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Literary Testimonies of War and Conflict of Twentieth-Century British and Pakistani Women Writers

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Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of “Doctor in de Letterkunde”
Acknowledgments

Many people need to be thanked for the successful completion of this dissertation. First and foremost, I am grateful to my supervisor, Elke D’hoker, for her kindness, support and guidance which have kept me motivated throughout the past four years. Her consistent feedback has contributed immensely to the writing process of this dissertation. I am also thankful for the constructive comments by the members of the doctoral committee, Ortwin de Graef and Kate McLoughlin. I have been fortunate as well to be part of the MDRN research group where I attended some fascinating lectures on various subjects related to modernism. The feedback from the members of MDRN about my research has been particularly helpful in bringing this dissertation to a good end. Many friends and colleagues have contributed in making my work experience in Belgium a beautiful and memorable phase of my life. I thank Emma and Matthias who offered their valuable time and showed me different aspects of Belgian culture. I am also grateful for the joyful company and support of Anasthasia, Phyllis, Aude, Bieke, Fatima, Hira, Lena, Yasir. A very special thanks to colleague and fellow office-mate Tom Chadwick for proofreading this dissertation. Back in Lahore, my friends Ammarah, Shehreen, Rizwana and Qasim ensured me that what is out of sight need not always be out of mind. Of course, I thank my four brothers, my sisters-in-law and their children for the support and love while I was abroad. I am also grateful to Isaak’s family, particularly Jacque and Marleen, who provided me a family here in Belgium.

More than anything else, my mother’s unconditional love and faith in me has been a strong foundation not just in my PhD but in my entire life. This PhD is first and foremost a dedication to her, as well as in loving memory of my father. Finally, while being away from home, I found home not in a place, but in the love and kindness of my beloved partner, Isaak. I truly appreciate your patience, encouragement and continuing support throughout my writing process. With your steadfastness to stand by me through thick and thin, I am encouraged to look forward to a joyful future together.
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Introduction

I may, if I am lucky, tap the deep pathos that pertains to all authentic art because of the breach between its eternal values and the sufferings of a muddled world.¹

This dissertation studies some of the literary responses of British and Pakistani women writers to war as examples of literary testimony. Bearing witness to some of the major conflicts of the twentieth century, these literary texts evoke the tensions between a witness’ experiences and the literary techniques to render these experiences into narration. These tensions, which accompany any attempt to represent subjective experiences within a historical context, inform both the content and the style of these narratives. As I will elaborate further in the sections below, this dissertation is situated at the crossroads of theories about the role of testimony and critical debates about gender and literature of war and conflict. Against this critical background, I will analyse eight literary texts by women writers, which respond to the Great War, the Second World War, Indian Partition, and Pakistani conflicts, and are written between 1918 and 2010. These texts are Rebecca West’s *The Return of the Soldier* (1918) and Vera Brittain’s *Testament of Youth* (1933), with regard to WWI; Elizabeth Bowen’s *The Heat of the Day* (1948) and Naomi Mitchison’s *Among You Taking Notes* (1985), with regard to WWII; Mumtaz Shahnawaz’s *The Heart Divided* (1957) and Bapsi Sidhwa’s *Cracking India* (1988), with regard to the Partition of India; Sara Suleri’s *Meatless Days* (1989) and Fatima Bhutto’s *Songs of Blood and Sword* (2010) with regard to regional conflicts in Pakistan since Partition.

I have chosen these texts since all the selected writers were themselves witnesses of the historical events they subsequently describe in their literary texts. The experiences of the witnesses in these texts and the views on war and conflict reflected in the narratives are informed by the authors’ gendered perspective. Both the British and the Pakistani women writers selected for this study write in English and participate in a shared literary tradition. In analysing their texts, I will seek to answer such questions as: how do these narratives represent the experiences of a witness? How does the use of different literary techniques facilitate the representation of a witness in these narratives? How does the testimonial dimension of these

texts problematize the acts and modes of storytelling? To what extent do the texts challenge the traditional representations of war and conflict in terms of ideology, chronology and perspective? How does the gender of the author and/or narrator determine the representation of war in these texts?

Since in all eight case studies, a war or conflict is witnessed by and presented through a female perspective, I will analyse how the testimonies are shaped by gendered perspectives and experiences. In addition, the characters and narrators are of course also circumscribed by social contexts determined by race, religion, class, and ideology. Far from rendering their testimonies unreliable or false, these specific contextual frames make their narratives into unique representations of war and conflict. At the same time, bringing these different testimonies together in my dissertation will allow me to highlight shared contexts and trace common textual characteristics in their works. In this way, this study will situate British and Pakistani Anglophone literatures of war and conflict within a larger framework of witness and testimony in order to show how both literatures share the same tradition of dissent and resistance in the context of violence. My close textual analyses focus on three dimensions: the representation of the experiences of a witness, the literary techniques used to evoke the acts of witnessing, and the contextualisation of these acts of witnessing within different contexts. By looking at these three different dimensions of literary testimony, I will show, first, that the selected texts, despite their temporal and geographical differences, show certain common concerns and, second, that the framework of testimony can usefully be expanded from the historical contexts of the Holocaust, the Latin American testimonio, and the atomic bombings in which it has predominantly been used, to other contexts of war and violence.

Thus, I define literary testimony as a narrative which bears witness to a historical event through the experience of a character or the perspective of a narrator. Because the literary and the historical are intertwined, a literary testimony represents the tensions between the historical events that are represented and the literary means of representation. Indeed, as this dissertation hopes to show, these literary texts highlight issues of authority, authenticity, credibility, and literary influence as their protagonists and first-person narrators bear witness to war and conflict. Furthermore, I will analyse how acts of witnessing often necessitate the use of literary experimentation when disruptive experiences defy the traditional forms of storytelling and narration.

This dissertation is divided into four chapters. Each chapter deals with the literary representations of one violent and disruptive historical event by two female authors. In all the chapters, I focus on the narrator or characters engaged in the act of witnessing through memories and other sources. In order to understand the complexity of their voices, the chapters pay due attention to different textual strategies such as metafictionality, intertextuality, non-linear narration, and polyvocality used either by the characters and narrators or employed within the narrative. In line with these textual strategies, the contextual frameworks are also highlighted such as gender, class, socio-political alignments, literary traditions, publication-process, all of which come to circumscribe their testimonies. Introducing the selected texts, each chapter provides a brief historical overview of the events of war and conflict that are
represented in the texts. In addition, I give a brief survey of other literary responses to these historical events, in particular in fiction. The main objective of these brief overviews is to contextualize the selected works within the historical and literary milieu in which they were produced.

In chapter one, I will analyse Rebecca West’s *The Return of the Soldier* and Vera Brittain’s *Testament of Youth* since both present female witnesses whose gendered experiences of the Great War come to shape their testimonies. Jenny, the first-person narrator in the novel, and Brittain, the first-person authorial narrator in the memoir, seek to construct authentic narratives about their experiences of the Great War by mediating between past and present, between their own memories and the information received by other sources. The second chapter will analyse Elizabeth Bowen’s *The Heat of the Day* and Naomi Mitchison’s *Among You Taking Notes*, showing how Stella, the protagonist, and Mitchison, as the narrator in her diary, testify about their experience within the context of the Second World War. Bowen’s self-reflexive treatment of testimony and Mitchison’s merging of her concerns as a mother and a writer within the narrative of the diary both show how the war affects the individual lives. Analysing Mumtaz Shahnawaz’s *The Heart Divided* and Bapsi Sidhwa’s *Cracking India*, the focus of my third chapter will be to see how the female witnesses of Partition challenge traditional narratives of Indian Independence. While presenting the events of Partition through the eyes of marginalized female voices, both narratives also construct a postcolonial literary identity which, on the one hand, ties in with the existing Anglophone literary tradition and, on the other hand, foregrounds its own uniqueness. Finally, in my last chapter, I will show how Sara Suleri’s *Meatless Days* and Fatima Bhutto’s *Songs of Blood and Sword* both present postcolonial Pakistan through the perspective of second-generation witnesses. The postmemory witnessing in these texts emphasises the necessity of remembering through intergenerational testimony. In what follows, I will introduce the different critical understandings of trauma, testimony and literary testimony which have shaped my analyses of the selected corpus.
1. Critical Debates on Testimony in Literature

1.1 Testimony and the Unrepresentable

In Holocaust studies, the discussion about testimony has predominantly focussed on the issues of its unrepresentability. Different scholars attribute this unrepresentability to the nature of violence as it unfolded in the mass-scale and industrial killing during the Holocaust and the subsequent epistemological gap between the witness and the larger audience. In the struggle to represent the “inhuman” and “intolerable” encounter with violence, a witness is unable to express the experience in “any customary terms”. The extent and magnitude of the violence experienced by the survivor, who testifies through literature, put pressure on the traditional means of fictionalization and pushed the witness to find new means of representation. Indeed, the significance of a testimonial narrative lies precisely in the way in which a witness struggles to represent the experience through the available literary means. In his discussion of diaries and memoirs of the Holocaust as “literature of testimony”, James E. Young argues that “even if narrative cannot document events, or constitute perfect factuality, it can document the actuality of the writer and the text”. As the “narrative, structure and style” provide a commentary on “the writing act itself”, they give an insight into the mental processes through which a witness testifies about a violent event. Young’s analysis is helpful since it goes beyond mere factuality by highlighting the significance of the narrative rendition of testimony. This does not mean, however, that factuality becomes redundant. After all, Young describes a witness as a scribe whose main task is “to transcribe what was heard and seen” and whose testimony is laden “with an ontological authority that verifies both the authenticity and – by extension – the facticity of his record”.

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6 Young, “Interpreting Literary Testimony”, 420.

7 Young, “Interpreting Literary Testimony”, 409-10.
Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub elaborate on the paradox in witnessing: on the one hand, a witness bears “the solitude of a responsibility”, on the other hand, by choosing to speak to others about an experience, a witness “transgress[es] the confines of that isolated stance”. In the process of reading Holocaust testimony either in literary (Felman) or psychoanalytic terms (Laub), both scholars envisage a “crisis” that occurs between the witness and the witness of that witness, i.e., the listener, reader or larger audience. When shown the videotapes of Holocaust survivors, Felman notes that the graduate students at Yale became “inarticulate and speechless” in turn. This experience of inarticulacy is not limited to students. As Laub notes, the psychiatrist, while conducting interviews with the Holocaust survivors, is faced with a similar dilemma. Indeed, the crisis between the witness and the listener lies in the latter’s encounter with an ungraspable traumatic past. Laub explains: “[i]n so far as they remind us of a horrible, traumatic past, in so far as they bear witness to our own historical disfiguration […] survivors frighten us”. Despite the crisis in transferring a survivor’s account to the listener, Laub does mention that the survivor is at least able to find a listener inside the survivor’s self. In this way, testimony becomes “the process by which the narrator (the survivor) reclaims his position as a witness: reconstitutes the internal ‘thou,’ and thus the possibility of a witness or a listener inside himself”.

1.2 Different Approaches to Testimony and Trauma

The emphasis on the limits of representation of testimony and the crises of witnessing on the part of different scholars can be understood by looking broadly at the Anglo-European approach to trauma. A dominant view within Anglo-European scholarship is the belief that “witness/survivors are by definition traumatized by their experience” and that the effects of trauma in the broken, incoherent nature of their testimonies function as an “authenticating sign for their testimony”. Indeed, for Ana Douglass and Thomas A. Vogler the notion that “authority and authenticity are grounded in traumatic stories has become so pervasive that all Western culture can now be seen as a post-traumatic narrative”, an expression which is an equivalent of the post-traumatic stress disorder within a traumatic body, hence, the implication of the parallelism of body and sign. Psychiatric terms like shellshock, or trauma imply that the encounter with violent event has made the witness mute or inarticulate. Indeed, looking at

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the British literature of the two world wars, one is struck by two dominant traits: the legitimacy of writing about war through first-hand experiences and the inability or disability to represent these experiences on behalf of the witness.\(^{14}\)

Gianni Vattimo argues how the figure of the witness burdened with this notion of inability to speak makes the very idea of testimony “anachronistic”.\(^{15}\) He claims that “[t]he notion of testimony goes ‘out of date’ as a result of the inversion of the traditional hierarchy of the elements of the individual psyche”. Through the “inversion” of the self as unconscious, the notion of the subject has undergone an “actual destruction at the hands of analytical psychology in our own century”.\(^{16}\) At the level of experience, the subject who is represented as unconscious can no longer be held responsible. As a result, the witness as experiencing self is “reduced to the level of pure symptom”. The damage here is that “[f]ar from being the ultimate and active centre of interpretation, [the witness] turns into an object for subsequent interpretations”.\(^{17}\) For Michal Givoni, poststructuralists’ understanding of “witnessing and testimony as a metonym for the (deconstructed) subject” has drawn attention away from the role of witnesses “as a particular mode of political subjectivation and public action” to “an archetype of moral action”.\(^{18}\) At the level of literary representation, the subject who testifies about an event is also stripped of a certain authority if the level of symptomatic resemblance between experience and its literary manifestation is that what qualifies the witness’ testimony. The understanding of experience as traumatic is not a problem in itself; rather, the problem occurs when the authenticity of testimony and consequently of testimonial literature is determined through the symptomatic disabilities of trauma.\(^{19}\)

In contrast to this Anglo-European approach to trauma and witnessing, Douglass and Vogler point to an alternative approach. They argue that “the assumption of a coherent ego and the reliability of language and the narrative trope are more prevalent in the Latin American *testimonio* and the Japanese *hibakusha* narratives”.\(^{20}\) Indeed, the analyses of alternative testimonies such as the ones in Latin America and in Japan have enlarged the scope of the

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\(^{14}\) I have elaborated on these aspects in detail in the literary overviews of chapters one and two. However, for a brief reference, see: Margaret Higonnet, “Authenticity and Art in Trauma Narratives of World War I”, *Modernism/modernity* 9, no. 1 (2002): 91-107; Phyllis Lassner, *British Women Writers of World War II: Battlegrounds of their Own* (London: Macmillan Press, 1998). Both authors emphasize how the literature of the two world wars and its critical understanding has been dominated by the Anglo-European male experiences of the war.


\(^{16}\) Vattimo, *The Adventure of Difference*, 47.

\(^{17}\) Vattimo, *The Adventure of Difference*, 46.


\(^{19}\) Up until 1980s, the critical canon of literature of war and conflict has been dominated by this discourse whereby the Anglo-European white male’s experiences of war came to represent the authentic narratives of war. See: Dorothy Goldman *Women and World War 1: The Written Response* (London: Macmillan, 1993); Lassner, *British Women Writers of World War II*.

investigation of testimony beyond that of Holocaust literature. Nonetheless, it is important to say that the assumption of “a coherent ego” in a witness might face its own challenges. To explain this point, I borrow Lisa Yoneyama’s usage of three Japanese terms to describe the witnesses of the atomic bombings: *hibakusha*, *shogensha*, and *kataribe*. The term *hibakusha*, “those subjected to the bomb and/or radiation”, was used during the early postwar years, when the survivors of the atomic bombings on Hiroshima and Nagasaki were “subjected to the truth paradigms within which they spoke and produced the narrators of nuclear victimization”. Later on, and in contrast to the idea of *hibakusha*, the *shogen katsudo*, “the testimonial practices of 1980s”, have emphasized the self-conscious engagement of the surviving *shogensha* (witnesses) as *kataribe* (storytellers). In what Yoneyama calls, the “politics of naming”, from *hibakusha* to *kataribe*, a witness’ self-conscious engagement with past experiences through different narrative tools, and the awareness of the gaps between witness and audience, play an important role in the shaping of their “subjecthood”. The process of “[n]arrating one's own experiences of surviving [...] whether in speech, in writing, or in pictorial forms” constitutes one’s subjecthood. This process denies a simplistic notion of a coherent ego which can merely represent what has been experienced.

In other words, the reduction of one’s testimony, whether to symptoms of trauma (cf. Holocaust testimonies) or the factuality of events (cf. the first postwar testimonies of the atomic bombs) serves to equate the experience with representation. The process through which a narrative represents the limits of witnessing and the unrepresentability of certain experiences, is the process which leads from catastrophe to creation, from disability to ability, transforming a victim into a coherent storyteller. During the 1990s, the “return of the represented” has enabled discussions to understand the myriad forms in which a witness constructs his or her identity or subjectivity within a text without tarnishing the testimonial value of the narrative.

### 1.3 The Return of the Real

Due to the poststructuralists’ emphasis on the text as the “special object” and the claim that there is “nothing outside the text”, the event, the real or the “absent signified” remains “underground”. A witness is considered to testify to a traumatic event either through the symptomatic relation between body and language or through the inability to testify, i.e., through

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22 Yoneyama, *Hiroshima Traces*, 86.
incoherence or silence. As a result, the discourse about testimony becomes “anachronistic” or “out of date”. By paying attention to “the return of the repressed”, “the return of the real”, “the return of the represented”, or the “actual return of the voice”, scholars have challenged the poststructuralists’ assumptions about the decline of the subject and the gap between an event and its representation. For example, analysing Antonio Gramsci’s Letter’s from Prison (1947), Massimo Lollini claims that two kinds of subjectivities can be traced in Gramsci’s letters: a Marxist collective identity and a personal humanist identity. This division of subjectivities occurs due to the paradoxical situation that a witness encounters in giving testimony: a witness “need to be faithful to a consistent identity” and a simultaneous distancing from any fixed identity due to the traumatic event. This paradoxical condition results in “the ever-changing nature of the self” which does not hinder “the necessary attempt at constructing a subject”. In contrast to Jacques Derrida’s claim that a witness must be “singular” and “exemplary”, a witness emerges as a fluid, and heterogeneous subject constituting the “return of the repressed”. In parallel, Douglass and Vogler point how the gap between the sign and the signified is reconciled through this recent “return of the represented”. They consider that a witness’ testimony refers to an event (absent signified) which cannot be fully grasped within a narrative (sign). As a result, “the undecidable text” and “the ontological status of the traumatic event as an absolute signified” reconcile as mutually compulsory elements for a testimony.

In the last two decades, the events of 9/11, the global War on Terror, and the drone warfare in so-called third-world countries have reemphasized the role of testimony in literature. From an excessive focus on the witness and the issues of representing testimony, scholars have emphasized the role of the witness in the reception of a testimony. Meanwhile, critical debates have expanded to other dimensions of witnessing, which were formerly underrepresented, such as the role of transmitting memories or experiences of violent events from first to second (and even third) generation(s) and the role of different media in transmitting testimonies, for instance, through print, audio and visual media. Concerning the transmission of memories and experiences from one generation to another, which has also been termed “postmemory”, it

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28 Vattimo, “The Decline of the Subject”, 40, 47.
34 Douglass and Vogler, “Introduction”, 5.
has been posited that, in representing the past interwoven in their own memories and memories of their parents, the second and third generation accounts present “a structure of inter- and transgenerational return of traumatic knowledge and embodied experience”.36 The accounts of second- and third-generation witnesses embody the way in which the traumatic memories of the different generations coalesce. At the same time, they also represent the “lacunae”37 of silence, incomplete information, vague memories exchanged between the two generations thus highlighting the “partial and incomplete” nature of these testimonies.38 In doing so, the narratives represent “the desire of the hidden traumas to forcefully resist articulation”, on the one hand, and the mediation of this trauma across time and space by a different generation, on the other hand.

In terms of the transmission of print, audio and visual accounts of war and conflict, Stevan Weine, Michael G. Levine and Jennifer R. Ballengee discuss three kinds of witnesses and their significance in the understanding of testimony: the witness of the witness as a psychiatrist, a reader and a viewer. Weine discusses the psychoanalyst as the witness to a witness who must initiate a multidisciplinary approach to testimony by involving humanities as well as the clinical and social sciences together. In order to understand the testimonies of traumatized people, Weine argues, one must treat testimony as a “story”.39 Focussing on the Holocaust survivors and their children, Levine, for his part, discusses “the witness to the witness” as the reader of the testimonial narratives.40 Testimonial narratives are in search of “an addressable you”.41 The witness of these testimonial narratives therefore should cultivate “a more analytically informed mode of listening”, and more significantly “a way of assuming co-responsibility for the act of bearing witness”.42

Ballengee discusses how the transmission of news, be it print, audio or visual media, can act as a means to make the reader or the listener a spectator to torture. She maintains that “the audience, or the witness, is the key element in the ‘successful’ practice of torture in its political province”. She argues that “the witness is complicit in the production of meaning that torture communicates”.43 Through an analysis of the literary representations of the tortured body,
Ballengee suggests that the “nonlinguistic message” of torture might evoke “a particular physical, intellectual, or emotional response in its readers or audience”. These discussions on the role of the witness of the witness have been fruitful to emphasize the role of the second and third generation witnesses, the addressee, the reader, and the viewer in the reception of testimony. In turn, testimonial literature becomes a means to represent the past, to re-evaluate the present and to envisage a better future by remembering the past and re-evaluating the present. In what follows, I will first provide a brief commentary on the usage of different terms in relation to literary testimonies. Secondly, I will define the term literary testimony as it will be central to my own textual analyses.

2. Defining Literary Testimony

A variety of terms have been used by scholars to discuss the role of testimony in literature, such as literature of testimony, witness literature, testimonial literature and literary testimony. All of these terms are used to pinpoint certain characteristics that embody testimony in literature. Often, these characteristics add to one another, hence, the different terms are used interchangeably. Despite different nuances, these terms emphasize a witness’ need to narrate his or her experiences because of the violent nature of an event. Whether as a form of protest against violence, as “a particular claim to truth” and “the process that leads from catastrophe to creativity”, or due to “the urgency of a situation”, all these terms demonstrate the active resistance of a witness to being silenced by violence. Yet, in order to narrate, the witness

45 Elie Wiesel views literature of testimony “as a way to correct injustices”. The writers of the Holocaust “wrote their tales so as to protest against what was done to their friends, to their families, to their own childhood and to their people”. See: Wiesel, Dimensions of the Holocaust, 8.
struggles to find the language and the literary tools to represent his or her experiences.\textsuperscript{48} This particular tension between experience of the witness and its literary representation has led Peter Englund to call witness literature a “mongrel form of literature”, since “the genre is a difficult one, both in form and function”. Indeed, witness literature can neither be understood as “a source nor as literature”, since “[t]he requirements of veracity distort literary form while the literary form distorts the testimony”.\textsuperscript{49}

While Englund seems to focus on the question of veracity and form while defining the genre of witness literature, Maia Saj Schmidt focuses on the persuasive aspect of literary testimony: it is “a genre of persuasion” which “can be characterized rhetorically by its calls to action and its tones of conviction”.\textsuperscript{50} Despite the valid insights concerning the issue of veracity, the challenge of form, and the persuasive aspect of testimony in literature, in this dissertation, I will define literary testimony not as a genre, but rather as a discursive framework which may incorporate multiple genres and perhaps challenge genre boundaries.\textsuperscript{51} In general, whether a “literary reworking of true testimonies” or an “imagined representation of testimonies that do not actually exist”, the text transforms into a literary testimony which “offer[s] access to the human experience of traumas of political violence that are otherwise inaccessible”.\textsuperscript{52} Consequently, “the language, tropes, and selected details of their texts ultimately shape our understanding of events afterwards”.\textsuperscript{53} The different approaches and terminologies mentioned above demonstrate the different aspects of the role of testimony in literature, which are important for my reading of the literary texts in the subsequent chapters. To be more precise, the first chapter will deal with the issues of unrepresentability of trauma and the authenticity of a testimonial narrative. The second chapter will focus on a witness’ position as singular and exemplary, on the one hand, and heterogeneous and fluid, on the other. The third chapter on Partition will consider the question of a witness’ subjecthood. In the final chapter, the concept of postmemory will be used to discuss the regional conflicts in Pakistan since Partition.

Apart from these specific focal points, other aspects of testimony will crop up in my readings in all chapters. Firstly, I will analyse how the characters and narrators testify to certain historical

\textsuperscript{48} See: Wiesel, “The Holocaust as Literary Inspiration”, 9, where he mentions that “[t]his time, we wrote not with words but against words”; Horace Engdahl, “Philomela’s Tongue: Introductory Remarks on Witness Literature”, \textit{Witness Literature: Proceedings of the Nobel Centennial Symposium}, ed. H. Engdahl (Toh Tuck Link: World Scientific Publishing, 2002), 7, where he mentions that witness literature acts as “anti-literature: the struggle for literature’s point zero, the uncoloured word, the speech of the truthful witness”.


\textsuperscript{51} Cf. Maria Delaperrière, “Testimony as a Literary Problem”, trans. Przel. Marta Skotnicka, \textit{Teksty Drugie: The Institute of Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences} 2, Special Issue (2014): 53-4, where she mentions that the literariness of literary testimonies undermines “the traditional understanding of literariness often identified with novel fiction”.

\textsuperscript{52} Weine, \textit{Testimony after Catastrophe}, 24.

\textsuperscript{53} Young, “Interpreting Literary Testimony”, 407.
events and in doing so, how they construct their authenticity or identity. Secondly, I will focus on the way different literary techniques heighten the function of testimony in these narratives. Thirdly, I will investigate how the acts of witnessing are embedded within various contexts. For the purposes of this dissertation, I define literary testimony as a narrative that bears witness to a historical event through the experience of a character or the tale of a narrator. As will become clear throughout the different chapters, this intertwining of the personal, the historical, and the literary leads to certain tensions in testimonial literature: for instance, between the personal experience and the historical accounts, between the desire for objectivity and the subjective perspective, and between the testimonial impulse and the demands of literariness. These different aspects of literary testimony will be highlighted in the case studies which are presented in this dissertation. Together, these case studies suggest that, as literary testimonies, the selected texts present some similarities in terms of content and form. Content wise, all of the literary testimonies present the uncertainties, vulnerabilities and limitations faced by a witness in the process of testifying. In terms of form, these testimonies all have a certain degree of self-reflexivity with regard to their status as literary texts, within a specific literary tradition.

