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<sup>6</sup> For a particularly inclusive bibliography of Indian women writers writing in English, see Joel Kuortti's (2002) bibliography. I have not come across similar bibliographies made of Pakistani or Bangladeshi women writers.

of her election as prime minister and belongs to the "serious" genre of states(wo)man's memoirs, not begging for recognition as a Pakistani woman's voice. It has been available in almost every library in every country I have visited during my doctoral studies, but has been very little analysed by feminist critics worldwide.

Tehmina Durrani's *My Feudal Lord*, on the other hand, was marketed in the mid-1990s under the sensational category "woman's voice from an oppressive Muslim country", or what I have dubbed as "Muslim difference". Starting from the title, little is left for the reader to imagine about the reasons for the book's widespread marketing. The cover sleeve claims representativeness, the voice of a woman who has courage to reveal the "hidden" truths about misogyny in Pakistan, the voice of a former slave who breaking free from her bondage. Book clubs throughout Europe and North America stock titles belonging to this genre, making their readership wider than, for example, that of political autobiographies. Although *My Feudal Lord* contains sharp analysis of the feudal element in Pakistani politics, and an insider account from the high ranks of Pakistan People's Party both during its governmental leadership and exile, it sells mostly due to its sensational "Muslim difference" value.<sup>7</sup>

Begum Jahanara Shahnawaz' *Father and Daughter* and Begum Shaista Ikramullah's *From Purdah to Parliament* are fine examples of women's politicization in colonial India and participation in Pakistan's nation-building at its early stages. They belong to the category of rare books in Euroamerica. Fawcett Library is the only place I have ever located Shahnawaz' text. It was published in Lahore in 1971 and has

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<sup>7</sup> The text's title suggests ideological affinity with such bestsellers as Jean P. Sasson's (1997) *Princess* and Betty Mahmood's (1993) *Not Without My Daughter*; however, Durrani is perhaps more careful than the two other "notorious" authors about distinguishing between historical patriarchal remnants and Islamic cultural influences, which she hardly criticizes at all. The "Muslim difference" value is however present in her explicit analyses of her country's and especially its men's "backwardness".

obviously ran out of stock. I was happy to purchase a second, revised edition of Ikramullah's text in Lahore, which suggests that the text has an appeal for a new generation of domestic readers.

Sara Suleri's *Meatless Days* is widely taught in North American universities on courses of postcolonial literature.<sup>8</sup> It is a postcolonial feminist classic with an appeal for students and scholars worldwide. However, its distinctively academic style may alienate non-academic readers, if they are not insiders to the Pakistani cultural context. The complexity and specificity of Suleri's language makes the text extremely difficult to translate into other languages.

During my doctoral studies, I have never stopped looking for new possible research materials, and also my definition of life-writing has broadened in scope. I have gathered a collection of texts by Pakistani and former Muslim Indian women with a strong autobiographical content: essays, articles, poetry and fiction. The later additions of actual published autobiographies to this collection have not, however, stirred in me a willingness to change the research setting.

### *Towards a triangle*

At the textual level, the combination of five long autobiographical texts in one monograph did not "work". The readers were confused between too many names and storylines in my seminar papers. As a result of a long conversation with my supervisor and research team, I chose to cut down the number of "key texts" from five to three. I chose Suleri's *Meatless Days*, Benazir Bhutto's *The Daughter of the East* and Begum Shaista Ikramullah's *From Purdah to Parliament*, and withdrew Begum Shahnawaz' *Father and Daughter* and Tehmina Durrani's *My Feudal Lord*.

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<sup>8</sup> Proof of the text's ongoing popularity can be found on the internet, especially on Postcolonial Web, a website the construction of which I have been following since 1997: <http://www.postcolonialweb.org>



*Meatless Days* stayed on the agenda without further questioning. In terms of shadow dynasties, my original starting point, it also seemed paramount to include in my study the saga of the Bhutto clan, the penultimate Pakistani political dynasty, to the study of which I had already invested more time than the other texts. Durrani's melodramatic text formed a more personal counter-narrative to Bhutto's strategic and public political autobiography, but it had been so far impossible for me to write intelligibly about Durrani's memoirs, and predicted that time would not make the task any easier. Durrani's focus on her conjugal hell with Bhutto's father's close aide and later competitor Mustafa Khar was certainly a counter-narrative to all the other women's stories of independent personal development (the feminist heroic tale), and the mere publication of the text was a brave act from a divorced Lahori woman in 1993. Perhaps my own incompetence to deal with stories of domestic violence at any other level than that of the gut reaction made me opt out from further analysing *My Feudal Lord*.

Ikramullah's and Shah Nawaz' autobiographies formed a charming dialogue, but were in many ways too similar in tone and narrative to form an interesting contrapuntal reading. From these two early feminist texts dating back to days before the partition of India, I chose Ikramullah's narrative because I was intrigued by the negotiations of cultural and national identity in it, ie. her journey from Calcutta via Delhi and London to Karachi, and the subsequent articulations of Pakistani-ness based on a newcomer's experiences and memories. Begum Shah Nawaz belonged to a prominent Punjabi landowner clan, and thus did not leave her place of origin but for short visits. The static Punjabi experience does not make the text any less fascinating than Ikramullah's nomadic narrative, but out of the two texts, perhaps due to my own experiences of migration, I felt closer affinity with the nomadic tale.

To provide biographical sketches of the lives of the three women at this stage seems premature and violent; however, it will orientate

the reader who approaches the present life-writing for the first time. By writing down one paragraph of each woman's key tasks and roles in Pakistan's nation-building or in diaspora, I pin down and categorize their lives according to a common-sense logic, according to their publicly perceived roles. In the later analyses, I hope to approach their writerly self-expression through the clues that the texts themselves give. Here some words as an introduction:

Begum Shaista Suhradawardy Ikramullah (1915–2000) was known as the first female parliamentarian, who served the nation on a reserved women's seat in the ranks of the East Bengali Muslim League in the National Assembly from 1947 to 1953. In 1953, she personally resigned from her seat due to disagreements amongst the party members about the drafting of the country's first constitution. In the later years she still represented Pakistan in the United Nations, and after her husband's death in 1963 worked as a diplomat in Morocco. She held a PhD degree in Urdu literature from a University of London, and published regularly in both Urdu and English magazines and journals. *From Purdah to Parliament* has been published twice: the first edition of the text already came out in 1963 in London and the second edition was published due to the new generations' great interest with added chapters in 1998.

Benazir Bhutto (1953–) was the first female prime minister of the country, and her autobiography *The Daughter of the East* (1988) was published during her first election campaign as the leader of Pakistan People's Party, the party that her father Zulfikar Ali Bhutto had founded in 1966. Benazir studied political science and international law in Harvard and Cambridge in the 1970s up to the MA level and returned to Pakistan to take up a career in diplomacy a few months before Zia ul-Haq's *coup d'état* in 1977. Unlike Begum Ikramullah, Benazir did not consciously choose an active role in a political party but was thrown into politics as a result of the circumstances, the jailing and execution of her father. Benazir's young adulthood was spent in prison, home detention in Pakistan and in exile in the United King-

dom. Her two periods of prime ministership (1989–90, 1993–1996) were short and turbulent. In 1996, accused of aiding her husband's money laundering and serious mismanagement of state funds, Benazir Bhutto fled to another exile and has since then divided her time between London and Dubai.

Sara Suleri Goodyear (1953–) is known as a postcolonial literary scholar and writer of two praised literary autobiographical pieces, *Meatless Days* (1989) and *Boys Will Be Boys* (2003).<sup>9</sup> Unlike Ikramullah and Bhutto, Suleri has not participated in Pakistani politics but rather reflects on the country's political history from the perspective of her parents and siblings, who remained in the country after her emigration to the United States in the mid-1970s. Suleri wrote her PhD dissertation on the poetry of William Wordsworth and became shortly thereafter professor of English Literature at Yale University. She has lived a much more private life than Ikramullah and Bhutto, and this enables her role as a political commentator of the events of her former homeland rather than a politician.

In terms of ethnicity, interesting in the present triangle of texts is that none of authors is of Punjabi origin. If Pakistan's ethnic situation were to be paraphrased in a single sentence, one could say that the Punjabis as a majority ethnicity (40–50% of the present population) have gained remarkable assets particularly in state-level bureaucracy, the military and as landowners, whereas other ethnic groups have been struggling for the share in political, military and economic power that they would proportionally deserve. Begum Ikramullah's Bengali background, Benazir Bhutto's feudal Sindhi origins and Sara Suleri's negotiations between her mother's Welshness and her father's nomadic

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<sup>9</sup> The present study deals only with *Meatless Days*; *Boys Will Be Boys* was published at the final stages of the preparation of this monograph and can no longer be incorporated here. I have chosen to call Suleri by her maiden name, which is the authorial name of *Meatless Days*. For my first analysis of *Boys Will Be Boys*, see Hirsiaho (2004).

*mohajir*<sup>10</sup> tale all pose challenges to a Punjabi-centred storytelling of Pakistan<sup>11</sup>. What does ethnicity mean when all writers belong, disregarding their ethnic affiliations, to political élites and have had maximum access to Western education? When and how does ethnicity become contested? These questions will be elaborated in the coming chapters, when the context so allows.

*Inspirational theory or methods that "work"?*

*Theory – the seeing of patterns, showing the forest as well as trees – theory can be a dew that rises from the earth and collects in the rain cloud and returns to earth over and over. But if it doesn't smell of the earth, it isn't good for the earth.*

Adrienne Rich (1986/2002, 65)

Having made my choice of texts, I was to think more deeply about the meaning of the composition and the different approaches to the acts of writing and reading, the women's and mine. The texts were difficult to bring together into a single academic narrative, because of the different purposes of writing and levels of operating in the English language. Not even the umbrella term autobiography did seem to bring the texts together. Although they were all about the writers' personal histories, they used highly differing narrative strategies, and were obviously directed to different readerships.

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<sup>10</sup> The term *mohajir* refers to the migrants who arrived from the Urdu-speaking "heartland" of India to Pakistan during the Partition in 1947 and its aftermath. Initially, this Arabic term referred to the first Muslim migrants from Mecca to Medina. The powerful connotation may cause expressions of cultural superiority amongst the descendants of the *mohajirs*, and has also ignited ethnic conflicts, particularly in the city of Karachi (cf. Shamsie 2002).

<sup>11</sup> On Pakistan's ethnic fragmentation and the Punjabi political dominance, see eg. Hussain (1979), Gilmartin (1989), Ahmed (1997), Ali and Rehman (2001).

Consideration of the genres of life-writing seemed necessary, but not enough to strike my full attention. Neither was I particularly drawn to either strictly comparing the texts' narrative devices or concentrating on their reception as the sole focus of the study. Both approaches inform the present study, but initially seemed too neat and bookish to compress my hands-on involvement with the texts and their contexts. The enchantment of storylines lied in the very mess they created: there were too many interesting human threads, too many encounters, too much beauty and wonder. It was a matter of drama, turbulence, dangerous liaisons, excitement, disillusionment, fullness, emptiness, noise and silences. However patiently I tried to focus on only one aspect of the texts, the research context always seemed to spill over.<sup>12</sup>

The only sane solution to the chaos of concepts, reading strategies and theories on my desktop was to return to the ones that truly sustained my process, inspired me and seemed to form a dialogue with what I judged as the "highlights" or "points" of the three texts. I was lucky to know from the beginning of the process where to draw strength from even in desperate situations. It was everything but a matter of choosing "applicable" theories for the present project: I wanted to return to some of the classics of Western feminist theorizing that had formed me as a feminist researcher, and see what was found there that formed dialogues with non-Western feminist and postcolonial theoretical voices. I wanted to find affirmations of the possibility of *talking across*, as a self-reflexive attempt to wrestle out of the accusative "rhetoric of blame" that Said (1993, 19) warns postcolonial theorists about. In combining postcolonial feminist and Western materialist feminist voices, I am consciously applying a pick-and-mix method of analysis, in which the focus is not so much on pointing out the Eurocentric flaws of certain theorists but to find voices that have the potential of becoming translated across cultures.

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<sup>12</sup> For an inspiring philosophical analysis of storylines, see Guaraldo's (2002) analysis of Hannah Arendt's political storytelling.

I did not want a distinct theoretical "framework" (a neatly frozen container) to legitimate my process, nor a functional "methodology" that would miraculously put my observations in line. The life-writing as such came before theory, and the theoretical threads were gradually attached to the writing in a long process of brewing. Everything was in motion, the research itinerary was full of surprises, and I was gathering only the pieces of theory that came close enough, that struck a chord, that gave a sounding board to the women's voices.

To give a plausible name for the exercise I was involved in, I tried to see how other feminist scholars named their method. Something in my two former women's studies teachers' acts of naming seemed familiar: I felt at home with the way Eeva Jokinen (1996) and Marita Husso (2003) were engaged with the autobiographical materials produced by tired mothers and survivors of intimate violence in the Finnish context. Inspired by them, I am drawn to Teresa de Lauretis' (1987, xi) term rewriting as both a political strategy and method, which for her is "*a radical rewriting of the dominant forms of Western culture, a rewriting which effectively inscribes the presence of a different and gendered social subject.*" It involves both representation of others' texts and critical self-presentation. As my exercise involves imaginary and real encounters between cultures, South Asian and Northern European ones, the scene becomes more blurred, demanding and risky. In such a setting, a politics of reading, not only a politics of writing, seems equally necessary as a strategy, and in the next chapters I am to explore what happens when we allow, as Lynne Pearce (1997, 3) puts it, "for the fact that the politics of any event (including reading:AH) is defined not only by what we do, but by what is done to us."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> The idea of reversing the question towards conceptualizing the reader and researcher as a receiving cell, not only as the active mover and shaker, is particularly welcome in a Muslim cultural context. In the present study I have worked with notions of Sufi ways of knowing, because such undercurrents are to be found in all three women's texts. I refuse to treat Sufism as a "scientific" phenomenon into which

The subjects whose stories I re-write through a postcolonial materialist reading reflect not upon one mainstream culture but many cultural streams and undercurrents: local, diasporic, rural, metropolitan, provincial/regional, Muslim, Eastern, Western, Asian, European cultures. The rewriting occurs whether or not I actively name the exercise as such: I am giving new words to, pasting new conceptual layers on texts that after their publication have started to live lives of their own.

It is not always clear which cultural forms in the present texts are dominant, and what can be called emergent or alternative<sup>14</sup>. I am involved in the exercise of rewriting what I consider as dominant forms of Western culture through continuous entries of self-reflection but it is more problematic to radically rewrite forms of cultures I am not a member of, cultures of which I have knowledge only as a guest, a newcomer. However, de Lauretis brings me directly to the problematics that the texts as such invite me to explore: the rewriting of the gendered postcolonial autobiographical subject.

### *Directions of writing*

But how is rewriting done as a *praxis*? There is no linear recipe: "first we take childhood memories and the family, then memories of education, then some evidence of the subjects' struggle with individuation, then their entry into politics and encounters with patriarchy, then stir the ingredients with the magic bouillon (keep it confidential: it con-

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there would be frequent references, because Sufism is not a bookish epistemology to be rationally "known" but rather something that has to be felt, experienced and even hidden from view. For excellent resources provided by others see eg. Ahmed (1994), Andrae (1987), Ernst (1999), Hämeen-Anttila (2002), Schimmel (1997), Werbner (2003).

<sup>14</sup> The terms dominant, residual and emergent – key concepts in cultural studies – denote the processual nature of cultures, their movement and interconnections. See eg. Williams (1988, 139–145), and Eagleton (1991).

sists of some rooting and shifting, contrapuntal ideological clashes and a serious twist between the Gramscian notion of hegemony and the Althusserian thesis of the relative independence of culture), let simmer for seven years and voilà!" No. I am only to narrate the research process retrospectively, thinking of the directions of my writing, the turns I have taken for my analysis to approach feminist rewriting. Where am I with the three women, how do I interact with them and put into other words what they have told me? In this basic exercise, the very job I have assigned myself, I am never alone, I am amongst them (but in a fictional space that I have myself created), sometimes frankly only speaking *about* them, but willing to reach further, to speak *to* them or speak *with* them.

Speaking *to* and *with* the researched are exercises in using another voice, reflections on the directions of writing and attempts to steer the study towards more dialogical spaces, even if the dialogues in question here are imaginary and orchestrated. The other voice is colloquial, even chatty sometimes, ordinary. It is also an exercise in translating the acquired theoretical discourses into everyday practice, catching a glimpse of the thought processes that led to the writing of the monograph.

Writing *to*, particularly in the postcolonial context, can also be viewed as the prototypical colonial form of address, in which only the *memsahib* can speak, by haughtily addressing the subalterns, and if coming in terms with "their" culture, appropriating the "finest" of their cultural traditions as a pleasant pastime in the tropics.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, it can be a form of direct (assumedly) "democratic" ad-

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<sup>15</sup> The Victorian literary ideal of "finest" traditions, exemplified by Matthew Arnold, may have become translated in the colonies as a selective appreciation of "higher" forms of local cultural traditions, i.e. in Orientalists' interest in certain forms of poetry and the ancient Vedas. (cf. Said 1994, 10–13, Eagleton 1991, 33–36)



dress, in which one tries to share power as transparently as possible. A fascination with the preposition *to* can become a form of address "between two", as Luce Irigaray (2001, 14) puts it, "*a continual give-and-take in the establishing of boundaries and relationships, without the one having greater authority over the other*".

The most transformative exercise I can think of is writing *with* others. Here the affirmative philosophy of Hélène Cixous is most inspirational, calling for courage to learn with other women:

*They lead you into their gardens, they invite you into their forests, they make you explore their regions, they inaugurate their continents. Close your eyes and love them; you are at home in their lands, they visit you and you visit them, their sexes lavish their secrets on you. What you didn't know they teach you, and you teach them what you learn from them. If you love them, each woman adds herself to you, and you become morewoman. (Cixous 1992, 55)*

This kind of celebration does not have to be blind to global power imbalances. Mutual visitations and lessons through dialogue are neither innocent nor problem-free, but neither do our analyses of power have to become pessimistic *cul-de-sacs* with no other option but turning back.

Sometimes, I also find myself writing *around* the three women, or writing *from* their texts *towards* the historical contexts they themselves have indicated. In these instances, writing becomes mapped as a multidirectional arrow or a spiral. If the instances of writing *to* are episodic and rather dramatized, focusing on direct encounters and ideological clashes, the instances of writing *with*, *around* and *from* are more quiet, slower, processual. I will return to reflecting upon the directions taken in the concluding chapter, *Yarn*.

The present study deals with three women's politics of memory and emotions in life-writing that has been produced in specific political, historical and cultural locations, from early 1960s to late 1980s, within ca. 25 years of time. Although the women are or have once been Pakistani citizens and they all belong to the most educated and cosmopolitan strata of Pakistani society, their experiences of Pakistani-ness vary dramatically. Life-writing is the space where they all reflect on past historical episodes and their personal itineraries, and many of the politicized memories are expressed in culturally specific emotional terms. Some memories, on the other hand, are de-politicized or rendered in the distance through what I perceive as historical silences. Memory and forgetting, speaking and silence, nostalgia and amnesia are always intertwined in historical processes, and together these dialogical pairs form something that can be called "politics of memory" (cf Boyarin 1993).

With "politics of emotions" I refer to lasting expressive structures in autobiographical writing and the methodological challenge of reading maps of such "emotional landscapes"<sup>16</sup>. I use synonymously and indiscriminately the two everyday spoken-English terms "emotions" and "feelings", but want to take distance from the psychological terms "affects" and "impulses", which suggest at a certain biological/neurological understanding.

The generic term "emotions" may refer to an array of more specific "feelings" (joy, grief, frustration, fear etc.), but in everyday use the terms seem to fluently intertwine. "Emotions" is a meta-concept in the present study for more precise articulations of subjective his-

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<sup>16</sup> The term "emotional landscape" has arrived to my analysis from Björk (1997), who sings in "Yóga": "emotional landscapes/they puzzle me and confuse/then the riddle gets solved/and you push me up to this/ state of emergency/how beautiful to be!" On a normal day, when academic analysis of emotions is too demanding, this contemplative poem is all the theory I need.

torical embodied experience. In particular, my readings will highlight political traumas, amnesias and post-colonial "nervous conditions"<sup>17</sup> that may manifest themselves in such mundane activities as eating.

My understanding of "politics of emotions" is linguistic, social-constructivist and historical. The theoretical basis for studying emotions and feelings stems from feminist philosophers of the body, whose work will be covered in ch.2. Moreover, I am indebted to Raymond Williams (1977), whose cultural materialist term "structure of feeling" guides me to think about the borderlines between the lived and the actually spoken layers of experience. The notion suggests that emergent meanings based on memory and emotions are never exhaustive, and thus the social scientist's job is never fully completed. In all its tentativeness, it is a comforting notion.

I have not chosen to focus on the women's expressions of emotions because of finding the texts particularly "emotional"; rather I want to argue that such emotion-laden historical writing is common particularly in countries which have recently achieved independence. Pakistani nationalisms are, then, one of the back-stages of the present study. But how to write about them in a way that would retain the tone of the three women's voices?

To formulate the methodological task of rewriting in the context of the politics of memory and emotions, I have started from two notions. The first one, Adrienne Rich's (1986/2002, 62–82) idea of the politics of location, has followed me from the early stages of feminist studies. The notion of identity as embodied, strategic, situational and necessarily political is hardly anywhere else formulated with such clarity as in that little essay, which I read as a classic in both postcolonial theory and international relations.

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<sup>17</sup> The term "nervous conditions" was introduced to the postcolonial framework by Sartre in his foreword to Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1968). For postcolonial feminist re-interpretations of the term, particularly in relation to food, see Dangaremba (1987) and Mustafa (2000).

Starting her political analysis on the most intimate zone, her body and the places where it has let her go and the ones from which she has been excluded, she sharpens our understanding of global relations to include the senses and the memory. Her personal strategy thus involves de-centring her former notion of whiteness, which is only possible by learning with the heart. She is not afraid of using emotive terms such as "the heart", which in the deconstructive framework would be considered foundational or essentialist. In her embodied experience, such learning is possible and does not have to be excused. Echoing also the present shadow metaphor, she is fully conscious of "the cold shadow that we cast everywhere to the south" (Rich 1986/2002, 72).

Somehow Rich's formulation of location seems to coincide with the second notion, the politics of memory, which for Jonathan Boyarin (1994, 23) virtually translates as the construction of identity. But unlike Rich, although acknowledging the embodiment of remembering, Boyarin does not conceptualise politics of memory as strictly individual, emerging solely from *my body*, but rather as intersubjective, emerging from dialogue and the symbols we use to communicate with others. He is cautious about using the terms collective identity or memory, which for him sound like superorganic entities, but rather looks for "*a dynamically chosen selection of memories, and the constant reshaping, reinvention, and reinforcement of those memories as members contest and create the boundaries and links among themselves.*" (Boyarin 1994, 26.) In my reading, Boyarin's intersubjective understanding of memory highlights negotiation, active contestation and acceptance of dissonances and contradictions.

In other words, memory-work or the mnemonic weaving of identity is not a collective process of mass indoctrination that leads to, for example, a cohesive national consciousness, but rather occurs side by side with others in "spaces between us", as Cynthia Cockburn (1998) formulates it. Using the textile metaphor, the kind of knowledge she is looking for amongst feminists living in recent conflict zones is "like a cloth, a kind of embroidery, woven and worked by successive hands

(viii).” In my reading, it is knowledge emerging from encounters and dialogue.

In the Pakistani context, the thesis on the intersubjective nature of memory seems particularly valid. Ikramullah, Bhutto and Suleri are all bringing forth their lives’ significant others, the relations that affected their journeys towards becoming the women performing the autobiographical act in their now-time<sup>18</sup>, and their relationship to the building of the nation-state of Pakistan.

All three women often start remembering from the intimate zone of the body, Ikramullah from her politician’s body tingling with emotion, Bhutto from her withering body in prison, and Suleri from the body whose privileged memories always somehow include food. In the remembering process, not only memories but also emotions become politicized. But apart from their most intimate political memories, dealing directly with their own physical sensations, there are also other bodies and voices within their narratives.

### *Where is the context?*

Deciding upon the extent to which the other bodies and voices should be incorporated into the present research space became for me perhaps the trickiest methodological question, the question of the weight of the historical context. There were whispers and shouts, coy footnotes and screaming exclamation marks, blinding illuminations and murky shadows, and I alone was to judge which ones mattered in the space between the three women and myself as their mediator.

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<sup>18</sup> I use the concept “now-time” in the Benjaminian sense of a historical “blast”. How to blast out a specific era or text out of the homogeneous narrative course of history-writing? Benjamin (1968,263) writes: “A historian who takes this (blast: AH) as a point of departure stops telling the sequence of events like the beads of a rosary. Instead, he grasps the constellation which his own era has formed with a denitite earlier one. Thus he establishes a conception of the present as “the time of the now”, which is shot through with chips of Messianic time.”

To start making sense of the self-chosen trinity of texts, I knew I would have to put history, memory and place before literary considerations of genre, narrative form and technique, and the study of reception. I was convinced that my study would have to start from larger historical contexts, the texts, issues and debates surrounding the lives of the three women. I stepped far beyond the textual hints of immediate context, and then started approaching the texts from a certain distance.

In the spiralling movement towards the key research questions, many threads were lost or consciously removed, new ones were constantly begging for attention, and perhaps only one chain of questions remained the same: what enables the three women to become autobiographical subjects, which underlying forces are there to be found in their processes of becoming writers, and under which conditions are they writing?

The history of Indian Muslim women's education in the shadow of the institution of *purdah*<sup>19</sup> was the most concrete starting point in a discussion of literary and political agency. Tied to the question of education were the religious, class/caste, ethnic and regional divisions. The development of the urban middle classes – the educationally and politically most progressive social grouping in colonial India – was uneven in different provinces. Muslim women's access to literacy and education was much easier in Bengal and the United Provinces than in the provinces that now form modern Pakistan. (cf Sarkar 1999, Forbes 1996.)

Blissfully I pondered that I would now, on top of the metahistory of Indian Muslims striving towards a separate nation-state, be also given the chance to explore the separate, provincial histories of Bengal, United Provinces, Rajahstan, Punjab and Sindh! This was an

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<sup>19</sup> *Purdah*, in short, indicates the seclusion of women from the sight of unrelated men, or the existence of two separate gendered social spheres. For a wider conceptual mapping, see ch.4.

optimistic, naïve and megalomaniac expectation I imposed on myself but had to soon forget. Narrowing down the historical and geopolitical framework has been a difficult task indeed. Yet I consider it a great privilege of mine to have had the chance to immerse in the stories emerging from these culturally and linguistically divergent localities.

*We are playing within a limited time frame, you and I. My reading you is an act with a beginning and an end. Your writing has opened new windows in my life: it has taken me to unexpected places and in contact with new people. Snowball effect. Now I must say something. Choose to say the most important bits. Body, history, grief, joy, play, intimacy. Nothing is final. These are not my concluding words, but now I have the courage to say something. You inspire me to write otherwise, to select words that resonate with Pakistan, keep me more loyal to the context. They become my thesis, my profitable enterprise, the result of my fictional relationship with you. You have pushed me to say all this. These attentive years are my privilege. The passion remains.*

(Research diary, Helsinki, December 2001.)

### 1.3 Strategies

#### *Postcolonial studies in a country with a cold climate*

Kishwar Naheed, one of the most prominent contemporary Pakistani feminist poets, addresses the masters of countries with a cold climate:

*And to wreck my harvests, sometimes moneylenders  
sometimes wild beasts, sometimes calamities  
and sometimes self-styled masters arrive.*

*Don't teach me to hate my torrid country.  
Let me dry my wet clothes in these courtyards  
let me plant gold in its field  
let me quench my thirst at its rivers  
let me rest beneath the shade of its trees  
let me wear its dust and wrap its distances around me.*

(Naheed 1991, 63–65.)

These stanzas provide an excellent epistemological starting point when thinking of a dialogue between Pakistan and Finland. Naheed could be addressing any major economic power bloc, but the "self-styled master" could also be a mistress, a feminist from a cold country who does not understand the meaning of home and belonging to a Pakistani landscape. There is drought and dust on Naheed's courtyard, but for a moment, hers is the place of illumination and, echoing Adrienne Rich, the ones she addresses bring about the cold shadows of a "superior" kind of knowledge.

"Doing" postcolonial studies in a distant North European context can become, if one is not careful, an apologetic position of defence. Coming from Finland, a "peripheral" country the post/colonial status of which is a matter of interpretation, one is hardly motivated by the typical metropolitan post-colonial guilt to once colonised countries – and guilt does not seem to be the best possible motivation to study new cultures anyway. But in the countries that once had colonies the popular slogan "we are here because you were there" (Rich 1986/2002, 78) is a call for spontaneous dialogue between the ex-colonisers and the ex-colonised.

In Finland, one has to think of starting the dialogue from elsewhere because of the historical circumstances. It is possible to claim historical affinity with the non-European colonised, although the Finns have never fully accepted the terms postcoloniality (as a histori-



cal epoch) or postcolonialism (as a body of critical thought) as points of reference in either popular debates or academic studies on the past domestic occupations. In Finland, there is only a splintered crowd of researchers, mostly literary scholars and anthropologists, "doing" postcolonial studies on non-European cultures and literatures and using the "canon" of Anglo- and Francophone theorizing (Fanon, Said, Bhabha, Spivak etc.) as a starting point. Women's studies is perhaps the latest field of study that has been exposed to postcolonial theorizing during the past few years (see esp. Airaksinen and Ripatti 1999, Naskali et al 2003).

In the present study, postcolonial theory has been a promising critical anchor, which has opened my horizons to look at historical affinities between ex-colonies, not only between ex-colonies and the imperial powers. In the field of English literature, in particular, a method of reading across continents along an intentional South-South axis is pleasurable and invigorating. For instance, I have looked at the different meanings of the English language for women writers across continents:

*What is my mother  
tongue  
my mammy tongue  
my mummy tongue/  
my momsy tongue  
my modder tongue  
my ma tongue?*

This question is asked by the Tobago-born, now Canadian poet Marlene Nourbese Phillip (1989, 56) in her poetic study on the silences of English in the postcolonial Caribbean. The same question can be asked from native English speakers who grew up in Pakistan,

and in the present context it does resonate particularly with Sara Suleri's memories on learning the language.<sup>20</sup>

However, writing these words now in North America, I often feel I am "past the last post" (Tiffin 1990, vii), exhausted by the heavy jargon of postcolonial theorizing that seems to have already lost its sharpest edge. I keep asking myself whether postcolonial theory was just another academic trend, and where it still keeps producing new types of knowledge, whether it still stirs our intellectual passions. This is an open question to all of us.

### *Encountering class*

I was initiated into postcolonial theory in solitude, in quiet Finnish well-stocked libraries, and in my youthful enthusiasm, I found my *readings* groundbreaking and radical. Later in seminar rooms and reading groups, between teamwork and fieldwork, it turned out that we could work quite well with only carefully chosen splinters of that heavy theoretical mass. I in my solitude wanted to embrace it all. We together realised that we should rather diffuse postcolonial theory through our own hands-on working experience with other women, and that there were also other theoretical debates to consider. Collective thinktanks have displaced me. Poets, painters, filmmakers, social workers, anthropologists have shown me that we should reach out, out there towards the world, keep all our senses open, sensitize ourselves for *encountering* the other, ourselves, the others in ourselves.

And yet I do care about post/colonial histories. I do care about testimonies, the displaced, censored, almost vanishing voices of once

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<sup>20</sup> Marlene Nourbese Phillip and Sara Suleri speak across one another about English as their postcolonial heritage in Julian Samuel's (1993) documentary film, *The Raft of the Medusa*.

colonised subjects and about the best methods of radical retrieval.<sup>21</sup> In the present project, however, the mission is not that grand. I am dealing with élite women's complicity with the Empire, class interests and Pakistan's inner colonisations. I am dealing with voices that were encouraged to emerge, subjects for whom the best possible education was always provided, bodies that mattered (cf. Butler 1993). Here I am not dealing with the pedagogy of the oppressed (Freire 1972) or with the Benjaminian underdog (Benjamin 1968). I am not dealing with radical "grassroots" counter-memories of colonial oppression, but with three individual women's voices, whose families were key players in imperial politics and became prominent and wealthy as a result of the imperial contact. Power relations and the notion of hegemony are a crucial aspect in my reading of the three texts, as well as the psychological notion of the colonisation of the mind.<sup>22</sup>

Class polarisation between the minuscule feudal-based elites and the masses below internationally defined poverty lines is a societal fact, or what Sara Suleri (1992, 756–769) would call a postcolonial "realism" that has not diminished during Pakistan's short lifetime. Apart from the grossly unequal distribution of economic assets, class polarisation has to do with cultural, social and political power and human rights. The Islamic agenda for economic and social equality of believers has not materialised in the legislation of the Islamic republic as concrete measures towards fairer redistribution of wealth.

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<sup>21</sup> The work of the Subaltern Studies group of researchers, based in Delhi, has been most inspiring here. The researchers associated with the group I am referring to here are Amin (1995), Sarkar (1999), Spivak (1988, 1992, 1994) and Visweswaran (1990).

<sup>22</sup> The "spirit" of reading class can be found along the colonial axis can be found in what Hall (2002) and de Lauretis (1987) do with Gramsci's (1971) political philosophy, and more particularly in Gayatri Spivak's idea of colonialism as the enabling factor of the native urban middle classes. The term colonization of the mind is a borrowing from Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) whose ideas will be explicated shortly.

Alongside with gender and ethnicity, class is the dominant axis of difference in the coming analysis. The way I formulate the "class question" has to do with the three women's relationships with other women, the level of feminist analysis that personally interests me most in South Asian women's history.<sup>23</sup> I read class differences in the women's expressions about their access to education, politics and law, and their understanding of the country's political history. The autobiographical materials and the literary theoretical approaches chosen for the present study do not invite to a systematic structural class analysis but they do make their reader aware of the particular class positioning of the authors, and their individual discourses about class differences.<sup>24</sup>

Rather than engaging in an analysis of economic structures, I am interested in the three women's classed articulations of their relationship with the nation-state, nation-building, and the sphere of their own political agency. How are nationality and citizenship framed in a multi-ethnic society dominated by feudal kinship networks of patronage, where the only common nominator for the majority of its population is Islam? At which stage do nationality and citizenship become questions of key importance? Where do we find the three women speaking as female citizens of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan? How

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<sup>23</sup> In the Kristeva-Braidotti axis, my key level of interest would be the second wave feminist level, a move towards differences amongst and between women from an interest in differences between men and women. Because of my interest in intersubjectivity, the formation of subjectivity as a historical and political process, I am sometimes deliberately blind to the third level, differences inside an individual woman.

<sup>24</sup> Beverley Skeggs (2004) idea of moving from defining from what class is to what class does in specific discursive situations is the level of analysis I am aspiring towards. In such a "cultural studies" approach class is seen as cultural representations and performances rather than as national statistics. However, I do not want to deny the importance of figures and numbers, especially those dealing with social policy and plans towards the eradication of poverty. It is however clear that a textual study on life-writing cannot and even should not occupy the role of policy-makers.

does their privileged class position enable them such articulations, and what kind of awareness of the enabling factor do they express in their autobiographies?

### *Approaches to postcolonialism*

At the level of individuals, the terms postcoloniality and postcolonialism are not some objectively perceivable and measurable historical "conditions" but self-imposed political categories in language and thus always a matter of political debate. This is the nominalistic/mentalistic approach to postcolonialism: one can speak of the colonisation and de-colonisation of the mind as mental and linguistic processes of naming and cultural construction. If it is a matter of naming, it is up to us as individuals and citizens of particular countries to define if colonialism and its aftermath has affected us, and whether it is useful for us to conceptualise our present condition as postcolonialism – or as something else altogether.

Another approach to postcolonialism is more global, materialist and "macro" in scope. It can be called temporal or, as Ulla Vuorela (1999, 16–17) puts it, epochal, because it is more focused on global historical trends at large. One can look at maps of the world and read chronicles of different conquests and conclude that most parts of the world have once been either colonised or colonisers. From this perspective the whole world (apart from tiny remote areas rather unaffected by globalisation) is affected by postcolonialism, due to the power structures colonisation has left to world politics and economy, and to the global migration streams.

At the level of literary production, Helen Tiffin (1990, viii) speaks in a similar tone about the two "archives" of post-colonialism: one (that would in historical terms correspond with the "epochal", or materialist approach) includes all writing grounded in societies where subjectivity is constituted by the memory of European colonialism; the other (that seems to correspond with the nominalist approach)

contains only articulations of prominent resistance to colonialism and its legacies.

The two approaches do not have to be contradictory but can be combined. In the present study, I will be primarily looking at mental and linguistic processes of naming in order to contextualise postcolonial complicity and resistance, but this is intricately connected to the actual historical remnants of colonial power structures in Pakistan's short history of independence. For instance, only recently have the notorious "khaki shadows" of the Pakistan Army been *named* as postcolonial relics (cf. Khattak 1997, Ali 2003), although they have existed and, in my reading, deepened towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### *Language and postcolonial resistance*

Colonial Calcutta, early 1920s. The story begins from the little girl in a white starched pinafore and knee-high socks travelling to the convent school in *doeli*, a curtained horse-carriage, peeking through the tiniest gaps, seeing but not being seen by the curious passers-by. She is elevated above the masses in the streets. Most of her schoolmates are English girls. Together they cite nursery rhymes and Biblical stories. But in the evening she receives another tutor, who teaches Qur'anic recitals in Arabic, the oral tradition of *hadith* and how to pray. And the family teaches her the Persian *ghazals*, love poetry sung at homely gatherings. Her curriculum is not double, it is multiple. Is she a victim of the Empire or a particularly well-endowed student?

Colonialism affected different groups of Pakistanis in myriad ways, but it can be claimed that no-one is unaffected by it. When studying elite Pakistani women with a Western education and a transnational lifestyle, one can even proceed to thinking about direct colonisation of the mind, or, in Gayatri Spivak's (1988, 287) terms, epistemic violence.

The strong statement of mental colonisation originates from Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1986), who in his Kenyan context posits national language(s) as the primary device for decolonizing the mind:

*Language as culture is the collective memory bank of a people's experience in history. Culture is almost indistinguishable from the language that makes possible its genesis, growth, banking, articulation, and indeed its transmission from one generation to the next.*

(Thiong'o 1986, 15.)

Ngugi's linguistic insight is a response to Frantz Fanon's (1967) more psychiatric understanding of the dispossessed native's trauma of loss; in a sense, Ngugi attempts at reconstructing Fanon's sometimes despairing notes on national liberation in a new language of hope. He digs deep into the hegemonic aspects of colonisation (Fanon was more intent on coercion), and into informal sources of information and popular memory.

His emphasis on the role of language as a source of recovery and hope approaches Walter Benjamin's (1968, 259) ideas of brushing history against the grain, and the idea of saving at least the dead from the oppressor's amnesiac sweep. Reflecting upon the problematic role of the postcolonial bourgeoisie, its ongoing complicity with Western centres of power, betrayal and conflicting loyalties, he still advocates possibilities of active cultural transformation. But in Ngugi's universe, the key to transformation is a willingness to return to one's native language(s) as the primary source of creativity.

### *Language politics in Pakistan*

In the Pakistani context, however, the demand of a "return" to native languages can be an argument for ethnic fragmentation and is a topic of continuous power struggles. Urdu, the official *lingua franca* and the

first language in state-sponsored schools, is the first language of only ca. 8 per cent of the population. The statistically largest languages are Punjabi, Sindhi and Pashtu. All Pakistani major languages belong to the Indo-Aryan language group, but differ particularly in terms of vocabulary due to their histories' geographical distance.<sup>25</sup>

Before 1971, the largest language was, of course, Bengali. Whereas Urdu and Punjabi are interrelated and mutually comprehensible languages, Bengali was a language apart whose speakers, the then absolute majority of Pakistanis, retained a strong sense of regional identity. It was the common mother tongue of both Muslims and Hindus in Bengal and its literary history was not lacking of radical, secular minds able to reach the imaginations across the communal divide.

Before India's partition, Urdu was acknowledged as the language of Muslim communities in Northern India and the Muslim princely states. It was a rather recent historical merging from the interaction between Hindi, Arabic and Persian. However, as Iqbal Ahmad (2000, 15–16) points out, it was not a Muslim language as such but an effort between the Muslim "newcomers" and the local Hindi-speaking population to discover a common language through a multicultural encounter. In Bengal, Urdu was always a foreign language, associated with religious scholarship and classical literature. Bengali Muslims were confident enough to continue reading and writing in their own language despite Muslim League's rally for Urdu-speaking Pakistan.

Eventually, after the Partition, the East wing of Pakistan suffered tremendously because of the imposition of Urdu as the new national

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<sup>25</sup> The estimated figures in the latest Pakistani government census are: Punjabi 48%, Sindhi 12%, Saraiki (a Punjabi variant) 10%, Pashtu 8 %, Urdu 8 %, Baluchi 3 %, Hindko 2 %, Brahui 1%, English and other languages 8 %. Altogether 69 languages are listed as being spoken in the country. Telling of the Government's neglect towards the situation of minority languages is that the statistical information was not provided on its official webpages ([www.infopak.gov.pk](http://www.infopak.gov.pk)), but commercial Pakistani sites did include language statistics as relevant information. For a well-maintained site, see [www.pakistaninformation.com/pakistanstats.html](http://www.pakistaninformation.com/pakistanstats.html) (last viewed February 8, 2005).



language. Bengalis' access to the civil service and army was much constrained because of the linguistic disparity at the state level. It was no wonder that they even preferred communicating with their fellow citizens from the West wing in English. For East Pakistanis during the twenty-four years of the wing's existence, the coloniser was now brown, mostly Urdu-speaking and propagating lofty ideas of common Islamic nationhood to cover up economic exploitation. The foundation of his superiority was based on two pillars, the colonial martial race theory and the historical "fact" of his tribe's or region's earlier conversion to Islam than Bengalis'. (Ahmed 1997, 241–2, Talbot 2000, 22, Maclean 1989, 22–36.)

In terms of literary production, Urdu's role in Pakistan's cultural life has been privileged and uncompromising. Although the majority of Pakistanis today are functional in Urdu, due to schooling and media policies, it is not the language of most intimate memories for the majority. Access to writing in one's vernacular language is a matter of active re-training, if one has been schooled in Urdu and English. Scripts are available for the vernacular languages, but Pakistani government does not prioritize their development into standardized, easily taught format (Elias 1998, 9). The public/private split in this linguistic constellation seems violent, and the marginalisation of the vernaculars a lamentable fact. The majority of literate Pakistanis do not read in their mother tongue. Whether they read in Urdu or English, both are second languages.

In this setting, English does not automatically become the language of the "coloniser". For the non-Urdu speaking elites in Pakistan, English may be the preferred language as an informal *lingua franca*. In the Punjab, the hierarchy between Urdu and Punjabi is so obvious that some urban parents have felt a need to send their resistant children to their ancestral villages for Punjabi immersion, as a final attempt to restore the cultural memories of their families. Even if Punjabis are ethnically dominant, the truly powerful Punjabis speak Urdu as their first language, not the "peasant" Punjabi dialect of their

ancestral villages. If there are signs of linguistic rebellion inside the country, it is directed towards the class-based imposition of Urdu as a national language.

*In one cold country, the most common scribbling on the washroom walls is "rid of compulsory Swedish". The passion of the anti-Swedish lobby is sometimes hard to grasp. No-one ever makes such a scene there on the overall Anglicization of the country's cultural life. She wonders if the country had been once colonized by the British, would they uncritically accept the use of English everywhere like now? Is it the current socioeconomic status of its speakers or the long memory of oppression that makes a language unwanted? And what is a "backward", "rural" language then? She knows that if she stayed in another cold country for longer, her kids would become embarrassed of their mother's incomprehensible blabbering, rich with K's and R's. Finnish could so easily become another Punjabi. And this little Anglophile would continue writing her memoirs in English with little remorse.*

(Research diary, Toronto, January 2003.)

### *Literacy and representation*

A self-styled master is someone with a monopoly of knowledge due to his or her privileged place of birth and a "professional" mask, someone in possession of a master narrative or a "strong" language. Or, as bell hooks (1997, 99) puts it: *"They listen to me but they don't hear. They don't have to hear. This is what it means to be among the colonizers, you do not have to listen to what the colonizers have to say, especially if their ideas come from experience and not from books. They ask you if there is a book they can read that will explain what you are talking about."* So where does a study on published autobiographies stand in front of such chilling criticism? Why am I focusing on printed materials emerging from a country with one of the lowest percentages of female

literacy in Asia? And even if I can legitimise such a study, what does it mean to "listen"? Can texts be "heard" from their own locations? Am I able to hear the voices of the autobiographers, and understand their experience also without reference to Western feminist theory?

There are two dilemmas of representation here. On one hand, it may be considered irrelevant and outright elitist to study Pakistani women's autobiographies published in English, when ca. 70 % of the country's women are illiterate and 90 % do not read English well and/or do not have access to books.<sup>26</sup> On the other hand, the image of "downtrodden Pakistani woman" dies hard in the Western media and little is known about the women who participated in the modernisation project of the Pakistan Movement of the 1940s and beyond.

Ikramullah, Suleri and Bhutto invite their readers to past worlds in which women's voices and texts have mattered, where women have spoken out with their full name and where political participation has made sense. In the whole national spectrum, these feminist spaces may have been marginal, but they have existed as worlds of possibilities during the country's short existence (apart from perhaps the most critical times of the Zia regime starting from 1977 onwards).<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Pakistan's literacy rates are a matter of debate, depending on how one measures literacy. The UNESCO Institute of Statistics ([www.unesco.org](http://www.unesco.org)) estimates in the year 2000 vary from a general literacy rate of 43.2% to gendered regional estimates. A rough figure for women's literacy remains at 30%. In UNESCO's definition, a literate person can read and write a paragraph (3 lines) in a national or regional language with comprehension. Other definitions for literacy also involve numeral and functional literacy; considering these additions, the estimates would undoubtedly be lower. For example, Ian Talbot's 2000 (222) estimate for the country's general literacy is 36%, for women 23% and for rural Baluchi women 3.2%.

<sup>27</sup> Ali (2000, xvii–xviii) calls the political spaces the Muslim women of the Partition generation cleared for themselves and the following generations feminist without hesitation, because of their "awareness of constraints placed upon women because of their gender system involving new roles for women and new relations between women and men." According to her, any demand for women's increasing public space and visibility in the nation-state of Pakistan is a feminist demand. The present study follows her insightful pragmatism.

Representing the lives of powerful Muslim women may still be needed in the West to subvert the genre of "misery catalogues" of the lack of human rights in the Muslim world, or what Mohanty (1984/2003: 22) called the average third world woman, who:

*leads an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender (read: sexually constrained) and being "third world" (read: ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, religious, domesticated, family-oriented, victimised, etc.). This, I suggest, is in contrast to the (implicit) self-representation of western women as educated, modern, as having control over their own bodies and sexualities and the "freedom" to make their own decisions.*

In other words, Mohanty accuses Western feminists of representing the lives of their non-European sisters ahistorically, as if they belonged to a temporal "eternity", stasis, or a prison of tradition, "always there".

Bringing up images of strong, articulate, resourceful Pakistani women in the Western academia is surely a way of interfering in the distorted imagery on "Muslim difference", but this is only an external legitimization for the present study. I do not read and write about Pakistan for corrective purposes of equity, or to "fill in" historical gaps of "missing women". The attempt at correcting "false" representations with "correct" ones sounds suspect, and somewhat matronly benevolent. An easy shorthand term for this kind of history-writing would be colonial feminist.

Leila Ahmed (1992, 152) sees colonial feminism as a dichotomy between the white active woman and the "bad" opponents, the men of the Other culture. She claims that many Western women writing about the Muslim world still operate within the language of colonial feminism while listing the bad deeds of the Other men to "their" women. An easy conclusion, following the Manichean logic of such thinking, would be that the Western women's moral task is to stop this

oppression and bring light to the lives of "native" women from the civilised West. It becomes, then, assumed that non-European women cannot have a voice or agency without Western facilitation.

At the level of literary reception, it is not unusual for Western feminist readers to reduce a literary text to the level of fascinating, "exotic" ethnography. Marnia Lazreg (2000, 33–38) divides the politics of reception of Third World women's texts into three streams: theatrical indigenization, distanciation and cleansing/vindication. Theatrical indigenization means representing a woman's text first and foremost as a representative of her culture, and expecting the audience wanting to hear about "oppression" in a distant country. This often occurs even with subversive feminist texts emerging from Asia or Africa. The Western markets may profile a book in the media in completely distorting terms in order to sell better. Cover images are changed, exoticized, and the author is invited to the West to speak about her writing as an "expert" on retrogressive policies. Her other messages than those dealing with customs, traditions and religion become often trivialised.

The second strategy Lazreg identifies, distanciation, is a way of insisting on Western women's specialness and belonging to the group that "worlds the world". Related to this is the third strategy, cleansing and vindication. The few selected women's voices from their respective cultures are recognized as *progressive enough* to help Western women cleanse themselves of their prior prejudices. These representatives of culture are appreciated because they speak a language that Western women also did before their feminisms became more advanced. The cleansing of conscience may occur through these selected understandings, and global feminist claims are being vindicated by referring to the few, accepted mouthpieces.

### *Towards cross-cultural dialogues?*

Lazreg's critique, although based on personal experience in the US academia, may sound harsh to those who despite the ongoing exoti-

cization, tokenization and generalization of Other women's lives and writing, have devoted time to thinking about their own voice as a mediator between cultures. Such critique may discourage Western feminists from even trying to create more multivocal representations, but it may also lead to thinking, yet again, about the possibilities of unlearning the negative aspects of one's cultural baggage.

But there must always be beginnings for a dialogue. We all have to start from *somewhere*. We usually start from what is easily at hand in languages we can already understand. Reflecting on Lazreq, I can recognize my own feminist shorthand: when I think of Egypt, I see Nawal el Saadawi's face, of Morocco, and I am automatically reminded of Fatima Mernissi's dynamic prose. Leila Aboulela has taught me something about the Sudan and Ama Ata Aidoo about Ghana. Many countries I knew very little about previously now have in my mental archives a woman's face. It is perplexing to think how just these writers have reached me due to international publishers' political choice. But then, would it have been better if I hadn't read anything at all? Would it be better that students in the West remained within the completely Eurocentric curriculum and literary canons (cynically adding: what could they learn anyway, given the current global power imbalance)? Can anything good ever come out of this kind of iconic knowledge of feminist writing?

I can only think of reversing the question: should feminism be nativist, ie. would it be more correct that we only raised our voices in public to speak about women's writing from our own part of the world? Where do we draw borders between ours and theirs? Should we even revive the idea of national literatures, at a time when nation-states are losing their cultural relevance? Then what happens to those multiply displaced and those who only seem to enjoy books from far, far away? When feminists start distributing entitlements to speak or represent the words of other women, I get claustrophobic and wish to exit the scene quietly. I believe that voices are always legitimate, but the self-reflective challenge is what to do with one's voice; that

a choice of research theme is always one's own but how the inquiry is carried out is open to criticism. The legacy of colonial feminism is everywhere, but is the only way to question its presence a strategic silence, a politics of non-interference? I would be reluctant to continue my work in the academia if this were the case.

Ania Loomba (1998, 1996), in her critical introduction to postcolonial theorizing, hints at more innovative ways out of the problem of cross-cultural representation than what postcolonial feminist critics have done so far. There is enough emphasis on the connection between "ethnocentric" white colonial feminists and the African and Asian male nationalists speaking for indigenous women's rights, but unfortunately, further analysis often remains at the superficial level, as a rash statement of black women's ongoing double colonisation<sup>28</sup>. She points out that non-whiteness or non-Europeanness can never be a unifying experience and that an analysis of the cultural, racial and regional differences amongst women in a given country can be a way to discovering their subjectivity. (see also de Lauretis 1987, 136)

Understanding the frustrations expressed by the postcolonial critics above, my own objection to the postcolonial critique of the reception of non-European women's texts in the West is the critics' lack of initiative about deciphering a truly inclusive, communicative future. The present atmosphere does just the opposite by drawing again tighter boundaries between the two worlds.

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<sup>28</sup> Pakistani women living in their native country very rarely conceptualize themselves as "black", because of the virtual non-existence of both Caucasians and Africans (populations most commonly coded as "whites" and "blacks") in the country, and the very negative connotations that dark pigment still has in South Asia. It is particularly interesting how recently arrived immigrant women into Britain or North America may form political coalitions with other ethnic groups and collectively begin calling themselves "black". "Black" is a political strategic conceptual container that has little to do with pigment and more to do with cultural affiliation. For further description see Yuval-Davis (1997).

I refuse to believe that all Western audiences, after their initial prejudiced encounters, would continue treating literature from the other continents as mere exotic difference or as a mirror of their own excellence. There must be room for non-native readers to speak about literature that is *not theirs* (since when have national or ethnic literatures become again such objects of ownership?), because basically the line mine-yours could be drawn as tightly as one wishes, and in the end there will be no chance for dialogue anywhere.

To express interest in how the other (as a positive, affirmative concept) sees the world, even through translations, does not have to be an act of appropriation. The other can be beautiful, can make you wonder. She can take you to unexpected places, teach you new languages. Of course you have to listen patiently. But after you have listened, you may go and test your voice. Discuss. Perhaps someone else wants to share your fascination. Texts always live a life of their own as viruses. Reading and reflection are not matters of entitlement. It is more fascinating to share literatures and critical discourses across continents without a steady sense of "belonging".

The critique expressed by Mohanty, Ahmed and Lazreq is by no means directed against all Western feminists, but rather against certain obviously visible trends in the Western academia and the publishing world. However, if hastily torn from their contexts, their criticism can be read as an aggressive attack against all Western feminists as neocolonialists. There have been totalizing studies made on the masses of Third World women, and scandalizing media campaigns around the personalities of women writers as "exposers" of crimes against women in "undemocratic" and "backward" cultures<sup>29</sup>. Much of this is still happening despite postcolonial critics' outrage. The purpose of their directness is, emphatically, to make Western scholars aware

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<sup>29</sup> The Taslima Nasrin controversy is a telling example of such "Othering" campaigns. For a critical analysis see Ghosh (2000), and further elaboration ch 3.



of their continuing heritage of domination and unlistening. If the resulting introspection leads to increased self-reflexivity, postcolonial critics have succeeded in their task, but if there are signs of increasing political correctness and withdrawal from cross-cultural discussions, the case has been laid for nativism: the idea that only people from a certain culture may speak about its current concerns. The cultural climate then changes from a celebration of hybridity and multiculturalism to an accusative mood of cultural defence. The last card in the shuffle is always the cultural card.

### *Women, their men and the cultural card*

The cultural card, or, in other words, nativism or cultural "fundamentalism" (cf Stolcke 1995 in Yuval-Davis 1997, 63; Hall 2002), is often articulated loudest by conservative men and women when issues dealing with women, sexuality and family are at stake. In the fear of being stamped as a colonialist, a foreign researcher may see through detrimental and retrogressive practices, such as genital mutilation or "honour"/less killings, that are strategically excused with culture – stable, unitary and unchangeable. In the same conjuncture, local feminist activists speaking against the practices from within the culture become easily stamped as misled Westernised élitists.

Ania Loomba makes a clear distinction between postcolonial cultural resistance and sheer cruelty, pinpointing that "*colonialism intensified patriarchal relations in colonised lands, often because native men, increasingly disenfranchised and excluded from the public sphere, became more tyrannical at home. They seized upon the home and the woman as emblems of their culture and nationality. The outside world could be Westernised but all was not lost if the domestic space retained its cultural purity.*" (Loomba 1998, 168.)

In this context, it is necessary to ask whose culture is being protected or critiqued – men's, that of the privileged classes or ethnic groups, or everybody's on the given area. In the present textual universe, two

of the three texts are directly invested with cultural explanations, or "translations" to the outside world. For instance, arranged marriage is defended by both of them, whereas critique is expressed towards feudal attitudes towards women and the institution of *pardah*.

Sometimes local cultures may appear as "the exotic other" even for the Western-educated narrators themselves. In the present study, an "Orientalist" gaze is often a combination of class and educational differences, and the rural/urban divide. Here an example will foreground what is to come in the following chapters. It serves to suggest that the processes of "Othering" are not only the domain of Western visitors, but similar exoticizations and "virgin journeys" are also made amongst natives<sup>30</sup>.

Benazir Bhutto is "thrust into an unfamiliar Eastern tradition" while in detention at Al-Murtaza, the family estate at Larkana in inner Sindh. Local villagers came to see her in matters of dispute, as an alternative to expensive and slow court proceedings. In the feudal Sindh, people still trusted *faizlas*, judgments from the local clan elders. Although Benazir is still young and female, she is at this stage the only Bhutto family member around to make these judgments and people keep coming to her. She further confesses: "*after eight years in the West, I was discovering I was not well versed in dealing with the intricacies of rural life*". She narrates an encounter with a toothless old man coming to demand an eight-year-old girl as a compensation to a murder committed forty years ago. Benazir settles the problem by promising the man a cow and 20 000 rupees instead of the girl, who has already been engaged elsewhere. "*A cow for a girl – not an equation that had ever come up in discussions about the women's movement at Radcliffe. But this was Pakistan.*" (Bhutto 1988, 142–3)

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<sup>30</sup> In my native Finland, one of the most common "exoticizing" narratives in the mainstream media is a "virgin journey" to a notorious housing area, performed and dutifully reported by a middle-class journalist, who has never before had to step on such a threatening ground.

If Kishwar Naheed's words about the arrival of self-styled masters are taken seriously, one deals with "the cultural card" tactfully in close collaboration with Pakistani feminist activists, and preferably after a long silent traineeship at the grassroots NGO level. I do not yet have such experience. The present study cannot take a stance on the most acute feminist concerns in Pakistan today, such as the position of the girl child, violence against women, mobility in public spaces and entry into the job market (cf. Mumtaz and Shaheed 1987, Shaheed 1998, Khan and Zia 1995). I am confident that the new generation of Pakistani women are better equipped than me to study these matters on the spot with the benefit of life-long experience.

I am not discouraged by postcolonial critics to continue my dialogue with Pakistani women, but I must continuously re-define my politics of location, and be more sensitive of the common cultural context Pakistani women share with "their" men. "Their" men are in contemporary feminist analyses becoming almost as marginal a category as "their" women were during the colonial period.<sup>31</sup> What upper middle-class or elite women had in common with the men of their class was certainly more substantial than what they had in common with women from lower classes.

Following Joan W.Scott's (1996:7) insights to feminist history-writing, the challenge is to write gendered histories of difference and *"to analyse the conditions which have or have not produced a shared identity of women by examining contexts of living, differing experiences and*

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<sup>31</sup> For instance, one of the most powerful anti-colonial political thinkers, Frantz Fanon (1965, 1967, 1968) who wrote all his major works from the vantage point of another Muslim country, Algeria, did not really conceptualise the colonized women as subjects but as "their women". Fanon's revolutionary women were symbolic veil-bearers and unveilers, victims of patriarchy who could potentially become comrades, but none of his analyses gives individual women names and voices. Amongst the male colonial intellectuals he did pay much attention to the "woman question" but in his analyses women still remain as another continent. This kind of segregated gender treatment I want to challenge by also giving a voice to "their men", sometimes.

*different modes of acquiescence or resistance to society's rules about their behaviour*". It should be obvious by now that gendered histories of difference cannot exclude men, but will rather question any impositions of "universal subjecthood" in political philosophy, or assumptions of political history as a field of study dealing with genderless nations and states.

As a feminist historian, I will continue reading women's texts primarily, but not in isolation from men's texts. I can use my imagination as a tool to relate to bygone situations, but cannot assume a common identity between different historical players (myself included) *over time* to build an alternative *women's* history, to fill in a void or compete with the male-stream, or his-story. There is no pacifist feminist egalitarian haven out there waiting to be discovered. It does not whisper from underneath the layers of dust in archive boxes that no-one has yet bothered to open (cf. Steedman 2001). Such imaginings, if orchestrated by the researcher herself, are the stuff of feminist political utopias, useful for other purposes than empirical textual analysis.

Any kind of search for the "secret" or "hidden" histories of Pakistani women would not only be a naïve assumption but it would also mirror the colonial history of misunderstandings by denying the possibility that women also were participant as subjects in the "mainstream" nation-building. Despite the institutional remnants of *purdah*, most Pakistani men and women have historically faced one another on a daily basis, talked to one another, been mutually affected by one another's ideas and even loved one another. And perhaps they still do.

### *The backward glance and historical representation*

When Benazir Bhutto rose to power in 1988, I was sixteen years old, on the first grade in high school. I think I remember my train of thought watching the news, discussing this with my parents. In my pre-feminist consciousness I gave her my silent thumbs up sign.

That scarved woman in huge owl-like glasses was *right on*. After Cory Aquino she was to be the next rising woman comet of Asia. That this "backward" (yes, "backward" it was- full stop – back then) country that nine years before let her father be executed was now electing her as the head of state. That was really Something.

I don't remember news about Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's execution in 1979, or possible documentaries about Zia ul-Haq's rule. I first heard about political turbulence, located north-west from India, in 1988. Watching the news, judging from what I can remember, I imagine the younger self asking: would a woman prime minister heal the wounds of repression and dispossession and bring in hope? Would she cause sweeping sociopolitical changes? Would people in the villages learn to read under her rule? Would there be effective laws against the discrimination of women? What were her powers? What was her message?

In 1997, I started reading Pakistani history backwards. It seemed appropriate and necessary to start with politicians' personality cults. One could see from the first glance that personalities mattered. Structural developments were mostly initiated by martial law administrators, presidents and prime ministers. One read about *Auyb's* family law ordinances, *Bhutto's* programme of the socialization of industries, *Zia's* introduction of the *shari'a*. The parody of it all was played out to the world by Salman Rushdie in *Shame* (1983) through the figures of Iskander Harappa and Raza Hyder. And there was Isky's dutiful daughter, who was supposed to be a boy:

*Arjumand, the famous "Virgin Ironpants", regretted her female sex for wholly non-parental reasons. "This woman's body," she told her father on the day she became a grown woman, "it brings a person nothing but babies, pinches and shame."*

(Rushdie 1983, 107)

At that time, Benazir Bhutto's reputation had been badly tarnished, she was again in exile in London and her husband was in jail for multiple corruption charges. Both spouses were rumoured,

without concrete evidence, case dismissed, to have been involved in Benazir's brother Murtaza's murder in 1996 (cf. Anwar 1998). Her follower, Nawaz Sharif, did not seem any wiser but like father and daughter Bhutto, he was an elected head of state. Still, he did not seem to have the magnetic pull and charisma of the Bhutto family.

First, I wanted to know who the Bhuttos were, how Zulfikar Ali Bhutto became the first elected prime minister of Pakistan, and why it was so easy for Zia ul-Haq to dismantle his rule. What was the Bhutto legacy, what kind of connotations did the name carry? And who was general Zia? How did he manage to stay in power without the mandate of the people for eleven years?

My additional questions were: what was the meaning of general elections in Pakistan? How were military coups experienced by its people? What was it like to live under martial law? And was it essential to focus on the concept of democracy before everything else? In other words, during the brief periods of elected parliaments and uncontrolled party politics, where did democracy live, how did it provide food, shelter, literacy, justice to women and minorities?<sup>32</sup>

In October 1999, General Musharraf organised a quiet *coup d'état* and gave Sharif an opportunity to flee the country instead of jailing him. There was talk about an assassination attempt. Musharraf's plane, loaded with schoolchildren, was not allowed to land although it was running out of petrol. After landing, he claimed he was compelled to take over. Otherwise, the country would run into chaos. (cf.

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<sup>32</sup> In later analyses, my questions have turned towards the disentangling of the concepts of authoritarianism and totalitarianism in the Pakistani context. One can write about the *coups d'état* as "extreme situations" in which all political concepts lose their meaning, and the later periods of the stabilization of military regimes as examples of Third World authoritarianism (cf. Paastela 2000). But even here, one should be sensitive to the weakness of Western political concepts in the majority of Pakistani people's lifeworlds, due to the facts of extreme poverty and illiteracy. In other words, one should ask for whom the concept of democracy has lost its meaning? To the people at large or for the educated minority and the Western media? This is where political anthropology begins.

Mahmood 2001) The excuses Musharraf used to justify his coup were strikingly similar to those of Zia's. The doctrine of necessity was in full force again.<sup>33</sup> *What if...* was the question that occupied minds immediately after the coup. *Not again*. He cannot possibly reintroduce the witch hunts, the floggings. *But what if, after all?*

Pakistanis waited with bated breath for new punitive measures and ordinances. But Musharraf knew better than to repeat the pattern. Neither was he known as a particularly pious general. The context was different both locally and globally. The Cold War was over, it was not possible for him to gain international approval by playing the role of the enemy's enemy. Neither was his domestic enemy of possible martyr material. Sharif was free to take all his servants with him to the Emirates. He had no aura as the people's man, no political programme for the liberation of the masses, no attempts at profound social change. Once in jail, he would not have become an internationally acclaimed political prisoner. His prison journals would not have become bestsellers.

Statesmen, self-nominated and elected. One prominent stateswoman. Along the way back in time, I am being offered a few more feminist anchors. Footnotes and parentheses whispering: did you know of the first women parliamentarians, Begum Ikramullah and Begum Shahnawaz? What about Jinnah's sister Fatima who in the sixties, during her presidential campaign, became known as *Madar-i-millat*, mother of the nation? And did you know that many Punjabi women were active in the Communist Party, before and after Partition until the party was banned in 1953?

Look at Punjab and Bengal, the two hotbeds of political emotion. Look at how the provinces were cut into halves, clipped into wings,

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<sup>33</sup> The Pakistani "doctrine of necessity" is most often applied to validate *coups d'état*, or other types of unconstitutional action such as the postponement of elections and delay in the drafting of a constitution. It allows military regimes to maintain their power with the "excuse" of avoiding chaos, when elite groups fail to resolve their political differences. (Burki 1991, 63, Hussain 1979, 172.)

border sealed. Look at how these Indian Muslim women became Pakistanis, citizens in the land of the pure.<sup>34</sup> What was gained, what was lost, what was articulated, what was left unsaid?

I write down fragments, scraps, the tiniest clues. And gradually, I find articles, pieces of fiction, photographs, by, about and around the imagined experience of Pakistani women of the first generation, the "nation-builders", the "social workers", the *begums* (ladies). They are not long-lost women. Many Pakistani women remember them with love and admiration. I am not excavating anything. I am only getting connected with the Pakistani feminist scene. I am the novice, the apprentice, the newcomer. I am waiting for women to tell me more.

And then we start talking about Punjabi women, Sindhi women, women in the NWFP. The abstraction "Pakistani woman" has disappeared a long time ago. But we can compare Punjabi women's interests to the women in the NWFP, and women's interests in Lahore to those of women in the Punjabi villages. Who will speak for whom? Where is the subaltern, who according to Spivak (1988) can only speak from its historical grave? Whose voices am I hearing?

Another set of questions is linked to the Partition of India: from where have these voices, or their ancestors' voices travelled to the country that now is Pakistan? What do the patterns of migration have to do with these particular qualities of voice? In the land of long memory and storytelling, when are we speaking strictly about the *Pakistani* experience? Do not forget that Amritsar, the Sikh capital, is also a part of the Punjab. In the old days, women from Hindu and Sikh families came to study in Lahore<sup>35</sup>. I cannot ignore my research context's

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<sup>34</sup> The name Pakistan was invented by the Oxford student Rahmat Ali in 1933, to denote purity of the Islamic state (pak=pure, stan=land) and as a coining of the first letters of the names of ethnicities (Punjabis, Afghans, Kashmiris, Sindhis). For a profound analysis of the genesis of the concept, see Sarkar (1989, 378–9).

<sup>35</sup> On Hindu and Sikh women's pre-Partition lives in Lahore, cf. Kapur (1998), Saghal (1994), Baldwin (1999).



fundamental ties with India. All the stories I hear have a prehistory in the days before Partition. The roots of Pakistani women's politicization must be sought for in the nationalisms of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Ali 2000). To cut the story sterilely to 1947 would be a genealogical betrayal. Or, as Akbar S. Ahmad puts it in his phenomenological biography on Mohammed Ali Jinnah:

*When Pakistani scholarship congeals, at the moment of triumph, in 1947, at the peak of Muslim history, we need to start the clock again. We need to point out that, although it was a great triumph on one level, on another all hell had broken loose, that millions of people had been displaced and that the problems had just begun, not ended!.../We must look at dates only as useful pegs; we must look beyond and behind them.*

(Ahmed 1997, 28.)

