

INTRODUCTION

*To Rohith Verma.
You will always remind us of the accident of birth.*

Last year I volunteered to commission a special issue of RCEI on British India's Partition and its effects in literature, culture, language and the other fields in the scope of the journal. I invited colleagues to contribute and published a call for papers to complete a project that I had expected would include seminal or ovular texts on Sir Salman Rushdie, Sir V.S. Naipaul etc. I wondered if someone ventured to write on Sunny Leone's career as a cultural palimpsest. Well, I was the first disappointed at all that.

Little did I know then of the timely but ominous process that would develop in the following months. While manuscripts were arriving and messages exchanged, events took place that turned compiling this number into a personal experience for me. I managed to understand Partition not necessarily by reading more on the communal bloodbath in South Asia in the second half of the 1940s. Day after day, week after week, an eerie atmosphere was settling—and continues to at the moment of writing— in Spain on account of belonging, identity, nation, state, and other items on the semantic field of the *motherland*. An uncommitted teenager in the 1970s, I barely have any significant (much less traumatic) memory of the last years of Generalissimo Franco's regime. I used to feel happy to belong to the first generation ever of Spaniards spared from scarcity or war. However, the *procés* towards independence of Catalonia, supported by over a half of the population in that region, conjured the ghosts we all thought had banished from Spain's collective imaginary. Division has cut across different layers: among Catalans themselves, but most prominently between (those who assume to exclusively represent the vindications of) Catalonia and (those who steal the voice of) Spain. Happily, communal skirmishes seem to go no further than partisans displaying separatist *estelades* on their balconies in Barcelona while their antagonists in Madrid, Seville, Salamanca or Tenerife, show off the official Spanish flag. Up to now, the caption "hijos de pu... igdemont" I recently read on a T shirt a middle-aged man wore is the closest war cry that could poorly stand to "Qabristan ya Pakistan!" Luckily.

But this experience has managed I curate my commissioned issue with less exotic, academic, eyes. It remains for the reader to assess if I succeeded too in taming my Orientalist, initial prospect of an issue on "India at 70."



I wish to thank all contributors for their generosity and their confidence in this project. And I appreciate them too, for allowing me to think about Partition as a process (beyond the *procés*) more than an historical event. As a student trained in the erstwhile old-school Philology, I appreciate William Gould's study on the political implications of the debate on Hindi and Urdu to be the hegemonic language in the region; the controversy eventually led them to be the official language of either India or Pakistan (including the Eastern part!). One of the individuals responsible for this linguistic anomaly was Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the *Quaid*, father of a Pakistan he would not be able to recognise today (the same way Gandhiji would ponder current India as "an interesting idea.") In his article on Jinnah, Faisal Devji sheds light on questions of sovereignty based on representation beyond "belonging to the land," a prescient idea on what would later be a cultural battlefield. Jinnah understandably aimed to liberate his culture from the Hindu Raj. The development failed sometime later as Pakistan became a piece in the Great Game of the postwar. Western powers turned Muslim Zion into the talibanised, failed but nuclear-capable state they now malign —and Jinnah most certainly abjured. As Maurice O'Connor has it, however, the intrusion to spark communal hatred was being politically exploited in the destruction of Bengali nationalism by colonial authorities since early in the twentieth century.

When the blood caused by Partition soaked and dried up, "India" and "Pakistan" commenced to be gathered as texts to discuss in many fields in and outside Academia. In fact, Canary Islanders came to terms with multiculturalism long before the term was coined, thanks to the small, almost hermetic community of Hindus who settled here as a consequence of their flight from their native Sindh. Bhavani's article on the Sindhi diaspora is most welcome in this issue, as she offers clues about their construction of an ideal lost land. Globalisation, and neoliberalism via online shopping has diminished the economic clout of the Hindu community, natural-born merchants who in past decades had managed to hold an oligopoly on electronics trade in a duty-free territory. As economic conditions have changed and social mobility has forced arrogant "Indios" to reluctantly reach out to indolent "Canarios," the old sanitized Sindh of exiled traders is giving way to a more cosmopolitan placeness that their liberal professional grandchildren aspire to inhabit.

It goes without saying of the flood of cultural artifacts the Partition *has been creating*. Italics are intended, because rewriting will not end in the foreseeable future. Comparisons with the Spanish Civil War are daring —and India wins. While the reconstructions of our latest national trauma were stemmed in until the late 1970s (excluding the Spanish intelligentsia in the diaspora), India began to rewrite its birth in the wake of the atrocities that led to it. The poetry of the Partition that Raychaudhuri discusses witnesses the immediacy of the events in the minds of the writers; much the same can be said of Ritwik Ghatak's treatment of the refugees in his films, as Diamond Oberoi Vahali contends in her contribution —a topic that invites reflecting on one of the most glaring outrages in our own times. By 1947 British India was a battlefield with no well-delimited trenches where the enemy was among yesterday's beloved neighbours. It was not unusual thus, in societies structured on warped patriarchal affirmation, that all women and men from the minority



on the wrong side of the border (or even the town and the village) were legitimate targets. Not the only land, the bodies became war bounty too. This we can learn from Bodh Prakash's essay on the Muslims as Others in their own country, and from Escobedo's and Mookerjea-Leonard's respective articles on rape as an instrument of cultural annihilation. Arundhati Roy described the much later riot that took place in Gujarat in 2002, "how they had folded the men and unfolded the women. And how eventually they had pulled them apart limb from limb and set them on fire." This quotation from *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* directs me to Nalini Iyer's piece on the narrative strategy that Roy followed to describe the fragmented puzzle that is today's India. These fragments seem to be kept together by the nationalist discourse against archenemy Pakistan, by proxy (Kashmir, Balochistan) or in direct confrontation (nuclear deterrence, intelligence services covering terror attacks on either side of the Line of Control, etc). The military confrontations of 1965, 1971, 1999 seem to be hot exceptions in the low-intensity war that Indian nationalism played against its nemesis on Bollywood films, as Vinay Lal contends. The "Gujarat development model" that led Narendra Modi to victory in the elections in 2014, has been for other contributors in this issue an ominous reminder of the changes operating in India, an emerging, modern economy with records of inequality and brimming on another communal Armageddon. How the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party is managing to have leverage on more sectors of the state everyday via Hindutva and its affiliates (or vice versa) is the arena of the comments by Baghwah Josh (the rise of Hindutva), Sucheta Mahajan (doctoring the historiography of India) and Tanika Sarkar (legitimizing fascistic moods that imperil Indian democracy).

However, far from being a dystopia established by a saffron plutocracy, India struggles to keep alive the project of peoples who keep their religious-ethnic affiliation in private for the common good. While "cow vigilantes" under bovine protection punish people who consume beef, and paramilitary groups drill their khaki hatred filmmakers and writers, illiterate people from rural areas, and working poor from the slums INSIDE India struggle to keep the nation holding the record of the country from the global South where seemingly the military have always waived their power to the body politic (thanks to Vinay Lal for this point) no matter how dysfunctional the latter may be. In 2016 students protesting at JNU University managed to turn Bollywood songs into protest anthems, as Rosinka Chauduri points out. It was and continues to be a signal of resistance to classist, casteist and extremely sexist policies condoned by the Modi regime. "Dancing in the Street" is long relegated as a footnote in the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s in America, and "Si yo tuviera una escoba" is a piece of anti-Franco memorabilia. But "Mere kesh ki dharti" is kept well alive since its release in 1967 —incidentally the same as Lluís Llach's "L'estaca."