3. Chapter Summary

In the first chapter I will demonstrate how Jenny, the first-person narrator of *The Return of the Soldier*, and Brittain, the first-person authorial narrator of *Testament of Youth*, represent their witnessing of the Great War and its impact on their perception of life. I will show that both the narrators present the authenticity of their war tale by mediating between their memories, the accounts of other witnesses and information received from other sources. In doing so, this chapter will prove how the disruption of the Great War impacts the narrative styles of West’s novel and Brittain’s memoir whereby the former is wrenched between the romantic and modernist registers and the latter between the Victorian and the modernist modes. In the second chapter, I will analyse how Stella, as the main protagonist in Bowen’s *The Heat of the Day*, and Mitchison, in her diary *Among You Taking Notes*, are both constructed in these texts as witnesses in all their vulnerability, uncertainty and anxiety. By paying attention to the use of metafictionality and intertextuality in both the texts respectively, this chapter will simultaneously show how *The Heat of the Day* and *Among You Taking Notes* defy the traditional expectations of the form in which they are written. As for the third chapter, I will focus on the female perspectives in Shahnawaz’s *The Heart Divided* and Sidhwa’s *Cracking India* and will demonstrate how their narratives ultimately come to challenge the mainstream historical and political representation of the events of Indian Independence. In doing so, this chapter will prove how the multiple realities of a larger historical event shape the pluralistic, subjective truths which operate beyond factual representation. Along with this, I will elaborate how these narratives, as postcolonial literary responses of Partition, balance between the need to invent a
new literary register in postcolonial Pakistan, on the one hand, and align with the existing Anglophone literary tradition, on the other. The final chapter will demonstrate how Suleri’s *Meatless Days* and Bhutto’s *Songs of Blood and Sword* are to be considered postmemory witness-accounts of ethno-linguistic conflicts within Pakistan since Partition. In general, I will demonstrate how the narrators of both these memoirs create narratives about contemporary Pakistan based on their own experiences and those of their parents.
Chapter 1

Authenticity in *The Return of the Soldier* and *Testament of Youth*

In this chapter, I will analyse how the narrators of *The Return of the Soldier* (1918) and *Testament of Youth* (1933), present their acts of witnessing of the events of the Great War and, in doing so, struggle to assert their authenticity and authority by the available literary means. I will also demonstrate how both the narratives incorporate a self-reflexive engagement with witnessing and testimony through the use of different literary techniques. In doing so, I will pay attention to the specific contextual conditions such as gender, class, and literary tradition which shape their witnessing and the way in which the narratives present the limits of their subjective voices while testifying about war. My discussion of authenticity in literary testimony is shaped by the framework of Lubomír Doležel, Jacob Golomb, and Margaret Higonnet. The framework of testimony and witnessing will help us to understand how both the texts also represent the difficulty of writing a war-tale from a female perspective. A witness is considered authoritative as he or she claims a “privileged knowledge” about an event.\(^1\) This authority is experiential and conditioned by circumstances beyond the immediate control of a witness. However, in providing testimony, a witness also asserts another form of authority: the authority of choosing to communicate the events through narrative. Giving testimony a witness does not merely assert authority, which comes from knowing something from the past, but rather, constructs an authenticity which “is not delivered to us by higher authorities”.\(^2\) This is especially true when “extreme situations and events […] serve as a magnifying lens through which it is easier to see the almost invisible details of authenticity and its inner pathos”.\(^3\) In order to construct

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1 Lubomír Doležel, “Truth and Authenticity in Narrative”, *Poetics Today* 1, no. 3, 18.
3 Golomb, *In Search of Authenticity*, 12.
authenticity, one has “to invent one’s own way and pattern of life”. This “way” and “pattern” is the way in which a witness reconstructs the past and assumes “the role of being the originator of” his or her self. At the level of personal experience, a witness has the authority to speak due to his or her unique experience or privileged knowledge of an event. At the level of literary representation, a witness asserts authenticity by the way he or she chooses to write the story. Both *The Return of the Soldier* and *Testament of Youth* represent the events of the Great War through a female perspective. In both narratives this perspective is presented by a female narrator – where West uses a fictional first-person narrator named Jenny, Brittain presents her wartime experiences through an authorial first-person narrator. To understand the way both the narratives claim authority and authenticity as testimonies, I pay attention to the retrospective narration, the nonlinearity of the narrative, its complex web of intertextuality, and the style of writing in both the texts.

1. A Brief Historical and Literary Overview

The end of the Victorian era with Queen Victoria’s demise in 1901 marked the beginning of a new era in British history, albeit shorter than its preceding one. The Edwardian era lasted until the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. Already at the beginning of his reign, Edward VII had to cope with the continual unrest and guerrilla warfare of the Boers in South Africa in what is known as the Second Boer War (1899-1902). The British Empire eventually succeeded in being victorious, leading to the incorporation of the South African Republic and the Orange Free State into British rule on the basis of the Treaty of Vereeniging; however, not without the loss of many troops, brutal repression, the mass displacement of people within British concentration camps, and a high economical cost. It was not until 1910 that the dominion of the Union of South Africa was fully established.

After the Boer War, Britain also realized that its idea of Splendid Isolation, to refuse any permanent political alliance, would no longer be tenable at a time when Germany, the United States, Russia, France and Japan were becoming more powerful players on the international

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5 Golomb, *In Search of Authenticity*, 3.
Indeed, during the reign of Edward, Britain signed agreements with Japan, France and Russia in what is known as the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, the Entente Cordiale, and the Anglo-Russian Convention. In general, all these agreements contained settlements concerning colonial expansion, political and military interests, be they in Africa, Central Asia, or East-Asia, but also in other areas as well. Since France and Russia had already established an alliance, Britain’s separate agreements with France and Russia gave rise to the Triple Entente: the allied forces of Britain, France and Russia who would soon, at the outbreak of the First World War, wage war against the central powers of Germany, Austria-Hungary, the Ottoman Empire and Bulgaria. The relative peace of the Edwardian era and its overlap with the Belle Époque across Europe would soon come to a radical end, due to the unseen effects of an industrialized, modern, all-encompassing warfare which surpassed any previous war in terms of economic and human costs. Indeed, the technological innovations within the war-industry had caused the invention of new weaponry and machines able to strike more effectively and on a larger scale, both on the offensive and on the defensive level. Soon, soldiers had to dig themselves within trenches and offensive victories only occurred at high human costs. Warfare was now all encompassing and took place on land, at sea, and in the air.

While these political developments were taking place, Britain was also undergoing socio-economic, political and technological changes during the Edwardian era. When the Liberals won the elections in 1906, they passed many reforms within the larger society, especially in the improvement of labour and the introduction of a People’s Budget: an increase of taxes on lands and incomes of the British wealthy in order to redistribute wealth among the larger population. There was an increase in the overall literacy of women and of middle-class women’s status at the home front. Even though British women would only be able to vote at the end of First World War in 1918, more and more women were entering new professions and many middle- and upper-class women were writing about their own lives and that of other women. Moreover, new professions emerged, coinciding with technological innovations, which allowed women to take up new roles. Nursing was one of the newly emerged professions.

9 Notably in the Franco-Russian Alliance, a military-political alliance established in 1894 as a counter-response to the Triple Alliance of Germany, Austria-Hungary and Italy. For more on this alliance, see the Harvard classic: William Leonard Langer, *The Franco-Russian Alliance, 1890-1894* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1929).
10 Veldeman, “Britain and Europe”, 44.
professions, especially during the First World War. By the beginning of the twentieth century, journalism and news-media also increased in popularity, but if, during the Edwardian era, they omitted the main political and international affairs within their reporting by focusing on sensational or grievous topics, they would soon be used as a means of propaganda during the Great War. When King Edward VII died in 1910, his son George V took over. Due to the minority government of the Liberals that emerged from the general election of 1910, George V was caught up with the demands of Conservatives and Unionists in the House of Lords, on the one hand, and the Liberals and Irish nationalists in the House of Commons, on the other hand. The political struggle between the different parties continued until the outbreak of the Great War.

In its industrial scale, geographical magnitude, and mass-scale logistics, the Great War was indeed the “first true world war”. It was also the first modern war to “demand full participation of both combatants and noncombatants”. For women, this war presented “new opportunities for education, employment, and national service”. As Nicola Beauman mentions, “[b]y 1918 there were over one and a quarter million more women working than had been in 1914”. The experiences of men and women both on home and battle front have been reflected in the myriad forms of literary responses. Indeed, Trudi Tate mentions the range of literary responses to the Great War include: “trench poetry, combatants’ memoirs and fiction; memoirs by nurses and other civilian participants; popular, patriotic, and propagandistic writings; pacifist writings; and the civilian reflections upon the war experience”.

The wide range of fictional and autobiographical works by British women writers demonstrates the diversity of their experiences and the literary innovations used to communicate them. Whether fictional or autobiographical, many of these works show the impossibility of reporting the personal experiences of war while keeping traditional narrative forms intact. This trend is most vividly evident in the formal experimentation of the novel. In contrast to the romantic plot traditionally favoured by narrative fiction – in which the hero reconciles with the heroine – the experiences of the nurses, civilian women, factory workers

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18 Grayzel, *Women’s Identities at War*, 2.
20 Tate, “The First World War: British Writing”, 162.
and others defy this conventional narrative structure. Indeed, “the female lead is left to fill the void, either successfully, by restructuring her life through the dignity of work and a second best hero (Brittain, Cannan), or less satisfactorily, by floundering through a succession of cynically-motivated relationships (Thompson, Evadne Price)”. At the same time, they write about their war experiences not simply to look back to the past, but also to create an identity for themselves in the future.

Through their various responses, then, British women writers of the Great War represented the voices of suffering civilians: the nurses who lived in close proximity with their male counterparts; the pacifists and other intellectual voices which were critical of war and state-policies. In A Journal of Impressions in Belgium (1915), May Sinclair (1863-1946) captures her impressions about the war-wrecked Belgium and also presents her changing attitude as a secretary and reporter in the Munro Ambulance Corp. Despite a short stay, this experience lays the foundation of her later novels. In particular, Sinclair’s The Tree of Heaven (1917) shows the effects of the Great War on an English family of four children. Each one of them develops differently due to war with the female protagonist leaving the militaristic suffragette movement and becoming a voluntary ambulance driver. Enid Bagnold’s A Diary Without Dates (1917) tells of her experiences as a VAD nurse’s aide. Her criticism of the apathetic hospital routine and the voyeurism of the hospital visitors towards the mutilated and suffering soldiers was considered a breach of military discipline and she was sacked from her job. Evadne Price’s ‘Not so Quiet’… Step Daughters of War (1930) presents the experiences of a female ambulance driver through a narrator who shows how women actively participated in the war effort. Through this gendered perspective, the book provides a pacifist view on the war. In a similar vein, Irene Rathbone’s We That Were Young (1932) presents the war experiences through the perspective of a young suffragette and similarly incorporates an anti-war view. Children of No Man’s Land (1919), a novel by Gladys Bronwyn Stern, treats with scepticism the dominant ideas about national identity, especially during the wartime. Although not considered a war novel initially, Virginia Woolf’s Mrs. Dalloway (1925), like West’s The Return of the Soldier, presents a shell-shocked soldier who is unable to express his trauma. However, the theme of return and cure is treated with great irony as Septimus Smith is equally horrified by his traumatic experiences of the war and with the modern methods of curing trauma.

Until the 1960s and 1970s, war accounts from women writers received little attention. The anthologies of war poetry and the bibliographies of war novels were solely based on the experiences of men in the trenches. Together, they presented the war-tales about the “direct

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experience”23 of the Anglo European upper-class white male.24 Today, the canon of war literature is incomplete without including the works of women writers. It is significant though that, like many other rights, women’s right to narrate war underwent its own struggle. By the 1980s the feminist press, Virago, reintroduced different ‘lost’ texts, such as Bagnold’s *A Diary without Dates* and *The Happy Foreigner* or Price’s ‘Not So Quiet ... ’ *Stepdaughters of the War*. Their critical re-evaluation broadened the field of war-writing and brought to the surface women’s contribution to this canon.25 To give some examples of this re-evaluation: Nicola Beauman’s *A Very Great Profession: The Woman’s Novel 1914-39* (1983) presents a collective portrayal of middle-class Englishwomen during the Great War and the Interbellum period. Sandra Gilbert’s “Soldier’s Heart: Literary Men, Literary Women, and the Great War” (1983) places women’s contribution during the Great War in parallel with the dominant male perspective. Catherine Reilly’s *Scars Upon My Heart* (1983) is one of the first anthologies which focuses on women’s poetic responses to the First World War. Margaret Higonnet’s *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars* (1987) elaborates on how the two world wars impacted and redefined the gender dynamics in society. All in all, these studies have been ground-breaking, as they collectively form a body of scholarship that either puts women’s writing in parallel with their male counterparts or highlights the uniqueness of this body of literature in its own right.

More recently, this critical re-evaluation has continued with a new wave of critical studies focussing on lesser explored aspects of women’s literary responses to the Great War. Thus, we have Claire Tylee’s *The Great War and Women’s Consciousness: Images of Militarism and Womanhood in Women’s Writings, 1914-64* (1990), which provides a comprehensive view of women’s active, militaristic, civilian and literary responses to war. Dorothy Goldman’s essay collection *Women and World War I: The Written Response* (1993) which focusses on women’s divergent voices and the tradition of women’s war literature. Trudi Tate’s *Women, Men and the Great War: An Anthology of Stories* (1995) which presents a unique effort to put together stories by different writers, men as well as women, to show the heterogeneous nature of war experiences and their literary expressions. Jay Winter’s *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (1995) which re-evaluates the memory of First World War.

This new wave of scholarship on women’s writing of war is correlated with recent critical works that analyse war literature from different theoretical perspectives thus building a more inclusive framework for literary studies of war. Lynne Hanley’s *Writing War: Fiction, Gender and

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Memory (1991) analyses how war memory is shaped by certain dominant rhetorical devices and how gender can be one parameter to challenge the extant literary representation of war. She places her analysis of women’s literature of war next to the stories she wrote about women survivors of war and catastrophe. Jacqueline Rose’s Why War: Psychoanalysis, Politics and the Return to Melanie Klein (1993) provides a psycho-political explanation of war-writing. Patrick J. Quinn and Steven Trout’s The Literature of the Great War Reconsidered: Beyond Modern Memory (2001) re-evaluates, as the title suggests, the literature of the Great War beyond the myth perpetrated through the classical texts on war, such as Fussell’s The Great War and Modern Memory. Similarly, James Tatum’s study of the culture of war in The Mourner’s Song: War and Remembrance from the Iliad to Vietnam (2003) analyses the tradition of commemoration of war in both social and literary realms. James Anderson Winn’s The Poetry of War (2008) analyses the antagonistic relation between war and poetry whereby “war dismembers bodies” and poetry “re-members those bodies and the people who lived in them, making whole in verse what was destroyed on the battlefield”.\(^\text{26}\) Kate McLoughlin’s The Cambridge Companion to War Writing (2009), Authoring War: The Literary Representation of the Iliad to Iraq (2011), and Writing War, Writing Lives (co-authored with Lara Feigel and Nancy Martin, 2016) primarily dwell on the challenges to an author’s imagination to represent war while faced with its scale and magnitude. Santanu Das’ Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature (2008) pays attention to “the relation of gender to the witnessing of the body in pain [the wounded soldier] and the ‘charred’ senses of the young nurses”.\(^\text{27}\)

This body of criticism plays a significant role not just by placing women’s literary responses alongside those of their male counterparts or by highlighting their differences. Rather, by paying attention to female war writing, this critical scholarship also provides an opportunity to offer new perspectives on the war and war literature more generally. As mentioned earlier, I will add to these analyses by focusing on the way women writers of the Great War present a literary testimony. Through the reading of The Return of the Soldier and Testament of Youth, I want to highlight the way in which both the narrators present their acts of witnessing and, in doing so, struggle to assert their authenticity and authority by the available literary means.


2. Jenny’s Witnessing of the Great War in *The Return of the Soldier*

Since its publication in 1918, *The Return of the Soldier* has been hailed as one of the first modern novels to offer a female perspective on the trauma of a shell-shocked soldier. Existing critical studies have focussed on different aspects of the novel. Sharon Ouditt focusses on Chris’ final return to the symbolic order of violence.\(^{28}\) Marina Mackay, for her part, reads the soldier’s return to normalcy as endemic of the preponderance of men’s traditional lunacy and the subjugation of women to that lunacy.\(^{29}\) Wyatt Bonikowski provides a detailed psychoanalytic reading of the novel, focusing on Jenny’s traumatic experience of Chris’ return.\(^{30}\) Emily R. Hershman analyses how the novel manifests both male and female traumas of war by focussing on class and gender relations.\(^{31}\) Nicole Rizzuto focusses on the displaced war-trauma in the novel. She claims that the novel restores a “voice to female witnesses of the 1914-1918 period who were silenced by modernist literature and criticism alike”.\(^{32}\) Rebcah Pulsifer uses the term “twin trauma” to describe the conjoined nature of male and female experiences of war.\(^{33}\) Jeffrey Hershfield analyses the theme of return in light of recent philosophical discussions of the nature and value of truth.\(^{34}\) Building on this criticism, I will focus on how West presents an authentic narrative of war through the perspective of a female narrator and how the novel acts as a literary testimony.

2.1 A Brief Summary

After being shell-shocked in the Battle of the Somme (1916), Chris Baldry suffers from amnesia and returns to his home Baldry Court where his wife Kitty and his cousin Jenny await him. Chris’ amnesia erases his memory of the last fifteen years, causing him to fail to remember his

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wife, Kitty, his dead child, Oliver, and the changes made in his household by Kitty. In fact, to 
the surprise of Kitty and Jenny, he only remembers his life before 1901, the period in which he 
fell in love with a working-class woman, Margaret Grey. Jenny plays a significant role in 
providing information about Chris’ forgotten past and relating it to the events happening after 
he suffers from amnesia.

2.2 Jenny’s Authority as a Witness: From Oblivion to Remembering

Being the narrator, Jenny presents Chris’ past and present to the readers. When Kitty discovers 
that in amnesia Chris wrote a letter to Margaret rather than to her, she says to Jenny: “but 
you’re so slow you don’t see what it means”. At first glance, it seems ironic that Jenny is called 
a slow perceiver of reality by Kitty. Indeed, even among the scholars, her reputation fluctuates 
from being the one who “learns most”, “a veritable conscience of the novel”, to one whose 
narrative “is no more direct or strictly truthful than The Good Soldier’s John Dowell”, to one 
charged with the moral propensity of “voyeurism”, and, finally, to a significant “analyst” 
whose story-telling makes her and the reader participate “in bearing witness to trauma”. To 
these multiple interpretations, I add how Jenny constructs her authority as a witness. I analyse 
how using her first-hand memories, the memories of Chris and Margaret, which they each 
share with her on different occasions, and the second-hand information received through 
sources such as letters and news, Jenny asserts her authority in the narrative.

Doležel argues that, unlike that of an omniscient narrator, first-person narrators construct 
their authority by using their “privileged knowledge” to “construct the narrative world”. The narrator exhibits this knowledge by different means: direct experience, witness-accounts 
of other people, and second-hand information such as mediated reports. Doležel’s 
classification can be applied to Jenny’s narration as well. Firstly, Jenny’s “privileged knowledge” 
lies in her own memories of Baldry Court, her knowledge of Chris and Margaret’s memories, 
and the information she receives through other sources such as letters and war-news. Secondly, 
Jenny mediates between these forms of knowledge to construct the narrative world that gives 
insights to the mental processes she undergoes. This aspect will be explained later by focusing

35 All subsequent references to The Return of the Soldier are between parentheses in the text. Rebecca West, The Return of 
the Soldier (New York: The Century Co. 1918), 8.
36 Ouditt, Fighting Forces, Writing Women, 115.
37 Hershfield, “Truth and Value in Rebecca West’s The Return of the Soldier”, 373.
38 Ann V Norton, Paradoxical Feminism Norton: The Novels of Rebecca West (Lanham: International Scholars Publication, 
2000), 10.
39 Pulsifer, “Reading Kitty’s Trauma”, 42.
on her dreams and her suffering due to war. The very first scene opens with Jenny establishing her authority within the narrative by overlooking Kitty’s reference to her dead child and diverting attention to the magnificence of Baldry Court instead. Seeing Kitty dry her hair in her dead-child’s nursery, Jenny wishes to leave the nursery, “so that I might not spy on Kitty revisiting her dead” (2). Along with revisiting the dead, Kitty also tries to tell Jenny how the nursery might not be of any use in future, as she says, “I wish Chris wouldn't have it kept as a nursery when there's no chance—" (2). This is the only remark in the novel which can be interpreted as Kitty’s dual trauma of her failed marriage and of there being no chance of another child. Jenny responds to this, by shifting attention to the magnificence of the big house, her memories of its construction. If as Ouditt maintains, Jenny is the one who “learns most”, one must say that this learning starts by bringing her own somewhat flawed perspective to the forefront.

As she invokes the memories of the construction of Baldry Court, one realizes how the Baldry Court of today is constructed through wilful amnesia. In dwelling on the memories before the war, she is reconfirmed that Kitty and she could be “preserved from the reproach of luxury, because we had made a fine place for Chris”. Indeed, to verify her thoughts, she claims: “I could shut my eyes and think of innumerable proofs of how well we had succeeded, for there was never so visibly contented a man” (3). By keeping the big house in a good condition, Jenny justifies her role as a caretaker of this house and of Chris’ health. Her contentment with her role as a caretaker is cast in an ironic light when, due to Chris’ illness, she discovers that he was never a content man. Thus, an encounter with Chris’ illness and Margaret’s role in its cure, brings a shift in her initially flawed perspective. When Chris returns home, Jenny mediates between the past when he went to the front and the present when he returns from it. Recollecting the moment when he left for the front, she tells, “[a]s he bent over me I noticed once again how his hair was of two colors, brown and gold” (4). When he returns from the trenches, Jenny narrates, “I cried out, because I had seen that his hair was of three colors, brown and gold and silver” (11). As he does not have any wounds on his body, this tiny change noticed by Jenny becomes a proof of the change wrought in him through his war experiences. At the same time though, while Jenny recollects all this, her presence as a “thirty-five instead of twenty” year old woman becomes a proof of the time lapse which Chris cannot recollect (11). In this way, within the plot, Jenny becomes a literal embodiment of the “privileged knowledge” and at the level of narrative she mediates between the privileged knowledge of the past and its implication on the present-day life at Baldry Court.

As Doležel mentions, apart from first-hand memories, the first-person narrator also constructs his or her authority through witness accounts of other people. In The Return of the Soldier Jenny constructs her authority by presenting Chris and Margaret’s accounts of events about the past. In doing so, she learns to look differently at both of them. When Margaret visits Baldry Court with the news of Chris’ illness, Jenny and Kitty both smile at “the spectacle of a
fellow-creature occupied in baseness [...] This was such a fraud as one sees recorded in the papers [...] ‘Heartless Fraud on Soldier’s Wife’” (6). Both women judge Margaret through the prism of class prejudices and through the filters of war-propaganda. Assuming that Margaret wants to take advantage of their vulnerability towards Chris, Jenny realizes that she hates Margaret like “the rich hate the poor as insect things that will struggle out of the crannies which are their decent home and introduce ugliness to the light of day” (7). Her first impressions about Margaret confirm both the deep-rooted class prejudices and the infiltration of war propaganda which further legitimizes these prejudices even during the times of crises. However, when Margaret shows kindness towards Kitty despite the latter calling her “impertinent”, Jenny’s eyes are fixed on Margaret “with a certain wet, clear, patient gaze” (7). Perceiving Margaret’s moral superiority over Kitty, Jenny’s views about Margaret shift gradually. This change in perception becomes more evident when she learns about Margaret through Chris.

Chris praises Margaret’s beauty in front of Jenny. Initially, Jenny is surprised and shows disbelief by using asides. For example, when Chris says, “[s]he is a little near-sighted; you can’t imagine how sweet it makes her look,” Jenny responds in an aside, “(I did not say that I had seen her, for, indeed, this Margaret I have never seen)” (16). Her slow understanding of Margaret reaches a climax when Jenny “kissed [Margaret] not as women, but as lovers do; I think we each embraced that part of Chris the other had absorbed by her love” (40). The novel thus shows how Jenny’s perception about Margaret changes. As West incorporates her learning process within the narrative, this makes Jenny’s account authentic and reliable. That is why, towards the end of the novel, Jenny insists to “know the truth” regardless of its consequences: as she remarks, “I knew quite well that when one is adult one must raise to one’s lips the wine of the truth, heedless that it is not sweet like milk, but draws the mouth with its strength, and celebrate communion with reality, or else walk forever queer and small like a dwarf” (40).

Along with her own experiences of the past, Jenny also receives second-hand information through different media. Before Chris’ return and Margaret’s intrusion in Baldry Court, Kitty and Jenny are kept up to date about the war through newspapers, radio and films. Jenny experiences many nightmares due to her overexposure to news. The mediated war-narratives have affected her perception of war, as she recounts, “[b]y nights I saw Chris running across the brown rottenness of No-Man's-Land [...] and not till my dream was packed full of horror did I see him pitch forward on his knees as he reached safety, if it was that (3). She is not the only one who is disturbed by news of war. Indeed, she connects her nightmares with the larger society, “[w]ell, such are the dreams of English-women to-day. I could not complain, but I wished for the return of our soldier” (3).