I have no new *facts* to present of any of the eras. I have not spent these years in archives tracing previously unread files. The present study will not result in a new interpretation in the *course of events* during the Zia era, or Bhutto era, or any of the eras before them. I have formed my interpretations from the autobiographies women have published, what other women have later told me, from several pieces of fiction and from the discord of dissident historians' and political scientists' voices, writing mostly in exile from Pakistan. My access to the women's memories is not direct: I am dealing with negotiations, reconstructions, retrospectively cut and pasted temporal collages that autobiographies necessarily are. (cf. King 2000, 5–6)

Nothing was *bound* to happen. What is interesting is the narrative reproduction of events that later become stamped as key episodes. Episodes and their outcomes. How history becomes main- and mainstreamed. I know many, many outcomes from along the path. But I can only speculate on the events I know most intimately. If I have not lived through them, I must have brought them close to my body

otherwise, through imagination, dreams, even gossip with people who once were there.

Clifford Geertz' (1968, 59–60) definition of the role of the historical sociologist vis a vis the descriptive historian has somewhat eased my relationship with Pakistani history-writing. He finds it legitimate – and sufficient – to look out for the reasons why one of the endless possible futures was reached, and for the forces that have produced the present state of affairs, but warns against a descriptive stance of forming "prior" states of affairs, from which, for example, a *coup d'état* was bound to happen. The backward glance never gives an opportunity for faithful representation. It has everything to do with how the stories were told, and how we read them in the present.

Aijaz Ahmad (1999) calls his similar project in Gramscian terms an inventory of traces<sup>36</sup>, or in his Indianized version, tracking the lineages of the present. On a subcontinent where families can trace their lineages centuries back with the help of a lively oral heritage, and where social life is much determined by the status of blood, and blood is spilled for the preservation of pure lineages, it is always important to ask what the politics of memory does for human relations in the here and now.

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<sup>36</sup> Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* (1971) is the unquestionable prehistory to much of the feminist and literary theorizing presented here. The notion of traces is a also dominant theme in Subaltern Studies: "The starting-point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, and is "knowing thyself" as a product of the historical process to date which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory. Such an inventory must therefore be made at the outset." (Gramsci 1971, 324)

*"What is the social significance of your study?"*

In this chapter, I have tried to highlight the practical, methodological, processual and strategic knowledge gained from a variety of sources. Drawing on Terry Eagleton's (1991, 236–238) insight, I have intentionally given more analytical weight to reading strategies than actual methods of analysis. As a researcher, it has been easier for me to define what I want to do (the level of intentions) and why also others should become interested in it (the level of motivation) than how I actually approach my topic, and how to contain the research questions in a comprehensible format. The present study does not strive to produce "results" but frankly open questions. The ultimate purpose of the study is to engage readers to read and think otherwise, to situate themselves on the world map differently than they did before as citizens of the world, and to discover the ultimate "worldliness" (Said 1983) of the present pieces of life-writing. If I manage to do this even to a single reader, the "social significance" of the study has been fulfilled.

## 2 POSSIBLE WORLDS

*A new world is not only possible, she is on her way.  
On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing.*

Arundhati Roy 2003<sup>1</sup>

*"Possibility" is both a utopian "hands-free" concept and a mundane, materialist "hands down in the mud" one. Why should we limit ourselves to focus on only one aspect? We should both fly and stomp the ground fiercely. The nature of possibility is not the binary either/or but the all-embracing and-and. It is a question of the power of imagination in the immediate material realities surrounding us.*

(Research diary, Toronto, May 14, 2003)

### 2.1 Theories with texture

If in the previous chapter my intention was to retrospectively narrate the itinerary of the research process, to map the paths taken and not taken to become familiar with the research context, and envision ways *towards* cross-cultural readings of women's writing, in the next two

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<sup>1</sup> Extract from Roy's (2003) speech at the World Social Forum, Porto Alegre, Brazil.

chapters, I will turn to the worlds *within* the three chosen research texts. It is a journey between feminist theoretical voices and autobiographical/narratological insights, but it resists the idea of a framework.

In this chapter, I will try to define what is "material" in my post-colonial materialist feminist analytical strategies, mainly through the literary theoretical ideas of Michèle Barrett (1992, 1999), and discuss the idea of possible worlds in life-writing through scholars working with autobiography from a narratological perspective. Lastly, I get to the study of the expression of emotions and memories in the light of feminist ideas on embodiment and the politics of the body. These three dimensions cause tensions and contradictions in the coming textual analyses. I do not explicitly return to each theoretical notion in the coming chapters of analysis but try to work through the ideas in a narrative mode that sometimes approaches fiction.

In other words, the present chapter works as a theoretical "grounding" into which readers may wish to return while reading the forthcoming chapters, in which theory enters in more cryptic references, or when it is worked through in passages that contain no references at all. This is not the only theoretical chapter in the present study, but it is the chapter that contains ideas and concepts used throughout the study. The later chapters contain further ideas and concepts that are specific to their inner logic, or "governing metaphors"(cf. White 1978, 48): courtyard empires (focusing on the cultural institution of *purdah* and women's politicization inside and outside it), edible histories (focusing on culinary memories), khaki shadows (focusing on memories of militarism, nationalism and historical traumas) , and homespun subjects (focusing on the gap between feminist theorizing on "the subject" at large and context-specific analyses of autobiographical subjectivities in South Asia). The present chapter provides the theory that brings the chapters together in an analysis of narrative and memory.

At the level of discourses and narratives, the idea of possible worlds refers to the historically specific "conditions" that affect our writing and reading, drawing the limits of our imagination but also provide possibilities for transgression from commonly perceived norms. In other words, social and political "conditions", or ideologies, are never static or prescriptive, but there are always loopholes through which the author and the reader both can opt out. In a study of life-writing produced by individuals, this realm of relative autonomy could, for instance, in the German tradition be called lifeworld, *Lebenswelt*.

Husserl (1936) defined his *Lebenswelt* as the world of immediate experience, from which individuals derive their basic concepts and structures of meaning. The emphasis is on individuals as active meaning-makers although they may think of the world as objective and out of their reach. Habermas (1981) extended the term on the basis of Weber's understanding of rationality, to indicate the contextual marker to link theory of human action with rationalization processes. The Husserlian understanding of *Lebenswelt* lays emphasis on philosophical wonder and the phenomenology of the senses; the Habermasian understanding rather on communicative rationality, the construction of the world through speech and language that has its predetermined norms and limitations. Whether or not there is a scope for truly independent action is a debate between phenomenologists and social constructivists: a bouncing between the metaphors of being "thrown" into the world and being "contained" inside it with prior ideological baggage.

The concept of lifeworld plays well with the spirit of Virginia Woolf's (1941/1976, 90) term life-writing, the name she gave for her obsession of narrating the past, particularly events from her childhood and youth. Woolf used the term casually without clear conceptual analysis; it has become the task of Woolf scholars to interpret the term in the light of her hints and sketches (cf. Conway 1998, 109–114).

Her posthumously published autobiographical extracts suggest that she insisted on the processual nature of life-writing that allowed play with identities, multiple fragmentary versions of the same events, flux and volatility. In particular, Woolf believed that in each individual's life there are "moments of being", privileged times that allow one to reach unprecedented wisdom on one's own life, to disclose patterns previously unseen. These moments may be based on a flash of intuition, and may appear to us through recurring images seen in meditation or dreams.

Woolf's understanding of women's life-writing was not, however, detached from the material necessities of everyday life, as she stubbornly insisted on women's need to achieve rooms of their own and the salary of five hundred pounds in order to become writers (Woolf 1928). In addition, the obstacles on the way towards making art out of words were the Victorian ideological remnant of the "angel in the house" (whom she believed she had killed in her own context) and women's difficulty to write truthfully about their bodies (a task that she did not believe she had accomplished) (Woolf 1931). Overall, her passion was directed towards enabling women to write, and creatively re-thinking of the social change required to achieve spaces for writing.

The basic ideas in Woolf's essays have not lost their force in today's postcolonial world. Echoing Adrienne Rich's (1986/2002, 62–82) criticism of Woolf's universalism, women cannot any more think of becoming citizens in the world of writing, as Woolf did, but the urge to think of the material conditions of writing has not diminished since her days. Rooms of our own, as women, are hard-won in most societies, but we must specify our question: what are the specific arguments directed against women's writing in each society, and how can be contested from within the norms and values of that culture?

The question of possible worlds also becomes a question of choosing theories. What the possible theories that "work" in the present context are is one (rather functionalist) way of formulating the ques-

tion, but this question may also be inverted: what did the world do to my theorizing?

### *Pakistani feminist discourses*

If I am to place my acts of literary analysis on a feminist theoretical plane, the only kind of name available is postcolonial materialism. The purpose of this chapter is to argue why such naming matters, and how I have traveled towards adopting such a stance. The starting point is Pakistani women's literary production, its limits and possibilities, and the movements that have prompted the present three women to become educated literate subjects.

There has not been a major onslaught against women writers as such in Pakistan's short literary history. In the efforts to define the Islamic state, there have been attempts to limit women's appearance and free movement in the public, but writing as an activity has not been on any government's list of un-Islamic activities. The scripture of Islam contains nothing that would question women's right to express themselves in the written format. The act of writing is not an issue but rather the content. Pakistan's censorship laws have changed whimsically according to the needs of each regime, and sexually explicit books are being monitored, but the limitations affect male and female writers alike.<sup>2</sup>

The political "points" related to women's writing have to do with women's rights to literacy, education and employment. The women who have become writers belong to the strata of society that is not

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<sup>2</sup> Shahla Haeri (2002) narrates the story of the beforementioned feminist poet Kishwar Naheed, who has kept a government job at the Ministry of Information through various regimes. Naheed even kept her job during the Zia regime, but could not get a promotion because of her "notorious" translation of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* into Urdu. Such an anecdote is indicative of the position of juggling women writers live with in their everyday lives.



the primary target of social policy intervention: they are the ones for whom many doors have been already opened. Thus, the present study does not argue for the end of marginalisation of the Pakistani female writer, but rather for the need to examine what is possible for the present writers to write about, what their possible worlds are, who inhabit these worlds and who are excluded from them. And how has political history affected their storytelling?

The relationship between Pakistani high-profile women writers and the country's feminist movement is important if one wants to understand the writers' social outreach and discuss their relevance to inspire feminist causes amongst the next generations. Suleri, Bhutto and Ikramullah all express feminist concerns, and in the case of the younger generation, also exposure to the academic field of women's studies.<sup>3</sup> What kinds of discourses do they potentially share with feminist activists? And what do Pakistani feminist activists expect from writers, intellectuals and political leaders?

Most Pakistani feminists I have encountered, through the women's organizations ASR and Simorgh, either through their writings or personally subscribe to a Marxist/socialist/materialist feminism of some kind (cf. Khan and Zia 1995, The Simorgh Collective 1985). The material exigencies of Pakistani everyday life seem to be a logical reason for appropriating a rather practical and left-leaning frame of analysis striving towards social change. Even the academic researchers bent on deconstructive readings do manage to contain in their work an agenda of social reform, no matter how modest. For those involved in improving daily lives of large populations, there is still an acute need to think economically and pragmatically about the kind

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<sup>3</sup> On the feminist consciousness of the Partition generation cf. Ali (2000), Afsal (1999), Khan (1999). There is a wealth of documentation on the birth of the Pakistani women's movement and contemporary activists' lives, for the most interesting ones see Mumtaz and Shaheed (1987), Shaheed (1998), Rouse (1998), Haeri (2002).

of the feminist theorizing one can afford. This is not an anti-intellectual move, but a way of remaining intelligible in one's own cultural context.

Khawar Mumtaz and Farida Shaheed (1987, 157–8) argue that for them as feminist activists the only way to get rid of the condemning connotations of the term "Westernised" is to root one's action firmly into one's own Muslim history and culture. This is not a choice but a necessity if one wants to mobilize anyone outside the professional upper middle class urban *élite*. Pakistani feminists struggle in their everyday realities with the easy stereotypes of the "West", which in Michelle Maskiell's (1984, 15–16) terms could be condensed in the assumption that if a woman asks for a job outside the house today, she will dance naked in the street tomorrow.

A favourite binary pair used in much of Pakistani feminist analyses is progressive/retrogressive forces. The late intellectual Iqbal Ahmad (2000, 45) stated in an interview: "Feminism is the most progressive force in Pakistan today." Shahla Haeri (2002, 272) places the term "progressive" in the historical context of the left-wing Progressive Movement that originated in colonial India and continued its influence in independent Pakistan in the work of intellectuals and poets (see also ch.4). In this context, the particular connotation of "progressive" is anti-clerical, indicating a disdainful attitude towards the political intervention of the *ulema* (religious scholars) in state affairs. Furthermore, it carries a meaning of literary, intellectual up-to-date-ness, and is not synonymous with being "Westernised", which might embed an uncritical adaptation of foreign lifestyles and values.

The framework of the Third World is neither erased by Pakistani feminist critics as a historical inaccuracy, for reasons of solidarity between countries of the South. Even if the Third World should have been buried a long time ago as a totalizing *concept*, traces of Third Worldism as a *movement* of solidarity are still visible in the new millennium, and they should not be undervalued as sources of empowerment.

In fact, most feminist theories emerging from the world outside Euroamerica are fundamentally materialist, with or without a conscious articulation of this label. In South Asia, sub-categorizing feminist theory has not become as necessary as in Europe, because even its academic variants are still linked to grassroots feminist movements committed to social change. In most locations of the world, it is not considered outdated to speak of patriarchy, oppression and women's rights as human rights. One of the latest discourses in particular in South Asia is ecofeminism, but it cannot be separated from the women's movement and the materialist theorizing emerging from it (Mies and Shiva 1993, Braidotti 1994). And postcolonial theorizing, as practiced both in the South and North, also emerges from materialist/Marxist roots (cf. Moore-Gilbert 1997, Loomba 1998). All three streams of criticism, indigenous Third World feminisms, ecofeminism and postcolonial theory have one thing in common: an assertive critique of the continuing neocolonialist practises of the Western world today.

### *Between languages*

The Anglo-American linguistic and cultural bias in recent feminist theorizing is a fact that affects me as a researcher writing in English as a second language. It also happens to be the historical meeting point between myself and Pakistani feminists: we have been exposed to ideas from the (often unrecognized) intellectual "centre" but continue to discuss with them in our own localities. At the moment, I am only able to write about Pakistani women's life-writing in our *lingua franca*; and in my few efforts to present the project in Finnish, the pain of translation is, surprisingly enough, not caused by the primary materials but by the Anglo-American theorizing that I cannot get "right" in Finnish. In a way, then, I can also personally claim a mild case of the colonisation of the mind. I have been forced to ask myself what kind of feminist theorizing is necessary, useful or possibly visionary or sub-

versive in the Pakistani context that I now have some personal knowledge of. Are there possible messages in the Anglo-American streams of feminist theorizing that *do* translate across cultures, that cross over without too obvious epistemological crises?

I have also had to think about the time used for different dimensions of the study – a materialist feminist question of the value of intellectual labour *per se*. The feminist theoretical dimension in the present study is the one that has gone through greatest reconstruction. The other layers have made me take distance from Western feminist learning, made me read an endless amount of research literature written by men with little feminist sympathies, thoroughly enjoy all the translated bits of Urdu literature I have come across with, made me rewind my Urdu tapes over and over again with little results, and experiment with my own writing in relation to the women's that I am working on. I am now provided with a lot of cultural "content"<sup>4</sup> for which the available English and Finnish feminist theoretical terms do little justice. I am now somewhere in-between.

Here my task of writing *to* women is somewhat extended. I consider it as one of my theoretical tasks to write back to feminist theorists whose contributions have made me change my mind, over and over again. My intimate literary companions and other Pakistani feminists have made me re-think my relationship with women's studies: what worked "back then" before the beginning of this project does not necessarily work here and now. But certain materialist feminist voices bring me back to emphasizing the role of feminist theorizing as cultural criticism and political analysis of power (de Lauretis 1987, Braidotti 1993). They call for an awareness of the used concepts' origins, and for a need to speak theoretical languages that do not make

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<sup>4</sup> The term content-provision is a particular Finnish irony, as in the world of new media many of my contemporaries are employed to provide "content" for the expanding mobile phone industry. During the research process, one of my favourite jokes is to re-conceptualise what I have learnt as marketable, entertaining new media "content". Has someone already got the patent for daily text message *ghazals*?

the researched seem historically anachronistic or geographically displaced.

### *Theory in movement*

All great stories, or at least all great political science fables, somehow wind back to Karl Marx. This story does not even include a single quotation from him; yet he is everywhere. His shadow has caused major epistemological turns in feminist theorizing worldwide, and travelled to colonies to empower nationalist independence movements. To become a postcolonial feminist, one cannot argue well without a working definition of historical materialism (cf. Loomba 1998). In the history of Western feminist theory, the greatest partings of ways have been caused by the issue of economic determinism in historical materialism and the possible worth of keeping "women" or "the proletariat" as a singular concept of struggle. The feminists who somewhat claim an intellectual debt to Marx are most often divided into three "streams": the Marxists, the socialists and the materialists.

Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean (1993), in their comprehensive historical introduction to current materialist feminisms, see the greatest difference between the three streams in how they define the concepts woman, oppression, liberation and ideology. A rough summary of their presentation could be formulated as such:

- 1) Marxist feminists work strictly within the framework of oppression and emancipation, using particularly Engels' definitions of the woman question and the family as primary references. They do not believe that women's liberation is possible before the liberation of the working classes. Capitalism is *the* ideology against which their energies are invested.
- 2) Socialist feminists separate their feminist goals from the grand framework of women's liberation and are particularly drawn to standpoint theory as a strategic, political notion. They are more

interested in single political causes, such as abortion rights or violence against women, than in a possible revolution of the working classes. This also enables coalitions with less theoretically "correct" forces, such as liberal feminists, around common concerns. The substitution of Marxism with the softer term socialism can also be a way of gaining popularity in the Western academia.

- 3) Contrary to socialists, materialist feminists do not hide their ideological connectedness with Marxism, but insist on paying attention to the multiple ideological categories at work in our cultures. Instead of focusing on mere economic relations, they insist on analysing contradicting social movements and critiques of oppression both at the level of discourse and material interactions.

Amongst the three "streams", materialist feminism is the latest development and the most academic, textually and linguistically oriented one. The earliest materialists were feminist critics of Marxist feminist theory on both sides of the English channel, such as Christine Delphy, Monique Wittig and Michèle Barrett. At the same time, feminists from ex-colonies were approaching a revision of Marxism from their own anti-imperialist, postcolonial perspective. Critics already discussed in ch. 1, such as Gayatri Spivak, Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Ania Loomba in particular, work thoroughly through Marxist concepts, and claim historical materialism as their intellectual working ground.

To isolate materialist feminists from the wider spectrum of contemporary leftist thought is perhaps unnecessary or premature, as the theorists linked to it also express affinities with other political movements than the women's movement, and other theoretical streams than feminist criticism. For instance, Gayatri Spivak, whose contribution as a materialist feminist is also recognised by Landry and Maclean, has strong ties both with the Indian historiographers working under the name Subaltern Studies and the European philosophers working on

the idea of deconstruction, and because of her very multiplicity, her theoretical discourse is difficult to render into "grassroots" feminist activist use without elaborate translations.

For the purpose of suggesting reading strategies for the present study, the above presented outline may seem mechanistic or even unnecessary. After all, the coming analysis will be far removed from Western feminisms' inner epistemological wars. The authors I discuss with do not engage in a definition of their brand of feminism, and only in Sara Suleri's case can we argue that she has appeared in public as a postcolonial feminist critic as such (cf. Suleri 1992). Autobiographical spaces are rarely reserved for the analytical dissection of feminist theoretical terms, and the present texts are not an exception. The actual isms approached by the three women in their own terms are nationalism, militarism, feudalism and Islamism. When these phenomena are discussed by Pakistan feminist theorists, on the other hand, I can read from their analyses a strong materialist concern for everyday lifeworlds of citizens.

To locate theory as an exercise in politics of location is important, if one believes in the constructedness and situatedness of discourses. I use materialist feminist and postcolonial literary criticisms as sounding boards in the coming analysis, and, for reasons of academic transparency, I have tried to spell out where my own preferred "isms" have emerged from. The kind of writing I am later promoting is, in fact, as antithetical to isms as possible at the conjuncture of history and social sciences. *There must be a way out at some stage...*

### *Living it big in a material world*

*Murree hill station, off-season time. At an empty American-style diner (the ultimate teenage beehive during school holidays), they play 1980s Madonna, catchy dancefloor magnets, "La Isla Bonita, "Material Girl", and other classics of my generation. This bothers me, because I've just acquired a taste for Bollywood film music,*

*and find Madonna too wornout, too Western for my own purposes. Come on, give me my Bally Sagoo and Lata Mangeshkar! My Pakistani travelling companion seems to know the lyrics better than me. "Living it big in a material world", indeed, but on whose terms?*

(Flashback from research diary, Murree, March 2001)

The label "materialist" has admittedly become a pseudonym for various left-wing political affiliations since the 1980s. Pronouncing oneself as a materialist is a rhetorical gesture that might either embed, hide or lately even take critical distance from a Marxist agenda. Most of the feminist and postcolonial theorists covered in the present textual universe are self-pronouncing Marxists and/or materialists, and to differentiate between the labels would be an act of splitting hairs in this space. A common strategy is to explicitly work with Marx's historical materialism but to raise critique of the tendencies inside Marxism to relegate cultural production as a subordinate ally of capitalist industrial production, of the limitations of Marxists' theories of the sexual division of labour, and of historical materialism's apparent Eurocentric "flaws". The turns to Gramsci, Althusser and Foucault offer, then, analytical alternatives.

The present study is not about materialist feminisms as such, and therefore I cannot give a profound historical introduction of the development of its various sub-genres in the present research space. Here I can only articulate why it matters and makes sense in the present readings. As a materialist feminist, I have begun to understand that although our experience of the world is constructed by language, it is not absolutely necessary for all academic studies to focus on the philosophical process of linguistic construction, often referred to by outsiders as "language games". I see the "material" in materialist feminism as a composition of historical processes, emotions, bodily memories and political and economic structures. Our conceptions of history, politics and economy are all constructed by the very languages we speak, and



we participate, willingly or unwillingly, in the discourses surrounding us, but in our everyday experiences of the "system" there is variation, surplus or excess that the commonly accepted everyday terms may not reach. This is the realm of the body, emotions and artistic creation, but it is also the realm for new political beginnings.

How to speak about this emerging freedom (possible worlds in constant creation) in a language that is accessible to as many people as possible is, in my understanding, the actual challenge of materialist feminist theory. Many feminists have "found" or even "returned" to materialism during the 1990s after a long engagement with poststructuralism and deconstruction, and in my understanding of the current world order, it is a logical activist response to the global insecurities of our times. A materialist turn does not have to indicate an end to contemplation about the inner worlds of language and the psyche, but it puts history and politics back to the agenda in more direct terms than before. Our research questions are changing shape because of the global pressures surrounding us: it is again acceptable, or even required, to speak in a seminar room about the international division of labour and the modes of production and reproduction.

I have derived my understanding of materialist feminisms from the Anglo-American debates since the late 1980s, involving both white and non-white, established scholars and recently arrived critics from elsewhere, usually ex-colonies. I am particularly drawn to Stuart Hall's (2002, 10) articulation of the politics and poetics of the recently arrived intellectuals, whose very fact of recent experience of immigration provides them a fresh perspective into the cultural politics of the recipient country.

Thinking of Pakistan, itself a major producer of the postcolonial brain-drain, a link with theories emerging from a place that once was the "mother country" seems ironically cosy, and another, more contemporary link with theories emerging from a place that currently has the power to list the "axis of evil" and "rogue states", quite accurate. How Pakistani women are situated on the world map and how their

transnational networks are established still have a lot to do with these post-imperial shadows (cf. Vuorela 2003). In many ways, I am writing alongside feminist critics based in the Anglo-American academia, but I am also writing from a location that is outside, an off-path, a stop-over on the way from Asia towards Metropolis, slightly unpronounceable, even untranslatable.

When you walk far enough from Tampere through Russia, the Central Asian republics and Afghanistan towards the South-East, you arrive at Peshawar. Only this immense land mass separates us, and the map keeps on hopefully shrinking in my imagination. Sometimes, when I have difficulties to sleep, I keep thinking of this concrete geographical itinerary and the possible commonalities between Finnish and Pakistani feminists. If we stay at home, we must contend to writing margin notes to metropolitan feminist theory. We always arrive to its trends somewhat belated, and ask too basic questions to become keynote speakers in wider forums. Theoryspeak becomes more fluent only if we leave; at home we are adamant about the need for concrete referents, things, worldly phenomena. I know this is very little, and when we leave home and meet in the new place, our experiences become further divided, but sometimes this little can be quite enough for us to meet well. Then we become material girls, living it big – through our very differences.

### *Literary materialism: words and things*

Starting from materialist feminist *literary* theory (Barrett 1992, 1999, Hennessy 1993, Landry and Maclean 1993) as an embodied, personal feminist practice, I am particularly interested in its current "validity" as a bridge between the literary products of Euroamerica and the rest of the world. In the present study, this literary stream of materialist feminist theorizing has given argumentative force to the questions and issues that emerged from the autobiographies themselves, in particular the class dimension and the embodiment of politics.

Alongside Adrienne Rich, Michèle Barrett's theoretical contributions since the 1990s have been particularly helpful to me in the writing process as such. I find her latest texts as unrecognised interventions into postcolonial theory, providing moments that may feed the critical imagination of feminist from both East and West, North and South.

I have come to understand the gap between feminisms of the North and South, following Barrett's (1992) formulation, as a debate between words and things. The poststructuralist tide in feminist theorizing has led to an emphasis of fluidity and contingency of our language, experiences and identities, and, in particular, all narratives of "origins" and "foundations" have become problematized. As a self-pronouncing materialist, Barrett does not denounce the poststructuralist tide as a frill or luxury, but uses aspects of this theorizing economically and strategically. What is particularly useful in poststructuralism for women worldwide is its undivided attention to the power of naming. It should lead to an awareness of the power of language to construct our experiences, rather than perceiving language only as a medium for conveying messages.

The kind of materialist feminist theorizing Barrett advocates, then, is not a request to "return" to the mere level of things (the 1970s type of economic determinism focusing mostly on labour relations and the concept of value) but rather keeping the two levels, words and things, interconnected. Neither is it a request for theorists to start making "common sense" so that less educated women, and especially the majority of women from the Third World, would feel included in their theorizing (they rarely would have access to academic monographs, in any circumstances), but to pay attention to their own materially privileged situations, the institutional power backing up their publications and even what she calls the "commodification" of feminist theory. These are not mere matters of "articulation", "enunciation" or "discourses". They do have material referents in the world *out there*.

### *On the "writerliness" of theory*

One of Barrett's most important challenges is feminist theory's inner critique of its metanarratives. In particular, as she suggests in later work (1999, 105–7), it has opened our eyes to the "writerliness" of all theorizing and the dismantling of rigid boundaries between academic knowledge and fiction. She is sensitive to the performative, imaginative aspects of all theorizing, including her own.

A way of understanding these self-reflexive notes in my own research context has been to think of feminisms' preferred concepts and histories. My own unlearning narrative consists of moments when the Western feminist conceptual baggage has proved limiting, inappropriate or outright historically anachronistic in the Pakistani context.

By the 1990s one can see a definitive shift in materialist feminist theorizing from Marxist economic determinism towards a more cultural materialism (Landry and McLean 1993, 62). The establishment of cultural studies as an academic cross-discipline has particularly prompted this shift. For instance, Michèle Barrett acknowledges her intellectual debt to Raymond Williams, whose career was devoted to the "democratization" of the British academic system and its discourses. Williams' (1977) "cultural materialism" has been adopted by British feminists as a promising possibility that allows for the emergence of the voices of those who do not often enter academic feminist spaces.

The birth of cultural studies has been a liberatory event for all hesitant scholars, including myself, eclectically picking and mixing the best of all possible worlds. It has, though, been bitterly criticized by many left-wing scholars as a way of whitewashing Marxism of its political, transformative message.<sup>5</sup> One of the main criticisms against

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<sup>5</sup> For instance, Fredric Jameson (1995) is critical of the blatant populism of cultural studies, asking if "the people" consisted solely of the TV-watching, beer-drinking population of middle-to-lower class jobholders or unemployed. He finds its emer-

cultural studies is that it focuses too much on the "surfaces" of contemporary pop culture without enough historical grounding to make the study academically challenging, and thus can be a way of keeping potential radicals out of the streets. However, Williams' (1958, 6) thesis "culture is ordinary" has worked to democratize academic cultures from the inside, lowered thresholds between the students and professors, and made theorists accountable for the languages they use. In the contexts of "other" cultures, the claim to defend the "ordinariness" of each culture works particularly well against orientalist impulses of Othering and exoticizing.

If cultural studies became identified with "anything goes" type of populism in the 1990s, Euroamerican feminist theorizing, instead of opening out to the general public, became so self-referential that it alienated those newcomers to the field who did not have the opportunity for full-time conceptual immersion<sup>6</sup>. For instance, the most sophisticated, and perhaps theoretically radical, contributions to the question of embodiment (Grosz 1994) or the performativity of gender (Butler 1993) have unfortunately led to feminist studies' transformation from grassroots sources of collective empowerment to institutionalisation, professionalisation and highly competitive universes of language games.<sup>7</sup>

This is not the theorists' "fault" as such, but rather a reflection of the surrounding academic sub-cultures, for which epistemological warfare seems to be the natural way to communicate. When theoretical passions overflow, the "writerliness" and the specific discursive locations from where theory emerges remain often unacknowledged.

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gence as symptomatic of the need to fill the void left by Marxism discreetly and respectably. Another critique is towards its endless use of parentheses, the whole enterprise becoming "cultural" "studies", in constant ironization and negation of its own importance.

<sup>6</sup> On the convergence of feminist theory and cultural studies, see Schiah (1999).

<sup>7</sup> If the favourite punctuation of cultural studies has been parentheses, feminist theorizing has univocally adopted the slash!

Another risky adventure is the straightforward "application" of Western feminist philosophy on other women's courtyards. The levels at which philosophical ideas are being discussed – not the worthiness of the discussion as such – is particularly at stake here.

### *Senses of history*

How to read the braille of political history with your fingertips? The mere word materialism is indicative of the presence of the senses, in particular the touch. I have come to formulate my reading strategy first and foremost through the sensory references in the three narratives, backed up by a wide array of other pieces of life-writing, fiction and poetry from South Asia and also from other parts of the world. I call a selection of literary texts secondary materials, and the logic of selection has emerged from the primary texts' and their critics' inner dialogues. Some of the texts were chosen without such clues because they have moved me, caused in me key moments of discovery and coincidentally brought me to a better understanding of the primary texts themselves.

My decision to focus on the institution of *purdah* and the resulting "courtyard empires" in chapter 3, on the culinary metaphor in chapter 4 and on the idea of home-spinning in chapter 6 has resulted from the long exposure to texts by South Asian women theorizing *through* the genres of life-writing, fiction and poetry. In other words, I am inspired by arts-based research methodologies (cf. Dunlop 2000), through which argumentation occurs mainly in other forms than the standard academic thesis-counterthesis one. The key metaphors around which the study is organized are living metaphors, embedded in the autobiographers' narrated past realities, in which representations of culture are mediated (cf. White 1978, 20–21). In such a space of possibilities, research becomes, instead of a solid linear argumentation, a processual inquiry that may end in further questions rather than in firm answers.

### *Towards productive misapprehensions?*

It is not my intention to dismiss "advanced" Western feminist theorists for their "difficulty", but to express words of caution to anyone considering to apply their ideas in studies focusing on other cultures than the Euroamerican ones. The Western feminist philosophers I am familiar with rarely, if ever, make such "colonising" epistemological moves. Elizabeth Grosz (1994) and Judith Butler (1993) are, in my reading, the two key feminist philosophers, whose influence on the past decade's "body boom" has been most significant. However, one should be aware that it is not in the "spirit" of either women to recommend their ideas for direct empirical application. Their ideas are not intended for simple "hands-on" operations in the analysis of single literary texts or other cultural products, but require more complicated discussion. If Butler's idea of performativity or Grosz' analysis of volatile bodies are taken seriously, one learns to respect the positivity of their difficulty, the learning through misunderstandings and paradox, the confusion that may create new concepts. The present study has more modest tasks than that, but at some stages of the analysis, I am being enlightened by small clues given by both philosophers.

The recent philosophical ventures towards re-conceptualising embodiment are rooted in Western philosophy and psychoanalysis, and should be treated as such. Within their own discursive communities, philosophers such as Grosz and Butler have a groundbreaking role in questioning phallocentrism and re-thinking subjectivity and identity, but even for them, as Grosz (1994, xiii, xiv) admits, it implies stepping on risky borderlines within classical philosophy and political isolation within women's movements.

The present study is informed by the recent feminist theorizing on embodiment but will only use its ideas as a tip of an iceberg in contexts where they seem relevant. Most of the time, I will be arguing from within more conventional materialist positions, focusing on political power imbalances *between* bodies, subjects, nations and parts

of the world, rather than the differences *inside* subjects (cf. Braidotti 1993, 146–172). In this conjuncture, however, I am impressed by Judith Butler's (1993, xii) awareness that her book *Bodies that Matter* is "*destined to produce a new set of misapprehensions. I hope that they prove, at least to be productive ones.*" After such a self-reflective wish, I almost "buy" her idea of performativity. *In theory*, I cannot imagine anything as satisfying as productive misapprehensions.

In my own experience, however, even the basic idea of feminists as analysts of power relations at the everyday microlevel, to which even the most "advanced" theorists seem to in principle subscribe, turns against itself when formulated in the typical opaque language requiring years of painstaking initiation. Even poetic philosophical language may alienate its reader, if her struggle for "symbolic intelligibility" (Butler 1993, 3) involves some other kinds of tools than deconstruction.

My thinking in terms of bodies moves towards the social, political and historical ("foundational" discourses of community and memory), because I cannot imagine "the reversibility of the flesh" (Grosz 1994, 103) at any other level but the purely conceptual. I may learn to *speak* the feminist theoretical language fluently, but what I *feel* in my body and how I *perceive* other women's writing often seems to escape the juggling between subjects, objects and the hard intellectual labour of dismantling philosophical binary pairs. I understand, *in theory*, some "points" the above mentioned philosophers want to say, but it does not seep under my skin, sustain me in my writing, or feed my imagination.

In this context, I have found immense satisfaction in rediscovering the materialist feminists I once, as a theoretically relentless but inexperienced undergraduate, read about superficially and dismissed as "old-fashioned" or "unchallenging".



*Mam, what kind of history do you prefer?*

In addition to the words and things question referred to above, Michèle Barrett (1980, 42) presents the idea of preferred readings, which I, in my own context, dub as preferred histories. The same notion was presented in a different TV/media context by Stuart Hall (1980) and remains a basic concept in semiotics. A preferred reading is a context-dependent notion of every culture's sanctioned or dominant ways of receiving literary texts or works of art, thus limiting the range of possible meanings. In other words, we are being informed by the surrounding society's myth-making and collective historical imagination, which always even without our own active willingness to be included, strives towards the construction of desired pasts.

In the current research space, there are at least three cultural value systems at work: 1) the North Indian Muslim cultural sphere, a part of which became Pakistani in 1947 2) the still ongoing British post/colonial influences and 3) my own North European location consisting of shifting meanings of Nordic, Finnish, feminist etc. identities. I have come to contact with Pakistani women's writing through an eclectic interest in postcolonial Britain and Ireland: my imaginary flights to Lahore have been most often via London or Dublin. In particular, my Irish experiences have made me critical of too easy labellings of Europeanness: there is no European perspective to study the political history of Pakistan, and neither is there a single Eurocentrism that all Europeans would automatically succumb to.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Samir Amin (1989) defines Eurocentrism as a culturalist phenomenon, a kind of anti-universalism that presents itself as universalism, claiming that the imitation of the Western world is the only solution to the challenges of our time. His argumentation is quite in line with Edward Said's (1978) *Orientalism*, but he is arguing from a political economy perspective and deals, for instance, with development rhetorics. The analysis of the psychological spontaneity of Eurocentrism is still quite telling; however, the deconstruction of a single denominator "Europe" does not happen.

In myself I find a certain Nordic social democratic bias: when reading the women's texts, I am often stuck at their description (or the lack of it) of the domestic servants, the working classes and peasants. In the realm of autobiographies, I am perhaps making too high demands from the authors: I would like them to include more voices from other classes than their own, to engage in reflection about a more egalitarian future for Pakistan. My preferred reading includes history-writing in which also the illiterate "subaltern" would be present and radical imaginings of a future that would do away with such a figure. If I cannot find such visions, it is easy for me to become frustrated. But I try to systematically teach myself to reach beyond the first ideological/cultural clashes, to see what else there is to be found, what else can be learnt, and whether the women themselves could provide me with new questions.

The obstacles I have faced have to do with deep structures and long historical memories. First, I have had to situate autobiographies in the country's cultural production on the whole and think of their realistic role and space. In a dominantly oral culture, the issue of autobiographical representation of Others becomes rather marginal. I have never faced the kind of criticism I impose on the texts from Pakistani scholars, with whom the conversation about autobiographies easily slides towards poetry and theatre.

*Surely there's a class bias but look at everything else. Listen to that voice!*

Second, I have had to admit that despite all my readings, I cannot engage in any systematic class analysis but my readings are based on impressions left by the texts themselves. I am wary of engaging in an analysis of the remnants of feudalism in Pakistan's recent history, and only touch the surface of the phenomenon of loyalties inside families. Both restrictions considered, it becomes apparent that my exercise is "writerly" and openness about the writing process itself can pro-

vide clues about the texts' inner worlds, the only Pakistani universe of which I may have intimate knowledge of.

*The father was a martialer of facts, but the daughter became a storyteller. Now whose path are you trying to discover?*

The ideas of "writerliness" and preferred readings are in fruitful dialogue with Rich's (1986) idea of politics of location and Haraway's (1991) notion of situated knowledges. The hegemonic operation of any ideology, including any variety of Western feminisms, is made visible, and can then also be contested, when a preference is mapped out consciously through personal memory-work. The more one acknowledges the "writerliness" of one's thoughts, the more there is room for the possible new worlds quietly seeping into one's study.

Barrett is one of the fiercest materialist critics of the paradoxes of aesthetic response, in particular in relation to the late capitalist modes of production, through a strategic and selective use of deconstructive reading practices. Landry and MacLean (1993, 12–13) conclude, in a manner similar to Barrett's and in conversation with her work, that they are looking for "*an articulation that takes the political claims of deconstruction seriously, without abandoning either class struggle or resistance to gender ideology where these obtain in specific historico-political sites, and opening itself as well to other possible categories of identity of resistance.*" In other words, the kind of materialist feminism that all three authors seek is a body of ideas for transforming political impossibilities into possibilities.

The fact that the academic world today is increasingly focusing on idioms such as embodiment, the mapping of desire, or nomadic subjectivities is indicative of the advanced capitalist societies' accumulation of wealth that have produced the scholars. The turn towards metatheory is made possible by active political decisions of funding and educational strategies.

Finland is a fine example of such a society. *We* have had funding and time to become familiar with *our* preferred academic canons, but the critical question underlying all our ventures to cultures distant from our own is: is it justifiable that we apply our metatheoretical learning on other societies and cultures, which themselves intrinsically value other types of knowledge? For myself personally, as an aspiring scholar of South Asian cultures and politics, the present study will be only a starting point in this debate.

## 2.2 Narratives

Tracing possible lives

*All biographies like all autobiographies like all narratives tell one story in place of another story.*

Hélène Cixous

(Cixous and Galle-Gruber 1997, 178.)

A simple statement but easily forgotten. Autobiography: always imaginary and fictional inasmuch as our memories are a retrospective pastiche of chaotic flashes from a past that can never be rendered in a precise form.<sup>9</sup> Forget exactitude, forget truths, live in the realm of the possible – the fantasmagoric realm of the narrator. The past is a foreign country<sup>10</sup>, a playground of contesting possibilities. We may have dates and years and archived documents, but we never have om-

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<sup>9</sup> The angel of progress in Benjamin's (1940/1968) historical theses is one of the most poetic formulations historical memory, in which the flash-like nature of our recallings of the past questions any stable historical "truths". Koselleck (1987) uses a more mundane metaphor, that of the whirlpool or washing machine, from the window of which we can see an ever-changing composition or pastiche of items. Boyarin (1994) equates memory to identity in his formulations of TimeSpace.

<sup>10</sup> This popular slogan in cultural history was presented by David Lowenthal (1985).

niciently true *meanings* – only subjectively true ones to the speakers or writers.

Anni Vilkkio (1997) emphasizes the narrativity of all autobiographical material, and reminds the readers of the fictional bond between the text and the "real world":

*Autobiography has not happened really, it has not come about in the real world; more precisely, it can be said to have happened to its narrator. In addition to its centredness on the individual and situation, an autobiography is strongly context-dependent. The storage of themes and narratives that organize our lives is our common property, our culture. A life is narrated in ways suitable to each culture, and images of life are images of a particular society. An autobiography does not directly reflect life, but it can be assumed to reflect the prevailing theories of "possible lives". Society is therefore within the story.*

(Vilkkio 1997, 92, translation mine)

The quote clarifies the idea of possible worlds in the present context: I will be reading images/flashes/individual accounts of Pakistani culture and society through the fictive accounts by its members, not as true stories but as reflections of the theories of "possible lives" in the colonial Indian Muslim and post-colonial Pakistani frameworks. It is a question of available narratives in specific socio-historical contexts, inasmuch as the women's own power to name themselves. Thus the idea of *reading possible worlds* means opening autobiographical windows that allow insights to possible lives interwoven in narrative.

In my forthcoming readings, I will be using the terms autobiography, memoirs and life-writing, not fully interchangeably but to denote nuances in the literary discourse around the study of writing about the self. For the present purposes, a brief sketch of the concepts' differences will suffice.

Woolf's term life-writing has been taken into use particularly by feminist critics such as Shari Benstock (1988), Hélène Cixous (1992,

1997) and Suzette Henke (1998). It challenges traditional limits of autobiography and may include memoirs, diaries, journals letters and even fiction. Flux and discontinuity are welcome to life-writing, as are the authors' later revisions, scraps, fragments that may challenge a once published piece. Life-writing may also include other voices inside a narrative, which makes a case for both intersubjectivity and intertextuality.

In the Anglophone world, it has become a convention to divide published pieces of life-writing into autobiographies and memoirs. An autobiography often refers to an account of a highly public or philosophically/spiritually oriented narrative, which is wholistic in scope and is believed to contain remarkable wisdom of life, often only acquired at old age. Interiority is the key focus of autobiography, whereas a memoir focuses on external events (Marcus 1994, 4–6, Jelinek 1986, xii). This distinction is, however, awkward and consists of embedded value judgments about lives worth living and reflecting upon, operating on a scale of merit and "higher"/"lower" knowledge.

In the recent postmodern cultural milieu of the Western world, autobiography, as understood in the classical sense, is becoming almost extinct. The term memoir is more inclusive, and can be valued according to other merits than external achievements or unusual wisdom of life. A memoir often experiments with form and temporalization, and may not cover the person's whole life span.

Two of the present texts could be conveniently categorized under the important South Asian sub-genre, political autobiography, and one could either be named as a literary autobiography or a memoir. One of the texts also resembles a popular Latin American textual form, *testimonio*, although one would get into arguments about its revolutionary content (cf. Harlow 1987, Zimmerman 1995). I will be elaborating on this connection in chapters 6 and 8 in the context of historical trauma and subjectivity.

Personally, I am most in favour of the term life-writing, which seems to include a more diverse array of textual forms than autobi-

ography or memoir. It is an umbrella concept for all forms of textual representation of the self, and is currently used in the Anglo-American world by adult educators and writing collectives as an attempt to lower the threshold of engaging into writing about one's life. Conceptually it can also serve as a tool for the researcher to widen her perspective to what can be found in an already published text. It emphasizes the value of the lived life as a unique trace in the world, and allows room for variation in the practices of writing.

However, external distinctions of genre do not serve their purpose in a contextual reading such as the present one. My reading will not provide new insights into theories on the genres of life-writing, but rather into the webs of power and meaning embedded in the narratives. The reader will notice that I use the actual terms autobiography, memoir and life-writing rather sparingly. Instead, I prefer to write about mere "texts" or "narratives".

The present study will not begin from critical, deconstructive feminist readings of the "classical" prototypical autobiographies of St. Augustine or Rousseau, although the shadow of the Western political man can be perceived even on the pages of the chosen texts.<sup>11</sup> References to Western political figures and literary influences are admittedly abundant in all three narratives, and obviously the women have been exposed to autobiographies written by Western and Westernized authors, but the texts also refer to the literary traditions of the Indian subcontinent and the Muslim world.

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<sup>11</sup> In the recent theorizing on autobiographies, it has been considered necessary to track the genealogy of writing about the self from Augustine's confessions via Rousseau towards more modern narratives (cf. Marcus 1995, Hyvärinen 1997). The birth of the Western European male as an autobiographical subject and its influences on later canonical norms on what counts as life-writing is an interesting debate as such, but one has to keep in mind other simultaneous or earlier traditions that emerged on other continents, too. Why not begin from China or Japan, where the privileged subject was a noble woman? When discussing political autobiographies, the West-centredness has to, of course be taken into account. The Indian and Pakistani political autobiographies are intimately linked to the histories of the nationalist movements and their Westernised conceptions of modernity and progress.

In many ways, the texts form intercultural, and also postcolonial dialogues between the East and the West, and also between Islam and Christianity. All the three women in question were educated by Catholic nuns. And still, their texts have been fed with nationalist songs of the Khilafat movement, with Urdu novels, with Ghālib's poetry and with the rich traditions of the Prophet's and his followers' sayings (hadith) . Therefore, it would be preposterous to devote too much space in the present study to the Western debates on the legacy of European autobiographical forefathers. Instead, further comparisons will be made to women's auto/biographical practices in Egypt, Turkey, Iran and the Indian subcontinent in chapter 3.

*Is it possible to read gender?*

*I am not sure that a theory of women's writing is useful or even desirable at this point.*

Teresa de Lauretis 1987, 84

*Women's writing/.../ begins to articulate the silenced voice of women, but it is obliged to do so in the context of a dominant, alien but ultimately enabling culture.*

Janet Wolff 1990, 82

Writing an autobiographical narrative is always an act of power: it re-defines relations between the writer and her social circle, interferes as a temporally fixed text in the flow of events, leaving a steady sign, a trace, a capsulated memory. We are being warned of the dangers of being "trapped" in autobiographical texts solely, and thus becoming blindfolded from the visions of the less "exemplary" storytellers outside literary canons. One has to always ask whose life-writing is at stake, and what is considered a worthy and interesting life by the reading public in each cultural context.



In addition, one can ask what kind of space autobiographies fill in a country's literary life. Are autobiographies published for the collective remembering of past struggles and victories, for the legitimization of a regime or a political party, for educational purposes to the next generations, for spiritual growth and healing, or as mere entertainment? And are there differences in women's and men's orientations, tone and the grounding of the self? Where can one read gender apart from other differences?

Reading gender differences as the sole focus in a literary study is, in my understanding, not very productive neither politically nor aesthetically. There are stubborn ideas circulating amongst literary critics on how men and women write, but more detailed readings often disturb polarised gender settings. Here I would like to pay attention to three common assumptions that I find problematic not only in my own research context but also in the South Asian literary context in general.

1. Women's writing is relational rather than autonomous, dialogical rather than insular.

Laura Marcus (1994, 67) warns against making "innate" assumptions of gender differences in autobiographical texts, "in terms which represent men's autobiography as ego-centred and progressive, and women's as discontinuous and associative". In similar tone, Julia Watson (1993, 59) calls the canonical emphasis on great persons and public events a "*bios-bias*" rather than male bias. "*To privilege bios is to accept that one's cultural status as a subject is externally authorized in this way. Bios, then, is not synonymous with identity but signals the significance of a life within authorized traditions of representing lives in Western culture.*" (58) A *bios*-biased text, thus, focuses on external achievements, important historical mileposts which the author has experienced as an eye-witness, a fully booked life or an important single mission often causing the author a lot of suffering.

In the contemporary world of literary production one cannot automatically assume that men's autobiographies contain a clearer *bios*-bias than women's, although the historical evidences for the case are countless. Many women who in their respective cultures become autobiographical subjects have struggled for their position so hard that the mere journey provides enough content for a *bios*-bias, which in feminist terms could be translated as the exceptional woman syndrome. On the other hand, some women from extremely privileged settings write confidently about themselves and their achievements, without a need to articulate what enabled them to become writers. The notion of *bios*-bias is flexible enough to contain all kinds of notions of superiority and privilege, not only gender privilege.

Amongst my three chosen texts, *Meatless Days* is the one with the clearest lack of *bios*-bias. Sara Suleri hardly celebrates her encounters with important people or her possible sufferings as an emigrant, a Pakistani woman or someone who has lost family members in violent settings. She is too learned to produce a linear autobiography of how "I" became an "I". Her critique of Pakistan's feudalism, patriarchal state structures and the waves of Islamisation is presented with irony rather than as a grand narrative of suffering. There are no perceptible idols or key figures of influence rising above others – rather, Suleri focuses on the dynamics inside her household and familiar patterns of communication. This feature – her undivided attention to the family, friends and the private sphere – could be seen as a "feminine" autobiographical trait, if one believed the "truism" that relativity is a more common orientation in women's writing and autonomy of the writing subject in men's.

*The Daughter of the East* is a political testimony of hardship, filled with important names and historical mileposts. One of the key tropes in the narrative is how she "transcended gender" (Bhutto 1988, 140). However, Benazir Bhutto has included in her narrative twenty-one first person testimonies of her friends and party comrades, and writes extensively about the characters of her parents and siblings. She does

not only focus on her martyred father, but expresses equal concern for the whole family.

If compared to *From Purdah to Parliament*, *The Daughter of the East* is indeed a multivocal narrative. Begum Ikramullah's political autobiography is the most solitary and career-oriented narrative amongst the three texts studied here; it devotes very little space to family life, and is organised in linear time following her personal achievements. Political figures, party comrades from the Muslim League are its "significant others" rather than her parents, husband or children. And despite the public, political content, the narrative is emotionally charged and by no means formal. Her tone is chattering, fluid, and easy-going.

2. Women's writing is sensual rather than abstract, "hands-on" rather than conceptual, focusing on everyday life rather than public, political events.

Estelle Jelinek (1986, xiii), in her mapping of the "tradition" of women's autobiography in the Western cultural sphere from antiquity to present, states that the topics women write about throughout centuries are strikingly similar: instead of focusing on the political, women are said to write extensively about family, close friends and domestic activities.

Tanita Sarkar (1999) questions this supposition in the Indian context through a translation of an unknown rural Bengali 19<sup>th</sup> century woman's, Rashundari Debi's autobiography, *Amar Jiban*. Debi taught herself to read and write in *purdah*, and produced an abstract, spiritual, self-absorbed and non-dialogical narrative, which was almost completely void of sensuous content. She asks whether it is possible to ever assume that a writer is bound to her most immediate surroundings, and what made it possible for this secluded woman to distance herself from her kitchen, where she as a "pure" Brahmin wife was responsible for feeding the whole extended family.

The present textual universe is not lacking in sensual description,

but neither does it exclude the public and the political, or the abstract. What the texts particularly manage to convey is that a focus on material, everyday realities can be, at the same time, a reflection of the national and the public. We should think of the sensual and the abstract, the domestic and the political feeding upon one another rather than as binary pairs. Besides, who said that cookery books could not count as political history, or that sewing circles were an innocent pastime?

3. Feminist writing is by definition separate from women's writing in general. What distinguishes the two genres is that feminist writing is liberated from the houses, economies and politics run by men.

Carolyn Heilbrun (1988) in her pioneering *Writing a Woman's Life* partly explodes the myth that women's autobiographies are necessarily relational but at the same time remains within the Euroamerican second wave framework of feminist separatism. She claims: "*There will be narratives of female lives only when women no longer live their lives isolated in the houses and stories of men.*"(47) " She is particularly interested in the articulation of friendship between women and in formulations of heterosexual partnership that do not comply with the prevailing patriarchal ideologies as sources of empowerment and liberation. However, she assumes that before women liberate themselves from men's houses, both concrete and metaphorical, they in fact continue *writing like men*.

Sidonie Smith (1987, 44), in a similar logic to Heilbrun's, states that women who do not challenge gender ideologies do not achieve to write autobiographies but may be still involved in the production of self-writing<sup>12</sup>. Women's autobiographies are for her essentially voices from the margins, from culturally disempowered people, who are yet able to promote empowering visions of selfhood. Writing is then a form of unmasking and taking possession of *her very own story*.

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<sup>12</sup> With the term self-writing, Smith refers to a larger genre including a range of personal narratives, such as diaries, journals, letters and poetry, and her use of it is quite similar than the other scholars' use of the term life-writing.

For both Heilbrun and Smith the actual emancipatory category is "woman", not "feminist". However, both draw distinctive lines between liberated women (who have reached the required level of self-reflection and political consciousness to write autobiographies) and other women (whose writing, ideologically tainted by patriarchy, remains of lesser importance to feminist critics). Both are fiercely critical of the cultural silencing of "women" but do not, in my reading, manage to sufficiently explore the differences amongst women, the marginalisation and silencing of women done by other women.

In the South Asian context, the above notions become particularly problematic. Heilbrun's complaint of women being held captive in men's houses, taken to a foreign context and understood literally, would be too close to the colonial feminists' concerns about the evils of *purdah* (cf. Mayo 1927, Hauswirth 1932). Gender segregation is still a societal fact in South Asia, and was a categorical borderline and a spatial division into two amongst the very urban middle classes that first became educated and achieved literacy during the British colonial era.

South Asian women have produced fascinating life stories and sharp political analyses from inside *purdah* arrangements, being housed without any access to the outside world first in the houses of fathers, then in the houses of in-laws. If they did not have expensive home tutors, they could teach themselves to read and write. They may have been physically isolated from the world, but never isolated from other women. In fact, the isolation from the outside world produced in many families distinctive women's languages (Minault 1993). What kinds of narratives of women's lives did *purdah* arrangements thus produce? How does the fact of their writing despite all odds challenge Western notions of what constitutes a writer's life?

*What is individualism, egocentrism or elevated isolation? Where is gender?*

*Amongst us feminists, the highest mistake a woman writer can make is to write like a man. It almost seems easier to describe how*

*a man would write his memoirs, but the definitions, the attributes of writing like a woman still escape me after all these years. Would a woman be sensitive, always include other voices like a good, polite girl? Would she automatically bring her audiences to tears? Or would she send shivers down our spines? Would she make us roll with laughter? Or would she irritate us to our wits' end with her self-conscious seriousness? Would she include in her memoirs pamphlets, slogans or solemn proclamations? Would she seriously act out and misbehave? Pull out her tongue, perhaps?*

*To be honest, I don't really care how women write. The most powerful words always emerge from individuals, regardless of gender. The essence of beauty escapes isms and categories. No-one should define how women write. What matters is the voice.*

*Reformulate the question: what enables women to begin writing and how can we empower one another to continue? Now that's the kind of theory of life-writing that thrills me. A theory that does not thwart expression. A theory completely devoted for the emergence of voice.*

(Research diary, Toronto, December 2002.)

### *Braidings, encounters and pacts*

The narratological approach to the study of life-writing may enable an escape from the somewhat standardized social sciences discourse on the commonly perceived "identity tags" altogether. No longer does one have to "read" gender, ethnicity or feminist resistances in life-writing, but, instead, it is possible to move towards one's own interaction with the texts and the imagined negotiations between the researcher and the authors. The reader becomes complicit in the process, and the power relations between the present reader and the past authors become a legitimate "point" of analysis.

To conceive of narratives as meaningful acts as such and focus on the conditions of their writing and reading is, in my understanding, a more sophisticated level of analysis than a narrow entanglement in

the texts' identity politics. It is a move from "being" to "doing", and from the level of isolated subjects to the level of interaction. One does not ask how the authors construct selves but what their writing does to the reader and how the reader responds – what their mutual agency is like. Throughout the thesis, I struggle with both levels and bear the burden of not being able to choose only one approach.

In this section, I refer to particular narratological ideas that I find useful, and which I work with loosely throughout the research. I understand the philosophical underpinnings of the poststructuralist idea that only discourses, narratives and texts matter, and that "society" is an linguistic construction which does not really exist. The linguistic turn is the underlying philosophical orientation in narratology.<sup>13</sup> I understand parts of it momentarily, in theory, but when I get back to reading about women's lives, their storylines and threads, I become alienated from the textual surface level of signs and signifiers and the underlying discursive negotiations of power.

I am also acutely reminded by Aijaz Ahmad (1992, 68–9) about the "luxury" of poststructuralist theoretical constructions, and their complete denial of the discourses of modernity:

*Those who live within the consequences of that "long past" (European imperialist "modernity": AH), good and bad, and in places where a majority of the population has been denied access to such benefits of "modernity" as hospitals or better health insurance or even basic literacy, can hardly afford the terms of such thought.*

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<sup>13</sup> The linguistic turn – a worn-out catchphrase in social sciences since the 1970s – refers to the loss of safe havens anywhere outside the use of language. The first philosopher to use the term was Richard Rorty (1967) but the roots of the turn can be found in Wittgenstein and Heidegger. Prominent fields of study amongst those who have made the linguistic turn are pragmatics of natural languages, politics of language, critique of ideologies, hermeneutics, deconstruction and narratology. For a comprehensive introduction, see Baynes et al (1987).

What academics can "afford" is a materialist question of the value of intellectual labour in their societies, which do exist, at least at the level of research funding and educational priorities. It is hardly a matter of individual choice, but is dependent on the material state structures that support them.

According to Ahmad, theoretical formulations that scorn any discourses on "origins" (including nations, states and political parties), consider any experience of oppression as a discursive construct, or elevate the individual as the only valid unit of analysis emerge, most often, from metropolitan and institutionally secure locations. In particular, postcolonial theorists and cultural critics, who on one hand take distance from the legacy of European colonialism, but on the other become infatuated with the tropes of migrancy, body-as-text, or the discursive negotiation of subject positions, are far too often unaware of their own academic isolation and élitism. For Ahmad, such critics are "repressive and bourgeois". In my own understanding, "advanced" language games hardly repress large populations of people with more pressing things to worry about than their "subject positions" or the most ethical and dialogical reading strategies, but neither do they have a remarkable influence on the world outside their own debate societies.<sup>14</sup>

*Good, bad theory. The theories that sustain me are the ones I don't have to start reading at 8AM to ensure I won't fall asleep after the prologue. They make appearances as silly déjà-vus and unlikely associations in public transport, and it is difficult to suppress a giggle. They can be summarised past midnight in crowded bars, and someone will respond with a joke. They invade my dreams, but I won't wake up in cold sweat. I can live through the day with theory*

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<sup>14</sup> Aijaz Ahmad's extremely edgy and polemical *In Theory* (1992) started an avalanche of criticism, both for and against his arguments, inside postcolonial theory and became a kind of "landmark text" that could not be treated neutrally. For a patient reading, see Moore-Gilbert (1997).



*that "works", and more importantly, I can take it out of my study without it losing its edge. Anything that docilely stays there and will not attempt to escape out to fresh air is no good.*

*Even more importantly, good theory is not only a matter of my own preferences and desires. It is not only for my own recreational use. I don't theorize to get "high" on my own life – this would be far too banal and hedonistic. Good theorizing must engage the world, raise passions and be circulated through multiple voices in surprising, creative ways. It connects and crosses over. Theorizing narrativity should not be so far removed from all that. We listen to voices and pass over our own voices to others, echoing through bodies, resonating with what constitutes our currently existing, and also possible future worlds.*

(Research diary, Toronto, May 19, 2003.)

Somewhere at the back of my mind, when I think of nationalist politics and communalist tensions in South Asia, the violence of the Partition, Pakistani women's struggle against oppressive regimes, friendships, voices and labouring hands, it is not only narratives and texts that I see and hear. The problem of the linguistic turn, if taken to the extremes, is its lofty distance from past and existing tensions, conflicts, struggles, movements, emotions and passions. I am not only referring to "extreme situations" in which "things" forcefully take over words (cf. Lentin 1997) but also to more quiet historical processes.

When I repeatedly mutter to myself on the streets "there is too much body in the business"<sup>15</sup>, I mean a sense of betrayal with the question how stories are told – if this remains as the only question. I find it insufficient, ahistorical and apolitical. The "how?" intellectually fascinates me for a while, but in the long run, if it becomes

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<sup>15</sup> This phrase entered my subconsciousness, once again, from Suleri who remembers her sister Ifat's pregnancies: "There's too much body about the business", she once told me, "and too much of it is your own." (Suleri 1989, 35.)

the only question asked from autobiographies, texts that involve past lives, historical testimonies, and embodied voices, it turns sterile and unchallenging. As mentioned before in chapter 1, the ideal alternative to "how?" would hardly be a meticulously descriptive "what?", but perhaps the colloquial "how come?", a milder version of the deep ethical "why?".

In the context of cultures I am only beginning to understand, cultures in which I was not born and raised, and which I try to approach in dialogical terms, the "how?" sometimes sounds pretentious and bookish. Before I can move to the level of narrative strategies, I must despite all odds understand what is being told. I may not rewrite all the answers to my whats, but remain mostly at that level to also become intelligible to those readers who have not spent seven years studying with me the same texts and Pakistani history.

At the moment, I only slip into the how when it seems productive. A lot of my research still deals with what is being told and how I understand it – the actual content, "the body in the business" – from the temporal and geographical distance. The failure to move on to a more advanced level does not bother me much, honestly. I feel loyal to the materialist questions of agency, cultural production and post-colonial/feminist struggles. These questions do seem real to me. On a quiet day I can hear them breathing...

I return to listening to voices, resonating with historical, political and individual differences. Françoise Lionnet (1989, 6) suggests that at the level of an autobiographical narrative, both the writer and the reader are allowed to play with multiple differences. She uses the concept *métissage*, which translates as *créolisation*, or as a textual "braiding" of cultural influences to form an identity that always moves beyond a list of technical attributes. It is a particularly useful strategy for Third World writers, opening up "*a site of undecidability and indeterminacy, where solidarity becomes the fundamental principle of political action.*" *Métissage* calls for extending the generic definitions of autobiography and crossing textual boundaries, mixing aesthetics and politics. It is

a way towards imagining nonhierarchical modes of relation not only between individuals but also between nations and cultures. It involves symbiotic transcultural exchanges, but does not strive towards perfect understandings. As a postcolonial site of resistance, *métissage* is beyond "truths" and Manichean dichotomies, respecting life's unheroic aspects, its mud and noise.

As a reading strategy, sensitivity to *métissage* means, then, the unfolding of differences from within the text, according to its own logic. Lionnet wrote in the 1980s when many feminist literary scholars were still focused on gender as a separate universe from other dimensions forming our identities. In particular, this bias on gender was severely criticized by working-class women and women of colour, whose experiences of disadvantage were never based on gender alone. Lionnet's type of "braided" solidarity is never uniform but rather playful and welcoming of contradictions. I will be elaborating on this metaphor particularly in the final chapter of analysis, *Homespun Subjects*.

If we are to follow Philippe Lejeune's (1989, 30) idea of the autobiographical pact "as a historically variable contractual effect", it is no longer relevant to compartmentalize the texts' gendered worlds, or class restrictions, or any preconceived labels as single topics of study. Rather, one should pay attention to the event of the text's production and to the interaction between the author and reader. In such re-negotiated circumstances, it is the nature of the writer's encounter with the imagined past and the writer's and reader's contractual encounter in the present that become more interesting than a pre-set agenda of "identity tags".

I have also come to view the autobiographical pact as a transfer of power. Autobiographical texts are never final statements, but events occurring within a limited time frame of production, and the possibility of revision of memory obviously exists after publication. Thus what happens to the writer while interacting with his or her past is a process exceeding the temporal limits of a single text. The text as an event feeds upon other events and acts that are at the moment of pub-

lication unpredictable. Once life-writing is published, it starts living a life of its own. Its future is violently separate from that of its author. The author hands over power to the readership. The interaction between the author and the readership is a new power formation.

The possibilities of response to life-writing may range from anything between an affirmation of common identity to an announcement of *fatwa*. The reader may want to form a hegemonic alliance with the author, or s/he may burn the text as blasphemy. How different generations respond to texts during changing regimes and versions of history-writing is a particularly relevant question. This basic idea of cross-generational bonding coincides in particular with the idea of colonial complicity, which will be accentuated in chapters 4, 6 and 7.

More generally, each chapter is a proof of my own ongoing difficulties with seamlessly incorporating the idea of the autobiographical pact, or *métissage*. The observations of the women's notions of class, in particular, are indicative of my own *preferred histories*. Therefore, I have considered it necessary to include aside the main text of analysis excerpts from my research diaries, which hopefully are more indicative of the thought process leading to the publication of this monograph. I call the excerpts the political scientist's field notes, from the journey of learning about global power relations through literature. Some field notes, however, witness not so much learning but rather unlearning, or clearing the clutter. For the writer in me, they have been the most powerful moments of discovery.

*A researcher imagining a discussion with her textual informant. She would like to interview her, and keeps on rehearsing the imagined encounter. They are both academics. The informant has published a highly literary autobiography in the form of a novel (that the researcher prefers to call "life-writing", and the American critics "memoirs") and a monograph on postcolonial literary theory. Their age gap is ca. twenty years; the informant is a Welsh-Pakistani in*

*exile in the United States, the researcher is a Finn. English is their shared medium. The researcher has tried to learn Urdu but without daily exposure to the language nothing happens. The informant has apparently not published in Urdu at all so this is not the major problem. Perhaps the informant's Urdu is turning, if not rusty, at least a bit archaic or broken after her exile of twenty-plus years.*

*The cultural translations have been the problem – a neverending circle – but also the greatest joy in the researcher's lonely project. It has taken her too many years to develop a reading strategy not too far gone from the Pakistani context, not too loaded with Western political philosophy (which was her major and point of departure years back). And she was haughtily metatheoretical. Then she took her time to think again.*

*To proceed with the help of her informants first and foremost, she needs a more tangible basis. When she can relate to the informants' memories in the body, when the texts feed her imagination and make her see the world in new eyes, something unique is happening – even momentarily. Otherwise she just refers to High Theory – fluently but somehow distantly.*

*The encounter is what matters, theory comes second. Of course, the researcher can never escape her Western education and North European politics of location, but she is willing to unlearn something. When she puts her best feminist learning – the kind of learning that crosses over – and her friendships with South Asians on line, she knows the analysis must start from skin, flesh and blood. These are the sites of memory, not dusty national archives.*

*After such imaginings, she starts reading with fingertips, imagining it as a textile woven of layers of memories of many generations of women. Home-spinning. Khadi worn intimately against the skin. The text, the textile, the skin expose and are exposed.*

(Research diary, Helsinki, December 2001.)

## 2.3

### Embodied voices

In this section, I will trace some theoretical references that have led me to think of political analysis at the skin level, the analysis of embodied memories and emotions, as a kind of textual elaboration of the materialist feminist ideas expressed above. If there is a single hypothesis to be defended in the present study, it is the very simple notion that emotions are a relevant phenomenon for the political scientist to understand. Here I am dealing with both expressions of emotions as a topic of research and the emotionally charged encounters between the researcher and the researched.

This embodied level of analysis and interaction requires from the researcher good listening skills, and political imagination to reach beyond silences. In my understanding, the process of "listening" to textual silences should not be strikingly different from the feminist anthropologist's role as a self-reflective "vulnerable observer" (Behar 1996). Condensed in one question, what I am dealing with here is how to approach other people's emotions, embodied voices and strategic silences as a feeling, involved person, whose hands are always deep in the mud of the research context.

#### *Emotional politics*

*The cries of "Allah-o-Akbar", "Islam Zindabad", "Namus-ai-paimbar Zindabad", "Dushman-ai-Islam Murdabad", rent the air, and as each slogan was raised and echoed by the thousands I felt a tingle of emotion pass through my whole body.*

(Ikramullah 1963/1998, 45,  
italics AH.)

*Like all children, I had taken my father for granted. Now that I had lost him, I felt an emptiness that could never be fulfilled. But I*

*did not weep, believing as a Muslim that tears pull a spirit earthward and won't let it be free.*

(Bhutto 1988, 16., italics AH)

*I need not feel grief, I can eat grief; that I need not bury my mother but instead can offer her into earth, for I am in Urdu now.*

(Suleri 1989, 177, italics AH.)

Emotional undertones. Islam, Urdu, belonging. Political rallies and graveyards. Peak time, prime time, decisive turning points in each writer's life. I keep returning to these key moments, believing that their narration has taught me something new about women and political agency. But how can I translate this intuitive knowledge into an academic discourse, without missing the exquisite light and shade of these emotional landscapes? Will my message carry through or will my voice break indeterminably? How to theorize on hope or grief?

In the first quote above, Begum Ikramullah narrates her participation in an important Muslim League political rally in Delhi before Pakistani independence, and the political tingle she feels is particularly caused by the excitement of imagining a Muslim nation. This is public memory intimately embodied, whereas Bhutto's and Suleri's expressions of grief at the deaths of Bhutto's father and Suleri's mother are personal losses. Elsewhere Bhutto writes about her father's death as a national loss, but there are many instances in the narrative where she stops writing as a party leader or citizen and becomes a daughter. Bhutto explains her "proper Muslim" cultural and spiritual behaviour at her father's grave; whereas Suleri does not return to Islam in her mourning as a scripture and faith but rather to her native language, Urdu, which for her still suits better as the language of mourning than English. There is more to each expression than just personal feeling: these bodies are historical bodies, negotiating their belonging to wider units. So how to bring the expressions of feeling to political analysis?

As early as in 1959, C. Wright Mills found the study of emotions from a historically grounded "biographical" perspective as one of the most promising challenges to social sciences. He encouraged researchers to take biographical accounts – case studies, life-writing, microhistories (although the two latter terms were not yet in use) seriously, because for him there were no purely "private" stories. He urged researchers to ask what institutions have influenced this particular biography, and what the social context of his/her expressions of fear, hatred, love and rage is. The kind of sociological imagination he was looking for was sensitive to historical changes in the expression of emotions and in conceptualising family relations – a kind of social science that would not marginalise important public issues in terms of "the psychiatric". In other words, he urged social scientists to further develop a historical sense of psychic events.

### *How societies remember*

Paul Connerton (1989, 72–79), in his study *How societies remember*, deals with the choreography of communal remembering, using the idea of embodiment to include performative utterances, authoritarian and non-authoritarian public postures, what is heard and seen in public commemorative gatherings. He writes about pasts sedimented in the body, and for the study of such embodied memories clearly seems to advocate a phenomenological, "hands-on" approach rather than a deconstructive approach that isolates texts from their immediate surroundings.

I am not convinced about the possibility of grasping how societies remember as collectives, apart from the level of an ethnographic study of certain nationalist or religious rituals. Connerton uses the Shia commemoration of the killing of Ali at Karbala during the month of Muharram as an example of "an incorporating practice". Muharram is also briefly mentioned by Benazir Bhutto (whose Shia Muslim mother took her to the commemoration events) but it does not become a



main theme or a privileged site of memory. Other mass events do convey a message of collective remembering in both Bhutto's and Ikram-ullah's texts. However, individual autobiographies cannot successfully portray mass behaviour, apart from glimpses, flashes and clues.

One Connerton's "point" which I, however, find particularly useful here is his critique of the division between incorporating and inscribing practices in Western philosophy, the separation of the body and the text, or rendering bodies as textual surfaces only analysable through linguistic/psychoanalytical devices. In other words, he remains sceptical of the semiotic turn when discussing bodily phenomena:

*When the defining feature of the human species was seen as language, the body was "readable" as a text or code, but the body is regarded as the arbitrary bearer of meanings: bodily practices are acknowledged, but in an etherealised form.*

(Connerton 1989, 101, emphasis AH)

It is against this kind of etherealization of the body that I would like to argue against. Or, rather, his examples from "extreme" situations such as genocide, mass migration, civil war, *coup d'état* or imprisonment argue against etherealization for me. In a situation of choice between the perhaps outdated question "how societies remember" and the more trendy "what becomes inscribed on the surface of the text through the body" I would choose the former. However, no instance has ever asked me to make that choice.

### *Embodied silences*

So far, I have tried to avoid psychohistorical perspectives, but without realising it myself, my questions on memory have never been merely questions about the writers' philosophical attitude to historical time, or nation-time. I am also interested in the texts' broader emotional

"landscapes" which manifest themselves in the interplay of amnesia and nostalgia. In addition to highlighting the obvious themes, it seems necessary to speculate on what the texts do not say, cannot say, or say metaphorically, allegorically or in parentheses.

This is where the subalternist idea of measuring silences steps in. Gayatri Spivak (1988, 286–7) uses the idea of silence-sensitive historiography with reference to Pierre Macherey (1978, 85–89) who claims that only literary texts can make us read the blind spots of "ideological" projects. There is the "real" that can never be known, but a literary text can expose the limits of ideology, the historical subjects' complicities and resistances.

For Macherey, literary texts are complete universes as such, not hiding unsolvable mysteries but rather gifts whose unraveling takes time. Spontaneous responses, therefore, usually fail to grasp a text's historical complexity: "*Loquacious with an obstinate silence, the work is not immediately accessible: it cannot say everything at once; its scattered discourse is its only means of uniting and gathering what it has to say.*" (Macherey 1978, 98) He calls attention to the play of history beyond the work's edges, the historical splits possessing the author. Becoming sensitive to historical silences is, then, a way of crossing over the idea of a "haunted" work to studying the ideological and material processes of haunting.

Kamala Visweswaran discusses the question of silence in the Indian nationalist context, by forging connections between shifting identities, temporality and silence. Through her interviews with elderly Gandhian women activists, she became convinced that agency is not reducible to speech. She attempts at theorizing "a kind of agency where resistance can be framed by silence: a refusal to speak (Visweswaran 1990, 202)." The researcher's task is to understand how women frame their speech, which silences are decisive, and what hints at general historical events can be self-referential.

The idea of measuring silences in ethnography seems more materially "grounded" than in a literary study, where the speaking/writing

body is not physically present in interaction. Nevertheless, in chapter 6, discussing the question of Bangladesh, I will attempt to approach the question of autobiographical silences. In many cases, I must contend to using emotional expressions as "trigger words", from which suggestive interpretations may arise. Without careful historical contextualisation, such imaginative readings remain very shaky indeed. There is no objective historical "truth" about women's agency *out there* to be discovered, but there are historical and political linkages between people and texts that make our readings meaningful. So what does it mean to historicize or politicize bodies, silences or expressions of emotion?

### *Affective economies*

Sara Ahmed (2002) studies emotions from a collective and political point of view, as something she articulates as "affective economies". She perceives emotions as exchange and as always socially constructed, not as individualist, insular events. Her study on the politics of fear encourages me to deepen my analysis of the expression of emotions, in particular grief, hope, euphoria, disenchantment and disappointment. The topical focusing on different discourses of emotion may bring me closer to the actual play of politics of memory than a linear, historical narrative. Unavoidably, the three women's reactions to Pakistani nationalisms are affective, as the Pakistani dramaturgy unfolds as assassinations, poisoning attempts, feudalism, corruption, postponement of the drafting of constitution, postponement of women's rights, postponement of elections, *ad nauseam*.

Ahmed ties her analysis of affective economies to nationalisms and asks which bodies become more privileged than others in nation-states. Her question is not far removed from Butler's (1993, 3) "exclusionary matrix" that divides subjects from the abjected outside, but she succeeds in bringing her discussion to a more pragmatic, phenomenological level. This is the point at which feminist theories of

embodiment become interesting and useful tools for political analysis. If some aspects of feminist theorising on "the body" have the tendency to become self-indulgent, Ahmed's turn towards nations as collective bodies is a refreshing and welcome one. This is also where the message of key postcolonial theorists such as Fanon concreticises: Ahmed convinces us that the intimate skin pore level of analysis is crucial not only in theories of sexuality but also in political analysis of historical processes.

### *Trauma, emergency, struggle*

The eras of military regimes in Pakistan can be compared with other countries' experiences in an analysis of authoritarianism. Alice Nelson's (2002) recent study on political bodies in Chilean literature during the Pinochet regime and its aftermath is a promising example of literary analysis that transcends the metaphorical/allegorical level, tying the books she reads into the everyday, material struggle for narrative power under dictatorship. Her understanding of literary history is a material and symbolic struggle for the ability to tell one's story and the story of one's community. The political bodies she searches in the chosen literature are literal and metaphorical markings of power: those of the disappeared, hungry, erotic, marginalised etc. The terms she uses of the Pinochet years are strikingly similar to the ideas I have come across about the Zia years in Pakistan. Apart from the special form of torture, disappearances, which was not a widespread phenomenon in Pakistan<sup>16</sup>, the basic concepts around which her readings revolve do sound familiar: collective bodies, violence, historical struggle, patriarchy, militarism, sexualized bodies, control, discipline,

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<sup>16</sup> Disappearances have not been an unknown form of political repression in Pakistan, but their occurrence has been minor if compared to South American dictatorships. All regimes, including the father and daughter Bhutto regimes have been involved in human rights violations in the form of "operation cleanups". (personal communication: SASIALIT e-mail forum, May 2003.)

execution, stigma, trauma, bodiless spirits of the dead.

Here I will ask again, as I did in the beginning of the study: how are political coups and other kinds of national "emergencies" experienced in the body? What kinds of affective economies do they stir in citizens at the everyday level? Into this I will add: what makes the narration of these experiences so powerful that people will read them cross-culturally? What is their pedagogy, and how can we discuss the narratives on a common agenda without losing the specificity of each cultural context?<sup>17</sup> I will elaborate on the transnational challenge in chapter 8, by which an attentive reader must have realized that the present study was not, after all, only about Pakistan.

### *Histories of sensual bodies*

Bodies are never fixed in positions of power, inasmuch as power is a shifting, contested and leaking constellation. The opposite turn from reading accounts of historical traumas in recent historiography has been to read bodies in motion in all aspects of the senses. Susan Leigh Foster uses the term "choreographing history" as an interdisciplinary challenge:

*...to grant that history is made by bodies, and then to acknowledge that all those bodies, in moving and in documenting their movements, in learning about past movement, continually conspire together and are conspired against. In the process of committing their actions to history, these past and present bodies transit to a mutually constructed semiosis.*

(Foster 1995, 3.)

The kind of history-writing that Foster is engaged in sets both the historian's body and the historical bodies in motion as a mutual

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<sup>17</sup> Questions inspired by Grewal and Kaplan (1994) and Amireh and Majaj (2000).

conspiracy, or a phenomenological discovery of the senses. The imaginative process of coming together from across centuries does not deny the role of fantasy, as history-as-construction is never scientifically true. The coming together also re-writes theory by making codes and conventions of historical representation as the encounter moves along. It is a dance in which the dancers' feet do not stick. (Foster 1995,3–21.)

Similarly, Hayden White (1995, 229–234) advocates the use of imagination in the mapping of historical bodies by invoking images, sounds, smell, touch and taste beyond mere words. If the Western medicine has been obsessed with the categorization of normal bodily functions, White claims that historical bodies, in this light, are always abnormal and monstrous, as signifiers of deviance from the ahistorical ideal body. Historical bodies leak dubious substances and become deformed as they age; they exist in particular time and space, with severe worldly constraints. Bodily drives are repressed or sublimated, the body may cause itself pain, or battle between opposing forces. What is historically interesting is always a violation from some predefined norm. An important question in this framework, then, is whose embodied history becomes told in the first place.<sup>18</sup>

### *The vulnerable observer meets modest witness*

If one is engaged in an analysis of affective responses of others, the self-reflective challenge is to become equally sensitive to one's own emotions while carrying out the project. Certainly, this basic notion of reciprocity emerges from everyday life in social sciences, from our interviews, situations of participatory observation, and also from

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<sup>18</sup> Interestingly, White's formulations of the bodies' struggle for narrative power coincides with Judith Butler's (1993) abovementioned ideas of "bodies that matter" and the matrix of intelligibility. White may have come to his analysis of embodiment via another kind of philosophical route, but ends up in similar questions.

readings of emotionally charged pieces of personal writing. It would be unfair to claim that the self-reflective impulse is a recent feminist finding. Instead, the feminist challenge during the past decades has been to question our practices of research writing by demanding that our reporting on other people's lives should contain the embodiment of the initial encounters. In other words, it has become paramount to make our silent emotional and ethical work while engaging in the lives of others transparent in our texts.

Ruth Behar (1996) advocates vulnerability as a key to understanding the researcher's emotional bonds with the research as a key to understanding cultures. Rather than hiding emotions as "lapses" from "mainstream" research documentation, Behar encourages researchers (in her context, anthropologists) to reveal their emotional involvement and commitment to the people on the "field". Her dilemma, after returning home from fieldwork with homeless flood victims in Colombia must be common to any academic enjoying government funding in a cold country:

*Lay down in the mud of Colombia. Put your arms around Onaira Sanchez. But when the grant money runs out or the summer vacation is over, please stand up, dust yourself off and write down what you saw and heard, relate it to something you've read by Marx, Weber, Gramsci or Geertz and you're on your way to doing anthropology.*

(Behar 1996, 5.)

Here Behar does not actually criticize the need to go home, but the controversial "dusting off" of embodied experience gathered in the intimate encounters with the researched. In opposition to a detached, generally theoretical framework, Behar asks her fellow feminist anthropologists to include in their work an element of pitiless self-reflection. All sentiments, even stories of a broken heart, can be included, but she advises this to be done with "tenderminded toughmindedness

(14).” It means that the inclusion of the personal narrative should be included when it is essential to the argument, but not for exposure for its own sake. Following Behar, I would like to ask whether it is possible to selectively tailor oneself into the research text/ile and continue contextualizing, historicizing and theorizing with perhaps more compassion than before.

The vulnerable observer is a fascinating figure that in my reading meets another “ideal type” of a feminist researcher, the modest witness, a favourite figuration in Donna Haraway’s (1998) political utopianism. The modest witness traces back to the days of the Royal Society of London as a role model for a scientist – an unmarked, self-invisible, disembodied male without “unruly” passions – a total antithesis of the medieval, self-obsessed heroic knight. Only gentlemen of a certain class background were granted with the position of the witness; women and men of lower classes would be treated as mere spectators. A “naked way of writing” was the new norm, and only gentlemen were considered to have the necessary honour and civility to tell the truth about science. Women were the “covered” people with dubious, disorderly associations and thus incapable of modesty. Witch hunts were still running in the Europe of the seventeenth century, which made wise men dissociate themselves from anything dealing with femininity in their texts. No research reports were to be polluted by the body: those considered to be embodied (ie. women, lower class European males and all non-Europeans) became objects of study and thus epistemologically invisible. This act of effacement led to a “culture of no culture” from which the research objects gendered, racialised bodies could be conveniently categorised and analysed.

In the figuration of the modest witness, Haraway re-vamps the term for her own purposes by asking: “how to queer the modest witness this time around so that s/he is constituted in the furnace of technoscientific practice as self-aware, accountable, anti-racist FemaleMan, one of the proliferating, twentieth-century children of the early modern *haec vir* and *hic mulier* (1997, 35.)” She further asks



the question who can give credible testimony to what and what kinds of bodies constitute valid knowledge. Modesty is not a problematic term for Haraway but the scientific norms of transparency and self-invisibility are. The "queered" modest witness knows how to get her hands dirty and her time-space is finite, not transcendent. Her way of knowing includes critical reflexivity that insist on locating precisely both the subject and object of knowledge-making. But what, then, constitutes modesty in Haraway's figuration? Is it possible to know modestly and in an embodied way at the same time? Do not bodies always demand full attention to themselves?

Haraway writes messily, all her limbs down in the mud of materialist practices and the perversions of the global capitalist economy. Her modest witness's preferred tone is irony. If the vulnerable observer makes her audiences weep with compassion for the researched, Haraway's modest witness sends us electronic signals down the spine. Both scholars' materialist roots are obvious but their ways of expressing their involvement with the world differ dramatically.

In the present study, both figurations have appeared to me as sources of inspiration during the writing process. Elements drawn from Behar's and Haraway's stimulatingly contradicting words will materialise as two types of editorial voices that will meet and interact throughout the research narrative. An understanding that the two figurations indeed are ideal types, tropes and metaphors is, however, necessary. A feminist needs her utopias and her subversive fairy tales, but then she must get back to work and make the best of the existing worlds on her desktop.

In a study on life-writing dealing with politicisation and finding a voice as subjects, one cannot take the tropes of modesty and vulnerability too far. The emergent voices may disappear altogether if the researcher is too hesitant about her intentions. Alongside vulnerability, we need courage, empowerment and engagement.

Engaging in a dialogue is to find oneself indeterminably in states-in-between, making questions to the other and expecting to receive

not only answers but also new questions. It is, then, more important to be explicit about one's intentions than about identity politics. What kinds of questions lead to mutual understanding, what kinds of question construct new types of knowledge, and what kinds of questions are appropriate in this particular cultural setting? Thinking about one's intentions is also a form of self-reflection. Reformulating Behar's "tenderminded toughmindedness", I have come to believe that sometimes, at least in the present context, a focus on intentions (questions of agency and interaction) rather than the researcher's sentiments and inner drives (questions of identity, the construction of "self") may save us from major epistemological crises.

In other words, a call for vulnerability or modesty may in the worst circumstances lead to a sense of powerlessness or self-annihilation in the research text. Here the previously discussed linguistic/textual turn will come for rescue: if our readings of the world are context-dependent and unique every time, would it not be wiser to invest more energy on the actual interaction between us, the researchers and the researched, than on microscopic "honesty" about ourselves? Are we not creators of new fictional worlds whenever we take up a new research topic? The in-between level is the level of cultural interpretation. It is a meeting place, a crossroads and a field of imaginary and real action.

If contrapuntal reading indicates tracking down points and counter-points, narratives and counter-narratives, looking at the present texts' possible cross-cultural affinities and points of convergence becomes a necessary exercise. In this chapter, before taking the readers to the actual memories of Pakistani nation-building, my purpose is to locate the texts in an international textual web, in the worlds of women's life-writing in the Muslim world and in South Asia. A comprehensive account is not even attempted, but I am content to provide some comparative literary "points" or an idea of possible, parallel worlds to the textual universe covered in this study.

I work through fragments, sketches and flashes, informed by self-chosen primary readings and studies made by others. The "dual affinities" pattern is drawn from the autobiographies themselves: looking at the three women's biographical details, their families' patterns of migration and references to both the histories of "English India" and of the arrival of Islam to South Asia, gives an impression of genuine multiculturalism, which resulted in a constant negotiation of cultural belonging, reconstruction of identity in the mesh of familial, regional, ethnic, religious, national pressures.

In studies of Muslim modernism as an intellectual movement, starting from mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, it is easy to notice parallel philosophical and political developments in the large Muslim countries of Egypt, Turkey, Iran and what was then colonial India (cf. Jayawardena 1986, Moaddel and Talattof 2002, Fischer and Abedi 1990, Dahlgren 1999). It has become commonplace to read texts from modernists (and also from conservative Islamists) across national lines in order to trace the pan-Islamic continuities.

One of the focal points of reform for the modernist male intellectuals was the position of women, as an argument for the need for educated mothers and intellectual companions. The modernists believed that Islam was compatible with Western-type of higher education that would eventually lead to economic development and intellectual "progress". One of the most obvious symbols of "backwardness" were women, visible in their invisibility. Although articulations for radical change in family structures were scarce, for Muslim male modernists it was no longer possible to justify the containment of women within the four walls of the house.

In British India of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, not all Muslims sought for a communal identity through religious affiliation. The historical emergence of "Muslim" political positions in the Empire was an uneven process, which eventually led to the mass movement for Pakistan in the 1940s (cf. Jalal 1983, 2000). Early Muslim women activists, for instance, often worked in secular women's organisations alongside with Hindu women, and sent their children to convent schools run by European nuns. Due to the pressures towards modernisation, the Muslim and Hindu middle classes' social life was becoming more mixed than ever. With "dual affinities" I refer to the identity work Pakistani women are still confronted with: there is no automatic choice between the articulation of South Asian and Islamic "belongings".

How the first generations of literate, educated women responded to the male modernists' and nationalists' visions of "new womanhood" is more interesting than close reading of the men's texts in the present context. The "new women" who emerged in the position to write autobiographies were often painfully conscious about the fragility and insecurity of the phenomenon of "firstness". Here one should be particularly attentive not to form automatic cross-cultural genealogies of feminist heroism, but also to look at the actual compromises women made to attain public roles, mapping out their often conflict-ridden contexts of speaking out as subjects.

### 3.1

## Egypt, Turkey and Iran

### Women's Islam

*Islam, as I got it from them, was gentle, generous, pacifist, inclusive, somewhat mystical – just as they themselves were. Mother's pacifism was entirely a piece with their sense of the religion. Being Muslim was about believing in a world in which life was meaningful and in which all events and happenings were permeated (although not transparently to us) with meaning. Religion was above all about inner things. The outwards signs of religiousness, such as prayer and fasting, might be signs of true religiousness but equally well might not. They were certainly not what was important about being a Muslim. What was important was how you conducted yourself and how you were in yourself and in your attitude toward others and in your heart.*

(Ahmed 1999, 121)

This is the luminous, mystical Islam, as the Egyptian-born scholar Leila Ahmed remembers it through the example of the women in her family during summer holidays in Alexandria. Women "figure out" Islam amongst themselves, feeling no need to consult anyone on the correctness of their practice. Their Islam is completely opposed to religious orders, any authority that could interfere in their direct access to God. They are not allowed to go to mosques. They rarely leave their houses. They listen to recitations of the Qur'an in family gatherings and bury chants in their hearts. If they are literate, they may read the Scripture themselves. However, it is the human voice, the life breathed onto the words that makes the message sacred.

Leila Ahmed builds her narrative around the poetry of Jalaluddin Rumi (1207–1273), the Persian Sufi mystic, whose song of the reed haunts her in its melancholy. She lives in the United States, teaches

Women's Studies in Religion at Harvard, her parents are dead and she only returns to Cairo for lecture trips. Behind her are tormenting years of the Nasser regime, which made her family's life difficult and almost halted her academic career. The aggressive brand of Arab nationalism that she encountered in her youth has displaced her politically, but she has no problems in admitting her nostalgia towards the special kind of Islam, her domestic religious subculture that she was brought up in.

*The Border Passage* is not only an autobiographical text, it is a carefully constructed academic defence of women as subjects in Islam, and the possibility of feminist interpretations of the religion. It speaks across Muslim countries, and in particular, the mystical dimension of the text brings it into contact with the three Pakistani texts studied here. Ahmed believes that the kind of Islam she encountered in her childhood is the most common "garden variety" of her religion throughout the Muslim world, practiced at homes and conceptualised as a moral universe of relational terms rather than as a legalistic, scriptural set of rules.

The pleasures in the company of women is what connects *The Border Passage* with the Pakistani context, particularly Ikramullah's and Suleri's narratives, most vividly. The other connecting dimension is the legacy of post/colonial education in the British style, its impact on the lifestyles of the urban middle classes. Political histories are never directly comparable, but Ahmed's memories of regimes, jailed intellectuals, intelligence operations and disappearances resonate with the present context well.<sup>1</sup>

Egypt's radical articulations of postcolonial resistance, most fiercely articulated by Nasser through the episode of the Suez crisis in 1956,

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<sup>1</sup> Nawal el Sa'adawi's contribution to Egyptian women's life-writing should also be acknowledged, and her *Memoirs from the Women's Prison* (1986) testifies the misogynist operations of Anwar Sadat's regime, and the cross-communal solidarity women expressed towards one another inside the prison gates.

were heard in the faraway Pakistan. In *The Border Passage*, Ahmed provides her readers insider views of the authoritarianism of that period. Nasser was one of the greatest postcolonial heroes of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, alongside Napoleon, Sukarno and Mao Tse Tung. Egypt was one of the model countries for "progressive" Muslim statesmen, a vanguard of an indigenous brand of socialism and development.

### *What to do with exemplary lives?*

Cairo's position as one of the intellectual centres of the Muslim world is also affirmed by Marilyn Booth (2001), who studies the modernist literary circles in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and the production of biographies of exemplary women's lives in modernist women's journals. The educational purpose of such tales of courageous and accomplished women was to provide role-models for the next generations. Booth studies the feminist motivations of such efforts, and links the particular type of life-writing to the histories of women's education and professional development in Egypt more generally.

The idea of "exemplary lives" is particularly interesting both in terms of feminist political strategies and the theories of life-writing. To publish hundreds of stories of "exemplary lives" for other women, and especially young girls, to share and learn from is a massive political project, which from today's perspective sounds rather demagogical. Yet its possible empowering effects cannot be denied. Booth studies the texts in their wide sociopolitical context, not in terms of their narrative structures, and succeeds in providing a comprehensive account of women as actors and ideologues of the Egyptian brand of Muslim modernism.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> For a concise and scholarly introduction to the Egyptian history of autobiographical writing, see Malti-Douglas (1988), in the foreword of her translation of the modernist writer Taha Husayn's autobiography *al-Ayyam*.

"Exemplary lives" seems to me a rather universal motive to legitimise a publication of either an autobiography or biography. One can find predecessors to this type of texts in the Muslim world in the biographies of the Prophet and his early followers, and in the later hagiographies of Sufi saints. The religious and spiritual auto/biographies of "exemplary lives" give to their readers, then, guidance to choose the right path, to reach the level of *adab* (proper conduct) that is required from them by Islam (cf. Dahlgren 2004). "Exemplary lives" is a top-down mode of life-writing, which emphasizes morality, righteousness and unselfish accomplishment. Such narratives are revealing of the prevailing norms and standards of the author's society, and make good material for a critical, deconstructive feminist reading, but at the same time, the very normativity is unchallenging in terms of literary analysis.

Historically, for Egyptian, Pakistani, and also Euroamerican women who ventured on paths less travelled, the pressures to lead "exemplary lives" were, however, real, lived intensely in the body. Past narratives on becoming "exemplary" may fatigue us, postmodern, disillusioned readers as such, but if we use our political imagination to reach behind the obvious, we might yet want to follow the text through. The "point" of reading life-writing by prominent, accomplished members of a society is not to become hegemonic allies of dominant powers nor to find from within the texts what was not there in the first place, but to imagine the interplay of complicity and resistance that went into the writing of the text, and reconstruct the circumstances under which the author was able to write in the first place.

The "point" of reading and analysing life-writing is to find something that strikes you, touches you or makes you better understand the world. I have come to believe that even normative accounts of "exemplary lives" can do this for us, if they manage to convince us at some level. But they must convince us: we must *at some level* "get along" with the author. If the narrative structure of such texts is con-



ventional, flat, unsurprising, and does not stimulate us as readers, we should not approach them from a narratological perspective. If the writer's vocabulary is neutral or full of banal clichés, we should not focus on its particular metaphors.

We should choose the method of approaching the text according to the mood that the text leaves us in. We can combine ways of reading, highlight the very points that strike us, move us, agitate us, and lead us to new places. Anything that leaves us cold, or bores us should be avoided. And if the text does not challenge us at any level, we should stop reading it immediately and find better things to do. A routine kind of analysis of "data", when thinking of texts about lived lives, is, in my understanding, not very inspiring.

The expectations of proper conduct are culturally specific, but at the same time, one can read the following sentence and empathize with its writer cross-culturally:

*I also felt that I was somehow on trial, that all eyes were on me, waiting to see if it were possible to combine a home and a career, and if I failed it would have an adverse effect on other women's chances of doing the same. I tried very hard not to fail.*

(Ikramullah 1963, 167.)

This is a sympathetic passage. A very simple one, in everyday language but fluent. It manages to condense the pressures towards leading "exemplary lives", and it has a feeling of intensity, commitment and hope. Basically, the woman writing the words could be your lady next door, in any country. She is not out there only for herself. She wants to leave a legacy, a testament for others. Who are the other women that she addresses? What kind of feminist agenda is behind such a sentence? What is success in her context, and what is failure?

A method of reading: always begin from the questions that raise your curiosity.

### *Selves in hiding*

Ayşe Durakbasa (1997) studies the autobiography of the Turkish nationalist Halide Edib Adivar (1884–1964), who belonged to the inner circle of Kemal Atatürk. She links her text particularly to the contracting pressures of “new womanhood” and nationalism of the time, and analyses Adivar’s crisis of subjecthood and distancing mechanisms in this original English text, which is split into first and third person narratives. Adivar wrote her autobiography in exile in England, thus providing a similar kind of transnational narrative as all three texts in the present study do.

Writing an autobiographical text in a second language raises questions about the writer’s intentions. It may be considered as an act of distancing from the culture one writes about, or a way of choosing one’s audience other than the most immediate context. It may be an international campaign for support, or a defence of one’s culture in front of a hostile world outside. It may be a compromise between different linguistic loyalties, or particularly in the case of English in South Asia, a consequence of one’s Western education. Like Adivar’s narrative on Turkey, the three present texts have been written, at least partly while residing in the West, in Britain or the United States. All writers’ level of English is proficient, and one of the writers is a native speaker.

Durakbasa finds in Adivar’s narrative perplexing moments of insecurity, or what she calls as “moments in hiding”. She is concerned about the author’s repressed inner self for the good of the nation and the rhetorical formulation of national motherhood. What bothers Durakbasa most is the temporalization of Adivar’s narrative: it seems to be fixed in the War of Independence as a kind of point of fulfilment and standstill. Also Adivar’s elitism and “exceptional woman syndrome” as a member of the urban, modernist Ottoman upper middle class becomes a point of critique in Durakbasa’s analysis.

The "exceptional woman syndrome" is by no means unfamiliar amongst Pakistani élites, in particular the political ones. It has, however, different shades. Ikramullah and Bhutto, both narrating their rise to political power and focusing on the suffering of their people under the threat of the coming Hindu *raj*, or a repressive Martial Law, are prone to articulate their successes as results of the circumstances, not so much as results of their own active striving. They articulate an awareness of their "firstness" in the world of politics, and fierce misunderstandings between them and patriarchal "uncles", but undermine their own ambition, skills and, in Ikramullah's case, even their own importance.

What Durakbasa articulates as a fully blown public voice is also heard in the present context. Turkish nationalism provides a fascinating, yet not seamless point of comparison for the present study. As David Willmer (1996, 585) points out, both Iranian and Turkish nationalisms had the cultural, geo-political and historical bases for a modern nation-state articulated to some extent before mass mobilisation. In colonial India, there was no existing state structures to which Muslims could lay claim, only the facts of colonialism and down-trodden minority status. Evidence to what this might have done to emerging feminist voices can be found in the autobiographies of the participants in the Pakistan Movement: imagining the nation often dominated other imaginings. The development of feminist thought independent of nationalist agendas was therefore slow.

Inspired by the Turkish example, the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century discourses of "new womanhood" and "mothers of the nation" seem to me notions worth comparing across the Muslim world, although this is not systematically done in the present study.

### *The price of going public*

The Iranian case of women's life-writing has been collaboratively studied by scholars Milani, Hanaway and Najmabadi at Harvard University (Najmabadi 1990). They insist on the extension and redefinition of the genre of autobiography in the Iranian context, finding autobiographical elements also in women's poetry and journalism. The cross-cutting question of all the articles is why auto/biographical writing has been so discouraged in Iranian literary culture, and what forms women writers have taken to hide the personal references. They are also critical of the Western notions of autobiography, suggesting that certain genres of writing may not be directly transportable.

Iranian public culture is still very prone to encouraging the wearing of masks, and in particular for the few women writers in recent 20<sup>th</sup> century history, such as Taj os-Saltaneh and Forugh Farrokhzad, who dared write about their lives, the consequences were dramatic. Marriages broke because of their writing, children were lost to their fathers, desperation led to suicide attempts, and people were talking about the price the women paid for living an independent life.

In the present Pakistani narratives, the turbulence women describe may be equally dramatic, but it is not caused by the women's significant others, but by political history. As Tehmina Durrani's (1993) text *My Feudal Lord* suggests, there are also writers in Pakistan who have experienced family hells, but I have not yet come across narratives in which a Pakistani woman becomes an outcaste *because of her writing*. What does this indicate? Are literate, educated women in Pakistan freer to express themselves than in Iran, or is it rather that Iranian women have broken out from oppressive silences in situations in which Pakistani women would not write in the first place? Are the masks worn in Pakistan different from or similar to the ones worn in Iran? How threatening was the public to "come out in" for nationalist Muslim women in colonial India before Partition, and how have conceptions of the public changed during Pakistan's independence?

One should also think of privacy, care and concern about the consequences of one's subversive words to the lives of others' as intrinsic values in some societies, and of the consequent resistance to impulses to publish autobiographies. The silencing factors can be tied to historical circumstances, a particular moment in time, but they can also be more generally cultural. In the Western cultures, where autobiographies are consumed as entertainment, and the shelf life of a celebrity's carefully marketed bestseller is perhaps shorter than her current marriage, one could revert the question and ask why autobiographies still interest people, and why one should produce more noise about "the self", the writing subject. What kinds of people publish their memoirs, and who would rather write anything else? What is "a marketable life"? What is the value of not speaking, not writing, not publishing one's intimate secrets? Is there more resistance to the idea of one's life as a product to be consumed by others in the Muslim world? What about the concepts of dignity, mercy, respect, grace? Is there a moral philosophy or ethics behind autobiographical silences? Most of my questions here are purely speculative. To some of these I hope to respond to, modestly, in the coming chapters.

The key problem of Iranian writers seems to be how to safely cross the public-private boundary. The scholars do not pose Islam as the definitive obstacle for women's self-expression, but rather argue within the set of Persian cultural values. This separation of Islam and local practices and values is, in my reading, a particularly fruitful one, when reading Pakistani women's texts. If the texts are not explicitly spiritual, it is not easy even for the native reader to determine which elements of it are "religious" or "cultural". The three narratives studied here argue relatively little from within an explicit framework of Islam, and the cultures they refer to are situational.

The Iranian scholars also try to place the "problem" of the lack of an autobiographical tradition into a global perspective by suggesting that it may not be a problem at all. Another relevant question they pose is whether autobiographical memory functions in the same way

in all cultures. They are on the lookout of the limits of autobiography as a Persian cultural form, and relativize its centrality in the study of non-Western literatures.<sup>3</sup>

What the Iranian case suggests, in particular, is to look for autobiographical elements in women's poetry and other forms of literary production, and also think of the oral forms of storytelling as relevant forms of transmission of life stories. Folktales and popular songs may be media into which contemporary stories are knit. The concept of cultural memory becomes, then, more important than the actual literary genre of autobiography.

The cross-cultural insights of Najmabadi et al. are perhaps the most useful ones in terms of my research design amongst the references from the Muslim world. I have not acquired a comprehensive answer to the role of life-writing in Pakistani literary culture as a whole (I have not come across such studies yet), but studying the Western-educated women's texts gives an indication of the genre's recent arrival and foreign influences. If Pakistan as a whole is a recent country, and the literacy figures are low, one can hardly expect to find an established *Pakistani* tradition of autobiographical writing. One has to look for the intersecting cultural influences of the Muslim world and the South Asian mosaic, and at the writing subjects' own multiple locations.

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<sup>3</sup> Persian cultural forms can sometimes also be North Indian Muslim cultural forms, due to the long cultural exchange between the areas in the era of the Mughal dynasties. Until 19C, Persian was considered as the most sophisticated language of poetry in India, and one must also remember the development of the Urdu language as a cultural hybrid between Hindi and Persian. It is not uncommon that Persian and Urdu literatures are studied and enjoyed together – they do share a common history that deserves more attention elsewhere.

## 3.2 South Asia

### *Court tales*

*The Beloved has placed a noose on my neck,  
And He pulls me wherever He wishes.*

Princess Jahanara (1614–1681),  
in Ernst (1999, 196–7)

The first available records of Muslim Indian women's life-writing can be found from the Mughal court, where princesses and court ladies were often literate and highly cultured. Two narratives which I have been able to locate are a high-ranking court lady Gulbadan Bano Begum Ahwal-e-Humayun's autobiographical text *Humayunnama* from the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century (Gulbadan 1972) , and Princess Jahanara's *The Confidant of Spirits* from 1640 (in Ernst 1999). The latter is relevant to the present context, because it contains a spiritual Sufi element. Sufism is an important undercurrent into which we will return during this journey.

Princess Jahanara was highly educated, and her special talents were in architecture and gardening. She and her brother Shikoh Dara were followers of the Chishti Sufi order, and made pilgrimages to the holy city of Ajmer in North India. The tombs of the saints in Ajmer were not, in those days, open to women, but Jahanara had a special license to enter them. She considered the tombs as a "corner of security", and performed ritual prayers on them on a regular basis. *Confidant of Spirits* is a combination of biography and autobiography: it contains *tazkiras* (biographies of Sufi saints) and autobiographical remarks on her personal engagement with Sufism. To underline her commitment, she calls herself *faqira*, a female discipline:

*This lowly one is a faqira who is in the reality of realities, by the blessing of the saving master, the revered lord Mu'in al-din Chishti, and from the external and internal attention of the real master, the revered Mulla Shah (may God lengthen his shadow and preserve him). Fictitious existence has gone, and that endless existence remains by itself.*

(Ernst 1999, 199.)

Carl Ernst finds in Jahanara's narration qualities of illumination and grace. What I find interesting in terms of the present study is her possibility to challenge the dominant gender order and achieve public, religious agency as a member of the Chishti order because of her royal status. Also here the shadow metaphor is used in a positive sense: "may God lengthen his shadow". The religious shadow dynasties are a less conspicuous but yet traceable element in the three texts studied here. In their tracing, however, I have been more economic than in the tracing of familial, ethnic or nationalist dynasties.

### Purdah narratives

*The bird was thrust behind the cage, the fish fell into the net.  
However, that was His will, one cannot question it.*

Rashundari Debi 1868  
(in Sarkar 1999, 152)

In the previous section, I briefly discussed a text, *Amar Jiban* (1868), by the Bengali housewife Rashundari Debi (b.1809), which Tanika Sarkar (1999) has translated into English and analysed in depth both from historical and literary perspectives. It is perhaps the first full-scale autobiography written in the Bengali language, and its universal discourse of Hindu mythology and spirituality puzzles readers who might expect a more "earthy" approach from a secluded,



uneducated housewife. Sarkar finds in the text surprisingly modern ingredients, considering that it was written by a woman who hardly ever left the four walls of her household. In a sense, Sarkar sees the text spiralling towards later women's activism, organisations and movements at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Bengali history of social reform becomes mapped in her analysis from an acute class and caste perspective.

Partha Chatterjee (1993, 116–57) places Debi's text on a continuum of women's autobiographical writing in Bengali, in which she was the pioneer of the older generation but which extended soon to cover the life narratives of the so-called "new women". Although Debi's narrative was the first of its kind, Bengali male literary critics have been reluctant to place it within the genre of autobiography (*ātmacarit*) but rather preferred to call it memoirs (*smrtikatha*). In a sense, then, Chatterjee's article and Sarkar's book on *Amar Jiban* are the first critical introductions to Bengali women's autobiographical writing, and thus landmark texts as such. In the South Asian textual universe, they are the only literary-critical scholarly presentations of women's life-writing I have come across so far. If compared to the wealth of analyses on life-writing emerging from the Muslim world west from Pakistan, the South Asian critical contribution (in English) remains thin indeed.

Sarkar speculates on the reasons why Rashundari Debi chose to write in a "disembodied" way and ties her narration into distant temporal landmarks instead of local, communal time. There is no definitive conclusion to be reached in her imaginary encounter with Debi's text, but one of the important points she raises is the need to tread with caution when re-thinking the times of women's seclusion. She tries to re-construct Rashundari Debi's situation, the reasons why her mind wandered from daily household matters towards the male bastion of "knowledge", and her motivations to become an autobiographer. This is her warning for contemporary feminist analysts of Indian, gender-segregated pasts:

*Here is a questioning of women's culture as a domain of happiness, creativity and self-making that feminist scholars tend to celebrate a little too unproblematically. When we find that women, consigned to such pleasures, turn to the forbidden fruit of "male" pursuits of knowledge, we need to be a little more wary of happily recreating sexual difference through such celebrations.*

(Sarkar 1999, 129–30)

The "possible worlds" of *purdah* are indeed one of the epistemological challenges in the present study. One of my tasks has been to contextualise Begum Ikramullah's *From Purdah to Parliament* to its "native" Indian historical continuum of what I call *purdah* narratives. The only productive way we can catch a glimpse of possible lives lived in *zenanas* is to read life-writing, fiction and political writings by women who were brought up in seclusion, and who either broke free from it completely in adulthood or became veiled literary and political subjects.

Considering Begum Ikramullah's Bengali ethnicity, one should acknowledge Bengali women's active role in questioning their own seclusion. One of the most vocal pioneers addressing the problem from the confines of her own house was Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain (1880–1932), the author of the feminist utopia *Sultana's Dream* (1905)<sup>4</sup>. At the time of writing her masterpiece Hossain was a dutiful *purdah*-observing housewife, who had become educated by her

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<sup>4</sup> *Sultana's Dream* is often mentioned as the first modern feminist utopia, in which women are portrayed as building a technologically advanced, pacifist haven. In 1915, Charlotte Perkins Gilman published *Herland*, in which similar themes rise to the fore, but both writers may have been unaware of each other's projects. In *Sultana's Dream* men are relegated to the *mardana* (men's rooms), which in the reverse logic is not the public sitting room but the domestic sphere. In *Herland*, men have died of extinction and women have developed their own method of reproduction. The power of *Sultana's Dream* lies in its universal message; Gilman is more contained in the analysis of the American male psyche.

brother in the confines of the family house, and become proficient in Urdu, Persian, Arabic and English. Her initial motivation to write *Sultana's Dream* was to prove her husband her proficiency in English and to pass the time in her confinement. The text was published in the Madras-based *Indian Ladies' Magazine*, and stirred the literate Indian public's emotions far beyond Bengal. The text itself is not autobiographical, but much of Rokeya's life has been later reconstructed by Indian and Bangladeshi feminist activists.

Rokeya Hossain was an early Muslim feminist icon, a champion for women's education and a political satirist, who never abandoned Islam or even seclusion, but had a fully blown public career dressed in *burqa*. She foresaw the possibility of a seclusion-free society in the future, but believed that a gradual process towards its achievement was more agreeable than a sudden rupture. Her pragmatism led to the establishment of indigenous high-quality girl schools in the Calcutta area, where the restrictions of *purdah* were taken into account, eg. in architectural design and transportation provision. She was brutally honest about the health risks of the practice, and promoted situational logic in its observation, which unfortunately was often lacking in her Calcutta surroundings. Her rationalist arguments were difficult to dismiss, although by her critics she was perceived as a rebel misled by Christian missionaries. But Rokeya Hossain could not accept literal woman-killing caused by absurd *purdah* restrictions of her society. Here is an example of her uncompromising honesty, a passage in which she testifies the death of a *begum* whose *burqa* got stuck in the railroad tracks in front of an approaching train:

*The Begum's body was smashed – her burqa torn. A whole stationful of men witnessed this horrible accident – yet none of them was permitted to assist her. Finally her mangled body was taken to a luggage shed. Her maid wailed piteously. After eleven hours of unspeakable agony she died. What a gruesome way to die!*

(Hossain 1988, 27)

In such extreme situations, one could state that lower class women had better chances to survive than the "noble" secluded ones. Her contemporary Bangladeshi translator and commentator Roushan Jahan (1988, 21) argues that the elite women's *pardah* was dependent on other women's *pardah*lessness, who were allowed greater mobility and visibility, and this paradox did not occupy the minds of social reformists of the time. When critique against *pardah* was raised, it went unacknowledged that the women who reformists wanted to liberate were the highest ranks of urban middle class Muslims and upper caste Hindus.

### *Rokeya's legacy in Bangladesh*

Bangladeshi women's recent history since the country's formation in 1971 is still under active reconstruction, due to the traumatic events of the country's liberation war from Pakistan and the continuing struggles over the meanings of community and nation-state. One of the country's most visible, bravest and also most controversial literary character is Taslima Nasrin, whose first novel *Lajja* (1994) led to the pronouncement of *fatwa* by the local religious elite and exile in Sweden and France. *Lajja* is a testimony of the hardships of the ever shrinking Hindu minority in a Muslim country that no longer desires secular legislation. The remnants of British colonialism and Pakistani militarism are strongly brought to the fore as reasons for the country's current chaos, but overall Nasrin's critique is directed towards the mixing of religion and politics.

Nasrin's voice resembles Rokeya Hossain's in its passion and call for human reason, but unlike Hossain who argued firmly from within the Bengali Muslim community, Nasrin positions herself firmly outside religious affiliations as a sceptical rationalist. Cultural Muslimhood is not something that interests her, but she rather defends Bengal's common history with Hindus and the linguistic and cultural difference from the rest of South Asia's Muslim populations.

During her years in exile, her writing has turned autobiographical. The first part of her autobiographical series is called *Meyebela. My Bengali Girlhood* (2002). It is typical of Nasrin's feminism that she invents the term "girlhood" herself in the Bengali language because no such term exists in it (boyhood does). The narrative works through a series of repressions and denials, and argues for the end of women's second class citizenship through the linguistic invention of experience that was not possible to be articulated before.

In Europe and North America, Taslima Nasrin has become an icon and a "case" of a victim of Muslim fundamentalism, and it is her media image and her writing skills that bother her South Asian critics more than the actual content of her texts. Taslima Nasrin has been made the spokeswoman for the wrongs performed against women by Muslim fundamentalists at large, but the iconic treatment leaves no space for other, perhaps more subtle and literary voices that would do more justice to the complexity of Bengali culture (cf. Ghosh 2000).

I am mostly interested in Nasrin's texts as acts of writing back to Pakistan, the country in which she was born in 1963. Her literary tone is angrier and more agitational than any of the West Pakistani authors I have come across with. It is a voice from the other side of the present voice space, a kind of response to the historical silences Pakistani women only recently have begun to unravel about their own memories of the events of 1971 (cf. ch 6). On the Bangladeshi side, women's memories of the events have become the interest of feminist activists and historians only during the past decade, and the English language publications have focused on oral history, not on literary memoirs (cf. Rosario 1997.)

### *Religious narratives*

Apart from the Sufi *tazkiras* mentioned above, pilgrimage narratives are an important form of life-writing in Muslim South Asia, combining travel writing, spiritual guidance and autobiographical elements.

Barbara Metcalf (1993) studies the phenomenon through the "case" of the Pakistani male intellectual Mumtaz Mufti, who wrote his Meccan *hajj* narrative, *Labbaik*<sup>5</sup> as a series in an Urdu journal in the mid-1960s. Mufti's "case" is not particularly relevant to the three women's texts as such, but Metcalf's analysis of the wider phenomenon of religious life-writing provides some points of comparison worth considering.

Metcalf uncovers the Urdu term of autobiography, *ap biti*, literally "what happened to oneself", and compares it to the Western notions of introspection and individual agency as qualities of life-writing. She links *ap biti* to the wider Islamic autobiographical context, where the key idea seems to be that events do not constitute character, and thus chronology of life's key events is secondary to the spiritual journey. This corresponds to a more general Muslim model of human behaviour: that the subject is not seen as the shaper of events, but rather responds to events happening to him or her. Thus the question whether agency rests with the individual or whether it is predetermined by higher powers is an important cross-cultural notion, which also often divides "traditional" religious narratives and their modernist reinterpretations within the Muslim world.

Benazir Bhutto reflects on her *'umra* to Mecca in *The Daughter of the East*, and overall, Islamic symbols and sayings are a more steady part of her narrative than in Ikramullah's and Suleri's texts. However, in terms of thematics, she concentrates fully on secular, political events that shadowed her childhood and young adulthood, and does not deepen her Islamic references into spiritual "inner journeys". What brings the notion of *ap biti* closer to her text than the two others' is the fact that it does not contain many ruptures and active leavetakings of previously upheld "truths", historical, political or familial. Her "shadows of doubt", if there are any, are difficult to read even between the lines.

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<sup>5</sup> The meaning of *Labbaik* is "I am ready to obey your orders, o Allah".

## *A voice from the National Congress*

Out of all women's autobiographies produced during the Indian nationalist movement, for the present purposes, I have chosen to focus on one text, Manmohini Zutshi Saghal's (b. 1909) narrative *An Indian Freedom Fighter Recalls Her Life* (1994). This text offers a counter-narrative to Begum Ikramullah's *From Purdah to Parliament* from the National Congress supporter's point of view. Saghal belonged to the Nehru family, and notifies the "family legacy", which almost compelled her to become politically active. Her account of her cousin Jawaharlal Nehru's rise as a Congress leader is very similar to what we will soon hear of Ikramullah's close relationship to her cousin Shaheed Suhrawardy. Both women write of a male "significant other" who is a peer, not a father nor a husband, but *bhai*, brother/cousin, with whom one has a special bond.

I have found Saghal's text most enlightening in the questions of women's education in colonial India and the special cosmopolitanism of the city of Lahore, which she dearly remembers. Saghal was the first female to study history at The Government College for Men in Lahore in 1928, and soon became involved in nationalist politics. Here she narrates her first imprisonment in 1930, a triumphant moment:

*At last the formalities were complete and we were ushered into the jail. What celebrations there were then! We were treated as heroines coming home. Everyone rejoiced that there had been so many arrests in one day, although we did not yet know that thirty-five young men had been arrested. That sixteen women had been arrested from sleepy Lahore was a great thing! The movement would certainly continue.*

(Saghal 1994, 73–4.)

The celebratory tone of Saghal's prison memories stands in sharp contrast with Benazir Bhutto's dramatic memories of solitary confinement. The only thing that unites the two texts is the colonial continu-

um of prison cell classifications: Pakistani prisons continued using the colonial rankings A, B and C for their inmates, and like Saghal, also Benazir was at least officially treated as an A class prisoner.

Saghal's memories from Lahore also "foreground" Sara Suleri's narration on schooling. The Government College for Men became The University of Punjab in 1947, and both Sara's and her mother's lives were tangled with the institution. Saghal pays attention to the colonial education system's racism and sexism, and remembers how she almost got expelled many times over during her years of activism.

The intersection between class and caste is interesting here. Amongst the progressive radicals of the 1940s, the most backward signifier in use was caste, and thus also Hindu women activists preferred to use the modern vocabulary of class when writing about socioeconomic and cultural differences. In Saghal's narration, class as a status marker based on wealth and education becomes a focal point in similar ways as in the Pakistani Muslim narratives. Not unlike Ikramullah, she also characterises herself as a selfless "social worker", who devotes her energies to the common good. Saghal's political career went through crises, she never became elected to the Indian Parliament, and this is why her voice remains more at the "grassroots" level of resistance than the two politicians' voices studied here.

Both Hindu and Muslim women of "enlightened" families dressed in *khadi* (homespun cotton) in the 1920s. Textiles unified women across the communal divide, brought them to public bonfires of foreign cloth, which also worked as great publicity stunts. Saghal's activist mother forbid even the use of ribbons in her daughters' hair. I cannot help myself from joining in the nostalgia many Indians express towards Lahore of the pre-Partition days, when imagining the following scene of Saghal's mother in 1917:

*In the evenings she bicycled to her classes. No other Indian lady of her status in Lahore had the courage to do so. The only concession*



*she made to society's rules was to have her own servant running behind her bicycle so that in case of accident she would not have to ask for help from a stranger; her servant would be there to help her. Fortunately for all concerned, such an occasion never arose.*

(Saghal 1994, 11.)

Saghal's comic memories tell something about changes in women's mobility and the activities that are considered "proper" for a woman to do. The change has taken place gradually, not necessarily yet after the formation of Pakistan but in the aftermath of Zia ul-Haq's 1977 coup. In the new millennium, Lahori women do not ride bikes, not alone nor with the assistance of their servants.

### *Literary autobiography as skin memory*

Meena Alexander, in her autobiographical collection of postcolonial literary essays, *The Shock of Arrival* (1996), studies her scars of coming into English, the bruises and nervous outbursts of her writing in a language that became hers through her family's multiple diasporas and postcolonial education in well-established institutions on three continents. The intellectual, literary quality of Alexander's essays is very close to the language used by Sara Suleri in *Meatless Days*, although Suleri's narration contains less academic interventions in the form of explicit postcolonial theorizing than Alexander's. Suleri's is the story with no literary theoretical explanations (only "imaginary footnotes" that a reader well immersed in postcolonial literary theory may point out); Alexander willingly uses theory also as a tool for self-representation.

Alexander belongs to a prominent, upper middle class Syrian Christian family from Kerala, but her notions of the body as the site of writing in the midst of state-level violence are very similar to Sara Suleri's analysis of what happened to her in Muslim Pakistan. In other words, Christianity and Islam do not seem relevant "differences" when

reading Suleri and Alexander together. What brings the two texts together is the women's acute awareness of the body as the most immediate site of political resistance, and this seems to be a transnational, or in the South Asian context, an inter-communal feminist "point" of solidarity. Both texts utilise the element of touch, and indeed, all the senses, in order to bring "home" political interventions to nationalist history-writing, subverting sterile public-private splits, attempting to create "intimate languages that can also work in the public sphere (Alexander 1996,3)". Alexander believes that these disturbing sites of memory should be etched into convulsive beauty: the transformative power of art lies in its "plunging headfirst into the destructive element" (163).

I am particularly indebted to Alexander in the design of chapter 7, *Homespun Subjects*. Her usage of the textile metaphor in the context of the social, political and historical was once a novelty to me, and I have returned to her ideas freely throughout my analysis. She considers textiles as symbols of "national" and "communal" belonging but also as potential sites of subversion, as materials that can be rubbed against, ruffled, and elaborately distressed. In the diasporic context, it can also mean an affirmation of identity through clothes. Here she encounters a young Indian student in the United States, who approaches her, disturbed by the fact that her own mother was not allowed to wear a sari at work:

*I wanted to draw off the six yards of silk I had draped over my body, wheaten-coloured silk, a gift from my mother in India. I wanted to show the young woman the gleaming length of the sari, then let the fabric flutter out of the window, as a banner might, signifying some hidden, transient joy passersby could only guess at. Suddenly the snow seemed ever so close, beautiful, blinding. And I wondered what it would be like to walk through the snow, all borders erased, skin tingling, eyes filled with blue skies of Somerville.*

(Alexander 1996, 70.)

In the coming analysis, we will look at what happened when saris became perceived as signifiers of difference in the postcolonial nation-state of Pakistan.

To sum up this eclectic journey to the texts' dual affinities, I must, once again, emphasize my own power and agency in constructing a virtual, intertextual reality. I am only beginning to discover the traditions of life-writing in the Muslim world and South Asia, and cannot at this point do more than refer to secondary sources and a small collection of texts I have personally enjoyed and found relevant. What this journey has taught me, in particular, is the rubberband-like quality of our notions of what constitutes life-writing, and the "artificial" division between auto/biography, political writing and fiction.



## VIGNETTE ONE

### At the Fair Trade Junction

*The Regale cinema junction on Mall Road at sunset. Testosterone-filled movie posters, flower-sellers, steamy tea stalls everywhere. Also behind me the somewhat displaced European-style Karim Buksh mini-department store selling overpriced jarred Ragù tomato sauce and matron-like handbags. Horns, the whistles of the traffic wardens, the blare of political agitation from the nearby fundo mosque. A competition between secular and religious, indigenous and Westernised sounds, finally all intertwining into this hazy din in my head.*

*Here I am always alone: I hear more than in the company of others but also the sounds become so much more blurred. Usually others distinguish the sounds for me even without my asking. Here no "listen to this" or "look here". This is the only place in the city where I have felt something like existential pain. Pain and pleasure intertwine. It is here that I come to listen to my own freedom to come and go as I please. It is only here that no-one tells me what to look for, what to be aware of, beware of, whom to speak to, and whom to avoid.*

*Lahore understood in fragments: the fun-loving, relaxed, flirtatious Lahore, often dubbed as Lollywood, and the more secretive jihadi Lahore, the country's largest recruitment base of the underground training camps. Kashmir and Afghanistan here and now. Accompanied by the women of the movie posters, these busty Amazons carrying Kalashnikovs, and the shapeless burqa babes.*

*I seem to always end up at this junction. Trying to catch a rickshaw home before sunset. I have become a pro at bargaining with the rickshawallahs: pachas rupees is one of the figures I can pronounce clearly enough. I've been around long enough to know that no rickshaw trip within the city area during daylight can cost more than fifty rupees. Fifty is my special fair trade price: I can easily afford it and it makes both parties happy. If any rickshawallah tries to ask more, I simply go to the next one in the line. I do not mind paying slightly more than the locals, after all this personal service costs a fourth of my bus ride in Helsinki. But I refuse to become ripped off.*

*Oh Regale. The car honks and screeching crows and rose petals and beggars, the worn-out acryl sweaters and meticulously embroidered wedding sari fabrics, all my enthusiasms and irritations.*

*I am always standing here in the late afternoon in the pink smoggy sunset. I breathe pollution through my navy dupatta and forget everything else. Ecstatic about the perfection of the moment and my lack of direction. Tomorrow I could be anywhere. No-one here tries to tie me anywhere (apart from a few paper-marriage candidates and potential business partners). The Regale moment is mine, all mine. I know something new is beginning which I cannot yet imagine. I am steering towards my temporary home on Jail Road opposite Services hospital, without an idea where my thoughts are heading.*

*On the busy Mall Road, the motorcycles loaded with girlfriends, sisters, wives or children always bypass the slower, coughing rickshaws. Sometimes mothers breastfeed babies while riding. No helmets are in sight. Whether dressed in their cloaks of respectability or just jeans underneath the flowing kameez shirts, all women are gracefully perched sideways. Nothing ever gets stuck at the motorcycle parts. I admire their absent-minded relaxation in this noisy chaos of peak time pendling.*

*I have tried the woman's part once, and was too terrified to sit like a lady. I mounted the motorcycle like a sheriff and gave my friend an unthinkable tight body hug. Spreading my legs and hugging a man in public. Offense after offense after offense. I cannot even mount the rickshaw as women should. I tuck myself in through the plastic flip-flap door like a genderless Northern Sea whale. And still I become an object of desire. I can afford many, many rickshaw rides. My genderlessness is a formation of power. On one hand I am culturally semi-literate and clumsy; on the other hand a horrifying sex object based on my assumed status and wealth. A madam sahib. But am I a woman? No, I think that category evades me.*

*As if I were worried about the crumbling of my femininity. As if. I have been paid to immerse myself in this culture, and to determine solidarity prices for rickshaw rides, and find brilliant women with whom to talk about political history. Who cares about the rest? The Regale moment: autistic, androgynous and all mine.*

## 4 COURTYARD EMPIRES

*I left my parents,  
And attached my hem to yours  
Have mercy on my longing  
Come into my courtyard!*

Waris Shah (in Schimmel 1997, 126)

In the Northern Indian and Pakistani aesthetics, inner courtyards are one of the most spellbinding spaces, devoted to the play of light and shadows during the course of the day. In mosques and private houses, one can spend hours examining the mystical qualities of light condensed in these walled spaces. For a traveller, an anthropologist and a student of literature alike, one of the first tasks when arriving to the country is to penetrate the wall. What happens in the inner courtyards is often more interesting and relevant for grasping a sense of society than the more commonly recorded, touristic "bazaar noise".

This chapter is devoted to domestic politics in courtyards and verandahs, to the arrival of "the sun of the world" into the private sphere, and to the negotiations between imperial influences and nationalist agendas during the last decades of the British Empire in undivided India and the immediate aftermath of the Partition in 1947. Thinking of women as autobiographers and political subjects in this historical conjuncture, it is necessary to pay attention to the institution of *purdah* (the spatial seclusion of women from the public sphere, or unrelated men) and the discourses on women's education related to the modernist Muslim ideal of "progress".

Another important question that courtyard empires provoke is the intersection of gender and class interests in late colonial India and Pakistan. The sunny courtyards of *havelis* (classical North Indian family houses) or more modern family compounds are essentially working places, sites in which women and men of different class backgrounds meet and interact. To study these interactions at the level of literary production, one is of course tied to the literate, educated authors' versions of courtyard politics. In my reading, the key class question is how domestic class relations are related to the outside world, which often boils down to the question how autobiographers relate to their servants in their narratives. In this chapter, I will dramatise my own "Western-prejudiced" encounter with one of the texts, as an example of the kinds of cultural clashes a Western reader may become involved in when approaching elite Pakistani women's writing. The preliminary attempts at class analysis will continue in forthcoming chapters.

In the Indian subcontinent, memories of historical empires as "shadow dynasties" are by no means restricted to the arrival and departure of the British. In the Indian Muslim cultural context, the Mughal Empire and the genealogies of the Arab merchants who first arrived in the coast of Sindh are important components of identity politics. Articulations of the Muslim *umma* have drawn inspiration from Sufism, the "lost glories" of Baghdad and al-Andalus, and the Turkish Caliphate.<sup>1</sup> In other words, in the literature of Indian Muslims, one can often find yearnings towards bygone Muslim empires and distant

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<sup>1</sup> One of the most inspiring analyses of the "long memory" is Akbar S. Ahmad's (1997, xvii–xviii) analysis of Mohammed Ali Jinnah's historical role as another Saladin, early saviour of the Muslim nation. Ahmed also compares the personalities of Bhutto and Zia to those of Dara Shikoh and Aurangzeb. Dara Shikoh was a Sufi disciple in the Mughal court whose political power was denied him; Aurangzeb represented the orthodox Sunni Muslim for whom Sufism was a form of blasphemy. Although such historical "comparisons" may beg question strictly academically, his writing is much telling of today's Pakistani political culture. It is possible to hear similar comparisons live in Lahore every day.



lands. Memory is not contained to one's place of birth, region or nation – its site is as wide as *Dar-al-Islam*.<sup>2</sup>

I will try to provide glimpses to the memories of the other empires than the British one, yet in the narratives of the Partition and Pakistan's birth as a nation-state, one cannot escape the primary contestation with the British imperial legacy. The sense of haunting one gets when reading the present texts or walking the streets of Lahore is caused by the overwhelming remnants of the British presence rather than by the more distant reminders of the Mughal empire. In this chapter, negotiations with the British Empire form a two-way traffic: on one hand, there is the colonial Indian's desire to achieve superior British education and meet the Queen and on the other, there is an anti-imperialist Welsh woman who falls in love with an Indian man on the last metres of the *raj* and follows him to Pakistan to become a citizen of the newly founded state. If the first narrative forms the argument "from *pardah* to parliament", the second could be dubbed as "the rebellious *memsahib* goes native".

## 4.1

### Liberated hands

#### Purdah politics

*Purdah* is originally a Persian word for "curtain", and became used particularly in the Indian Muslim world to indicate the spatial and symbolic separation of women and men into two spheres, the *zenana* (women's space) and the *mardana* (men's space). It is first and foremost a mental notion of the organisation of society, and varieties in

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<sup>2</sup> On the gendered zones of belief and unbelief (*dar al-Islam* and *dar ul-harb*) in transnational Islam, see Malti-Douglas 2001.

its observance are wide, as are the interpretations about its meaning. It can be compared to harems in the other parts of the Muslim world, but also its fully indigenous and locally variable features should be taken into account. (Papanek 1982, Minault 1982, Khan 1999.)

*Purdah* is a class-based notion, and is linked with the idea of upward mobility. In today's Pakistan, apart from the province of NWFP, *purdah*-observing women are mostly from the urban lower middle class, for whom secluded women are a marker of wealth. These women mostly leave their houses dressed in *burqas*. In today's context, when the Afghani women's *burqas* are shown in the media as signs of repression, one should not forget that the invention of *burqa* was once a way towards liberation from *zenanas*, promising the extension of personal space. *Burqa* was also an expensive item of clothing only wealthier women could afford. It could not be worn while working on fields, and thus it even could become an object of envy.

For Muslims, the legitimization of *purdah* is found in the Qur'anic reference to the falling of the curtain on Medina. In many parts of India, seclusion of women was widely practiced also amongst higher caste Hindus, especially Brahmins, and dates back to times before the arrival of Islam into India. In Northern India (pre-Islamic practices) seclusion was called *gosha* (corner) in Maharashtra and Gujarat, *ghungat* (covering of face) in Madhya Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh and *olha* (hiding) in Uttar Pradesh (Vatuk 1982, 58). In Kerala, certain subgroups of Brahmins called their women *anterjanams* (those who live inside), and the particular device these women used for covering themselves when leaving the house was a large umbrella (Anterjanam 1998, xiii, 140). Muslims and Hindus had different rules as to from whom women should seclude themselves, but the two systems have on many areas mutually affected one another.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Similarly, Fedwa el Guindi (1999) analyses the use of veils in pre-Islamic times in the Mediterranean and concludes that a lot of the Muslim veiling practices were in fact inherited from early Christians. The more the cross-communal traffic of

Modesty and shame are the two cultural notions most adamantly linked to the Muslim version of *purdah* by Western anthropologists, perhaps too vigorously. Based on my own readings, I find other key concepts that characterize *purdah*, eg. the notion of protection and continuity of cultural tradition. It is the home that is protected and sheltered from the corrupt influences of the outside world, and women are considered its most precious items, transmitters of values to the children *and* signifiers of family honour (*izzat*) (Papanek 1982). The meaning of the outside world and worldly merits is secondary to the inner world of the household, in which lives are lived and the values of the community taught to the next generation. In a sense, then, one can perceive the home as a sacred cosmological order, and the secluded women's quarters, the *zenanas*, as the heart of family life.

To think of life in *zenanas* as mere shadow existence of that of the world outside is a die-hard colonial feminist theme. A common observance in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century by Western women visitors to *zenanas* was that the women were in poor health and cared little about the aesthetics of their surroundings. The rooms were reported to be crowded, swarming with children, and the hierarchies between women were said to cause an edgy atmosphere. The most notorious commentary on *zenana* life (and the "vices" of Indian society in general) came from an American woman, Katherine Mayo, whose publication *Mother India* (1927) raised furious defences amongst Indian nationalists, both men and women for decades to come. A more sympathetic but yet Eurocentric response about *zenana* life came from Frieda Hauswirth (1932, 93–95), who was particularly concerned about the health and lack of cultural stimulation amongst *purdahnashins*. She found most women's quarters joyless, untidy and lacking of the cultural objects that she associated with Muslim civilisation, and asked:

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ideas and practices related to the body are studied historically, the more difficult it becomes to differentiate "religious" practices from cultural ones.

*"how could women have retained that sense of beauty which certainly had been keenly alive in former ages?"*

Another, more contemporary Utopian feminist response would be to reconceptualise the past worlds of *pardah* as special women's spaces and havens from patriarchy. This is, in my reading, as dangerous as the colonial feminist stance, and equally unacceptable, except perhaps at the level of personal fantasy. Both stances deny the ambiguity, contradictions and local variations in the historical practices of *pardah*, and are not by any means helpful in analysing the existence of *pardah* as a mode of social organisation and mentality in South Asia today.

The only way we can relate to the past worlds of *zenanas* is to study their representations in literature and arts, not as "reliable" data but as unique texts and images. It is not the actual descriptions of *pardah* conditions that are relevant but the expressive force of the voices reflecting on the phenomenon. We can find accounts from women who stepped out of *pardah*, and a handful of texts by women who had the means to write from inside the *zenanas*. We can study, for instance, miniature paintings and cultural objects left behind from past *zenanas*, but we cannot re-create a comprehensive historical narrative of "what life was like" in Indian Muslim women's quarters. Such a reconstruction would lead to a theme park virtual world, which South Asians are fortunately intelligent enough to resist.<sup>4</sup>

During the colonial contact between the British and Indians, *pardah* became a politicized issue. The first critics of *pardah* were Christian missionaries, who considered the practice dehumanising. Their first attempts to interfere in the practice were, however, rather moderate: they established *zenana* missions, whose purpose was to provide homeschooling for those families who wanted to educate their *pur-*

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<sup>4</sup> Ziauddin Sardar (1998, 85–122) criticizes sharply postmodern "infotainment" and "edutainment" on non-Western histories as a form of cybercolonialism. His analysis of the Disney department of history curiously remind me of what may not have yet happened in South Asia, not at least on such a large commercial scale.

*dah*-observing daughters. For instance, in the province of Punjab, this "evangelical entente" began in 1839 and was soon followed by *zenana* schools. It was recognised, then, that *purdah* and women's education were not self-disclosing phenomena, but that women could become "wise mothers" and literate subjects even within the four walls of the family house. (Maskiell 1984, Saiyid 1998, Talbot 2000, 96–97.)

During the peak time of British imperialism in India (from 1858 onwards), "the woman question" was a rhetorical justification for the civilising mission. Amongst the "detrimental practices" of Indians, *purdah* only graded third after *sati* and child marriages. The fact of *purdah* as gendered separate spheres was an institutional matter organising community life, and the disturbing aspect of it for the colonial mind was not its specific vices, but the very fact of the high walls and closed gates. The colonial imagination created fantasmagoric visions of what happened inside those walls; at the same time, the rulers were essentially unwelcome outsiders to this complexly organised society.<sup>5</sup>

Due to the pressures caused by missionaries and colonial administrators, the educated Muslim men were virtually forced to express their views about the condition of their women in the *zenanas*. Muslim modernism grew out of the pressures to accommodate Islam to the demands of colonial, increasingly Westernised society, in order to guarantee the upper classes' entry into universities and the job market. If Muslims were to "catch up" with Hindus in the race for money and power, there was no way of maintaining all the restrictions of tradition, of which *purdah* was perhaps the most pervasive element. Notions of family life and marriage were slowly changing, and the modernists' idea of educated mothers and wives as informed companions was becoming popular amongst the urban middle class and élite – the very groups that once were most strictly *purdah*-observing.