Marcel L’Herbier, the French filmmaker, recalls his exposure to war-films in a somewhat similar vein, “everything that was filmed at the front passed through our hands [...] We cut, we sliced, we chose what could be shown. I watched scenes of horror; I saw soldiers who had been
eviscerated, cut in two, decapitated”. In this way, as a narrator, Jenny presents “the authority of an experience, a witness, a mediator of information acquired from other sources” in her narrative. While she constructs her authority to tell about events of Chris’ illness by mediating between her memories of Chris, Margaret and Chris’s accounts about a past she otherwise had not access to, and other forms of information, it is also significant to understand how her witnessing is shaped by her subjective position which makes her different both from Kitty, Chris’s wife in the present and Margaret, Chris’ beloved from the past.

2.3 No Woman’s Land: The Subjective Witnessing

The outbreak of war shakes Jenny out of her complacency. While telling the story of Chris’ return, Jenny learns to question her pre-suppositions about Baldry Court as an idyllic place and Chris as a contented man. The war dissolves her role as the caretaker of Chris’ life and household. Storytelling provides an antidote to this dissolution whereby the narrative becomes more than a tale about the return of an amnesiac soldier becomes a testimony through which Jenny constructs her own identity. One might ask, what stimulates Jenny to raise to her lips “the wine of the truth” (40)? Is it because she is the absolute, unquestionable and “veritable conscience” of the novel? Or is it because of her moral propensity towards “voyeurism”? The answer lies somewhere in between these two clear borders of moral distinction between the no woman’s land that Jenny experiences as a result of her class and the socio-political changes which were further accentuated by the war. Indeed, an analysis of Jenny’s class and gendered position demonstrates how her acts of witnessing are informed by her status as an upper class and unmarried woman.

Being raised in the Victorian age, Jenny is one of the “mob of female relatives who were all useless either in the old way, with antimacassars, or in the new way, with gold-clubs” (4). While Jenny has no prospect of marriage, she witnesses Chris’ love for Margaret and his later marriage to Kitty. Thus, despite being part of Baldry Court, she lacks the experiences which Kitty and Margaret have on their disposal – Kitty enjoys the benefits of marriage while Margaret gets married, works as a cleaning woman and has her own household. Both also experience motherhood and face the trauma of a dead child. Meanwhile, Chris complies with the social norms and pretends to live as a contented man. Only through the condition of abnormality, be it war or amnesia, one finds out that he is an unhappy man after all. None of these experiences shape the core of Jenny’s existence. She is not a wife, a mother or a soldier. Indeed, while pondering over the involvement of Kitty and Margaret in Chris’ life, Jenny presents an

48 Hershfield, “Truth and Value in Rebecca West’s The Return of the Soldier”, 373.
49 Pulsifer, “Reading Kitty’s Trauma”, 42.
interesting analogy which highlights her own position as a witness. In this analogy, she describes Kitty as “a polished surface that reflected light, like a mirror hung opposite a window” and Margaret as “a lamp grimed by the smoke of careless use, but still giving out radiance from its burning oil” (34). If Kitty symbolizes the mirror through which Chris’ image can be reflected and Margaret the bright lamp which bestows the radiance of romance and adventure to his life, where does Jenny stand? Within this zone of a feminine battle for the man, does she belong to a no woman’s land?

If anything, her role is that of a bystander as she observes Chris’ formation through his involvement with Kitty and Margaret. Just as she stands by Chris’ illness at this present moment, she also stood by when in the past he rejected Margaret. In 1901, the year after which Chris does not remember anything, he broke up with Margaret under his father’s insistence to handle family business in Mexico and marry a woman from the same class. After breaking up with Margaret, he returns from Monkey Island and passes by Jenny on the threshold of Baldry Court, Jenny recalls, “I remembered it well, because my surprise that he passed me without seeing me had made me perceive for the first time that he had never seen me at all save in the most cursory fashion” (24). Chris’ amnesia and the subsequent circumstances of Margaret’s appearance in their lives remind her once again how she has never been loved by Chris. Jenny, the analyst of Chris’ discontent, amnesia, shellshock and war-trauma, is equally discontented with her own role in Chris’ life.

At a personal level, she is discontent because she is neither the desired one, like Margaret, nor the legally and socially accepted partner, like Kitty. At a social level, she is discontent since her identity and life are both under threat in the war-torn world. Jenny is in a vulnerable position because the postwar world, the suffragette movement and modern life, questions the very existence of women who are not the socio-political equivalent of men. Her constant mediation between the main characters, between home and battlefront and between the story and the reader, is thus a way of demanding her place in the changing social structure, as she says: “There is, you [narratee] know, really room for all of us; we each have our peculiar use” (34). In becoming the privileged witness of the lives of Chris, Kitty and Margaret, Jenny also presents her own life and the different forms of absence in her life. In this way, the novel presents her authority as a witness and her subjective position both of which play a significant part in lending authenticity to her narrative.

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50 In The Mirror and the Lamp, Meyer Howard Abrams creates a similar analogy between the realist writings before the Romantics, who relied heavily on mimesis (the mirror), and the writings after the Romantics, whose imaginative endeavours pushed the limits of realism and reinforced the supremacy of the creative impulse (the lamp). In this context, one might say that Rebecca West tries to build a similar analogy between the Romantic diction and the modernist need for rupture from the traditional means of representation. The characters of Kitty and Margaret internalize that rift in which Jenny stands as the artistic mediation between two different art forms. See: M.H. Abrams The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953).
2.4 The Novel as Testimony: Representing Crisis

As is evident in Jenny’s account, the Great War disrupted the lives of British men and women. It also disrupted established literary traditions, which is manifested in the formal characteristics of the novel. Rebecca West presents the gap between the literary convention and the modern crisis of storytelling through two different time frames of the novel: the time before the war and the time during the war. However, a simplistic division between the two times might lead one to assume that pre-war time frame is idyllic and the wartime is disruptive. In both of these times, the style of the novel fluctuates between the transcendental, nostalgic and sentimental on the one hand and the modernist, fragmented and analytical on the other. In remembering his life before 1901, Chris remembers the Victorian time when he falls in love with Margaret but within the plot this time can only be revived through the non-linear, subjective narrative voice of Jenny. The wartime in which Chris needs to recover from amnesia is also treated with irony and scepticism especially through the representation of psychiatric innovations in the treatment of trauma.

2.4.1 The Talking Cure

The method of the talking cure implies that a patient transmits his or her trauma to a listener and, by venting their troubled emotions, heals the trauma. During the Great War, no proper methods were available to deal with shell-shocked soldiers. In fact, as Ben Shephard writes, “the military scarcely knew about psychology [...] As a result, most of the British academic psychologists (Myers, Rivers, McDougall and Brown) worked as psychiatrists in shell-shock hospitals [...] In seeking to understand and treat shell-shock they drew mainly on psychiatrists such as Janet and Freud”.

If war causes trauma and psychiatric methods offer a possible cure for this trauma, then I argue that the novel uses irony to unmask and criticize an all too simplistic understanding of trauma and the talking cure. To explain this irony, I will pay attention to the way the character of Gilbert Anderson is used in the novel.

Apart from Chris, Gilbert Anderson is the only male character who enters Baldry Court – a house turned into a female siege (Kitty, Jenny and Margaret). Unlike other men such as Chris or William Grey, Margaret’s husband, Gilbert Anderson is aware of his limitations. For example, when Margaret points out that Gilbert’s new methods cannot cure Chris or “make him happy, I mean. All you can do is to make him ordinary”. The doctor responds, “I grant you that’s all I do” (37). Aware of his limits, he tells Margaret what he is capable of: “[i]t’s my profession to bring people from various outlying districts of the mind to the normal” (37). By interrogating Kitty, Margaret and Jenny, the doctor indirectly brings all of them out of the unusual siege in different ways. During Chris’ amnesia, his wife Kitty loses her status as the centre of attention in Baldry Court. Jenny and Margaret make a bond beyond the class

differences. Now, with the doctor reminding them of what is socially acceptable, each one of them is ready to surrender her position. For example, Margaret is once again ready to lose Chris if that means his return as the provider of Baldry Court. Kitty comes out of her stoicism and cherishes the return of a “cured” Chris (41). Jenny, the witness of all these events, does not see Chris as a cured man. Rather, she only reports on what Kitty sees, “I heard her suck in her breath with satisfaction. ‘He’s cured!’ she whispered slowly. ‘He’s cured’” (41). Surely, this ‘bringing back to the normal’ is not a healing. The normal, in this case, becomes a relapse to, or continuity of, the situation which causes discontent for all the characters involved.

Gilbert Anderson’s character also implies another kind of irony. As Victoria Glendinning notes, “the psychoanalytic doctor” is “in appearance, a playful portrait of [H. G.] Wells”.52 Anderson as a “little man with winking blue eyes, a flushed and crumpled forehead, a little gray mustache [sic]”, strikes a physical semblance with the author. At the same time, perceived from Jenny’s perspective, Gilbert Anderson appeared “at once more comical and more suggestive of power than any other doctor [Jenny] had ever seen” (33). Not only does West present the famous writer in sarcastic light but her novel as a narrative about amnesia can be considered a literary response to Well’s war novel Mr. Britling Sees it Through (1916). For Mr. Britling war brings a possibility to “take some part in the establishment of a new order of living upon the earth”.53 Towards the end of the novel, he finds himself not alone but connected to “the thousands and tens of thousands of men and women like himself, desiring with all their hearts to say, as he desired to say, the reconciling word”.54 In contrast, upon recovery from amnesia, Chris “was looking up under his brows at the over-arching house as though it were a hated place to which, against all his hopes, business had forced him to return” (41). Chris’ return embodies an inability to reconcile with the past as he must once again turn his back on Margaret called by Jenny as “this fading unhappiness” (41). The Return of the Soldier therefore does not offer a healing story to its readers. Rather in the guise of story about healing, West presents the predicament of modern man who unlike the protagonist in Mr. Britling Sees it Through is unable to find the reconciling word.

2.4.2 Romantic or Modernist: A Rupture in Style

The Return of the Soldier is characterized by two distinct literary styles. On the one hand, there are abundant romantic images, epistolary exchanges, plot twists, and a search for transcendental values by the main characters – all of which easily befit a romantic narrative. On the other hand, there is the overtly self-reflexive narrator who allows an insight into her different psychological processes she undergoes, and the non-linear shifts which shape the narrative as modernist in style. Just as in the plot Jenny bridges the gap between Chris’ forgotten past and

54 Wells, Mr. Britling Sees it Through, 438.
his disrupted present, similarly at the narrative level, Jenny becomes an intermediary between the stories of the “inveterate romanticist” (22) and the “modern subaltern” (3).\textsuperscript{55}

Paul de Man describes the “fundamental ambiguity” of the poetics of romanticism as follows: “[a]n abundant imagery coincide[s] with an equally abundant quantity of natural objects”.\textsuperscript{56} Being nostalgic for a lost past, the romanticist forgets the difference between the “transcendental presence” of the “natural objects” and the existential “absence” of the imagery used to describe them.\textsuperscript{57} Unlike the flowers, words “need to find the mode of their beginning in another entity; they originate out of nothing, in an attempt to be the first words that will arise as if they were natural objects, and, as such, they remain essentially distinct from natural entities”.\textsuperscript{58} Metaphors, symbols and analogies, as much as they are used to create a semblance of natural entities, fail and become abstraction. Unlike the natural objects, words originate from a complex set of contexts. To take the word as a substitute for the object is to crave for a transcendental reality which lacks the complex multiplicity of contexts. This section analyses how the stylistic mediation between romantic and modernist in \textit{The Return} makes way for the narrative of mourning, loss and remembering. The novel uses rich sensual imagery which involves metaphors, analogy and imagery to describe places and people. Both Monkey Island and Baldry Court are imagined as transcendental origins of values like love and safety.

For Margaret and Chris, the memories of Monkey Island contrast with the war-torn world. Monkey Island is one of the few places which seems “real” to the amnesiac Chris and to the love-forsaken Margaret (64). Jenny tells how Chris remembers Monkey Island in meticulous detail. Through a “private road”, Chris came upon “the dark-green, glassy waters of an unvisited backwater” entering a “bright lawn set with many walnut-trees and a few great chestnuts” […] Chris continues in recollecting, “[t]his was the Monkey Island Inn. The third Duke of Marlborough had built it for a ‘folly’, and perching there with nothing but a line of walnut-trees and a fringe of lawn between it and the fast, full, shining Thames, it had an eighteenth-century grace and silliness” (65-6). This rich natural imagery, “a private road” promising undisturbed peace, the secrecy of “unvisited backwater”, and the “fast, full, shining Thames” suggest not just an “eighteenth-century grace and silliness” but also rural abundance and materiality. The physical seclusion of Monkey Island from the rest of the world provides a sense of security and isolation to Chris. What Monkey Island means to Chris and Margaret is what pre-war Baldry Court means to Jenny, as she recalls, “[t]he house lies on the crest of Harrowweald”, where one can see “miles of emerald pasture-land lying wet and brilliant under a west-ward line of sleek hills, blue with distance and distant woods, while nearer it range the

\textsuperscript{55} The two terms are used by Jenny. She calls Margaret an “inveterate romanticist” as despite her humble abode, Margaret calls her home: Mariposa (Spanish for Butterfly). The term “modern subaltern” conveys Jenny’s impression of young soldiers in the war-films whose voices though indomitable yet whose gay notes are flattened with the monotony and the horrors of war (3).


\textsuperscript{57} de Man, \textit{The Rhetoric of Romanticism}, 6.

\textsuperscript{58} de Man, \textit{The Rhetoric of Romanticism}, 6.
suave decorum of the lawn and the Lebanon cedar” (6-7). Through the use of sensual, natural imagery, these places become symbols for the abstract values of love, peace and security, i.e., counter-spaces to war and violence. This might lead one to conclude that Rebecca West links pre-war Imperialist Britain to beauty, harmony and security. However, a deeper look at the way these images are bound together with Jenny’s narrative shows a departure from this simplistic representation.

Firstly, the use of places and natural objects point to an absence rather than to a transcendental origin. As mentioned earlier, in the memories of Chris and Margaret, Monkey Island is idyllic, natural and symbolic of the innocence of their youthful desire and love. Yet, the novel presents the place as an absence. Moreover, the historical context of the place dissuades this simplistic representation. Monkey Island was reconstructed with stones from Oxfordshire after the Great Fire of London in 1666, and the rubble from the burning was spread among certain islands of the Thames. In its current state, the place signifies reconstruction rather than origin. Just as the place is a reconstruction in its present form, the love which Chris and Margaret can cherish due to Chris’ amnesia is a reconstruction of a past transcendental ideal. This idea is further confirmed when one realizes that Monkey Island is presented through Jenny’s narration within the wartime milieu as an absent signified and never as a presence. Similarly, Baldry Court is presented in two different timeframes: the time before the war and before Chris’ marriage with Kitty, and the time after his marriage and during the war and his amnesia. In both cases, Baldry Court becomes symbolic of Chris’ ‘forgetfulness’ about his father’s business in Mexico and its political consequences in pre-war scenario, and about his failed marriage and dead child in the wartime milieu.

The contradiction between representation and reality is presented most starkly still through a third place: Margaret’s home. Jenny describes how a “long road of red-brick boxes, flecked here and there with the pink blur of almond-blossom” was “debouched in a flat field” where “coal-dust from the railway” left marks of permanent damage on the surroundings. Margaret’s house, “Mariposa, which was the last house in the road, did not even have an almond-tree” (84). The words “boxes”, “flat”, “coal” and “dust” all contrast the visual harmony of Monkey Island and Baldry Court. Meeting Margaret at her place and unable to find anything praiseworthy Jenny remarks: “‘[b]ut it's got a very pretty name,’ ‘Ah, isn't it!’ [Margaret] exclaimed, with the smile of the inveterate romanticist. ‘It's Spanish, you know, for butterfly.’” (95) On the one hand, different images of Baldry Court and Mariposa reveal the class distinctions between them. On the other hand, words as signs of the outside reality fail to signify what they stand for thus pointing to a greater socio-political amnesia which legitimizes wars in the first place. Moreover, the intertextual reference to “Tintern Abbey” brings the same irony to the fore. Tintern Abbey is a reference to a lost world and a past literary tradition. The need to preserve this world in memory appears twice in the novel. Once, when Jenny visits Margaret’s house for the first time and finds nothing special in her room, “but Margaret’s sewing-machine on the table and the enlarged photograph of Margaret’s mother over the mantel-piece, and the views of Tintern Abbey framed in red plush, and on the floor, the
marigold pattern making itself felt through the dusk” (18). The second time, when Margaret recalls her meeting with Chris on Monkey Island (20).

This is clearly an intertextual reference to William Wordsworth’s poem, “Lines composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey”, which simultaneously shows the limits of the romantic register in the contemporary time. The “views of Tintern Abbey”, framed in the red plush, now present the past preserved as a monument, framed in time, frozen in memory, like the memory of Monkey Island in Chris’ mind which comes to the surface only as a recurrence of trauma. The use of this intertextual reference shows West’s mediation between the past literary legacy and the present ruptures of experiences of the Great War. The romantic imagery shapes the idyllic memory of Monkey Island for Chris and Margaret, and also shapes Jenny’s celebration of an un-shattered masculinity. In the novel, the romantic register, both in terms of a way of life and its literary representation, is presented through Jenny’s non-linear, subjective, testimonial narration. Her self-reflexive narration about her own memories, her constant mediation of Chris and Margaret’s accounts and of other sources of information, bring to attention the modern experience of mourning, loss and the obligation to remember. Through this careful configuration of the romantic and the modernist style, this novel about amnesia forges the act of anamnesis, i.e., remembering.

2.5 Conclusion

In *The Return of the Soldier*, Jenny, as the main witness, narrates an authentic story about the effects of the Great War on the British home front. She brings the past which Chris has forgotten and the past which he remembers together into one narrative. To do so, she relies on her own memories as well as information acquired through second-hand accounts and other sources. At the formal level, *The Return of the Soldier* presents the crises of representing war by incorporating a subtle criticism of the romantic and modernist registers and of the modern means of curing trauma. In this way, the novel becomes an important literary testimony in which Jenny’s narrative gains authenticity by presenting both the acts of witnessing and the way her subjective position as an upper-class unmarried woman limits this witnessing
3. Authenticity in Testament of Youth

Upon its publication, Testament of Youth was an immediate success. The former editor of London Times, Sir William Haley, called it “the war book of the Women of England”. Storm Jameson, Brittain’s contemporary wrote, “It is the story of a generation – of mine and it may be yours”. Rebecca West called it a “vivid testimony” and Virginia Woolf wrote that “she felt compelled to stay up all night to finish the memoir”. To this day, Testament of Youth is one of the most widely read and popular of all of Brittain’s works. The changes in critical debates about the war have strongly affected the reading of the memoir and its relevance. This is evident in the shift from the veneration of the memoir as the female equivalent of trench warfare upon its publication in 1933, to a more critical and ambivalent stance in revisionist studies such as Mellown, Joannou, Albrinck, Das, Parkins, and Fell. These studies have mainly focussed on the questionable status of the memoir as a feminist text, or as an “unorthodox (female)” text which opens up the genre of war literature when read “alongside the canonized (male) war texts”, or one which presents Brittain’s testimony of the Great War in ambiguous terms. Fell connects the ambiguous nature of Brittain’s narrative with the active and passive status of her witnessing, while I connect this ambiguity with the function of her text as a self-conscious testimonial. In this section, I pay attention to how Brittain presents her testimony as authentic by drawing upon the existing literary traditions of writing about war. For this purpose, I will focus on the role of the retrospective narrator, the mediation between two styles of writing, the use of intertextual references, and the implication of the testimonial bond between her as a witness and the implied reader.

66 Das, Touch and Intimacy, 175-203.
71 Fell, “Myth, Countermyth and the Politics of Memory”, 11.
3.1 A Brief Summary

*Testament of Youth* presents the story of Brittain’s life from 1900 to 1925. In this narrative, Brittain metamorphoses from a young Edwardian middle-class lady, with almost no political voice of her own, to someone who leaves behind her life as a student to serve in the war. In postwar England, she transforms into a confirmed pacifist. The point of departure here, as in many other Great War narratives, is the idyllic days of an adolescent, carefree, young person in an Edwardian timeframe. In the first part of her memoir, Brittain presents the frustrations of her younger self given the lack of career prospects for women. She also writes about her brother, Edward, and her romance with Roland Leighton, her fiancée. The Great War ruptures her plans for higher education and her blossoming romance. Just as Edward and Roland have to obey the patriotic call, by enlisting for the War, Brittain leaves her university education to serve as a nurse during the War.

The second and larger part of her memoir is based on her experience as a Voluntary Aid Nurse (VAD) serving in London, Malta and Étaples in France during the war. Yet, Roland’s sudden death brings disillusionment and a deep trauma to her life. After recovering from the shock of her fiancée’s death, Brittain re-joins the VAD, this time, with a sense of stoicism. Later on, during the war, she also loses her brother and some other close male friends, and comes home ever more traumatized with the loss of all her dear ones, but also with the first-hand experiences of nursing the wounded soldiers. Her experiences of the war and her precarious position in postwar England leads her to study history, contrary to her initial desire to study literature, at the University of Oxford. In postwar England, Brittain finds herself even more isolated. Yet, she manages to struggle through her isolation and decides to partake in a series of UN lectures as a pacifist. She also travels to the defeated parts of Germany and Austria. Her memoir ends with her finding a partner in George Catlin.

3.2 Brittain’s Narrative Voice

As was the case in West’s *The Return of the Soldier*, Brittain also presents her experiences of the Great War through a narrator whose claims and struggles to find authenticity and authority as a witness form an equally important part of her narrative as the experiences the narrative describes. Despite the different genres of the two texts, there is a similarity in the way both authors aim to present an authentic literary testimony, be it through a fictional or an autobiographical first-person narrator. Brittain’s experiences and the retrospective voice of her narrative present what Higonnet has called “first” and “second knowing” in trauma narratives. The “first knowing” is an “unobstructed, specific consciousness of violence” which a witness experiences as both an “ungraspable” and “unbearable” “event”. The “second knowing” is the “story of the unbearable nature of survival”, whereby a witness is “impelled to restore the self
and to change one’s audience”. In this process of second knowing, a witness acquires and creates “knowledge about the causes and consequences of violence”. The first kind of knowing shapes the experience of a witness, lending him or her authority to tell and the second knowing shapes the processes through which a witness determines to interpret that experience thus creating his or her own authentic expression of that event. Higonnet’s concept of first and second knowing can be paralleled with Dolezel’s concepts of authority and authenticity as discussed in the first section.

In Testament of Youth, Brittain seeks to construct an authentic voice for her testimony. Reading with “scientific precision” the war “memoirs of Blunden, Sassoon and Graves”, Brittain says she became motivated to write “the epic of the women who went to the war”. Through her writing, she aimed to present how she saw “things other than they [male memoirist of the war] have seen, and some of the things they perceive I see differently”. Through this unique perspective, Brittain aimed to make her “story as truthful as history but as readable as fiction”. Rather than reading her memoir against her own claims, however, I suggest that through a retrospective narration, Brittain puts her past self in dialogue with her present retrospective self. She breaks the narrative flow through mediating between the first and second knowing in her narrative. In doing so, she enters into a dialogue with her past self, i.e., the stage of her first knowing the events she writes about. For example, in 1915, Brittain recollects her time as a “provincial debutante”, in 1912, as follows:

By that time so many of the fatuous young men had acquired dignity through death in France and the Dardanelles, that these records of my dances with them seemed like the incongruous souvenirs of a long-vanished and half-forgotten world – a world in which only the sinking of the Titanic had suddenly but quite temporarily reminded its inhabitants of the vanity of human calculations.

In retrospect, she finds the tokens of dance events as “incongruous souvenirs”, and she thus represents the activities of her pre-war girlhood with irony. This time before the war is shown through double displacement; firstly, she looks back at 1912 in 1915 and shows what she felt about the dances in the immediate proximity with death and war, secondly, the phrase “by that time” refers how even 1915 has gone by and she recollects this in the timeframe after the war and thus is distanced from both moments in retrospection. Thus, for Brittain, the world before the war seems “long-vanished” and “half-forgotten”. The contrast between pre-war and wartime England is even more starkly emphasized with the breaking of the narrative flow

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74 Joannou, “Vera Brittain’s Testament of Youth Revisited”, 50.
75 Joannou, “Vera Brittain’s Testament of Youth Revisited”, 50.
76 All subsequent references to Testament of Youth are between parentheses in the text. Vera Brittain, Testament of Youth. (London: Victor Gollancz, 1933), 51.
through her retrospective narration. Similarly, on another occasion, Brittain writes of the plight of the civilians during the war: “[a]t twenty-three, having been consistently well fed on a rough but ample Army diet since 1915, I realised only dimly the state of acute neurasthenia into which poor food, constant anxiety, frequent air-raids and the shortage of all necessities were steadily driving middle-aged London” (393).

Through postwar retrospection, she comes to realize the plight of the civilians more clearly than during the hectic time of the war. Brittain even changes her perception about the older generation whom she initially perceived as immune to the everyday challenges faced both by soldiers and nurses alike, as she narrates, “[i]t seemed to me then, with my crude judgments and black-and-white values, quite inexplicable that the older generation, which had merely looked on at the War, should break under the strain so much more quickly than those of us who had faced death or horror” (427). If she could not decipher the suffering of the older generation because of her earlier “crude judgement”, she is now able to understand their condition better in retrospection. In all the above-mentioned examples, Brittain includes both the mental processes which shaped her understanding of the war during her earlier years, and her narratorial act of coming to terms with that understanding in retrospection. Through narratorial interjections, Brittain mediates between first knowing as her experiencing self and second knowing as the narrating self. Firstly, the retrospective narrator demonstrates the fears, doubts and imperfections of her experiencing self, thus creating a testimonial bond of trust between her and the reader. Secondly, at the level of narration, the constant intrusions of the narrative voice also act as a reminder of the nature of testimony as a speech act. It is primarily about the communication of an experience, and not about direct experiences as such. Hence, the reader is constantly aware of reading a carefully crafted memoir, the result of much deliberation on the part of the author. Looking back at her Victorian girlhood, her wartime participation as a nurse and her postwar social and psychological isolation, the retrospective narrator testifies to the socio-political events and the psychological processes which shape the narrative as a literary testimony.