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<sup>5</sup> For most vivid descriptions of the desire of the Orientalist gaze, see Said (1978), Kabbani (1986) and Alloula (1986).

### *Aligarh vs. Deobandi: the battle on Muslim women's education*

One should, however, remember in this context that the battles for women's higher education and citizenship had only just begun in Europe, and that developments in India in terms of women's rights were not only caused by the need to please the imperialists. The motives for questioning the *status quo* of gender relations were complex, and gradually the literate, educated women themselves took the initiative to protest against institutions that they felt confined them and suffocated their intellectual potential.

It is striking to observe how rapidly sociopolitical changes in gender relations occurred in colonial India, in particular in terms of women's education. The numbers of educated women remained modest in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the number of literate Muslim women was everywhere lower than that of Hindu women.<sup>6</sup> Yet the handful of women who became literate often went further in their studies than their European sisters. Indian women gained access to universities earlier than British women, first as private students, then separately taught in women's colleges. In colonial India, the educated native woman was not considered to be as big a threat to the *status quo* as her British counterpart. Long before Virginia Woolf (1928) wrote about her denied entry to the greens of Oxford, many Indian women were pursuing higher degrees and working in academic professions, particularly in the field of medicine. (cf. Sarkar 1999, 106–7)

One of the important "points" that Muslim modernists raised in the debates on *pardah* was the distinction between custom and the teachings of Islam. For male reformers, such as Nazir Ahmed and Rashid ul-Khairi, the notion of *pardah* was flexible and did not impose rigid seclusion. Ul-Khairi made a special conceptual distinction between customary and Muslim *pardah* (*rawaji pardah* and *shari pardah*). (Ali 2000, 8–10) The reformers were looking for an articulation of women's rights that would not contradict Islamic teachings on gen-

der relations. The first argument for women's education, then, became Islam's fundamental idea of the love of knowledge.

The Muslim modernists were often linked to the intellectual centre of Aligarh, which was founded by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan with the mission to provide modern education for Muslim males to compete economically and politically with the Hindu majority. The Aligarh school was pragmatic in its goals, emphasizing the need to study English and modern sciences. The college that later became a university also provided education in Arabic, Persian and Qur'anic studies, but the young students were primarily trained to become eligible for foreign universities for higher education.

Gail Minault (1994, 119–20) finds in the Aligarh reformists' texts a discourse of inferiority, not far removed from the imperialist discourses on Indian cultures. She contends that their adoption of the discourse of women's rights was strongly linked to their need to break down their own social and intellectual marginalisation. What happened at everyday level in houses was not directly linked to Muslim reformists' drawing room rhetorics of breaking down *purdah*. The Aligarh modernists may have wished their wives to be their literate companions and to gradually introduce them to "mixed society", but this change could not happen overnight.

The opponents of the Aligarh school in late 19<sup>th</sup> century were the *ulama* associated with the Deobandi school. The most famous Deobandi text on the status of women is *Bihishti Zewar* (Heavenly Adornments), written by Maulana Ashraf Ali Thanawi (1864–1943).<sup>6</sup> In it, Thawawi argues for women's education for purposes of personal piety and the spreading of the observance of *shari'a*. It is a detailed guidebook for proper conduct, including rules about eating, dress and

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<sup>6</sup> The Deobandi version of Islam is currently popular in Pakistan amongst Islamist right-wing political parties, such as *Jamaat-i-Islam*. Thawawi's book is immensely popular as a marriage guide for newly wedded couples, and is widely distributed in Pakistani bookstores and also in diasporic communities worldwide.

marital life. The transformational element in it was, however, the fact that it provided direct access to Islamic scholarship in simple language to women who had no access to mosques. (Metcalf 1990)<sup>7</sup>

The Deobandi school was vigilant about the removal of un-Islamic customary practices and Sufi traditions, such as visits to shrines, devotional music and dancing, indigenous healing practices and some wedding rituals. Women's equity as believers was acknowledged, but, at the same time, the need for seclusion as an Islamic practice was confirmed. The kind of wives and mothers the Deobandis wanted, then, were secluded, appropriately educated, pious and clear of heretical superstitions.<sup>8</sup>

A generational shift and involvement in political movements were needed for Indian Muslim women to begin expressing what *they* wanted. This rise in political agency was first enabled by the pan-Islamic Khilafat movement (1920–22), which collaborated with Gandhi and the National Congress at the all-Indian level, and by the year 1940 by the emerging Pakistan Movement propagated by the communalist party, the All-Indian Muslim League. In its ranks, the call for the abolishment of *purdah* was by no means unusual. The dream of an egalitarian Muslim country was condensed in this popular Progressive Writers' slogan: "*The colourful scarf on your forehead looks lovely, it would be better yet if this scarf were to become a flag.*" (Haroon 1995, 178.)

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<sup>7</sup> For a contemporary critique of the text cf. Simorgh (1985), Burki (1991, 28–9) and Kishwar Naheed's fierce criticism of Barbara Metcalf's translation project (Haeri 2002). By making a single religious guidebook for Muslim women widely available in the Western academia, Naheed sees that Metcalf exoticises Pakistani women's lives and makes "fools" out of them.

<sup>8</sup> There is a direct ideological affinity between the 19C Deobandis and late 20C and early 21C religious parties in Pakistan, particularly the best-known party Jamaat-i-Islam. The most extreme interpretation of Deobandi ideas of proper womanhood was recently made by the Taliban in Afghanistan. Most South Asian Muslims find Deobandi ideas in deep discord with the spirit of Islam.



*"And the veil tears and rages/till her voices are remembered/ and his secrets can be told." I cannot help listening to Tori Amos' song Lust in this particular context. A circular song, dripping with desire. It plays nonstop as I struggle with this chapter. Ideas travelling across continents and times. Turning and returning. Spiralling.*

*I am thinking of the young men and women in political meetings in the 1940s Lahore, who perhaps got a chance to see one another for the first time in the crowds. They were not cousins, not from the family sphere, and no, this time they did not have aprons. I am sure they did not lower their gazes.*

(Research diary, Toronto, May 15, 2003.)

### The Muslim League's modernism

*It is a crime against humanity that our women are shut up within the four walls of the houses as prisoners. There is no sanction anywhere for the deplorable conditions in which our women have to live. You should take your women along with you as comrades in every sphere of life.*

Mohammed Ali Jinnah  
(in Mumtaz and Shaheed 1987, 7)

In 1944, *Quaid-I-Azam* (literally: The Great Leader), the coming leader of Pakistan, spoke sternly about gender relations in Aligarh, the North Indian centre of Muslim education and Urdu literature. Women were present in the meeting but Jinnah explicitly addressed his male comrades, pleading them to free *their* women from the confines of *zenanas*. He acted as a reconciliator between the young radicals insisting on the total eradication of gender segregation (and, as a result, finding intellectually compatible wives) and the conservatives to whom the sight of an unveiled woman at a political meeting was still a taboo.

In order to accentuate his point, he had taken his younger sister Fatima as a companion and hostess into all political meetings he arranged. Fatima was a dentist by profession but had discarded her career for the cause of the Muslim League. She served as an example of the independent working woman, though, and her presence in the meetings encouraged other women to join her, either in separate women's wings in the more conservative Indian provinces, or among the male public in the urban centres, such as Delhi and Lucknow.<sup>9</sup> Women had also taken to streets, donned their veils and shouted slogans. They had exposed their bodies and voices, many of them for the first time, to complete strangers. Ladies were *coming out*. They were swallowing the world.

The idea of women as comrades in the public sphere had become a standard nationalist demand by 1940s both in the National Congress and in the Muslim League, but it still implied radicalism at the community level. Some Muslim women had attended special *zenana* education or secluded girl schools since the late 19th century, and the idea of educated, literate mothers had already gained popularity among the urban middle classes, but *purdah* was still a social code hard to question or deny, even if there was a high degree of flexibility in its observance.

Khawar Mumtaz and Farida Shaheed (1987, 44–48) argue that the nationalism of the Muslim League provided women with a new space in which they could break with the *purdah* code, leave their homes, even cast off their veils, approach strangers for the sake of common good, confront the police – and enter politics. Only a handful of women made it to national politics after Pakistan's independ-

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<sup>9</sup> Fatima Jinnah is quite a forgotten figure in Pakistani political history, if compared, for instance to Begums Ikramullah and Shahnawaz. I was lucky to find a collection of her speeches in Lahore (Jinnah 1976), which bring about her own voice as a historical and political agent.

ence, but the consciousness-raising effect of the 1940s Muslim League activism cannot, however, be underestimated.

Jinnah's egalitarian search for women comrades perhaps dated back to his days as a law student in London, when he attended suffragettes' meetings. Geraldine Forbes (1996, 61) finds behind the Indian male nationalists' progressive articulations a civilising mission to oppose the colonisers' characterizations of India as backward and decadent. Jinnah himself exemplified the progressive nationalist reformist by boldly speaking about "crimes against humanity". Fatima accompanied him everywhere and hosted events like a model wife. Only after her brother's death did she aim for political leadership.

Hanna Papanek (1982, 17) finds in the tragedy of India's partition a paradoxical catalyst for Muslim women's liberation from *purdah*. In the riots and massive displacement of millions, women learnt to efface their communal identity by baring their faces. In situations of extreme violence in the province of Punjab, *purdah* certainly did not provide shelter. For the displaced women, often raped and pregnant with an "enemy"'s child, *purdah* was simply useless. Piety and heavenly adornments often lost their importance overnight.

After the Partition, Pakistani women did their best to collectively accommodate and comfort the refugee population. They formed social welfare organisations and relief committees. Only two women were nominated on reserved women's seats in the parliament<sup>10</sup>. Geraldine Forbes suggests that there was a hidden division of labour in the male

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<sup>10</sup> Until 1954 Pakistan had two women parliamentarians, Begum Shah Nawaz and Begum Ikramullah on reserved women's seats. This practice was an amendment of the 1935 Government of India Act, which served as Pakistan's interim constitution until 1956. Between the years 1954–1962 there were no women in the Constituent Assembly. Nabeela Afsal (1999, 18–40) analyses the phenomenon, stating that the two pioneer women's performance was more comprehensive than their followers' in the 1960s and the 1970s. She also points out that the women MPs' educational level was higher than the male representatives' average.

nationalists' seemingly egalitarian rhetorics: that women were put in charge of social reform and welfare, whereas men pursued politics.

Sociocultural practices, historical contexts and processes, structures. I think it's good to know how *purdah* has been approached as a concept by various scholars. This is what I have found so far. But then the scenery changes, skies darken and it starts to rain on this map. Everything becomes blurred, soggy, out of focus when we move on, cross the threshold into someone's home. It is no longer a sociologically interesting domestic arrangement. We become guests in other women's homes. How do we speak then? How should we speak?

### *Progress for whom?*

For the class of women that engaged in political parties, organisations and committees, the greatest obstacle to a public career was not housework or childcare, but rather public opinions and expectations of "proper" feminine conduct. They belonged to the so-called "respectable classes", or in Urdu, *shurafa* families, stemming from words *ashraf/sharif*: "respectable, cultured, educated" (Saiyid 1998, 4–5, Jalal 1990, 80). These activist women did not ruin their families' economies by their newly found, selfless passions; neither did their children roam about the city streets unsupervised. Other women and men were there to take care of the everyday running of the household. Most of the time, they remained nameless. And as years went by, the *begums* were complaining that the servants had become greedier and less loyal to their employers. Or, as the first female parliamentarian of Pakistan puts it:

*This type of servant was becoming rare by the time I set up my house, but I was fortunate to have found a set that had many of these old-fashioned virtues, and I was consequently envied by my friends. There is no doubt that had I not been so fortunate I could not have given my time to political and social work as I did, for I am not one of those social workers who is indifferent to her home.*

*I could go about canvassing votes for the Muslim League only if I was sure that my house was well-run and that my children would be getting their meals on time.*

(Ikramullah 1963, 129.)

In this narrative, the servants are a set with old-fashioned virtues. They do not need constant supervision, so the *begum* can leave her house assured that children are punctually fed. And despite the fact that she spends her time in prototypical *political* work, canvassing votes, not raising funds for charity, she refers to herself as a *social worker*, not as a politician.<sup>11</sup> She acknowledges the servants' loyalty to the family, but does not thank them as individuals. The people who enabled her rise to the parliament remain as statist. Only the name of an English nanny brought along from the family's London sojourn is mentioned: Helen. The writer is constantly negotiating her position vis-à-vis patriarchy and the Empire, but remains confined within her predetermined social class.

Gut reaction: Goodness. Only the white servant has a name. Talk about colonial complicity and role reversal. She can afford an English nanny. She employs a white woman and wants the Brits out as rulers. Amazing confidence. How can she write like that?

Politics of location: who am I to judge her? Why am I so bothered by this? The fact that she does not give space to servants in a political autobiography hardly makes her a traitor to the soil of her land. Think of political autobiography as a genre with conventions. Would

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<sup>11</sup> Jill Ker Conway (1998, 15–16) names this kind of belittling of one's own ambitions in the Western (particularly US) context as "philanthropic romance". It is a means of narratively hiding one's own power in good works and articulating possible personal ambitions as service for the common good. Whether or not this is a particularly Anglo-American feminine response or not, one can definitely relate this to Ikramullah's life-writing in the late colonial context in India. More generally, these kinds of veilings could be seen as censorship for public self-presentation. What to make of these dubbings or silences?

male politicians even mention what enabled them to work outside the house? Hardly. This woman mentions the servants and whisks them away. As a reader, I catch a glimpse of her crew toiling away but this is all. *Class question disclosed.*

The air becomes stuffy when I try to analyse her obvious class bias sixty years later on another continent. Memory and imagination bounce me back and forth. *I know this is not fair.* Even my own Finnish grandmother, this woman's contemporary, had a maid for years. She never wrote her memoirs but just sold fabric at the rural co-op store. She had only primary level education, plus vocational training – and a life of her own, no matter how modest. This woman held a PhD from the University of London. She was a staunch nationalist but not a socialist. My grandmother was fiercely patriotic, a member of the war-time women's organisation Lotta Svärd and a proud supporter of the red-bashing *Suojeluskunta*<sup>12</sup>. And I learnt to question her version of history, that which Mom knowingly referred to as "hegemony", from a very young age.

Yet I completely understood her motivations to hire a maid and get out of the house. I just believed that *all women who wish so* should eventually get out of the house. And I knew my granny sent a maid or two to nursing school with raving references. She didn't make a huge issue about that. If she had written her memoirs, would she have given a lot of space to these girls who came and went? Perhaps not. So how can I possibly know what happened behind the scenes of this Pakistani politician's house? Who am I to blame her?

I have done my required readings, aware that other feminists, mostly South Asian, are struggling with the same dilemma: how to deal with the gaping class and caste divides? How to understand the

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<sup>12</sup> The name for the right-wing paramilitary forces in Finland has received plenty of English translations: The White Guards, Civil Guard, White Militia; the most literal one perhaps is "Protection Corps".

overlapping historical layers of feudalism and the remnants of the caste system in the South Asian Muslim world? How to deal with the attitude that people are not equal by definition?<sup>13</sup>

Socialist women writers, many of them of Muslim origin, from the 1930s onwards chose to write about the labouring hands with affection and respect. It bothers me that my key informant does not write like Ismat Chughtai, Attia Hosain or Khadija Mastur, the Muslim women linked with the left-wing *Progressive Writers' Association*.<sup>14</sup> I cannot help myself contrasting the quote above with Ismat Chughtai's bittersweet prose in the short story *Chauthi ka Jaura*:

*I babbled away and held Aapa's hands tightly in mine. They were rough, and smelled of coriander and turmeric. I couldn't stop my tears. I said to myself: these hands which keep working from dawn to dusk, they grind spices, fetch water, slice onions, make beds, clean shoes. They are like slaves, working from morning till night. God knows when their slavery is going to end. Will someone ever hold them tenderly, kiss them? Will they ever be decorated with henna? Will they ever smell of wedding scent? I wanted to scream.*

(Chughtai 1990, 83)

Overwhelmed by the contrast, I am coming in terms with my *preferred history*. I am expecting *solidarity, sisterhood*. I want the texts I

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<sup>13</sup> Tanika Sarkar (1999, 133) calls Indian women of the British colonial days as "unfinished class and caste subjects", referring to their imperfect but yet stable "stitching" to the social fabric. One of the most ironic terms I heard in Pakistan was "de-classing": an elite woman cooking her own meals would say, tongue in cheek, that she has learnt to "de-class" herself.

<sup>14</sup> For further analysis on the Progressive Writers' role in late colonial India, see eg Ahmad (1992, 117–8). An early version of the present chapter, in which *From Purdah to Parliament* is read together with Attia Hosain's (an author linked with the Progressive Writers) novel *Sunlight on a Broken Column* (1961) was published in Finnish (Hirsiaho 2002).

spend most of my days with to be *progressive enough*. I am emotional, naïve and short of breath.

A *reading strategy* of women's autobiographies should be more nuanced than this. I am dealing with the shift from colonialism to postcolonialism, and a specific point in historical time when women were redefining their social space and personal potential. They did so from within the confines of their upbringing in the values of an extremely hierarchical caste and class society. Even urban families with progressive ideas about women's education were often landowners, with strong ties to their ancestral village. Family lineage was not an issue to be taken lightly; it determined the course of life, the way one's words and actions were received by others and the personal liberties one could take without becoming a social outcaste.

The woman who discloses the class question all too easily, in my reading, narrates her journey to political agency from within the safe confines of her class prestige. Her voice is also affected by imperialism, and the social class formations of the time cannot be detached from imperial interests. The Empire needed its tiny indigenous middle class to act as a buffer between the state and its colonised subjects. Degrees from British universities served a purpose. An ideological purpose. But then, this explanation seems almost too neat and hasty. One still needs to elaborate things further:

*If this rhetoric is to be comprehended as a dynamic and culturally plangent process, then the reader is bound to admit to her participation in its bewildering production of peripheries, of cultural margins that refer to no historical center. Much as the colonizer and the colonized can no longer be examined as totally autonomous entities, so must critical discourse recognize its imbrication in the fields of its analyses. The postcolonial condition is neither territorially bound nor more the property of one people than the other: instead, its inevitably retroactive narrative allows for the inclu-*



*sion both of its colonial past and of the function of criticism at the present time as necessary corollaries to the telling of its stories.*

(Suleri 1993, 21–22.)

A way towards a reading strategy? The idea of the rhetoric of English India that Sara Suleri advocates involves the reader and the researcher to also rethink his or her own postcolonial agency, not only the agency of the researched. It is here that the term complicity widens its meaning, towards interaction and dialogue. What Suleri does here is perhaps what Teresa de Lauretis (1987, 10–11) calls for inside feminisms, as an emerging consciousness of complicity, which is “central to the understanding of ideology in these postmodern and postcolonial times.” In the light of de Lauretis’ definition, Suleri the literary theorist becomes the exemplary *poco-pomo* subject, for whom neither storytelling nor the stories’ reception are innocent acts.

All post/colonial historical narratives eventually bounce back to the present in which they are being read. Anyone interested in the ideology of the British Empire is posthumously participating in this collective effort of imperial storytelling. There are no disinterested outsiders to the reconstruction of these storylines. It is retroactive and contagious. By choosing to focus on these set dates, the nationalist movement, India’s partition and the formation of two independent nation-states (or three, if we include Bangladesh in 1971), I am complicit in the perpetuation of the rhetoric of the English India, no matter how critically I read texts immersed in this rhetoric. Ironically, the rhetoric of English India, alongside with other, intertwining rhetorics, will help me forward on my own academic path. Whose agency, then, is the primary focus of my study?

In a sense, I am the superagent: I have judged the text in front of me relevant for my self-designed purposes. Or echoing Kamala Visweswaran (1990), I should pay attention to the action-verbs in which I narrate my own journey. A process of subject-restoration may

turn against its initial purposes and in the end, leave an impression of the researcher as the feminist hero with the loudest voice. Visweswaran asks (1990, 220): "*(i)n my attempts to undercut and interrupt my own authority, has my own voice become louder in the process? My own agency underscored at the expense of other women's?*"

The question indicates a return from the isolated class question to its links with notions of agency and subjectivity across the class divide. A wise suggestion: do not delete class, but braid it with other dimensions of analysis. I chose Begum Ikramullah's text because of her radiant, optimistic presence in the making of a nation ("I tried very hard not to fail", p.167). I chose it for the moments of sheer feminist empowerment. To dismiss her contributions because she chooses not to name her servants, not to include them in her story of political success would be foolish.

I cannot anachronistically bring this text to today's quasi-democratic discourse of *social inclusion*. Neither can I completely dismiss the servant quote. I can utter my words of frustration, but then I remember how I guiltily enjoyed my break from housework in Pakistan. I have engaged in hours of anonymous servant-gossip. But then, I have also worked as a maid. I can identify myself with both sides, but whose side I am on is simply an irrelevant question here. Here, all of a sudden, I am not so concerned by what is being said, but by how (the level of narration), and to whom (the level of intersubjectivity).

I have done my frustrating work with what Begum Ikramullah says about her servants. The questions always change in their context, and to ask *how* she says it, and to *whom* may in this instance help me a bit further. She writes about the servants superficially and casually, but always in the spirit of respecting their workload, thanking them between the lines anonymously. She refers to "types" of servants in a manner that may not open up for a Western reader, and in this I see a powerful *begum* comparing notes with a neighbour or relative, rather than trying to find justification of the institution of domestic servants for the outside world. The servant-speech happens then "amongst us",

and at least some kind of sharing of cultural codes is needed for its closer reading.

How would I defend Ikramullah's stance of mentioning her servants but not narrating their lives in flesh and blood? I can only do this partially, and would translate our half-way encounter with the following explanation. Having servants in South Asia is legitimated by the need to employ uneducated people and give them a respectable income. It is also a way of taking care of orphaned children, widows and others without the economic safety of an extended family. Long-term relations between the employers and servants often become affectionate and may substitute a life-insurance or a pension plan. In my understanding, it is not the cultural tradition of having "help" in the house that is problematic as such. Although perpetuating the *status quo*, ie. the notion that people are not born equal, servants' presence in the house is not a direct sign of class oppression. Giving and receiving "help" can be mutually beneficial, and it can substitute otherwise missing welfare contracts, if the "helpers" are not delegated to their unchanging fate, as anonymous and outside history.

## 4.2

### From colonial complicity to Muslim nationhood

#### *Bengali particulars*

*"...I often longed for the peace and leisure of the days in purdah. But there could be no turning back, no return to the secluded and sheltered existence of the past. I had to continue on this new road on which the women of my country had set out, in which one could taste the joys of achievement as well as the bitterness of failure, to know both hope and fear, disillusionment and attainment. And who can deny that this is a richer, fuller and more rewarding way of life?"*

(Ikramullah 1963, 168.)

Begum Shaista Suhrawardy Ikramullah (1915–2000) grew up in Calcutta in two households, in the ultra-modern house of her parents, and in the *zenana* of her maternal grandfather's house and learnt from an early age to juggle between different codes and expectations of proper feminine conduct. Her traditionally brought up mother had been married to a modern doctor working for the imperial railways, and later as the surgeon of the Viceroy. In the Bengali context, her father could have been caricatured by political satirists as a *baboo*, a hybrid creature, a cross-dresser between England and India, transgressing the imperial order by his adoption of the Western standards of dress and behaviour. (cf. Tarlo 1996, 50). The Bengalis' sophisticated taste for political irony blossomed, in particular, in cartoons and journalism.

In the British colonial mind, the Anglicized Bengali *baboo* was dangerous, but not as dangerous than the "fanatical peasant Musalman", whose stubborn resistance to imperial influences was registered by W.W.Hunter in 1871. Hunter advised the colonial government of the religious tenets of Islam, of which the most pressing one was their duty to rebel against unbelievers. The recommendation of the Hunter report was to create a strategy to suppress the "Musalmans" innate subversive tendencies through careful educational policies and religious sensitivity: *"It is hopeless to look for anything like enthusiastic loyalty from our Muhammadan subjects. But we can reasonably expect that, so long as we scrupulously discharge our obligations to them, they will honestly fulfill their duties in the position which God has placed them to us"* (Hunter 1871, 133–135)."

Shaista's<sup>15</sup> maternal grandparents were "resisting" traditionalists; the paternal Suhrawardy clan was politically active, affluent and West-

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<sup>15</sup> Amongst the three women writers, Begum Ikramullah is the one who is constantly referred to as *begum* by the Pakistani commentators. She is commonly known by her marital name, not by her own family name Suhrawardy. Unlike most South Asian Muslim women today, she chose to be addressed in public by her husband's family name. I have chosen to refer to her by her first name when writing about

ernised. Its women had stepped out of *pardah* and become highly educated in her father's generation. Thus she was not the first woman in the family to enter university in the 1930s. The generational clashes on the father's side were tinged with goodwill and humour; the young girls' "queer modern ideas" (Ikramullah 1991, 7) were accepted by the elder women rather than discouraged.

Originating from the rural centre of Midnapur in West Bengal, they claimed descent from the Suhrawardiyya Sufi order, one of India's most prominent Sufi orders with a genealogy of scholars and saints. The Suhrawardiyya is perhaps the most philosophical and scholarly oriented one of the four large Sufi orders in South Asia. It originated from Persia and travelled to both Punjab and Bengal in 13<sup>th</sup> century. (Subhan 1960, 183–7, Hämeen-Anttila 2002, 167–9, Hamiduddin 1961, 310–334.) From the early stages, the Suhrawardiyya *pirs* were politically influential and prone to resist authorities, or as Shaista's husband put it, "people who don't keep quiet" (Ikramullah 1991, 11). Indeed, politics was a temptation for the Suhrawardys that kept many family members from pursuing a stable career.

The family had adopted as their slogan "Poverty is our pride", a reflection of the Suhrawardy order's and ultimately the Prophet's teachings, which for Shaista was obviously a personal value statement<sup>16</sup>. On many occasions, she underlines her distaste for too eager thriftiness and the need to feed guests in no matter how dire financial straits. The ancestral memory was still for her generation a kind of *noblesse*

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her childhood and youth, the times she was not yet married and her early years as a colonial wife in her early 20s, and when writing about the later times I use either the Western way of reference to the last name (Ikramullah) or the last name with the title *begum* (Begum Ikramullah). My politics of naming Bhutto and Suleri follow no logical line: Pakistanis themselves prefer to speak about "Benazir" without any additions, and I have reason to believe that Sara Suleri would not mind me calling her by the first name at times.

<sup>16</sup> More on this saying of the Prophet (*hadith*) in Ernst (1999, 216), and more generally on poverty in Sufism, Hämeen-Anttila (2002, 14–15).

*oblige*, which gave an aura of sanctity to their politics. "(O)thers seemed to regard us as a people apart and expected much more from us because we were Suhrawardys." (Ikramullah 1991, 10.)

### *Enter Shaheed bhai*

Perhaps the most prominent figure in the family was one of Shaista's cousins, the flamboyant, extravagant Muslim League representative, Hosain Shaheed Suhrawardy (1892–1963), who ended up protecting Mahatma Gandhi in the summer of 1947 during the countdown to independence, living together with him in a deserted house in one of Calcutta's poorest slums. This was his "finest hour" and entry into world history as the most peculiar working pair for Gandhi. He was known as Calcutta's playboy with a passion for nightclubs, jazz, gourmet food and finest European clothing. Contrary to his habitual lifestyle, that summer he slept on the floor with Gandhi, shared his food and attended all political meetings virtually as his Muslim bodyguard. (Collins and Lapierre 1975, 294–5)

The entry of Shaheed *bhai* as one of Shaista's most significant "others" into the scene of narration brings us directly in contact with the power politics of India's Partition. Shaheed Suhrawardy was a dissident inside the Muslim League, and in Bengal he and his arch-rival Khwaja Nazimuddin (1894–1964) competed on regional party leadership. Mohammed Ali Jinnah's influence in Bengal was lesser than in any other province. For Shaheed Suhrawardy, the dream of a secular, united Bengal was paramount, and the idea of "cracking" Bengal into two religiously nominated states was unacceptable. Sensitive to foreseeing the catastrophe of the communal solution, he formed allies with the Communist Party, and was more open towards negotiation with the National Congress than Jinnah was. Until the very last minute before Partition, he plotted together with dissident Bengali Congress members, such as Subhas Chandra Bose, on saving Bengal from its looming fate. (Jalal 1983, 220, 280–1.)

Unlike Shaista, who emigrated to West Pakistan directly after Partition, Shaheed *bhai* remained in India for many years before embarking on a new career as a Pakistani politician. In 1952 he withdrew from the Muslim League and formed a new political party in East Pakistan, the Awami League. In 1955–6 he briefly served as the Prime Minister of Pakistan (the only Bengali to receive that status), but was in his old age first imprisoned and then exiled by his opponent Ayub Khan. Shaista and Shaheed *bhai* were extremely close, both intellectually and emotionally. In terms of *political* storytelling, this "significant other" counts more than her marriage to Mohammed Ikramullah, who was in his nature an apolitical person, not interested in publicity.

In my present analysis, alongside with Ikramullah's official political autobiography, I will be referring to her two other texts with a strong autobiographical content, the biography *Husayn Shaheed Suhrawardy* (1991) and an article collection *Behind the Veil* (1953/1998) that she originally published in *Pakistan Quarterly* in the early 1950s and later edited into a book.<sup>17</sup> Particularly the former text provides helpful insights and contextual references that are missing in *From Purdah to Parliament*.

### *Imperial code-switchings*

Shaista's childhood was a constant negotiation between her parents' contradictory worldviews. Her father would have welcomed his wife to step out of *purdah*, but this was contrary to her upbringing and values. In the British-dominated Calcutta suburb of Lilloah, Shaista's mother kept on living in *purdah*, only stepping out of the house in ap-

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<sup>17</sup> As many women activists of her period, Begum Ikramullah was a frequent contributor to both Urdu women's magazines and "serious" political magazines in English. On her role in the Urdu press cf. Ali 2000, 272. I have come across a haphazard collection of her English political articles in Canadian libraries, which cover a wide array of themes both domestic and foreign.

propriate *purdah* transportation to visit her father's *haveli*. Although her father decorated the bungalow in European drawing-room style, he was considerate enough to allow his wife to determine her own space and codes of behaviour.<sup>18</sup> This was unusual from an Indian educated male in the service of the Empire. Shaista portrays her mother as a strong, highly opinionated woman.

The young Shaista was taken to the British club for Christmas parties in starched dresses and white pinafores, and she attended a convent school in the standard uniform, baring her knees. If, however, her mother had visitors in the house, she was not supposed to show up in her Western clothes. She claims to have learnt the cultural code-switching quite painlessly:

*And so I spent my childhood and early girlhood between the Arabian Nights world of my mother's family and my ultra-Westernized home, and the English school. This dual existence did not seem to have worried me, and I used to slip easily from one to the other, as I still do, only that Arabian Nights world of my childhood has all but disappeared.*

(Ikramullah 1963, 26)

The code-switching partially ended when Shaista grew older. This resulted in the shrinking of her world. From the age of nine, she was only allowed to attend her school; from puberty her mother's family insisted that because of her future marriage prospects, she could no longer attend the English school. Shaista stepped into *purdah* but was allowed to continue her schooling with the help of a tutor.

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<sup>18</sup> Qurratulain Hyder (1990, 46) writes about the upper middle class Indians who were accepted into the British community if they were "civilised enough to live in bungalows". Attia Hosain (1990) describes the humiliation of a Muslim colonial clerk's wife who is torn out from *purdah* by her husband and taken to British dinner parties loaded with alcohol and vulgar dancing.



Shaista's early memories include nostalgic (and rather Orientalist) references to the Arabian Nights world of her grandfather's *haveli*, its unchanging order, and the relaxed pleasures of the women's *pardah* parties and shopping from the comfort of one's house. In her narrative universe, women's days are spent chewing *pan* and planning weddings or recalling the bygone ones. They lounge on *takhats* on verandahs, assured of their power within the family, mostly disregarding the public world that they have never entered. The warmth of the household is tangible to the reader, but at the same time she actively builds the narrative of her own active leavetaking from this secluded, *almost* timeless world.

The times of the *zenana* is a question that has fascinated many scholars and fiction-writers, both South Asian and Western<sup>19</sup>. Contrary to common assumptions, history and politics did often seep into the *zenana*, and women were able to converse about the recent events *out there*, because they were diabolically skilled listeners. In upper class families with large *havelis* (where complete *pardah* was possible), women were able to "spy" on men unrelated to them through the *chik* curtains that separated *zenana* from *mardana*.

Uma Parameswaran (1998, 41–54) discusses the phenomenon of both men and women's limited gaze in Salman Rushdie's writing through the perforated sheet metaphor. She suggests that seeing through holes extends in Rushdie's work from the context of arranged marriages to the idea of Indian historiography. A partial, fragmentary view would be considered as modest and appropriate both in familial and national terms. More generally, one can draw connections between architecture and clothing, both reflecting women's and men's separate worlds. The opaque curtain that separates women's and

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<sup>19</sup> The most comprehensive historical studies of women's lives in 19C and early 20C *zenanas* have been made by Hanna Papanek (1982), Gail Minault (1994) and Geraldine Forbes (1996).

men's domestic spaces may in the outside world become a *burqa*, and when studying details of Muslim architecture, one can see the elaborate carved window-screens of marble reflected in the stitchings of the *burqa*'s eye-nets.

In *zenanas*, women saw without being seen. They heard the slightest whispers and took advantage of all gossip. They learnt nationalist songs and slogans and kept passing them on to the next generation on the sunny inner courtyards. These temporal anchors were shared by both *begums* and servant women alike. Perhaps the servant women brought along political gossip to the *zenana* from the outside world, because they were occasionally allowed out on errands.

### *Politicization: the Khilafat movement*

In Begum Ikramullah's narration, the Khilafat movement was one such temporal anchor to which women could relate. Her maternal family were fierce supporters of the Khilafat movement, which merged the Muslim concerns for the maintenance of the Caliphate in Constantinople and Gandhi's nationalist demands for *swaraj* (self-determination). The movement emerged in 1920 partially as a response to the Jallianwala Bagh massacre of the previous year; it was an anti-imperialist move and a vital symbol of Hindu-Muslim unity. Young Shaista grew up listening to songs emerging from this movement, and was allowed to peek through the *chik* curtains of the *zenana* at her grandfather's important political guests.

She particularly remembers Gandhi's vital role in the Khilafat movement, and the mixed symbolics that were not yet stained by communalist overtones:

*The spinning and weaving of khaddar, the rough cotton cloth, became synonymous with the fight for freedom. This doctrine was also accepted and practised by the Mussalmans of India at that time. It may seem incredible but such is the power of suggestion that the*

*wearing of khaddar got tied up in the minds of the Muslims of India as a means of helping Turkey fight against the British.*

(Ikramullah 1991, 21)

The Khilafat movement was a mass-mobilising watershed in Indian Muslim politics, causing scathing arguments and dividing family members into followers and opponents. As Ayesha Khan (1999, 6–7) remarks, the movement had a high symbolic value for women in particular. Political action became desirable and religiously justifiable for the female Khilafat followers because of the selfless bond with the greater Muslim *ummah*. Thus women's participation was not perceived as selfish individualism but as devotion to the pan-Islamic cause.

For the fiercest supporters Khilafat implied total non-cooperation with any Government institutions. Mohammed Ali Jinnah, then a cool constitutionalist, withdrew bitterly from all-Indian nationalist politics because of Gandhi's teaming up with whom he considered to be amongst the most dangerous and conservative elements of the Muslim community. Gandhi himself called off the movement in 1922 because of the violence in the village of Chauri Chaura. In 1924, Kemal Atatürk abolished the Caliphate. The message that the Khilafat movement left to the rest of India was that Muslims could be passionately interested in independence only if it ensured the prominence of Islam. (Sayeed 1967, 22–26, Ahmad 2000, 3–4, Amin 1995, 49–50.)

The trial of the Ali brothers in 1931 was an important episode in young Shaista's politicization. The two young men, former leaders of the Khilafat, had killed an offensive Hindu writer and claimed martyrdom if they were executed. Shaista supported the Ali brothers so intensely that she wrote a speech in secret from her mother and read it in a *purdah* gathering without her consent. This juvenile outburst in the company of remarkable *begums* was "*a proof of the extent I had begun to be swayed by political emotion*" (Ikramullah 1963, 46). Her mother put her on house arrest after the incident, which lasted until her marriage in 1933.

When Shaista Suhrawardy was married to Mohammed Ikramullah at the age of eighteen, her in-laws were particularly observant about their new daughter-in-law's behaviour. English education was not yet considered as an asset in the upper middle class/elite marriage market in the 1930s (cf. ch. 7: "Desi introductions"). Fortunately, her mother had been wise enough to bring her daughter into the *zenana* often enough for her to learn the graceful, submissive manners a girl was expected to cultivate in front of the in-laws. But even more fortunately for Shaista, Mohammed Ikramullah was soon posted as a civil servant to Delhi, and the couple could start an independent life. Begum Ikramullah jokingly dedicates her autobiography to her late husband, who "*took me out of purdah and has regretted it ever since.*" (Ikramullah 1963/1998, foreword)

### *Coming out to Empire*

Shaista stepped out of purdah to the social life of colonial New Delhi as a young wife in 1933. For the first years, she felt awkward about the tight social restrictions surrounding her, and bored in the company of fellow colonial wives. It was her first proper entry into "mixed society", which left her disappointed. Her expectations of enlightened conversations were not met, and she found the husbands' interests as banal as the wives'. The hierarchies of Indian society were not wiped away despite outward mimicry of the manners of the British drawing room. She claims that the husbands did a slightly better job in assimilating democratic rules of conduct than the wives, for whom the notions of provincial identity, caste and class were still important. Underneath the official snobbery, the ranks of caste society still prevailed:

*They all paid and returned calls with due formality, gave correct but dull little parties, knew the use of the right knives and forks and registered the same degree of disapproval as an English "Memsahib" if an unfortunate bearer made the slightest mistake in*

*serving meals or announcing calls. This spectacle of their laboured Westernization was rather pathetic and ridiculous, as was their effort to give themselves the airs of "grands dames".*

(Ikramullah 1963, 72.)

She spends time knitting with the British memsahibs in their immaculately groomed gardens, and retires for the summer season to the hill station of Simla where another social calendar begins. Balls, garden parties, Horse Shows and polo games follow year after year.

The independent nature of her character shows in the description of friendships. Young Begum Ikramullah confesses her boredom as a colonial bureaucrat's wife in Delhi, until she meets like-minded souls, and begins her informal "liberal education" with the Urdu-speaking cultural elite of Delhi. This is urban individualism: forget (at least part-time) the relatives and husband's colleagues' wives. Her best friends become the Congress politicians Asaf and Aruna Ali and the already then elderly poet Sarojini Naidu.<sup>20</sup> She begins attending mus-hairas (poetry recitals), lectures by famous visitors and gets her first taste of "social service" in the Delhi Women's League. Yet the 1930s are for her a "life untouched by the stress and strain of politics" (79).

She spends formative years in London, where she realises that the replica of Britishness to which he became initiated in India was an extreme version, an exaggerated parody of life back in "the mother

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<sup>20</sup> The life stories of both Aruna Asaf Ali and Sarojini Naidu are discussed in the same context by Vijay Agnew (1979). Both women's feminist politics coincided with nationalism, and particularly Naidu's denial of having been a political player seems problematic even in the context of her time. However, the women's impact in colonial Delhi society seems radical enough. Naidu's role as an inspiration for younger women was exemplary, as she extended the definitions of what was acceptable and available for Indian women (Agnew 1979, 96). It is interesting that Begum Ikramullah mentions in her autobiography first and foremost Ali and Naidu as her political mentors and close friends. Her friendships with these two Hindu women pioneers (Ali was a secular Hindu married to a secular Muslim) caused whispering campaigns amongst Muslim Leaguers and bad press in the 1940s.

country". There social life is not a formal burden, but a matter of personal choice. Cucumber sandwiches and heavy teak furniture were what she was brought up with in India. If compared to her society life in Delhi, in London she feels no pressure whatsoever to conform to pre-set standards of behaviour:

*I myself led a much freer life; even though compared with my English friends I had much more domestic help, I did little chores myself which in India I would not have thought of doing, such as buying my stamps, posting my letters, taking things to the dyers and cleaners, etc. But despite this, I found much more time than in Delhi for I had much less social life to cope with.*

(Ikramullah 1963, 83)

These are the years during which her four children were born; yet she finds the time to enrol into London University to complete her PhD on Urdu literature. The story of her studies is only an anecdote in the larger historical stream of events. So, in fact, are the pregnancies and the births of the children, of which only the last one is mentioned. Her youngest child was born prematurely in the summer of 1947 in rural Bengal, and this event caused delay in the family's emigration to Pakistan.

The public, historical nature of the narrative becomes obvious from the gaps based on my own expectations as a mother-reader completing a PhD in another space and time. It amuses me that she mentions posting letters all by herself in democratic Britain. But I would like to know whether her children pulled her sleeve while she was writing the manuscript of her thesis, whether they argued so loud that she could not concentrate, and what she did to make them quiet down, or if she ever had to think of this at all. Now I can only imagine.

Begum Ikramullah hardly hides her colonial complicity in the maintenance of the Empire, and instead of retrospectively constructing her formative years as "colonization of the mind", she rather highlights the positive aspects of education and social life between two

cultures. It is a typical response of educated élite Indian women of her time, and this "dual pattern" is also briefly referred to by Michelle Maskiell (1984, 75–6) in her comprehensive study on women alumni at Kinnaird College, Lahore. As a generational experience for elite Indian women, the encounters with Englishness were not as painful as one might expect. The cultural continuum from convent schools to garden parties and social reform meetings was still in the pre-Partition days considered as "progressive" and "enlightened".

In Ikramullah's case, her loyalty to Britain does not even end at Partition. Her years in London are filled with excitement and personal development, and unlike the next generation's writers, Sara Suleri and Benazir Bhutto, nowhere does she mention racism. Her colour while living first as a colonial wife, then as the wife of the Pakistani High Commissioner in London, is not an autobiographical issue. She is outspoken in her admiration for the royal family, sporting a photograph of her encounter with Queen Elizabeth II in the appendix of her book. It is the threat of Hindu raj that bothers her much more than the ongoing colonisation of her country, and the British government's inherently racist agenda, at the eve of independence.

### *The rise of communalism*

Geraldine Forbes (1996, 196–203) uses *From Purdah to Parliament* as an example of the growing alienation Muslim women felt from their Hindu social reformist "sisters" who had suddenly started singing *Bande Mataram* as a national anthem. The phenomenon of overlapping membership to all-Indian women's organizations and political parties caused tensions between women of different communities. For Muslim women as representatives of the cultural minority, there were no easy choices between personal friendships and the concern over the interest of the nation in the making. Many educated Muslim women resisted the idea of citizenship along religious lines, and remained loyal to the idea of one independent India.

Begum Ikramullah reacted strongly to the emerging Hindu communalism, and her response to it was to accentuate her own Muslim belongings. Her multiple loyalties, her loyalty to the British Commonwealth on one hand, and the communal loyalties to her upbringing as a Muslim, to the Sufi heritage, and to her husband's administrative career on the other hand, raise an important question about the meaning of community. To which communities does she articulate belonging, and from where does she actively resign herself? Can one see the political shades of communalism through her eyewitness account? What was going on in Delhi in the 1930s and 1940s that made her a staunch Muslim nationalist, instead of an all-Indian one?

A powerful image in her narrative is Humayyun's Tomb in Delhi, which she nostalgically and almost melodramatically claims as hers. After a long description of the essentially Muslim characteristics of Delhi cultural life, she sums up her longing in lines intended to mourn the Muslims' loss of al-Andalus, the mosques and minarets of Cordoba and Grenada:

*The descendants of Arabs, they were those who created me.  
I stand here, a memorial to their vanished glory.*

(Ikramullah 1963, 136)

Thus, she does not mourn the loss of her own ancestors', the Sufi pirs' and walis' graves, to the Indian part of West Bengal, but the fading memory of the Mughal glory, and even the more distant loss of Muslim Spain. In an instance, she flings herself back to bygone empires, first the South Asian Muslim one, then the expansion of Arabs to Europe. The peculiar claim of ownership of history by religious affiliation enters here that in earlier instances in her text was not present.

According to Akbar S. Ahmed (1997, 44–45) such a flight of memory from the local to the universal Muslim umma was, in fact, a predominant trait in Urdu literature since the fall of Delhi in 1857. In



late 19C Urdu novels and poetry, the mourning over vanished glory extends to other more distant losses, and for Begum Ikramullah who studied the development of the Urdu novel for her PhD degree, such a style must have been intimately familiar. But it is also a personal geographical positioning westwards, a claiming of her pan-Islamic identity and her Persian Sufi roots. In a sense, then, her politics of memory is a form of addressing the West as the Western Muslim world, a construction of identity around an imaginary umma to which Pakistan legitimately belongs. Such far-flung historical nostalgia happens much less in Suleri's and Bhutto's texts, and can signify a generational difference in terms of memory.

The growing gap between Hindus and Muslims appears at the everyday level of friendships as changing attitudes to the Other's symbols and as "whispering campaigns" against those who dared step across the communal lines. Ikramullah comments primarily on the growing Hindu communalism particularly in the ranks of the National Congress. Yet communalism seeps into her friendships in the form of petty criticisms and narrow-mindedness. For instance, her Hindu friend suddenly objected to her using the word begum as a title instead of the standard Mrs. because it was too obviously a Muslim form of address. Later on, her friendships with prominent Congress members became a matter of objection amongst her party comrades in the Muslim League. In 1945, her youthful enthusiasm is somewhat replaced by an awareness of the tensions and sacrifices her position as a Muslim Leaguer would entail: "I began to realize that I had chosen to read a very difficult and tortuous path and could not be sure where it would lead me (Ikramullah 1963, 121)."

### *Addicted to politics*

The ideological void left by the death of Mohammed Ali Jinnah in 1948 in the Pakistani project of nation-building was so remarkable that it took the country nine years to draft its first constitution. The

fact that a modern nation-state had to be built on the mere ruins of the former provincial colonial structures was acutely accentuated after the country lost its main ideologue. The idea of a unitary Muslim homeland was severely challenged by the country's multiple ethnic fractions and conflicts between Shias and Sunnis. The country's religious minorities were facing everything but the ultimate tolerance Jinnah was assuring them in a pre-independence speech in August 1947.<sup>21</sup>

In this historical conjuncture, Begum Ikramullah provides a faithful testimony of her time, in particular in relation to statesmen. Her participation in politics only increased as a young wife and mother in the 1940s, when she took an active role in the Pakistan Movement. She looks back to her prime time of politicization as a period when she was to become "*a political addict*", "*drinking up political gossip with an avidity that would have done credit to a newspaper reporter*" (Ikramullah 1963, 114). In particular, she reflects upon her relationship with Jinnah, painting emotional scenes first at mass meetings, later on personal encounters. In this scene in April 1943, people are gathered in the streets of Delhi to greet their leader, people swerve between respectful silence and the cries of *Allah-o-Akbar* and *Quaid-i-Azam Zindabad*:

*I began to get worried that I had brought the children, but I am glad I did so, for that day was one worth remembering, and they do remember it. There was terrific excitement amongst the crowds and a feeling of elation and expectation. At least there was something to hope and work for. Not only were the roads packed to capacity*

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<sup>21</sup> In August 11, 1947, Mohammed Ali Jinnah told in a speech to the Constituent Assembly in formation: "You are free; you are free to go to your temples, you are free to go to your mosques or to any other place or worship in this State of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion or caste or creed that has nothing to do with the business of the State." ([http://www.pakistani.org/pakistan/legislation/constituent\\_address\\_11aug1947.html](http://www.pakistani.org/pakistan/legislation/constituent_address_11aug1947.html), viewed Sept 2, 2004)

*but the terraces of the houses were crowded and from the windows women threw rose petals as Quaid's lorry slowly vended its way. He was profusely garlanded and was sitting on a chair in the open lorry taking the salutes of the people with the characteristic gesture of raising his hand to a half salute.*

(Ikramullah 1963, 107)

Begum Ikramullah is happy to have provided her children first-hand memories of the genesis of Pakistan. Her narrative on the last years before independence is filled with energy, optimism and, in scenes like these, also euphoria. Her enthusiasm for the idea of Pakistan seems fresh and genuine, and she writes about it to the extent that her more mundane commitments are completely erased from the narration of those years.

At times, Ikramullah's hero worship resembles that of a teenage groupie's, making the reader forget her actual position as a *begum* of a household:

*Quaid looked at me and gave me a radiant smile of approval which made me feel I was in seventh heaven. He asked me:*

*"Were you at the session today?"*

*"Oh yes", I replied, "I thought you were wonderful. You did not even drink water once."*

*"Is that all that impressed you?" he said, rather amused.*

(Ikramullah 1963, 110)

Ikramullah returns here to the first personal contact with her great leader. It is hard to dismiss Jinnah's patronising stance towards his younger, nervous, idolizing female comrade. She does not evaluate the meaning of this encounter afterwards, for instance, if she was intimidated or also herself amused by *Quaid's* reply to her. She is in "seventh heaven", a mother temporarily turned into "political addict" or in more contemporary terms, a groupie. In her first encounters

with Jinnah, the age and gender hierarchies are obvious, but the later scenes suggest that their relationship evolved towards more egalitarian terms.

Ikramullah's memory of Jinnah questions the Indian and British representations of him as a cold-blooded, distant, calculating Muslim legislator, and also the later Pakistani portrayals of an omnipotent, disembodied and likewise distant hero on a pedestal. She remembers an ageing man, whose health was a daily concern, but despite this he treated his guests with kindness and patience. During the Simla Conference in 1945, Ikramullah's friendship with Jinnah deepened, as she took the habit of visiting him every day at his hotel room. Later on she was amazed by her audacity, but explained her directness by the naïveté of her youth. In the stressful conditions of negotiations with the British about the future of India, which turned out a disappointment for the Muslim League, Jinnah, who was already suffering from tuberculosis, must have been pleased to meet Ikramullah, a younger woman with whom he could chat more casually about the events. Later on, Ikramullah's memories of Jinnah have been used as counter-evidence to prove the man's softer, more domestic side (see eg. Ahmed 1997).

Three years after Simla, Ikramullah locates herself taking the oath of allegiance as the first Pakistani woman member of parliament. At this stage Jinnah is definitely dying, but Ikramullah sees only his disarming smile:

*When my turn came I went up with my heart beating and knees trembling, I somehow climbed the three steps of the platform. The Secretary handed me the card on which the oath was written for me to read. After I finished taking the oath, Mr. Jinnah smiled at me encouragingly, rose, shook hands and said a few words, after which I walked across to the other side and climbed down.*

(Ikramullah 1965, 166)

Here her narrative on Jinnah takes up a certain father-daughter dimension, although she is a parent herself at their time of interaction. Surprisingly, though, she does not devote pages to mourn his death but continues the plot rather undramatically. The coming years pass in the hard labour of nation-building, and it seems as if she had no time to reflect upon the daily tasks of these years.

In 1953, Begum Ikramullah resigned from The Muslim League, dishearted with her fellow male MPs who according to her did nothing to urge the drafting of the constitution: "*I intended to be a thorn in their side, to be a lone voice of dissent among the "yes" men.*" (Ikramullah 1998, 200) At this stage, nothing in her voice reminds the reader of the earlier voice of the nervous political groupie. She stands alone, no longer needing male mentors to nod their approval.

Pakistan only got its first Constitution in 1956. One of the main reasons for the delay was West Pakistanis' unwillingness to acknowledge the rights of the Bengalis as a majority population. As a result of compromises, the country's two wings received an equal 150 seats each in the National Assembly, although according to democratic electoral principles, the East should have received a majority of seats.

Shaheed Suhrawardy was one of the main architects of the first constitution. It was soon undone in Auyb Khan's *coup d'état* in 1958. The second Constitution's version of democracy was not direct representation but an engineered notion of "basic democracies", indirect, nomination-based system of "colonial tutelage" (Talbot 2000, 205) that Auyb believed the illiterate population could more easily understand and work with. In his memoirs *Friends Not Masters* (1967), Ayub Khan presents his Montesquieu-inspired geopolitical theory that democracy was only suited to cold countries. He was toppled by another military general Yahya Khan in 1969.

Here we have seen glimpses of an Indian woman's entry into increasing contact with the British Empire and anti-imperialist activism. We have followed her departure from the safe courtyards of domestic-

ity towards both the imperial Mother Country and the turbulence of nationalist politics. In the next section, our attention will turn towards Britain, and another departure from Europe to Asia. This continental shift is narrated by her half-British daughter, who follows her mother's journey towards the courtyards in Lahore with the insight of a new generation's postcolonial experience. The generational gap between the two narratives provides fruitful tensions that will later be summed up under the theme of loyalties.

### 4.3

#### Sticklebacks in scorpio land

*But what a horrible surprise! Instead of a smooth fat minnow,  
Mr. Jeremy landed little Jack Sharp the stickleback, covered  
with spines!*

Beatrix Potter (1906, 34)

*A brackish land, all thorns from the poison of scorpions,  
Whose ants hunt scorpions and sting dragons,  
Whose gale is a fire from hell,  
And gives a fair wind to the ship of Iblis...*

Mohammed Iqbal (Mir 2000, 89)

At the time when the first generation of Muslim girls were educated in convent schools to memorize English nursery rhymes and fables loaded with exotic names of foreign fish, Mohammed Iqbal (1877–1938) wrote passionate nationalist poems filled with Islamic imagery. For him, even life in hellish Scorpio Land was better than a moment's colonial slavery. Iqbal and Beatrix Potter (1866–1943) were both fond of sharp creatures in their imageries. Both writers feature intertextually in *Meatless Days*, not side by side as points of comparison, but

in different instances as "contrapuntal" references to colonialism and its aftermath.<sup>22</sup>

Having lived in a house with fish-shaped ponds in Lahore, Sara Suleri thinks the previous owner's fish fetish has somehow transcended on her family. She remembers wondering about the origins of their family's saying "scabble of a fish", imagining it stemming "(f)rom an native strain of sticklebacks, maybe, those finny creatures who build nests? From an unknown Indian bastardy in which the guilty woman could only be Beatrix Potter?" (1989, 92) For children listening to Beatrix Potter tales in the Punjabi heartland, a stickleback is an exotic species, even if the book's illustration is clear and their mother is British. If they have not seen the fish live, it remains an abstraction. The fish then "goes native" and receives weird connotations and translations.

I only paid attention to the detail of the strange English fish from *The Tale of Mr. Jeremy Fisher* in *Meatless Days* after moving to Canada. The hilarious little book became my son's favourite bedtime story, which I ended up reading to him in Finnish as a simultaneous translation. I could not find the correct Finnish word for "stickleback". Every time I translated, I made up a new word for the scary fish threatening Jeremy the Frog. For me, this was a prime example of the problems that immigrant parents face when negotiating between one's mother tongue and the newly acquired language.

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<sup>22</sup> In addition to Potter and Iqbal, Suleri's intertextual borrowings extend to wider realms of both children's and adult fiction. In the children's section, we find at least a collection of British nursery rhymes, *The Little Red Hen*, *The Jungle Book*, *They Took The Wrong Road* (a little-known British tale) and *The Right Path* (an Islamic studies reader for children). In the adult section, I can find references to Ghalib, Nasrul Islam, Bullhe Shah, Shakespeare, Dickens, Kipling, Henry James, Poe, Dickens, Shelley, Milton, Austen, Woolf, Flaubert, Robert Browning, Eugene O'Neill. In reviews, she is most often compared with Marcel Proust. The present study is not a full examination of intertextuality, but with this list I hope to encourage literary scholars to engage in a discussion of postcolonial intertextuality.

Finding the reference to sticklebacks in *Meatless Days* caused me a lot of amusement, and also relief: I was no longer worried about the flexibility between original terms and bastard indigenisations, but started seeing in my very inability to translate correctly a possibility for imaginary transgressions.

Sara Suleri constantly blends images from the canons of English literature and Muslim Indian classics. One can almost hear at times the voices of Hir and Ranjha (a Punjabi classic folktale) alongside with Jane Eyre, Ghālib's *ghazals* alongside with Shelley's verses. Echoes of a similar kind of cultural duality were already heard in Begum Ikramullah's narration. Here I am to examine the encounters of the two worlds, the British colonial and the Pakistani nationalist, through the story of Sara Suleri's mother's emigration to Pakistan, and the post-colonial literary repercussions that her parents' marriage had on her teaching and writing life. At the metaphorical level, one may ask what happens to the "slippy-sloppy" stickleback arriving on dry Punjabi plains, and how it might survive in the river Ravi.

### *Immediate resistances*

*Did she really think that she could assume the burden of empire,  
that if she let my father colonize her body and her name she would  
perform some slight reparation for the race from which she came?  
Could she not see that his desire for her was quickened with em-  
pire's ghosts, that his need for her was a clear index of how he was  
still possessed?*

(Suleri 1989, 163)

Mair Jones and Ziauddin Suleri met in London in the mid-1940s, a moment before the Partition. Suleri seemed to have forgotten his cousin-wife and daughter in Karachi, and married the articulate Welsh woman, who was later to become a lecturer in English Literature at the University of Punjab in Lahore. Mair nominally converted into



Islam and received an Islamic name, Sorraya. The couple moved to Pakistan soon after its formation and Mair took up Pakistani citizenship. But despite her attempts to abnegate her position of power, she could never become a fully fledged Pakistani. In the immediate aftermath of decolonisation, her denial of Empire would certainly be viewed as suspect. Hers now was a country only learning not to bow down too eagerly in front of *sahibs* and *memsahibs*, changing its street names and opening the clubs and polo fields to a new indigenous elite. She was an equally new Pakistani as anyone else, but could not help evoking in her fellow citizens a long historical memory of colonial oppression.

In a sense, Suleri engages in what her Yale literary colleague Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (2003, 123–151) calls a “reparative reading” of her mother’s wishes to repair the wrongs of British colonialism and imperialism. But this is not only individuals’ psychological reparation but also a wish to repair political history, by slightly replacing it against the grain.

Mair Suleri’s story somewhat coincides with another ex-British citizen Alys Faiz’ (1993) narrative of her encounter and marriage with the poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz. Both women were fierce anti-imperialists and, according to Faiz, eventually ended up competing for the same jobs. Alys Faiz remembers losing her job as the editor of women’s and children’s pages at *Pakistan Times* to Mair Suleri at the time when her husband sat in prison accused of the spreading of communism. Sara’s father appears in Faiz’ memoirs as an authoritarian editor, with whom she had a highly problematic relationship. She was forced to leave Pakistan, as she could not find a way to support her children, for self-exile back to London for the time of her husband’s imprisonment.

Begum Ikramullah’s narrative is also linked with this plot: she remembers her cousin Shaheed Suhrawardy working as Faiz Ahmed Faiz’ lawyer during the years of the Pakistani internal “red scare” better known as the Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case. Faiz, amongst several other key leftist intellectuals were accused of planning a Marxist-Leninist *coup d’état*. Faiz Ahmed Faiz received the Lenin Peace Prize in

1963. In today's Pakistan, Alys Faiz is known in particular for her independent contributions as a feminist activist.

After her arrival to Pakistan, Mair Suleri soon became Mamma of five children, whom Sara considers to be her embodied books. The question of race is articulated in Mamma's wonder at the babies' brown, wide Asiatic feet, so different from hers:

*For my mother loved to look at us in race. I have watched her pick up an infant's foot – Irfan's, perhaps, or Tillat's – with an expression of curiously sealed wonder, as though her hand had never felt so full as when she held her infant's feet. They were Asiatic, happiest when allowed to be barefoot or to walk throughout the world with a leather thong between the toes – a moving thought, to Mamma.*  
(161)

Sara, Mamma's third "Asiatic" baby, puts together a Fanon-inspired analysis of her parents' marriage: that her father had a "need" to marry a British woman in order to occupy the coloniser's bedroom. This according to Fanon (1967, 63) is the ultimate act of ownership and "whitewashing" in the typical Manichean logic inherited from the coloniser: *"I am loved like a whiteness. I am a white man"*. The race issue within the family, in my reading, appears mostly through the imaginary footnotes to Fanon, of whose contribution Suleri must have been fully aware while writing *Meatless Days* in the North American academia.

Ziauddin Suleri, the fierce nationalist immersed in the worship of the "household god" Quaid ( "The Leader"; mentioning his real name, Jinnah, would have been blasphemous), is the prototypical postcolonial loudmouth intellectual also appearing in Fanon's texts, a journalist jailed and released, banned by some generals, again favoured by others. But unlike Fanon's, Suleri's narrative is not only about the revolutionary native male's desires and motivations. From

a feminist perspective, it is more promising than Fanon's compelling but hasty, one-sided statements.

Suleri studies her both parents, perhaps more intrigued by her mother's choice to leave Britain than in her father's desire for the white other. She goes on to state that her mother's life in Pakistan, the absent-minded, surprisingly relaxed acceptance of her own cultural otherness, was in itself more political than anything her father ever did:

*"He made each front page fit into his control of the aesthetic of his history. My mother, however, let history seep, so that, miraculously, she had no language in which to locate its functioning but held it rather as a distracted manner sheathed about her face, a scarf. "Mamma was more political..." I essayed the idea to Tillat. "She did not have to put it into print – it was the sheet in which she slept..." (168)*

Suleri studies her mother's immersion into history at the intimate skin level. History is in her postures, her facial expressions and gestures. The way she distractedly pulls away a scarf from her face is historical, because choosing to wear a scarf is something contrary to what she was brought up with. Politics is wrapped around her skin as "the sheet in which she slept". It is a scarf, a sheet, a flag with a crescent and a star. All these are symbols of her independent choice, signifiers of her leavetaking from imperial England.

Mamma's primal desire for her foreign lover is transformed into a scrupulous study of Punjabi customs, "love turned historical" (164). It is no longer a passionate encounter in the present but becomes a "social nicety, companionable" (165), with the necessary burden of historical context. And Mamma chooses to immerse into that context without constant articulation of her own difference. Her patience, grace and charm makes her a saintly figure amongst her students. She goes on lecturing Jane Austen with passion, but will not impose any-

thing else of the imperialist culture she has left behind. For instance, when the time comes to arrange her daughters' marriages, she considers obliged to withdraw from the negotiations.

Suleri portrays her mother as the most quiet and ethereally withdrawing family member, who obviously reflects on her right to interfere in the local customs. Mamma is present but also sometimes spiritually absent, lost between the English "tradition" she is hired to teach and the fragile Urdu she is hesitant to speak. In today's context, it is because of the historical presence of literature professors like Mamma that we can still imagine displaced sticklebacks swimming against the stream in the River Ravi. The ideological continuum from Lord Macaulay's notorious thesis on the unworthiness of Indian literature via the establishment of universities for colonial subjects towards postcolonial literary hauntings is a sub-text in Suleri's narration, torn between nostalgia and resistance.<sup>23</sup> The prestige of Eng.Lit. in Punjab University has not diminished since Mamma's departure:

*In Jinnah Library (the former Lawrence Hall, the Governor's house), because I don't want to seclude myself in the purdah room reserved for women, I am always surrounded by a social club of young men. It is as if sitting in an audition: one after one they spot me, capture me and insist on giving me a lecture on whatever they are working on.*

*The social science students are my faithful friends, from whom I think I learn something new. It is fun to listen to their conspiracy theories, and scary to find out about the recruitment for the jihadi camps in their very neighbourhoods. They don't all come from the liberal suburbs of Gulberg. The English lit students from Punjab University I have some difficulties relating to. I cannot understand*

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<sup>23</sup> Lord Macaulay stated in his Minute on Indian Education that "a single shelf of a good European library is worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia" (Macaulay 1835: www source ). On the prestige of Eng.Lit as a part of the colonial bureaucrats' education, see Eagleton (1991, 38–9).

*their bubbly enthusiasm and love of Thomas Hardy and Jane Austen.*

*I would like to ask: what about Iqbal, Manto, Faiz? I wonder if this is an important postcolonial lesson. For me right here it seems too obvious.*

(Research diary, Lahore, March 2001)

### *Pedagogical motherhood*

*Meatless Days* is a thoroughly Pakistani narrative, with only short references to the family's stays in London. Despite her half-Welsh genetic background, Sara Suleri does not express affinity to Britain. Mamma's family members remain as shadows in the narrative; there are little references to her past before the act of "going native". The maternal grandparents are only briefly mentioned. Amongst her new Pakistani relatives, Mamma is an immigrant without a meaningful history. Her experience can be read as a reversal of the experiences of Pakistanis abroad, and in Stuart Hall's (2002, 9–10) words be treated as identity work of "minimal selves", or a kind of poetics of the recently arrived. She emerges into the extended family from an abstract "Inglestan" and sometimes disappears into her "Welsh moments" but does not burden her new family with her personal baggage. After her tragic death in a rickshaw accident, Ziauddin Suleri cannot remember the name of her place of birth. The name carved on her gravestone is completely fabricated. And then, as we saw in chapter 1, when Sara returns from the United States to pay her respects, she cannot even find the grave. She chooses not to worship bones but rather cherish the memory of the once lived body. Then, the imaginary visits to her mother's living body as a site of memory become transcended to writing.

Suleri acknowledges, though, the first and most influential gift she received from Mamma, her mother tongue. It is a precise gift of academic Britishness somewhat displaced in postcolonial Pakistan that at the time of Sara's birth was only learning to speak a discourse

of nationalism. She learns to ape words for which she does not have a direct referent. Sometimes "Mamma" becomes "squirrel", sometimes "marmalade" (Suleri 1989, 169). Her progeny with English words dates back to her babyhood, when Mamma was "*putting words into my mouth before my taste buds had acquired a means to cope with their suggestion*" (Suleri 1989, 151). Later on, the children spent all their secluded afternoon siestas reading books in English. Later, Sara actually ends up sitting at her mother's lectures at Punjab University, completing yet another degree to escape an arranged marriage.

Her mother's postcolonial pedagogy, at its best, treads at the edge of impossibility:

*During the years of her existence, I did not altogether understand this gravity, this weightlessness, she carried with her. But then, I did not teach. Now that I do, I know that great sobriety of tone betokens the bearing of a stately teacher whose step is always measuring out what she sees as the edges of this great impossibility, of what it means to teach.* (154)

Sara carries the memory of her mother on the Gothic imperial red-brick old campus on the Mall Road, just a stone's throw away from Kim's gun, while teaching postcolonial literature at Yale.<sup>24</sup> It is there her mother is in her element, most alive, and also distant from the Mamma of children's fables and domestic cross-cultural sensitivity. Her arrival at the courtyards of Punjab University is a gift also to

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<sup>24</sup> Suleri builds impressionistic connections between the colonial architecture of Punjab University and the dark, cloistered buildings of the Yale campus, but does not explicate the specific imperial history of her US institution. Amitava Kumar (2000, 60–1) re-tells the story of Yale from a postcolonial perspective: named after its major donor, the wealthy colonial merchant Elihu Yale, who served as a governor of Madras, Yale University is a historical remnant of the East India Company's mercantile capital and patrimony.

the daughter, who seems to enjoy watching her mother teach. She watches much closer than an average teenager or young adult would do.

Suleri treats her father's immersion into journalism with a great degree of irony, but her mother's teaching is something she can only respect. In the universe of *Meatless Days*, the distinction in memories about the dead and still living parent (cf. Miller 1998) is quite pronounced: the dead mother is forgiven for much more than the still living father. Her mother's teaching becomes an element that is still alive in her; it obviously affects her academic future. The bygone women inhabit Sara's English literature professor's body at Yale, in her own study of contradictions and impossibilities in literary representation. Teaching moments such as these make her push her own concepts and definitions towards that very limit of impossibility:

*A face, puzzled and attentive and belonging to my gender, raises its intelligence to t question why, since I am teaching third world writing, I haven't given equal space to women writers in my syllabus. I look up, the horse's mouth, a foolish thing to be. Unequal images battle in my mind for precedence – there's imperial Ifat, there's Mamma in the garden, and Halima the cleaning woman is there too, there's uncanny Dadi with her goat. Against all my own odds I know what I must say. Because, I'll answer slowly, there are no women in the third world.*

(Suleri 1989,20.)

The enigmatic statement "there are no women in the third world" can be read as a postcolonial feminist theoretical opening, an argument for situational gender and the impossibility to teach about women's personal experiences in the context of "third world", a category which itself escapes intelligible definition. The women who brought her up do not fit into this "discourse of convenience" that she as an academic is sometimes compelled to use in the classroom.

The pedagogical encounter between Suleri and her student is where the opening chapter "Excellent Things in Women" ends. The title suggests that the chapter may be in itself a prolonged answer to the question why she does not focus on gender quotas in her teaching. The women whose historical subjectivity she would like to discuss are too distant from the literature department's curriculum, and too close to her body to become academically labelled into neat containers. "Third World writing" is an artificial Western academic imposition, a canonical notion of literatures born in opposition to colonisation with the goal of nation-states in mind. National allegory is one of its favourite tropes.<sup>25</sup> What would Suleri's excellent women have to do with the homogeneous time of national allegories? Quite a little, as they inhabit other temporalities created by themselves. Also, the signifier "Third World" denotes scarcity of resources, struggles out of poverty. Suleri is assigned to teach this, but she cannot find an affinity between the texts on her reading lists and the women's stories she yearns to tell.

Suleri's women, mothers, sisters, grandmothers and servants, are too busy in their immediate, everyday contexts to think of their generic womanhood and "belonging" to an outwardly imposed category "postcolonial nation-state", or "third world". Neither are they poor or hungry. The memories of their presence are counter-memories to the assumed collective Third World resistance and poverty. They have gone on living in their own idioms despite the world's attempt to put them on their places as signifiers of underdevelopment. And if their lives have been so rich, so full of delicious micro-political twists, it would be somewhat absurd to urge their stories' insertion to canons where they would never agree on belonging.

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<sup>25</sup> If national allegory is promoted as *the* dominant mode of storytelling in Third World literature, or postcolonial literature, it means privileging national identity before other, potentially more subversive identities. For a comprehensive analysis of this debate, see Ahmad (1992).



The pedagogy of *Meatless Days* as a transnational text lies in its resistance to ready-made categories and "discourses of convenience", and in its enigmatic riddles. It is the moments of "horse's mouth", bewilderment and confusion that may provoke in the reader alternative ways of reading. The text demands of its reader a tolerance for endless ambiguity. The riddles can never be sufficiently unravelled. But while working on these textual tangles, thorns and spikes, against the stream in River Ravi, we might be moving towards something new. The reading process itself becomes Mamma embodied: a suggestion for a postcolonial feminist pedagogy.

#### 4.4 Loyalties

*The rending of the social and emotional fabric that took place in 1947 is still far from mended.*

Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin (1998, 3.)

#### *Counting on women*

The concept of loyalty, ethnic, national, class, family etc. seems particularly useful in feminist political analysis, where assumptions are too often made under the generic banner of "women", or the sub-groups of "mothers", "lesbians", "black women" etc. Loyalty is linked to identity politics, and it operates on a hierarchical scale of priorities. If identity is something that can keep on expanding during one's lifetime, loyalties are either kept or broken. There are situations which demand putting aside one type of loyalty for another, more pressing one, like we saw in Begum Ikramullah's case as a choice for Muslim nationhood, at the expense of her previous activism in all-Indian women's groups.

Here I have not been convinced that the presently available Western political theorizing on the concept of loyalty would help me highlight anything found in the primary materials. The following starting point to the analysis of loyalties is based mostly on Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin's (1998) analyses of women's oral history about 1947 and on Vijay Agnew's (1978) analysis of Indian women politicians' family ties. I sum up what I have learnt from these three feminist scholars points that are also relevant in Pakistan.

Loyalty is a more acute concept than mere "identity"; it emerges in times of crises as special demands, and it is often a matter of conscious negotiation. It is vocally appealed to through highly emotive discourses. Loyalties, like identities, can also be conceptualised as shifting and situational, but they consist of less play between possibilities, and more commitment. They can be extremely painful.

In South Asia, in particular, the weight of multiple loyalties seems heavier than in Western political cultures. There are classes, castes, sub-castes, ethnic minorities, major and minor religious groups, sects, lineages, clans, extended families, parents, in-laws – people demanding you to stay where you are, amongst us. The political structures rely on family and community alliances rather than on independent "showing of colour". Children of political families are born to become politicians. And particularly in the case of women politicians, there is often a father or a husband, most often a dead one, behind their campaigns. India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Pakistan all have their own political clans, out of which, in lucky circumstances, a woman leader emerges. This familial type of political power is by no means unusual in the Western world, but it operates with greater intensity in South Asia. Political clans have the tendency to become dynasties, in which bloody feuds, corruption and nepotism and the order of the day.

Foregrounding the Bhutto saga, to which we will only arrive in chapter 6, one can think of the weight of family loyalty in South Asian politics as a continuum from colonialism to postcolonial nation-states. The phenomenon was noticeable already in the pre-Partition politics,

when behind almost every woman activist there was a powerful father or husband. Vijay Agnew (1979, 139–40) contends that women were perceived as the most trustworthy and loyal politicians, who could be relied on to maintain family honour and not to exploit their power for personal advantage vis-à-vis the advantage of the whole family. Agnew sees in the pre-Partition women political activists' public presence, despite their excellent leadership talents, a tendency to represent themselves as adjuncts or trusted political aides of the significant male others. Women's loyalty to the family was taken for granted whereas men's was not.

In the present setting of two politicians' life-writing, it is Begum Ikramullah's narrative that is less shadowed by a single male (and rather, inspired by many), and Benazir Bhutto's story which is completely structured around her father's martyrdom. Begum Ikramullah did worship Jinnah, like most participants in the Pakistan Movement did, and was much influenced by her politically powerful cousin, but her father and husband, although supportive, remain in the story as marginal characters. She stepped into politics independently, despite her husband's initial reservations.

Benazir Bhutto was drawn into politics as the martyr's daughter, a living saint, and the only possible saviour of the country from under martial law. The difference between the two plots is quite remarkable. In terms of the two women's agency, one can claim that Benazir's space of action was predetermined long before she even started planning her first election campaign, and that if compared to this, Begum Ikramullah, in spite of her more modest career, was freer to act according to her own agenda.

When loyalty blinds one's vision from surrounding chaos, violence or oppression, the "false consciousness" of the loyal political leader is no longer an object of embarrassment or ridicule but a major disturbance. The lack of political judgment is not only immature but also damaging, and in the worst cases destructive. It is easier to practice political judgment on parties, organisations and countries than on the

person who lovingly brought you up or the one with whom you share a bed. Being a member of a political dynasty is, in other words, almost certainly a doomed exercise.

In the following analysis, we will travel through the intersection of family and national loyalties during India's Partition, one of the most massive human displacements in recent history. It was the tragic consequence of a hasty imperial leavetaking. The *raj* was gone, and the new border was leaking. What is remembered of the women who arrived to Pakistan? What kinds of loyalties did they articulate?

### *Abandoned courtyards, 1947*

*"Subtlety": that word cropped up often when Pakistan attempted to talk about itself in history. It was at the cutting edge of our border with India, that great divide of sibling rivalry: when India described our portion of the map of the subcontinent as ferociously mean and skinny, we bridled and said that actually it was subtle and slim.*

(Suleri 1989, 55)

We now return to courtyards where memories are cast and excellent things in women come forth in a new light. The play of light and shadows may be seen as a mixture of emotions that Pakistan's birth generated in its first citizens, the hope of the new homeland and the bitterness about what was left behind on the Indian side of the border. Many families were forced to abandon their courtyards at the sight of their neighbours being murdered; many left India voluntarily due to their loyalty to the imagined Muslim community. The border was virtually sealed, and many families have met their relatives and friends living on the other side only after decades of separation (cf. Butalia 1999, Menon and Bhasin 1998). Ikramullah and Suleri do not directly refer to such reunions, but this does not mean that the shadow of the flesh and blood horrors of the Partition would not be

present in their texts at some level. What Ikramullah and Suleri share is their "immigrant" (*mohajir*) background in the new nation-state of Pakistan, the family histories of diaspora and migration.

The Partition is a sub-continental haunting, a trauma with "an overdetermined significance" for everyday life (Hubel 1996, 3, cf. White 1978, 87). One can easily connect Partition narratives from both sides of the border to the postcolonial theoretical discourse on mourning, melancholy, loss and ghosts (cf. Punter 2000). The rhetoric of haunting often involves changing landscapes, lost territories, and the idea of the theft of language. Memory is the place where undercurrents, spirits and shadows take over, and postcolonial writing is the site where the re-naming and -claiming of loss occurs. It is a site open to untranslatability, instability, melancholy and meaningful silences.

The Partition as a rupture that shook the whole Indian subcontinent is narrated by Suleri as a violent imposition of "nationhood", which despite the articulations of "homeland" had a foreign taste to most citizens, especially the immigrants:

*It was extravagant, history's wrenching price: farmers, villagers, living in some other world, one day awoke to find that they no longer inhabited familiar homes but that most modern thing, a Muslim or Hindu nation.*

(Suleri 1989, 116)

Amongst the displaced people was Dadi (literally: paternal grandmother), who moved her "thin-pure Urdu" from Meerut, a city in the Urdu-speaking heartland of United Provinces, to Lahore to wait for the arrival of her son from England to take care of her. Names of the countries where her children live are abstractions to her: England becomes "Inglestan" and Switzerland "Swaziland". In Pakistan, she escapes to the world of Qur'an, from behind which she gives her grandchildren some cryptic statements about the past. Dadi cannot

remember names, or the exact number of children she had borne. Instead, she quotes *hadiths* verbatim. Her emigration is not dramatized in detail, but her sense of betrayal is apparent:

*Dadi was peeved. She had long since dispensed with any loyalties larger than the pitiless give-and-take of people who are forced to live together in the same place, and she resented independence for the distances it made. She was not among those who, on the fourteenth of August, unfurled flags and festivities against the backdrop of people running and cities burning.*

(Suleri 1989, 2)

Dadi's loyalties are not in India or in Pakistan but only within the immediate family circle. She lives with Sara's family, but her relationship with God is more immediate than with anyone else. She spends her days on the courtyard and roof terrace on the family compound with her Qur'an, a metal basin for washing hands and a brass water-pot, which no-one else was pure enough to touch. She converses with God, otherworldly, and comes up with the idea that women are holier than men. If heaven lies upon the feet of women, according to the Prophet's *hadith*, the men "live as though they were unsuckled things" (Suleri 1989, 7).

What we found out about Leila Ahmed's (1999) memories of "women's Islam" somewhat corresponds to Suleri's memory of Dadi, although this displaced grandmother of India's Partition is a more awe-inspiring figure than the women in Ahmed's maternal harem. God and food "move her to intensities", but in the presence of her grandchildren she is either eccentric or frightening. She has severe communication problems with his nationalist son, for whom the project of Pakistan is sacred. Dadi's immediate God ignores nations and states.

For Sara, from the distance of another generation, the family's conflicting loyalties between God and the newborn nation are sometimes irritating, sometimes amusing. Her own loyalty to the nation

is vanishing, if it ever existed in the first place, and Islam features in the text as a cultural framework from which she constantly begs to be excused, or, during religious holidays like Eid, pretends to be Islamic for a day to please her grandmother.

Mair Suleri's loyalty to Pakistan, as we found before, is the political twist of the narrative, the postcolonial challenge, or a kind of post-imperial role-reversal. Her citizenship as a nominally converted British wife may have been fragile, but at the same time it was a project that she immersed herself in, without completely denying her British past. The mother and daughter's common love of English literature provides us another kind of fictional space, which may be a proof of colonial complicity, but at the same time gives clues about the negotiations between cultures that happened in their family. Suleri gives a humorous and affectionate account of the fictional sticklebacks and the little red hen on the Punjabi landscape of her childhood, in such a vivid way that a reader can hear her Mamma's voice at bedtime.

Begum Ikramullah's Partition narrative takes a somewhat different route than that of the *mohajirs* from East Punjab and the Urdu heartland, the United Provinces and the Delhi area. Under the title "the shadow of the coming events" (92), she narrates the growing communalism in her Delhi society and the rift she experienced between her Congress and Muslim League friends. The Partition itself is, for her, a thunderstorm, and the last years in Delhi she lives "under the darkening sky" (128), lamenting the inevitability of leaving the rich cultural life of the city behind. In 1946, she moves temporarily to Calcutta to take care of her ill father, and witnesses in shock and horror the Direct Action Day riots:

*It made me realize what a terrible responsibility we take on ourselves when we champion a cause and ask people to be ready to sacrifice and die for it. How few of us realize, as these words glibly pass our lips, what it actually costs people in blood and tears.*

(Ikramullah 1963, 142.)

Despite the trauma of the riots, the events have a sobering effect on her. She becomes more moderate in the choice of words in her speeches, and the idea of sacrifice for any community seems now absurd to her. Her father's condition worsens month after month, and in the tense atmosphere of the city, medical care cannot be taken for granted. When she finally takes the father into a hospital to die, she discovers that nearly all of the staff are Hindus. She mentions her gratefulness to them especially, because during such a period of upheaval, Hindu-Muslim solidarity could not be taken for granted. The political emotion of communal distrust raised its head here, tinged with absurd fears. The Hindu doctors and nurses try in vain to prolong her father's life. Outside Calcutta, in the province of Bihar, rivers are turning into blood.

The year 1947 is extremely stressful for her because of her daughter's illness and the premature birth of her fourth child. This is the only time in *From Purdah to Parliament* that she briefly mentions childbirth. At the eve of independence she is in Calcutta, anxious about her children's health and about the possible riots ahead. Her cousin, Shaheed *bhai*, does his peace-in with Mahatma Gandhi in the Calcutta slums in the days following the independence celebrations. She calls this act "superhuman" and laments the fact that Pakistanis stamped it as an act of disloyalty, when it actually stopped mass destruction in Bengal altogether, and another refugee crisis at Pakistan's eastern border with India.

Her narrative does not specify the reasons why she and her husband chose to migrate to West Pakistan instead of East Pakistan. Neither of them had previous ties to Karachi, and Shaista's Bengali roots were strong indeed. Her husband's high rank bureaucratic position in the Empire perhaps implied a transfer to civil service in the country's new capital. She reached the new homeland by boat in September 1947. The trains to Pakistan had stopped operating altogether after the mass murders on both sides of the border. She wakes up in her new house in the suburb of Clifton feeling displaced, then realizes



being in the country she had dreamed of the past years, and for a brief moment *"the realization went to my head like wine. It made me feel as if I was walking on air* (Ikramullah 1963, 159)."

The ecstatic moment passes by quickly, and there is a need to think of the price paid for the displacements, killings, suicides, rapes, lootings and the construction of a country from the scratch. For her, the price was paid "almost without regret" (Ikramullah 1963, 162). *Almost*. She remembers collecting blankets and warm clothes for the refugees, and the involvement of society women who had never before worked outside their homes. The tiny *almost* in Ikramullah's confident nationalist prose is a shadow of doubt, a silent haunting. Perhaps it contains the stories she heard about Punjabi women voluntarily jumping into wells to protect family honour, and about the ghost trains arriving in Lahore and Delhi.

For Ikramullah's generation of newcomers to Pakistan, clues such as her *almost* are painfully embodied, and no matter how a feminist reader attempts at theorizing the echoes and shadows of the dying, mutilated bodies on the Indian-Pakistani border, there is no way to conceptualise them as "surfaces", or "texts" (cf. Menon and Bhasin 1998, Lentin 1997). In the immediate aftermath of the convulsion, perhaps the only sane way to deal with the memory of the factual, humiliated, branded, dismembered, or disappeared bodies was a reparative silence, or a weighing of words, which resulted in only small hints.

### *Postcolonial nationalisms and the mythical "later"*

Ironically, the plight of the millions of displaced people was a catalyst for changing notions of the public and the private in both India and Pakistan. The work in the refugee centres did empower women to think of future public roles. The rhetoric of "nation-building" did accomplish some minor feminist goals. But, at the same time, it served to postpone women's special demands under the banner of urgent

national interests. The gendered, temporal twist of what Cynthia Enloe (1987, 62–3) calls “the mythical later” of postcolonial nationalist movements is of particular importance also in Ikramullah’s case. Despite her praise for the society women’s work during this time of crisis, her understanding of the national priorities and interests is rather conventional. For instance, she looks back on her own career from middle age, and pities her husband who as a government servant had to go through periods of “awkwardness” because of her political activism:

*Now that the heat of the battle is over and I can look back on events calmly, I feel that while in a time of national resistance to foreign domination it is right for all rules to be broken, it is not a good thing at other times for wives of Government servants to take part in politics. (1963, 97)*

For her own insistence on breaking this norm, she blames her “youthful egoism” (97). On one hand, she writes with the intention to empower other women to follow her path in the Parliament, on the other, she supports society women’s voluntary social work as the “correct”, apolitical way of involvement. The confusion between wifehood and a political career is here fully blown. What becomes apparent is, however, that her own career is a product of “the heat of the moment”, the energies of anti-colonial resistance, the excitement of the Pakistani movement and the euphoria of landing in a newborn state. The other times would perhaps, in her thinking, produce better wives.

The narrative ends at her first years as a member of parliament. She does not describe life in the newly found state with similar kind of enthusiasm as in Calcutta and Delhi. The tingling of political emotion fades at the pressures of nation-building. In the second edition of the book, she has added chapters about her work in the United Nations and of her years as an ambassador in Morocco. A great part of her cousin’s biography is located in London, where she lived with her

husband, then the Pakistani High Commissioner, in the 1960s. The readers do not, in other words, get much of a taste of the Pakistani part of her life story. The colonial Indian part of the narrative is full of colourful description of culture (that one could call "ethnographic" details) but the storyteller's voice is extinguished at her arrival to the Land of the Pure. The departure from politically safe nostalgia to the portrayal of political power struggles is sometimes almost too hasty for the reader: Begum Ikramullah is too preoccupied with the polar opposites of "then" and "now" to analyse the processes that happened in-between.

The arrival to Pakistan is followed by a "back to work" mentality, and a list of her public achievements. We do not read about the cultural "scene" in Karachi, about her possible involvement in the newly formed women's organisations, nor about her possible homesickness for Bengal. Neither do we read about her opinions about the status of the Bengali language, her mother tongue. Whether these are strategic silences of "selves in hiding" (Durakbasa 1997) or irrelevant political questions, one is left to wonder about the emptiness of her narration on the actual Pakistan vis-à-vis the passionate Pakistan of her dreams before the Partition.

Begum Ikramullah's multiple loyalties to her Bengali Sufi family heritage, the British Empire, the Muslim League and finally, the nation-state of Pakistan take, in my reading of her two texts together, more complicated turns than her linear and cheerful narrator's voice in her first text *From Purdah to Parliament* seems to suggest. *H.S. Subrawardy* fills in some gaps that *From Purdah to Parliament* left unanswered. The narrative style in her autobiography is confident, clear and, from an academic perspective, almost too "neat". Her belonging to Pakistan is never questioned, and she presents herself as a prime mover in the national scene, like a good politician should. The politician's voice moves on like a train, solidly, smoothly, always arriving where it should on time. The text's schedule is perfectly organised – at least on the surface. The question, then, emerges, are there other

voices to be heard in her texts? Are there, if we listen with maximum concentration?

In this chapter I have mostly re-told Begum Ikramullah's story from the Calcutta *zenana* to the first Pakistani parliament in Karachi in the light of class identity "braided" with multiple belongings. I have brought in Sara Suleri's narrative of her mother's and grandmother's arrivals to Pakistan as a second voice that somewhat confuses the first. Both women are able to deal with the Partition of India at the comfortable historical distance of some decades. In chapter 6, I will contrast this with the uncomfortable silences and loyalty conflicts that the country's second partition, the 1971 secession of Bangladesh, produces in the texts. A question, then, will rise about the time it takes to heal deep-seated national traumas, and whether gender affects their remembering.

Now from courtyards to kitchens.

*Meatless Days* was my first insight to Pakistan. In all its fleshiness, it was a textual *naimatkhana*, an Urdu term for larder, or literally, a chamber of bounty<sup>1</sup>. The title's ambiguity is twofold: it bluffs the reader at the national and personal, embodied levels. Referring to a national food rationing plan in Pakistan, when butchers' were to be closed on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, Suleri reveals that there were no actual meatless days, after all, in her closest circles. In wealthy households, meat was stocked up on Mondays, and maybe, on leaner days, one could get by with "small meat" such as chicken. The second ambiguity is the title's connotation of the fading of the flesh. In fact, the text paradoxically ends in the very word, "disembodiment" (Suleri 1989, 186). The narrative, on the other hand, is full of meat, flesh, bodies, emotions, laughter, mannerisms. It never gives a rest to the senses. And why should we be confused in front such a display of contradictions? Such is life in Lahore, the capital of the Punjab.

*Edible Histories* focuses almost completely on the intersection of food, historical bodies and politics, primarily in *Meatless Days* and to a lesser extent in *From Purdah to Parliament*. My purpose is here to study sensuous food passages, and passages using the "culinary metaphor" for memories of other events, at three levels. First, to provide a historical context, the symbols of food as cultural power at the intersection of colonialism, class and Islam will be studied. From the historical level I will move towards Sara Suleri's experience of mourning in language through the idea of edible histories. The third part

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<sup>1</sup> This term is borrowed from Aamer Hussein's (1999, 31–40) short story "Sweet Rice."

is devoted to food as pleasure and the privileged site of memory in diasporic locations. In the last section, kitchens will be discussed as a metaphor for political lineage and also political security.

Somewhere between the lines, the chapter is also an ethnographic love letter to the city of Lahore. I do not intend to hide the "ethnographic romance" of my story of arrival to Pakistan, the story which is still ongoing, and which is fuelled by what Fischer and Abedi (1990, xix) call genres of access. For me, culinary narratives have worked as the most powerful initiators, the most welcoming kinds of text that transcend the "purely" textual and discursive. The initial idea of edible histories has followed me from Helsinki via Lahore to Toronto, where I am now comparing "the real things" with diasporic variations, and bewildered by the "long memory" of generations of immigrants and the long travels of foodstuffs from South Asia to North America. My analysis has involved fieldwork, perhaps not in the conventional ethnographic sense of systematic note-taking and taped interviews, but rather through an eclectic collection of observations made in friends' kitchens, grocery stores and restaurants. This is a "hands-on" chapter, which I started writing earliest of all the chapters in this composition. It embodies more personal memories than the other parts, and is written with greatest passion and enthusiasm, because the writing experience was pleasurable and tasty.

## 5.1

### Food as cultural power

#### *Basic ingredients*

*Ajowan, allspice, anise, bay leaves, cardamom, chilies, cinnamon, cloves, coriander, cumin, fennel, fenugreek, garam masala, garlic, ginger, mace, mint, mustard, nutmeg, pepper, pomegranate seeds, poppy seeds, rose water, saffron, tamarind, tulsi, turmeric.*

(Weston 1992, 193)

These are the basic ingredients every respectable Pakistani kitchen should have, found in an educational children's book. The first sense through which I became curious about the country was taste. Faithful to the edible origins of the study, I am now turning from courtyards to kitchens, to the many culinary metaphors dealing with political history, and more concrete passages where the women's relation to cooking, household management and their memories of past kitchens become mapped out.

In cultural studies and cultural history, food has been an important focal point of analysis for some time now. Historians often link their analyses into the global economic relations, tracing the travel of foodstuffs from one continent to another via colonialism (cf. Goody 1998, Zubaida and Tapper 2000), whereas in contemporary cultural studies it has become fashionable to conceptualise kitchens, particularly the postcolonial emigrée ones, as one of the most primal and pervasive sites of memory (cf. Goldman 1992, Narayan 1997).

The benefits of taking food seriously as a research topic are everywhere to be seen: it brings one to experiment with recipes one might otherwise never think of, takes one to new quarters of the city to visit fabulous restaurants, and gives one cultural capital beyond concepts and methodologies which even one's non-academic friends can relate to. Studying food and cooking is a life-affirming exercise, yet never far detached from contemporary political debates. The journey of the mango into my Northern kitchen is a highly political one, which raises questions about the ethics of international trade. I am pleased to eat them sometimes, although I would much rather enjoy them in the monsoon rains.

Anne Goldman (1992), in her study on the politics of Mexican food narratives in the United States, uses the term *autoethnography*<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The terms *autoethnography* and *ethnic autobiography* have been used interchangeably by ethnographers and literary theorists alike since the 1980s (see eg. Lionnet 1989, Fischer 1986). A theoretical debate about the challenges that auto-

to discuss women's culinary memories. She deliberately confounds the line between autobiography proper and voices attached to the genre of ethnography, which are expected by Western readers to be representative of their cultures. By taking cookery books and recipe sharing as relevant autobiographical practices, she extends her understanding of autobiography to include the embodied, marginal and often hastily scribbled, or orally passed on culinary notes. In terms of politics of immigration, she uses Maya Angelou's (1986) descriptions of food as the signifier of political wellbeing, yet resisting the pull to reduce culinary narratives to simplistic ethnic "types". She reads women's texts on cooking and eating as a vital expression on the construction of subjectivity, and thus also as concrete means of re-examining both domestic and global power relations.

Uma Narayan (1997, 161–188) studies the complications and contradictions of eating on cultural boundaries, tying her analysis to examples from both colonial and postcolonial histories of India and its diaspora. Her lively discussions shift from food as metaphor and symbol to food as material practice and back, attempting at re-thinking political and cultural identities as concretely and vividly as possible. Reading Narayan, one becomes convinced that South Asia is one of the areas in which communal lines are most manifestly drawn by food animosity, and that even the most mundane food narratives may be embedded in communal politics. She manages to intertwine the political processes of naming food and the concrete, material effects of foodstuffs travelling around the world due to increased immigration and free trade policies. At the level of nation-states, she uses the culinary metaphor to move away from the assimilative "melting pot"

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biographical writing brings to the genres of ethnography has been ongoing since mid-80s. Fischer (1986) in the controversial collection *Writing Culture* was an early proponent of ethnic autobiographies as the ironic and "pluralistic" return of the repressed; Visweswaran (1994) criticizes Fischer's celebrations as ahistorical "trying of identities" but elaborates on his ideas from a postcolonial feminist perspective.



idea towards "stir fries" or "masalas", in which each flavour maintains its distinctiveness. Each "masala" needs to be created afresh:

*There are few ready-made recipes for how to combine the various ingredients into political and cultural arrangements that are nourishing to all their members. Thinking about food might offer some lessons about how to think about the cultural identities and commodities that enter into our heterogeneous societies.*

(Narayan 1997, 188)

By edible histories, I am referring to both the culinary metaphors South Asians often use when talking about history, memory and emotions, and to the more concrete memories and experiences of cooking, eating, watching cooks working, and becoming a community member through food. Kitchens are sites of belonging but also sites of resistance and play. They are contested sites of cultural competence, or indeed, "symbolic intelligibility" (Butler 1993, 1–22), but also places where one can learn to be private, to let go the excessive burdens of history.

### *Colonial kitchens*

Amongst the wealthy urban middle classes in British India, kitchens often underwent rapid transformations to suit the needs of their well-travelled owners, and their increasingly cosmopolitan guests. Many households served local and Western dishes, *dhal* and cucumber sandwiches, side by side, and cooks who had previously served British families were in demand. Within the hierarchy of household servants, cooks and *ayahs* were the most respected and well-paid ones, whose loyalty to the family was a matter of honour. Cooks represented cultural capital, and their certain autonomy, and even authority, inside households was not easily messed with. Their "long memory" of recipes and capacity for endless variety ultimately resembled the skills

of an alchemist. The most respected Muslim cooks in North India boasted that they had in their possession original recipes from the Mughal court.<sup>3</sup>

If the *begums* of wealthy Muslim households rarely cooked, this did not mean idleness or lack of involvement in household affairs. *Begums* were the household managers, whose power was exceedingly financial. They also designed the families' functions and ensured that all the guests of the house were properly fed. Begum Ikramullah remembers managing her household during large Muslim League gatherings. Of one particularly spontaneous visit, she remembers:

*My servants had risen to the occasion manfully. Another tent had rigged up to accommodate those who said it was necessary for them to stay at the same place as my cousin. Others were put in touch with the Muslim League Reception Committee Office which arranged for their accommodation, but before they left all of them, fifty or more, were given tea and refreshment by my servants. I asked my bearer how on earth he had done it, for there was strict rationing still in force and I hardly had tea and sugar in the house for half a dozen extra people, let alone for a whole army.*

(Ikramullah 1963, 125)

She was constantly surprised at the skills of her bearer, who seemed to pull out tea and sugar from his turban for the armies of party comrades that invaded her house. Keeping the family's standard was paramount for her, and she confesses that thriftiness was not her quality, not even during WW2 rationing.

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<sup>3</sup> Chakravorty (1972, 67–74) covers the cuisines of the Mughal dynasties of India, of which emperor Akbar's reign was the peak time of lavish food. Akbar was much influenced by Sufism, and his court kitchen also observed meatless days of Sundays and Fridays, due to religious reasons of modesty.

Amongst *begums*, there were power games and competitions about who keeps her servants best in line, and who finds the best deals in the bazaar for chicken or *ghee*. In her neighbourhood, Ikramullah felt being the "odd one out", who often had to resort to white lies to get away with her lack of concentration on prices. As a young wife, she found it difficult to face criticism from the better organised women: "*Even now I can't help feeling guilty when one of these efficient women fixes me with a steely eye and demands to know what I pay for my coal or butter or whatever it is.*" (Ikramullah 1963, 132.)

Ikramullah gives an account of *disciplined kitchens*, which must have been affected not only by the Muslim community's inner rules of respectability and hospitality, but also by the European-imported domestic ideology of hygiene and punctuality. In this setting, managing a household became a science, for which women had to be trained from an early age.<sup>4</sup> At this historical conjuncture, it also indicated a turn from oral passing on of recipes and the following of the sun's rhythm to consulting cookbooks and observing clock-based time.<sup>5</sup> Dinners were being served in dinner tables with appropriate cutlery, and formal dinner parties were one of the most common ways of entertaining.

Although Ikramullah nostalgically remembers the times of her childhood *zenana*, and the ways she was brought up to respect family traditions, she does not mention lessons in domesticity. Her education is a scholarly matter, and she feels awkward in her various household management duties. In subtle ways, she criticizes the efficient

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<sup>4</sup> Rubina Saigol (1995, 136) calls this phenomenon in the Pakistani context "domestic knowledge systems". The role of home economics has been important in Pakistan's gender-segregated educational system.

<sup>5</sup> Tanita Sarkar (1999, 89) finds in the 19C Bengali male reformists' writings detailed recommendations for housewives' education, of which one of the key ideas was the observance of clock-oriented time.

"Martha Stewarts"<sup>6</sup> of her time, and distances herself from the bossy standard of *begum*-like behaviour.

When the *begums* organised parties, one of the critical questions was how to serve all guests belonging to different communities. They also had to accept the fact that their upper-caste Hindu neighbours might refuse food, even if they otherwise attended the event. Begum Ikramullah does not emphasize the caste restrictions related to the purity of food as a way of the "Hindu imperialism" that she otherwise found being expressed to an increasing extent in colonial Delhi; she is rather concerned about publicly displayed symbols, such as songs, flags and political plays, that became more communal in orientation each year.

In the Delhi functions, such as buffets and breakfast parties, one always ate enormously.

This is how Ikramullah's typical Sunday morning would be spent:

*We had sizzling Parathas with a sort of Indian scrambled eggs called khagina, or we had delicious halwa puri or jalabi, straight out of the frying pan, wrapped in dried leaves to retain their heat and moisture, and of course we ate nehari, the traditional breakfast dish of Delhi. It always had lots and lots of chillies and everyone's eyes would be streaming before they finished, but nobody ever stopped till the plate was empty. Then we ate thick clotted cream and carrot halwa to take away the effect of the chillies. By the time we had finished it all, there would hardly be room for tea, but of course we would drink it and, after that, sit chewing pan and talking in a desultory fashion for hours.*

(Ikramullah 1963, 130.)

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<sup>6</sup> Martha Stewart is a North American postmodern icon of domesticity, whose cookery books, magazines and product series are an extreme example of commodification.

No-one counted calories. Appetite was to be demonstrated, not hidden. Enjoyment of food was a great blessing, a communal delight. In my own Lahori experience, a breakfast party with an almost identical menu and mannerisms was a tough physical accomplishment.

*Been there, done that. The politics of experience: having had halwa puri with parathas on Sunday mornings, every week gaining a few kilos because of the inability to say no, does make a difference here. After my stay Pakistan, I've been sending posthumous postcards to Begum Ikramullah in her grave, saying: now I get the "point" of your ethnographic notes, now I recognise at least some of the more subtle shades, now I am entering. But the mere level of recognition, becoming familiar with the "scene" and getting one's senses sharpened is not quite yet Research.*

(Research diary, Tampere, December 29, 2003)

### *Does a "Muslim" cuisine exist?*

If for Hindus the question about the purity of food deals with the correct caste of the cook and the question in the presence of whom food can be shared, for Muslims pure food has nothing to do with pollution of the touch. This great cultural difference is indeed divisive in South Asia, because it does not only set limits to the act of eating but also extends to define "rules" for public interaction and celebrations. If one cannot share a meal with friends, it may be difficult to relax and enjoy life together. How communal borderlines are drawn with food, and what food symbolises politically, are fundamental questions for a political scientist to understand in South Asia.

In the Muslim world, the two obvious food restrictions are the pork ban and the question of *halal* meat. The ritual performance of prayers when slaughtering animals may sometimes take comical turns in the eyes of the outsider (when, for example, in a large industrial slaughterhouse, the function of prayer is covered with a tape recorder

at the end of the assembly line), but is a way of respecting the animals' souls that God created as a part of the food chain.

The ethics of *halal*, ie. what is allowed for the good Muslim to do in everyday life and, in this particular context, to eat, is not far removed from contemporary Western notions of "fair trade". Pure *halal* food cannot be materially defined but is "legal" in terms of conscience. Any food that is gained through fair dealing, the honest work of one's hands or as lawful gifts is basically allowed. The philosophy of fair eating is particularly developed in Sufism, in which it is emphasized that the eater of permitted food becomes obedient and disposed to do good. A Sufi is a person for whom "*the intentions of the heart, the mental attitude, mean more.../ than tithes of mint and dill and cummin*". (Andrae 1987, 37–40.)

The inclusive, tolerant nature of such ethical dispositions should be emphasized in today's world, where people tend to draw increasingly tighter lines between themselves and others, and stamp others' eating habits as "barbarian", "unethical" or even "suicidal". The exclusion of others based on what they eat (except pork) is unthinkable for most Muslims, and neither are there restrictions about who can cook the food. If there is pollution, it is not caused by human hands but by impure intentions. Food is provided by God as nourishment for all and an enjoyment, and moderation in eating is the key "rule", not the content of one's plate. Food should be always eaten in the company of others. In the heyday of South Asian Sufism, the fourteenth century, this ideal was realized in the form of free kitchens (*langar*) that were open to all, including non-believers (Islam 2002, 338).

In the contemporary Pakistani context, Pnina Werbner (2002) studies the life of a Sufi lodge devoted to the cult of a *pir* named Zindapir and finds *langar* as a key element of the lodge's everyday spirituality. Also today, meanings around pure food are constructed around the ideas of pure intentions, voluntary work and gift economy as opposed to profit and commercialism. The ideas of sacrifice, nurture and protectiveness are at the core of her analysis of *langar*, and

one can find similar food-related values in wider Pakistani society especially during religious festivals. In other words, could there be a less fussy food philosophy than the one that is historically perceived as the "Muslim" one?

Particular attention to the rhythms of the Islamic calendar in terms of cuisines will be paid in the third section, "Pleasures". Most of the political expressions of food analysed in this chapter are not, by any means, tied to a "Muslim" framework and do not necessarily demand from a reader a deep understanding of Islam. It seems almost absurd in this context how the Western world is preoccupied in defining "Islamic" practices, dress codes and food cultures<sup>7</sup>. What is religious observance and what consists of local cultural influences become, here, particularly blurred. Reversing the question, I would be genuinely amused (but not offended) if a Muslim scholar came to Finland to study "Christian" cuisines.

### *Challenges to m(e)an time through kitchens*

Let us return to the passage that once stirred in me an impulse to begin this study:

*Food certainly gave us a way not simply of ordering a week or a day but **of living inside history**, measuring everything we remembered against a **chronology of cooks**. Just as Papa had his own yardstick – a word he loved – with which to measure history and would talk about the Ayub era, or the second martial law, or the Bhutto regime, so my sisters and I would place ourselves in time by remembering and naming cooks./...*

(Suleri 1989,34)

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<sup>7</sup> An anecdote from Denmark in the late 1990s: there was a heated debate in the media on whether daycares and schools on immigrant-populated areas should serve *halal* meat for all children, in order to avoid confrontations with Muslim parents. "Muslim" food became stamped as the great Other, and the opposition to *halal* meat was argued from within the "Christian" and animal rights frameworks.

Young women in Lahore questioning their Papa's yardstick, the m(e)an time of mighty generals and secular statesmen. In their imaginations, they turn towards the domestic, finding in their homes a source of subversion. The m(e)an time matters to a nationalist journalist like Papa, but for many Pakistanis the succession of statesmen and generals is just an acquired litany that one remembers with great pain. The kitchen chronologies provide the Suleri sisters much more pleasure, and a much needed source of escape in the midst of harsh political realities.

As the narrative unfolds, the reader gets more clues about the acuteness with which the Suleri children wanted an escape from under the patriarchal yoke. In their house, Jinnah was a "household god" whose only allowed name to be used was *Quaid-i-Azam*.<sup>8</sup> Sara is still self-conscious about writing about the man under his actual surname. Their father was so "swamped in the true devotion of his soul" (Suleri 1989, 113) that their actual family history became irrelevant:

*No wonder I never heard more details of my grandfather, I mused, when Papa had thus named the Quaid and then veered off into his rapturous litany of desire. But what an odd man to make familial: gaunt with elegance and intellect, the discourse of a barrister imprinted on his brain, Jinnah the maker of Pakistan was hardly an easy idea to domesticate – and yet Pippy did it. He loved everything about the man: his design, his phrase, his clothes.*

(Suleri 1989, 113.)

Sara obviously feels alienated from this passionate hero-worship and prefers to concentrate on living people and the micro-politics of

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<sup>8</sup> The Suleri family got a part of their income from Ziauddin Suleri's book royalties. His first title, *My Leader* (1945) was a national bestseller, written at the peak of the Pakistan movement to urgently defend Jinnah's position and personality as a statesman. Not quite biography but rather pamphlets or manifestos without the grace of brevity, this "shadowing" genre of politicians' defence has blossomed in independent Pakistan.



her household. The figure of the distant barrister in immaculate Savile Row suits is an annoying presence for the adolescent daughter – a presence which she would have at least wanted to diminish if not eradicate.

But the idea of domestic regimes is not only a matter of entertainment for adolescent girls. What Suleri's main critics (Ray 1993, Grewal 1994) find troublesome in *Meatless Days* is that she does not extend her analysis of the cooks' and servants' personalities to a wider analysis of social justice. The argument is sound, yet Suleri's approach to cooks does not deny their personhood and agency. The cooks are revered by children, and although they may be powerless in the world outside, within the household they rule in the kitchens. They can be bossy, bad-tempered, even authoritarian. Children who are discovered stealing cauliflower from the vegetable garden will be punished with a diet of kidney for the coming week: "*They caught me out that week, two times over, because after I had been exposed as the cauliflower despoiler and had to enter a new phase of penitence, Qayyum the cook insisted on making me eat kidney. Kirrnee, he would call it with a glint in his eye, 'kirrnee'.*" (Suleri 1989, 26.)

Sangeeta Ray (1993, 50) suggests that the way in which the statesmen and cooks are yoked together in *Meatless Days* is a proof of their interdependence. In Pakistani society, following Ray's argumentation, one can conclude that the statesmen can rule and the upper middle class families continue to enjoy their privileges because of these shadow dynasties.

However, in Suleri's narrative, the cooks and other servants are not portrayed as low-status servants but as adult workers with clear characteristics and specified tasks, and they seem fiercely independent. Suleri does not make political claims for the domestic servants' rights, but neither does she take them for granted, or hypocritically portray her own class as the "helpers" of the poor. There is no definitive closure to the class question, but neither is it ignored.

## 5.2

### Devouring grief

#### *Doubly damned by discourse*

*I read you closely, then swallow your text in one bite. Just like you devour grief and steal your mother's knuckle-bone and place it under your tongue in your dreams (and how Freud would have loved that dream! cannibalism and all!) , I consume your writing and digest your terminology. But also your writing swallows me. You invited me to all those kitchens, courtyards and zenanas and the fleshy, funloving culture of Lahore. I took you seriously and had my exclusive fun at the sites of your childhood memories. Your words still haunt me, possess me, and now my imagined bond with you – this invented intimacy – should develop into a thesis.*

(Research diary, Helsinki, December 2001.)

Sara Suleri wrote *Meatless Days* in the 1980s as a recently arrived immigrant and a lecturer of English Literature at Yale University. The text is a private piece of mourning, and also offers a rich ethnography of the urban Pakistani upper middle class family life. Furthermore, it is a subversion of Pakistani political history from an embodied, personal, exiled ex-citizen's point of view. It is also an elegy of departure, and thus an emigrée narrative of a place where the writer can no longer return, except perhaps in favourable political conditions for short visits.

The text's origins are transnational: its definite South Asianness goes unquestioned, but the text's multiple locations – Britain and the United States, and in particular its theoretical and philosophical leanings to the West – are also obvious. Suleri is a fully-fledged *po-co/po-mo* metropolitan intellectual, ie. she is informed by both the paradigms of the neo-Marxist postcolonial theorizing and the French

poststructuralist turn.<sup>9</sup> She writes in fragments, without long translations or introductions, and indulges the reader in a complex series of verbal acrobatics, playing with names and small anecdotes in family history. The playfulness of her writing is a wonderful negation of the commonly circulated "downtrodden Pakistani woman" images in the Western media. Still, she feels like being treated as an "otherness machine" (Suleri 1989, 105) in the American academia sometimes.

*Meatless Days* is an easier read as a novel, a piece of fiction, than as an actual autobiography with most of the characters still alive and traceable. Its fictional pull lies in the narrative structure, and the "fabulous", sensually overflowing qualities of her storytelling. In fact, Suleri has admitted in an interview (Lee 1991: www source) that she has condensed events the order of which she can no longer remember into a narrative that "works" beyond the reality principle, added minor characters who did not exist, and generally taken fictional liberties in the narrative. As a collection of vignettes about her family and closest friends (most chapters are dedicated to one key figure in her life), the text is at times painfully intimate, unfolding as a prolonged argument. The malicious aspects of the text (albeit the witty and complex articulation), if read as an autobiography, can make the reader defend her friends for unfair treatment, without ever having met them and not knowing the reasons for the suddenly emerging meanness.

But Suleri writes unapologetically all the way, and introduces her idiosyncratic discourse, influenced by her journalist father's newspaper English with Urdu flavours and her Welsh mother's academic, literary precision. Accusing these influences of upbringing, and the

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<sup>9</sup> The label *po-mo/po-co* is widely used academic self-ironical slang in the North American academia. Teresa de Lauretis (1987, 10–11) discusses the emergence of radical women of color, and finds the discovery of their own complicity in the reproduction of classism, bourgeois liberalism, colonialism etc. as an important theoretical turn as such. Suleri's *The Rhetoric of English India* (1993) becomes, then, a South Asian case study in the emergence of such a consciousness of complicity.

surrounding Pakistani cultural context, Suleri claims being "damned by my own discourse" (1989, 1).

The discourse she is particularly damned by, while trying to explain her relationship to the important women in her life, is the Urdu relational gender discourse that mostly ignores *aurat*, the generic concept for "woman" (which has only entered her vocabulary in the West) and deals with females always in relation to others, as daughters, sisters, wives, mothers, grandmothers etc:

*By this point admittedly I am damned by my own discourse, and doubly damned when I add yes, once in a while, we naturally thought of ourselves as women, but only in some perfunctory biological way that we happened on perchance. Or else it was a hugely practical joke, we thought, hidden somewhere among our clothes. But formulating that definition is about as impossible as attempting to locate the luminous qualities of an Islamic landscape, which can on occasion generate such aesthetically pleasing moments of life.*

(Suleri 1989, 1–2, emphasis AH.)

In the above quote, she simply states her conceptual bias of excluding women in generic and continues the story. Her tight-knit narrative has no space for elaborate cultural translations of kin relations – the story's rhythm and intensity capture the foreign reader's attention. We can locate gender, woven in the intimate fabric of family ties, but we cannot make statements about the women as a collective.

What happens to me while reading Sara Suleri? I get stuck on the actual weaving of the text, the narrative structure, the teasing choice of words rescued from the dustbin of extinction – to the extent that her idiosyncratic discourse *as such* becomes my primary interest. I become damned by our imagined shared discourse. In this section, I will focus on her expressions of grief and the culinary metaphor as examples of politics of memory and emotions. The narrative of mourning cuts across the whole text, to the extent that grief becomes the under-

lying emotion that seems to "spill over" other more joyful episodes, although it is nowhere expressed too dramatically or sentimentally.

Here the theme of cultural dialogues – and indeed, encounters – rises to the very fore. Reading grief, I will ask what kinds of possible worlds are conveyed to the reader, and how s/he can relate to Pakistan's political history brought to the skin level of memory. What are the possible limitations and exclusions for the foreign reader? What does she mean with this non-existent "woman" or the futility of trying to "locate the luminous qualities of an Islamic landscape"? Why is Suleri so damned by her discourse, and what are my own damnations as her reader?

The dramatic context in which the autobiographical act has happened to Suleri makes me re-formulate my theoretical question of possible worlds: what kind of strategies does Sara Suleri develop to be able to tell her story? How does she cope with the loss of her loved ones and the postcolonial trauma, which in her case seem to fluently intertwine? What is possible for her to write about?

*You irritate me, expect me to know everything. I make an effort to get closer: the movement is my gift to you. You animate me, flirt with me but also bring me to my wit's end. Then the question of possible worlds emerges, it's been there as an amalgamation of many sources at the back of my head, and suddenly I am able to pronounce it. It gives me relief.*

(Research diary, Helsinki, December 2001.)

### *A permanent subscription to history and grief*

Sara Suleri does not narrate a personal "coming of age" as a political subject at all, but rather plays with the political history of Pakistan, twists it around and creates an alternative stance to history-writing. It is a very intimate and public text at the same time but nothing in-between. I call her remembering strategy a circle of immediacy and

distancing. Often she effaces herself as a minor character in the more complex weaving of a story. How Sara became an emigrant scholar of literature at the University of Yale is almost a non-event.

Sometimes she documents the most dramatic events in a distant journalistic or parodic style, without a more "profound" analysis of emotions. The emerging distances of the autobiographical "I" are, on the other hand, compensated by a general atmosphere of intimacy that Suleri invites the reader to participate in. She brings the reader into different times and places in a crash, with little reference or introduction, offers layers or segments of her life with others – never her life alone as a separate entity but always *in relation to* her closest ones. Her narration thus escapes linear temporality and the Western individualist autobiographical tradition of *bios*-bias (cf Watson 1993, 58–9).

Before all, I read *Meatless Days* as a challenge to the kind of simplistic country studies which I am myself skilled at writing, in which the political history of a Third World country is "explained" to Western readers from the pre-colonial days via European colonisation to its postcolonial modernity. Suleri clearly wants to challenge her readers and represent Pakistan *as it has appeared to her*, without unnecessary reference to historical chronologies. Neither does she provide a glossary of Urdu words for the comfort of the foreign reader. She expects her readers to know Pakistan quite well in advance, or to find out from other sources. There is nothing extraordinary in this strategy of non-referentiality – if it were a European text, it would be justified to expect readers to be civilised enough to know about the Reformation, the French revolution, or the division of Germany after WW2. Why should a Pakistani writer then take the job of a primary school history teacher when s/he publishes in the West?

To call *Meatless Days* "ethnography" would perhaps not please Suleri as a writer; I am not here referring to her *intentions* as a writer but to the possible ethnographic *effects* *Meatless Days* may have on foreign readers, to the "life of their own" texts begin to live after publication.

For me, the text once worked as a highly unorthodox invitation, in a format that raised my curiosity to an unexpected level. I found myself as her reader in a privileged position, thrown right inside a web of past lives, complex relationships and a difficult world, and being challenged to become more than a mere passer-by.

Suleri invites the readers as informed guests into her childhood homes in Lahore. The foreign reader may decide him- or herself the extent of commitment to the text, whether to go to the library to look for the missing cultural translations or not. A holistic reading exercise may be puzzling for the uninitiated reader, but remaining at the level of personal acquaintance with Sara's family and friends is one way of reading, no less valuable than a more historicized reading.

A historicized reading, from the vantage point of political science, involves looking for the use of political concepts, moments of rupture, contingency, memories of the national and public. These temporal spectacles may sometimes lead to a focus on public issues, which to some feminists may seem as hypermasculine. Yet the challenge of *Meatless Days* is that it is simultaneously intimate, embodied and political. And Suleri's political is not political in the Western feminist sense of rendering of the most private questions of "life politics" (eg. issues dealing with sexuality and reproduction) into public scrutiny, but she deals creatively with the public trauma that came out of the partition of India and Pakistan, the subsequent wars and violence. As a Western reader accustomed to overt explicitness in terms of relationships and sexuality, I find her other kind of intimacy – intimacy with history – graceful and refreshing.

*Meatless Days* is to a great extent a testament of grief and mourning. Sara Suleri lost her mother and elder sister within two years between 1978 and 1980, during the rule of the notorious military dictator Zia ul-Haq. She heard the news of the tragedies in the distance of the pretty "toyland" (Suleri 1989, 123) of American Midwest where she was doing her postgraduate studies. Her mother died in a mysterious rickshaw accident and her sister was murdered by an anonymous hit-

and-run driver outside her house in Lahore. Both cases may have been politically motivated, due to her father's controversial public career and the loyalty conflicts between Bhutto and Zia. However, the cases were never resolved. The diasporic family did not insist on continuing the investigations for too long. Suleri published the book in 1989 at the University of Chicago Press, far away from Pakistan, and a year after general Zia's death in an air crash. This is hardly a coincidence.

Suleri writes more about her sister Ifat's death than her mother's. The figure of Ifat is closely linked to nationalism and nationalist history-writing; in fact she confesses that only on the day of finding out about Ifat's death did she start grasping something about her country's history. She claims that Ifat's death made her life fully public, and she had to sharpen her views about history: "*It was only then that I became historical, a creature gravely ready to admit that significance did not sit upon someone else's table like a magazine to which one could or could not subscribe.*" (Suleri 1989, 127.) In other words, for Pakistan she seemed to have a life-long subscription even from the distance of an emigrant scholar.

This is one of the "turns" in her narrative when politics colonises her whole life, takes over whatever remnants there were of the previously "untouchable" private, and dramatically disrupts her scholarly isolation from the politics of the homeland. The autobiographical voice becomes here a testimony, an intervention in collective memorizing and history-writing that is weighed with responsibility. The depth of the sentence above lies in the voluntary "submission" to historicity. As a citizen of a quiet and cold country, Suleri's words shake me every time I return to the passage: I am constantly reminded of the absurdity of the idea of "opting out" from one's past. Such an amnesiac sweep does no longer seem a luxury that citizens of some countries can "afford" but a sign of a lack, a void, or isolation.

In a state of historical confusion, Sara "loses" the Pakistan she once lived in. Ifat, who ran away from college to marry a Punjabi-speaking general, becomes an embodiment of the "new" Pakistan she



never herself completely understood. She wonders whether Ifat's love marriage to a man in uniform was in fact a hidden way of showing solidarity to her nationalist father, although the father stopped speaking to her for two years afterwards.

The Suleris were fully Urdu-speaking migrants from the United Provinces, which meant that the marriage led Ifat to learn a new language, Punjabi. In 1971, Ifat's husband was active in the war in Bangladesh and became a prisoner of war in India afterwards. After his release, he was mentally so disturbed that she had to take the family to live in his native village and live on horse-breeding. For an upper middle class Lahori woman, this was not a light move. In a sense, then, Ifat becomes for Sara a kind of "going native" figure, the truest Pakistani of the family, when her father was still culturally a migrant, and her other siblings chose to leave Pakistan just like herself.

Her reflections on Ifat are a vivid example of the circle of immediacy and distancing mentioned above. Her style of writing has been perceived by some critics (cf. Lee 1990, Wolf 1989) as journalistic, cold, distant, not vulnerable enough. There is little *psychoanalysis* of her own emotions at a time of crisis; rather, she puts a lot of effort into the *aesthetic* description of Ifat's body, their childhood games, her way of speaking, carrying herself and her pregnancies. But the descriptions themselves are tender, precise, immediate. The hasty mistranslations and judgments made by her critics according to the values of North American psychoculture indicate a major cultural clash. It is indeed curious how in some cultures the media can diagnose someone else's memories as cold or distant.

Sara remembers best Ifat's beautiful body and her aristocratic manners. The other aspects of her personality have been temporarily washed away. Distancing thus becomes a way of coping with the loss. Here she confesses her willingness to amnesia:

*It reminds me that I am glad to have washed my hands of my sister  
Ifat's death and can think of her now as a house I once rented but*

*which is presently inhabited by people I do not know. I miss her body, of course, and how tall she was, with the skull of a leopard and the manner of a hawk. But that's aesthetic, and aside from it, Ifat is just a repository of anecdotes for me, something I carry around without noticing, like lymph.*

(Suleri 1989, 42)

Sara received a letter from Ifat written on the day before her death, weeks after the funeral, in the United States. The letter becomes her most precious possession, the ultimate symbol of the tender privacy that once existed between the siblings. She is astonished when her brother advises her to give it to the police as evidence: how could she give Ifat's words directed for her eyes only for a state authority to read? Giving the letter is a tough moment of discovery for her: *"At that moment, privacy left our lexicon; it surely left my life.(126)"*

Here, the confrontation with the patriarchal state is pushed to the limits of tolerance. Simultaneously, Ifat's body and last words become her "geography", a massive monument of mourning:

*When policemen came to take that sentence from me, I darkly knew that my task of reclamation would keep me working for some time to come, and that by the time I had got them back, those words would be my home. And not just my residence I made a city of that sentence, laying it out like an architect as a picture of the parameters where I could rest, or shop, or work. In simpleheaded fealty, I worked at making Ifat my geography, my terrain of significance, on which I thought, and slept, and breathed. Now context becomes a more abstracting thought, admitting finally you never lived in Ifat anyway; you live in New Haven.*

(Suleri 1989,182)

Here Ifat is no longer the beautiful body but a sentence in the letter which Sara had to give away. She has to remind herself about life in New Haven and the fact that loss is a permanent part of her life. She

is rebirthing Ifat in language, bringing her back to the private sphere from the national and political so that she can continue living:

*Let us wash the word of murder from her limbs, we said, let us transcribe her into some more seemly idiom. And so with painful labor we placed Ifat's body into a different discourse, words as private and precise as water when water wished to perform both in and out of light. Let it lie hidden in my eye, I thought, her tiny spirit, buoyant in the excessive salt of that dead sea, so that henceforth too she can direct my gaze, a strange happening, phosphorescent!*

(Suleri 1989, 148)

Mourning: sentences, idioms and discourses. Fluidity and privacy. This is the way the daughter of an Eng Lit professor may remember, the girl who learnt the grammar of sentences earlier than the meaning of words. "Transcribing Ifat into another idiom" is her idiosyncratic, academic way to deal with the loss. It is here for the first time during my academic path that linguistic terms become sites of beauty and wonder.

So who says that a linguistic, or otherwise academically precise way to denote loss should be less personal than any other way? Sara does not commemorate the deaths through commonly accepted rituals; instead she plays with words and names and draws tidy lists and catalogs:

*Memory is not the work of mourning. I used to think it was a matter of a catalog, some list that I could draw with loving neatness, since neatness is the attribute of tenderness. And so, each year when Dale and Fawzi flood my home with flowers to commemorate my sister or my mother, I know at last that what those flowers represent is not an attitude available for my adoption: instead, with curiosity, I watch the tulips curl, stiffen, and collapse, performing on their own behalf the sufficiency of mourning.*

(Suleri 1989, 171–2)

I read here, between the lines, a willingness to work with emotions through silent contemplation and direct action, rather than therapy. Writing a book in which Ifat is a major character is an active perpetuation of the relationship; in the text she continues playing and corresponding with her dead sister. Watching tulips curl may also be read as a reference to Urdu/Persian poetry, in which tulips have a high symbolic value: the shadows of Ghālib and Iqbāl emerge here as a clue of healing in poetic and philosophical forms.<sup>10</sup> She mourns in English, not in American English, but in Pakistani English spiced with echoes of the Urdu language.

The idea of eating grief corresponds with the general culinary metaphor carried on throughout the book. In Urdu, many emotions are eaten or drunk instead of merely "feeling" them – the metaphor stretches to the level of concrete embodiment. Grief is a constant presence in the body – it has to be swallowed and digested intimately:

*When I return to Urdu, I feel shocked at my own neglect of a space so intimate to me like relearning the proportions of a once-familiar room, it takes me by surprise to recollect that I need not feel grief, I can eat grief; that I need not bury my mother but instead can offer her into earth, for I am in Urdu now.*

(Suleri 1989, 177)

This is a rare example of cultural translation in Suleri's text, and to get the emotional content of the translation right, one should at least have listened to Urdu in the native context for some time. Mostly there are no such hints given for the non-Urdu speaking readers, but one is left to wonder at the specificity of Suleri's expression. This is the charm of her writing, its magic spell, but realistically, for some foreign readers, also its vexing irritation.

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<sup>10</sup> See Mir (2000) and Ahmad (1971) for Iqbāl's and Ghālib's English translations. Fischer and Abedi (1990, 340–1) give an interesting reading of the symbolic value of tulips in the Iranian revolution.

Mother Mair's earlier death is less "worked through" in *Meatless Days*. If Ifat's death is the conscious political turning point of her narrative, the earlier loss of the mother is a more private event, which she processes sub-consciously in dreams. This dream was located in London: she came up with his father in a refrigerated van with her mother's body cut in parts and wrapped in cellophane. The father asked her to carry the parts into a coffin across the street. Smugly, Sara did something irresistible:

*Then , when my father's back was turned, I found myself in rapid theft – for the sake of Ifat and Shahid and Tillat and all of us, I stole away a portion of that body. It was a piece of her foot I found, a small bone like a knuckle, which I quickly hid inside my mouth, under my tongue. Then I and the dream dissolved, into an extremity of tenderness.*

(Suleri 1989, 44.)

Ideas of cannibalism in mourning can be seen, in a Derridean way, as internalising the Other to the extent that the loss of the Other is experienced as loss of the self (Derrida 1997 in Deutscher 1998, 159). This act of "devouring grief" becomes, then , a crystallization of daughterly love. The mother's bone under Sara's tongue is the ultimate merging of mother and daughter, a perfect union.

If in the earlier passage Sara transforms Ifat into the "seemly" idiom of water, the ultimate "feminine" element of fluidity, liquidity and seepage<sup>11</sup>, here she uses solid, edible metaphors. At times, she lets her grief float on the fluid surfaces of bodies, at times she devours it in cannibalistic tropes. The volatility of her emotions reflect on her grieving process that does not follow a neat linear pattern of "getting

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<sup>11</sup> Elizabeth Grosz' (1994, 202–5) hypothesis is that women's corporeality is inscribed as a mode of seepage, liquidity and undecidability of borders. Its uncontainability is the experience of sexual difference, which for many may feel as being cast outside the male-stream culture's idea of self-contained adulthood.

over with” as a way of managing one’s grief, but rather grief turns and returns in cycles.

After the two tragedies, Sara experiences a sub-conscious loss of memory of Pakistani maps and street names, as if to make sure she cannot return. It is only the tastes and textures – the embodied and sensual elements, the very ones feeding the auto/ethnographic imagination – she wants to remember and retain of the land of the pure<sup>12</sup>. Tenderness, grace, order and silence characterise her literary mourning, and the act of writing materialises a long journey towards perhaps one day accepting the tragedies and their possible relation to the retrogressive policies of the dictator ”Zulu Haq”. Because of the khaki shadows cast by this general, she cannot think of returning.

*”Men live in homes, women in bodies”*

The international media image of Pakistan as an ultramilitarist but fragile nation-state is reflected by Suleri in the references to her father, the nationalist, and Ifat’s husband, the shattered ex-prisoner of war. If compared to the feasts of the private sphere populated by women, the images of the public, related to rigid, grey masculinity and statesmen on a high pedestal, are grim and robbed of meaning. There are statesmen’s television speeches gravely announcing national emergencies and *coups d’état*, but despite these ruptures and the concrete embodied fear of violence, Suleri’s women, as Dadi would wish from the midst

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<sup>12</sup> The word Pakistan means, literally, the land of the pure. Its idea was to unite the Muslims of the subcontinent under the same banner of the crescent and star. The trope of purity was not, however, commonly used by the Muslim League during its pre-independence rising. It does not refer to racial purity, or the sexual purity of the woman-as-land. Even the idea of Muslims as pure national ”essence” is controversial because Islam is a religion of conversion based on the submission of the individual. In the post-independence days, the idea has been mostly treated parodically, as Rushdie (1983) does in *Shame*.

of her conversations with God, keep on living. Life is lived in family houses, which are political microcosms in themselves, but the meaning attached to life is made through bodies. The phrase "men live in homes, women in bodies" (Suleri 1989, 143) told to the siblings by Mamma is a South Asian "truism" resembling a wedding lament of a mother sending her daughter to the in-laws. And in Suleri's narration, the houses are indeed temporary but the women's bodily geography becomes a constant source of celebration. The memories of bodies keep on living in her writing without questioning, with a force of their own.

The political dimension in *Meatless Days* can be found in its insistence on the meanings of the private. The text was produced during the most repressive era in Pakistan's history, when Zia ul-Haq's regime did its best not only metaphorically but also literally to liquidate women inside walls and all his opponents underground. If the national symbolic register, for her, is empty and only anecdotal, the micropolitical private is the only available site for feminist subversion. When public spaces are littered by military paraphernalia, and watched over by men in khaki, especially during martial law, the only possible site for individual expression, play and resistance is the walled home.

*Meatless Days* is not a celebration of *purdah* but neither does it undermine the richness of life mainly spent within the four walls of a house. In fact, the book is not an argument for either *purdah* or women's increasingly public lives. Rather, it maturely and self-reflectively shows how violence and national emergencies colonise the private, demanding people's loyalties to projects they'd rather live without. Suleri's intimacy with history is a product of a life lived in a constant atmosphere of tension and doubt – it is not a chosen orientation. Her only choice was to leave the noisy turbulence for America that was "less demanding of my loyalty" (Suleri 1989, 105).

The old-fashioned term "national consciousness" may be of some use here. In the postcolonial Pakistani context, Sara Suleri's class was the privileged group invested with "national" concerns. In a country

with a sweeping percentage of illiteracy, the majority of the population still lived within the feudal framework and understood voting as a favour to the landlord candidate. The nation was an abstraction to the illiterate masses, outside their realm of everyday experience. Thinking in terms of the nation-state was a possibility for the educated administrative and propertied classes of Pakistanis, but there would be no way of uniting the linguistically and ethnically heterogeneous population in two wings under a newly invented slogan.<sup>13</sup>

The idea of Pakistan as a nation-state does not stir Suleri's imagination. She is displaced in and disillusioned about her father's nationalist project, and cannot think of a future in it. She does not mourn the idea of Pakistan but the loss of her loved ones, and also the loss of the fabulous Islamic landscape: the rising moons, *sehri* meals during *Ramzan* and the prayer cries from minarets. But her braiding of identity in the present seems to require a temporary break, a rupture and a new skin. Or, as Meena Alexander (1996, 92–3) formulates her postcolonial shock of arrival: "*To disclose ordinary lives as they cut against the grand narratives of history, the rubric of desire gritty against the supposed truths we have learnt. Poetry becomes part of this difficult labor, weaving a fabric that can bear the gnarled, tangled threads of our lives. Then, too, to cross a border can be to die a little.*"

So the little death becomes an elegiac, literary goodbye:

*You seem to have overcome the worst by the autobiographical act. By transcribing all this feminine flesh onto the pages, you heal yourself. And what graceful flesh! Even your grandmother's burnt body receives an aesthetic dimension, becomes a landscape. And Ifat's*

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<sup>13</sup> Anderson (1991) argues that for the successful imagining of a nation, a country must provide mass education, a popular printed press, museums and archives for the storing of past traces and a reliable census in order to control the moves of the population. A special emphasis is put on the achievement of mass literacy before independence.



*pregnancies and her aristocratic bones, and the way your Mamma's body seemed to dissolve during her long walks in the Lahori gardens. Different women, different bodies, different relationships. Mamma did not tie her kids onto her body, expecting endless affection and care, like your Dadi did. She gave birth first, then plenty of space. Is this an essential cultural difference or just a biographical coincidence?*

*The women are born again into textual bodies in your writing. The text is pregnant. Every new birth is a beginning, a source of new possibilities. The bodies do not dust as long as your story continues to feed our minds, and we respond to your writing in our essays and articles. The women live intertextually, our texts consist of their imaginary bones. You lost the way to their graves in Lahore, but you know exactly how you re-created them. The title of the creation, Meatless Days, sounds strange in this fleshy context.*

*Pakistan tried to stop its citizens (the wealthier ones, of course: who among the poor would eat meat every day?) from eating meat two days a week, under the banner of meatless days. What a joke. How could they think of doing that in Lahore, the unofficial culinary capital of Pakistan? Did they think your people would bend to this, a ridiculous paragraph, like they would somewhere closer to my location? That they could deny the Lahoris' primal pleasure just like that? Give me a break. Life there, for those who can afford it, is a carnal carnival. The State may act as meatless a role as it wishes, but affluent Lahoris will eat whatever pleases them.*

*In Northern Europe, even bourgeois career women (and men) cook. In Pakistan, well-off women have the privilege of enjoying the food. You learnt to cook too in America. In a sense, you had to revise your relationship to food and its material roots, get used to creating a meal out of raw ingredients. You reveal instances of initial clumsiness in the kitchen. It takes years until you can be private in a kitchen, which was before a noisy central station of the whole extended household.*

*Then you feel comfortable about inviting guests. You offer Dadi, Ifat and Mamma to us as main courses for sure. We are your honorary cannibals. But when the worst of your grief passes, you entertain us with lighter "ethnographic" bits from home. You hate the names I give to the dishes. We argue. You give no explanations, no recipe – swallow at your own risk. I pick only my favourites, hungrily consume them all but will allow time for digestion from now on. I will stay seated at this dinner table until the last cup of dessert chai.*

### 5.3 Pleasures

#### *From severity to celebration*

*There was a curious invitation about the occasion, converting what began as an act of penance into a godly and obligatory cocktail hour that provided a fine excuse for company and affability. When we lived in Pakistan, that little swerve from severity to celebration happened often.*

(Suleri 1989, 31)

The culinary aesthetics in *Meatless Days* are to a great extent linked to the month of *Ramzan* and the following celebration of the two Eids. Although Suleri considers many aspects of her family members' religiousness as embarrassments, and thus subtly suggests at her own atheism or at least deep agnosticism, she appreciates the temporalities of the Islamic calendar, the dramatic turns from severity to celebration that provided the rhythm of her life in Pakistan.

Suleri's Islamic calendar is tinged with horror and pleasure rather than contemplation on the sacred. On one hand, she recalls how Dadi sacrificed the children's pet goat on Eid to teach them a horrific les-

son about loss and God's will; on the other hand she remembers with tenderness the *sehri* meals Dadi shared with the children before dawn, flavoured with jokes in a "discourse of unholy comradeship", a kind of conspiracy against the sleeping parents. She also celebrates the "excuse" of getting together in large parties in the evenings for the *iftar* meal at dusk. *Ramzan* becomes in her memory "the season for perfect meals": Muhammad's dates combined with grilled liver, spinach leaves, chick-pea batter, fresh fruit, tastes "touching to the palate" in their intensity and richness (Suleri 1989, 29–31).

The intense swerve from severity to celebration practised in fasting is to a great extent lacking in Western cultures, except for the minority of practicing Christians and "health freaks". In Pakistan, fasting during *Ramzan* is an element of mainstream Muslim culture, something that is done even amongst not the deeply religious. The cultural value of *Ramzan* is not questioned by Suleri at all; it belongs to the luminous qualities of the Islamic landscape that she despite her personal scepticism appreciates. In fact, other people's practices often make her shy, like in a taxi in Lahore when the driver stops to call her "Sister, let's open our fast", and offers her a bunch of grapes:

*The meter ticked on, and of a sudden I felt ravished by a grace to which I had no real belonging but whose arrival made me intensely shy. And so I bent my head and ate those pallid grapes, as though I absolutely knew why people should be grateful when made hungry by the course of God.*

(Suleri 1989, 77.)

Such incidents are indicative of the assertion of the positive values of cultural Muslimhood in *Meatless Days*. *Ramzan* still affects Suleri's sense of time, and sometimes in New Haven she mistakes city noise for the shrill Qur'anic cry from Lahore's mosques. Echoes from Lahore enter her head at regular intervals, following the sun.