3.3 Speech, Survival and the “Lonely Survivor”

In postwar England, Brittain describes herself as “a lonely survivor drowning in black waves of memory” (461). To understand this alienation and its representation in the memoir, I focus on a particular episode in which Brittain describes her experiences of chronic hallucination. While looking at herself in the mirror, she recollects the following: “[a] dark shadow seemed to lie across my chin; was I beginning to grow a beard, like a witch? Thereafter my hand began, at regular intervals, to steal towards my face” (484). This is one of the most surreal incidents in the memoir. During her postwar time at university, Brittain identifies with one of those “obscure young women” who “represented neither a respect-worthy volunteer in a national cause nor a surviving victim of history’s cruellest catastrophe” (493). Upon returning home, her war stories are not treated with the same compassion as the stories of her male counterparts,
as she herself notes: “I was the only woman returning, bringing with me, no doubt - terrifying thought! - the psychological fruit of my embarrassing experiences” (476). She experiences dual exclusion as she is not like those men who died in the trenches or who came back with war-wounds, nor is she like those young women who remained at university during the wartime. Indeed, the socially acceptable gendered norms have received a new legitimacy in the postwar milieu. Her hallucination of the bearded face is the unnatural superimposition of the male face on her own. The failure to find empathy in society forms an “incommunicable horror” (484). This horror lies in the unnatural convergence of the teller and the listener, the female and the male, the self and the other. This forced convergence results in the horrifying image of a “witch” — the typical social outcast.

In her desolation, speech and writing forms Brittain’s postwar survival as a feminist, pacifist, speaker on behalf of League of Nations and ultimately a writer. When she is called for interview to be a speaker on behalf of League of Nations, an “anonymous, impressive individual” interrupts her in the middle of the interview, asking thus, “what makes you think you can speak?”(538). Brittain does not recall her immediate response to this intrusion. Yet, through the memoir, Brittain engages her reader in a long answer to this question. To speak for Brittain, as for any other witness of war, is to engage in a “process that leads from catastrophe to creativity and that turns the victim into a writing witness with the power to suspend forgetfulness and denial”. 77 Testament of Youth presents Brittain’s speech acts as a witness on multiple levels: her diary, her postwar journalist work, her speeches on behalf of League of Nations and finally the publication of her first novel The Dark Tide (1923). Through her speeches and writing, Brittain projects “a coherent ego” and constructs a testimonial narrative. 78 This partially explains why Brittain spends quite some time representing the processes which shape her as a journalist, writer and peace activist. Through these engagements, Brittain narrates, “I felt my responsibility very keenly; already, I thought, I had begun to take part in that campaign for enlightenment which must inevitably lead a bewildered, suffering world into the serene paths of rational understanding” (539). Brittain sees the platform of the League of Nations, “to be the one element of hope and progress contained in the peace treaties” (538). Finally, sharing her thoughts about her responsibility as a writer with her friend Winifred Holtby, Brittain writes, “[p]eople like you and me … possessed of sufficient means to choose the form of expression their intellectuality shall take, are very few and far between and yet very much needed” (547).

I will now pay attention to the title of the memoir and to the way Brittain represents armistice day to show how the memoir emphasizes the need to remember and mourn rather than forget the past in the present-day clamour of celebration. The title, “testament of youth” is an example of how Brittain presents her own voice while mediating between the existing literary tradition and her own literary work. The word ‘testament’ refers to a long-established,

78 Douglass and Vogler, Witness and Memory, 11.
mostly masculine, tradition of passing on a legacy or, as the Judeo-Christian religious tradition holds, a covenant. In both cases, the legacy is passed on from an older to a younger generation. Brittain’s memoir, however, refers to an inherited male tradition but subverts it for her own purposes. Her testament is about the experiences of a woman at war, yet, it is addressed not merely to the fellow women, but to men and women alike. Moreover, unlike the hierarchical flow of hard-earned wisdom passed on from an older to a younger generation, this testament communicates with different generations: the lost generations of war, whom the memoir commemorates as the heroes of the Great War; the younger generation who might understand the Great War through different media; and, more significantly, the older generation whose socio-political complacency Brittain holds responsible for the outcome of war.

The subtitle “An Autobiographical Study of the Years 1900-1925” reflects Brittain’s anthropological approach towards her own past. The narrating self can study her experiencing self and, in the process, can represent the entanglement of her personal lived experience and the historic past. Brittain is not alone in looking back to her personal experiences so as to understand the personal within the political. In fact, one of the reactions to the highly technological World War was ever more focused analysis of subjective human experience. Jean Norton Cru’s monumental tome Témoins [Witnesses], published in 1929, is one such example.79 Cru brings together first-hand accounts of French soldiers, presenting their testimonies not merely as “memories and experiences but also [as] an ethos and a mode of address”.80 The difference between a project like Témoins and Testament of Youth is that the former presents the personal as collective, i.e., the first-hand accounts of French soldiers, while the latter, despite positioning herself along with the other men and women of the lost generation, never forgets to assert her uniqueness both in her personal experiences and in the way she narrates them. In both texts, however, narration reconstitutes the traumatised subject as the speaking witness. As Ursula Tidd claims, “through the production of narrative, the autobiographical subject is able to gain a knowledge about her life as a sum of particular experiences”.81 This knowledge, however, is not merely self-knowledge but knowledge about the self in relation to the world.

The representation of armistice day in Testament of Youth also forges her relation to herself as a witness and her relation with the world as one who wants to bridge the epistemological gap between herself and the implied reader. To do so, the narrative foregrounds the act of remembering over the jingoistic celebrations. The section about the armistice celebrations is the shortest section in the whole memoir. Moreover, rather than the celebrations, a small elderly woman’s death takes centre stage. Witnessing the accident, Brittain describes it as follows:

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Like Victor in the mortuary chapel, she seemed to have shrunk to the dimensions of a child with the sharp features of age, but on the tiny chalk-white face an expression of shocked surprise still lingered, and she stared hard at me as Geoffrey had stared at his orderly [...] Had she been thinking, I wondered, when the taxi struck her, of her sons at the front, now safe? (461)

The dying woman reminds Brittain of “the dead and the strange irony of their fates” (462). She reflects on her fiancée, Roland “who had died without glory”, her friends, Victor and Geoffrey who “had each gone down bravely in a big ‘show’” and her brother, Edward, “who had fought courageously through so many battles” (462). Drawing a parallel between the death of the old woman and the soldiers, Brittain shows the suffering on the home-front and the battlefront, among men and women at the same time. Moreover, these parallels also put in sharper contrast other elements of the anonymous woman’s suffering. Even though the old woman might have been thinking of the safety of her sons, her own physical and psychological vulnerability is exposed through the accident. Her existence and even her death will soon be forgotten in the clamour of the armistice celebrations. One might say that the presentation of this incident in the narrative allows Brittain to reiterate her concern about the necessity of remembering the past. She also registers this concern walking through the slums of Cologne, as she reflects, how all the sacrifices during the war had amounted to nothing but “a passionate gesture of negation – the negation of all that the centuries had taught themselves through long aeons of pain” (635). Just as the accident is later forgotten in the celebration of armistice, similarly, the burdensome past of the Great War is presented through the selective amnesia of the postwar world. The antidote to this forgetfulness is an adamant plea to remember, hence, the urgency of the literary testimony. Brittain talks of the urgency as follows, “the best that we who were left could do, was to refuse to forget, and to teach our successors what we remembered in the hope that they, when their own day came, would have more power to change the state of the world than this bankrupt, shattered generation” (645-6).

Brittain’s Testament of Youth has been analysed in multiple scholarly contributions as a “nurse’s memoir”, as a war-epic of women of England, and as a feminist rendition of wartime experiences. More than anything else, however, Testament of Youth is a record of one woman’s development as a pacifist writer. As we have seen, Brittain faced dual isolation both from the

84 Muriel Mellown has analysed Brittain’s feminist and pacifist development in her novels, while Lynn Layton has analysed her pacifist development in Testament of Youth. See: Mellown, “University of Tulsa Reflections, 215-28; Lynn Layton, “Vera Brittain’s Testament(s)” in Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 70-83.
women at university who stayed behind during the war and from mainstream cultural memory which hailed trench experiences as the representative experience of war. Through her narration Brittain communicates the necessity of remembering and learning from the past experiences. As a literary space, Testament of Youth is not merely symptomatic of the trauma but rather counters the violence of these events through formal deliberation.

### 3.4 Authenticity and Literary Technique

In her study of the trauma narratives of World War I, Higonnet elucidates a link between modernist writing and the symptoms of shellshock evident in the memoirs and the autobiographical accounts of the soldiers. For Higonnet, “nonsequential memory, flashbacks, nightmares, and mutism or fragmented language” in the writings of the soldiers “bear a suggestive resemblance to certain features of modernist experiment” such as the “decentering of the subject, montage, ellipses or gaps in narrative, and startlingly vivid images”.85 Here, I want to draw attention to a general assumption regarding the appearance of these symptoms of trauma in the body and their manifestation in literature. The overlap between the traumatic body and its literary representation has led critics to not only foster what Higonnet terms, “a masculine canon of modernism”, but also to overlook the gap between witnessing and its representation in literature.86 As mentioned in my general introduction, the Anglo-European approach to trauma whereby “the effects of trauma” function as an “authenticating sign” of testimonial narrative have persistently focussed on the inability of the witness both experiential (trauma) and representational (sign).87

In contrast to this Anglo-European approach, in Japanese hibakusha narratives and Latin American testimonio, the witness who decides to tell his or her story has “a coherent ego” and is therefore able to consciously use language and narrative tropes to create a testimony.88 If one follows the Anglo-European approach, the witness becomes a passive receiver of shock and trauma who can neither control the circumstances of violence, which caused trauma in the first place, nor the circumstances of reproducing it in narration. In the second approach, the emphasis on a coherent ego which is capable of overcoming trauma through representation seems to downplay the gap between experience and its representation and the involvement of craft in narrating one’s experiences. I suggest that rather than merely symptomatic of the trauma or representative of a coherent ego, the authenticity of literary testimonies lies somewhere in between these two approaches. The narrative enables a witness to transform from incoherence, fragmentation and disruption to coherence, order and control through the shaping of a coherent ego in narration. In this way, the use of different literary tools to convey

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85 Higonnet, “Authenticity and Art in Trauma Narratives of World War I”, 92.
86 Higonnet, “Authenticity and Art in Trauma Narratives of World War I”, 92.
87 Douglass and Vogler, Witness and Memory, 11.
88 Douglass and Vogler, Witness and Memory, 11.
disruptive experiences then becomes an expression of one’s ability, one’s authenticity, rather than an expression of one’s disability, passive reflection of trauma.

3.4.1 Between Victorian and Modernist Styles

*Testament of Youth* is not just symptomatic of Brittain’s suffering during the war but, more significantly, it also constitutes a careful, formal representation of that suffering. To make her story “as truthful as history, but as readable as fiction”, 89 Brittain “combines educational and war history with autobiography and fiction to create a triple reading of her own experiences”. 90 The complexity which results from this combination is reflected in multiple ways. In *Testament of Youth* one finds a combination of two styles of narration: Victorian and modernist. The time before and during the war is expressed through the use of these two styles. The chapter titled “Provincial Ladyhood” could be the opening section of a Victorian novel where Brittain as a young lady enters society with the sole purpose of finding a life partner. Marriage and social conformity appear as the dominant issues in the young woman’s life and the romance between Brittain and Roland particularly draws on these themes. Brittain’s conflictive relation with her father, who forces her to adapt to behaviour befitting a young lady, and her rebellion for higher education and self-realization are ingredients of a traditional *bildungsroman*. However, war brings disruption to this plot, for Brittain quite literally and for the readers in terms of narrative progression. As Richard Badenhausen suggests, “the memoir is overladen with the Victorian novelistic tradition and incorporates “domestic conflicts, amorous encounters, epistolary exchanges, diary confessions, and melodramatic plot reversals that result in often tragic consequences, all delivered at great length and in a some-what breathless yet intimate narrative voice” 91 At the same time however, the “modernist strategies like polyvocality, intense psychological introspection, and a collage of different media and allusions” draw the Victorian plot to its limits and reflect the need to find other means to communicate her experiences of war. 92 An experiential and stylistic rupture thus informs her act of witnessing: the former rooted in the political and personal circumstances, and the latter in a deliberate formal intervention in order to gain authenticity. These ruptures, then, lay the foundation for her negotiation between the desire for authenticity and the pre-existing tradition of storytelling. In what follows, I will discuss how Brittain uses different intertextual allusions to construct her authenticity as a witness in her narration.

90 Ann K. McClellan, “‘I was my war; my war was I’: Vera Brittain, Autobiography and University Fiction during the Great War”, *Paedagogica Historica*, 52:1-2 (2016): 133.
92 Badenhausen, “Mourning through Memoir”, 40.
3.4.2 Intertextuality

Testament of Youth contains multiple allusions to other texts. There are direct or indirect references to other texts such as the war memoirs written by soldiers of the Great war, as well as Homer’s Iliad, Shelley’s Adonais, Olive Schreiner’s The Story of An African Farm, Bertrand Russell’s The Conquest of Happiness, and Ecclesiastes. These references perform the double function of situating her narrative within the existing literary tradition while highlighting its own uniqueness. An example of this careful configuration is found when Brittain puts her memories in parallel with Robert Graves’ Good-bye to All That. In the very first chapter, Brittain creates an analogy between her and Graves’ earliest childhood memories: “I have, indeed, the honour of sharing with Robert Graves the subject of my earliest recollection, which is that of watching, as a tiny child, the flags flying in the streets of Macclesfield for Queen Victoria’s Diamond Jubilee” (17). Just after this recollection, she notes, “[f]ortunately there is no need to emulate my contemporary’s Good-bye to All That in travelling still further back into the ponderous Victorianism of the nineteenth century, for no set of ancestors could have been less conspicuous or more robustly ‘low-brow’ than mine” (18). Although she represents her childhood memory along the lines of Robert Graves’ representation of his childhood, yet, she immediately asserts how she is different in terms of class and family background.

Along with these literary references, Brittain alludes to her letter correspondence with Roland, her wartime diary, and the poems written by Roland and herself which appear as epigraphs in different chapters. The use of these texts function as sharp reminders of war’s disruption in many ways. The letters which before the war represent the ideal of love and harmony come to represent the growing aloofness between the two lovers during the war. The wartime diary keeps a record of many important events in Brittain’s life but also acts as the only space in which Brittain could find refuge from the chaos of war. Finally, the war poems by Brittain and Roland used alternately as an epigraph for each chapter serves both as a traditional opening and as a continuity of the poetic dialogue between the dead lover, Roland, and the mourning beloved, Brittain. Brittain’s letter correspondence with Roland also acts against her earlier attempts in the memoir to equate Roland with the English poet Rupert Brooke (1887-1915) who, like Roland, served as an officer in the Great War. On multiple occasions, Brittain compares Roland with Rupert Brooke. This, however, seems to fall flat in the narrative, as Roland’s development and experiences, communicated mostly through letters, defy the earlier idealism of war, which dominates Brooke’s poetry. The latter’s poetry became symbolic of the early enthusiasm for war and patriotism among British soldiers. As Brooke in “The Soldier” (1915) says,

If I should die, think only this of me:
That there’s some corner of a foreign field
Roland, in contrast, outlived both Brooke and this early enthusiasm. Despite her desire to equate Roland with Brooke, Brittain includes letters from Roland which testify to an alternative understanding of war. For example, in one of the letters, Roland writes, “You can listen, […] to the undulating artillery bombardment from the direction of Ypres, not with equanimity but with a certain tremulous gratitude that it is no nearer. Someone is getting hell, but it isn’t you – yet” (148). Even the sense of comradery is expressed with ambivalence, as he writes in a letter after witnessing the first dying man in war, “I do not quite know how I felt at that moment. It was not anger […] only a great pity, and a sudden feeling of impotence. It is cruel of me to tell you this…. Try not to remember; as I do” (156). Clearly, Roland’s experiences set him apart not only from the celebrated soldier poet Rupert Brooke, but also from socio-political setting before the war. In one of his last letters, he admits experiencing complete alienation from the life before the war, “I feel a barbarian, a wild man of the woods, stiff, narrowed, practical, an incipient martinet perhaps - not at all the kind of person who would be associated with prizes on Speech Day, or poetry, or dilettante classicism” (216).

Indeed, war transforms Roland into a stranger to his own beloved Brittain, as he writes in one of the letters, “[d]o I seem very much of a phantom in the void to you? […] I must. You seem to me rather like a character in a book or someone whom one has dreamt of and never seen” (216-7). The epistolary exchanges which before the war presented romantic communication and harmony between the lovers have now come to represent firstly the disintegration of that past and secondly their inability to understand each other. As Brittain writes back to Roland: “I have taken to cursing the War … and the jarringness of even healed mutilations, and the ghastly look of wounds which are never the same in different people and which one can therefore never get used to” (220). These excerpts present Roland as quite different from Brooke. One witnesses Roland’s metamorphosis from a man who believed in “abstract heroism” (129) to one who finds nothing but “pity” and “impotence” at the core of his war experiences (156). Just as through a self-reflexive narrative voice Brittain engages non-linearly with her past self thus bringing her own naivities to the fore, by including excerpts from the letter-correspondence with Roland, Brittain not only shows a more intimate side of her relationship but also demonstrates how the two lovers develop differently in war.

Secondly, the narrator does use her diary as an authentic source of memories. This can be elaborated through a few more examples. The diary functions as a factual record, as Brittain writes in her diary, “[o]n April 17th, 1915, when the British were gruesomely capturing Hill 60, the first mention of Zeppelin raids appears in my diary” (140). The diary entries refer to the outside reality, but, at the same time, they also manifest how the socio-political events happening at a larger scale affected Brittain’s personal life. Thus, on the same day when she writes of the Zeppelin raids, she adds, “Edward, whose battalion was still in Folkestone, wrote

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that the raiders had caused a refreshing outbreak of activity to interrupt the daily routine” (141). Furthermore, in the midst of war, her diary proves to be a solacing companion. As Brittain explains, “that night, I sat long and sorrowfully over my diary. If it is really to go on for years, what shall we do? I asked it” (158). The diary becomes the equivalent of the friends she was away from or who lost their lives due to war. The diary also shows her fluctuating feelings towards war, especially after Roland’s death: “‘I cannot cherish any optimistic hopes about the front now’ … my diary recorded. ‘Yet I cannot feel very acutely – I don’t feel anything but an utter, utter weariness … It is all so unbelievable’” (255). This contradicts the next statement where she remembers her brother Edward: “I realise how it is to him all my hopes of the future are anchored” (255).

The epigraphs containing Brittain and Roland’s poems further add to the authenticity of the memoir. These poems, as well as lending a sense of structure and coherence to the narrative, constitute a poetic dialogue between the male and the female, the soldier and the nurse, the corporeal and the ethereal. For example, Brittain uses Roland’s poem, “Villanelle” (1915) in which Roland refers to the strangeness that the violets are still blue when his companion soldier’s blood was red:

[H]is soaked blood was red,  
For they grew around his head  
It is strange they should be blue. (135)

He finds it strange that, despite the amount of blood pouring into the earth, the violets still come out in the colour blue. This raises the question of how much more bloodshed the earth can take before a change is made, and of how the earth can testify to all the bloodshed, if everything seems to continue as it always does? In response to his sorrow for the dead comrade, Brittain uses her poem “Perhaps to R.A.L.” in the next chapter of the memoir:

Perhaps some day the sun will shine again,  
And I shall see that still the skies are blue,  
And feel once more I do not live in vain,  
Although bereft of You. (239)

In contrast to the red, the use of the colour blue by Brittain shows a continuity of the poetic dialogue with her beloved Roland, even after his death. Roland in “Villanelle” is almost resilient to blue, because the red of the war should not keep even the smallest flower untouched by its brutality. In Brittain, the colour blue appears as a sign of hope for the distant future, the normality of which will be carved from the sacrifice of his death and her survival. In this way, beyond the medium of letters, the dialogue between Roland and Brittain continues in a poetic form, informing the larger dynamics of the memoir.
3.5 Conclusion

*Testament of Youth* presents Brittain’s experiences of provincial ladyhood, wartime nursing, postwar pacifism and authorship. By projecting herself as an autobiographical subject, Brittain shows “what the whole War and postwar period […] had meant” (11) to the men and women of her generation. On a textual level, *Testament of Youth* is a self-reflexive narrative in which a retrospective narrator, the complex intertextual references and the non-linear narration show Brittain to be the “originator”\(^9\) of her own story. A nurse’s memoir, an autobiographical study of an emerging writer, a war-epic of the English women, *Testament of Youth* is all this and more – the memoir is a literary testimony which presents Brittain’s authority as a woman witness of war and the authenticity of her narrative as a tale of survival.

4. Comparative Conclusion

*The Return of the Soldier* and *Testament of Youth* show how the Great War affected the lives of men and women in England. Both narratives present a female perspective whereby gender informs different dimensions of war trauma. In *The Return of the Soldier*, Jenny’s suffering is inevitably linked to, and determined by, Chris’ memories of his own past and return to the front. In *Testament of Youth*, Brittain’s course of life is changed by witnessing the death of her fiancée, brother, and friends and her wartime nursing experiences so that she becomes a committed pacifist. *The Return of the Soldier*, written in the midst of war, might be thought of as a sentimental and perhaps premature treatment of shell-shock. Yet, in this analysis, I have shown how the novel incorporates a subtle critique of the way trauma and its cure are understood in literary and psychoanalytic terms. *Testament of Youth* published almost a decade after the events Brittain describes contains a more distanced retrospective stance towards her experiencing self.

In both the texts, the time before the war and the time during the war are contrasted. In *The Return of the Soldier* this happens through places which symbolize absence rather than the presence of transcendental reality. In *Testament of Youth* this is done through a retrospective narrator who contrasts her past experiences with her present understanding. Both texts blur stereotypical binaries such as male and female, home and battlefront, war and peace, subjective and public, political and personal, to heighten the complexity of the social and political fabric of society, and to point to the deeper roots of war rather than focus on its surface impact. Instead, these female protagonists move from a position of static idealism, to doubt, scepticism and active engagement with an implied audience through narration. Both also present the pre-war context as static and corrosive to the overall development of the English society, whether

it is in the form of suffragist struggle, or Jenny's self-conscious presentation of class and imperial prejudices. Trauma, because of violence or deep-rooted social injustice, is not located solely on the battlefield. Rather, it is shown to be present in the personal or domestic space as well. Both *The Return of the Soldier* and *Testament of Youth* present a witness' struggle to find authenticity in the act of telling through literary means of representation. Here, form and content go hand in hand and the disruption of war is conveyed through the continuous disruption of the narrative flow by retrospective voices.
Chapter 2

Witnessing the Second World War in *The Heat of the Day* and *Among You Taking Notes*

Elizabeth Bowen and Naomi Mitchison present the events of the Second World War as they unfolded in England and Scotland in, respectively, the novel, *The Heat of the Day* (1948), and the wartime diary *Among You Taking Notes* (1985). Stella, the female protagonist in Bowen’s spy novel, and Mitchison, the autobiographical narrator of her own war-time diary, are each shaped and confined by both the socio-political and ideological conditions within Great Britain, but also by the larger international developments. These conditions clearly shape the testimonies of Stella and Mitchison as well as, in the case of Mitchison, the publication process of the diary itself. In this chapter, I will first contrast the testimony Stella gives before the court in *The Heat of the Day* with the alternative testimony provided in the novel in the form of other information and through its use of literary techniques. Second, I will analyse how in recording her daily experiences during the war, Mitchison constructs her identity as a witness within the specific genre of the diary. Despite the different genre of these texts and the different settings in London and Carradale that they inhabit both *The Heat of the Day* and *Among You Taking Notes* show how literary testimony presents the predicament of an individual *vis-à-vis* the wartime developments and the dominant ideologies surrounding them, thereby mediating the space between *us* and *them*, between antipathy and empathy and between testimony and literature. Indeed, both narratives are significant in that they allow the reader to see the mental development of Stella and Mitchison, which allows both characters to provide a testimony. By reading these texts through the framework of testimony, I aim to show how literary witnesses of the Second World War in representing the past also represent their vulnerabilities, anxieties and uncertainties as witnesses of war.
1. A Brief Historical and Literary Overview

Although victorious, the British empire faced great political challenges both at home and abroad in the aftermath of the Great War. British wartime unity with France and the United States “did not survive disputes over the terms of the peace settlement, including the purpose of the most iconic of all the liberal peace projects, the League of Nations”.1 At the same time, the principle of “ethnic self-determination” in the Paris Peace Settlement (1919) was not applied to the colonial subjects of Britain and France.2 This caused political unrest within the colonies whose manpower and resources were exploited during the Great War and would soon be used again for the Second World War. Indeed, after two years of guerrilla war, Ireland achieved independence in 1921 and became the Irish Free State.3 Meanwhile, the hope for independence in India among revolutionary movements was crushed by the so-called Rowlatt Acts of 1919, which allowed the Imperial Legislative Council in Delhi to arrest and detain any suspect of ‘terrorism’ without justification. These acts caused a storm of protest among Indian leaders, such as Mahatma Gandhi and Mohammed Ali Jinnah, as well as the wider public.4

Despite the continued protests and political unrest, factual independence from Britain would not be established until 1947, two years after the Second World War. Meanwhile, the allocation of the Mandates of Palestine and Iraq to British rule, founded on the Sykes-Picot Treaty, caused political protest against the British Empire and ethnic tensions among local communities. Indeed, the British Empire soon had to deal with the struggles for independence among the Arab people in Iraq and Palestine, who were promised the recognition of an Arab nation, but also among the Jewish people, who, especially since the Balfour Declaration of 1916, had been promised an independent Jewish state. Soon, the British Empire had to either sign treaties for some sort of independence, or repress rebellions in order to subdue the local

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population.\textsuperscript{5} Similar and parallel problems occurred in the protectorate of Egypt as well.\textsuperscript{6} Other colonies of the British Empire such as Burma, Singapore, and Nigeria would soon follow in their struggle for independence, if not during the inter-war period, then in the aftermath of the Second World War.