### *Sensual food and sexual politics*

Pakistani fast food is often consumed in parks in the evenings, freshly bought from carriage vendors. In the absence of youth clubs and discos, parks are the teenagers' beehives, where both sexes openly gather to "hang out". Sara Suleri attended a strict and respectable seat of learning, Kinnaird College for Women in Lahore, where the girls "of prime-time marriagability" (Suleri 1989, 47) lived in an old-fashioned *zenana* wing completely closed from males. However, her youth was not spent in *purdah*: she narrates incidents where she and her friends went cruising and ended up in Lawrence Gardens for a late night snack. She describes an event of sexual awakening in a culinary form that occurred to her in the form of spilt tamarind sauce of *gol gup-pas*:

*It gave me a new respect for foodstuffs, for never has desire brought me to quite such an instantaneous effect. My groin's surprise called attention to passageways that as a rule only I am theoretically aware of knowing, all of which folded up like a concertina in protest against such an explosive aeration. for days after, my pupils stayed dilated, while my interiors felt gaunt and hollow-eyed.*

(Suleri 1989, 39.)

The comically sensual passage can be read as a literal example of embodied food. Passages such as this are frequent: hints at the sexual awakening of teenage girls in a strictly Muslim country are dropped in a good-humoured way. Her sexual politics is subversively suggestive: there are no explicit confessions about her intimate relationships, but she still successfully explodes the myth of the submissive and sexually repressed Pakistani woman.

It seems that as an emigrant in the States Suleri developed her love of food into a food/sex analogy in her adult relationships. She recalls in one vignette "the greatness of Tom" (1989, 73), a boyfriend with

whom kitchens and restaurant tables became more intimate places than bedrooms. One of the reasons for their separation was his ignorance of her past: Tom could not know what mangoes tasted like in the monsoon rain.

### *Kapuras and Kuwaiti kebabs*

*The culinary humor of kidneys and testicles stewing in one another's juices is, on the other hand, very fine: I wish I had had the imagination to intuit all the unwonted jokes people tell when they start cooking food. I should have remembered all those nervously comic edges, and the pangs, that constitute most poignancies of nourishment.*

(Suleri 1989, 27.)

One of the most hilarious, carnivalistic passages in *Meatless Days* is Sara's confusion with the origins of the dish *kapura*, which foregrounds a more general postcolonial theme of food betrayal<sup>14</sup>. All her life, she has believed that *kapura* are sweetbreads. She has eaten *kapura* in good faith in family gatherings, until her sister Tillat drops a secret that Sara never figured out while growing up in Pakistan: *kapura* is a dish made out of goat's testicles. Not only is the revelation a proof of Sara's fading "nativeness", but she feels betrayed by her own mother who never told her the correct recipe.

In fact, she refuses to believe Tillat. She does remember the chuckles that the serving of *kapura* always provoked at dinnertime in Pakistan, but needs a confirmation from an "objective" third party about the true origins of the dish. At a Pakistani gathering in New York, she gathers her courage to find a neutral opinion:

*/...expatriates are adamant, entirely passionate about such matters as the eating habits of the motherland. Accordingly, even though I*

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<sup>14</sup> See eg. Jamaica Kincaid's (1983) semi-autobiographical novel *Annie John* for similar expressions of betrayal of camouflaged food.

*was made to feel that it was wrong to strip food of its sauce and put it back into its bodily belonging, I certainly received an unequivocal response: kapura, as naked meat, equals testicle.*

(Suleri 1989, 22)

The answer to her autoethnographic question becomes a drawling chatup line: "Balls, darling, balls (Suleri 1989, 22)." *Kapura* invokes nervously comical pangs, and Sara is left to wonder at her own innocence. She cannot grasp why her sister understood the etymology of the dish and she never did.

Tillat has emigrated to Kuwait, so the family's culinary secrets' travel between continents is a truly transnational phenomenon. In Sara's kitchen in New Haven, Tillat takes over the kitchen duties and tries to produce Pakistani *kebabs* for a party. As a mother of three children, her cooking goes through "neurotic collapses". The Pakistani recipe of *shami kebabs* refuses to take the right shape, which makes Tillat upset:

*I did not expect Tillat's moon-face to look so wracked, as though the secret of all things lay in that which made the shami cling to the kebab. "Never mind, Tillat. We'll just call them Kuwaiti kebabs and then no-one will know they look peculiar." Of course I was right, and the meal was most satisfactory.*

(Suleri 1989, 40.)

The *kebab* incident is an argument for the flexibility and hybridity of diasporic kitchens: dishes that would not "pass" in the homeland can be enjoyed with a great appetite in a new location. Sara's invention of Kuwaiti *kebabs* is a proof of the ongoing negotiation and créolisation in immigrant kitchens, the reshaping of food memories and the "bastardization" of recipes. Perfection is not the key to the culinary enjoyment, and memories of how the dishes were once cooked in the homeland may undergo changes during the years after emigration.

Suleri is anything but concerned about reproducing the exact tastes of Lahore as they once appeared to her. The food nostalgia in *Meatless Days* is oriented towards the situations in which cooking occurred and the people with whom food was shared. The social aspects of sharing meals together with a large family are something she clearly misses.

But then, leavetaking from the cooks' shadow dynasties can also be liberatory. In the United States, she discovers her kitchen as a place where no-one interferes, bosses around or makes noise: "*When I left Pakistan, I had to learn how to cook – or, better – how to conceive of a kitchen as a place where I actually could be private* (Suleri 1989, 36)." Learning privacy and reclaiming a space as one's own. For Sara Suleri, the diasporic kitchen becomes a room of her own, a place for contemplation and creation, a site for memories in constant flux, allowing noise, mess and emergent meanings. New Haven. A necessary luxury in a writer's life.

## 5.4

### Political brews

#### *Dynastic dramaturgy*

Turning around the private/public setting, also state-level political power in the Indian subcontinent can be related to the culinary metaphor. The flavours of political dramas are skilfully portrayed in ancient and contemporary epics. Tariq Ali (1985, xv–xvi) recalls the eight formal categories in Sanskrit plays that make up the rules of dramaturgy, or eight "flavours": marvellous, romantic, comic, sorrowful, violent, heroic, terrifying and repulsive. Collective judgment on the success of performance is encouraged. In his prologue to the saga of the Nehrus and Gandhis, he stages the setting: "*The founding fathers of our dynasty are shadowed from beginning to end by wonder, love, mirth, grief, fury and resoluteness.* (Ali 1985, xvi)" The analysis is later extended to other

contemporary South Asian political clans, including the Bhuttos. Ali lists the basic ingredients in these political brews in all South Asian countries as belonging in the same continuum of political culture: low literacy rate, emphasis on religious rather than political agency, repression through feudal landlordship and political personality cults as a way of preserving the status quo.

### *The taste of terror*

All of the "flavours" mentioned by Ali can be located in the present study. The most dramatic one undoubtedly is the taste of terror, particularly if it is fed to you by government agents or other political enemies. In *Meatless Days*, this threatening flavour is not only in metaphorical use but becomes literal, when foodstuffs disappear and return poisoned:

*All of us were equally watchful for hidden trickeries in the scheme of nourishment, for the way in which things would always be missing or out of place in Pakistan's erratic emotional market. Items of security – such as flour or butter or cigarettes or tea – were always vanishing, or returning in such dubiously shiny attire that we could barely stand to look at them. We lived in the expectation of threatening surprise: a crow had drowned in the water tank on the roof, so for a week we had been drinking dead-crow water and couldn't understand why we felt so ill; the milkman had accidentally diluted our supply of milk with paraffin instead of water; and those were not pistachios, at all, in a tub of Hico's green ice cream.*

(Suleri 1989, 29)

Suleri does not specify the era when these hidden trickeries occurred. This is the only instance where I have heard about food poisonings as a form of political terror in Pakistan. It reminds European readers of the need for proof-tasters in different courts; however, for



Suleri the above passage is the only instance in the text in which culinary memory moves from the celebratory, sensual and comic towards worry, fear and concern.

Here the recognition of foodstuffs is no longer a matter of cultural intelligibility, or a diasporic search for vanishing cultural traditions, but a matter of political security. We enter strongly the Butlerian zone of "bodies that matter" (Butler 1993) , but it is not only a symbolic zone of meaning-making and getting one's voice heard in the struggle for intelligibility; it is also, and I would emphasize even rather, a zone of physical survival.

Suleri's phrase "Pakistan's erratic emotional market" becomes, then, a health hazard, a lethal cocktail. In a context of fear, a lot of pressure is laid on the domestic servants and cooks to keep the kitchen intact from intruders and to inspect all the items purchased. Watchfulness may become a neurosis, and trust an extinct commodity. Suleri's sense of betrayal of meals that are not what they look like is not only a matter of cultural intelligibility, a proof that she is losing her nativeness, but stems from a deeper, political insecurity. She appreciates orderly plates and kitchens as sanctuaries of privacy. Thus, in *Meatless Days* the argument for *disciplined kitchens*, which we already found in Ikramullah's narrative, transcends its colonial meaning of "civilising" the natives and becomes a key to the author's mental – and political – wellbeing.



## VIGNETTE TWO

### Learning/unlearning

*In the shade of Minar-i-Pakistan, the oddly modernist, white phallic rocket that Pakistan's founder Jinnah built, Sanjeevani and I are immersed in a discussion on Foucault and feminism. She has found his concept of power helpful in her book on honour killings, and I am trying to relate to her theorizing, although I still am slightly disturbed by the dozens of male eyes on us, and the pushy sellers of pistachios, watermelon and coconut slices. Trays swarming with flies in the midday heat. Teenagers on school trips from villages, acting out in front of a white stranger. Sanjeevani tells me I'd better get used to this and goes on with her understanding of biopower. This is the way to be. Sometimes a girl has to look through people, and go on fully occupied with her own thing. She is so streetwise and learned. I don't know what I'd do without her.*

*Some people, mostly teenager boys, are still excited about the presence of a ferenji mem. I am still dressed in my Western clothes that I have judged good enough, and a hastily bought dupatta. Later on I am to power shop outfits that I think will make me look less conspicuous. I am hoping to pass as a Pathan or Kashmiri and get away with the gazes. In vain. Little am I aware of my own hyperactive gaze, my constant need to categorize and make absolute sense with all the antennas poised out. Sometimes mere observations give me a headache. I want to recognize everything I have so far read about in books. I must be giving my friend a headache. All the questions from the years during which I didn't make it here. And here we are lounging now, me and my best-friend-informant-hostess. I feel so privileged to be here with her.*

*Jinnah built the Minaret right after Pakistani independence to signal Muslim unity. It is very phallic and misplaced in the midst of the key monuments of Sikh and Mughal Muslim histories, the picturesque gurdwara, Lahore fort and the magnificent Badshahi and Wazir Khan mosques. Unless the Lahore fort is declared a UNESCO world heritage site soon, its enigmatic flora and fauna murals will be lost and the mosa-*

*ics will have crumbled for good. In today's Pakistan, the secular Muslim history has been relegated to the back seat. Fortunately, the mosques of the Mughal era are better restored and will continue carrying the memories of the times of Muslim glory in the subcontinent.*

*In fact, the minaret is a more important historical site in my research context than the Fort and the miraculous mosques. Benazir Bhutto returned here in 1986 after two years' exile in London. The Zia regime could not stop her from holding her arrival speech right here. About three million people were greeting her at the airport and on the ten kilometres' truck ride here. All imagining another kind of nation. For some people this used to be a site of hope. I wonder if it still is.*

*Sanjeevani continues taking me to places. She introduces me to many important players in the Lahori feminist "scene", and I get to visit her workplace, her relatives and friends. We watch Bollywood movies on the satellite TV, and sometimes her girlfriends take us for a ride in the evenings. And when these women strongly in their thirties, some in their forties, mothers, widows, sisters, best friends from primary school, start seriously misbehaving in their cars under the night sky of Lahore, I know that I no longer have to worry about cultural sensitivity. All my anxieties about my academic power or whiteness or non-Muslimness or unrealized Eurocentrism are completely swept away – for a moment. We are having fun full stop. I don't always get all the jokes, because the women have the habit of switching from English to Urdu in mid-sentence, but the context is always groovy enough to make me smile. A lot of singing always follows. Mostly movie songs from their youth. Ironic twists to the utter Bollywood romanticism. The best I can do here is to be with my new friends in my own no-matter-how-biased person. I am mostly listening and giggling along. If on the streets alone I am making the unavoidable notes about structural maladjustment to IMF regulations and the resulting poverty, I have no need to think of the signifiers of Third World difference in the company of these educated, middle-class women. We are for sure sharing discourses and experiences. And when did I last learn so much just by breathing city air and admiring its smoggy night skies?*

In *Khaki Shadows*, General K.M. Arif (2001) provides an "insider account" to the history of Pakistan Army, particularly to "the Zia years" (1977–1988), when he worked as a close aide to Zia ul-Haq, even delivering ultimatums from the dictator to the detained Benazir Bhutto. The military autobiography delivers more than it first seems to promise. It stands as evidence to the mechanistic, operational logic the country's military governments have ruled the country with, mostly staying in power longer than democratically elected ones.

The khaki shadows' persistence in Pakistan's political history is one of the questions most political analysts will, at some level, become involved in<sup>1</sup>. The metaphor is frequently used to denote the army's overpower on civil society, and even General Arif, as a loyal insider to the country's largest and most powerful institution, regrets the fact that since the country's foundation, military regimes have thwarted the democratic process.

A deeper historical analysis on the colour khaki is made by Tariq Ali (2003, 253–278), who links it with "postcolonial looting", low turnouts in mock elections, and people's sense of disenfranchisement and alienation from anything resembling state structures. More generally, it is linked to the South Asian phenomenon of religious com-

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<sup>1</sup> On criticism of militarism see eg. Hussain (1979), Ali (1983, 2003), Kapur (1991), Khattak (1995). A Western feminist anti-militarist classic with a global vision is Cynthia Enloe's *Does Khaki Become You?* (1983) that in my reading makes good sense in Pakistan.

munalism and the colours of morally acceptable violence (cf. Kakar 1996). The shadow metaphor is also used by Benazir Bhutto to discuss the fractions in Pakistani society at the time of Zia's coup in 1977: "*And over all these lay the mighty shadow of the Army, the single most organised and smoothly functioning institution in fractious Pakistan*" (Bhutto 1988, 70).

The present venture into khaki foregrounds Benazir Bhutto's saga, and sets the tone to my strategy of reading her *Daughter of the East* as a gendered testimony of geopolitical time. The temporal perspective may sound exceedingly abstract, considering the "red thread" of the text, her uncompromising loyalty to her father, who in her memory is the martyr, the *shaheed*, the sacred dead parent. My purpose, however, is not to undermine the father-daughter relationship, and its dramatic consequences reaching beyond the autobiographical narration to the changing catalogue of her images: Benazir as a calculated "product" and showcase of Muslim "progress" in the international media, or as *Mohtarma* (honorary title "Madam" for a female leader), the vanishing hope of the dispossessed, or as the exiled opposition leader, whose corruption charges are processed *in absentia* in Pakistani and Swiss courtrooms, or as an incarnation of goddess Kali, bringing about destruction and chaos. Behind all these images lies her father's shadow, his historical memory and legacy.

My studies in Bhuttology<sup>2</sup> have been an exploration of recent political culture (understood as mental states and atmospheres) even more than political history (understood as chronological timelines and events). I have been intrigued by the personality cults surrounding Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and his daughter and tried to understand what the Pakistanis refer to when they knowingly speak of "the Bhutto fac-

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<sup>2</sup> Like the characters in *Meatless Days*, also Pakistani political scientists love playing with names. Burki (1980, 224,238–9) uses the term Bhuttoism; I cannot locate who first coined "Bhuttology" but it refers to the mushrooming of literature on the Bhutto clan.

tor". Considering the wealth of literature available on Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's life and times, I will not dwell here on his personality or leadership style as such, but will provide a contextual path to an informed reading of Benazir's narrative.

I will not offer an "alternative" reading of her text, in which the obvious, disturbing, and, for most readers, immature daughterly voice would be strategically downplayed. Rather, I consider it important to highlight the historical and political *processes* that have made it possible for women such as Benazir Bhutto to become political leaders in South Asia, and the ideologies she actively opposed during her rise to power. A part of the pre-history of my analysis became already covered in chapter 4; here I will look at the more recent clashes between ideological forces during Pakistan's lifetime.

I do not automatically "relate" to *The Daughter of the East*, but neither do I find the text unpromising for feminist analysis. My intention is not to judge Bhutto's actions outside the publication of the autobiography but neither do I want to hide an awareness of their implications. Returning to the problematic notion of "exemplary lives" (Booth 2001), it seems necessary to articulate what strikes me in Benazir's narration. I "get along" at a certain level with Benazir Bhutto the autobiographer, despite her élitist biases, and although her saga sometimes treads at the level of the extreme, the unbelievable and the intentionally dramatized. It is her notion of not giving up, her stubbornness, strength and certain kind of majesty that attract me.

*The Daughter of the East* has not become a popular text for feminist analysis in Pakistan or in the West. It is one of the most widespread and best-selling texts dealing with Pakistan worldwide, and most people in the field of South Asian studies claim to have read it. Is it the text's "overdetermination" as an autobiography of the most successful woman in Pakistan's political history that makes it unattractive for closer reading? I have struggled with this question as her reader: dealing with a political icon with a high mythmaking potential is both inspiring and nauseating. It is not actually rewarding to

study the autobiography of the most obvious and the most notorious female political player in the country's political history, if one has any concern for the larger issues that the majority of Pakistani women are faced with. On the other hand, the very lack of studies made of her is a challenge that I have consciously wanted to take.<sup>3</sup>

I have had to, however, consciously and strategically *elaborate* my relationship to the text. My response to it is not spontaneous, playful or direct by any means. The text has less charm than Ikramullah's elegant, and admittedly nostalgic, narrative of coming into Pakistan, and less intellectual puzzles and emotional complexities than Suleri's tight-knit prose. On the other hand, it has more twists of plot and more referents to international politics, particularly to the Cold War dynamics, than the two other texts. There are highly meaningful and controversial clusters of "thick description" to be found in the text, but they are easily buried under the weight of the family drama.

However critically one approaches the father-daughter theme, one cannot argue that the narrative lacks substance. The *realpolitik* dimension is interesting for those interested in the gendering of recent Pakistani political history. The text brings its reader to the world of feudal politics, negotiations between Pakistan and India, different prison cells, the Pakistani community of political exiles in London. To ask strictly within the framework of narratology *how* Bhutto narrates her years of suffering and exile would make this chapter a study in political dramaturgy as soap opera; I have considered it wiser to withdraw from such a carnivalistic, "pop culture" approach.

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<sup>3</sup> The recent biographies written on Benazir Bhutto (Bokhari 1993, Shaikh 2000) are written by her faithful and opportunist male followers from the ranks of the PPP. I have also found one French Benazir biography (Gorret 1997), which in an orientalist and superficial way engages in an analysis of Benazir's media images in the light of Hindu mythology. Lubna Rafique's (1994) study on Benazir's British media images is the only academic piece of analysis I have read so far.



The valuable insights in *The Daughter of the East*, for the present purposes of re-thinking the connections between gender, time and embodiment, lie in Bhutto's detailed description of her confrontations with the military regime, and in the idea of gendered, embodied political leadership that was a novelty in Pakistan in 1988. Fully conscious of the daughterly complicity with a man whose alleged sainthood was questioned, and also parodied, by the surrounding world and Pakistanis themselves, and of her authoritarian co-optation of the Pakistan People's Party leadership, I will be reading her political autobiography slightly "against the grain" by trying to highlight moments in which she reflects on her own political agency. "Where is *Benazir's* voice located?", has been my most urgent question to the text. The other even more difficult question is: "How can I possibly hear *her*?" Where are the alternative selves to this icon, are they hiding or can some clues to them be found (cf Durakbasa 1997) ?

First, I will make a contextual journey "inside Coupistan", and look at the gendered temporalities of the Zia era, the version of divine time the military regime attempted, in vain, at imposing on its citizens, and the implications of Islamic legislation to women's sense of agency in the 1980s Pakistan. The second part of the chapter consists of an analysis of *The Daughter of the East* as a text with distinctive temporal orientations. In the third part, I will return to an earlier phase in the Bhutto saga, the secession of Bangladesh in the year 1971, and Benazir Bhutto's juvenile understanding of the situation as a prime minister's daughter, read alongside Sara Suleri's voluntary amnesia and Begum Ikramullah's unwillingness to open her "Pandora's Box" containing the memories of the tragic year. How the khaki shadows of militarism and nationalism cause silences, amnesias and active refusals to come in terms with the material, tangible and traumatic consequences of the country's ethnic fragmentation, is, then, the question from which this chapter will begin and to which it will end.

## 6.1

### Inside coupistan

#### *The historical weight of the colour khaki*

Khaki is known as the colonial colour intended for survival in the tropics. It is the colour of invisibility, male adventure and racial superiority. In British India, there were regulations as to who could wear khaki uniforms in public. Shahid Amin (1995, 148–50) renarrates the Chauri Chaura incident of 1922, paying special attention to the hierarchies in dress code at the police station which was eventually set on fire. The rural policemen were only allowed “indigenous” indigo-dyed clothing, whereas the official police wore starched khaki. The rural policemen could only patrol in sandals, whereas the khaki-clad policemen stepped proudly into boots.

The memory of privilege was continued in the postcolonial states, as khaki became the official Indo-Pakistani colour for formal organization after independence. It is the official colour of both armies, but has also been adopted by various right-wing paramilitary groups. From a postcolonial feminist perspective, khaki can also be seen as a colour of Western-imported masculinity, of postcolonial patriarchal nationalism.

Pakistan’s political history seems ultramilitaristic, due to the many military *coups d’état* within a relatively short period. Urban public spaces are decorated by military paraphernalia, such as remains of tanks and fighter planes from the country’s different wars. Paradoxically, the army of an impoverished state that cannot school the majority of its children can still afford to arrange flashy tattoo shows and military parades. Despite the visible symbols of military power, the “official” nationalism in khaki as promoted by the army seems empty and sterile. It cannot bring the majority of the population together and educate them with a sense of common history.

However, the Pakistani state-level nationalist discourses, focusing almost exclusively on nuclear weapons and the issue of Kashmir, are highly emotive and gendered. As Sabha Gul Khattak (1997, 38–52) exemplifies, in the key documents dealing with Pakistan's nuclear program, operations are rhetorically performed by the state/army (always rational, just, protective, powerful and in control) on the nation (symbolizing emotions, solidarity, passing of culture and values, care for the family). She claims that under military dictatorship in Pakistan the army has assumed the hypermasculinist role, undermining the powers of the civilian institutions as incompetent and effeminate. The "protection" of women from the enemy's attacks has become a top national priority.

Many feminist political scientists and sociologists argue today, drawing on Frantz Fanon's (1965) early Algerian insight, that in the colonial context, symbols of male potency have been particularly important as counter-images to the colonial constructions of the "effeminate" native men. Thus national sovereignty becomes linked with masculinity and women's symbolic otherness is legitimised (see eg. Yuval-Davis 1997, 60, Enloe 1987, 44–45, Young 1990, 138).

But the male-female axis is not enough to grasp the multiple gendered stereotypes at play in South Asia. At the level of ethnicity, processes of othering have been equally harsh. The memory of the British colonial system of army recruitment according to social Darwinist racial categories dies hard. The category "martial races" consisted mainly of Punjabis and Pathans, and the least desirable candidates were the Bengalis, whom the British perceived as lazy, rebellious, effeminate and non-co-operative. At least until the 1857 Mutiny/independence war, the British felt greatest affinity with "the martial races", in which they recognized some of their own imagined characteristics. The legacy of the colonial categories persisted in the Pakistani Army since its early days, resulting in the marginalisation of Bengalis in the recruitment policies and, finally, mass destruction in 1971. (Hussain 1979, 126–8, Talbot 2000, 22.)

If the argument for the Islamic bomb serves as the peak of the army's hypermasculinist stance, it may come as a surprise that the person who almost single-handedly initiated Pakistan's interest in acquiring the nuclear capacity was not a general. As early as in 1965, the young minister of industry Zulfikar Ali Bhutto stressed the country's fundamental need to get even with India and become the Islamic superpower:

*If India makes an atom bomb then, even if we have to feed on grass and leaves – or even if we have to starve – we shall also produce an atom bomb as we would be left with no other alternative.*

(Z.A.Bhutto quoted in Niazi 1991, 85)

What to make of the edible histories and meatless days of hunger that the statement above embodies? Who was Bhutto, who, on one hand, rose to power with the populist slogan *roti, kapra aur makaan* (bread, clothing and shelter)<sup>4</sup>, and on the other, prioritised nukes over feeding the people? What to make of his discourse of necessity ("no other alternative") that was a faithful replica of the rhetorics of the generals? Who was the man whose voice resonates as an echo in her daughter's texts and speeches? What was his legacy?

### *Narrating coupgemony*

In his prison testimony, *If I am Assassinated* (1979), Zulfikar Ali Bhutto cunningly coined the term *coupgemony* to describe Pakistan's addiction to military coups and quick fixes in the expense of "messy" and painstaking parliamentary process. Once again, he lamented, Pakistan

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<sup>4</sup> Bhutto's populist slogans of "Islamic socialism" granted his party PPP a sweeping victory in the 1970 general elections; however his *musawaat* (egalitarianism) ended only in cosmetic reforms and undelivered promises. For further analysis, see Talbot (2000, 208), Ali (1983, 99–111) and Jalal (1988, 313–16).

had yielded to the temptation of the easiest but most harmful way out of democracy. In his typical flamboyant manner, he did not hesitate playing with the term *coup d'état*: it became alternatively *coupgeomony* or *coupistan*, "the bridge over which hegemony walks in to stalk our lands" (149), "the falling of the last petal of the last withered rose" (129), or the experience through which Pakistan is "thrown into the debris of history" (197).

Bhutto was overtaken by his commander-in-chief, Zia ul-Haq, in July 1977 under the code name "Operation Fairplay". He had carefully nominated Zia as the head of Pakistan Army because of his faithful simple soldier image, and his alleged disinterest in and unsuitability for politics. Amongst the candidates for the job, he was of the lowest rank and his reputation had not been tarnished in the Bangladeshi war, as he had spent the early 1970s in the Jordan fighting the PLO. Zia's religious background made him seem obedient and serious. His lack of charisma also made him an easy target of mockery. The first nickname I came across was "Zulu Haq" in *Meatless Days* (Suleri 1989, 124). Another one, referring to his tendency to imitate a holy custom was "the master with the kohl-lined eyes" (Naqvi 1997, 61.).

The coup was tidy, efficient and bloodless. In the first weeks, during which Bhutto was held in house arrest, Zia's excuse to the nation was the allegedly rigged elections, but he produced a murder charge against Bhutto. He was accused of arranging the murder of a father of a dissident PPP member, and the trial went on for a year, during which Bhutto sat at different prisons. Bhutto's family was detained and his closest allies were equally imprisoned or exiled. Raja Anwar (1998, 21–22), a PPP youth leader recalls the immediate aftermath of the 1977 coup as "witch hunts", during which he was acting underground, sleeping every night in a different address. The raids against potential PPP supporters were close to absurd. A mere mention of "constitution, "elections" or Bhutto's name was enough for a person to be picked up and punished.

Even after the execution verdict, there was still hope that international pressure would keep Bhutto alive. There were rumours that he be sent away to life term exile. Had there been such bids, Bhutto had turned his back on them, resisting bargains on his status. In the early morning of April 4, 1979, he was hanged at Rawalpindi Jail. The aftermath of his hanging was perhaps even more dramatic than the deed itself.

### *The chameleon's legacy*

*Laws were changing in Pakistan, and I had a dread that the country was prepared to consume the last vestiges of its compassion. Away in America, I cringed to hear the unseemly news that Bhutto had been hanged. What had happened to the memory of those minds, I thought, that they could so abuse a body that they once loved? I could feel that a brute energy was building up in Pakistan, as though the ghost of that populace – mercilessly cast about in 1947, then again in 1971 – had summoned up its strength again, but this time for revenge.*

(Suleri 1989, 125)

Sara Suleri expresses here considerable sympathy for Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, if compared to the memories of other previous politicians such as Jinnah and Ayub Khan. She connects Bhutto's execution to the earlier traumas of historical division, to the long memory of mass destruction and hatred. She observed the events from her academic self-exile, and through her father who was, despite his ideological disagreements with the leftists, "busy talking Bhutto-talk" (Suleri 1989, 17) in London to save his life. So focused was her father to keep Bhutto alive that he missed a plane to Pakistan to attend his own mother's funeral. Dadi's memory becomes buried under the grim exigencies of Zia's martial law. Also Bhutto's hanging is quickly effaced in the Pakistani media, but the emigrant Pakistanis continue their mourning. In America, Sara does not mourn the assassination itself

as much as the symbolic loss of a country for which she could feel compassion. She states: "*our imaginations were consumed by that public and historical dying*" (Suleri 1989, 17).

What Suleri sees as "the ghost of the populace" seems to be an agent as such, a manic-depressive subject with abrupt changes of mood, a force leading to bloodshed and historical revenge. But to what exactly does Suleri refer to when she writes about her country consuming "the last vestiges of its compassion"? How does this phrase echo with other backward glances to that era?

While Sara Suleri looked back on the revenge of her people from the academia of the American Midwest, Benazir Bhutto had just returned from Oxford to witness her father's fall, repeating a single question: why and how did people let this happen? She concedes that there were key people for whom "letting it happen" was an active choice, and some people who initially opposed the *coup* were easily bribed to silence. There were brutal lessons for her to be learnt apart from the neat conceptual analysis at Harvard and Oxford. A common reference to her naïveté during the protected university years is: "*But as a student at Oxford, I did not yet understand that.*" (78)

Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was the first Pakistani leader after Jinnah to capture the imagination of the masses and promise them hope of a better future. His many biographers (eg. Taseer 1979, Burki 1980, Wolpert 1993) portray a passionate, hard-working, meticulous statesman with a bent towards nepotism, revenge and absolute control of his party colleagues. In other words, he was a political chameleon. His brand of Islamic socialism became less revolutionary every year, despite his attempts to nationalise major industries and encouragement of workers to unionize. As a concession to the *ulema*, he even introduced Islamic cosmetic reforms, such as the ban on alcohol. His strengths were in diplomacy and international relations; his biggest weakness was economic analysis, which towards the end of his reign was running the country more bankrupt than ever (Ahmad 1999, 21–44).

Yet as a self-proclaimed people's man, the son of the powerful Sindhi landowner clan was unconditionally loved by the illiterate rural masses and the cities' small working class. He was the first politician to speak about the people's most immediate worries in their own language. He also articulated visions of Third Worldism as a positive political force and advocated further relations with African and Middle Eastern countries. Thus the images of an autocrat and an acrobat appeared as a juggle between visions of a more egalitarian Pakistan and one-party authoritarianism. Censorship, special party-based secret police and the jailing of dissidents linked with authoritarianism were no less present during the Bhutto era than in other eras.

Because Bhutto was approachable and direct, it also made him seem more vulnerable as a politician than his predecessors. His personal life became a target of ridicule and condemnation. His vulnerability was in the frail attempts to bring democracy into a deeply divided society, being the first democratically elected leader, trying out paths never tested before. He was a soft target. He mostly dressed in tailored suits and cologne, the "un-Islamic" attire of a Western-educated statesman, and occasionally in *shalwar kameez*, or the Mao cap.

After his imprisonment, the country was immobilized in fear and apathy. Benazir pays special attention to his withering body in the prison cells, and the farcical courtroom sessions where the verdicts were always predetermined. After the world's initial shock and the pouring letters of amnesty to the Martial Law Administrator's office, Bhutto's looming death sentence was soon forgotten. Conspiracy theories have ever since emphasized US vested interests in the 1977 coup: Bhutto was reluctant to negotiate severely conditioned aid packages with the US, whereas Zia ul-Haq's vested Cold War interests were clear from the beginning of his reign. Consequently, Zia's image in the world media altered soon from the brutal dictator to the Muslim gatekeeper of the "free world" against possible Soviet invasions.

The favourite accusation against Bhutto was that he was not a Muslim:



*Meanwhile the subsidized fundamentalists in the street were sinking to a new low. "Bhutto is a Hindu, Bhutto is a Jew," they chanted, as if the two religions, neither of which my father practiced, were mutually compatible."*

(Bhutto 1988, 77)

Even the heavy monsoons were blamed on Bhutto. A rumour was circulating that Bhutto had caused heavy rains and thus destroyed thousands of villages in the floods as a revenge to his overthrow . But as Sara Suleri (1989, 19) remembers, it was also the season for "bumper harvests". And after the turbulent weather, there was suddenly a deadly calm.

### *In the egalitarian desert*

The Islamization of Pakistan began systematically after Bhutto's execution. Unlike during the Islamic Revolution in Iran, in Pakistan there was no widespread popular and intellectual movement in sight to back up the new legislations. During the last months of the Bhutto rule, there were violent expressions of frustration at his autocratic leadership style and inefficient economic policies under the umbrella coalition PNA , but the actual "Islamists" consisted only of the most conservative members of the *ulema* and the supporters of *Jamaat-i-Islam* and other tiny religious parties (JUI and JUP) . After the coup, the anti-Bhutto forces "found themselves in the political wilderness" (Bhutto 1988, 143) of martial law, unable to rise into important political posts or even convene legally.

*Reading Althusser. He points out that under despotism, "everyone is nothing in an egalitarian desert". A compelling landscape metaphor. I write down in the margins "Zia rule 1977–1988". Althusser points out the Orientalism of Montesquieu's climactic categorisations of regimes. Perhaps he was an early postcolonial theorist? Of course, the torrid landscape of Pakistan is a perfect fit*

*to the category of "Asian" despotism. Ironically, the landscape theory was also supported by Auyb Khan, Bhutto's early mentor. But then, Althusser goes on to condemn the category as a "geographical illusion and historical allusion ". Still, he tells me to take political passions seriously. Surprisingly, his political analysis is sensitive to emotions.*

(Research diary, October 2001)

The *Jamaat* members acted as Zia's civilian paramilitary forces, or as Raja Anwar (1998, 21) puts it, as the "martial law's concubines", guarding the public morality by arbitrary and unauthorized stick beatings. In Shahnaz Rouse's (1988, 59–60) words, there was "*a powerful alliance between the guardians of the state and the guardians of public and private morality*". This resulted in effective boundary protection within the country's political borders.

Zia called the new order *Nizam-i-Mustafa*, community of the faithful, which was to be based on the Qu'ran and *shari'a*. Zia was careful to consult his measures with the conservative *ulema*, who were in 1981 to form *Majlis-e-Shura*, the Federal Council of Islamic Ideology, a state body to plan the concrete measures of the new order. The most acute problem within an order invented without popular support was where to start. The purpose of *Majlis-e-Shura* was to give the regime a hasty puff of legitimacy. (Jalal 1988, 319–326, Hussain 1979, 90.)

Paradoxically, Zia's Islamization started with what he conceived as deep moral cleansing. There was no vision for the levelling down of the class differences, for reaching economic justice, which after all was the basis of the first Muslim community. Zia was relentlessly legalistic, focusing on punishments instead of the reasons for crimes that could be interpreted as mere means of survival. In a context where Islam's messages of brotherhood, mercy and tolerance would have been in great demand, the new *Nizam-i-Mustafa* enforced the ritualistic, performative and corrective aspects of the religion. It was a move away from Sufism (favoured during Bhutto rule) towards the puritanical

Deobandi tradition, which also further marginalised the Shia Muslims. (Talbot 2000, 209–11, Ahmed 1992, 242.)

According to Ayesha Jalal (1988, 319–326), Zia argued that Pakistan and Islam were two sides of the same coin, and for the time being only the military establishment could safeguard the integrity of both. There was pretence of unity, but his chief concern was to eliminate the Bhutto family and the whole PPP support basis. His political program consisted of assertions and proclamations, but there were little attempts at building and maintaining political structures, bridges or alliances. The country was kept under martial law until December 1985, when a puppet, non-party-based parliament was elected, the major opposition forces withdrawing from the elections altogether. This resulted in the emergence of a new generation of politicians, now fully dependent on state patronage and its "grants economy".

Ironically, images of Zia's prescribed top-down Islamism draw close to what Montesquieu categorised as despotism in European history, here reflected by Althusser:

*But the despot has no more idea of the future than the merchant who profits in order to eat and that's all. All his reflection comes down to deciding, and the legion of his precarious administrators repeat the same blind gesture to the end of the most remote province. What could they decide anyway?*

(Althusser 1972, 79.)

The terms "despotism", "feudalism" or "totalitarianism" are all highly problematic in a non-European context<sup>5</sup>, but I am here con-

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<sup>5</sup> Despotism was Aristotle's special term for the Persian form of autocracy, as differentiated from Greek tyranny. It was later taken into wider analysis by Montesquieu in his geopolitical theory and developed by Marx into a formation of the Asian form of production. On the problems of naming Asian historical periods as feudal, see Hietaniemi et al (1997). In particular, the use of "totalitarianism" in an Asian context seems problematic, due to the concept's boundedness with European 20C history. For further political analysis, see Paastela (2000).

cerned by the coincidental figure of the merchant. Pakistani political analysts have themselves taken the figure of the urban petty shopkeeper as the exemplary supporter of Islamism, aspiring towards upward mobility and possibly still rooted to the native village, feeling slightly displaced in the city.<sup>6</sup>

Zia's support basis consisted mainly of the lower middle class: traders and shopkeepers, who often were migrants from East Punjab from where he originated. During the Zia rule, sons of *Jamaat-i-Islami*-supporting families were increasingly recruited to the army. But *Jamaat* never emerged as a mass movement, not even during the regime that promised its supporters social mobility. (Shaheed 1998, 146, cf. Nasr 1994.)

The militarization of Pakistani society was striking during the Zia rule. Military officers were drawn to all cadres of civilian administration under martial law, which left no state level free of the "khaki shadows". Cheap Kalashnikovs were pouring into the country from the Afghan border. Islamabad became the largest foreign CIA base in the early 1980s, and the country was praised for its hosting of the Afghan refugees. In the Western media, the strategic geopolitical position of Pakistan meant that an army once accused of destroying the slow democratic process was suddenly praised for acting as the guardians of the "free world". Benazir Bhutto testifies bitterly the magic of geopolitical re-naming: how Zia's image was whitewashed from the brutal dictator to a "world statesman", or even "the benevolent dictator" in the US media. (Bhutto 1988, 178.)

### *Hudood and women's voices*

The first step towards the complete application of *shari'a* were the *Hudood* ordinances, promulgated in 1979. *Hudood* is the plural form

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<sup>6</sup> For discussions on the stereotypes of the Muslim "fundamentalist" see also Merinissi (1996), Sardar (1998) and Ali (2003).

of the Qu'ranic term *hadd* indicating a major offence, and the severest category for punishment according to the *shari'a*. They consist of theft, adultery, consumption of alcohol, slander, robbery and apostasy. (Weiss 1985, 2.) The amputation of hands was never realised, but the stonings to death of alleged adulterers occurred in the early 1980s. Floggings were a minor and more frequent punishment, and especially in the cases of pregnant women, the lashes were often reduced from a "charitable" viewpoint. Paradoxically, none of the following governments, including Benazir Bhutto's, has been able to repeal these misogynous ordinances. Although stonings and floggings may not take place in contemporary Pakistan, the possibility for the application of *hudood* always exists. This is the ongoing, concrete legacy of Zia ul-Haq. (Yusuf 2002, www source.)

The development of *shari'a* courts in Pakistan was not a systematic process, and Zia never reached his ultimate goal, the full "Islamization" of the country's legal system before his death. Feminists from the Simorgh collective (1985, 20) point out that the incomplete and arbitrary application of the *hudood* ordinances was a way to divert attention from the economic and political failures onto questions towards the connection between sex and sin, and women's bodies. In a sense, then, women had become the symbolic excuse of the regime to avoid solving its immediate problems.

Sara Suleri (1992, 756–769) argues outside *Meatless Days* that this legislation is the "limit" against which women must continue writing about lived experiences, and an imposed postcolonial "realism"<sup>7</sup> that can only be challenged by insisting on the provision of accurate historical context instead of abstract feminist-theoretical jargon. The

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<sup>7</sup> Another interconnected "realism" against which feminists are compelled to write against is the international relations theoretical school of realism, emphasizing survival and necessity as the proper "zone" of world politics, not progress nor freedom. In this mode of understanding the world, states are unitary, rational and always pursue power defined as the national interest. (Sylvester 1995, 6–7.)

reading of *Meatless Days* in this contemporary legal context can provide some suggestions to how women "keep on living" (Suleri 1989, 8) and what alternative registers of meaning-making can exist despite and beyond woman-killing legal paragraphs.

The promulgation of *hudood* also led to the introduction of the early Islamic laws of witness in 1984, which reduced women's testimony in court to a half of men's. In a rape case, a testimony of four eye-witnesses was required; otherwise the woman would be accused of adultery. As a rule, two women could testify together, but a single woman's testimony would be considered unreliable. How indeed could one best challenge such a "realism" in the best strategic way? What kind of postcolonial feminist criticism could repeal *hudood*?, asks Suleri.<sup>8</sup>

The important distinction one has to make here is between Islam as a contemporary, living and dynamic set of practices and one post-colonial Muslim country's inner struggles for power, its geopolitical opportunism. Zia ul-Haq saw a golden opportunity in the Cold War setting to act as a gatekeeper of US interests, and knew that assistance to the Afghan *mujahideen* would guarantee him free hands in domestic politics. The *Hudood* ordinances were made possible because of the US vested interests in Afghanistan. Why the ordinances were never powerfully enough questioned to form a cohesive civil rights movement, and how legislation affects women's voices as writers of their time, as political and historical testifiers, are still relevant questions.

*How many living voices need to emerge to pull down a lethal paragraph? What is the point of writing about other things, about beauty and wonder, joy and pleasures, if any day your voice may become legally reduced to a half of what it sounds like today? When*

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<sup>8</sup> Suleri's 1992 text "Woman Skin Deep" is still a powerful piece of postcolonial feminist criticism, which has been read across cultures, not only in the Pakistani context. Her idea of writing against a limit can also be applied to other controversial themes, such as female circumcision and polygyny.

*you can speak, but whatever you say is only half as good as your male opponent's? When you are always defined as a less-than, a not-quite, a half empty glass?*

*Here I start deeply caring about how women write. But not about the difference from men's texts, rather about the very possibility of writing, its emergence after all. Writing as such. Where should a woman start writing under such conditions? What could she testify? How could she write despite and across the insulting reductions? Where is the most permanent ink available? She should really smudge and mess around without any constraints, riot-proof. Her subversive ink stains on the ordinances should become a shrine.*

(Research diary, Toronto, June 5, 2003.)

### Women's Action Forum

In the early 1980s, women became the highest symbols of the purity of the new moral order, pawns in the struggle of the honour and sanctity of the Muslim family. Ayesha Jalal (1988, 326) comments on Zia's policy of *chador aur chardivari*, the veil and four walls, as "*an indigenous recipe with which to establish the legitimacy of his regime without unduly taxing the sensibilities of Pakistan's male-dominated society*". Gender, ethnicity and religious identity become interconnected in the analysis of the Zia years: Jalal links the developments to the need to appease otherwise disempowered male citizens; Aijaz Ahmad sees in Zia's definitions of an Islamic way of life a way to deal with the crisis of the loss of East Pakistan. When Pakistan no longer was the homeland of the Muslim majority in South Asia, there were pressures to articulate the country as the home of the most pious Muslims, concedes Ahmad. In addition to the national identity crisis after the split of the two wings, Islamism served as a tool to explain away poverty as "*a consequence neither of neocolonialist imperialism nor of indigenous systems of ownership and appropriation, but a divine punishment for 'un-Islamic*

*ways of life", namely corruption, conspicuous consumption, alcohol, lack of prayers, and the propensity of women to leave their kitchens sometimes."* (Ahmad 2000, 41.)

The laws of witness were particularly articulated around the idea of women's bodily cycles and the irrational behaviour menstruation or pregnancy may cause in a courtroom. Leila Ahmed (1992, 73–74) sees here as a contemporary patriarchal application, unknown in the early Muslim history, in which a woman's full voice was suddenly articulated as "invention" (*bid'a*). Women's testimonies in the Muslim world begin from Aisha's and Muhammad's other wives' *hadiths*, and these voices were never questioned because of their menstruation or pregnancy. If women were fully present in the moulding of the core of Islamic traditions, asks Ahmed, why does a contemporary Muslim state deny women's agency in such a profound way?

Contrary to the regime's expectations, women were still leaving their kitchens. Urban professional women did not succumb to the regime's attempts to wipe women away from all spheres of public life, but fought fiercely under the umbrella organisation Women's Action Forum, forming their own local and regional sub-groups. This was the beginning of the Pakistani women's movement as known today. (Mumtaz and Shaheed 1987, Haeri 2002.)

The movement has experienced difficulties in achieving a "reachout" or impact outside its own privileged circle. Shamila Chaudhary (2000) finds in many of its core groups top-down discourses that "will foster greater feminist consciousness among women who are conveniently placed to accept it". Pakistani feminists have become labelled by the general public as emissaries or mirrors of the West, and due to their transformative experiences in the West, often fall into the role of the cultural outsider. For the critics of the movement from the inside (Mumtaz and Shaheed 1987, Jalal 1990, Chaudhary 2000) the most critical question is about the sharp division between feminists and women, feminist struggles and other struggles into which women participate without articulating their special gender concerns.



Farida Shaheed (1998, 146–7) argues that despite the tightened definitions of gender in the retrogressive rhetorics of the religious right, the Zia rule was the time when Pakistani women entered in masses into the labour market and higher education<sup>9</sup>. Despite the demands for an Islamic dress code, the 1980s witnessed a higher presence of women in public spaces than ever before. There were serious attempts to remove women's faces from the media and advertising (see eg. Simorgh 1985), but at the same time women acted out boldly and were finding their voices as feminists.

My own readings of Pakistani feminists' texts since the mid-80s and observations of their activism home and on international forums sustain a belief that the country is not in need of Western gender consultants to raise women's consciousness or report to the world about their "condition". Inside Pakistani feminism(s) there is a rich trafficking of ideas across continents, and a sense of South-South solidarity that may be also called postcolonial feminist consciousness. Pakistani feminists now speak in their own voice in international gatherings, and sustain a strong sense of agency. Class-based, yes, weak or silenced, by no means.

### *The cloak of Islam and its definitional others*

*Nizam-i-Mustafa* was continuously negatively defined by what it was not. The ideal-typical political agent, subservient to the state and programmed by Zia himself, was a Sunni Muslim male, preferably from the Punjab or belonging to the *mohajir* community. Women, Shia Muslims and other religious or ethnic minorities counted as invisible non-entities against which the ideal man could mirror his own image,

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<sup>9</sup> For a wide-ranging and insightful study on the lives of professional Pakistani women in the 1990s, which also reflects on the backlash of the 1980s, see Haeri (2002).

escaping positive definition. Thus, as Farida Shaheed (1998) puts it, Islam became a cloak to cover repression.

The cloak was thick and opaque. Definitions of who counted as good Muslims were tightening to the extent that in order to fully function in society one was constantly forced to prove one's "Islamic" credentials. So the religious idiom became popular in particular amongst the urban commercial lower middle class (in Pakistani slang, LMC<sup>10</sup>) to gain entry into politics.

All the factors examined above led to a depoliticization of Pakistani society by the mid-1980s. As Akbar S. Ahmed (1997, 209–11) sees it, the Bhutto period led to the general *awamification* of the country (mass politicization and giving space for the voices of the working class and the rural labourers), but during the Zia rule the newly found appreciation of working class and rural cultures turned into gross commercialism. New technologies and diversions were imported to keep the people in their place. And a new generation was growing which did not remember their parents' and grandparents' struggles.

## 6.2

### Waiting for a daughter

#### *Temporality of the 1977 coup*

To condense the above dramatic narrative of Pakistan's longest experience of martial law, I have found four dimensions of temporal experience recurring in most testimonies of the period. The dimensions indicate the shift from *coup d'état* towards the stabilisation of martial law.

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<sup>10</sup> Parodied by Aamer Hussein (1999, 32–4) in the short story "Sweet Rice".

1. Suddenness: violence, emergency, rule of the moment
2. Standstill: instability, uncertainty, apathy
3. Waiting game: procrastination, postponement, changing dates
4. Repetition: status quo, lack of revolutionary ideas, empty declarations

Here I will look how these temporal dimensions of martial law appear in Benazir Bhutto's narration, and also how she herself as a young exiled party leader learnt to play with time. In her narrative, I can find three different temporal dimensions, which somehow "shadow" the experience of martial law: "eternal", repetitive time, anticipation and play.

"Eternal" time refers to the Islamist visions of Zia ul-Haq's government (1977–1988) that paradoxically emphasized a return to a Muslim state in the Medinan style, empty declarations and proclamations made during that era, and the apathy into which the citizens fell after a ban on party politics, political gatherings and publications. Anticipation refers to people's resistance and hope of a human saviour, who would pull the nation out of its current misery; a Messianic notion of salvation is intimately tied to it. With "play" I mean power to play with political time, to somehow take advantage of the people's anticipation of a saviour, and a strong sense of *realpolitik*, or in Kari Palonen's (2003, 177–179) terms politicking, in the here and now.<sup>11</sup>

In terms of temporal modes, eternal time is a past-oriented, anticipation a future-oriented, and play a present-oriented temporality. In the coming analysis of Benazir Bhutto's narrative of her rise to power

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<sup>11</sup> *Realpolitik*, German term for "politics of the real", indicates determination to treat politics as it is and not as an idealist would wish it to be. The term is closely related to the idea of postcolonial realism, and the international politics "school" of realism vis-a-vis idealists (cf. McLean 1996, 422). In the South Asian context, one can find realist masterpieces written by political historians employed to defend either India or Pakistan in the competition for nuclear weapons.

I am not going to explicitly spell out the appearance of each temporal orientation, but to deal with the interplay of the three different modes creatively according to a situational logic.

To re-write her story from the perspective of political time, to dramatise the situations which eventually led to her rise as the first female prime minister of Pakistan, the most powerful woman politician in her country's history and yet a woman whose hands were tied to family loyalty, is a risky business. Inasmuch Benazir's hands were tied when she wrote *The Daughter of the East*, so are mine as her reader. By choosing to include her story in the present study, I am, despite my resistances, complicit in the reproduction of "Bhuttology", the perpetuation of the mythology on and around this political dynasty, whose involvement in Pakistan's political history is by no means over yet.

### *When empathy fails: ethnographic interventions*

Of the three authors, the figure of Benazir Bhutto is the most distant one to me: her text does not invite to intimacy but a threshold between Benazir-the-politician and the readership is skilfully maintained. *The Daughter of the East* may evoke in the readers sympathy, but it is difficult to imagine a close-up emphatic reading, in which the reader would re-live the narrated events under the skin. At least my imagination does not extend that far. Benazir remains for me a somewhat enigmatic figure, and this matters a great deal in choosing a writing-back strategy.

I meet Benazir-the-autobiographer first in what I believe to be a purely textual space, in which it seems possible to interact with her single cultural product only. I believe this is ethical because of the imbalance of the setting. I have little access to extratextual information about Ikramullah's and Suleri's lives, especially their lives after the publication of the texts. With Benazir the situation is quite contrary: I could start a Benazir Bhutto archive filled with websites, newsarticles,

speeches, statements, videos and photographs. I could also study the ongoing debates about her scandals and possible future return to Pakistan. I am informed about the latest turns in her saga, but I refrain myself from immersing in the gossip and the media buzz.

The messiness and noisiness of what happened next, after the publication of her autobiography, puzzles me. And I cannot pretend not knowing more than what the text itself indicates. My reading is, consciously or unconsciously, overinformed by what came afterwards. I also believe that this kind of after-wisdom is unavoidable, and an important aspect of political storytelling as such. There is no political analysis without after-wisdom, without speculation and always context-dependent and situational attempts at judgment (cf. Parvikko 2003).

The more I see Benazir in the BBC South Asia Special, the more I visit her website, the more I collect her fans' and enemies' statements, the more distant she becomes as an autobiographer. She is everywhere as an icon, her face colonises my living room, and at the same time she is vanishing from my active comprehension. I feel almost corrupted by the information overload, and at the end of the research process, there is not much to tell about my actual *encounters* with her autobiography. I am not sure if I have ever encountered her text as such without the intervention of the media, and now I have lost the sensitivity to even try.

I have had to process feelings of disappointment and betrayal, but this is what feminist ethnographers (see esp. Visweswaran 1990, 1994) in fact encourage me to do. I am not here to tell the objective "truth" about Benazir and her husband's money laundering scandals; however, I cannot delete the constant interference of the world in the reading process. My interpretations of her texts have changed more dramatically over the years than those of the other two texts. This is the most worldly, noisy and messy text I am dealing with, the one that brings me into constant trouble, the reading of which I am never completely comfortable with. Rather than with *Meatless Days* which

is celebrated as a postmodernist version of Pakistani history without closure, with *The Daughter of the East*, written in a more conventional autobiographical format, I am thrust into the zones of indeterminacy, undecidability, and self-censorship. My "interpretations" become forced, ungrounded, inauthentic. In fact, I try to steer myself to avoid too intentional interpretations. But how could I say something?

*From courtrooms to the family graveyard*

She was a fresh graduate in international relations from Oxford, ready to compete for the foreign ministry exams to be held later that year. Unlike her father, she was not so fond of political play, preferring instead the idea of a stable career and a more low-key service to the nation. That summer Papa was in trouble, as a mass movement of discontent members of the urban lower middle class, backed up by the conservative *ulema*, took the streets to demonstrate against the elections were allegedly rigged. Then one July night the phone rang and a voice said "the general has done it, hurry". Then the phone was disconnected.

Papa did not take the next plane to London. He was detained in the prime minister's guest house up in the hill station of Murree. The rest of the family were in house arrest on their estate. The general promised fresh elections in no time. Of course, no-one in the People's Party believed that. Houses were wired and even the purchasing of copy machines was banned. They started overloading the prisons within a few weeks of Papa's arrest. She and Mama were held and released, in and out again and again. The regime-backed media started calling them "gangsters in bangles" (Lamb 1991, 36).

Benazir remembers every detail in her father's excruciating trials. The clash between the British-style decorum and the martial law administration's "Islamic" intervention in the proceedings was everywhere to be seen in the buildings of Lahore High Court:

*The judges, wearing black robes and white wigs, took their places in five high-backed chairs under a red satin tasselled canopy. My father's lawyers were already in court, dressed in black silk gowns over their black jackets, starched white shirts with winged collars, morning suit trousers. Sitting with the other onlookers filling the rows of wooden benches in the court-room, I should have felt comforted. It looked like a trial being held in the finest tradition of British law. It wasn't. (104)*

It is the British law that Benazir can trust, and she does not mind the Empire's ghosts in the courtroom, which for her, are preferable to her family's indigenous Pakistani enemy. Her address here is towards the world outside Pakistan to show what parody her country's new rulers have made of "the finest traditions".

Here is an example of the "waiting game" that Benazir experienced during her detention:

June 21, 1978

*I smooth out my shalwar kameez. I want to look smart for my parents on my birthday to show them my morale is high. 1.00 PM. 2.00 PM This is one of the regime's favourite tricks. I cannot count the numbers of times in my own periods of detention when I have been ready at the appointed hour to be taken to visit my father, only to wait hour after hour with no word. (123)*

Benazir knew soon after her first imprisonment that she could expect anything from her jailers, and that every single move they made was ordained from the top level of the Martial Law administration.

Her father turned religious during the last months of his life. He believed his life was in God's hands. International letters of amnesty kept pouring to the martial law administrator's office but unless Papa himself gave a sign of withdrawal from the power struggle, there did

not seem to be any chance for a fair hearing. Papa did not understand why he should appeal for amnesty for a crime he plead non-guilty of. This was the theatre of the absurd, but at the same time the plot against him was plausible, because landlords had eliminated unwanted people without becoming charged for centuries. Most Pakistani politicians were still doing it. Papa was known as a man of the people, but surely he was no saint. Minutes were ticking towards his fate.

April 3, 1979

*Tick. Tick. The Martial Law forces are cordoning off our family graveyard, cutting off all roads to Garhi Khuda Baksh. Tick. Tick. Amina goes directly to the Niazi's house from the airport. Not wanting to be alone. Tick. Tick. "It's tonight", Dr Niazi is saying quietly into the phone over and over again, as Yasmin and Amina lie silent and wide awake in the darkened house. Tick. Tick. (137)<sup>12</sup>*

Benazir dramatizes the night of her father's execution as a saga of near-religious martyrdom. The weather is a first sign that the event is exceptional: *"The skies rained tears that night, pelting our family lands in Larkana with hail."* (Bhutto 1988, 10) Also many members of the family and loyal party cadres all wake up in the night and experience a passing of a spirit. Later on, miracles are reported in the vicinity of the Bhutto graveyard.

Although father Zulfikar's grave is patrolled by the government and is allowed to remain only as a mound of mud – no mausoleum

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<sup>12</sup> Salman Rushdie (1991, 56–58) begins his dismissal of Bhutto's autobiography by a parody of her love for sound effects. Her political naïvety and unwillingness to acknowledge her father's misdeeds ("the depressing daughterliness") bothered Rusdhie most in her 1988 election campaign. Yet he thinks he would have voted for Benazir, despite the hollowness of her message, and concludes: "If Benazir is the best, you can guess what the rest are like."



can be built around it on the orders of the Martial Law administration – for Benazir the grave becomes a site for pilgrimage.

### *Prison cells and skin cells*

Benazir's struggle only began after her father's execution. She had promised Papa to take over the party leadership. And what government job was there available for her now as the martyred arch-enemy's daughter anyway? They kept shifting her from detention to prison, from Sindh to Punjab and back. She developed anorexia and a serious ear problem. Mama was diagnosed of lung cancer and eventually let out of the country for chemotherapy. Her two brothers had gone missing to Afghanistan where they planned the ultimate revenge under the name al-Zulfikar. Conspiracy theories on the whole family's blasphemous connections with the Soviet Union and India were circulating wildly. Her little sister was lucky to fall in love and marry a man of her choice, but what else could she have done, without parents or siblings around? The whole family was displaced in mourning. It was also a Cold War diaspora.

The torture she went through in prison was mostly psychological, apart from the few times she was given government-sponsored medical care. She makes a clear difference between her status and the other PPP prisoners, who received gun beatings, electric shocks, sleep deprivation etc. At times she was allowed to stay in A class (political prisoner) cells without the actual material comforts of the class.<sup>13</sup> Many of her party comrades were enlisted as Amnesty International prisoners of conscience. If compared to the fate of the average political prisoner

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<sup>13</sup> The historical continuum of the classification of prison cells in South Asia is certainly postcolonial. In British India, "A" class was strictly reserved for political prisoners of upper classes and Europeans. Benazir Bhutto reflects upon the classes, and what kinds of amenities were included in each class, in a very similar way than the pre-partition prisoners (cf. Saghal 1994, 65–66).

in a Pakistani jail, Benazir's experience with insects, stinking toilets and isolation was from the lighter end. After all, as a daughter of the ex-prime minister with contacts to the power centres of the world, her severe mistreatment would have soon become an international scandal. Of the treatment of others, she says the situation was "reaching a new level of barbarity" (Bhutto 1988, 49) by 1981.

The first months of her imprisonment were spent in Sukkur Jail in the inner Sindhi desert, where she was left isolated for five months in her own compound, meeting only the wardens who would only bring her bad news about the tightening Martial Law and the arrests and whippings of her friends. She reacted by a refusal to eat, and soon her anaemia turned into anorexia, which she only acknowledges retrospectively. She does not call the situation a hunger strike but the refusal to eat is narrated rather as a personal response to political trauma. She does not intentionally stop eating and thus pressurise Zia's government to set her free, but rather her body seems to react to the conditions by its own force.<sup>14</sup> As the summer proceeded, a sandstorm entered her boiling cell:

*My skin split and peeled, coming off my hands in sheets. More boils erupted on my face. The sweat dripped into them, burning like acid. My hair, which had always been thick, began to come out by the handful. I had no mirror, but I could always feel my scalp with my fingertips: damp, gritty and naked. Every morning I would find clumps of hair on my pillow.*

(Bhutto 1988, 168)

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<sup>14</sup> Eating disorders have only recently entered the postcolonial theoretical discourse, perhaps through the Zimbabwean author Tsitsi Dangarembga's novel *Nervous Conditions* (1987). It is important to point out that eating disorders are not only the "luxury" of Western teenagers, but do occur also in other parts of the world, especially in contexts of political extremity. Prison testimonies often make food a key theme, due to the horrors related to prison food. Bhutto had at least for a part of her detainment the luxury of getting food brought in from her house or even a cook staying with her and her mother inside the prison.

The prison cell makes her skin peel, and as the new skin cells grow, Benazir has toughened her act and started to play with the Martial Law administration. The regime gives her ultimatums and takes advantage of her young age: she is often given the opportunity of release and exile on the condition she gives up politics altogether. She refuses to discuss the matter altogether, and keeps suspicious of any offers given to her.

The worst terror she experienced personally was the waiting game. The regime was specialised in creating false hopes and postponing its vague promises of meetings with family members, the upgrading of her cell or final release. Like most prisoners, she found security and comfort in newly created routines.

*Time, relentless, monotonous. To keep my brain stimulated, I recorded everything that was happening to me in a thin little notebook a sympathetic jailer smuggled into my cell. That passed some of the time.*

(Bhutto 1988, 153)

Newspapers and magazines brought variation into her daily note-making. With nostalgia, she remembers the occasional copies of *Time* and *Newsweek* (which one jailer denied, calling them Communist publications) and even local Sindhi papers filled with society wedding reports and fishing stories. Faithful summaries of the world news offered momentary escape from the most immediate realities. In house arrest at the family estate al-Murtaza, she taught herself to cook, sew and plant roses. In terms of edible histories, her new motto to maintain sanity was "coquo ergo sum" (Bhutto 1988, 195).

### *Exile and anticipation*

In January 1984, Benazir Bhutto's detention ended. In order to avoid "political embarrassments" (209), she was silently taken to Karachi Airport and flown to London for an ear operation. Political exile was

legitimated in Pakistan by medical need. From the perspective of political time, this passage of exiled party leadership is perhaps the densest part of her narration. And in terms of political agency, the memories from these years show how she learnt, at times, to stand on her own feet, without the tutelage of a man, father or another male mentor. Hopeful, empowering years of rolling up sleeves, back in business.

Soon after her arrival in London, she found herself speaking in high places about the human rights situation in Pakistan. As if to make up for lost time, words kept spilling out from her mouth accompanied with nervous body language. In a way, mentally she still lived in isolation, uncomfortable about encountering too many people, in particular journalists.

The speculations on her return to Pakistan were indicative of the extent to which she had learnt to play her enemy's game. It was paramount to find the symbolically and psychologically most perfect date to return, and this required first-hand knowledge of the political temperature in Pakistan on a regular basis. In December 1985, the Martial Law was finally lifted, which enhanced expectations of the return of the PPP.

*We got an unexpected bonus when this element of secrecy did our publicity work for us. All over Pakistan people started a guessing game. "She is coming on March 23, Pakistan Day," one popular rumour ran. "No, she is coming on April 4, the anniversary of her father's death," others insisted. Even the press carried the latest speculations. (272)*

The importance of dates in Pakistani political culture stems from a combination of Islamic beliefs, for example the celebration of martyrs' death anniversaries, and the ongoing interest in Indian astrology. Arrival on the right day was the key for the success of her campaign. The anniversary of her father's death was in the PPP calendar comparable

to a saint's death anniversary. But also the Islamic calendar, and the Pakistani nationalist calendar were full of meaningful days to return.

The London years become her time of independent political apprenticeship, during which she is enabled to take distance from the autocratic ways of her father's generation, whom she refers to as "uncles". She is running a party from her high-rise Barbican apartment, which she finds perfectly secure, as the moustached gentlemen parking around the complex could not enter the building nor install their wires onto the tenth floor.

By the time she starts running PPP from the Barbican tower, the party has fragmented into competing sects, and the exiled politicians cannot wait for her return so that they could follow her and grab the minister chairs. Unanimously the party leadership has agreed that she is the one to be sent to Pakistan first – she with the highest media profile and the longest prison experience. In many ways, she recalls how she had "transcended gender" (1988, 140) and how people had started to view her as a kind of superhuman or saint because of her father's memory and long isolation from the world.

Gender, for Benazir, is primarily a negative notion, an obstacle that has to be "transcended" in order to become successful. The metaphor is further extended: *"The suffering in the country, the suffering of my family, of all of us, had risen above the barrier of gender."* (128) It is others who define her boundedness to gender: *"There was not a person who did not know the circumstances that had forced me out of the pattern of landowning families."* (140) Gender in her conception is a static barrier but, quite accurately, it is also socially produced and defined. She seems fully aware of the liberties her family status allows her, and of how difficult it would be for another woman from a less powerful family to follow suit.

In London, her party comrades come to meetings at her home, which helps her rid herself of initial feelings of uncertainty and anxiety. It irritates her most when the establishment-oriented "uncles" persuade her to nominate them to their future posts at a stage when

no guarantee about the party's return is in sight. The power-hungry men of the old school seem to take up most of her time. Soon she learns the magic of the assertive response:

*This was the old way of Pakistani politics. Angle for yourself. Throw your weight around. Grab every office you can. Blackmail. Threaten. I had had it with the old ways. And with him. "Uncle", I said, taking a deep breath and leaning forward in my chair. "You know, if you leave the party, it will be hard for you even to win a seat in the Parliament."* (232)

Apart from the opportunist uncles, the Marxist wing of the party gave her challenging times. In the Cold War setting, they criticized her visits to the US harshly, and she even went to the extent of paying a courtesy visit to Soviet women's groups in order to appease them.

### *Arrival*

If her father's execution is the point of departure in Benazir's narrative, the departure from democracy, human rights and family life, the point of arrival is her return to Lahore in March 1986. This is the cathartic moment of the narrative, the victorious turning point.

She returns with thirty other party members on a PIA plane from Saudi Arabia and the party already starts in the plane. They do not know what to expect at the airport, conscious of the possibility that they may all get arrested immediately, or even shot. The knowledge of the risks involved does not cause panic but rather a carnivalistic mood of living in the moment. But their negative speculations are misinformed; it is a protecting shield of humanity that awaits them with garlands and hand-made presents. Figures rising from one to three million. And the roar of the masses Benazir hears in the truck transporting her from the airport to *Minar-I-Pakistan* is the same she heard many times in detention. The echoes of the past that she then thought of as signs of losing her mind were, after all, an omen.

This is the way the people of Pakistan welcomed her as their liberator:

*Hundreds of balloons soared into the sky as the airport gates opened. Rose petals, not tear gas, filled the air, showering onto the truck until they rose above my ankles. Garlands of roses flew through the air.*

(Bhutto 1988, 179)

The people have put all their faith in this woman. They sing songs about her as the revolutionary. They have used all their creativity to decorate the roadsides to welcome her back home. They have done their very best to show political emotion and express their hopes for a better future. This is the moment women in particular have been working for. They have picked the flowers and embroidered *dupattas* and shawls for her to wear with pride. And Benazir greets her sisters, comrades, widows and orphans:

*I saw a girl whose brother had been hanged and threw a garland to her. More garlands were thrown onto the truck, as were hundreds of hand-made dupattas and shawls, I put one dupatta after another on my head and slung others on my shoulder. When we passed former political prisoners I recognised in the throng, I threw flowers and the embroidered clothes to them as well as to the families of those who had been hanged or tortured, and the young and very old women who lined the route.*

(Bhutto 1988, 279)

*Dupattas* thrown in and out as symbols of solidarity. Although the people are shouting slogans, this is not a moment for anger. Torture and fear is remembered by the very act of gathering, but momentarily, they also push the pain aside. They have chosen a woman to embody their will.

## *Political marriage*

Benazir Bhutto writes about the day of her return to Lahore with more intensity and passion than about her own wedding. The marriage narrative forms an epilogue, beginning with a rational explanation why she chose an arranged marriage, and why she chose to get married at all. When she discusses her own and her sister's marriages, she continuously refers to the cultural pressures and "Eastern" traditions. Conformity to tradition is for her a compromise in the midst of preparation for her future role as the country's potential leader. She knows the marriage proceedings by heart and nothing in them surprises her, whereas the political high moments are moments of her own, which she cannot predict. Her return to Lahore in 1986 is a moment of ecstasy, the climax, after which she gets back to work. Getting married is part of the schedule.

Narrating her short courtship, she lays out the expectations the people and the media had of her as a political leader, fully aware that her path to power would be easier married than as a single woman. Her marriage to Asif Zardari is culturally expected of her at thirty-four years of age, a sign of responsible adulthood. She is not willing to risk her political future by rebelling against her fate. In addition, she is looking for stability that has been missing in her life for more than a decade.

Her fiancé is fully aware that her first commitment is to the people, and has accepted the strict conditions. Announcing the engagement, she emphasizes the fact that the marriage will not affect her political career. Public reassurance and reaffirmation of her commitments are indeed needed. If we return to the idea of relational gender expressed by Suleri in *Meatless Days*, Benazir's public role is the daughter's burden, which she carries with few complaints. While she countered the patronizing uncles in exile, she cannot assert her right to private life and irresponsible love in front of her people. Her wifehood, then,



becomes something more marginal and also secondary to the role of the nation's daughter.

Zia ul-Haq's last revenge against Benazir Bhutto was a symbolic body blow. He postponed the promised parliamentary elections immediately after having heard the news of Benazir's pregnancy. Her pregnant body becomes a time bomb, and a source of speculation: would she be able to go on? And would people believe in her with a protruding belly? His body crashed in the mountains of NWFP; she went on and became not only the first woman head-of-state but the first breastfeeding head-of-state of Pakistan.

### *Testimony, eyewitnessing and the notion of authenticity*

Of the three narratives studied, *The Daughter of the East* contains the largest amount of references to international politics, and can thus be read as a gendered geopolitical testimony of her time. With the term "testimony" I do not form an immediate affinity with the Latin American genre of *testimonio* (cf. Zimmerman 1995), but would rather like to link it to local/regional literary traditions and the international human rights discourses, particularly those produced by Amnesty International, who actively campaigned for the release of Pakistani political prisoners during the Zia era. In the Muslim historical context, there is an important etymological linkage between the Arabic words *shadada* ("to witness") and *shaheed* ("martyr"), the noun is a derivation of the verb. The term *shaheed* is also the standard Urdu word for "martyr", and refers to death in *jihad*. (Harlow 1987)

Prison memoirs do always somehow enter the genre of testimony, no matter how disputed the prisoner's life may otherwise have been. Barbara Harlow (1987), in a cross-cultural study of resistance literature, also takes up many Pakistani prisoners' writings, both prose and poetry, interestingly from the Bhutto era. This was a time when particularly people of Baluchi ethnicity were easily imprisoned, accused

or treason and sectarianism. Harlow, in the study made before the publication of *The Daughter of the East*, does not consider the testimonies of the PPP supporters worthwhile Pakistani research material. It seems that especially in countries where regimes change quickly through orchestrated coups, and in which generations after generations see their relatives at times imprisoned, at times highly favoured by the sitting government, the act of naming someone's writing as "resistance literature" and "testimony" becomes a political battlefield as such.

Testimony refers to eyewitnessing, legal procedures, psychotherapy, oral history, storytelling in times of crises, even in situations that in today's language can be called "extremities" (Felman and Laub 1992, Miller and Tougaw 2002). The more dispossessed and marginalised the voice, or the more physical and mental suffering the writing subject has gone through the more "authentic" the testimony is believed to become. Conversely, "inauthentic" testimonies come from those whose suffering is somewhat feigned, whose marginalisation is under dispute, and who with the act of writing believe to achieve status, power and fame. It can also be an attempt to reclaim lost social standing. I call such attempts "lapsed" testimonies, but do not wish to place *The Daughter of the East* on the authentic/inauthentic scale.

The present voice space does not justify the forming of a truth commission. It is not *The Daughter of the East* as a text that has provoked most critique towards Benazir Bhutto's leadership but her later actions. The text may be perceived as a plausible political testimony as such, but for anyone following South Asian politics, it is impossible to detach the text from its notorious aftermath. In other words, posterity has brought about obstacles to reading *The Daughter of the East* as a testimony of the historical suffering of the Pakistani people (as the author perhaps intended), but it can still be read as an insider account of the anatomy of political coups, political imprisonment and Cold War geopolitical strategies. These are the "fields" about which I have learnt most from the famous author. But the fame and the bazaar

gossip often blur my speculations on what she would be like beyond her iconic image. The text does not help me much in reaching beyond that image. And participating in the gossip has sometimes been a much required outlet in my study of Bhuttology.

### 6.3 Pandora's box

*Thirty years after*

*After those many encounters, that easy intimacy,  
We are strangers now-  
After how many meetings will we be that close again?*

*When will we again see a spring of unstained green?  
After how many monsoons will the blood be washed  
From the branches?*

Faiz Ahmed Faiz: On My Return  
from Dhaka (Bangladesh III)<sup>15</sup>

*Moistening March morning. Droplets of sweat on European temples. The coming heat of the day already seeps in through the red conference tent fabric. We, a gathering of women mostly from South Asia with a handful of Euro-American transplants, sit at the rooftop of the ASR Institute, quietly listening to the crackling LP sound of Nayara Noor singing the poems of Faiz Ahmed Faiz about the tortures of 1971. Some women hugging their bodies, eyes closed, swaying to the music, others holding hands, looking down,*

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<sup>15</sup> Agha Shahid Ali's 1991 translation (Faiz 1995, 87).

*not bothering to wipe the flood of tears. Sari-clad and kameez-clad arms intertwine. Bangle noise breaks the silence at intervals, but the deep historical anger, shame and sorrow, and from the younger Pakistani women's part also embarrassment for their parents' generation's unforgettable mistakes, are lived momentarily alone.*

*Today 30 years have passed since the West Pakistani army entered the streets of Dacca. They say it is the first feminist conference in which the genocide and the rapes of women are discussed between Bengali and Pakistani women. I believe this. They hold hands tentatively, like touching a fragile and foreign surface. Temperatures in the room become increasingly difficult to measure.*

*Bunny the leader of the ASR Institute finally breaks the silence by welcoming all new guests in, also the greying gentlemen from ISI, the state intelligence agency.*

(Research diary, Lahore, March 25, 2001.)

### *Silent agency*

At times the autobiographical voice breaks. No matter how polished the narrative, there are always gaps and ruptures to be found. To conclude my analysis of "khaki shadows", I will return to instances in all three narratives, in which moments of terror are actively pushed to the background of memory, in an effort to restore life in its presence. I have become to find these silent ruptures more meaningful in terms of understanding historical processes than the more assertive articulations of identity and belonging. In terms of politics of memory, one has to keep in mind that all that is remembered may not be articulated, and that a surface level of articulation may in itself be a disguise for something else. So how to listen to silence and how to respond to it? I have no definitive answer, but perhaps unsurprisingly, the most precise formulations of the kind of philosophy of listening I am looking for, come from feminist theorists from the South.

Fatima Mernissi (1987, 11) writes from her native Morocco: "*I have learned to give great importance to unspoken forces, unexpressed desires, suppressed dreams, un verbalized claims. I know as a woman, from my ordinary daily interaction as a professional or emotional person, that silence does not means consent or surrender.*" She writes about the necessary compromises women make while performing their everyday acts, and that full expression of one's desires is always impossible. Still women manage to express themselves, and whatever becomes said, no matter how little, can be empowering as such.

Nita Kumar (1994, 14) sees commonalities between South Asian women's history and the "subalternist" effort<sup>16</sup>, reformulating Gayatri Spivak's (1988) question whether the subaltern can speak from its historical grave. Kumar encourages researchers to pay attention to processes, not only dramatic events, silences, not only talk and writing and the interconnections between subversion and compliance, not just subversion. In all historical accounts on silences and missing women, Kumar advises us to think:

*that there could have been actors and agents that they did not lack consciousness or will; that they had parallel discourses; that these discourses had varying relationships with dominant men, sometimes loyalist, sometimes subversive, sometimes scornful and silent, at other times directly challenging. The historiographical effort needs not only this breakthrough in using new data but a further theoretical widening of agenda because it is after all only when*

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<sup>16</sup> Kumar refers here specifically to Subaltern Studies, the left-wing movement of history-writing known practiced at the University of Calcutta, informed by Gramsci, Foucault and Spivak. Subaltern historians tend to combine a deconstructive approach with a mission to narrate histories of peasants, the illiterate, the casteless and others who mostly left behind non-textual traces. In the present context, Amin's (1995) study on the revolt of Chauri Chaura is a fine example of subalternist history-writing.

*history is recognised to be also about certain routines and patterns that do not conventionally constitute "events" that the history of the majority of the people in the world will get written at all.*

(Kumar 1994, 14)

In my reading of Kumar's words, "a further widening of agenda" becomes not a systematic method of interpretation but rather an expression of the need to stop and unlearn. The recognition of historical silences is always fuelled by imagination. What is not there can never be proved by what is. And even routines and patterns can be shaken like the particles in a kaleidoscope. Every time I am faced with a meaningful silence, in the lucky circumstances when I happen to recognise it, I listen to it from a slightly different angle than before. The potentials of finding new layers of meanings in them are never exhausted. We always find a story within a story, a poem within a poem, another kind of voice from the midst of silence, and dumbstriking amnesias in a room filled with eloquent speech.

### *Voluntary amnesia*

In 1971, at the advent of the Bangladesh crisis, the country's leader General Yahya gave a farewell speech to the nation drunk in the national television. The Muslim nation's condemnation of his behaviour was total. Sara Suleri's family watched the speech together with a visitor who was Yahya's alleged mistress, who labelled the coming era as "trying times". This became a favourite code phrase in the family for all larger-scale misfortunes.

The passage on "trying times", ie. the formation of Bangladesh and the aftermath of this huge national crisis, is a point of no return in Suleri's narrative. After realizing how her own countrymen, her own father included, kept on fighting for an abstract cause in the midst of absurd bloodshed, she states, using the familiar culinary metaphor: *"we were coming to a parting, Pakistan and I. I felt supped full of his-*

*tory, hungry of flavours less stringent on my palate, less demanding of my loyalty.*" (Suleri 1989, 105.)

In other words, Sara decides to embark upon her own path, which enables her to criticise the father's political commitments in an indirect, literary format. The above subtle criticism almost passes as casual storytelling, but its message is still clear: politics made her turn her back on Pakistan, and *Meatless Days* becomes a site of negotiating her shifting loyalties at different life stages.

Despite the fragmentary style of narration and the ironic references to her father's version of history, *Meatless Days* is not the kind of postmodernist text in which the whole basis for a making of meaning is devalued, or in which the only references to emotions are nihilistic "as if" twists. Some aspects of her writing seem therapeutical, striving towards healing and coming in terms with the past, some others resemble the style of a disillusioned political journalist. In terms of Pakistani nationalism, however, *Meatless Days* is an anti-foundationalist, disillusioned, carnivalistic narrative, suggesting possibilities for feminist temporalities far apart from what is generally conceived as national history.

Some instances in Sara Suleri's flow of memory strive towards active amnesia. Her sense of displacement is not only caused by the tragic deaths and her siblings' diaspora, but by history, politics and language:

*There was no longer any need to wait for change, because change was all there was, and we had quite forgotten the flavor of an era that stayed in place long enough to gain a name. One morning I awoke to find that, during the course of the night, my mind had completely ejected the names of all streets in Pakistan, as though to assure I could not return, or that if I did, it would be returning to a loss. Overnight the country had grown absentminded, and patches of amnesia hung over the hollows of the land like fog.*

(Suleri 1989, 18.)

The sudden blurrings of memory bury all the terror she and her family have experienced. There has been no time to learn the new names for political realities such as the one-winged Pakistan, Bhutto's populist slogans and Zia's Islamic pseudonyms for absolutism. At this point, she does not want to testify more than her own fatigue with the constant change, which in her understanding rarely is change for the better. This willingness to amnesia is perhaps the gloomiest passage in *Meatless Days*, as it effectively contains both personal and national trauma. Sometimes forgetting is an essential strategy to survive and re-build a life elsewhere.

### *Denial and ignorance*

Benazir Bhutto was studying at Harvard when the Bangladeshi war for independence broke out in 1971. During this year, she experienced angry attacks from her fellow students and professors towards her nationality, and also became known no longer as Pinkie from Pakistan, but as Pinkie Bhutto, the daughter of the president of Pakistan. Becoming famous amongst her peers involved a painful process of historical denial and a slow awakening to the possibility of multiple "truths". Typically as a dutiful daughter, she, however, completely denies her father's involvement in the events that led to the break-up of Pakistan.

The ethnic prejudice that West Pakistanis held against the Bengalis was not only caused by colonial racism, but had its roots also in the history of Islam in the subcontinent. It was Sindhis and Punjabis who first converted into Islam and some could even claim ascendance to Sayid or Qur'eshi families, whereas Bengalis' conversions occurred only since ca. twelfth century (cf. Maclean 1992). Due to this historical disparity, West Pakistanis were confident that theirs was the "original" Islam, and Bengali Muslims, as potential Hindus in disguise, could not be trusted. A psycho-historian would here also conclude that Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's personal distrust of the Bengalis was caused



by his own Hindu background: his mother was a Hindu dancing girl who had converted to Islam through marriage (Wolpert 1993).

Sisson and Rose (1990, 54–8) concede that a culture of distrust was the defining factor in the events leading to civil war: what were perceived as fundamental claims by one wing were seen as threats to the core values and rights by the other. The 1970 election results produced two absolute majority parties, the Awami League in the east and the PPP in the west, which were fearful of each others' agendas.

The PPP considered the Awami League as bourgeois and reactionary; for the Awami League all West Pakistani parties, apart from the sympathizing "radical" National Awami League from the North-Western Frontier Province, were advocates of the continuing inner colonisation. In this situation, the formation of government proved to be nearly an impossible task. There was no way that the PPP led by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto would stand by as an opposition party. The two power-hungry parties' coalition also seemed like a recipe for catastrophe. The first obstacle was Mujibur Rahman's demand that the National Assembly would from then on be held in Dacca, because of the majority principle. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto threatened to break the legs of those PPP representatives who chose to attend the Dacca inauguration. He openly spoke of "capitulation" to the Bengalis and the consequent loss of national integrity. Invitations for negotiations were neglected on both sides, and all major players were playing under the logic of postponement. The National Assembly never convened before the outbreak of war. (Sisson and Rose 1990, 91–110.)

Two wars, the first one a civil war breaking out when the West Pakistani forces occupied Dacca on March 25, and the second war a war against India in late 1971 backed up by the indigenous forces, Mukti Bahini, trained by India on Indian soil. The first war started by the West Pakistani troops' initiative "Operation Searchlight", the objective of which was to neutralize the political power of the Awami League and to reestablish public order in the East Wing. The army's intention was to arrest the leadership of the Awami League, and the

major student groups at the University of Dacca. The campaign was a failure from the first day and only led to mass destruction, rapes, looting and humiliation of innocent civilians. The Bengali resistance was organized and persistent, and led to many West Pakistani soldiers' willing escape to India as prisoners of war. (Sisson and Rose 1990, 157–60)

Pakistan's surrender to India in December 1971 was a national humiliation with a gendered, communalist twist. The proud, hyper-masculine army of the Islamic state had to admit their loss to Hindu India led by a woman. The deep psychological scar that the year left to citizens in both wings has only begun to heal now, in the new millennium, so that public remembrances can be held in the most liberal settings, such as left-wing feminist conferences. The memory of Bangladesh challenges too easy formulations of pan-Islamic solidarity, and makes one ask whether a common religion is anywhere a sound enough basis for nation-states.

Benazir Bhutto does not deny the inner colonisation thesis, and admits her own countrymen's jingoistic nationalist lines of defense, the most common of which was a "Zionist plot". She relates the news of the rapes committed by the Pakistani Army to what she had only recently learned on campus about the possibility of rape, which had not been in her active vocabulary in Pakistan. The "crimes" of West Pakistani soldiers are acknowledged but superficially covered. She does not mention any personal relationships with Bengalis. Bengal, for her, is "out there", and she only receives the same news as anyone else about the catastrophes. First, she is in complete denial of the events, but then experiences a painful awakening to accept the stories' truthfulness. Guilt about her naïveté is expressed: *"How many times since have I asked God to forgive for my ignorance?"* (1988, 47). At the same time, she, however, devotes pages to her father's heroic attempts to "save" united Pakistan at the UN security Council in December 1971. There may have been an ethnic bias, an unjust war and hundreds of thousands of victims, which have made her slightly compro-

mise her innocent nationalism, but at the end of the day, her father the president emerges from under the khaki shadows, untainted and unselfishly serving the nation.

### *Incompetence*

Begum Ikramullah revised *From Purdah to Parliament* in her eighties, adding into her narrative chapters on her work in the United Nations and on her brief sojourn in the 1960s to Morocco as an ambassador. However, she admits in the introduction that her decision to finish the narrative at the year 1967 was strategic. She was tempted to write about the subsequent secession of East Pakistan in 1971 but she hesitated, claiming: "*it would be like the opening of Pandora's Box and I did not feel competent to deal with this. (Ikramullah 1992, xiv)*"

A single sentence here gives an idea of the omissions and silences the text necessarily entails. Perhaps it is indicative of her confused political identity as a famous Pakistani parliamentarian, writing in old age in Karachi, Sindh, thousands of miles away from Calcutta, India, torn between languages, histories, contradicting memories. Holding the confusion bravely together through silence. Unwilling to publicise more than a line of the possible pain that the changing geopolitics and definitions of national identity undoubtedly have caused her.

In the beginning of her political career, Begum Ikramullah represented East Pakistan in the parliament although she had permanently migrated to Karachi in 1947. Her seat in the National Assembly was nominated by both ethnicity and gender: she embodied the single reserved Bengali woman's seat. The migration did not erase her Bengali family history, and her nostalgic childhood memories of Calcutta.

In the autobiography proper, her cousin's contributions to nation-building remain a somewhat hidden plot but she suggests in the *H.S. Subrawardy* biography (1991) that had her cousin stayed alive to continue his leadership of the Awami League, the human tragedy of 1971 may have been avoided: "*But the chance was never given to Shaheed*

*Suhrawardy, and when the crisis came, he was no more, so it will remain one of the Ifs of History.*" (Ikramullah 1991, 119) This is the second statement I have found about Bangladesh in her writings. All the rest is relegated to Pandora's box.

The term "Pandora's box", originally a Greek myth, refers to repressed, conflicting memories that she cannot publish while living as a Bengali in the western wing of Pakistan. She claims she is "not competent" to deal with 1971. While she pours out her feelings of hope, euphoria, empowerment, and also disillusionment and frustration during the earlier nation-building process, the only term she can use about Bangladesh is incompetence. An unusual term from such a powerful woman. Is this a rational, determined omission of uncomfortable historical truths, an act of retaining her sanity, or mere survival in a country where belonging to a wrong ethnic group can become fatal? Is this a strong or weak political silence or both?

Perhaps both. But there are silences one can never measure. One can recognize their exquisite shades a moment before they all get blurred in the great whirlpool of memory<sup>17</sup>, and this is the moment when the reader, the recipient of someone else's life-writing, can only stand back and wonder. If she is trained in ideology-subjectivity-complicity talk, she may well go on pointing out the obvious hegemonic links the text embodies, but this hardly raises any new questions amongst her equally trained peers. It becomes only bad writing.

An informed reader knows by now that Pandora's box contains a genocide. Who can use the word genocide, how and when is historically determined.<sup>18</sup> Whether or not to open the box is a question of

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<sup>17</sup> The sentence is a resonance of Koselleck's (1987) and Huyssen's (1994) versions of the role of historical memory.

<sup>18</sup> The term genocide was first coined by Raphael Lemkin in 1944, and taken into usage in the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide (UNGC) in 1948 (Lentin 1997, 2). Begum Ikramullah reflects on her observations on the term's usage in the UN (Ikramullah 1960). Helen Fein (1993) includes the 1971 catastrophe in her list of internationally recognised genocides.

agency. But also the choice not to open it is an active one. A silence is an ocean of possibilities.

*Somewhere a woman is writing on another woman's silence, peeling it layer by layer. First she finds the layer of respect, then the layer of justice. And she knows the terms she uses are always ahistorical, anachronistic or inaccurate for someone. Still she must go on.*

(Research diary, Toronto December 11, 2002.)

### *Active silence, wrapped in khaki*

In her discussion of the influence of totalitarian regimes on individual memory, Luisa Passerini (1992) urges us to pay attention not only to active signs of remembering but, for instance, to mechanisms of forgetting, reconstruction of memory, changes of place names, confusions between different regimes, generation gaps, oppositional loyalties inside families, and feelings of guilt and complicity when one's own participation in the events of the period of question is discussed. Despite my reservations to use the term "totalitarianism" in the Pakistani context, all of the aforementioned themes can be found in the autobiographical materials produced by Pakistani women and men during the country's existence.

The following "key sentences" do not only deal with Bangladesh but they also reflect upon a more general confusion about historical memory:

*Overnight the country had grown absent-minded, and patches of amnesia hung over the hollows of the land like fog.*

(Suleri 1989, 18)

*How many times since have I asked God to forgive for my ignorance?*

(Bhutto 1988, 47)

*...it would be like the opening of Pandora's Box and I did not feel competent to deal with this.*

(Ikramullah 1997, xiv)

Absentminded, ignorant, incompetent. Coming to terms with negativity. Negotiating weakness and failures to remember or act can also be a part of autobiographical subjectivity, although for a feminist critic such subjectivities may appear as disappointing. In the look-out for empowering voices, a researcher easily dismisses expressions of negativity, powerlessness or lack of knowledge. Here we enter the liminal zone of non-action, which may be difficult for a Western reader to tread upon. The guessing game at the sentences' possible meanings exhausts me, but two terms come to rescue: sincerity and survival.

It is not my task as a researcher to form a truth commission about the authors' actual intentions. With sincerity I do not allude to complete transparency of thoughts, actions, memories but of acceptance of one's limited powers in situations of crisis and cross-pressure of multiple loyalties. The women's voices suggest a limit beyond which they cannot remember (Suleri), did not know how to look (Bhutto) or cannot manage to look (Ikramullah) as autobiographers.

Of the above silences, wrapped in khaki, Begum Ikramullah's silence is politically the most charged one, as the 1971 war dealt directly with her fragile and potentially flammable ethnic position in a country that she chose but which failed to integrate her ethnicity. Of her years after 1967 until early 1990s, when she began editing her old texts, we hear nothing. Considering her wide range of publications from the 1940s to 1960s, it is difficult to imagine that in the later years she wrote nothing. But her public voice disappeared, at least in the English language. Here I feel tempted to think of the strong word survival.

Memory is intersubjective (Boyarin 1994, 23–26) and negotiated between different layers of experience, each time a fresh construction (King 2000, 5–6). It is a selective sedimentation of past traces, a force

constantly resonating in the present, producing new layers of sound and meaning (Popular Memory Group 1982, 211). What would these rather abstract theoretical notions mean in actual lived contexts?

I would like to extend the notion of intersubjectivity (or intertextuality) not only to cover the chain of voices passed on inside a narrative (or text), but also to include the extratextual care and concern about the consequences of "speaking up" for the lives of others. This extended notion is equally important for theories of life-writing than mere mapping of texts' internal narrative devices and cross-references. Important in its urgency: it can even become a matter of life and death. What may be named in the West as "extremity" may elsewhere be the everyday material conditions of life, kept on living.

I am tempted to call this geopolitical imbalance in the naming of historical events a postcolonial phenomenon, a subject matter concretized in encounters. For instance, if a Bengali-born retired politician published a critical counter-memoir about the events of 1971 in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan (or, most likely, outside the country's borders), how would this affect her children or grandchildren? Would they keep their jobs? Would their homes be targeted in ethnic riots?

Bangladesh is a haunting void in Pakistani history-writing, a crisis that threatened the whole country's *raison d'être* and had led to greater political instability for decades afterwards. The civil war also disrupted friendships and broke families. No public discourse on the trauma has been available in Pakistan and becoming the first to write about it is always a great risk.

In terms of generations, it can be suggested that the time lag to publicly process civil wars is at least two generations, if not three or four. Testimonies of war and national crises are generational narratives depending on eyewitnessing, and here one should be particularly sensitive to the changing styles, genres and themes suitable not only along the axis of gender but also along the axis of generation and historical context (cf. Leydesdorff et al 1996). Here again, the idea of *writing like a woman* becomes problematized: there are memories

that are common to men and women of a certain generation, and although men's and women's narrative strategies may differ, the shared memories may bring them closer together than, for instance, women across generations.

It may be too early in South Asia to reach mature historical analyses on the meanings of 1971. It was only at the advent of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of independence, or the episode South Asians most commonly refer to as the "Partition", that the popular memory boom on the Partition started in India and Pakistan, and many of the books published were by women about women's memories (cf. Menon and Bhasin 1998, Butalia 1998). The first titles written by women about the events of 1971, for instance Taslima Nasrin's *Lajja* (1993) and Kamila Shamsie's *Kartography* (2002) have been fictional.

### *The researcher as a testifier*

Echoing Shoshana Felman (1992, 2) I am appointed to bear witness, employed to re-live the moments of horror is another country's political history. My salary runs as I travel through a body of secondary materials on 1947, 1971 and the Zia rule in well-stacked metropolitan libraries, far away from Islamabad or Dacca.

Everything I read and hear about the two countries' formation sends shivers down my spine. It is easier to read than to listen. In the left-wing women's conference in Lahore I am almost forced to leave the room after some hours of discussion about the politics of rape in 1971: my level of tolerance seems much lower than others'. I enter a stage when I no longer hear. The limit has been crossed. There can be no hourly wages for my emerging feelings, yet the fact that I am doing this for a degree increases my discomfort. Ironically, bell hooks' (1997, 98) words about listening without hearing reappear as I return to my diary of the conference week : *They ask you if there is a book that will explain what you are talking about.*



And there are books indeed, stacks of carefully researched tomes. Every day of the civil war scrupulously backtracked. But then what? Political historians rarely ask why they have spent so many years getting the timelines and causalities quite correct. What makes them tick is the question that puzzles me. And what about the uncertainties, the doors left unopened and the voices never heard? What kind of bodies have a history worth remembering, who fit into our academic matrix of intelligibility (cf. Butler 1993, White 1995)?

This is not a question of historical entitlement, based on passport or permit. As a Northern person approaching the political history of the South, I am, however, in the world of Adrienne Rich (1991), involved in the mapping of "an atlas of the difficult world". The notion of intersubjective politics of memory leads me directly to considering two words as crucial on my research agenda: reciprocity and solidarity. The only way towards even approaching these terms is through self-reflection.

The term reciprocity suggests shared vulnerabilities, but it is not obvious that mere feelings would get us very far. As Nancy K. Miller and Jason Tougaw (200, 1–24) suggest, the cultural climate in post-WW2 Western Europe and North America encourages the mass consumption of historical traumas to the extent that suffering has become a commodity. In such a context, readers are expected to get intensively involved with narratives of trauma, to even feel phantom pain. But what is this "willingness to be bruised" that Miller and Tougaw dub as "reading for the extreme" (2002, 18)? Does it possibly produce something more than a bewildered gaze in the mirror? Can it transform the ways in which we encounter cultural differences beyond the texts themselves? Can it provide spaces for listening and dialogue, just for once?

*They are your garments  
And ye are their garments.*

The Holy Koran 2:187<sup>1</sup>

## 7.1

### A *desi* introduction to subjectivity

In this chapter, my focus will be on homespun autobiographical subjects, taking cross-cultural feminist theoretical debates on subjectivity into account but at the same time keeping Pakistan as the point of departure. The term *desi* (Hindi/Urdu term for local cultural influences), much cultivated by the South Asian diaspora worldwide, is on my mind as an ideal, as an effort to bring the analysis closer to home. How I understand *desi* is exactly the desire to come closer to an imaginary home, an atmosphere of homeliness, a sense of belonging to an imagined community disregarding one's physical whereabouts.

*Desi* is a derivation of the word *deysi*, meaning simply "local". In the South Asian diasporic communities, there are attempts to re-vamp Indo-Pakistani food and clothing as trendy and marketable by

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<sup>1</sup> This is one of the most powerful suras on marriage in the Holy Koran, indicating the reciprocal relationship of the partners during a lifetime. I have used Abdullah Yusuf Ali's 1938 translation, which was revised in 1991 (Elmhurst NY: Tahrike). The Koran as Scripture does not appear to me as secondary research literature, and this is why I will not include it in the Bibliography.

re-naming the products as *desi*. Also matrimonial agencies offer *desi* introductions for young, academically successful candidates. Bollywood movies and *bhangra* are also extremely *desi*. In the transnational context, *desi* indicates a movement towards "roots" a rediscovery and acknowledgment of one's, one's parents' or grandparents' South Asianness, and a willingness to select the most attractive features of the family tradition.<sup>2</sup>

In this chapter, the method of reading the three women's expressions of their historical and political subjectivities is "contextualist", ie. it somewhat extends outside the limits of the texts themselves. I will be bringing fragments from other sources, from the women's other published texts, and, in the case of Ikramullah and Bhutto, retrospective commentaries on their public roles, images and political strategies.

### *Spinning, weaving, stitching: the uses of textile metaphors*

*They always gather in moonlight, after the day's hard work is done. What they remember is passed on in song, and the songs become embroidered or woven as intricate patterns. This is the way of making a meaning: a voice is stitched into a shawl, a memory enshrined in a corner of a carpet. They work obsessively to become remembered. They are spinning their own history, weaving human life for the ones yet to come. Nightingales, shamans, witches, spinsters, spiders. Poets, mystics, healers, matchmakers, believers. Wisewomen always form a circle.*

*It is not the physical labour of stitching that sustains them. No. One would not expect them to stay up so late. But the moon invites them to plot yet another tale and make the most of it. This is their*

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<sup>2</sup> The meanings of the term opened up to me during my stay in Toronto, through daily observations of the "lifestyles" of the relatively affluent and well-educated South Asian communities there.

*time, these stolen hours from sleep. Not a pastime, but dreamtime. In this space, they become schooled, entertained and nourished. In the circle, they can fly a little.*

(Research diary, Tampere, August 28, 2003)

Sadie Plant (1997, 62–70) sees in women's textile work across cultures the pre-history of the current digital revolution, a primary invention of zeros and ones, a lasting mnemonic device found in most cultures. She finds mythical associations between women and webs. spinsters and spiders, and the spinning of yarn and storylines. In the Bengali context, Mircea Eliade (1965) was mystified by women's conspirational gatherings, into which he as a husband as a high-born Brahmin lady had no access. Trinh T.Minh-ha (1989, 128) connects the rhythm of weaving and the symbolism of the loom with post-colonial women's writing. In her hands, the clapping of the shuttle becomes poetry: *"Life is perpetuated to and from a dis/continuous releasing and absorbing of the self. Let her weave her story within their stories, her life amidst their lives. And while she weaves, let her whip spur and set them on fire. Thus making them sing again. Very softly a-new a-gain."*

So we are dealing with textiles and texts, stitching and storytelling, generations, memory and women's active historical subjectivity in the formation of storylines (cf. Guaraldo 2001). The imaginary creation of possible worlds, but also a strong involvement in the actual world here and now. Even the postcolonial literary term *métissage* derives from the Latin word "mixtus": "cloth made of two different fibres usually cotton for the warp and flax for the woof (Lionnet 1989, 14)." A discussion on postcolonial subjectivities based on such formulations cannot be too abstract, not too ethereal, it has to bring the point home, or at least close to it. Close to the skin, close to the body, but also *out there* in the world.

Following Michelle Maskiell's (1999, 362) insights to combining materialist feminist and postcolonial cultural studies' methodologies

in the study of the production of Punjabi embroideries, I want to see how in the present context of life-writing the material and the cultural, the present day *realpolitik* and the historical traditions challenge and feed upon one another. In these sometimes contradictory pressures, subject positions do appear – and it also becomes meaningful to discuss them.

In the South Asian context, I am mostly indebted to feminist literary critics, such as Tanika Sarkar (1999) and Kumkum Sangari (2000), who take subjectivity seriously, and suggest that not all theoretizations of the emergence of the subject as a political unit have to be Eurocentric. In the South Asian context, one of the favourite metaphors for women's subject formation is the textile metaphor, the "stitching" of women into larger social fabrics (cf. Sarkar 1999, Alexander 1996).

In this chapter, I am to examine articulations of subjectivity through the textile metaphor at three intertwining levels of articulation: the level of the family, the national and transnational levels. I will pay attention to the "stitching" of subjects and the "spinning" of historical contexts as a tool for memory, multiple negotiations and loyalty conflicts, as well as to the continuing importance of *pardah*, or "the curtain", when Pakistani women's political agency is considered.

My aim here is to remain loyal to the material contexts from where the present subject positions have emerged, to retain the historical shades of cotton fields, smell the burning pyres of English clothing in the 1920s, think of the communal differences that were created through dress, and look at the curtains that fell between genders in Pakistan after the "liberating" moments of the Pakistan Movement and the Partition. It is a matter of getting *there*, becoming, even as a foreigner, slightly *desi*, catching glimpses of the atmosphere, what might have once been.

My work resembles much of that of a shadow agent, a private investigator who has to retrospectively construct a setting for her "case", and work through many ungrounded speculations. Throughout the study, I have respond to the texts at radically different levels, and do

not attempt at smoothing these disparities, or rough edges, out. The unevenness of the narratives, and the necessity to work through various theoretical notions to make this journey meaningful, is itself one of the research "results".

I will be looking for political symbols, imaginary articulations of belonging, or unbelonging, negotiations between different belongings, and transgressions from commonly accepted norms of behaviour. Most of the work has, actually, been already done in the previous chapters, and here it is my task to bring together different threads, for a moment, to form an analytical "social fabric". Like all hand-woven textiles, also this chapter has been a product of conscious, time-consuming and hopefully productive labour.

Glimpses of subjectivity are often found in the shadows, in the half-articulated or silenced layers of narration, tossed into the margins by history, geopolitics or cultural notions of proper conduct. I am tracing shadows, amongst women and inside each woman's self-portraiture. It is impossible to frame a "self", an active subject, without articulating its difference from others. Who are the three women shadowing while telling stories about themselves? Who are these texts? Others?

## 7.2

### The *shalwar kameez* nation

#### *Failed homogenisation*

Since the Partition, the processes of "Othering" have been growing in Pakistan particularly regarding clothing. Shahnaz Rouse (1998, 57–8) claims that since independence the women who insisted on wearing saris or Western dresses have become easily stamped as cultural outsiders. This rang true especially for Pakistani Christian women, still wearing skirts in the style of the European missionaries, and for *mo-*

*hajir* women, the Muslim emigrants from the Indian heartland, who considered the *shalwar kameez* to be a Punjabi dress and thus a foreign imposition.

In the 1970s, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto appeared in mass events in what became called the *awami* (people's) dress: a basic model of *shalwar kameez* in beige or light blue. It was a new kind of male national costume, indicating modesty and brotherhood. The advocacy of this standardised outfit stood in line with Bhutto's general populism and his love affair with the notion of "the people". The *shalwar kameez* nation, dressed in the most common "Muslim" outfit used by men and women alike, would learn to work together towards national prosperity and forget their ethnic and religious differences, it was believed.

After 1977, the new (attempted) guidelines regarding women's clothing (only fully effective in state employment: government, media and schools) were legitimised by the idea of protection as the duty of the state. It was not women who could judge their own safety when choosing clothes to wear in public; the idea was that the state would eventually know better the length of sleeve, hem and *shalwar* leg, the looseness of the composition, and the occasions where the wearing of *dupatta* or *chador* would be mandatory. The campaign was never brought to its logical end in Pakistan: unlike in Iran, the "Islamic" guidelines were never formally legislated, but at the level of civil society it was however successful: the prevalent mood became hostile towards unveiled or unscarved women.

During the 1980s, the lines between immoral and socially permissible were tightened: saris became stamped as "Indian" and "Hindu" and deeply frowned upon, and sleeveless dresses were no longer tolerated amongst the newly religious. The Council of Islamic Ideology (*Majlis-e-shura*) was propagating for *chador* for women in all public situations according to the Iranian model. There were unofficial morality guardians on the streets in urban areas, recruited from the ranks of Islamist party *Jamaat-I-Islam*, controlling the behaviour of the masses with batons. Thus women became the repositories of

”pure” Muslim culture, however it happened to be defined by the sitting Council of Islamic Ideology. The veil became reintroduced as the cloak of feminine respectability. Modesty was artificially manoeuvred by guidelines and regulations. (Shaheed 1998, 146–7)

Despite the incoherence in actual everyday *practices*, eleven years of Islamist rule did manage to produce changes in Pakistani women’s *conceptions* about proper dress and movement in public spaces. A mere look at family albums from different decades proves the point: both women’s and men’s clothing has become more ”Islamic” (read: looser and less revealing of bare skin) during the 1980s and 1990s. After Benazir Bhutto’s rise to power in 1988, there have been no further state-level regulation attempts in clothing, but this has not had an adverse effect in fashion: Pakistani dress codes are more homogeneous and conservative in the 2000s than before the 1977 coup.

How many times politicians world-wide have dressed up for success hardly surprises anyone – and one could indeed think of it as a superficial matter – but in the context of the aftermath of Zia’s Islami-zation campaign, choosing convincing clothing that would have the desired effect in the electorate undoubtedly became more toilsome than a mere visit to a PR consultant. When Benazir campaigned for prime ministership, dressed conservatively in the *awami* dress and white *dupattas*, covering her face with huge sunglasses, it is difficult to think of her gestures as a mental submission to the country’s new realities, a sudden religious awakening or a realisation of a need for protection in the midst of unknown men. The new apparel was pure political strategy, made her look older than her age and thus more ”mature” as an aspiring stateswoman, and perhaps imaginatively symbolised her *nation-ness*, as if dressed up in the country’s flag, literally embodying the nation.

In this light, Begum Ikramullah’s public appearance, observed from the photograph materials in her autobiography and other publications of the time, seems, from the Western feminist vantage point, more ”liberated” and daring. The earlier woman politician was free to



become photographed in stunning saris and if she wore a *dupatta* on her head, it was not fully covering her hair. Her public photogenic habitus demonstrates great context-specific flexibility and wide-ranging cultural influences. But is this freedom to choose a key political issue, a national priority?

*It is learning how to stand alone, unpopular and sometimes reviled, and how to make common cause with those others identified as outside the structures in order to define and seek a world in which we can all flourish. For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house.*

(Lorde 1984, 112)

Taking slight distance from Audre Lorde's famous words, I believe that sometimes, in very rare occasions, the master's house can be strategically dismantled by his own tools. If women's clothes – especially beautiful and fashionable ones – have received so much negative attention in Pakistan since Zia's coup in 1977, why should one not – in the present textual universe and beyond – reverse the meanings of clothing and instead of de-politicizing the issue, marking it off as secondary and trivial, re-politicize it with emergent, positive meanings from within the culture itself?

*What indeed is "liberation"? Painted toenails and distressed jeans underneath a burqa? So delicious for Western journalists, so banal. Such a repetitive image that anyone with brains should be bored by now. Into this catalogue of images of Women's Lib we could add dungarees with baggy flannel, overprized Indian cotton dresses from the "Oriental" bazaar, dominatrix leather, power suits with shoulder pads, glam vintage second-hand dresses from the 40s, and girly-girl's cartoon T-shirts, children's size? If I don't know how "liberated" women dress up in Europe, how can I know how they dress up in Pakistan? And why should anyone care?*

*And who am I to make any kinds of suggestions? With whom am I discussing this? My Pakistani friends? The women writers themselves? Am I again stepping on other women's backyards? I only have one political point: "get your laws off my body". Politicizing clothing means making scenes and noise until those in power get the point: adult women have the intelligence to choose what to wear in all circumstances. They are the ones to judge their own codes of modesty, honour and respectability. National politics should have more urgent priorities than the prevention of lusty gazes of male citizens towards female citizens, and vice versa. Here I'm not discussing identity politics, I'm discussing intelligence and judgment. Political judgment of priorities. Subject matter at its core.*

(Research diary, Tampere, January 17, 2004 )

My formulation of the *shalwar kameez* nation is not a matter of "mere" fashion or a "surface" phenomenon of playful postmodern identities. I am referring here to the wider national homogenisation attempts performed by successive governments, either named as nation-building or state terror depending on whose initiatives were at stake. Linked to the politics of dress are other homogenisation processes, such as the imposition of Urdu as a national language, the growing intolerance towards Muslim minority sects and the growing militarisation of everyday life. Most of the homogenisation processes have simply failed: Pakistan is not ideologically one nation but an ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious mosaic, the seams of which are fragile. The term "porous borders" (Kapur 1991, 9) is also used to refer to the many alliances Pakistanis have to "their" people on the other side of the national border: the Baluchis to Iran, the Pathans to Afghanistan, the Punjabis to Kashmir and India, etc.

Here I am to look at the ways women have negotiated their belonging to the national fabric: how women have been welcome as political players, how nationalist loyalties have framed their scope for

action and at the important conceptual difference between the ideas of the Muslim nation (a sociocultural notion) and the Islamic state (a religious notion based on the *Qur'an* and the *sharia*).

### *Female heads of state*

The debate about whether a woman can become Head of State in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan sheds some light on the discursive limits of political subjectivity in the present autobiographies. When Benazir Bhutto uses the term "transcending gender" (1988, 140) in *The Daughter of the East*, she is fully aware of the ideological opposition to her future leadership as a woman. Also Begum Ikramullah's determined phrase "I tried very hard not to fail" (1963, 167) indicates the heightened expectations she received because of her gender.

Mumtaz and Shaheed (1987, 56) contend that in the early days of Pakistan's existence, the mere presence of a woman in a committee room was enough for the conservative ulema to demand that the meeting should be stopped. There was no discussion on women as heads of state in the 1940s and 1950s, but the debate was about whether the two women appointed to the National Assembly should be there in the first place. Begum Ikramullah does not mention these constraints to her work in FPP, but the clashes are reported in the Constituent Assembly archives. The ulema would only accept burqa-clad women over the age of fifty amongst them. Younger women were considered as a threat to society's "equilibrium", risking to destroy the harmony of a segregated society. Time was not yet ripe to even consider the possibility of a woman as a head of state.

Ayesha Jalal (1990, 91) finds in the Constituent Assembly archives proof of Begum Ikramullah's attempts to promote women's educational and employment rights in the early 1950s. Her motions were mostly univocally dismissed with mocking chauvinism by her fellow MPs (even the ones who did not object to her presence in the room). When confronted, like in a session in March 1951, she would outspo-

kenly defend her feminist goals: "I mean their rights to an equal share in the country's legislature and in every other sphere of work. The fault lies in your nasty minds. I cannot help that."

One of the main arguments against Benazir Bhutto's campaign for political leadership in 1988 was the thesis that a woman leader is repugnant to Qur'anic ideas of statehood. The same argument had been expressed already in 1965, when Fatima Jinnah ran a presidential campaign as a candidate of the Muslim League and almost toppled her established opponent, Ayub Khan.<sup>3</sup> As Jinnah's sister, Fatima Jinnah was called *Madar-e-Millat* (Mother of the Nation) and was considered a pious candidate if compared to the secularised Khan who had even attempted at removing the term "Islamic" from the country's name. In this context, it was not self-evident that the conservative edge of the ulema and the religious parties would automatically support the male candidate. In fact, even Maulana Maudoodi, the leader of *Jamaat-i-Islam*, who had before vehemently opposed women's political participation at any level, supported Fatima Jinnah. His legendary legitimisation of the sudden turn was related to the Prophet's advice to his followers to eat pork in extreme conditions of survival; Maudoodi advised his followers to vote for Fatima Jinnah to rid the country of the un-Islamic legislator. A woman was a lesser evil in a situation of choice between a religious-minded and a secularised leader. (Ahmed 1991, 217, Sayeed 1967, 219–221.)

In 1988, Pakistani electors were prepared to vote for PPP and Benazir, not despite her gender but because of her feminine charisma and image as the national liberator. In particular, she spoke directly to the women electors as a woman, and women were mobilised to vote for her. Besides, there was no powerful enough male alternative to compete with Benazir. The conservative ulema tried to appeal to the voters by claiming that having a woman head-of-state were a form of

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<sup>3</sup> On Fatima Jinnah's election campaign, see eg. her collected speeches and statements (Jinnah 1976).

blasphemy, but this did not affect Benazir's personal appeal. (Mernissi 1996, 87)

### 7.3

#### Stitched into the family shawl

*Pinkie, the burqa and the Mao cap*

*This is a statement of my beliefs which, I have no reason to doubt, represents the thinking of my own father, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, executed in jail in 1979 by Pakistani generals, and my own mother, Nusrat Bhutto, now abroad for treatment of suspected cancer*

(Bhutto 1983, v)

This is how Benazir Bhutto begins her first political pamphlet, *Pakistan: The Gathering Storm*, which was published in India in 1983 and from there smuggled to underground PPP party members in Pakistan. The opening sentence serves as a political closing of the family circle, the ideas of whom she from her solitary confinement is able to represent. Her stance to the question of women in politics is uncompromisingly pro-family: her interest in politics stems from the family, and she also articulates a firm belief in family values. In her confinement, she understandably longs for the memories of the "normal family life" she once led, its emotional comfort and fullness.

At the age of thirty, she speaks as a daughter, a representative of her parents' beliefs. She has temporarily taken over the PPP leadership from her mother, who is too ill to be in charge. Party leadership within the PPP seems hereditary. Benazir writes as a vicereine, although later in the pamphlet she assures her readers that "*I have no personal aims or ambitions. I will presently give a programme to set at rest any doubts that any of us wishes to grab power in future and retain it in the family.*" (Bhutto 1983, 3)."

Benazir Bhutto has been the leader of Pakistan People's party for twenty years now. It has always been led by a Bhutto. The question how Benazir is stitched as political subject in to the (interchangeable) family and PPP fabrics is perhaps too obvious to explore. There is no distinction between her voice as a daughter and a party leader: the intertwining of the party and the family are in *The Daughter of the East* complete. This is why I take liberties to think of the political symbols embedded in her wardrobe as expressions of family and party-based subjectivity. Such a reading may bring out more nuances in her voice.

In *The Daughter of the East* more emphasis is laid on the symbols of clothing than in the two other texts. How the Bhutto children were dressed was a question of political importance for their father, who wanted to emphasize the family's modern ways. Benazir remembers the somewhat awkward Western clothes her father brought them from his UN trips to New York and insisted on their wearing on important state visits. Chou en-Lai's visit to Pakistan was a dear memory to Benazir, and in her excitement "(f)or oncel.../ didn't mind being dressed up in the outfits my father brought back every year from Saks Fifth Avenue in New York where the saleslady kept our measurements." (Bhutto 1988, 33) Curiously, in her family, it is the mother of urban industrial background who brings indigenous *shalwar kameez* suits to the children and the father of a feudal landowner clan who dresses them in the latest Western fashions. The cross-dressing is carefully planned according to a situational logic.

In many ways, Benazir reflects upon her "firstness" as the first-born of her family and the first woman of the Bhutto clan to step out in public without a *burqa*. Here her mother's "progressive" Iranian family tradition and the Bhutto ways somewhat clash. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's first wife never left Larkana, whereas Nusrat Bhutto appeared everywhere by his side, mostly dressed in stunning saris. "The Bhutto women" are in Benazir's narrative a *burqa*-clad collective without individual agency:

*While the Bhutto women still lived in purdah, rarely allowed to leave the four walls of their compounds, and then completely covered in their black burqas, my mother and her sisters went around Karachi and drove their own cars. The daughters of an Iranian businessman, they had gone to college and after the birth of Pakistan, even served as officers in the National Guard, a paramilitary force for women. Such public exposure would have been impossible for the Bhutto women.*

(Bhutto 1988, 29)

Benazir finds her mother in a position of negotiator between "the Bhutto ways" and her father's Westernised ideas regarding family life. Nusrat Bhutto is clearly more concerned about becoming accepted by the family in Larkana than Zulfikar Ali himself, and decides to strategically perform certain rites of passage to please her in-laws, Benazir's narrative of her symbolic stepping into *purdah* is reflective of this tendency.

As a teenager, she travels with her mother on a train from Karachi to Larkana, and suddenly her mother draws a *burqa* from her bag: "You are no longer a child, she told me with a tinge of regret. As she performed this age-old rite of passage for the daughters of conservative land-owning families, I passed from childhood into the world of the adult." (Bhutto 1988, 33) Benazir spends the trip sweating and unable to walk properly. Upon their return, father Zulfi asks his wife to think of the *hadith* that says modesty lies behind the eyes. Wearing a *burqa*, then, remains a mere initiation into what "could have been", a glimpse into the realities of her paternal female relatives. The incident is a formal stepping into adulthood, but the code of "Bhutto ways" is soon cancelled by her father. Her "firstness" is again dramatised: "And I became the first Bhutto woman to be released from a life spent in perpetual twilight." (Bhutto 1988, 33)

Soon after having tried a *burqa*, Benazir is sent to study at Radcliffe and is accompanied for the first days by her mother, who equips her closet with woollen *shalwar kameez* suits suited for the cold weath-

er. Left alone, she prefers to blend in the mass of students: "*I quickly shed the shalwar kameez and re-emerged in jeans and sweatshirts from the Harvard co-op.*" (Bhutto 1988, 49) The movement from *burqa* to blue jeans is a sudden but fluid, not articulated as massive rebellion against Pakistani dress codes but rather as a pragmatic adaptation into student life in the West. Later on, as an MA student in Oxford and the spokesperson of the Oxford Union, she is required to change her wardrobe again: "*Student speakers dressed in formal clothes with carnations in their lapels, forcing me out of my jeans and into the silks of Anna Belinda.*" (Bhutto 1988, 63)

The references to changes in clothing are not portrayed as major identity issues, but rather reflect her pragmatic wish to be part of the cultural mainstream in each setting. It is tempting to think of her youth's changing public images as a "nomadic" or "performative" play of identities and an active contestation of what is "proper" for a Pakistani woman to wear; yet Bhutto does not highlight her diasporic experience as consisting of painful or celebratory metamorphoses, a trend in auto/ethnographic texts and postcolonial literature at large (cf. Fischer 1986, Goldman 1992, Lionnet 1989). The clothes are mere surface for her, and she articulates with certainty that after her studies she would return to Pakistan and use her education for the good of the country. But does clothing matter, as Emma Tarlo (1996) suggests, in terms of South Asian political agency and subjectivity?

Stanley Wolpert (1984, 152) and Akbar S. Ahmed (1997, 95–100) point out the political opportunism in the wardrobes of both Jinnah and father Bhutto, and Benazir's autobiographical clues and the wealth of photographic materials suggest that she is also particularly well trained in choosing the correct symbols according to occasion. In all occasions, the emphasis is on pride and glory, or as Ahmed (1997, 97) puts it: "*Muslims look up to a person of substance, a leader whose dress and deportment proclaim his or her shan – glory. Muslims want their commanders to look like leaders: proud, dignified head held high.*"



In *The Daughter of the East*, the main clothing consultant is, unsurprisingly, her father, who even from the prison cell expresses concern about Benazir's first public performances as his mouthpiece. For instance, he is keen on her wearing his Mao cap while touring in the North Western Frontier Province, where the sympathies for China ran deep. In fact, she is supposed to wear *both* the Mao cap and the *dupatta*, as symbols of the workers' struggle and female modesty. From the year 1977 onwards, Benazir Bhutto has been listening to her father's timely advice: "*Be careful, Pinkie*", he called after me. "*You are going into the tribal areas. Don't forget how conservative they are. Sometimes your dupatta falls off your head while you're speaking. Remember to put it back up.*" (Bhutto 1988, 127.)

Choosing clothes to suit the tastes of one's electors is a phenomenon by no means restricted to South Asia. Benazir's carefully tailored media image as a modern Muslim woman politician has remained a constant during her otherwise stormy career, and has had wide international repercussions. How she as the first Muslim woman prime minister would deliver the message of indigenous "progress" was followed with interests also by feminists in other Muslim countries (cf. Mernissi 1996, Ahmed 1992), and the Western media in particular (cf. Rafique 1994).

Since the mid-80s, the *dupatta* has stayed firmly on her forehead, and her most favourite colours are the colours of Pakistan and Islam, green and white. In *The Daughter of the East*, she narrates other, later strategic masquerades in *burqa* for the purpose of anonymity. After becoming the leader of the PPP, it seems she has not appeared in public in Western clothes. Unlike her parents, who both fluently cross-dressed in either South Asian or Western clothes, especially on state visits abroad, she is not expected to wear "foreign" symbols such as the sari. What she wears has been of high national interest since the year 1977, when she started touring the country with her father's Mao cap on. Her choice of "Muslim" symbols, such as the *shalwar kameez*, large sunglasses covering the face, and the often white *dupatta*, is indicative

of either her willingness to please the more conservative voters, her growing personal religiosity, or both. Or simply personal taste...

Now thinking of Pinkie, the modern parents' English-nicknamed first-born, her *burqa*, jeans, drawing-room silks and *shalwar kameez* in national colours, her personal trajectory towards becoming the first woman PM of a Muslim country, and the compromises and adjustments she has had to make, one can indeed much in her father's warning: *Be careful, Pinkie. Don't forget how conservative they are.*

### *Bhutto's "people": imageries for a nation*

Like her father, Benazir Bhutto writes sentimentally about the working class and the rural masses, in particular about the ones who committed suicide as a public performance to protest against her father's execution. Otherwise, she does not refer to her father's "Islamic socialism" as socialism, and is very sparing in showing political colour of any kind. She does not write passionately about Third Worldism or China like her father did. But after all, her experience in international relations was restricted to the university summer holidays with her father before 1977. In 1988, her career has been badly halted by the Martial Law. Her political profile does not resemble her father's at the same age. Time has treated her particularly roughly. Due to her family's displacement and suffering, her political agenda remains much more modest than her father's first party program. Neither has she been building her career in different ministries. In many ways, her political schools, first the long apprenticeship with her father, then prison and exile have been more draining than anything Zulfikar Bhutto did before the age of thirty-five.

The discourse she has learnt in flesh and blood is that of human rights. This is where the echoes of *testimonio* enter. She includes in her own narrative twenty-two other first hand accounts of torture from the inner party circle. My task as the text's analyst is not to determine whether or not the included voices are "real", but rather to wonder

how Benazir incorporates her voice with the voices of others. The text at least leaves the reader with an intersubjective effect, the impression that the meaning of her autobiography is not to highlight her own excellence or the extremity of her own suffering but rather give a collective account of political terror. At times, she writes like the editor of the Amnesty International annual report. At times, she writes like a dutiful daughter. At times, she is a high suspense novelist. And at times, she just sounds like a woman who has been through too much stress and suffering too early in life.

More than Ikramullah's and Suleri's narratives, *The Daughter of the East* brings the reader in the midst of crowds, mass meetings and demonstrations. Bhutto's memories of "the people" are tinged with both teargas and rose petals: when attending the mass meetings, the supporters of the PPP are faced with fear of becoming arrested, but also engage in the collective raising of the atmosphere by manifesting enthusiasm, support, even adoration in the front of their party leaders.

What unites "the people" of the PPP supporters is a commitment to the achievement of democracy. Before the 1977 coup, there was another popular movement under the umbrella organisation PNA gathering to protest against father Bhutto's autocratic government. About this segment of the people, Benazir states: "*But not all the people, it was turning out, had learned the self-discipline that democracy requires* (Bhutto 1988, 73)."

There is no profound analysis of the actual structural problems of the people in *The Daughter of the East*. Benazir's political analysis stems from the Party, which for her is the vanguard of progress, the mouthpiece of development. The voices of the people inserted in the narrative are indeed those of the PPP members, of the most loyal inner circle and the family's domestic servants. In Benazir's vision it is the party benevolently relieving the plight of the people and not the people actively forming the party programme. When she says "The people have little or no voice in their future (Bhutto 1988, 301)", she

does not plunge deeper into the historical causes of this marginalisation but puts most of the blame onto the Zia government.

Out of the three autobiographers, Bhutto is the most prone to provide rough cultural generalisations, and in some instances she accepts the very obstacles to democracy by resorting to "in our culture" - explanations. Truisms about Pakistan are widely cultivated, such as: "In our culture, one does not betray one's benefactor (Bhutto 1988, 74)." For Bhutto, this is the cultural framework in which she has agreed to perform, into which she succumbs and which also benefits her, but there is no serious questioning of the very term "culture". If her vision is that of democracy, the "culturalist" explanations make it that of feudal democracy, a paradoxical term *per se* and not analytically valid at all. Feudalism is the historical phenomenon that has helped the whole Bhutto clan rise to political power, and Benazir's political career is a vivid example of the paradoxes of her upbringing. She has been brought up to understand the people, and represent them in the national colours and local textiles, but is she *of* the same people she describes?

Benazir's understanding of the people is in many occasions strategic and symbolic. She does express solidarity towards the economic hardships of the people, but this is done in a somewhat "pedagogical" way. The ghost of "exemplary lives" (cf. Booth 2001 in ch. 3) enters her narrative when she describes her wedding preparations:

*I even eschewed the traditional gold bangles that brides wear on each arm from elbow to wrist, planning to wear a few of pure gold and the rest of glass. I wanted people to say that if Benazir can wear glass bangles on her wedding day, so can my daughter.*

(Bhutto 1988, 312)

This symbolic act of wearing glass bangles is, in fact, a sympathetic gesture as such, but not enough to achieve permanent social change. "The people" are surely aware of the Bhutto family's property and con-

sider them as a case apart, as members of a political elite who do not play by the same rules as the others. By constructing her public image as the daughter of a martyr scarcely helps to bring down the existing class barrier between her and her electorate. Benazir in glass bangles cannot become an "ordinary" woman, and it is still virtually impossible for "ordinary" Pakistani women to become national leaders.

### *Aftermath*

After the landslide success of the PPP in the 1989 elections, prime minister Benazir Bhutto was put on a test period by her electors, particularly the feminist ones. The expectations laid on her were high, but at the same time she was given time to begin the social and political transformation she had promised. Would this be the golden chance for the country's women to be brought into national politics within Benazir's "pull"? Would Benazir herself initiate large campaigns for gender equality? Would she deliver the goods and become a beacon of women's hopes?

In the beginning of her short career as PM, many feminist activists considered it an act of disloyalty to criticize Benazir or place too high demands on her. Ayesha Jalal regretted already in 1990 Benazir's reluctance to promote other women into key political roles, finding traces how she was "compelled to win social approbation with measured nods to the orthodox and fundamental galleries." (Jalal 1990, 108.) From the feminist critics' point of view, the repelling of the laws of witness and the *hudoood* ordinances would have been the concrete proof of success; however, these legislative amendments never materialised. Her hated enemy Zia's discriminatory laws thus remained effective even under her reign. A similar postcolonial logic of delay of feminist demands was used by Benazir to that used by her male nationalist predecessors: gender-specific claims would have to wait until the political situation in the country would stabilise. (cf. Yusuf 2002, [www source.](#))

Before judging Benazir as a traitor to feminist causes, one must however pay attention to the structural constraints of her office. In 1989–90, her prime ministership was realised on a "split mandate", which meant that all decision-making was constrained by a governing council, consisting of Benazir herself, the president and the chief of army staff (Burki 1998, 89). The two other members of the council may not have been as sympathetic to feminist causes as Benazir. In terms of changing the law, it was Benazir's skills of convincing the National Assembly to vote for the repelling of the anti-feminist legal paragraphs, in which she failed. In the beginning of her office, she seemed to be more interested in toppling the opposition than in introducing social change. Also the power-hungry "gatekeepers", ie. the PPP inner circle fighting for jobs and assets, were a distraction to nation-building.

One should also look at the actual changes Benazir made in terms of women's rights during the two terms. The list of achievements is not long, but it does still exist. She seemed to believe in women's economic empowerment as the most immediate goal, after which the rest would follow. Women pilots were recruited in the national airline company PIA, a First Women's Bank was established for microcredit loans, more women were recruited into the police forces and special women's police stations for women were established. The idea of a quota for women in the government service as well as judges in the High Courts was introduced but there is no proof of its application. (Shaikh 2000, Yusuf 2002, [www source](#).)

Were Benazir's hands tied as the country's leader or could she have achieved deep socio-political change, if she had had enough political will? Shaheed Javed Burki (1998, 89–93) believes that she had enough freedom to at least initiate more daring changes than she did. The list of "could haves" is unfortunately longer also in terms of women's rights than the list of actual achievements. Burki blames Benazir most for the leadership style, which he finds a copy of her father's authoritarianism in the guise of democracy. Why people elected the PPP for

the second term in 1993 is also a relevant question to ask here. The first term ended abruptly due to accusations of economic mismanagement. Why did Pakistani electors still trust Benazir in 1993, how powerful was the word she gave to the public about having learnt her lesson?

"Keeping the husband in a tight leash" seems to be the standard phrase used to indicate Benazir's key problem and its solution (see eg. Burki 1998, 92). The wedding that was not foregrounded in *The Daughter of the East* as a fulfilment of every princess's dreams, the event that took place because of cultural expectations, turned out to be Benazir's political Achilles' heel. Nepotism. Corruption. Elbow tactics. Shared state accounts. At this stage I as Benazir's reader have nothing more to say. Despite my dislike of statistics and distrust of catalogues in which countries are ranked according to mathematically measurable degrees of welfare, it seems necessary to notify Pakistan's "ranking" in the Transparency International annual competition: at the end of Benazir's second term in power in 1996, Pakistan was perceived to be the second most corrupt country in the world (Burki 1998, 96).

## 7.4

### A citizen remembers

#### *Anti-familism: a chosen orientation or sign of the times?*

Familism and womanism are two discourses often appearing in debates about women's subjectivity and political agency, citizenship and leadership potential, and both of them may work as "strategic essentialism" in short-term situations but have been found to be detrimental for women in long-term processes.

By familism I refer to a political discourse that takes families as valid political units rather than individuals, and to political ideologies

and programs in which the coherence of the family stands before individual family members' cares and concerns.<sup>4</sup> In the Pakistani context, notions such as "respectable classes", good families and pure lineages support political familism, imposing a hierarchical class system, in which not only money can guarantee sure upward social mobility, but more depends on birth and "right" kinds of marriages. In particular, the half-imaginary constructs of Sayeed and Qur'aysh families, and the contest to belong to such nobility, are far removed from the Prophet's ideal umma.

Mary Dietz (1992, 78–9) calls womanism an ideology based on the premise of gender opposition and women's inherent moral superiority. In my understanding, womanism is intimately linked with familism in essentialising rhetorical figures such as "women and children" or "mothers of the nation". Such talk was not uncommon in late colonial India; for instance Begum Ikramullah's close friend Sarojini Naidu's writings are prime examples of womanism. Both familism and womanism take advantage of "the cultural card", elevating certain practices as "proper" and "respectable", and defending them as "family life" or "women's culture".

Linked to both isms is concern about women's political potential not as members of a clan or as mothers of the future generation but as citizens, whose decisionmaking does not always have to be tied to family and gender-specific interests. A rough and impulsive question, which however deserves to become asked, is whether the political dynasty is the only path to top political posts for South Asian women today. If anything, what do the autobiographies suggest?

Amongst the three texts, *From Furdah to Parliament* is the least "family-oriented" narrative. I support this stance due to Begum

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<sup>4</sup> Familism is often used as a concept rather controversially to deal with political structures of particularly Asian and Latin American societies; however, the term was first used by political scientists to analyse Italian society and the influence of the Catholic Church in the Mediterranean. (see eg. Banfield 1958, Putnam 1993)



Ikramullah's relative lack of references to family members in the narration starting from her marriage onwards. I call her stance to women's political subjectivity anti-familist.

After narrating her marriage to Mohammed Ikramullah, Begum Ikramullah hardly describes her everyday family life at all. Her entrance into public life happens through the marriage, through the newly emergent, unveiled social life that she as a married colonial bureaucrat's wife is freely enjoying. The marriage is a passport to adulthood and increasing personal freedom, particularly from the power of her *purdah*-observing maternal relatives. As we found in ch. 4, Begum Ikramullah comments on the "youthful egoism" of her career choices only retrospectively, forming a key paradox in the otherwise confident feminist narration, and explaining the boldness of her moves as a product of the historical conditions. Her husband is portrayed as a gentle and moderate man, who does not interfere too much in his wife's doings. The details of their relationship are clearly not a public, autobiographical issue. Amongst the "significant others" in the text, it is her parents, her cousin Shaheed Suhrawardy and Mohammed and Fatima Jinnah who receive more attention than her husband.

Her four children remain as "the children", whose personalities are not present in the text at all. In small doses, one can hear the children's involvement in their mothers' nationalism, but the references are sparse and short. We learn that they sometimes attend political rallies, and during their mother's absence they are well taken care of by her loyal staff. On August 15, 1947, Begum Ikramullah is stuck in rural Bengal with a prematurely born baby and another ill daughter, and cannot participate in the independence celebrations. In this context, the children appear as better nationalists than the mother: *"The children, however, made little green flags themselves and went up and down the long verandah, singing Pakistani songs and shouting 'Pakistan Zindabad'. This was all the celebration we could manage on this long-awaited day."* (Ikramullah 1963, 155.)

In other words, Begum Ikramullah's political autobiography is not about her wifehood and motherhood, the relational terms of everyday life. There is a clear separation between domestic and national affairs, and the family members "pop up" only in instances where they significantly affect the political narrative. The questions she asks throughout the text is how she became involved in the making of Pakistan as a nation-state. As a writer, she is focused and determined on her pre-set goal of narrating her entry into political subjecthood.

There are at least three possible explanations to Ikramullah's anti-familism. First, the most obvious one: political autobiography is a "statesmanly" genre with set conventions, and Begum Ikramullah as a well-read PhD must have been affected by many previously published texts of this genre, mostly written by well-established, older men. If her text is set in this context, even a small mentioning of family life can be read as a "frill" or an "off-path". Second, Begum Ikramullah braids her belonging into a greater socio-political movement of Muslim modernism (cf. ch. 3 and 4), in which one of the male representatives' greatest wishes was to have educated wives as partners and companions. By emphasizing her involvement in national affairs as an informed individual and citizen, not first and foremost as a wife and mother, she "neutralises" the family from possible religious and cultural debates and renders it a matter of private negotiation. In other words, she does not support the womanist idea of women as the morally privileged "saviours" of the nation. Third, and as already suggested in chapter 6, she may be protective of her family members' privacy, hinting that her involvement in politics is a large enough burden for her husband and children, and should not be increased by too much autobiographical exposure.

By anti-familism I do not mean that Begum Ikramullah as a mother of four would have been ignorant of the daily pressures of parenthood, but rather I see in FPP and her other publications a need to be recognised as an individual, a thinking and writing subject, not

as a representative of the Suhrawardy clan or as her father's or husband's assistant. In her particular setting, the role of a dutiful daughter or wife would not even have been possible, as neither of the men had high political aspirations. She belonged to a political family, the Suhrawardys, but did not stand ideologically in line with her cousin Shaheed Suhrawardy. In a sense, one can say that her career was shadowed by the important Bengali Sufi family name, but not by individual males expecting to find a loyal ally in a female relative.

### *The ambassador of Muslim culture*

If in *From Purdah to Parliament*, the "ethnographic" bits are restricted to Begum Ikramullah's childhood and youth, her article collection *Behind the Veil* (1953/1992) is devoted to the description of "ceremonies, customs and colour" of the Mughal tradition. The book's tone is celebratory and nostalgic, looking back to the glory of a civilization at its height. In today's terms, the text unfolds as Orientalist fireworks without apologies. The difference of the "East" is confirmed on every page, and individuals' behaviour is explained unproblematically as belonging to culture. The primary audience of the articles seem to be Western visitors to Pakistan, and Begum Ikramullah's tone of voice as a narrator is rather impersonal and diplomatic.

In the context of a newly formed nation-state, the text is a piece of public relations work that politely corrects the visitors' false views of Muslim cultural history. There is no reference to the earlier debates on *purdah*, but the text however works as a retrospective intervention into the grim imageries of secluded women of the colonial days. It can be viewed as a post-colonial revision of the earlier *purdah* narratives of the colonial times. In my anachronistic reading, the text appears as a history-oriented lifestyle catalogue, a source for inspiration for the organization of weddings and other ceremonies in the "true" Mughal fashion, and a source of enjoyment, relaxation and cultural empowerment.

The text emphasizes festivities, and the description of everyday life is somewhat timeless, and also anonymous. This "long past" is harmless and recovered mainly for the purposes of enjoyment. Begum Ikramullah is embracing "modernity" and witnessing such profound cultural change around her in urban upper middle class Karachi that she can only remember the past South Asian Muslim "tradition" through weddings and the annual Muslim celebrations. The everyday life is changing, and she is not particularly sorry about the speed at which the changes are happening. What she longs for and wants to maintain of the past is colour and magic:

*Much has changed; there are today no houses in Karachi where there are separate women's apartments, and milady has had to make drastic reductions in her staff; but despite all this, much of the colour, much of the mystery of life behind the veil persists, even in the life of the most modern of us. I, for one, hope that it will be so for many a year to come, and that we shall, no matter how modern we become, never lose the magic and the colour that the words "east" and "Orient" bring to mind. (Ikramullah 1992, xxvii)*

The fascination with ceremonies also links with her curious royalism. Her admiration for the British royal family is already apparent in *From Purdah to Parliament* in descriptions of her excitement to witness coronation parades outside Buckingham Palace, and the pride she took about meeting the Queen Elizabeth. She also describes her close ties with the Moroccan court during her diplomatic service there in the 1960s. *Behind the Veil* introduces photographic material of her youngest daughter Sarvath's marriage to the Prince Hassan of Jordan.