While the Great War was still considered a “geopolitical” conflict, the rise of fascism, the failure of international dialogue through the League of Nations, and the nationalist freedom movement within British colonies all paved the way for the Second World War to be an “ideological war”, whereby “ideological affinity or antipathy became a way to identify friend or foe”.\textsuperscript{7} The bifurcation of the globe on ideological grounds ensured that the Second World War was “the most complex event of the twentieth century” in its costs, scale, magnitude, course and consequences.\textsuperscript{8} As Roberts notes, “the Second World War lasted 2,174 days, cost $1.5 trillion and claimed the lives of over 50 million people”.\textsuperscript{9} In comparison to the Great War where 5 per cent of deaths were civilians, in the Second World War, the number of civilian deaths increased up to 66 per cent.\textsuperscript{10} Clearly, “the home front of the first war became the front line of the second”.\textsuperscript{11} The mass-scale engagement of “the entire globe to the waging of war and the breaking-down of distinctions between the battlefield and the home front were the chief traits of this conflict”.\textsuperscript{12} Indeed, “it was during the war that British culture broke its back, and in many ways it has never quite recovered”.\textsuperscript{13}

While the British Empire was caught in this battle of political ideologies on an international and bureaucratic level, its own citizens, as witnesses of the path to war, were also personally and intellectually caught up in a battle of ideology. One example of the intellectual response to the political events leading to war is women writers’ use of dystopian fiction to respond to the rise of fascism in Europe and its culminating threat at the home front. As Lassner notes,
“women’s dystopias grapple with political and social unease in radically non-realistic forms”.14 In their dystopian writings of the 1930s, many women writers warned about the rise of fascism, the increasing militarism and the precarious individual within the rising power of ideologies: Naomi Mitchison’s *We have been Warned* (1935) forms an interesting case whereby the causes of wars and larger social and political violence are situated in the domestic experiences and gender constructions. Storm Jameson’s *In the Second Year* (1936) meanwhile, presents a British fascist regime where the narrative juggles between the “unselfconscious and uncensored self-serving dialogue and actions of political leaders and the unspoken and fearful reflections or anguished voices of their victims”.15 Katharine Burdekin’s *Swastika Night* (1937) presents the grim outcome of war as the fascist forces become victorious. Stevie Smith’s *Novel on Yellow Paper* (1936) and *Over the Frontier* (1938) both represent the individual surrounded by the political milieu of fascism and militarism. Of course, these authors often differed in their understanding of the political developments themselves. For example, while Virginia Woolf writes about the unequal patriarchal power-structures in which a political ideology like fascism finds its legitimacy in *Three Guineas* (1938), Mitchison’s *The Moral Basis of Politics*, written in the same year, does not consider fascism “endemic” to the British patriarchy. Rather, she presents it as a “political possibility” which can erupt if the long-standing economic disparity among the different classes of British men and women is not dealt with.16

As mentioned earlier, with the outbreak of the Second World War, the home front became the new frontline. This implied not only a literal infiltration of war in the domestic space but, as is evident in the fiction of women writers during this period, an ideological infiltration of the domestic space whereby the need to ascribe to socially approved gendered roles was reemphasized through state-propaganda. Unsurprisingly then, the women in the domestic novels of the war exist “in a contradictory space in which their symbolic representation is frequently at odds with the practical demands of the war economy”.17 Elizabeth Goudge’s *The Castle on the Hill* (1942) critically engages with the traditional ideas of safety, home and ideal rural life in wartime England. In *N or M?* (1941), Agatha Christie through the figure of Tuppence Beresford, a female spy, raises significant questions about women’s role in a patriarchal society. Storm Jameson’s novels *Then We shall Hear the Singing* (1942) and *The Other Side* (1946) both present women in the oppressive invasions and their attempts to survive despite these invasions. Elizabeth Taylor’s *Mrs. Lippincote’s* (1945) depicts the rented house of the female protagonist Julia as nothing more than a relic from the past, symbolic of the bygone

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14 Lassner, *British Women Writers of World War II*, 14; While comparing women’s dystopias of the time with the dystopia of male writers such as H.G. Wells and Aldous Huxley, Lassner points out how women’s dystopias were “earthbound” and the evil forces evolved not in “test tubes, outer space or under a rock, but in Parliamentary halls”.

15 Lassner, *British Women Writers of World War II*, 89.


17 Plain, *Women’s Fiction of the Second World War*, x.
certainties of the British empire. The plot drives its force from the dichotomy between Julia and her husband’s understanding of war and militarism.

Survival, both on a physical and an ideological level, became the driving force behind the every-day experiences of British men and women during the war. Vera Brittain’s *England’s Hour* (1941) provides a glimpse into the everyday life-patterns during the Blitz in London.\(^{18}\) Her main focus, she claims, was “to present, from several different angles, this wartime life as it has appeared to the ordinary London civilian day by day”.\(^{19}\) Olivia Manning’s *Fortunes of War: The Balkan Trilogy* presents the war through the eyes of a young married couple, Harriet and Gay Pringle. Semi-autobiographical in nature, this chronology “twins the Jew and the woman” as the “infantilized, feminized Other”, presenting, thus, the “survival of the silenced Other”.\(^{20}\) Manning’s theme of the “survival of the silenced Other” could even be enlarged to the survival of any wartime author as such. Indeed, as Elizabeth Bowen mentions, “I wonder whether in a sense all wartime writing is not resistance writing? Personal life here, too, put up its own resistance to the annihilation that was threatening it – war”.\(^{21}\) Women writers resist the wartime disruption of everyday reality in three main ways: by writing dystopian fiction which is grounded in reality; by presenting gendered perspective on power relations in society; and by reconstructing wartime reality to show “the mind in the war”.\(^{22}\) Together, these women writers fulfil a “writer’s duties to tell future generations what it was like to have a sensitive, enquiring intelligence during the times he or she lived through”.\(^{23}\)

The earlier critical responses to the literature of Second World War repeat the fallacy of the critical responses to the First World War: they focus on combat experience at the cost of marginalizing other perspectives.\(^{24}\) Lassner claims that the critic’s presuppositions about action on the battlefront as the authentic experience of the war hindered sufficient analysis of the war-literature produced by women writers. Indeed, understanding war literature as “combat experience” omits the experiences of those “who merely suffered through the Blitz, the aerial bombardment of British cities in 1940 and 1941, and for whom home front and battlefield

\(^{18}\) Blitz derives from the term Blitzkrieg, a term first used to imply the use of tanks, air power, subversion and later paratroops to undermine a target country such as Germany’s invasion of Poland in 1939. In May 1940, the same means were used to invade the Low Countries and France. The term was soon used by the British to refer to the “nightly *luftwaffe* raids over their own country”. London Blitz soon followed with blitz on other British cities. Angus Calder, ed., *Wars* (London: Penguin, 1999), 245.
\(^{19}\) Vera Brittain, *England’s Hour* (London: Continuum, 1941), xii.
\(^{21}\) Elizabeth Bowen, *The Demon Lover and Other Stories* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1945), 220.
\(^{22}\) Piette, *Imagination at War*, 1.
\(^{23}\) Piette, *Imagination at War*, 4.
However, the 1980s saw an increasing interest in the works of women authors, since many of the primary texts were republished by feminist publishing houses. This renewed interest entailed a critical engagement with these texts from feminist and interdisciplinary perspectives. Revisionist studies focussed more on the relation between war and gender, studying texts which represent civilian, non-combat experiences or the mental state of an individual living through the crisis of war.

In this regard, Lassner’s *British Women Writers of World War II: Battlegrounds of their Own* (1998) discusses a diverse range of female literary responses to the Second World War, analysing the way their responses challenge patriarchal assumptions about war, violence, and militarism. For Lassner, British women writers’ literary responses are of dual significance as they challenge both the “British national and cultural identity and relationship with Europe” and the “theories and practices of literary and cultural critics of women and war today”.

In a similar vein, Margaret Higonnet’s essay collection *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars* (1987) presents an early example of a multidisciplinary team of experts reflecting on the impact of the two world wars on the relations between men and women, not only in Britain, but also in the rest of Europe and the US. Gill Plain’s *Women’s Fiction of the Second World War: Gender, Power and Resistance* (1996) debunks the different myths about the ideal condition of manhood and womanhood during the wartime by means of a detailed study of selected fictional works by different British women writers.

Karen Schneider’s *Loving Arms: British Women Writing the Second World War* (1997) discusses the relation between war, gender and storytelling by focusing on five British women’s responses to the tropes of nationalism and masculinity. Maroula Joannou’s *The History of British Women’s Writing 1920-1945* (2013) places a variety of texts by women writers within the larger debates of literary modernism and re-evaluates how some texts have been deemed representative of this timeframe, while others have not. In this chapter I will analyse Bowen and Mitchison’s narratives about the Second World War as narratives which primarily challenge traditional gender roles, gendered identities and power structures as well as notions of nationalism and patriotism. Using the framework of testimony and witnessing, I will show how the selected texts present the predicament of the war witness, who is shaped by the conditions of gender, class and ideology. I will also pay attention to the role of literary techniques in shaping these narratives as literary testimonies.

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26 Lassner, *British Women Writers of World War II*, 3.
2. The Ambivalence of Testimony in *The Heat of the Day*

2.1 Brief Summary

*The Heat of the Day* is a spy novel with a romance plot which revolves around three major characters: Stella Rodney, a middle-aged English woman who falls in love with Robert Kelway, a soldier wounded in Dunkirk, and Robert Harrison, a British spy. It is Harrison who brings a twist in Stella and Robert’s romance by revealing that Robert is a double spy. Presented as an opportunist, Harrison blackmails Stella to bargain Robert’s safety in exchange for a sexual liaison with him. The narrative revolves around Stella’s procrastination in either confronting her lover Robert Kelway about his double spying or in accepting Harrison’s proposal to save Kelway’s life. Towards the end of the novel, Robert does confront Stella, telling her of his reasons for choosing the enemy side. In his fear of being caught by Harrison in Stella’s flat, he tries to go through the roof and dies either from a leap or a fall. Within the narrative, the real condition of his death remains unclear, yet Stella, who hears the fall from the roof of her apartment, testifies in court that he must have fallen because of drunkenness. Stella’s legal testimony thus raises important question about truth, justice and cultural memory in society.

2.2 Critical Reception

Set in the bleak atmosphere of London after the Blitz, *The Heat of the Day* has been acclaimed by many critics and commentators for its singular portrayal of the war and its complex effects. For Neil Corcoran, “it is an unillusioned treatment of the relationship between tiny human stories and the vast wreckage that is the public story between 1942 and 1944”.27 Bowen’s biographer, Hermione Lee refers to it as “a woman’s view of a male world of Intelligence” and she quotes Phyllis Lassner’s description of the novel as “a subversion of the traditional spy novel”.28 Victoria Coulson suggests that the novel “develop[s] a psychological analysis of war as a manifestation of internal conflict, in the form of civil war or treachery from within the state”.29 Jessica Gildersleeve calls it a work representative of the “narrative responsibilities of the survivor” and suggests that it is “an example of the inextricability of twentieth-century literature, suffering, and bearing witness”.30 Although considered “difficult or diffident realism” by her contemporary critics, Anna Teekell maintains that “Bowen’s prose is now read, as James

Purdon has put it, as a form of ‘modernist reflexivity,’ a late modernist answer to the “difficulty” of modernist prose. These critical comments all suggest that The Heat of the Day bears witness to the devastation of the Second World War, yet they do not stop to scrutinize the act of witnessing, specifically the use of self-conscious and enigmatic treatment of testimony. I will examine Stella’s court testimony in parallel with the testimony constructed in the narrative by representing time, event and fictionality in a self-reflexive way. I also address how the novel re-evaluates the interrelation of political and personal spheres of experience and how its experimental aesthetic highlights the challenges faced by a witness during the process of witnessing.

2.3 Robert Kelway and Robert Harrison: The Divide between Us and Them

On the surface, Robert Harrison and Robert Kelway represent the binary opposition between us and them: the counterspy fighting for his country (us) and the German spy fighting against his own country (them). However, throughout the novel, the traditional dualism of us and them is undermined. Hermione Lee is of the view that Kelway upsets the traditional opposition of traitor and enemy, “Bowen, though, has tried to make us like Robert Kelway, whose disaffectedness to some extent resembles her own. This involves a political and moral difficulty as well as an aesthetic one. And it makes the novel’s whole treatment of treachery peculiarly unstable and strange”. Contrary to Lee’s remark, this reading suggests that precisely this political and moral difficulty represented through Kelway draws attention to presuppositions about patriotism and treachery thus making the notions of us and them porous and permeable.

Robert Kelway is from an upper middle-class family but is rebellious towards the conservative, static and lethargic social set-up of his own class. His family home, Holme Dene, in the Home Counties, is symptomatic of the political oppression for which he struggles to find an alternative. For John Coates, the house in its “tight, self-justifying, suspicious and yet impermanent organism ‘suspended in the middle of nothing’, supplies the background to Robert’s tragedy”. Lee makes a similar point as she claims how the house must stand as an “aesthetic satire” whereby “[h]is father’s impotence, his mother’s regime and imprisoning nullity of Holme Dene have to justify his loathing of English democracy”. Curiously, even though a traitor, Kelway does not use the method of crude psychological violence to impose

32 Lee, Elizabeth Bowen, 173.
34 Lee, Elizabeth Bowen, 172.
his will on Stella, whereas Harrison, although anti-fascist, uses a form of mental manipulation more typical of fascist tactics to impose his will on her. In contrast, while Harrison is ready to bargain between national loyalty and the fulfilment of his desire to possess Stella, Kelway stays true to his anti-British ideology even when Stella discovers his role as a spy. Clearly then, Harrison’s character complicates simplistic notions of lawfulness and lawlessness. As Plain writes, “Harrison is an ambiguous figure, representing both the law of the father and a state of unlawful excess – nothing is quite what it seems”. Indeed, the consistent use of the same first name, Robert, by both Stella and the omniscient narrator also undermines the neatly drawn divisions between traitor and patriot.

2.4 Stella’s Court Testimony vis-à-vis Kelway’s Last Words

“He was determined to leave by the roof,” she stated. “He had the idea that someone he did not name to me had followed us back and was in the street waiting to make trouble […] Yes, I should agree in calling it the decision of a man in an excitable state”…She left the coroner’s court with one kind of reputation, that of being a good witness.

In this passage, Stella Rodney is called a “good witness”. This is probably more than a little tongue-in-cheek. After all, the novel provides an alternative description and interpretation of Robert’s death next to Stella’s court testimony. Describing her as a “good witness”, therefore, draws attention to the ambivalent nature of testimony. Stella, the principal protagonist, is a middle-aged, divorced and independent woman who lost her two brothers during the First World War. Through her age, class and nationality, Stella is connected to the mid-century milieu. As Claire Seiler observes, “the idea of the middle came to inform the novel’s mid-war setting and the characterization of Stella as an upper-middle-class, middle-aged woman of vague nationality”. Thus, Stella is representative of the mid-century generation – a generation situated historically between two world wars. Just as the ‘lost generation’ was the collective symbol of the young men and women affected by the Great War, the great loss of World War Two is characterized in Stella’s “suspension, indecision, and uncertainty”. Suspended between the two wars, her past is heavily laden with the sacrifice of her brothers in World War One and her present looks towards a bleak future as her son, Roderick, receives the military training to equip himself for war.

Unlike in a classic spy novel, the outcome does not depend on Kelway’s or Harrison’s choices but on Stella’s response to those choices. As Lee points out, the story derives not from

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55 Plain, Women’s Fiction of the Second World War, 179.
58 Seiler, “At Midcentury”, 132.
plot, “but from psychology: Is Robert Kelway a traitor, and if so, what will Stella do about it?”  

Stella’s procrastination in believing Harrison’s story enables Kelway to give his testimony and his reasons for treason. In doing so, he also reveals his disillusionment after Dunkirk as follows: “[t]hat was the end of that war – army of freedom queueing up to be taken off by pleasure boats [...] The extremity – can they not conceive that’s a thing you never do come back from? [...] We’re to be avoided – Dunkirk wounded men” (272). Next to his condemnation of the fiasco at Dunkirk, Kelway expresses his disbelief in the meaning of country and his desire to adhere to the principle of force: “I don’t see what you mean – what do you mean? Country? – there are no more countries left; nothing but names [...] We must have law – if necessary, let it break us: to have been broken is to have been something” (267-9). In speaking his mind to Stella, Robert makes her a witness to his identity, ideology and anger, as he says, “[y]ou’ll have to reread me backwards, figure me out - you will have years to do that in, if you want to. You will be the one who will have to see” (270). His words are important in the novel on two levels. Firstly, on the level of plot, he makes Stella see what the outside world is not willing or able to see. Secondly, on the level of narration, Robert’s confession to Stella, his subsequent death and the court interpretation of his death highlight the ambiguity of the act of testimony, especially when that testimony does not fit into the dominant narrative of patriotism, nationhood and heroism.

In his final visit to Stella’s flat, Kelway admits to his role as a German spy in a conversation fraught with foreboding. The scene displays an interplay of inside and outside, light and dark, hour and no-hour that creates an atmosphere of unreality comparable to the anonymity of the confessional. Robert is only able to tell, or to testify, in a room which is “absolutely unseeable at last, might now have been any room” (269), a “room [that] had the look of no hour” (277). The awareness of the hour returns when Robert opens the window to look outside; the inside darkness and timelessness of Stella’s flat placed in contrast with the “star-filled two o’clock morning sky” (269). Fearing that Harrison is waiting for him outside the front door he attempts his escape by the roof. Stella witnesses his extreme fear and knows his state of mind, but she cannot know if his jump was a “fall or leap” (291).

In her court testimony, however, Stella agrees that Robert died after falling from the roof in drunkenness, concealing her own doubts. The reader who is privy to Robert’s earlier testimony cannot but treat Stella’s court testimony with scepticism. “A witness”, states Nadine Gordimer, “is the one who was present and is able to testify from personal observation”. Hence, when a witness testifies, tells or narrates what happened, listeners or readers are conscious of the epistemological gap – the missing information or knowledge – between them and the witness. According to Laub, “the testimony is, therefore, the process by which the narrator (the

39 Lee, Elizabeth Bowen, 165.
survivor) reclaims his position as a witness”. In this respect, Stella is witness to Robert’s excited state of mind, but not to the precise moment of his fall. She is, nonetheless, the only one to have met him before his death and the only one who can testify through personal observation. She corroborates in court the coroner’s version of events that it was an excited lover’s slip from the roof. This witnessing is rendered doubtful within the narrative, as the reader is aware of how much she holds back; in Plain’s words, “how much of nothing there was”. Stella’s responses make few assertions, offering only innocuous speculation, but they are interpreted as confirming the preferred narrative. This is evident in the following excerpt from her testimony:

“No, I cannot tell you whom Captain Kelway may have had in mind […] No, I cannot suggest any other reason, but one never knows […] we met in September 1940… Yes, we saw one another frequently… Yes, I have always tried to keep some drink in my flat, never to run quite out of it […] I'm afraid I cannot say; I have no idea how much other people do drink… No, I don't think I remember any quarrels […] Yes, I did notice that Captain Kelway was in an excitable state. Possibly that was because we had been talking about the war; he had been taken off the active service list since Dunkirk… I cannot say, I'm afraid; I did not notice…” (302)

Although the questions are left out of this description, their scope seems partial and specific. Stella interprets – and answers – these questions in a limited and literal manner, ignoring their larger implications. The use of ellipses suggests Stella’s hesitation and the repetitiveness of these questions. The passage also shows how Stella answers most questions by echoing them, merely adding a “yes”, “no” or “I do not know”. She willingly goes along with the story provided by the coroner. Not knowing for certain whether it was a fall or a leap, Stella implies it was a fall. There is a personal stake involved in her compliance with the court testimony. By working for the Ministry of Information, her involvement with a German spy who leapt to his death being pursued by a British agent would destroy her reputation. As Hepburn observes: “by dissembling, Stella protects Robert’s reputation and her own. By not disclosing the full truth, she inadvertently draws attention to her possible culpability”. This withholding of information and dissembling both serve her own interests and those of the government.

Kelway’s death, whether by fall or leap, happens at a time when, following victory at El Alamein (1942), the British are starting to win battles in the war, with increasing hope for a Nazi defeat. Within this political and military context, it could only damage the nation’s morale to bring out a story of deceit, treachery, and spying – all the more so, if the traitor is convinced of the moral righteousness of his acts. The projection of his death as an accident serves a

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41 Felman and Laub, Testimony, 85.
42 Plain, Women’s Fiction of the Second World War, 167.
propagandist narrative even as it depends on Stella’s reputation, albeit inaccurate, as a *femme fatale*. Earlier in the novel we learn that her relatives had spread the story of her as the woman who left her husband at a time when he needed her the most. Rather than denying this false story, she acquiesces to it, admitting its fallaciousness to Harrison: “No, not even that, unfortunately. Half-baked, bottomlessly unconfident in myself as a woman, frenziedly acting up. Not having found myself, at a time when – how boring it was, how little it matters now! […] To be the one who was left – the boring pathetic casualty, the ‘injured’ one” (224). Her adherence to this story is driven by the desire to be proactive rather than submissive; the subject of desire rather than its object. A similar urge to appear as a “monster [rather] than look a fool” is seen in the court proceedings (224). Stella’s testimony is important not for what it bears witness to, nor for the epistemological gap that is bridged or the facts it testifies to, but precisely for what it leaves out: her own fears and uncertainty about being the injured one, the one who could fall in love with an enemy spy, just as she found it more comfortable to be portrayed as the wife who left her husband. Stella’s testimony protects both herself and Robert Kelway from the negative consequences of public knowledge about the truth of the affair.

2.5 The Novel as Alternative Testimony

The novel offers an alternative to Stella’s testimony in the court. On the one hand, the narrative shows why Robert becomes a spy for Germany during the war. On the other hand, a self-reflexive representation of both personal and political context, time, event and fictionality serves to emphasize the role that literary testimony plays in challenging the dominant narratives of war, bravery and patriotism.

2.5.1 The Personal and Political Context

Throughout the novel the personal events and the dramatic actions of the characters are related to the political events. From Dunkirk to the fall of France to the Blitz to the Second Battle of El Alamein to the end of war, the narrative thrust of the novel relies on paralleling the historical events with the personal lives of the main characters. For example, in the first week of September 1940, when London is devastated by an aerial bombardment, Stella is introduced to Robert Kelway through a friend. This moment is prophetic since it bears witness to the prospect of her personal disintegration as a result of falling in love with an enemy spy. Two years later, she recalls the moment vividly, as the narrator tells, “forever she was to see, photographed as though it had been someone else’s, her hand up. The bracelet slipping down and sleeve falling back, against a dissolving background of lights and faces, were vestiges, and the last, of her solidity” (95).

In contrast to the moment when Stella like London city faces a certain form of disintegration, the victory of El Alamein in November 1942 is presented as bringing a clarity to Stella’s life. A turning point for Britain in the timeline of World War Two is paralleled with a turning point in the plot. Stella’s revisit to Mount Morris in Ireland after twenty years is pivotal
to her psychological struggle. At Mount Morris she gets to know about the secret meeting of Cousin Francis and Harrison from Francis's servant, Donovan. Stella finds strong proof in Harrison’s favour and concludes that if Harrison was truthful about his visit to Francis, he may be correct in accusing Robert Kelway of treason. In other words, the historical events of the war and the events in the lives of the main characters function together to determine the overall narrative thrust in the novel. Stella’s act of witnessing is inflected by being situated in the middle of a hundred years wrecked by colossal wars, history and gender.

2.5.2 From Time to Timelessness

The personal and political chronology of *The Heat of the Day* is situated within a peculiar linear and non-linear temporality. Due to this unique temporal setting, Plain describes the novel as “a catalogue of stopped clocks and disrupted time”. For example, the novel opens with an orchestra performance in a park where Harrison and Louie are in the audience. This music lends a timeless effect on the atmosphere of the park as “from above the trees round the theatre there stole away not only colour but time” (8). Indeed, Cousin Nettie whose marital house is inherited by Roderick, experiences timelessness in living her days in a mental asylum. When meeting her for the first time, Roderick notes, “[a]nd years ago she must have ceased to look out of this [window], for today she sat with her back to it with finality. Across the sky over her head ran the bolted window-sash: this timeless colourless afternoon silhouetted the upper part of her figure” (206).

Similarly, when he arrives at Stella’s flat, Roderick is struck with the absence of time. The narrator notes, “the room lacked one more thing: apprehension of time. Inside it the senses were cut off from hour and season; nothing spoke but the clock [...] Every crack was stopped; not a mote of darkness could enter—the room, sealed up in its artificial light, remained exaggerated and cerebral” (56). Stella, for her part, observes the mismatch of Roderick’s anachronistic eyes with his military uniform while the restaurant where Robert and Stella meet has a “shock-stopped clock” (99). Such absence of time disrupts the linear temporality of the novel. These moments of temporal confusion not only act as bugle calls for that “time being which war had made the very being of time”, but also capture the psychological impact of war itself (100). Upon Roderick’s homecoming, both the mother and the son are said to ‘feel’ what they cannot admit to each other. As the narrator tells, “[h]is homecoming should have been one more chapter added to an august book” (55). Instead, between the two of them the “wariness” of war “had driven away poetry: from hesitating to feel came the moment when you no longer could. Was this war’s doing?” (55). While the war’s persistence continues to compel them to hold back their emotions, this withholding of love is not a failure of two individuals. Quite the contrary, it is a “sign, in them, of an impoverishment of the world” (56).