The other Muslim countries are not really "foreign" to Begum Ikramullah, and thinking of the family name Suhrawardy, known everywhere in the Muslim world for the Sufi lineage, one can think of the cultural ease she has experienced in the countries West of Pakistan. In

this sense, she is not only a representative of a newly formed Muslim nation-state but also a transnational subject whose imagined cultural affiliations, as we saw already in ch 4, reach as far as Andalucia. Even if the "East" of her family lineages (for the past few hundred years) is geographically located in the terrain between Dacca and Calcutta, it is constructed in her narration as a mobile element extending to the very Western edge of Europe. There we enter the world of nomadic metaphors and travelling texts much before postcolonial theorists took fancy of the terms.

## 7.5

### Transnational intimacy

#### *The family takes over everything*

In *Meatless Days*, the Suleri family is a comprehensive universe, where family members are geographically mapped and where versions of political history are performed in highly unorthodox terms. There is no way of interpreting the text "outside" a familial frame of reference, because in the course of the narrative, the family takes over everything. Sara Suleri is not interested in courses of events in political history as such, but in the various ways in which her family members once embodied that history. Public narratives are being colonised by the domestic, parodied and rendered to positions of secondary importance, as a kind of strategic counterpoint to the overdetermined role history-writing in general amongst the educated Pakistani elites.

Suleri creates intimacy through repetitive, familial sayings and play with people's names. The more nicknames one gets, the closer the relationship. The way Sara and her siblings talk of her friend Mus-takori, who has arrived to Pakistan alone from East Africa to study

at Kinnaird College, suggests that she has been adopted as a family member<sup>5</sup>:

*That summer, dressed in Fabron red and green, Faze Mackaw changed names like clothes, getting up as Fancy and going to sleep as the Fonz. It rapidly became our favourite game, to see the permutations we could put to Mustakori's name, tossing it around like a beach ball on sultry afternoons. "Where is Fuchsia?" Ifat would shriek with a gleam of maniacal inventiveness. "Where's Fuchsia McKey?" "And where's Fotsie Moose?" Tillat replied.*

(Suleri 1989, 64)

*Meatless Days*, in most general terms, is about the perpetuation of diasporic, transnational family ties through the linguistic intimacy created in writing.<sup>6</sup> As an unapologetically nostalgic elegy, it engages the reader's emotions to mourn the loss and celebrate the personalities of Suleri's loved ones. Every character in the text, including the servants, becomes automatically domesticated by this policy of nick-naming, intimately stitched into the narrative, remembered vividly enough to create a fresh, and often contradictory or humorous, image. If the two other texts consist of anonymous collective agents, (such as "the servants", "the children" or "The Bhutto women") and lists of less significant names, in Suleri's dense narration there is no room for distant "minor characters" Through her narration, blood ties and friendships merge into a close-knit circle in which everyone matters. This intensity is what gives *Meatless Days* a particular "literary" quality, if compared to the other two texts, in which more descriptive narra-

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<sup>5</sup> The "real-life" Mustakori's story has also been vividly narrated from the anthropological perspective of transnational families by Vuorela (2003).

<sup>6</sup> Merolla's (2003) article on transnational family ties in Dutch-Moroccan literature made me realise the centrality of the theme in *Meatless Days*.

tive devices rise to the fore and which house dozens of less important figures that the reader soon forgets.

Sara's own moments of subversion from family traditions are dealt with lightly. Her father's failed attempts to marry her off do not cause much disturbance in their relationship; they seem to argue more about the purpose of Pakistan as a nation-state. However, during her last years in Pakistan, Sara's hidden agenda is to "(s)tave off marriage/.../keep it at bay." (Suleri 1989, 58) She succeeds in this by first completing a master's degree and then joining the Caravan Theatre with Mustakori. The two women's private joke is the question "What next?" which eventually takes them to study in the United States, to both become professors in English literature and reciprocally thank one another in their academic publications (cf. Mustafa 1995, Suleri 1993) In addition, Suleri hints in *Meatless Days* that the encouraging birthday telegram that Mustakori sent to her to Pakistan was a crucial step towards the text's production.

As a writing subject, Suleri voluntarily stitches herself into the family shawl in relational terms. By portraying herself first and foremost as a family member and friend, she rids herself of the *besserwisser* position of a scholar and brings the reader directly into the Lahori domestic scene, "amongst us". Her individual subject positions as an autobiographical "I" do not always stand out clearly, as she seems to enjoy, as a proficient storyteller, the art of juggling between multiple storylines. We meet her family members at different ages, in different familial roles that are not organised according to linear time. Due to the intensity of her prose, every character appears as an active subject, but where the subjects are located and how they are constituted become rather tiring questions, considering the text's multilayered nature. In other words, the political "core" of *Meatless Days* cannot be found in the individual women's subject positions *as such*, but in the intersubjective negotiations between the family members about their ties to nationalism, history-writing and religion.

Despite the tragedies, the family history is also a source of amusement and pleasure for Sara. The accounts of the siblings' meetings across continents give an impression of the perpetuation of their language games and private jokes. Yet one can and should ask whether Suleri remains captive of her family history, and, if this is the case, what kinds of political implications this captiveness has. How would the narrative change if even a slice of the world outside were introduced into it? Would the text lose its magical aura of intimacy, or only make it slightly more accessible? These are, however, questions I have only begun to ask after seven years of interaction with the text.

*"Serving my part in someone else's tale"*

In the transnationally intimate universe *Meatless Days*, Sara the family member only occasionally retreats to the position of Sara the North American academic. Her academic achievement is nowhere emphasized, and the text does not portray academic competitiveness or bookish rigour. If the text is read as an intellectual autobiography of an academic, one is surprised to find stories related to studies and academic everyday life only at the very margins. Her academic voice is distinctly recognizable at the level of vocabulary, but Suleri the author cannot be blamed for an overt obsession with facts. The impressionist and lyrical aspects of her writing make the text refreshing, unique and, indeed, "writerly", but at the same time one is inclined, and in my view should ask, whether her kind of "forgetfulness" is something only established immigrant scholars can afford.

Is it a metropolitan privilege to transgress the perceived lines between literary genres, blur historical timelines, "indulge" in aesthetic celebrations of the fragment and renounce oneself from the nationalist commitments of the homeland? What liberties are there for the postcolonial writer in diaspora that do not exist in the homeland? How safe is Suleri in America to say things that could not be said back home?



It is difficult for me to imagine that *Meatless Days* would ever provoke the passions of the religious right in Pakistan. The text may subvert received meanings inside political history but is by no means offensive of Islam. Suleri's leavetaking from religion is articulated as a personal matter, and some everyday observances about the religion may cause amusement, but there are no provocations about Islam-as-scripture or about single religious scholars, parties or sects. People outside the family circle and the immediate circle of friends are rarely named, which makes the text "polite" despite the bubbly, gossipy voice of the narrator. In this sense, I would suggest that the text is also sensitive to the interests of those who have stayed at home.

Suleri's America is no more "real" than the Pakistan she has left behind. Her own foreignness in the midst of American customs and mentalities is an issue she returns to every now and then, but she accepts this condition and does not, at least at the textual level, make great efforts at assimilating. Living in America is not painful but neither does it evoke her writerly passion. America is a conversation held on endless walks on city streets and docklands with Mustakori, or an argument in a diner with Tom, but never an entity with which she tries to establish a relationship with a name. She lives her life through the visits of friends, who virtually become her America, but she does not dwell on American landscapes, history or cultural trends as such. Neither does she provide a narrative of her arrival to America, or description of her possible difficulties as a newcomer immigrant. There are lonely apartments and private kitchens, but Suleri's life, "the brittle dependency of those days" (Suleri 1989, 82) is still measured by relational terms, in constant expectation of the visits of relatives and friends:

*I lived alone but in expectancy, which robbed me of the necessary solace that surely must accrue for those who truly lived alone. Still, I was obstinate, determined to assert my enjoyment of the ways of life above all things, thus pleased to cast my eye about the cool spaces*

*of an empty room and murmur, "St Praxed's ever was the church for peace." And so I waited to conduct the ceremonies of welcome, sitting up a little straighter with the thought that, if not Tom, then tomorrow Mustafa or Dale or Jamie or Tillat would come to visit.*

(Suleri 1989, 82–3)

Longing for the sociability of Pakistan, Sara cites Robert Browning, and evokes in the reader a curious image of a cathedral in Rome. Her congregation is clearly what keeps her living, straightens her posture and keeps her in New Haven. Despite the grimness of the city, its dark, cloistered architecture, she builds temporary roots where she is sitting: "I could not move, I thought, till I had served my part in someone else's tale." (Suleri 1989, 83.)

Although Sara here thinks her dependency on others was an irritation to them, I feel an urge to separate the above sentence from its context and think of it as a dialogical autobiographical statement, one of the "lifelines" of *Meatless Days*. How else could we think of living a life than serving a part in someone else's tale? The tales of the significant others in Sara's narrative claim their unique worth, and it is Sara's wish to become equally important in someone else's tale. In terms of storytelling, what else is there to be done? How else could one become a subject? How else could there be anything to tell, anything to share, anything to look forward to?

## 7.6

### Spaces, times and becoming

*On the difficult labour of "reading subjectivity"*

In 1994, Inderpal Grewal wrote about the diasporic, transnational subject positions in *Meatless Days*:

*It does not go beyond a critique of modernist binaries to create a politically empowering self. In Suleri's text, postmodern selves seem sometimes to be disquietingly marginalised, unsure, silenced, and sometimes even seeking for some surer grounding for identity that seems not to be available for them. New antiessentialist, nonexclusionary, postmodern subjects seem to be available here as syncretic, diasporic, immigrant selves, but we do not find ways in which to make these positions politically powerful.*

(Grewal 1994, 244.)

Grewal expresses here the sense of betrayal many of Suleri's feminist readers have felt (cf. Ahmad 1990, Ray 1993) when after a celebration of micropolitical differences and the questioning of nationalism as relevant for women's search for identities, she does not seem to promote oppositional political subjectivities or, in other words, does not draw far-reaching enough political conclusions after her journey into memories of the significant, multiply displaced women in her life. The question clearly is "and then what?"

My argument with Grewal starts first and foremost with disagreement about what life-writing should be about. I am happy to be in a contradictory position of sharing many of her political concerns and also to turn away from her kind of literary criticism. Her article is perhaps the most carefully constructed and politically "sound" piece of criticism of *Meatless Days* I have come across so far. It is uncompromising about its feminist commitments, and yet manages to reach beyond gender to study other differences in the text, particularly class. It is because of fellow world-travellers like Grewal that I have become interested in the transnational cultural "flows" between women writers on different continents, and can develop reading strategies that do not ignore the material conditions underlying all literary production.

Grewal uses the term scattered hegemonies to denote the construction of postmodern, multiple subjectivities that may replace the European unitary subject. The possible scattered hegemonies that

women subjects worldwide adhere to and contest, and which can be analysed transnationally, consist of, for instance, global economic structures, nationalisms, cultural fundamentalisms and juridical oppression. Feminist critique that takes these emerging and hard-to-map hegemonies seriously has the possibility to rise beyond naïve, and most often Eurocentric, articulations of "global feminism", and move towards creating coalitions between diversely positioned women instead of assuming a common political identity. (Grewal and Kaplan 1994, 17–18.)

I am positively bothered by Grewal's "worldly", politically accountable criticism of Suleri's subject positions. The same "points" could be extended to the reading of the other three texts as well. As a political *program*, her stance is wonderful. She is committed to the empowerment of future women readers and activists, and reads *Meatless Days* from this perspective. What she misses out, however, is questioning Suleri's motivations and purposes of writing an autobiographical text, and the reader's possibility of learning from the text's "oblique" subject positions *as they appear* in the text, unpolished and unapologetic, as they were remembered, not as strategically "empowering", but as signs, traces, lineages from a constructed past. Grewal focuses on political agendas, but not on the complexities of the politics of memory.

Grewal assumes that an autobiographical text by a postcolonial literary scholar should be explicit and strategic in its feminist commitments. She is disappointed by the moments of ambiguity and insecurity in Suleri's narration, and her refusal to engage with feminist practices that would bring about strategic, situational solidarities between different groups of women of colour, and diasporic, immigrant women. She reads *Meatless Days* together with Gloria Andalzúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987), and concludes that Suleri's position is more institutionally secure, more confident in the English language, and less confrontational what comes to criticizing modernist, white,

bourgeois practices of subject formation than Andalzúa, whose feminist practice is spelt out as a politicised "counterstance" that cuts across different communities of women with transformational force.

Subjectivity is a slippery concept linked to agency and identity, yet somewhat escaping definition. Or at least demanding redefinition each time it is used. Its provisionality, tentativeness is something that bothers is and pushes us to caution every time we write or utter the word. Or, as Iris Marion Young (1990, 231) puts it:

*I do not always know what I mean, need, want, desire, because meanings, needs and desires do not arise from an origin in some transparent ego. Often I express my desire in gesture or tone of voice, without meaning to do so. Consciousness, speech, expressiveness are possible only if the subject surpasses itself, and is thus necessarily unable to comprehend itself.*

So, my question to Grewal is: if we cannot situate ourselves as subjects in our everyday situations that slip away, how is it that we allow ourselves to read other women's subject positions so proficiently? How can we retrospectively situate others when we cannot situate ourselves right here and now?

As a linguistic construction, a philosophical concept, or even category, subjectivity appears as a pressing concern, to be defended or done away with, only for a handful of academics.<sup>7</sup> To profoundly study how subject positions appear in today's women's autobiographical texts, we should begin from Michel Foucault's seminal *The History*

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<sup>7</sup> I am indebted here to Päivi Kosonen (1996), who lays out the different streams in recent Western feminist thought of conceptualising subjectivity. If re-thinking different models and visions of feminist subjectivity has become one of the key concerns in feminist philosophy, Kosonen suggests that the philosophers' personal interests and stakes, their enchantment with language games should be explicitly acknowledged.

of *Sexuality* and explore how discourses on the formation of the ethical subject were tied to the regulation of bodies, desires and sexuality since classical Greek culture in the fourth century BC. In a sense, this would not be far-fetched even in the Pakistani context, since Greeks influenced the cultures of the Indus valley during the time of Alexander the Great's conquest (326 BC), and Greek philosophy has profoundly affected Islamic philosophy in the middle ages. Foucault's historical "subject matter" in *The Use of Pleasure* (1985) is not culturally any more distant to contemporary Pakistani scholars than it is to North Europeans. I am sure Muslim and South Asian feminists can recognise in the Greek, pre-Christian section of Foucault's analysis as many (or few) familiarities as I as a Finn can when approaching my own country's history. Starting from life-writing, we could ask a Foucauldian question: how are selves organised, controlled and discursively delimited in texts "into an oeuvre that would endure beyond (their:AH) own ephemeral existence?" (Foucault 1985, 139)

*Dearest Sanjeevani, how I wish I could continue our park bench discussions, as it really seems you "got" the point about subjects and power. It is so rarely that theory really comes alive, bubbles with laughter, seeks out its most proper scene, and also its appropriate exit. With you "Foucault and feminisms"-talk was never obnoxious and bookish.*

(Research diary, Tampere February 8, 2005.)

Through Foucault, we end up examining the very themes covered in the past chapters: care for the self, pleasures and their containment, food and sexuality, the role of the individual within the family sphere, marriage as a social duty, bodies as historical organisms that are being summoned up to perform certain tasks for the common good, such as nation-building. However, my readings are not particularly "Foucauldian", and within this research space I cannot engage in the debate about Foucault and feminisms. I end up marginalising a key

philosopher and social scientist in a similar way as Meaghan Morris (1988) does to male thinkers in *Pirate's Fiancée*: Foucauldian themes enter my footnotes. This is not even a deliberate feminist subversion but a concession to the fact that I do not yet find myself in a position to say something original about this theoretical conjunction.

I am cautious about deliberate subject-speech, because not all of it convinces me. The world outside may be committed to promoting the access of women to education, professions and political leadership, but it rarely asks what kinds of subjectivities are being constructed, and in whose terms. Here again, the materialist feminist question of the relationship between words and things (Barrett 1992), and the postcolonial one between the world and texts (Said 1983), appear.

For Kathy Ferguson (1993, 66–67), there is no necessary gap in feminist thought between theorists and activists: subjectivity may simply be a notion of what it means to be a person, or if one wishes, a woman, and to express what one wants and desires: *"As intellectual/political positions within feminism, these thematizations of subjectivity and desire are detectable both in academic debates on identity and desire and in extra-academic activities. They are, in other words, findable in texts (which are part of the world) and in the world (which requires interpretation as text)."*

As Adriana Cavarero (1992, 45) suggests, it seems crucial to ask what gives material to our theorizing of the subject, what kinds of political projects are surrounded by it. Without this kind of "embodiment", any kind of chat on the subject seems meaningless. I translate this as a need for the world to enter forcefully onto one's theory. *Subject: whatever we once dreamed about and can no longer catch. Dream-world, real world and somewhere in-between.*

In Western philosophy, a subject position, unavoidably as an ideal-type, is something to be reached, to be strived for, not automatically available for everyone, demanding a modern understanding of the uniqueness of the "self". It may involve literacy, formal education, political rights, capacity to raise one's voice in public, being able to speak

in one's own person, uncensored and unobstructed by others. In other words, it entails access to society's dominant symbols and institutions of meaning-making. Basically, subjectivity is what feminists in most locations of the world "still" aim for in their campaigns for women's rights, although their needs may be framed in more concrete terms. In political philosophy, subjectivity is also a matter of entitlement, something that requires public recognition from others. A person cannot decide him or herself to become a political subject overnight: it is a matter of contestation and struggle. The political content of subjectivity is temporal: it denotes a process of becoming, a transformation, which can also be halted due to political pressures. *Two steps forward, one step back*.<sup>8</sup>

Yet the concept of subjectivity and West European masculinist modernism, based on colonial and misogynist exclusions, are intimately connected to the extent that feminists should always investigate whether theorizing on subjectivity is still useful. From a temporal perspective, attention should be paid to the use of such adverbs as "yet", "still" and "already", and the possible radical rewritings that move beyond the linear view of history. Operating on an assumedly shared timeline of human development, and defining what women in some less developed locations in the world "still" need to become subjects is an interventionist mode of reading the world. In such readings, the subject passionately looked for is an ideal-type: the woman who schools herself when schooling is not provided, the one who empowers others to become literate and politically active, and who invests a lot of time into self-reflection and the creation of communities, even nation-building. Looking for such subjects is serious intellectual labour for feminist critics, myself included, but I would like to pause for a while and ask where such searches are located. Are feminist critics

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<sup>8</sup> This is the subtitle of Mumtaz and Shaheed's (1987) comprehensive study of the Pakistani women's movement indicating the backlashes to women's rights brought about by military *coups*.



perfectionists when they ask from writers to create strong subjects for solidarity?

As Gayatri Spivak (1988) suggests, sometimes incoherent subjectivities may be a politically more promising strategy than making the black Other (or the unpropertied servant, or the culturally different immigrant mother in Suleri's universe) the intending subject of resistance. I translate incoherence, or Grewal's "oblique" subjects, as figures who may not always be able to decide their loyalties, who may not always be able to speak out against perceived prejudice and injustice, who may find retreat in privacy at times when their contribution in crises, national or otherwise, were acutely needed.

Here feminists have found sympathetic allies in poststructuralist theorizing: the death of the subject or author may seem radical and politically empowering for those who have "already" have fought their way through modernist binaries. In terms of autobiographies, however, it is almost impossible not to discuss the position of the writing subject, the individual producing a narrative about the self, and the political implications of the autobiographical act. Feminist critics such as Nancy K. Miller (1988) argue that in the case of women's autobiographies, concerning the long history and marginalisation, one should not too hastily proceed to a celebration of the death of the subject. Whether the portrayal of the autobiographical "I" is coherent or split, the act of writing is still a conscious, self-reflecting effort that requires an author.

Subjectivity is a "deeper" concept than mere agency, involving contemplation on the meanings of one's actions, and something more intentional than identity, which due to its volatility often escapes conscious articulation. In feminist theorizing, discussions on subjectivity are often linked to politics (dealing with citizenship, women's relationship with the state, the vote and political representation, leadership and the spaces allocated to women in political history) and the broad continuum of arts (questions of voice, the process of becoming an artist, individual expression, censorship, state sponsorship or

repression). Autobiographical subjectivity is a phenomenon between these public and private concerns, between commonly accepted history and personal memories, loyalties to a community and individual subversion from its homogenizing pressures, staying and leavetaking, enter and exit.

In the present texts, the directions of autobiographical writing vary according to the historical and political situation. Begum Ikramullah's narration can be read as a story of arrival into Pakistan, and remaining within the contours of that nation-state in spite of the identity hurt the choice must have caused her. The Pakistani-ness is a construction and under a lot of debate but she imagines it also as a glue that can hold the diverse populations together. Likewise, for Benazir Bhutto, Pakistan as a solid nation-state exists, even during the repression of martial law, embodied in her mythical construction of "the people" according to the party line. On the other hand, for Sara Suleri, Pakistan is a country that too often demands her loyalty and of which she would like to beg to become liberated from, even for a while. The elegiac mode of narrating emphasizes the emigrant's labour of active leavetaking and negotiating the new relationship to the land one left behind. More than her mother's Wales, her first point of reference is to Pakistan, but this Pakistan is by no means a stable referent. Bhutto's political exile and Suleri's voluntary emigration are two sides of the current problematics of diaspora: the stories raise the important differentiating question about how one left, with which intentions one travelled. Bhutto does not narrate any conscious break between herself and the motherland; Suleri is actively trying to construct that break but often fails no matter how hard she tries. In short, if Begum Ikramullah's direction of writing is *towards* Pakistan, Bhutto writes firmly *within* the country's boundaries, and Suleri writes *from* Pakistan as a point of departure.

In the course of this study, most of my research questions have dealt, implicitly or explicitly, with the broad phenomenon of subjectivity (spaces, times and becoming); however, I am reluctant to use

the term excessively, due to its alienating bookishness. I am imagining a synchronised encounter with the three women as girls, skipping rope on the enclosed convent schoolyard, chanting their dreams in skipping songs, each taking their own turn. I also see them in adult age, walking hurriedly on the corridors of power, national or academic, piles of paper almost dropping from their laps, almost making it on time to the meeting. A conspirational whisper: *Whatever we once dreamed about, yearned for, we can't recall it involved becoming a Subversive Feminist Subject. We are only asking to be heard.*

My question to Grewal is whether it is still possible as a feminist reader to enjoy and learn from autobiographical texts "flawed" by modernist binaries, or postmodernist individualism, or whether the modernist/postmodernist framework is the best way to achieve transnational readings altogether. I am partly invigorated by Grewal's stance which emphasizes grassroots, "hands-on" activist involvement as a reader and literary critic, but the technicalities of her theoretical jargon do not promise much in terms of cross-cultural encounters. She dismisses the imaginary, "luminous" qualities of Suleri's writing and the uniqueness of the Pakistani historical context for the sake of an "advanced" and strategic political program. Readers such as Grewal are not tuned into an appreciation of "individualist" beauty, "modernist" nostalgia towards bygone places, or the magic of storytelling. The militant tone leaves little doubt about her feminist positioning, the preference of ethics over aesthetics, material "conditions" over imagination and creativity. She seems to be, in other words, a fierce historical materialist, for whom theoretical "writerliness" and literary imagination are mere indulgences.

As Jane Flax suggests, notions of empowering feminist subjectivity (she uses the terms subjectivity and "self" almost interchangeably) do not have to become explicitly "mapped" or "positioned" but not unlike in Suleri's storytelling, they may include enigmatic contradictions and may even vanish from intelligible analysis. Relations with others and our feelings and fantasies about them, along with experi-

ences of embodiment also mediated by such relations, contribute to the constitution of self/subjectivity. This new "self" is "*simultaneously embodied, gendered, social, unique, bounded, determined, open and unfinished. It is capable of telling stories about and experiencing itself these ways* (Flax 1993, 119)." The intersubjective constitution of storylines in *Meatless Days* can be seen, then, as open-ended puzzle to which the ideal response would be another piece of art, not an attempt to fix the flow of emergent meanings.

Another set of questions to Grewal is whether the "point" of life-writing is to articulate political strategies for the empowerment of future generations, and what other kinds of notions of political action may be found in autobiographical texts. Is autobiography the primary site for expression of political commitments or issues, or should we also look beyond the text itself for other forums where women have acted? How do we articulate our politics of reading as feminist critics (cf. Pearce 1997) ? Can we dismiss women writers as "apolitical", if their texts do not contain *progressive enough* visions for the collective empowerment of feminist reading subjects ? What other kinds of voices should we listen to? What else can life-writing do to us than to empower our collective feminist struggles? What about play, joy, wonder and dialogue? Are these too simplistic, naïve or "bourgeois" points of departure? And where do we arrive, when using them as a starting point?

## 8 YARN

### *Fortunate accidents*

Where have we arrived? The nationalist khadi, the begums' expensive sari silks, and the Sufi wool all got tangled into a hybrid yarn that unravels from a tight ball onto the floor. From industrious spinning and ecstatic whirling, the circular movement between the disembodied history of political ideas and the material history of textiles, food-stuffs, civil wars and coups, unstoppable and neverending, it is now time to stretch out the research yarn and let it search a temporary exit for itself.

Instead of a coherent, linear summary of the research "results", the present journey will end in open questions and speculations about the research process, and about reading women's texts from faraway, yet so close as a Western feminist who has spent years to un/learn rather simple things. For me as a writer, this is not a matter of choosing a style but rather the only kind of temporary conclusion I can come up with after seven years of eclectic interest in the cultures of South Asia. The previous chapters are proof of how the three women's texts lived a life of their own on my desktop, how they travelled across continents in my rucksack, what kinds of new forms they took and how they in/formed me. What is left now is a yarn.

As I am writing, I am thinking about the wider South Asian cultural continuum the present study has taken me to: the hilarious Hir and Ranjha play I saw at a theatre festival in Lahore, the graceful way Nargis cooks Bangla fish dishes in Helsinki, Rishma's sudden inter-

est in the story of the Mughal princess Nur Jahan in faraway Canada, and my recent viewing of the film *Bend it Like Beckham* and how I could not stop the tears rolling at the sight of a Punjabi Sikh girl playing soccer in Southall, UK. I am plotting how I could possibly visit Pakistan over the next holidays, although my friends' wedding season must be over by then.

I am thinking of all the coincidental encounters that have taught me more than the hundreds of monographs from which I wrote notes onto thousands of index cards organised cutely in shoeboxes. I hope to discard the boxes ASAP and use some of the gathered knowledge in a new, perhaps slightly less bookish context. I am thinking of a life that continues to spin and whirl around this research project although the project must end soon. *Chalo thika*, let's go.

If I am to condense the project in one word, it is serendipity. The rare antiquarian word brings us to the mood I have been in while reading Sara Suleri, the initiator and the guiding light of the project. Carlo Ginzburg (1989, 116) uses the term to refer to fortunate accidents, or "making discoveries, by accidents and sagacity, of things they were not in quest of". Serendipity requires willed enchantment, and in terms of genre or style, it may lead to what was previously named as the "ethnographic romance". The risks of involvement, showing one's enthusiasms and vulnerability, are always larger than life. But let there be love, in the midst of conceptual dissections, the analysis of political structures, and structural maladjustment. I do not think it can get us all wrong.

In many ways, the study involves storytelling of places and encounters. Eventually, the places where the project has taken me matter more than this monograph, which despite my resistances seems to require a closure, a violent ending. I would like to take you to some of the places where the three texts and their sideways and off-paths have taken me, as a retrospective unraveling of the research yarn.

We should surely begin with the extended metaphor of the whole research narrative: shadow dynasties. The term's initial clang to people hearing about my project for the first time often suggests a study of Pakistani political culture, particularly the phenomenon of political families, their rivalries and thirst for power. To a certain extent, the study has indeed covered the life and times of the Bhutto dynasty, and the expressions of political culture it has inspired in ordinary citizens' minds (such as the embroidered *dupattas*, woolen hats and scarves with PPP slogans, political cartoons and internet pages devoted for political gossip), but I would argue that the saga of the Bhutto clan and the PPP is one of the dynasties, and its shadow dynasties lie elsewhere.

As Sara Suleri suggests, the recourse to shadow dynasties is an alternative way to measure time based on the everyday life of citizens, not on a litany of "key events" on a nation's timeline. There is a sense of overdetermination in much of Pakistani social scientific and historical research literature about the "eras" named by statesmen. The highly educated urban minority are passionately involved in the writing and consuming of political history books usually devoted to the critical examination of one of the commonly known eras. Nowhere else on my travels have I come across on the streets and public libraries with so many people able to give me exact references to political history titles either written by themselves or ones that they had recently studied. If compared to other fields in social sciences, such as sociology and psychology, it is political science and political history that obviously engage readers far beyond the ranks of university faculties. In the beginning of this study I was not yet aware of this civil dimension: political history was "hot" amongst the people I encountered in a way I could not imagine before travelling there. And because of this discursive heat surrounding the eras and their progenitors, Sara

Suleri's accounts of cooks, school principals and underwear trends are a de-centralising and a cooling down move. It is not an apolitical retreat to the private sphere, but a narrative displacement of commonly known historical "truths".

Whereas Begum Ikramullah's and Benazir Bhutto's texts are uncompromisingly nationalist, ending with the assumption that the nation-state will continue existing and it needs women as actors to design its futures, Sara Suleri struggles with the whole idea of the nation-state and the loyalties it demands from her even in exile, but cannot however detach herself from its narration. She does not coin the futures of Pakistani women with the future of the nation-state, but neither does she demand for a radical feminist break (which is what feminist critics such as Inderpal Grewal seem to ask from her). Suleri teaches lessons about post/colonial complicity but also complicity in thinking in terms of nation-states.

I would reformulate her meaning of shadow dynasties beginning from girly giggles. The narration of nation-states always needs its Others. Some Others are placed strategically outside the limits of acceptability, but also amongst the "insiders" there are differences in commitment, focus of interest etc. The giggling girls cruising in their parents' cars around popular parks are not in Suleri's narration portrayed as the nation's future mothers but as insider Others to the nation-state. They are the ones who couldn't care less about the portrait of Mohammed Ali Jinnah in the school hallway, and thus form a fringe, a signifier of excess, bodies that cannot be taken quite seriously in the nationalist business. Still their presence is absolutely crucial to the cultural constitution of "us" and "them". The girls are the producers and targets of gossip and silly anecdotes, the micropolitical "twists" without which any ideology of nationalism would remain as empty skeletons. Due to Pakistan's short history as a nation-state and its hasty formation that did not engage the population as a whole, it can be argued that the cultural construction (the content-provision) of the nation-state is still underway, and also exiled writers of Pakistan using advanced



postmodernist narrative strategies participate in the formation of a national (not only transnational or cosmopolitan) literary culture.

However, what the real-life teenage girls of Pakistan need today is not to become cultural repositories of signs but to gain confidence and skills to represent their own political interests and desires. These may or may not coincide with national agendas of development, not even in the post-1995 Beijing conference era, after which "the girl child" became a mandatory focus of concern in the rhetorics of governmental agencies and NGOs. An increasing amount of Pakistani females are under 25 years of age, and how they become aware of the feminist genealogies of their own country is a matter of political will. In other words, whether or not the mass of women's writing presented here becomes a part of their cultural capital depends on the government's will to fund the state education system. We enter here the second meaning of shadow dynasties that Begum Ikramullah calls "the shadow of the coming events".

I have played with the aesthetic and spiritual dimensions of shadows at the margins of this study, trying to reflect upon my own memories of the luminous qualities of Pakistani life, and I find the idea of the shadow of the future an interesting temporal reversal, as the most common "hauntings" inspired by postcolonial theory are those of the past. Being able to predict or sensing the inevitability of future events is a skill of "political literacy" that may be informed by facts but also by imagination.

The most literal meaning of the term "shadow dynasties" extends to the layers of historical memory before Pakistan's independence. As we have seen, it is a matter of naming, in Aijaz Ahmad's (2000) words, one's "lineages of the present". Some stories are always preferable to others, and in the present context, for all the three writers, cultural Muslimhood is a "preferred history", disregarding the actual intensity of religious practice. Crafting of one's Muslim self in Pakistan means emphasizing the meaning of the invasions Arabs to Sindh, the Mughal dynasties and other cultural influences from the Middle East

and Central Asia. Begum Ikramullah, Bhutto and Suleri are not particularly interested in their ancestors, but all women's stories contain elements of emigration and cultural hybridity. There are many pasts embedded in their narration, and the great challenge to the postcolonial paradigm is to ask from which foreign invasion one should begin the labeling of "pre" and "post". The British one or the earlier Asian ones? We have seen here glimpses of the Persian Suhrawardiyya clan emigrating to the East in the 13<sup>th</sup> century BC. How does this kind of information enter postcolonial studies? Whose ex-colonies and emigrations matter?

The rest of the concluding chapter unwinds the extended metaphor's meaning in the research process. As a shadow agent, my tracing of the shadows of the subjects-in-information meant walking closely in the women's tracks and sometimes letting them gallop far ahead. Why I sometimes felt I was losing sight of them have to do with the accompanying research literature. One can rewrite individuals' life-writing and write back to their authors but my imagination does not extend to writing back to nation-states. So, my indigenous auto/ethnographical question as a student in political science is: how does one write about states? How do we enter the discursive space of state-talk?

### *Emotions in political history?*

The academic disciplines of political history and international relations have been the most frequently aimed targets of my feminist outbursts during the past seven years. "How can they write like that?" has been my standard response to even the most relevant readings on South Asia. It is difficult for me to keep up with statesmen-dominated accounts of public events, in which women inhabit footnotes if they enter at all. But even more difficult for me has been the IR discourse of states performing actions towards other states (criticism: Sylvester 1995, Enloe 1987, 2002) .

The prediction of state behaviour, and the judgments of "rogue states" behaving badly, appear to me as a curious quasi-psychological twist in the history of social sciences: collective agents seem to be capable of misbehaving, performing, apologising, even feel deep emotions. States also have bodies contained in the physical contours of their borders, which are often porous and thus leak. All such talk is both targeted towards Pakistan by foreign analysts and reproduced by Pakistani political analysts themselves.<sup>1</sup>

A study focusing on autobiographies, even political ones with a "public" agenda, should revert us from using the language of collective agents. It often brings us on a head-on collision course with the authors' expressions of emotions, whether they are in a half-baked or fully-blown analytical form. They bring to the fore thinking, feeling and acting individuals, aware of the fact that if the subjective level is omitted, the text will change genre from autobiography to political history. No wonder that autobiographies are treated by political historians proper as "background" materials that due to their very subjectivity cannot be trusted.

In feminist studies, the setting can become exactly the opposite: studies on individuals' expressions of emotion are highly relevant and studies on collective behaviour or the histories of "pure" philosophical and political ideas may appear as problematic. The notion of voice – the insertion of real-life encounters and quotes from the researched – makes it difficult not to become emotionally engaged with research.

My initial thesis that emotions are an important phenomenon for the political scientist to understand was perhaps a provocation to start

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<sup>1</sup> The most useful texts dealing with Pakistan's relations with India and Bangladesh (Ahmed 2000, Burki 1991, 1998, Kapur 1991, Sisson and Rose 1990 and Talbot 2000) engage in this rather impersonal, quasi-psychological state-talk. Despite my irritations, I have learnt a lot of the regional dynamics and historical processes through them.

with. It soon extended to another, even more demanding thesis: that without having a sense of the material cultures of the countries whose behaviour one predicts, it is impossible to achieve anything deeper than the reproduction of the pre-set world order. I believed that a focus on the politics of memory and emotions in life-writing would offer me an escape from writing yet another country study of an "exotic" distant country. I wanted to get as close as my own resources made possible, merge in the writers' shadows.

I have dealt with complex expressions of emotions and selected fragments of the material cultures from which the expressions have emerged, but without access to Urdu/Bengali/Sindhi literatures in original form and the spoken languages, I cannot get very far in actual analysis. Cultures of emotion and political cultures have their specific local idioms, which translations can only reproduce in a pale form. Usually foreign scholars choose only one aspect of emotions (eg. grief) or one key notion in political culture (eg. the influence of Sufism) to "specialise" in (cf Grima 1993, Werbner 2003). "Country studies" are total, want to explain everything in one volume.

In other words, I have made a decisive move from political science's fixation on collective agency towards the more intersubjective level of individuals, but am only beginning to understand the depth of certain emotional expressions related to politics of memory in the women's texts in their actual cultural contexts. I am still struggling with an impulse to write "country studies" but hopefully my cross-cultural understanding of the importance of emotions is a trigger towards paths yet untravelled.

### *Messy texts and imperfect narratives*

*Lives are made up of contradictions. So you need a theory of representing life lived in contradiction. That would allow you to account for the syntax of real lives. In the study of narrative, people who try*

*to provide a logic of narrative fail. Because the point and fact is that a narration is not a sentence.*

Hayden White  
(in Domanska 1998, 20)

Life-writing, the stuff of lived lives, embodied memories, and necessary ideological complicities, tends to be a particularly "messy" research topic. After this exercise, I tread with caution with any explanatory models trying to put autobiographical texts on line. As we found in ch. 2, all notions of autobiographical genres are arbitrary and do not necessarily indicate more than the writer's outward social standing. There are political autobiographies written by politicians, intellectual and literary autobiographies written by scholars and established writers, and spiritual autobiographies written by religious authorities. Sticking with a predetermined genre is likely to reproduce canons rather than question them.

When choosing texts to work with, I would rather use intuition and personal chemistry than external canons to justify the setting. The feminist method of rewriting I have applied here is not particularly suitable to the study of texts with which one does not "get along" with at all. I see it as a patient tracing of the writer's shadow, sometimes walking alongside her, sometimes taking a completely different itinerary in order to return to her. (cf. Guaraldo 2001, 22)

The notion of messy texts, as Anna Banks (1998, 173) sees them, means admitting one's own multiple entanglements in the study of others' messy lives. She calls for research texts that are aware of their own narrative apparatuses as a strategy towards seeing the subject more precisely. This notion, in my reading, approaches Hayden White's (1978, 57–8) "stories of a particular kind", historical narratives that do not attempt to hide their embeddedness in commonly circulated cultural mythologies.

In a postcolonial literary setting that involves not only one shared cultural mythology or metanarrative but always many, Francoise Li-

onnet's (1989) usage of the term *métissage* has particularly paved me the way for the acceptance of imperfection, noise and mud not only in the studied texts themselves but as a basic condition of the research process. The chain of voices and the sequences of events that emerged from this mud were hand-picked sometimes according to some external analytical logic, sometimes by the expressive force and emotional involvement they created in me.

The goals of the study are expressive rather than representational or descriptive. It is not based on newly "found" archive materials that would radically re-write Pakistani women's history as a whole; rather my rewriting invites to a sharing of historical atmospheres, or "structures of feeling" (Williams 1977, 132). By using a relatively heavy apparatus of direct quotations, I have wanted the readers to stop with me to listen to the historical subjects' voices, and I have intentionally dramatised their voices by repetition and the strategic circulation of "key metaphors". Perhaps the next stage from the study of shadows is the study of echoes.

### *Counterpoints*

Spinning songs. Circular songs. Think of cotton fields, women returning home at dusk, gathering after a simple plateful of *dhal* to card their own share of the freshly picked whiteness. Their songs are called *charkhinama*. Tonight they sing about Sassi, travelling through red-hot deserts to reunite with her beloved. She becomes one with him in her longing, running wild towards her pure love, her wedding night with the one, the only almighty. Sassi is the soul, the passion, the promise. (Schimmel 1997, 121–2)

My silly pink sheets, chaotically patterned in polka dots, florals and paisley, are made in Pakistan. My imagination does not extend to link their production with Sufi mysticism or Punjabi folk tales. I believe they have been machine-stitched together by a woman in

sweatshop-like conditions. From another continent, I cannot see her face. I cannot hear her voice. I wonder if she knows the tale of Sassi. A German scholar told it to me.

During the years of interaction with the three texts, I have spent an endless amount of time tracing the biographies of the texts' significant others, but paid much less attention to their insignificant others, the nameless outsiders of the privileged worlds of Pakistan's political élites and the educated, professional upper middle class. The question of domestic servants in Ikramullah's and Suleri's texts and Benazir Bhutto's notion of the people have given me a momentary opportunity of extending my political imagination towards the possible figures of the subaltern (and, indeed, the question whether s/he exists at all), but their actual faces and voices remain abstract, blurred, distant to me.

I do not believe that the most interesting contrapuntal reading of the three texts here could be achieved by juxtaposing them with other autobiographical texts from the colonial feminists of the Empire, or contemporary Western women leaders and intellectuals. As we found out in chapter 3, interesting pathways can be found in the autobiographical traditions of the Muslim world and South Asia, but even there all the materials I covered (with the exception of Rashundari Debi's extraordinary *Amar Jiban* (Sarkar 1999)) suggest the authors' relative independence, membership in an intellectual/spiritual community and material privileges. The notion of "getting away with" autobiographical exposure is a class-and-gender-based issue in every culture, which deserves further study than is possible here.

The ultimate counter-point to the stories covered here would, in my reading, be Pakistani women writing in their native languages without the support of a prominent family. At the moment, I can only use my limited imagination to catch glimpses of such women. In the transnational world of global capitalism, I sleep under their labour, participating in the international division of labour with much too little remorse. The women who enable my immersion in the world

of books are much farther away from my reality than, for instance, Begum Ikramullah's servants or Sara Suleri's dynasties of cooks. Even if I wanted to, I could not possibly name them, let alone pass on their voices.

I could not therefore look for the mute subaltern as the three texts' ultimate counterpoint. The more realistic counter-points were found through articulated clues. I briefly hinted at other writers of Begum Ikramullah's generation, for whom critical class analysis was a realisable option, and tried to work with the notion of post/colonial complicity through an active involvement in this textual web. I got stuck to *The Tale of Mr. Jeremy Fisher* through a personal coincidence and found in the tale possibilities of postcolonial "bastardization". I found some khaki-coloured texts by Pakistani generals and statesmen and offered short samples of their rhetorics to suggest at the context from which Sara Suleri tries to negotiate distance by writing, but ultimately accepts her boundedness to even that history. I also referred to the international emergence of human rights testimonies and Benazir Bhutto's strategic usage of their narrative strategies.

Only in the case of the two major crises in Pakistan's political history, the traumas related to the Partition and the subsequent nationalist birth story, and the second split of 1971 did I attempt at a tentative historical "measuring of silences". Begum Ikramullah's narrative seemed to me the most productive text for that exercise, because of her generation's eyewitness position during the first crisis, and because of her strong refusal to become involved in the public evaluation of the second one.

The present research project began from Western feminisms' preferred histories and moved towards South Asian micro-histories of ifs, perhapses and could-have-beens. Working with hints, clues, and cluelessness (in the cases of historical silences) requires sudden changes of perspective, the usage of different prisms, and even the film techniques of editing. Close-up portrayal of single textual twists (episodes)



and "the big picture" (the narration of historical processes and "long memory") have to be brought into some kind of harmony to reach plausibility.

It is not so much a matter of the amount of well-read references as a matter of artisanal skills that are at stake here. Eventually, my argument is for the narrative techniques of fiction, both in literary texts and film, to better convey the "spirit" of bygone moments, and even political ideas, than conventional "dry" academic prose. The present study is unavoidably a compromise, due to operating in a foreign language and the fact that I actually enjoy some aspects of formal academic argumentation. To respond to the autobiographers themselves in the form of a novel was a possibility I considered, but my imagination did not extend to the fictionalising of the theoretical knowledge that one is required to demonstrate in a PhD thesis.

### *Is unlearning possible?*

Throughout the present study, I have played with the idea of feminist unlearning as a strategy of politics of location, of locating the cultures and subcultures in which one was raised and the communities in which one now works and discusses, and, likewise, of locating theory and concepts in their historical contexts. Inside academic feminisms, the idea of unlearning is particularly challenging: in the competitive atmosphere for jobs, publications and funding, the call for unlearning may be dismissed as an impossible task. How can one positively unlearn certain habits of thought based on historical privilege, or stop to genuinely listen to other women's voices with ten overdue deadlines on the table? How does a feminist "superagent" listen?

Unlearning as a term has strong ideological, ethical or even spiritual connotations. In Marxist terms, unlearning could be understood as "de-classing" or unlearning other types of social privilege, in struggles against sexism, ethnocentrism, racism and heteronormativity. Ga-

yatri Spivak (1988, 295) sees unlearning as the postcolonial feminist intellectual's primary task, particularly in relation to the idea of female privilege: women are not equipped with superior skills to achieve common understanding but the historical shadow of the subaltern does enter our discussions no matter how we try to avoid it. Her suggestion is to unlearn discourses in which the silenced other is spoken for or about and rather learn to speak *to* her silence.

All such struggles inside academia are welcome and worthwhile, but there should not be romantic retreats to "origins" or formulations of ethical superiority through the process of unlearning privilege, or what Stuart Hall (2002, 28) calls decentring. Such an unlearning is always partial, imperfect and controversial, as there are no egalitarian havens *out there* to be found. In terms of concepts and theory, the accusations against theoretical élitism may often become a form of anti-intellectualism. Speaking in a "basic" language that everyone can understand can easily become an Orwellian nightmare, and in such a setting "difficult" or "obscure" theory can be truly liberatory, inclusive and open-ended. A struggle against Eurocentric theory is always justifiable, and one can and should think of the theories one can "afford", but as we have seen throughout the present study, for many South Asian scholars there is no automatic choice between "imported" and "indigenous" ideas. Arguments can be formed in another kind of logic that challenges too easy geopolitical binaries.

But even in the worlds outside academia, a constant consciousness-raising about location from which to speak, and its limits, is tiresome, particularly if it assumes a search for the *avant-garde*, the *most* ethical, dialogical, radical position. Such a search is in itself competitive and hierarchical. Rather, I would suggest finding a good enough *writing strategy* for the present purposes. Discussion about one's location is needed in the present context of world politics more acutely than ever, but it should be done in a way that sparks creativity, joy, humour.

The other kind of unlearning that I would like to advocate is travelling lightly. "Less is more" is the much-circulated slogan of microhistory (cf. Ginzburg 1989), and what Carolyn Steedman (2001) writes about the occupational hazards of the archive historian reminds me of the constant need of dusting the study, clearing the clutter, letting fresh air in. In terms of postcolonial feminist pedagogy it could mean arriving on the scene with little prior conceptual baggage and being intensely present, or in a Sufi way, being a son or daughter of the moment. This does not have to mean ahistoricity, but can be an argument for the importance of *present encounters* to better understand texts, narratives and the burdens of history.

I do not believe that anyone can completely unlearn the negative aspects of one's cultural baggage, the remnants of the histories of conquest and the philosophical master narratives they enabled. In the present study, I have intentionally tried to place Western and South Asian feminist theory on autobiographies, embodiment and subjectivity in dialogue, and such a dialogue, as any constellation of power, can never be symmetrical or non-hierarchical. I have tried to show to the reader the process of struggle with my own *preferred histories*, which seem to highlight feminist heroism/individualism, fully blown, articulate subjectivities and a commitment to social justice based on egalitarian thinking. I do not even try to imagine I have passed this struggle, and do not even want to. Complicity is the keyword that the present study has taught me in its multiple meanings.

Instead of focusing solely on the active intentions of the researcher, unlearning can also mean a reversal of the roles of the learner and the learned, the researcher and the researched. It is a means of letting go of predetermined research plans, and let the context lead you to new locations. A full articulation of what Pakistan as a research context, and Pakistani women writers as the researched have done to me would be the theme of another book. Here I can only offer glimpses, patches, fragments and anecdotes that annoy some and amuse others.

The present study has relied from the beginning to its very end on the benevolence of others to translate certain cultural practices, terms and concepts to me. I regret my linguistic incompetence but at the same time encourage others to reach out towards non-Euroamerican literatures, even if they do not speak the local languages. The purpose of studying postcolonial literature is not to make all students anthropologists or Asian/African language majors, but to increase an understanding of global power relations and the embedded histories of colonialism and imperialism in our present day practices, disregarding which languages we speak.

One of the favoured metaphors inside postcolonial criticism is the tower of Babel, a place for dissonance and imperfect communication (cf. Steiner 1975). *Shadow Dynasties* has been produced inside such a tower, by a speaker who stubbornly insisted on using the imperial lingua franca. As a native speaker of a marginal European language, I can only think of all the misspellings, funny pronunciations and mistranslations foreign scholars writing about Finland have come up with. Learning tolerance with imperfection is a skill in itself.

The term cultural translation has evoked fierce debates inside anthropology and postcolonial theory, and the division between the proponents of cultural translation as a subversive inter-cultural critical practise and the proponents of untranslatability is rather blurred. (references!) Untranslatability is celebrated by its advocates as a positive force of resistance, as a way of showing the coloniser/master narratives that their indigenous cultural practices cannot be co-opted, fetishized and sold out to the West. Translation for them is necessarily a hierarchical power imbalance, in which a "weaker" language is translated into a "strong" one through necessary simplifications and processes of Othering (cf. Asad 1986). On the other hand, the proponents of cultural translation believe it is the only alternative towards saving the world from further catastrophes (cf. Spivak 1992) .

The politics, ethics and even economics of cultural translation at the cross-cultural, international level are here at stake. Our world is becoming ever more "translated", intertextual and multicultural, and the skills required from today's children to cope in everyday life are quite different than my generation's. The choice of having a cartoon theme, a Chinese New Year theme or perhaps a Hawaii theme for one's birthday party requires constant negotiation between idioms, genres, trends, a constant zapping of channels. Furthermore, parents go beyond their means to get their children to a French-, Russian- (or whichever language happens to be in fashion) immersion kindergarten. This is everyday practice of cultural translation – as voluntary, privileged and rather superficial code-switching – in today's North Europe and America.

On the other hand, cultural translation may in some other locations, such as in Pakistan and amongst the Pakistani diaspora worldwide, be an everyday necessity for becoming heard in the first place. The phenomenon of "Paki-bashing" is telling of the difficulties South Asian immigrants as a group have historically faced in diaspora (Brah 1996,9). If one never gets schooled in one's mother tongue even if one wanted to, and hears only pejorative dismissals of one's cultural heritage, the only way towards finding a public voice, a literary voice that gets published, without completely losing a sense of belonging, is an aggressive defense of one's cultural heritage in the language of the coloniser or the postcolonial lingua franca. This division between forced and voluntary cultural translations is an important point to make, because it affects the logic of translation, the rhythm, the pace and the political motivations of the exercise.

My own cultural translation attempts of the phenomenon of *pardah* in ch. 4, details of the culinary references in ch. 5, the textile metaphor in ch. 6 and the expressions of emotions and the meanings of kinship terms throughout the whole narrative are preliminary, in-progress and suggestive rather than finalised. They may be appreciated in Sara Suleri's (1989, 40) terms as "Kuwaiti kebabs", which may not

have retained the original form but can hopefully still be recognised as a version of the intended dish. Further than this I cannot reach without a long residence in Pakistan.

Rather than advocating cultural translation as meticulous conceptual mappings, I would like to speak for cross-cultural literacy, particularly in the realm of postcolonial literature, as a way of bringing unexpected voices together, finding previously unrealised affinities between cultures and creating spaces for dialogue. Such literacy depends more on imagination, empathy and political will than exact knowledge or quantifiable linguistic/cultural competence. There are no available reading lists, guidebooks, dictionaries or maps to such literacy. Each learning narrative is unique, as it depends on our specific and constantly changing politics of location.

Maximum cross-cultural literacy is never possible, as there are no available tests to measure one's success, but we can get a sense of being on a right track sometimes. Confusion between different cultural scripts and vocabularies does not have to be a hopelessly errant space, but can become a place for spontaneous creation. It is rather the ability to ask even clumsy or unlikely questions from others that triggers cross-cultural literacy than one's own powers of translating correctly.

The present research yarn has taken multiple directions, and I have attempted to name an awareness of the direction taken as a writer. The experimental activities of writing to, with, around and starting from the researched encourage the use of imagination and empathy as research tools. They lead to what Michèle Barrett (1999, 105–7) names as "writerliness", the creation of reciprocal imaginative spaces, in which political meaning is created through literature and arts, and also actively consumed in the form of possible new creative responses. The problem of "writerliness" in the current academic cultures is that it is particularly hostile to the ideas of objective evaluation, the formation of units of excellence and economic accountability. However, the personal gains may outweigh the institutional risks taken.

### *Historicity and the impossibility of "opting out"*

Much of the journey has been a code-switching between the past and present tenses. I have intentionally shifted between rather conventional narratives of the "long past" and more impressionistic "stories of the moment". There have been many attacks against feminist and cultural studies for their alleged "ahistoricity", or superficial covering of complex historical plots (cf. Schiach 2000, Jameson 1995) . The kind of shadow agency of the researcher I am promoting here indicates an awareness of the difficulty of creating historical narratives that both provide an accountable storyline and engage their readers to reformulate the critical questions of the present.

The most important postcolonial lesson this study has taught me is the incoherence of any formulations of "opting out" from historicity. I have begun to treat clues, traces and fragments of postcolonial histories not only important in the Benjaminian sense challenging hegemonic amnesia<sup>2</sup> but also as a way of accepting their ongoing legacy in the present and their meaning for the future generations living in expanding cultural hybridity. What are the possible worlds dreamed about based on an awareness of the ongoing legacy of European imperialist projects?

If possible worlds can be formulated as empowering visions, for instance as postcolonial feminist utopias for a more democratic and culturally inclusive future, their dependence on the past should also be acknowledged. Stories of departure and arrival are in greater demand now than ever (cf. Hall 2002). And it is not necessarily the starting point that interests us in them but the actual journey as a process of

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<sup>2</sup> My literal reference is to Benjamin's historical thesis VI (1968, 255): "Only that historian will have the gift of fanning a spark of hope in the past who is firmly convinced that even the dead will not be safe from the enemy if he wins. And the enemy has not ceased to be victorious."

becoming, and the location where the journey has left the writers in their authorial present. The ethnic, political and cultural diversity of the present three women, in their very own words, does not invite to a meticulous mapping of "roots" or "origins". What matters is where the writers are at and where they leave their readers at. The placing of "at", following Paul Gilroy's (1991) words, is a political reading exercise, a search for strategies, itineraries and processes rather than origins or sources.

Faithful to her cryptic style, Sara Suleri leaves her readers with a puzzle about Adam's broken ribcage, a feminist rewriting of the Quran'ic and Biblical tale of origins:

*In pale and liquid morning I hold the Adam in me, the one who had attempted to break loose. It is a rib that floats in longing for some other cage, in the wishbone-cracking urge of desire. I join its buoyancy and hide my head as though it were an infant's cranium still unknit, complicit in an Adam's way of claiming, in me, disembodiment.*

(Suleri 1989, 186)

This wonder at disembodiment occurs in a kitchen in New Haven, the place she has built for herself as a new home, and it is a place of new desire. The broken rib reminds her of the urgency of her life in the present, its complicities and daily claims of attention. There is no turning back but everything is there and then, here and now.

Begum Ikramullah is oriented further towards the future than Suleri in her optimistic lines about womanhood:

*But there could be no turning back, no return to the secluded and sheltered existence of the past. I had to continue on this new road on which the women of my country had set out, in which we could taste the joys of achievement as well as the bitterness of failure, to know both hope and fear, disillusionment and attainment. And*



*who can deny that this is a richer, fuller, and more rewarding way of life?*

(Ikramullah 1963, 168)

This is political propaganda to encourage other women to also don purdah and take up more prominent public roles. What truly sustains me in her ending is the emphasis on other women, the road the other women already paved out for her and the sense of solidarity. This is simply radiant writing, as such. The collective "we" are the female citizens of Pakistan who are in the process of building their own unique nationalist paths. And it is important that "we Pakistani women" get to experience the whole emotional scale of political life that makes it worth living.

Benazir Bhutto leaves her readers at two places: the voting booths and her father's grave. She is equally strong about her orientation towards the future as Ikramullah, but also reminds her readers of a past crime that she probably can never avoid referring to. The "we" here is more ambiguous but seems to refer to her family and her closest supporters in Larkana:

*We will go together to al-Murtaza in our home constituency to cast our votes on November 16. After voting I plan to pay my respects at the grave of my father, the only Prime Minister so far in Pakistan's history to be elected by the people. We are generations of politicians, devoted to an egalitarian and progressive Pakistan. The rest is in God's hands.*

(Bhutto 1988, 390)

Benazir leaves us with her keywords: daughterhood, democracy, and Islam. She is not willing to give up her relational family role as she aspires for the country's next democratic leadership. There is also a negotiation between commitment to secular, democratic political ideas and religious belief, a kind of division of labour between the two forces.

The mapping of possible worlds operates on hunches, speculations and guessing games. It leads to an estimated understanding how one of the the endless possible futures-in-the-past came about, and an acceptance of that story's finiteness. We are ultimately dealing with "stories of a particular kind" (White 1978, 58). This is not a call for an erasure of real lives, actual suffering, historical pain, memories explosive enough to kill. Quite the contrary. With "stories of a particular kind" one can bring received and officially certified historical meanings down from their pedestals. It would be preposterous to ask for more.

Life-writing can appear as a reminder of what once was possible. For instance, Begum Ikramullah's autoethnographic essay collection *Behind the Veil* was re-published in 1992 due to high demand by young Pakistani women to learn about past lives inside the four walls of the *zenana*. One of the most important history lessons I have learnt through the study of the three texts is that South Asian women's history is full of early pioneers who transgressed social boundaries alongside or even before the Western feminists "got there" in their own countries or as travellers and residents in colonial India. From a very early stage of this study, I realised that I was dealing with a long history of "women of substance", not with marginal groups waiting to be included into history. My shadowing acts do affirm the women's power but they also try to ask questions about what enabled this power to emerge.

Hayden White, elaborating on the idea of situated stories, points out that the notion of history in itself is highly ambiguous: it suggests that there are two orders of humanity, one of which is more human because it is historical, and the other is only waiting to be included into history proper. Such a division reproduces the fixed world order into the "developed" and "developing", "donors" and "recipients", "progressive" and "retrogressive", "literate" and "oral". The present study has consciously attempted to struggle out of the violent division between "historical" and "nonhistorical" research methods by

merging the voices of political scientists, sociologists, historians, literary theorists and anthropologists, and placing the autobiographies alongside with the fictional cultural products of their time and their constructed pasts. There is no real history but there are fully lived possible lives out there to be discovered that continue to inspire us and feed our imaginations. And as we cannot opt out from histories (with a small h) and the phenomenon of historicity, neither can we opt out from our imaginations.

*And the yarn unravels...*

In the end, we find the stories bouncing back to their writers, returning in another form, another voice, full of surprises and unexpected elements. Are they still recognizable? Do they resonate with their alleged originator's versions? Who knows? Rewritten, they continue living lives of their own, resisting entitlement and possession. For the best of all stories, there are no origins, what matters is the circulation of voices. The wonder of having your story told otherwise.

And this is how I want the journey to end, and perhaps another one to begin<sup>3</sup>:

Outside the Delhi gates stands a well-visited tomb of a woman. In the twelfth century, she spread Sufi wisdom in her community as a *murshid*, a spiritual guide. One spring, a hopeless drought hit the plains, and not even prayers could quench the thirst of the villagers. Still, they desperately sought comfort from the old woman and her son, whom she had raised to become her follower. On a particularly somber night, when the mother was already fast asleep, the son sneaked into her bedchamber, pulled a thread from the hem of her sari and attached it to a branch of a tree shadowing the house. The next

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<sup>3</sup> Legend of the female Sufi saint Sara loosely modified from Ernst (1999, 185–189).

morning, the monsoon rain broke and began nourishing the parched earth.

People still recall the miracle. For centuries, the cotton rags and the fine silk ribbons tied on graveposts and the surrounding trees have symbolised hope. Yarn is an embodiment of hope, of a complete surrender without ever giving up. It can be clutched in the palm of your hand, yet its spirit travels far beyond our active comprehension. In the quietness of a late afternoon, watching the play of darkening shadows on rooftops and courtyards, we can hear a woman's name being chanted in the midst of prayer: Sara Bibi...

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## APPENDIX 1

### Glossary

Urdu is a close relative, or some would even claim a variant of the Hindi language, which has been heavily affected by Arabic and Persian. After the formation of Pakistan in 1947 there have been conscious attempts to “Persianize” or “Arabicize” the language in terms of vocabulary. The terms and phrases used in the present study are commonly known for Urdu speakers and spelled as Sara Suleri, Benazir Bhutto and Begum Ikramullah and the English-speaking Pakistani scholars spell them in books intended for Western readers. There is no consensus about Europeanised spellings in my references. The present list may not be acceptable to linguistic scholars but I have tried to imitate the level of precision used by Pakistani authors.

To give the readers an idea of the linguistic variation between local South Asian and migrant Persian, Arabic and Turkish influences I have marked the words’ historical origin as I currently understand them (A=Arabic, P=Persian, Pu=Punjabi, T=Turkish, B=Bengali, H=Hindi, U=Urdu). I have omitted terms in other Indian languages, which are already translated in the main text. The terms related to Islam and Muslim statecraft are distinctly of Arabic origin, whereas the other terms suggest regional variation and blurred boundaries. The most common words are known in *most* South Asian languages, and their origin is of little importance here.

*Allah-o-Akbar* “God is Great” (A)

*adab* Muslim ideas of “proper conduct”, moral codes; here refers to the genre of *adab* literature, religious-minded conduct books for instance about family life and marriage (A)

*ap biti* autobiography/memoirs, “what happened to oneself” (U)

*aurat* generic term for woman (U)

*atmacarit* autobiography (B)

*awam* the people, common folk, adjective *awami* (U)

*ayah* nanny (H/U)

*baboo* term of insult for an Indian upwardly mobile gentleman, imitating European habits and fashions, during British colonialism (B)

*Bande Mataram* “Hail Motherland”, Indian national anthem, a politicized song during the 1940s (H)

*Basant Mela* a local Punjabi spring carnival of pre-Islamic origin. A politicized event in Pakistan today due to conflicts between Islamists and liberal forces. (Pu/H/U)

*begum* rich lady, wife (T/U)

*bhangra* a popular Punjabi genre of dance music (Pu)

*bhai* brother, or a close male relative of the same generation (H/U)

*bid’a* innovation (A)

*burqa* a large tent-like item of clothing worn by women to cover the whole body (U)

*chador aur chardivari* lit. “the veil and the four walls”, term used in the contemporary context particularly to denote the Islamist gender ideology of Zia ul Haq’s regime (1977-88) (U)

*chakra* the spinning wheel (H/U)

*charkhinama* spinning songs (H/U)

*chik* bamboo curtains, used in traditional households to separate *mardana* and *zenana* (H/U)

*dar-ul-harb* land of struggle, the non-Muslim world or countries where Muslims are a minority (A)

*dar-ul-Islam* land of Islam, the Muslim world or countries that are ruled by Muslims (A)

*desi* local, special reference to diasporic styles and fashions (H/U)

*dhal* a spicy lentil dish (H/U)

*dupatta* a large scarf used by women, most often as part of the *shalwar kameez* dress (U)

*faqira* a female *faqir*, a student of spirituality in Sufism (A)

*fatwa* a religious edict issued by the *ulema* (A)

*ghazal* a classical poetic form in Persian and Urdu literature, a collection of two-lined independent stanzas (*sher*) that form rhyming patterns (P/U)

*ghee* clarified butter (H/U)

*gol guppa* a South Asian dip snack, also known as *pani puri* (H/U)

- hadd* lit. limit, borderline, ordinance, pl. *hudood*. A legal term for the offences and punishments which are defined in the Qur'an (A)
- hadith* lit. speech", report, account; oral tradition relating to the Prophet's sayings as recalled by his contemporaries, collected in written scripts and divided into two groups *hadith qudsi* (sacred speech sent to the Prophet directly from God) and *hadith sharif* (noble speech, the Prophet's own utterances) (A)
- hajj* pilgrimage to Mecca on *Eid-al-Adha* (A)
- halal* lit. permitted, lawful; opposite of *haram*, the forbidden zone (A)
- haveli* a large old-fashioned urban house, usually accommodating many generations and servants consisting of separate spaces for women and men (H/U)
- hudood* punishments, plural form of *hadd* (A)
- iftar* conclusion of the daily fasting during *Ramzan* by eating and drinking something (A)
- izzat* honour (U)
- kapura* a dish made out of goat's testicles (U)
- khadi* coarse home-spun cotton or linen; a nationalist symbol across religious lines in early 20C India (H/U)
- Labbaik* "I am ready to obey Your orders", sentence to indicate one is ready to perform *hajj* (A)
- langar* communal kitchen, a special form of welfare in South Asian Sufism (U)
- Majlis-e-Shura* Council of Islamic Ideology during Zia-ul-Haq's regime (1977-88) (A)
- mardana* space reserved only for men in a private house; usually a living-room type of formal room for receiving guests (U/B)
- memsahib/mem/madam sahib* a colonial form of address for Western women (H/U)
- mohajir* refugee, immigrant, refers to the first Muslim immigrants from Mecca to Medina and, here, to the Indian Muslims who emigrated into Pakistan during the 1947 Partition and afterwards (A)
- mohtarma/mohtarama* "exalted lady", honorary term for a woman leader (H/U)
- mujahideen* "struggler", "holy warrior", someone who engages in *jihad* (A)

*murshid* a spiritual guide in Sufism (U)  
*musawaat* equality; a key slogan in Pakistan People's Party programs (A)  
*mushaira* poetry recital (H/U)  
*naimatkhana* larder, or literally "a chamber of bounty" (U)  
*Nizam-i-Mustafa* community of the faithful; a political slogan used in the 1980s in Pakistan to refer to a "return" to the original ideas of the Muslim community (A)  
*pan* Indian type of chewing tobacco, wrapped up in betel leaves and flavoured with spices (H/U)  
*pir* Sufi spiritual leader (U)  
*pardah* lit. curtain; the spatial seclusion of women from the public sphere, or inside private houses, from the sight of unrelated men. A relational and situational concept. Often the key idea is to define from whom *pardah* should be observed, not to strictly confine women indoors in all situations. (P/U)  
*pardahnashin* a woman observing *pardah* (U)  
*Quaid-i-Azam* The Great Leader, honorary title for Mohammed Ali Jinnah (U)  
*Quraysh* the tribe of Mecca, presumed descendants of the Prophet's early followers (A)  
*raj* rule, special reference to the British colonial administration (H/U)  
*Ramzan* local variant of the Arabic word *Ramadan*, the month of fasting (U)  
*rawaji pardah* customary, local seclusion of women (U)  
*roti, kapra aur makaan* "bread, clothing and shelter"; populist slogan of the PPP (U)  
*sahib* a colonial Indian term of address for European men (H/U)  
*sati* widow-burning (H/U/B)  
*Sayyid* the presumed descendants of the Prophet through his daughter Fatima and Ali Ibn Abi Talib (A)  
*sehri* pre-dawn meal during *Ramzan* (A)  
*shaheed* lit. witness, pl. *shuhada*, a martyr, first of all the one who dies fighting, baring witness to the faith (A)  
*shalwar kameez* an outfit consisting of a long shirt and loose pants, and a *dupatta* for women; also known as the "Punjabi dress" (U)

- shami kebab* spicy mutton and chickpea patties baked in the *tandoori* oven (U)
- shari purdah* Muslim practise of seclusion of women according to the Prophet's advice about the falling of the curtain over Medina (U)
- shari'a* noun from the root verb *shara'a* "to introduce", "to enact", "to prescribe". Revealed, canonical law of Islam as put forth in the Qur'an and the Sunna and elaborated in the analytical principles of different schools of law. (A)
- shurafa* nobility, singular form *sharif*. Descendants of the Prophet and the tribe of Mecca (Sayyid and Quraysh families). In Muslim South Asia the term also refers more generally to "respectable" classes or families, denoting a major class division (A)
- smrtikatha* memoirs (B)
- swaraj* autonomy, self-rule (H/U)
- takhat* seat of God, in Muslim Indian houses a traditional type of seating (U)
- tazkira* biography, commemorative literature of saints and martyrs (A)
- ulema* religious scholars (A)
- umma* community of believers, often refers to the whole Muslim world (A)
- 'umra* minor pilgrimage to Mecca which can be performed at any time of the year (A)
- zenana* women's space in a private house, the space for everyday family life (U/ B)
- zindabad* "long live" (H/U)

## APPENDIX 2

### Map of South Asia