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What would go unnoticed in the linear temporal narrative of heroism and war is recorded as a moment of loss between two generations.

What constitutes an event? Put differently, which events are worth being documented and commemorated? The specific use of words like event and happening in The Heat of the Day lays bare how history is a conglomeration of some events at the cost of other events. To challenge what and how an event is constituted is also to challenge the linear narrative of history. As Bowen contends in “The Bend Back”: “by art we are made to seem to remember that which we have not actually known…It is a case, here, not of the personal past, which may be evoked, but of the historic past, which must be created – i.e. re-created in terms of art”. It is perhaps after all “historic past” recreated “in terms of art” which transfixes narratives into what Bowen, commenting on her wartime short fiction, calls “literature of resistance” as “[p]ersonal life here, too, put up its own resistance to the annihilation that was threatening it – war”.

The Heat of the Day foregrounds this resistance by presenting a constant tussle between happening, action and event in historical and political terms and a parallel, yet submerged, happening at a personal level. In arguing with Stella about the nature of happening, Harrison sums this tussle as follows, “[w]ar […] hasn’t started anything that wasn’t there already – what it does is, put the other lot of us in the right. You, I mean to say, have got along on the assumption that things don’t happen; I, on the other hand, have taken it that things happen rather than not” (32-33). This dichotomy regarding the understanding of events presides not only between Stella and Harrison but seems to inform the actions of other men and women, thus amounting to a gendered awareness about war. In this way, the male characters in the novel show that war is a continuity of events, where things happen rather than not, where a wilfulness or an active force makes things happen. War to them is not an interruption to the prevailing will, but a continuation or a natural outcome of that will. As Jacqueline Rose suggests, “[i]f, therefore, war neither simply threatens nor simply advances the cause of civilization, it is because it mimics or participates in the fundamental ambivalence of civilization itself”.

Like Harrison, the other male characters feel and respond to this will or active force around them. Upon his homecoming, Roderick remarks to Stella that “there is so much I want to know—For instance, what has been happening?” When Stella’s replies, “[w]hy should anything happen?”, he looks at her “in not unnatural surprise” (53). During the Blitz, when Robert wakes up, thinking of Stella’s security, he says, “I’m very glad you are here. I was certain something had happened to you”. When Stella retorts, “Why should it?”, he says, “because that would be exactly the sort of thing that would happen to me!” (98). Even Cousin Francis, a character who does not participate directly in the events of the novel, tries to create an event, a happening, no matter how unsuccessfully, with his desperate plan to be involved in the war despite Irish

46 Bowen, The Demon Lover, 220.
neutrality and his will to make Roderick the rightful heir to Mount Morris: “[h]e had waited two and a half years for Eire to reverse her decision: hopes of German invasion had for part of that time sustained him – he had dug tank-traps in the Mount Morris avenues – but as those hopes petered out he resolved to act” (70).

The personal events experienced by the male characters resonate with the political events of the milieu. Robert Kelway’s personal choice to be an enemy spy following his disillusionment at Dunkirk, is an act of political resistance. Harrison, regardless of his working-class background and lack of a substantial personality of his own, desires Stella and this desire coheres with his political ambition to belong to an upper-middle class which is otherwise too rigid to accept him. Cousin Francis’s urge to participate in the war from the British side is an opportunistic attempt to find glory in the last war of his lifetime, and Roderick’s identification with Mount Morris is an attempt to find stability and certainty after the war in the old-style big house that, for people like Robert and Stella, has become a thing of the past.

2.5.3 “Nothing Really Happens”: The Unremarkable Events

Contrary to Harrison’s claim that things happen, Stella insists that nothing really happens. Her insistence is not a denial of historical events. Rather, it is a protest against the fact that some events are given more significance than others. Indeed, the female characters in the novel show the many ways in which their war experiences are marginalized. Louie and Cousin Nettie are examples of this representation. Louie is a twenty-seven-year-old woman from Kent, whose working-class parents died in a bomb blast during the Battle of Britain. Although marriage brings her to London, very soon, her husband leaves for the front. Stranded alone in a large city, Louie experiences acute alienation. However, her position is not even that of a refugee: “she had lately felt in London like a day tripper who has missed the last train home” (145). Her marginal existence is amplified by her clumsy appearance, her defiance of social manners, her desperate attempt to retrieve her husband’s love through the bodies of other men, and her urge to find refuge from the emptiness of her house in outside spaces.

Cousin Nettie, for her part, prefers the mental asylum over the safe haven of a patriarchal household and a failed marriage. The responses of Cousin Nettie and Louie to events driven by force, duty, and masculine passion not only represent resistance to the dominance of male historical time, but also suggest an alternative sense of happening which remains unnoticed in that form of temporality. This affects Stella, too, as she observes during her visit to Mount Morris: “[a]fter all, was it not chiefly here in this room and under this illusion that Cousin Nettie Morris — and who now knew how many more before her? — had been pressed back, hour by hour, by the hours themselves, into cloudland?” (174). Through this opposition between events represented in historical time and events which remain outside this representation, Stella realizes how history cancels out the stories of ordinary women. The text presents how Stella bears witness of the unheard oppression, “hour by hour, by the hours themselves” (174). Stella, Cousin Nettie and Louie nonetheless do not remain passive in the face of these circumstances, they make proactive choices. So, in opposition to the obvious monotony of her life as a working woman, Louie goes out in search of love and warmth and, in the end, becomes pregnant.
Cousin Nettie, unlike countless women before her, does not find meaning in the “louderning ticking of the clock” in the domestic space of the big house, but she seeks refuge in a mental asylum (174). Stella, although perceived by Louie as a “soul astray”, does not give in to Harrison’s blackmail (248). The events that Stella witnesses are not literally non-happenings, rather, they are events which run parallel to the dominant historical events that overshadow them. The novel shows this marginalization through Stella’s witnessing within the novel and Bowen’s authorial lens outside both of which present a gendered perspective on war and history. Indeed, the novel seems to diffuse the harsh division between story and history by presenting them as interchangeable by means of metafictionality.

2.5.4 “Possibly a Story”: Metafictionality

The novel challenges the binary divisions of fact and fiction, history and story by casting events as stories and stories as events. Stella is known among her husband’s relatives as a femme fatale. While the truth is that her husband, when serving as an officer during the Great War, fell in love with a nurse and betrayed Stella, the “story” was that she betrayed her husband, while he needed her most in his illness. Rather than denying this story, Stella starts to live up to it, admitting to Harrison, “[i]t was a funny day when the other, the opposite story came round to me — the story of how I had walked out on Victor. Who was I to say no to it: why should I? […] Whoever’s the story had been, I let it be mine” (224). As people rely on hearsay to make judgements about Stella’s character, this poses questions about the way a society understands truth.

Returning from military training Roderick is alienated: nothing in the flat seems to relate to his previous self or to his mother. That is why, when Roderick enters Stella’s flat, he notes that “[t]his did not look like home; but it looked like something—possibly a story” (47). The luxurious things lying in a chaotic atmosphere intensify the unreality of the home and subvert expectations about domestic space. Coates describes this lack of familiarity by stating that “Stella’s flat has none of the ‘music of the familiar’ which gives human emotion a context”.48 When Roderick calls his home a story, his defamiliarization registers the effect of this war on the quotidian. As Stella’s makeshift place does not have immediate cosiness and comfort, Roderick, rather than questioning his preconceived understanding about what a house should look like, questions the reality of the house and compares it with the unreality of a “story”. The same alienation is experienced by Stella in this episode but through Roderick’s body. Watching him adjust to the estrangement of the flat, the narrator tells how Stella perceives him, “each time he came back like this, he was at the beginning physically at a loss; till, by an imitation of her attitudes […] he traced his way back […] one by one, as though each could act as a clue or signpost to the Roderick his mother remembered” (48). The alienation which Roderick

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experiences in space (home), Stella experience through his body. In both cases, the unreality superimposed on their lived experiences is a by-product of the reality of war.

Likewise, when Stella thinks of Mount Morris’ historic continuity without her playing any significant role in it, she reflects whether “her own life should be a chapter missing from this book [but this] need not mean that the story was at an end” (175). This is Bowen’s reflection on a dual sense of belonging. As Teekell notes, “[l]ike her characters, Elizabeth Bowen spent the war engaged in intelligence gathering. From 1940 to 1945, she worked for the British Ministry of Information (MOI), secretly reporting to the Dominions Office about neutral Ireland’s attitudes on the war”.49 The narrative replicates this sense of duality by incorporating the duality of Stella’s experiences. Twenty years ago, she was present at Mount Morris, but being remembered as a femme fatale, her identity becomes an absence. Twenty years later, when she visits the place as Roderick’s mother who is the legal heir of Mount Morris, her relationship with a German spy and her work for the British state must remain an absence amidst Irish neutrality.

An abundance of stories makes up for the absence of facts, following state policies about classified information or patriarchal principles of oppression. The novel foregrounds the acts of storytelling; indeed, the narrative tension of the novel depends largely on the stories people tell about each other. As Maud Ellmann observes, “everyone seems trapped in someone else’s story”.50 Since Victor’s relatives did not like Stella, they came up with a story that portrayed her as a culprit and, although this story is far from truth, Stella prefers a lie, which makes her appear “a monster”, than truth, which makes her “look a fool” – “the boring pathetic casualty, the ‘injured’ one” (224).

2.6 Conclusion

In her court testimony, Stella complies with the narrative of the state against inconclusive facts of Robert’s life and death. Bowen situates the circumstances of her legal testimony along with Robert’s final words before his death, making Stella witness how Cousin Nettie and many women before her were pressed back, “hour by hour, by the hours themselves” (174). Clearly, The Heat of the Day raises questions about the use of the personal testimony in light of the political, propagandist purposes of the state. At the same time, however, the novel incorporates stories as lies, as fabrication and fiction to show how these stories come to represent cultural memory on the one hand, and shape individual understanding about life on the other. At the level of plot, the truth about Robert’s motivation to be a German spy remains overshadowed by the story that he was an excited lover whose death was a mere accident of drunkenness. The novel reveals the inadequacies of institutionalized mechanisms for the corroboration of stories

49 Teekell, Emergency Writing, 129.
that is made evident in Stella’s court testimony. The limited nature of questions asked by the coroner, Stella’s short and often fragmented answers, and Robert’s testimony to Stella before his death all point to the difficulty of trusting the official or propagandist narrative of Robert’s fall or leap.

At the level of narration, Bowen highlights the individual motivations to hide truth, to spy, to at times even fabricate lies to save an ideological front. Discussing the art of the novel, Bowen says, “plot must further the novel towards its object. What object? The non-poetic statement of a poetic truth”. The novel show how the poetic representation of events may stand in opposition to the chronological, historical representation of events, specifically the traditional narratives of war. Literature, in its ability to refer to its own fictionality, serves well the purpose of testimony to reach out to the ‘poetic truth’ rather than adhere to the limitations of historical accuracy. The Heat of the Day, as a work of literature, brings out the intricacy of bearing witness by means of both plot and narration. The novel’s opposition of the personal and the historical, of the personal and the political thus challenges the traditional, patriotic narrative of war.

3. Mitchison’s Witnessing and the Diary as Testimony in Among You Taking Notes

Unlike The Heat of the Day, which was published four years after the Second World War, Among You Taking Notes is a wartime diary initially written in the context of the Mass Observation project and subsequently published, four decades later, in 1985. How can we read Mitchison’s diary in tandem with Bowen’s fictional work as a literary testimony? How does the structure of the daily entries of the diary corroborate the urgency, necessity and immediacy of witnessing and testifying during the war? What role do literary techniques play in conveying the uniqueness as well as the representativeness of Mitchison’s experiences during the war? I will address these questions in my reading of Among You Taking Notes as a literary testimony that shows how Mitchison constructs a role for herself as a witness within the narrative space of diary entries.

51 Lee, The Mulberry Tree, 36.
52 Tom Harrisson, Charles Madge and Humphrey Jennings launched this project to create “an anthropology of ourselves/our own people” in Great Britain. Mass Observation project remained active from 1937 to 1960. Since 1974, Dorothy Sheridan was made responsible to keep the archive and make it accessible for researchers. See: Karen Meschia, “Naomi the Poet and Nella the Housewife: Finding a Space to Write From. The Wartime Diaries of Naomi Mitchison and Nella Last”, Miranda 2 (2010), 2, accessed November 15, 2018, https://journals.openedition.org/miranda/1238; The archive was revived in 1981 under Professor David Pocock. Upon finding popular interest in these diaries, Sheridan published the first diary of Nella Last and with its success decided to publish Mitchison’s diary as well. See: Sheridan, “Introduction”, Among You Taking Notes, 20.
In spite of its formal and stylistic limitations, therefore, the diary becomes a testimonial narrative about war. I will focus on the way Mitchison carves out her role as a witness across the boundaries of urban-rural and private-public. I will also show how the diary both represents and resists the war’s invasion of Mitchison’s daily experiences by means of polemical discourse, intertextuality and self-reflexivity.

3.1 A Brief Summary

*Among You Taking Notes* covers the time span between 1 September 1939 and 12 August 1945. With the outbreak of war, Mitchison moves from her family home, River Court, Hammersmith in London to her house in Carradale, Kintyre in Scotland. Throughout the war, Mitchison hosts the evacuated women and children from Glasgow and Clydeside. Very soon, she develops strong ties with the local community and helps to establish the first local branch of the Labour Party in Scotland. The diary provides glimpses of her daily struggles, from arranging accommodation and food for the evacuees and managing a big household, to her engagement in the political activities of the Labour Party, to writing articles for different periodicals on topics as diverse as education, health, farming, fishing, and war, and, finally, to writing her major historical novel, *The Bull Calves* (1947).

At first glance, the diary seems merely a factual record of Mitchison’s daily routine. Yet, a closer inspection uncovers the emergence of recurrent themes and concerns which dominate Mitchison’s representation of wartime experiences. Two recurring aspects are firstly, her attempts to present the local community of fishermen as an antidote to fascist principles of exclusion, and secondly her efforts to connect the issues of violence and war with the gendered roles ascribed to both men and women through patriarchy. In this way, *Among You Taking Notes* shows Mitchison’s attempts to both represent and resist war’s disruptions of the daily life through narration.

3.2 Critical Reception

Although an important literary text, *Among You Taking Notes* has received less critical attention than Mitchison’s novels and other travel writings. However, two critical studies elaborate on its significance as more than a mere contribution to Mass Observation. In her doctoral dissertation, *Witness to a Century: The Autobiographical Writings of Naomi Mitchison*, Helen Lloyd claims that “Mitchison’s personal writings are far more extensive than have been previously acknowledged” and claims that her autobiographical works bear “witness to an extraordinary
twentieth-century life, and constitute a substantial literary achievement”.

Lloyd reads *Among You Taking Notes* as a “public text” which, along with Mitchison’s other political diaries, *Pages from a Russian Diary* (1932) and *Vienna Diaries* (1935), were “created not as an exploration of inner existence, but as a portrait of surrounding life and events”.

My reading establishes how the diary, as well as presenting a portrait of Mitchison’s life in Carradale, also provides glimpses of her inner existence which she wishes to protect in the face of the overwhelming presence of war. In this way, her diary mediates between the observational authorial perspective, where she projects her role as a self-conscious diarist, and the introspective perspective which presents her inner struggles as a witness.

Karen Meschia, for her part, compares Mitchison’s diary with *Nella Last’s War: A Mother’s Diary, 1939-1945*. Reiterating Bowen’s concept, Meschia shows how the “discursive contexts” of these diaries lends them a form of “resistance writing”. Meschia pays attention to how gender and class inform these authors’ different representations of their wartime experiences. In her view, although both women used the diary as “a space for resistance”, the need for this space was different for both women: while Last wrote the diary with “an uninterrupted flow” until her death, for Mitchison, the need to write in the privacy of a diary was both “temporary” and “contingent”.

In the section that follows, I show how Mitchison’s diary is significant precisely because of this “temporary” and “contingent” stance. Indeed, this is what makes her diary different from that of Nella Last and from her own autobiographical works. Unlike Last, for whom the proposal to write a diary entry opened ways to imagine and present her autobiographical self, Mitchison was already an established writer and a public figure before taking up the task of keeping a diary. At the same time, the diary is different from her other autobiographical works as it lacks both the hindsight of her memoirs and the public and political commitment of her political diaries. Indeed, the “temporary” and “contingent” need to write in the private form of a diary informs the way wartime is represented and the way Mitchison presents her identity as a witness in relation to the war.

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56 Meschia, “Naomi the Poet and Nella the Housewife”, 12.
3.3 Writing and Publication

According to the editor of the diary, Dorothy Sheridan, *Among You Taking Notes* is “one of the most substantial pieces of writing which [Mitchison] produced during the war”. Initially, it was meant to be used anonymously as background information for Mass Observation (MO) (19). Launched by Tom Harrison in 1937, Mass Observation ventured “to ‘observe’: to watch and to record people’s behaviour and conversations”. To do so, Mass Observation recruited volunteers to respond to monthly open-ended ‘directive’ or thematic questionnaires. Almost 300 of the 3000 people who were on the mailing list of Mass Observation at this time, “kept full personal diaries throughout the war”. Mitchison’s diary was one among the three hundred others. Despite the fact that the diary was finished in 1945, it remained unpublished until 1985. This diachronic gap between the writing and publication of the diary demands special attention. When MO asked Mitchison to keep a diary in 1939, their main objective was to write the anthropology of “our own people”. This ambition reflects two tendencies: firstly, the aim to create a collective memory of British people living through a period of ideological crisis; secondly, the aim to understand British culture through the same methods used previously for British colonies.

Quite unsurprisingly then, questions were raised about the methods used, the overall focus of the project, the parameters of objectivity and class prejudices reflected in the selection of people who could participate in this project. More significantly, the first phase of MO (between 1937-1960s) indicates the period before “the winds of feminist theory, post-structuralism and post-modernity had begun to gather momentum”. By the time this project was revived in the 1980s, revisionist feminist studies had paved way for a popular interest in women’s responses to war. Moreover, at the same time, the rise of popular media such as film and television promoted a retelling of the stories previously considered obscure or kept in archives for specific purposes. Sheridan notes that “[w]e had not considered the question of publishing any of the Mass-Observation diaries until we were approached by a producer from Thames Television who hoped to use a diary as the basis for a drama documentary” (20). Thus, the publication of Mitchison’s diary in 1985 was a timely addition to the existing canon of literature of the Second World War.

Another significant difference between writing and publication is the editing process in which Sheridan, with Mitchison’s consent, reduced it to one-tenth of its original length. As

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60 Meschia, “Naomi the Poet and Nella the Housewife”, 2.

61 Meschia, “Naomi the Poet and Nella the Housewife”, 2.
Mitchison remarks in the foreword, “[t]he diary, which I wrote for Mass-Observation, runs to a million words: who is going to read all that? Not me” (11). Length, however, was not the only reason for cutting out nine tenths of the whole diary. Indeed, multiple reasons both personal and practical led to this reduction. Firstly, as Sheridan explain, “each month’s instalment runs to 30 to 40 closely typed quarto pages”, where the information is “densely packed with a plethora of names and places” (21). Secondly, some of the passages which are either more personal and might “hurt or offend people who are still alive” or “more libellous” in nature have been omitted. This editing constitutes a second shaping of Mitchison’s testimony. Clearly, when she sends her everyday accounts as an anonymous contributor to a larger project, she wrote more extensively about her life. However, the context of its publication to a wider audience opens room for self-censorship on the one hand and forces the editor to reduce repetition and more convoluted passages on the other. Although Sheridan assures that “it hasn’t been necessary to exclude anything of substance from the final version”, for the reasons mentioned above, it does open up a debate about how testimony is shaped as much by the intention to communicate as by the practical circumstances (21).

3.4 Mitchison’s Autobiographical Self: Witnessing the Second World War

Broadly speaking, a diary is an account of a subject in relation to time in all its facets: the present of writing, the past in which the events took place, and the future act of reading. All temporal frames shape the diary in different ways. As Irina Paperno explains, “[t]he diary offers a unique narrative form, or template, for the tracking of self in time”. As a wartime diary, Among You Taking Notes presents Mitchison in relation to the temporality of war. Therefore, I demonstrate how Mitchison’s witnessing of the war is informed by her proximity to both the Carradale community, and the urban centres of London, Edinburgh and Glasgow. I also show how the diary testifies to the possibilities and limitations offered by the genre of diary-writing within the context of war. Her context allows her to write from a perspective that is at once observational and authorial. Her accounts of the Carradale society, her frequent trips to different cities during the Blitz, her meetings with the London elite of intellectuals and writers, her activities as a farm-lady in Carradale, her political activities, and so on – these all influence her wartime observations. Upon closer inspection, one notices the emergence of introspection which, besides the recording of these outside events, bears witness to her inner conflicts, personal thoughts, and emotions.

3.4.1 The Urban and the Rural Spheres

During the war, Mitchison continuously moves between rural and urban localities. From her house in the village of Carradale, she frequently visits London, Edinburgh and Glasgow for personal and professional reasons. Her moving back and forth allows her to see the damage done by the war on some of the major cities as well as the village of Carradale. Yet, the diary also captures uncertainties about fully belonging to either the urban or the rural realm. Her struggle to locate herself not only geographically but also socially and politically is one of the major themes of the diary. Early in the diary, Mitchison shows how she perceives the community of Carradale as an ideological antidote to totalitarianism and fascism: “I am beginning to wonder whether the point of a place like this may not be that it will keep alive certain ideas of freedom which might easily be destroyed in the course of this totalitarian war” (42). One of these ideals is a sense of togetherness beyond class boundaries. Indeed, Mitchison writes about her continuous efforts to interact with people beyond the traditional class boundaries. When she has dinner in a local fisherman’s house, Mitchison notes how, “[i]t must have been easily the first time that anyone from the Big House came there, like that … it is hard to reproduce the quality of the long evening we spent, ceildhing [a Gaelic word for feast, dance, and often storytelling] […] nobody talked about the war” (182-3). In this instance, the rigid class structure seems to melt away as Mitchison records her experience of communality through the Scottish word ceildhing.

Her portrayal of the Carradale fishermen in their domestic and public lives involves crossing barriers of class and gender. She writes extensively about her involvement with the work of the fishermen. On one occasion, she joins them for shooting and at once, she feels connected to their way of life and the mythic culture of the past in Scotland. As she narrates, “I have never seen the rowans so bright as they are this year, or so many […] they kept on laughing and making jokes. I think one sees things more vividly, storing them up, insisting on the moment, at these times” (38). On the surface, the incident records the events of the day in an observational tone, yet, by bearing witness to the present moment, Mitchison connects it with two different temporalities: the current war and the Scottish mythic traditions of the past. She incorporates the mythical significance of the rowan tree with the contemporary ideological war. In The Golden Bough (1890), James George Frazer describes how the rowan tree has been used in Scotland to ward off the evil spirits. To counteract the machinations of the witches’ spell, “pieces of rowan-tree […] were placed over the doors of the cow-houses […] Meantime the young people danced round the fire or ran through the smoke shouting, “Fire! blaze and burn the witches; fire! fire! burn the witches” (63). In Mitchison’s diary, the witches of the past seem to be replaced by fascism and the perpetuation of total war. This moment allows Mitchison to see things vividly, whereby she combines natural beauty with the communal beauty of laughing and

making jokes together. In contrast to the dying and reviving gods of Frazer’s legend, Mitchison reconstitutes the myths of rebirth and renewal through the quotidian and communal experiences of rural men and women. Just as in the past the rowan tree was used to ward off witches, today, through communal activity, people seek to dispel the overarching presence of war.64

Very soon, however, the narrative which represents the people of Carradale as a unified community is disrupted by Mitchison’s anxieties about her own presence within this community. As she decides to live in Carradale and increase her knowledge of farm-life, Mitchison reflects anxiously about what the people of Carradale might think about her involvement in their lives. The diary presents many instances of people in Carradale doubting her ability to adapt to local life or questioning her capability of representing them politically. In one episode, Mitchison feels hurt when she is not selected by the local people to represent their concerns at the Herring Meeting. Since she had prepared a long report wherein she puts forth the concerns of the fishermen, she naturally feels let down by them and notes it in her diary: “I feel a little hurt that, after I have thought about it so much and written this report, there should be no question of asking me” (194). For Mitchison, part of the reason that the locals distrust her capabilities is because they see her as “a poor weak woman”. This creates a feeling of resentment in her, as she records in her diary, “very well, if you are going to treat me as a poor weak woman, then a poor weak woman I shall be and you can bloody well do all the work and I will trick you and cheat you and bleed you as women have done in the past” (194).

Although she thinks her hurt feelings are “transitional”, they are later confirmed and become even sorer when she learns of the locals’ opinions of her through the account of an evacuated schoolteacher, Dorothy Melville. The diary entry of that day shows how this incident disrupts her act of writing the diary, as Mitchison notes, “I got so depressed I couldn’t even write my diary” (243). The diary entry of this day consists largely of her reflections on what Dorothy tells her. She recollects Dorothy’s account as follows: “but what she said was that they were saying why on earth was I playing at farming, I was doing harm to the land, which someone else could make a good job of […] They admire me as a writer but think otherwise I’m just butting in” (243-4). As a witness, Mitchison struggles to be one of the people she is representing in her testimony. Yet, the differences which shape her relationship with the community are as real as the relationship itself. She feels betrayed by the people as they did not communicate their feelings directly to her. The same day, she went into the garden and shot a bullfinch in her anger, as she describes, “I felt I hated my own men, I didn’t want to go on farming with…

64 Lara Feigel elaborates how the bombarded sites offered a means for many short story writers to represent the “vivid and active moments” and to witness the “unreality of perception occasioned by this distortion of time”. See: Lara Feigel, “The Only Diary I Have Kept: Visionary Witnessing in the Second World War Short Story”, Textual Practice 29, no. 7 (2015): 1300; In contrast to this, Mitchison also presents vivid and active moments but by focusing on rural, local and natural site – the continuity of natural life, the harmony between man and nature and the communal joy of doing things together all create a site of resistance to the omniscience of war.
them [...] And I couldn’t go on with my book because it was all about these folk and they had betrayed me, and I couldn’t any more think or write in their tongue” (244).

Her experiences with urban life and the intellectual elite present a similar exclusion, but on different grounds. Firstly, Mitchison’s decision to move to Carradale was motivated by her sense of isolation from the intellectual elite in London, which constantly stays at the back of her mind despite building relationship with the local fishermen: “I kept on wondering whether I was double-crossing myself [...] whether I was just taking refuge among these people out of a romantic or sentimental feeling and possibly out of pique at being criticised by the London highbrows or of being the intellectual inferior of various people” (46-7). Every now and then, Mitchison travels to London and writes in her diary about the cold shoulder she receives from the intellectual circles in London. In one such visits, she describes her meeting with another novelist as follows, “[t]o tea with the Marshalls, Stevie Smith there, much as ever: am not so good at talking to intellectuals” (187).

Upon visiting Cyril Connolly, the editor of Horizon at the time, Mitchison notes how he considers the idea of a special Scottish number of “no good” with an excuse that “he can’t get the extra paper”. Her representation of this incident reflects both her personal isolation because of her national identity and the larger issue of marginalization of nationalities at the cost of apparently global metropole cultures. As a result of his disinterest, Mitchison describes the rest of the meeting as follows: “I felt very shy again, and was quite unable to ask him if he’d read or what he thought of my poems I’d sent him!” (186). Her shyness seems to arise from the lack of interest in the editor’s behaviour as a reader and listener. This can be contrasted with how another reader more informed of the Scottish culture reacts to Mitchison’s poetry. When John MacCormick the leader of the Scottish Convention visits Campbeltown, Mitchison sits together in a long conversation about Convention and Scotland, “I read him “The Knife” and he too became terribly excited, said it was magnificent, he had only had this experience once before, when someone was reading some old Scots poetry” (233). Here, as MacCormick is part of the culture and can relate Mitchison’s poetry with Older Scottish tradition, both Mitchison and MacCormick are “terribly excited” and both share in the “experience” of identifying themselves with a larger national tradition which was missing in her meeting with the editor of Horizon. Clearly, these incidents reveal her sense of exclusion. They represent the slow formation of Mitchison’s dichotomous sense of self whereby she relates to the two localities but only partially. In both Carradale and London, Mitchison experiences estrangement and isolation due to class, gender and national differences. Mitchison experiences social exclusion, because she does not fully belong to either urban or rural life, the intellectual elite or the working classes.65 This, in turn, informs her testimony in the diary.

Moreover, the diary captures how this urban-rural split is accentuated by the circumstances of war. The proximity between experience and representation in Mitchison’s diary reveals the

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65 For her socialist views and her class background, Lassner calls her a “socialist aristocrat”. See: Lassner, British Women Writers of World War II, 69.
limitations of witnessing and testifying to an event within the parameters of the everyday. Unsurprisingly then, Mitchison would come to feel distant from the self she represents in her own diary. For, as she describes in the foreword, forty years later, “[w]as I as I appear in the diary? I rather hope not as I don’t like myself much, but with any luck the book will be read less for the diarist than for what we at the time thought was happening and how we acted” (12). In retrospect, Mitchison, in 1985, diverts reader’s attention away from her self-projection in the diary towards the events she writes about and the way people lived through the war. Yet, the diary becomes significant for both the events narrated as well as for the way in which Mitchison experiences them personally and writes about them in the diary. Indeed, her self-representation overlaps with her anxieties about women’s roles in a patriarchal society. In the immediacy of experiencing and writing about her life, Mitchison coalesces the domestic and the public highlighting at once the oppression that women from different classes have to face due to set social norms. In this way, her discussion of gendered roles intersects with her representation of war making room for a discursive framework where gender and war overlap and inform each other.

3.4.2 “This Hellish Business of being a Woman”: The Domestic and the Public Spheres

Mitchison’s concerns with women’s sexual, social and economic freedom are not a side note in the diary. Instead, the interconnection between war and gender are a major theme in Among You Taking Notes. Within her diary, Mitchison presents her personal experiences, cites examples from the lives of other women close to her and comments on different aspects of women’s lives. Her reflections about the living conditions of women of different social classes and her self-reflection about her own position as a woman writer combine to give a clear picture of the predicament of the modern woman in English society. As she notes, “this hellish business of being a woman always with half an ear for babies or husbands or god knows what” (283). Through arguments, anecdotes and self-reflection, Mitchison brings to attention the way women, always in a submissive position in patriarchal society, are faced with disrupted temporalities. Talking to Dorothy, Mitchison explains how “[w]e talked about women cooking and washing up day after day; it seemed a new idea to her that it wasn’t what one was there for, that it wasn’t simply the noblest thing in life to cherish a tired man at the day’s end” (213). When her daughter-in-law Ruth gets pregnant, Mitchison notes, “[a]nd it will mean then that she’ll have to work twice as hard as anyone else, but that’s what women can do” (197). Ultimately, she presents the effect of the constant burdens as follows, “I began to sleep badly, to have buzzings in my head, to be so wretchedly tired that I could hardly see straight, couldn’t concentrate at all, was only doing things with the outside and semblance of myself” (279).

66 As mentioned earlier in the introduction of this chapter, Mitchison considered fascism a political possibility for the British society if the economic disparities due to class and gender differences were not resolved, see p. 50.
What she experiences as a woman is not a product of war but something that becomes accentuated during wartime. Just as the everyday life receives an added strain during the war, so the urge to question the very foundation of our everyday experiences becomes stronger as well. Thus, Lassner’s comments about We Have Been Warned (1935) apply equally to the diary as well: “[i]t is through a woman's sexual and political odyssey that we learn that the nation's retrograde social codes are implicated in totalitarian politics”.67 In discussing women's issues regarding health and education, the gulf between their domestic roles and professional aspirations, Mitchison creates a discourse which resists this totalitarian politics.

This is reflected in how she binds her concerns about women with her role as an author by conflating procreation (motherhood) with creation (authorship). Indeed, the diary also presents her mourning for her first- and last-born children. Her eldest son, Geoff died from spinal meningitis at the age of nine in 1927.68 Mitchison recollects the circumstances of Geoff’s death and notes: “we thought it would be pretty good hell to die in that state […] under modern conditions in hospitals and nursing homes […] And I kept on thinking about Geoff who died after seven operations, probably in that state of hell. Only I couldn’t speak of it” (282-3). While she wrote about this incident, she also records in the next diary entry how she felt about it, “I wrote that this morning and then landed up in a state of violent tears. Of course[,] it is not the first time I have thought it. But one mustn’t let the past savage one” (283). Indeed, as she kept the diary and came to live in Carradale, Mitchison was also pregnant with her seventh child whose birth she viewed “as a sign of renewal in the face of war, as well as a bond with Carradale itself”.69

However, the girl child named Clemency Ealasaid died just after a day of her birth on 5th of July 1940 due to “the septum of the heart not [being] closed properly” (71). The death of her daughter broke her confidence to strengthen her bond with the Carradale community, “[a]ll this was meant to be a kind of binding between me and Carradale, and now that’s smashed” (73). After her death, she also realizes that, “in her mid-forties, her childbearing years were over”.70 She combines her mourning for her dead children and inability to bear child in future with her anxieties to write creatively71: “I had dreamt so often of the sweet warmth and weight of a baby at my breasts and now my bound breasts ache […] If only I had my baby I wouldn’t need to write a book that probably nobody wants to read” (72-3). This concern is once again addressed in her last diary entry: “[w]e are both of us full of ideas and images and all the gestalt of writing and it may be pigeon-holed forever; it may never be dealt with for the future as such things should be. What we might do is lost except in so far as we can pass it on to our children in our chromosomes” (338). By connecting her inability to bear children in the future to her

67 Lassner, British Women Writers of World War II, 73.
anxieties about writing, Mitchison conflates her roles as author and as mother. The precarious condition of the author/mother in Among You Taking Notes emphasizes the importance of writing about this situation and these memories in her diary. Through her diary, she creates a narrative that grapples with and comments on her status as a public figure and her role as a domestic woman, which means she cannot be fully identified with either role, just as she can never fully belong to either the urban intellectual sphere or the rural life.

### 3.5 Between Experience and Representation: The Diary as a Testimony

If Mitchison’s diary can be seen to mediate between urban and rural, domestic and intellectual life on a thematic level, on a formal level the text similarly straddles binaries. As an introspective, intertextual and self-reflexive narrative, Among You Taking Notes is both an everyday factual journal and a literary narrative. Indeed, this is manifested in the way Mitchison positions herself vis-à-vis every-day wartime life. As mentioned above, a diary is not expected to have a plot as such, but it binds different events together through the linearity of time and the perspective of the diarist. Even though Mitchison was located away from cities directly affected by the Blitz, her daily life is still infiltrated by the constant presence of war news, war films, and state propaganda which affects both the content as well as the form of her diary. If war is the disruption of daily life, the diary form of Among You Taking Notes allows for the representation, and hence survival, of that disruption. At a surface level, the diary records all that is happening to Mitchison and the people around her during the Second World War. A closer look, however, shows the mental processes through which she experiences the events described. Writing about the way everyone anticipates news from the second front, Mitchison notes how “[i]n ten years nobody will know, one won’t know oneself, what the word [second front] meant emotionally, to all of us” (284). Quite contrary to her fear of oblivion, the diary becomes a “long-lasting trace” – an artefact of her personal emotions and thoughts, formulating, thus, “an effective defence against annihilation”.

On one occasion, Mitchison complains about the very practice of keeping this diary: “I am getting awfully tired of this diary. I never seem to write about what is really happening in my mind, and the various jealousies and resentments and fears that seem to get into me and the idiotic worries in the night” (298). Yet, on other occasions, she looks back at the practice of keeping the diary and finds it a fruitful exercise in itself: “[i]t was queer re-reading it. I was rather impressed. I felt for the first time that it was worth doing for itself, not just because it was a kind of thing to hold on to, a kind of standard for myself” (283-4). In what follows, I elaborate how Mitchison employs different literary techniques in her diary, including the use of polemics, the allusion to different media, and intertextuality, thus turning it into a testimonial

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72 Paperno, “What Can Be Done with Diaries?”: 563.
Among You Taking Notes abounds in references to a variety of texts in different media, including the news, popular flicks, literature and Mitchison’s own oeuvre. For example, the war events constantly broadcast on the radio play a key role in determining the psychological damage of war. As Mitchison writes, “I think really everyone [was] on edge with the news. It was a bit uncomfortable” (187).

Like Jenny, the narrator in Rebecca West’s *The Return of the Soldier*, Mitchison testifies to how war news even infiltrates her dreams: “I was very tired going to bed, had an awful dream that the Germans had invaded southern England, were taking one town after another, Bath, Oxford, and the BBC making soothing noises” (206). In another instance, Mitchison writes that she “listened to the news, felt pretty cynical about the BBC and the Indian Government saying Congress is betraying China and Russia – as though we hadn’t done that ourselves already” (207). These examples show how the day-to-day form of the diary entries interact with the day-to-day intrusion of the latest war news. Yet, unlike the radio news which disrupts, shatters, and unnerves the diarist, the diary transforms her encounter with the news into a narrative which incorporates both the news and its impact on the individual mind.

Along with radio, Mitchison makes innumerable allusions to the medium of films. Far from being mere sources of entertainment or information, films have been used to present the propagandist views of the state. As Plain mentions, “the Ministry of Information actively encouraged film-makers to portray the approved national character and to support the cause of collective unity”. Yet throughout her diary, Mitchison is wary of the simplistic binaries of *us* and *them* and propagandistic language used in the war films. Writing about the propaganda films from the Ministry of Information, she notes that “[t]he right film hadn’t come so the film programme was mostly MOI [Ministry of Information] stuff, the Disney Savings cartoon, not very good, various nice gentlemanly, forward-looking, rather misleading MOI things, one from America called Bomber which provoked everyone to laughter” (187). On another occasion, she writes about the news flicks as follows: “I don’t think it pleases any of us much to think of other places being bombed, and I think the general feeling, among the poor, anyhow, is that it is a kind of natural catastrophe” (271). Through these passages, Mitchison shows how the propaganda films magnified the presence of war in everyday life and how people responded to these propagandist films. Apart from the radio and films, Mitchison also tells her reader of the literature she reads during the wartime. These are references to books by other writers whose views she may or may not share. Yet, by referring to their works, she positions herself as a reader of other people’s writing which brings her closer to the reader of her own diary both the Mass Observation reader and the reader in general after its publication. Like her own processes of interpreting other writers, the reader must also decipher Mitchison’s writing. For example, when Mitchison finds Kathleen Raine’s poetry rather challenging to understand during the first reading, she notes, “[t]hough I wonder if people ought to be so obscure, so

putting off. It means you aren’t writing except for a limited audience, those who will try again. Even so I don’t get all of them and doubt if it is worth making the tremendous effort” (216).

Mitchison is critical of literature which precludes communication. Her reference to Edmund Wilson’s *To the Finland Station: A Study in the Writing and Acting of History* (1940) provides yet another example of intertextuality and of the merging of her identities as reader and author. Pondering over the content of the book, she notes: “[c]an one analyse society, can one foretell what is going to happen? If I could only concentrate, get past this buzz in my head, get down to the facts, the documents, if they exist, could I know what was going to happen?” (261). Mitchison thus connects her reading with the anxieties of her writing and the current war.

### 3.6 Conclusion

*Among You Taking Notes* represents Mitchison’s perspective on the Second World War. This perspective is infused by her concerns about oppression in terms of class and gender. Her role as a witness of the Carradale community of the fishermen, the urban intellectuals and the women and children of different classes affected differently by the war informs her way of writing the diary. Kept initially to record life at Carradale, the diary soon becomes a medium to resolve her inner conflicts, to register her deepest anxieties as a mourning mother and an author. Like any literary testimony, it also hints at its intrinsic limitations of doing so. Firstly, Mitchison keeps the diary on the directive of Mass Observation. Secondly, the span of time in which she experiences the events, writes about them and despatches them on regular basis to Mass Observation leaves not much room for retrospective distance.

Moreover, the restricted readership at the time of writing and the wider readership at the time of publication have both impacted the content and the form of the diary. The former allowed Mitchison to write about her personal thoughts and emotions in a way which make the diary distinct from her other autobiographical works. The later determined the editing and occasional commentary from the editor to provide a smooth narrative for the readers. The use of polemics, intertextuality and intermediation and the merging of her concerns for procreation and creation make the diary an important literary narrative. For these reasons, *Among You Taking Notes* remains relevant within the literature about war and conflict. Its enduring value lies in its ability to engage with the challenges of tackling with violence in the sphere of the everyday and in its ability to formulate a form of resistance through the corporeality of words and language as such.
4. Comparative Conclusion

Both *The Heat of the Day* and *Among You Taking Notes* present events of the Second World War through a female perspective. Hence, their representation is inevitably shaped by the gendered dimension of their experiences. Blending the genres of romance and spy thriller, Bowen’s narrative performs dual functions. On the one hand, it disintegrates the traditional expectations from both the genres. After all, unlike traditional spy novels, the plot is driven not by what the two spies do, but by the choices Stella will make. At the same time, the novel defies the traditional romance with Stella neither agreeing to marry Robert Kelway nor falling prey to Harrison’s blackmail. This ambiguous treatment of the two genres can be a way of diffusing the traditional expectations of the reader. On the other hand, Bowen’s use of these two genres to represent the milieu of the Second World War and its impact on both men and women creates what she calls “resistance-fantasies”. By positioning Stella’s court testimony along with the innumerable stories in the novel and by situating the narrative within the socio-political milieu of war, the novel combines the testimonial, i.e., the individual experiences vis-à-vis the historical as resistive and the literary, i.e., the metafictional excesses in the novel as fantasy.

Notwithstanding differences in genre and form, both *The Heat of the Day* and *Among You Taking Notes* present the predicament of the witnesses of war. In the novel, Bowen places Stella’s testimony in opposition to the way the omniscient narrator narrates the events. By registering the quotidian experiences within the space of a daily entry, Mitchison presents not only events around her, but more significantly, the way her inner anxieties as a woman, public figure, and writer shape her experience of the war. In the diary, Mitchison presents this predicament through experiences that are situated between the urban and the rural, the public and the domestic, the individual and the communal. In both the texts, the narrative bears mark of self-reflexivity be it metafictionality, as in *The Heat of the Day*, or a complex intertextuality, as in *Among You Taking Notes*. Through the juxtaposition of the witnesses vis-à-vis their acts of telling (narration), both texts show how literary testimony translates the ‘experiences’, rooted here in rupture or violence, into the ‘experiences’ of resistance, survival and, finally, a sustainable world.

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74 Bowen, *The Demon Lover*, 220.
Chapter 3

Witnesses of Partition in *The Heart Divided* and *Cracking India*

Recent scholarship within the fields of history and literature has highlighted how the two world wars played a key role in determining the political events in South Asia, particularly the Partition of British India (1947). Santanu Das rightly addresses the double marginality of roughly one and a half million Indian soldiers during the First World War. Despite being the largest contribution by any of the British colonies, the Indian men that served during the Great War have been sidelined by two scholarly traditions. Firstly, within a predominantly Eurocentric perspective on WWI, and secondly, within the “Indian national-elitist” point of view where scholars have reduced the history of Partition to the struggle for Indian Independence.1 If the Great War affected the lives of common men and women in India, things were no different in the Second World War. Indeed, the province of Punjab provides an apt example of the connection between the events of the Second World War and the way it effected local politics. The province of Punjab was most instrumental in providing manpower and other resources. Indeed, “nearly a million Punjabis served in the armed forces, and it was there that mounting

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communal tension and the dramatic wartime growth of the Muslim League culminated in the unparalleled massacres and the migrations of 1947”.

Moreover, the Second World War paved the way for “the revolutionary turn of events leading up to India’s Independence and the end of the Raj [the British rule]”. The “imperial subjects” were not convinced of the political relevance or moral justness of the war as they “faced astronomical price rises, lethal food shortages and famine, the loss of young men on unknown foreign battlefields, requisitioning and other disruptions to their everyday existence”. Instead, the already existent dichotomies “between the wealthy elites and the vast number of the very poor” were further sharpened by the war. Despite this, the “political pundits” could assess neither “the fragility of the British Raj after the Second World War” nor “the inevitability of [P]artition”. In short, contemporary historians and literary scholars commonly agree that the rise of communal hostilities and indigenous militias, the nationalist rhetoric of separation and division, as well as the disrupting events of Partition, had their roots in the two world wars. Indeed, a witness of Partition is shaped by a strong anti-colonial sentiment, the demands of modernity and rapid socio-political changes within indigenous cultures. In line with the literature of the two world wars, Partition literature predominantly depicts the individual coming to terms with the larger political and social chaos. In this regard, the many parallels between British and Pakistani women writers’ literary responses to the two wars and Partition respectively, allow for the construction of a common framework to understand conflict and its literary representation within a more transnational discursive space.

As delineated in the previous chapters, the literary texts of British women writers have particularly engaged with questions such as the reliability of a witness, the ambiguity of testimony, and the correlation between testimonial content and literary form. Like the British writers of the two world wars, South Asian writers in general, and Pakistani writers in particular, have engaged, and continue to engage, with the role of a witness in wars and conflicts, including the issue of literary representation within their testimonies. This chapter therefore will investigate how two Pakistani women writers witnessed and testified against the backdrop of Partition as well as the massacres and riots that shaped the memory of Partition. For this purpose, I will focus on Mumtaz Shahnawaz’s *The Heart Divided* (1957) and Bapsi Sidhwa’s *Cracking India* (1988) to highlight how both these Pakistani women writers represent the

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2 Ian Talbot, “The Second World War and Local Indian Politics: 1939-1947”, *The International History Review* 6, no. 4 (1984): 592; Syed Hussain Shaheed Soherwordi, “Punjabisation in the British Indian Army 1857-1947 and the Advent of Military Rule in Pakistan”, *South Asian Studies* 24 (2010): 1-32, helps to understand how the regional recruitment shaped the British Indian Army and formulated the newly Independent Pakistani army; Concerning the All-India Muslim League, which was founded in 1906, and which was one of the representative parties of the Muslim minority of India that initially demanded a separate electorate for the pre-dominantly Muslim areas in India, but, after the Second World War, became adamant for a separate dominion of Indian Muslims, see: Ayesha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan* (Cambridge: University Press, 1994), 3.


dilemma of a specific witness as well as the broader ambiguity of literary testimony within their texts. To sum up, in the analysis that follows, I will investigate how both novels construct a witnessing voice that is informed by gender, class, race and ethnicity. I will also demonstrate how their works are both shaped and limited by their immediate socio-historical contexts. Finally, I will pay attention to the formal characteristics of both novels and the way in which these characteristics highlight the self-conscious function of testimony in literature. Before doing so however, I first contextualise the authors by providing a brief historical and literary overview on Partition.

1. A Brief Historical and Literary Overview of Partition

The independence from the British rule on June 3, 1947, led to a massive wave of migration throughout India due to religious differences. Based on what is known as the Radcliffe Line, many Muslims travelled westwards to what is now Pakistan, and an equally large number of Hindus and Sikhs travelled eastwards to what is now India. Concerning the Radcliffe Line, and the later plan of dividing people based on this demarcation, Khan concludes,

> The plan – for all its superficial complexity and fine detail – was wafer thin and left numerous critical aspects unexamined and unclear. Where was India and where was Pakistan? Who was now an Indian or a Pakistani? [...] The tragedy of Partition was that by the time people started to ask and try answering these questions, unimaginable violence had escalated to the point of ethnic cleansing.

To this day, this “ethnic cleansing” and the subsequent violence constitute a painful chapter in the history of South Asian politics. Paul Brians has called Partition “a bloodbath of unprecedented proportions, blighting the independence celebrations and reinforcing hatreds that continue to erupt from time to time in the region. Ian Talbot highlights the “magnitude” of the refugee problem in Pakistan, asserting that “Pakistan’s 1951 Census enumerated one in ten of the population, some 7 million people, as of refugee origin”. So shameful is the memory of the Partition violence that it has been seldom written about. Since the 1980s, however, many scholars have sought to re-examine the events of Partition in order to challenge or

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6 Khan, *India at War*, 4.
complement the dominant historical narrative. These revisionist studies on Partition emphasize the need to remember rather than forget the past. In this re-examination, the focus has shifted away from the main belligerents of Partition, i.e., Muslim and Hindu metropolitan men involved as representatives of the high politics of the time, to the marginalized groups such as women, children, Dalits, and other minority voices from that period, as well as the next generation of the Partition survivors. While analysing the role and nature of Partition literature Niranjan Murthy argues,

What dominates the public/popular memory of 1947 is not the achievement (of independence) but the failure (of Partition) – the failure to keep the communities and the country together in the process of nation-formation. The Partition is thus characterized as violence – the violence in breaking the communities, the culture, and the country. It is this history of the failure that the new histories aim at narrating.

Many writers from both sides of the border have represented the events of Partition from the perspective of public memory thus exhibiting the failure of Partition. Partition literature, according to Anna Bernard, consists of “texts that represent either the event of territorial Partition or its consequences”. It would be impossible to provide an exhaustive list of Partition literature, but it is worth outlining some of the more important works written in English. One of the first English novels on Partition, which is also analysed in this chapter, is The Heart Divided by Mumtaz Shahnawaz. Other literary responses include Khushwant Singh’s Train to Pakistan (1956), which provides a detailed social and cultural backdrop of the riots and massacres during Partition, and Attia Hossain’s Sunlight on a Broken Column (1961) which talks about the development of a fifteen-year old Muslim girl during Partition. Anita Desai’s Clear Light of Day (1980), Salman Rushdie’s Midnight’s Children (1981), and Manju Kapur’s Difficult Daughters (1998), are also significant texts which examine the political events of Partition and the personal strife of individuals to survive.

Moreover, some of the best-known collections of Partition short stories are Alok Bhalla’s three volume Stories about the Partition of India (1994), Saros Cowasjee and Kartar Singh Duggal’s...
Of the events of Partition have generated divergent literary responses on both sides of the border. However, for the purposes of this dissertation, I mainly focus on Pakistani autobiographical fiction. Among these, two different accounts about Partition by Shahnawaz and Sidhwa manifest significant similarities. Both the novels present the events of Partition through a female perspective and through this witnessing a postcolonial Pakistani identity is forged within the narrative. Both novels use the motif of the bildungsroman against the backdrop of Partition. *The Heart Divided*, written in close proximity to the events leading to Partition, represents a more immediate response from the perspective of an upper-class Muslim woman. *Cracking India*, on its behalf, is the response of an upper-class Parsee woman who witnessed pre-Partition India and Partition as a child and who revisits the personal and political past from a more distant and retrospective lens. The autobiographical elements in both the novels present a style of writing that emphasizes the necessity and urgency of testifying about a historical event from a personal perspective.

In the section that follows, I will analyse Shahnawaz’s *The Heart Divided* to understand how an upper-class, educated Muslim woman witnesses the shaping of Muslim identity in undivided India as a precursor to Partition. Looking at different stylistic and formal aspects of the novel, I will also point to the representational limit of this witnessing of Partition, informed by the immediate socio-historic contexts. The framework of testimony is particularly useful in elaborating how the postcolonial subject as a witness takes up the task of telling their own narrative and thus become the originators of their stories.

2. **Muslim Identity and its Representational Limits in *The Heart Divided***

2.1 **Muslim Identity in British India: From Passive Victims to Active Subjects**

Mumtaz Shahnawaz grew up amid a series of increasingly popular nationalist movements in India. She witnessed the discontent of the indigenous people towards the British Raj, and the rise of women’s involvement in the socio-political spheres. Initially, she took part in the Indian

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Independence Movement\textsuperscript{13} by joining Indian National Congress\textsuperscript{14}. Disillusioned with Congress’s failure in addressing the concerns of Indian Muslims, she changed her political allegiance and joined the All India Muslim League in 1942.\textsuperscript{15} In April 1948, she was on her way to deliver a speech in the United States to plead for the “case of Pakistan”. The address remained undelivered, however, as she died in a plane crash. Her obituary in \textit{The Pakistan Times}, reads: “Pakistan, she thought, was badly in need of propaganda abroad. The case of Pakistan must be laid before the enlightened people of the world. America, where the fate of the nations was being decided, must know the truth and the whole truth”.\textsuperscript{16} Nonetheless, \textit{The Heart Divided} written between 1943 and 1948 makes one such plea.\textsuperscript{17} Written, thus, in close proximity to the events of Partition and with strong autobiographical references, \textit{The Heart Divided} presents the formation of the separatist Muslim identity and the role of women in the anti-colonial nationalist movements in India before Partition.

2.2 \textit{The Heart Divided}: The Posthumous Publication and its Critical Reception

In the aftermath of Shahnawaz’s sudden death, \textit{The Heart Divided} remained unedited and unpublished for a long time. The novel was first published in 1957 with a preface by her mother Begum Jahanara; a second edition followed in 1990 with a preface by her brother Ahmad Shahnawaz. These prefaces outline Shahnawaz’s struggle, her political journey and her writerly

\textsuperscript{13} The Indian Independence Movement (1857-1947) aimed to remove the colonial rule of the British Empire in India. This movement is also known as Indian Self-Rule Movement or Freedom Movement in India.

\textsuperscript{14} Indian National Congress was founded in 1885 and is considered to be the first modern national political party to emerge in the British Empire in Asia and Africa. In the aftermath of First World War, and as a reaction to the British policies during the war, Congress became the most representative political party in India under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948). Although initially defined as a secular party speaking for the rights of all people, Congress became increasingly adamant at controlling political representation. In this way, the political rights of separate electorates of the Muslims and the Untouchables of India were denied, thereby strengthening the political representation and the socio-economic interests of the Hindus formulating almost eighty percent of the population. The biggest minority group within British India were Muslims, constituting twenty-five percent of the total population. This flared up the concerned Muslim population to fight for proper means to represent themselves, which lead to the rise of another kind of nationalism: a nationalism based on the Islamic religion and the autonomy of self-rule. This culminated in the formation of All-India Muslim League (1906), which initially demanded a separate electorate for the pre-dominantly Muslim areas in India, but, after the Second World War, became adamant for a separate dominion of Indian Muslims. See: Jalal, \textit{The Sole Spokesman}, 4, 7, 15.

\textsuperscript{15} Muneeza Shamsie, ed., \textit{And the World Changed: Contemporary Stories of Pakistani Women} (New York: The Feminist Press, 2008), 8.


\textsuperscript{17} David Willmer, “Women as Participants in the Pakistan Movement: Modernization and the Promise of a Moral State”, \textit{Modern Asian Studies} 30, no. 3 (1996): 585.
ambitions, and mediate between the late writer and her future readers. Her mother Jahanara – who also wrote a novel, an autobiography and several journalistic articles – reminds herself and the readers of this responsibility as a mediator, “I lived on and it was left to me to present this book to the readers for whom she [Mumtaz Shahnawaz] had written it”.\(^{18}\)

Since its publication, *The Heart Divided* has been analysed from various perspectives. Mohammad Ayub Jajja and Zia Ahmed study the book as a postcolonial feminist discourse about the double coloniality that Muslim women in India were subjugated to: the colonial master of imperial rule and the male master of the house.\(^{19}\) David Willmer, for his part, claims that the novel foregrounds women’s engagement with the “social modernization regarding gender issues during the period of the Pakistan movement”.\(^{20}\) Furthermore, Humaira Saeed argues that the teleological narrative of the novel “proposes both the inevitability and desirability of Pakistan as it emerged from and through nationalist liberation movements for Indian independence”,\(^{21}\) while Shamsie calls it the first “South Asian English novel about Partition”, which, “despite many flaws and a narrative heavy with politics, reportage, and polemics [...] has great historical and sociological importance”.\(^{22}\)

Although many of the above-mentioned analyses are valid, the existing criticism does not pay significant attention to the novel with regard to the limitations of narrative as a justificatory and testimonial voice of Partition. Therefore, I will argue that *The Heart Divided* is significant as it locates the impetus of Partition within the pre-Partition communal tensions and constitutes the testimonial limit within the immediate socio-political context of Partition. The issues of Muslim identity vis-à-vis colonialism and Indian nationalism, gender and modernization, influence the shaping of this act of witnessing. Indeed, the novel uses different motifs which can be read as a manifestation of the representational limit of justifying Partition as the only possible solution to the existing communal tensions. The important question, however, is how exactly Shahnawaz testifies in her novel. Therefore, I will firstly analyse how the novel shapes the witnessing of pre-Partition communal and colonial tensions along the lines of gender, class and religion as a justificatory voice for Partition. Secondly, I will elaborate on the potential limitations of this witnessing in the aftermath of Partition.

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\(^{18}\) All subsequent references to *The Heart Divided* are between parentheses in the text. Mumtaz Shahnawaz, *The Heart Divided* (Lahore: Mumtaz Publications, 1957), viii.


\(^{20}\) Willmer, “Women as Participants in the Pakistan Movement”, 588.


\(^{22}\) Shamsie, *And the World Changed*, 8.
2.3 *The Heart Divided*: A Brief Summary

Unlike most literature on Partition, *The Heart Divided* does not directly address the violence, the massacres and the crises that ensued after the Independence of British India in 1947. Rather, it focuses on the socio-political events leading up to Partition and the way these events affected people’s personal experiences. The novel uses the motif of the *bildungsroman* and situates the political developments of Hindu-Muslim differences in parallel with the personal developments of the four main characters from two families: the Muslim Sheikh Jamaluddins and the Hindu Brahmin Kauls. The grandchildren of Sheikh Jamaluddin, Zohra, Sughra and their brother Habib, represent the politically active upper-class Muslims of India, whereas Mohini, the grandchild of Kaul, represents the upper-class Hindu perspective on the nationalist struggle against colonial rule. The novel starts with Zohra pondering over the circumstances that changed her and “the lives of all the girls of her generation” (1). The focus of the story soon shifts to Mohini, who, growing up in an upper-class Hindu household and sharing good relations with Muslims of the same class, finds the political differences between Indian National Congress and All India Muslim League quite superficial and temporal. It is her dream to see different communities live in harmony in India after the end of colonial Raj.

Inspired by the idea of a free and united India, she takes part in the Independence Movement and foresees a solution to the present-day differences between Muslim and Hindu communities. When she falls in love with Habib, she believes that their inter-religious marriage might act as a stepping-stone to resolve these differences. Contrary to her hopes, however, both the families resist this marriage. Her parents isolate her from her immediate friends, including Habib, and from the larger society. Partially due to her weak physical constitution and partially from a sense of isolation from her loved ones, Mohini’s health deteriorates quite rapidly and she dies of tuberculosis.

After Mohini’s death, the novel shifts to the Jamaluddins. The narrative focuses on the differences of caste, class and political ideology in the Muslim community. The conflict between the two sisters Zohra and Sughra represents the clash of political ideology within Muslim community. Mohini’s Muslim counterpart, Zohra, is a restless and rebellious girl, who initially remains the mouthpiece for a united India and speaks on behalf of the Muslim-faction who sought a different solution to Partition. Mohini’s death and the failure of her dream to unite different communities through matrimony contrasts with Zohra’s success in realizing her dreams at a personal and political level. After all, Zohra is the first one in her family to have a job, to live an independent life, to freely choose a life partner (from a lower-class), and to align herself with a political party matching her ideological standpoint.

In contrast to Zohra is Sughra, her elder sister. She appears to be a passive, traditional and conservative Muslim woman. In her conservatism, Sughra symbolizes that section of the Muslim community which was reluctant to accept the modern socio-political change, namely new methods of education, technological and industrial innovation and freedom for women. As a young girl, Sughra is the victim of the tradition of arranged child marriage. She is married to a stranger who fails to match her ideals of heroism, bravery and chivalry. Despite her initial
dismay, pregnancy brings another ray of hope into her life. She wants to raise her child in accordance with Islamic values. However, she is shattered by her son’s sudden death from illness. Browbeaten in the domestic sphere, Sughra turns to social work. She interacts with the lower-class Muslims in her province and discovers how they suffer from poverty, lack of social care, education and proper jobs due to the divide-and-rule policies of the British rulers. As a response, Sughra envisions an independent Muslim state where Muslims can live freely and exercise Islamic values without subjugation to external power. The novel shows how the Second World War, British policies during the war, and the discontent of locals towards these policies, all contribute to making her dream realizable. At the onset of the Second World War, the All India Muslim League, of which Sughra is an active member, becomes a representative political party for the Muslims of India. At the individual level, her social and political work transform her into the new woman of the Muslims in India. At the political level, she begins to perceive the All India Muslim League as the future for Muslim identity.

The plot further emphasizes this political shift when Zohra, a Muslim who stands and defends the writ of united India, becomes disillusioned with the Indian Congress Party and joins the Muslim League instead. Zohra, Sughra and their brother Habib, in this respect, show the changing face of Muslim identity in India just before Partition. In different ways they all break and reshape social norms and taboos. Sughra, after an extra-marital affair, returns to her husband. Zohra marries a man from the lower-class and her marriage receives familial and social approval. Habib marries a divorced Muslim woman, even if divorce is taboo in the traditional, Muslim household in the undivided India. Zohra, Sughra and Habib thus challenge the traditional norms, encounter the demands of modernity, and involve themselves politically into the formation of a separate country after the Indian independence in August 1947.

2.4 The Collective Witness

Within the historical context of the dual subjugation of Muslim identity mentioned earlier, it is no coincidence that The Heart Divided builds this identity through the perspective of Muslim women. Using upper-class Western-educated Muslim women such as Zohra and Sughra, the issues of religion, nationality and collective social suffering are represented. Their identity markers of Muslim and female constitute a double marginality, while class and education form dual privilege. In order to elaborate how they are represented as female witnesses of Partition,
I borrow the concept of subjecthood from Lisa Yoneyama. The process of writing and telling about oneself, inheres the process of constructing oneself as a witness. According to Yoneyama, the shaping of one’s subjecthood is the process of “making historical facts and past experiences available as inviolable objective realities [that] can be empowering, especially for those in marginalized social positions”. While referring to the survivors of atomic bombs, she further explains that “[n]arrating one’s own experiences of surviving [...] whether in speech, in writing, or in pictorial forms, is inextricably tied to the constitution of a narrator’s subjecthood.

The act of experiencing and the act of telling merge at the site of writing, moulding the witness and the testifier into one act of testimony. This act of writing his or her testimony also transforms a passive recipient of an event (war, violence, massacre) into an “an autonomous and self-conscious political subject, who could rationally grasp and then act on the environment”. The two selves merge into one entity and create a self-conscious way of writing. Literary testimony exhibits self-consciousness to what one tells: the past experiences, and how one chooses to tell it, exhibiting thus, the relation of the narrating self (in the present) to the experiencing self (in the past). This understanding of the subject of the witness-survivor contrasts with Dori Laub’s position on the witness. For Laub, testimony is a “process by which the narrator (the survivor) reclaims his position as a witness: reconstitutes the internal ‘thou,’ and thus the possibility of a witness or a listener inside himself”. Yoneyama’s definition of the survivor, however, highlights that a witness claims his or her position as a witness in the very act of testimony. The construction of her identity as a witness depends on her engagement with the act of testifying. In light of Yoneyama’s position, this analysis construes a critical space where the self-conscious act of constructing one’s testimony as a literary writing can be put in dialogue with the larger socio-political and historical connotations of that testimony.

In order to read this construction of subjecthood, let us look to the different *leitmotivs* within the novel, such as gender reversal, the binary of dream and reality, space and time. In *The Heart*

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23 In her discussion of the relation between the witness and his or her representation of violence, Veena Das claims that “the experience of being a subject is the experience of a limit”. As a witness’ account reflects the limits of his or her experiences, it gives insight into the shaping of his or her subjectivity. Although analysing two different historical events, i.e., the atomic bombing of Japan and the trauma of abducted women during Partition, both Yoneyama and Das come to show how a witness’ subjectivity is inevitably linked to the way in which he or she testifies about the traumatic event. Veena Das, *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary* (Berkeley: California University Press, 2007), 4. See: “The Act of Witnessing: Violence, Gender, and Subjectivity” in *Life and Words*, 59-78.


Divided, Shahnawaz presents the historical events of Congress-League antagonism, but, in doing so, she forms the subject of Muslim identity in undivided India as a separate political entity. Through the characters of Mohini, Zohra and Sughra three different political perspectives are presented. Using the trope of gender reversal, Shahnawaz explains the rapid shift in Indian politics: the new voice is, quite naturally then, the voice of the young, educated, upper-class woman. In the uprising against the colonial authorities, both Hindu and Muslim women entered the public domains traditionally held by men. Mohini participates in the student protests while her father is imprisoned by the government because of political agitation. Zohra, for her part, writes letters to Habib during his further education in an English university, informing him about the political upheavals back home and their impact on the lives of common people. Habib, upon his return to India, is fascinated by Mohini’s political activism. He listens to her story of imprisonment with the same awe and admiration which is held traditionally for a soldier’s tales. Habib exclaims, “I was going to say that I envy you. You took part in the struggle last year and actually went to jail: while, I only read about it in the newspapers, though I wished with all my heart to be in it too” (83). Upon many occasions, Mohini is paralleled with a soldier, for example, “she was a soldier in the cause of freedom” serving the needs of the “larger family”: the nation (31).

Mohini’s protest presents an important example of this gender reversal. During her march against the British policies, Robert Clyde, a British civil servant, warns her of the unlawful nature of their assembly, “[h]e looked at the young girl holding the flag and she looked back at him eyes flashing – the very spirit of freedom. Then she smiled, and in a clear and lovely voice, she began to sing ‘Jhanda Ooncha Rahe Hamara!’ Immediately, the crowd took up the song with great enthusiasm” (33). As a young girl with a sweet voice, Mohini confronts the colonial authority with a non-violent but resolute dissent. The song “Jhanda Ooncha Rahe Hamara!” [Let our Indian Tri Colour Flag Always Fly High!] is symbolic of the political stance to keep people of different religious backgrounds together under one flag. By singing a song about freedom in Hindi, she attempts, to say it in Yoneyama’s terms, the decolonization “of the language with which to speak of [her]self”. Mohini sings in the native language to assert the incommunicable difference between the colonizer and the colonized. This incommunicability is symbolic of the apathy prevalent in the political structure: the inability of the British civil servant to understand her, and the inability of the colonizer to understand the sentiment of the local people.

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28 At the time of the Indian Liberation Movement, there were many political parties who claimed to represent the case of the Indians to the colonial rulers. However, the Indian National Congress and the All India Muslim League became the massive representative parties of Hindus and Muslims respectively. This simplified representation of a large population through two parties disagreeing on many issues, resulted in the oppression of other Muslim and Hindu parties at the time, and the oppression of the interests and the rights of those who were represented by none of them, such as Christians or the Dalits in both pre- and post-partitioned India and Pakistan. Thus, when much of the partition literature and partition historiography demonstrates the events of partition as the high politics of Congress-League dialogue, it endlessly replicates the process by which many other identities lost their right for self-determination in the wake of partition as well as in its literary representation. See: Khan, The Great Partition, 23-39.

29 Yoneyama, Hiroshima Traces, 86.
Like other incidents, this incident is autobiographical since the author, Shahnawaz, underwent a similar episode in a protest march. Interestingly, though, her political involvement, first with the Indian Congress standing for a united India, and later with Muslim League standing for a separate land for the Muslims of India, is represented in the novel by depicting her experiences across two different characters; Mohini and Zohra respectively. The division of self or identity by which Shahnawaz elaborates her political positions is, in itself, a narrative construct hinting at the impossibility or the failure of communal union in the given milieu. The narrative structure thus mimics the foundation of separatist nationalist politics which, according to Eqbal Ahmed, “is an ideology of difference and so the very appropriation of nationalism in the service of anti-imperialism developed a politics that could divide the two communities”.

Zohra, for her part, mediates between the conservative Muslim factions and the “larger family” of the rapidly modernizing Indian society. She invites her Hindu friends to her household and goes out with them to places prohibited to Muslim women in general. Like her friend Mohini, Zohra believes in an independent but united India. She wants Muslim women to participate in the freedom movement actively like their Hindu counterparts. For example, upon noticing that the men of her house respond coldly to Gandhi’s Salt March, she exclaims, “I wish we were in this” (28). Zohra’s aspirations and Mohini’s active involvement in the freedom movement show, in both families, women’s active mediation between the private and the political.

The trope of marriage manifests the possibility of this mediation. In fact, the novel begins and ends with marital celebrations. Sughra’s arranged marriage at the beginning of the novel and the failure of this marriage as presented in the novel later, constitutes a critique of the Muslim community adamant at adhering to the social conventions, disregarding both the long-standing Islamic heritage and the demands of modernity. The novel ends with the preparations of Zohra’s wedding with Ahmad, a man from working-class background. The “halo of romance” which surrounded Sughra’s marriage is challenged by Zohra’s marriage which foregrounds the collapse of social, class and gender hierarchies (76). Along with these two marriages, the novel also presents another marriage which never took place, i.e., Habib and Mohini’s marriage. The failure of this marriage of a Hindu girl and a Muslim man symbolizes the lack of political unity between Indian Muslims who later demand a separate country, and the Hindu majority who wanted India to be free of the colonial master but be ruled by a predominantly Hindu majority. The concept of inter-religious marriage and its failure in the

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31 From March 12 to April 6, 1930, Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948) demonstrated a nonviolent civil disobedience movement against the taxes for salt production. It received world-wide attention as a collective act of dissent against the British regulations, hence, this Salt March became instrumental in shaping the Indian Independence Movement as well as Gandhi’s nonviolent tactics. See: Dennis Dalton, ed., *Mahatma Gandhi: Selected Political Writings* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1996), 73.
case of Habib and Mohini is not coincidental to the political scenario rather it presents how the “subjects [are] constituted as primarily Hindu and Muslim due to the resistance to their union”. However, the novel shows ambivalence towards this simplistic socio-religious dichotomy through the motifs of dream vs. reality and time vs. space.

2.5 The Twin Motifs of Dream vs. Reality and Time vs. Space in the Discourse of Muslim Nationhood

In the struggle to fight colonialism on the one hand and a Hindu majoritarian nationalism on the other hand, many Muslims in India started to redefine themselves as a separate religious community. As Jalal explain, when reduced to “an abstract legal and political category” in British India, Muslims evolved “a common sense of nationality only through conscious reconfiguring of their individual self-identification with the religious community”. In this struggle, the concept of Muslim ummah as a “universal and non-territorial identity” came to define Muslim identity in which the stories of the Muslim invaders of India from the past were now presented with heroic grandeur and glory. In The Heart Divided, Sughra adheres to this representation of the Islamic history in South Asia. The fictional family of the Jamaluddins, within the text, and the family of the Shahnawazs, outside the text, are the direct descendants of the Mughal king Shah Jahan (1592-1666). In her autobiography, Begum Jahanara, Shahnawaz’s mother, explains her family lineage as follows, “the Mian family […] belongs to the third largest tribe of the Punjab, the Arains. Tradition has it that the tribe migrated from Arabia to Egypt and from there came to the Indian sub-continent sometime in the eleventh century”.

Quite naturally, the stories of the Muslim conquest in India are presented as the proud heritage for the modern Muslim community; a heritage, whose roots are set not in India, but in another place. This provides the basis for the Indian Muslims to establish their difference, their otherness from the rest of the Indians. Sughra inherits the grand narrative of the glorious past of the Muslims in India from her grandfather. In the light of these narratives, she finds her husband incapable of fulfilling the role of an ideal Muslim man. For her husband Mansur is anything but heroic: he is fully engaged as a feudal landlord, incoherent in speech, and subjugated by his mother in the domestic sphere. In contrast to the dull present, a nostalgic reverence for the past remains the only anchor for Sughra to sustain her through the drab domesticity of being a feudal wife. As the narrator tells of her daydreaming as follows, “Would she never see these lands [Arabia, Syria, Palestine and Turkey] whose very history beat in her

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33 Jalal, Self and Sovereignty, 333.
34 Jalal, Self and Sovereignty, 165.
35 Jalal, Self and Sovereignty, 189.
blood? The glorious past was so different to the drab present [...] that she longed to escape into it, to retreat from dull reality and to lose herself in dreams” (119).

Sughra identifies with a transnational, transhistorical Muslimhood based upon the intersection of the self and the ummah [community]. However, her idealization of the ummah highlights the contrast between the imagined ideal of a Muslim nation beyond space and time, and the present ambiguities and clashes within the Muslim and other communities in India. The novel foregrounds this contrast by representing the current events through long reportage, newspaper writings, personal retellings, e.g., the recalling of 1919 Hindu-Muslim unity by the elders in Kaul and Jamaluddin families. In a similar vein, the interfamilial conflicts are presented in the mode of polemics, e.g., disagreements between older and younger Hindu-Muslim generations, between Zohra and Sughra mainly conceived in the rhetoric of polemics. In this context, two different forms of time present the incongruity of what Jalal calls, “worrying about the Islamic ummah and neglecting those at home was like “dreaming about palaces from the confines of straw huts”.

The motif of space also presents the limitations of this rhetoric of transnational Muslim identity. Like the family lineage, Shalimar Gardens is depicted as an inherited space. The Jamaluddins inherit these Gardens, a symbol of the Muslim glory in the past in India. This site converges upon two different ideological positions by making it a site of unrequited love for Sughra, Habib and Mohini. On meeting in the Shalimar Gardens, Mohini and Habib reiterate their political positions and envision the possibility of a new harmony. Habib registers the sense of loss and decay as follows: “The Moghuls loved life and beauty […] They were a happy people and what a sad people we have become now. Poor, hungry, ignorant, thousands upon thousands of us! he sighed” (144). To this, Mohini adds, “[Shalimar] is Muslim, as Muslim as you are Habib, yet how well it fits in with the setting of Hindustan around it. They don’t clash they merge and mingle […] There is no conflict between them only a perfect understanding” (144). Clearly, the understanding which Mohini conceives can only be presented as an absence as both could not get married because of religious differences and as on political level, Cripps Mission to bring Hindus and Muslims together met with failure. Shalimar Gardens which Habib visits after Mohini’s death becomes a site of remembrance of the dream of unity.

As for Sughra, during her stay in Delhi, she falls in love with a married Muslim man who cannot leave his wife because of social pressures. Returning from Delhi, Sughra, like Habib, finds relief in the same site of Shalimar Gardens, as the narrator tells, “March had come once more to Shalimar, and the ancient soil had blossomed again, and the sap was rich in the twisting

38 In March 1942, Sir Stafford Cripps, a left-wing Labour politician, was sent to India to come to a resolution for the nationalist movements. His offer was self-rule in exchange for India’s cooperation with the British until the end of the Second World War. The mission failed as it could not bring any unified resolution. As a result of this discussion, Congress’s Independence Movement developed into Quit India Movement as they declined to support the British war efforts. Muslim League promised to continue favouring the war effort, and Jinnah was pleasantly surprised to see the option of independent rule of the Muslims proposed in the mission. See: Talbot and Gurharpal, *Partition of India*, 35.
trees, and there she wandered one afternoon through the terraces and *baradaris* [pavilions] that seemed to be a fragment of Delhi flung into the Punjab” (412). After her unsuccessful extramarital love affair in Delhi, Sughra returns to the region of Punjab dominated by separatist politics. Her departure from Delhi is also a departure from the idea of communal harmony. Restricted thus to what will later be called Pakistani Punjab, the Shalimar Gardens are reminiscent of the lost past providing to Sughra a fragment of Delhi.

The sense of this territorial limitation binds her even closer to her brother Habib, for whom the site presents the loss of the “art of living” as well as the loss of Mohini. Shalimar, in this way, presents two realities (144). Firstly, it presents partition, loss, and unrequited love at the personal and political level. Secondly, through Sughra’s relation with the Gardens and the city of Delhi, the territorial limits of Partition are highlighted, as people were literally restricted from crossing the border in the aftermath of Partition. At a personal level, these motifs sharpen further the contrast between the present-day situation and the abstract ideologies of love and harmony as presented in the character of Mohini and later on in Sughra. At a socio-political level, then, the twin motifs of dream vs. reality and time vs. space work to challenge the simplistic construction of two-nation theory. Let us now look at how *The Heart Divided*, as a narrative of pre-Partition Muslim identity, manifests the limitation of separatist Muslim identity.

### 2.6 The Limits of Testimony: Narrative Rupture through the Character of Vijay

Through the dishevelled figure of Mohini’s elder brother, Vijay, Shahnawaz presents the limit of the pre-Partition Muslim identity. To use Veena Das’ terms, Vijay through his “experience of being a subject” represents the “experience of a limit”. His testimony is constituted by this limit. On the one hand, a witness is the product of a limit: a result of rupture, break, fragmentation or suffering. On the other hand, a witness’ response to this rupture can generate yet another rupture: the rupture in representation, the incommunicable gaps in the speech. This rupture, as a testimonial response, is often explained as a sign of a witness’ trauma, the incommunicability of his or her experience. However, this rupture can also be purely mimetic; rooted in a desire to imitate the violence which one is testifying about. The creation of Muslim nationalism and its representation in the novel formulate this limit of a witness.

Typically, testimonial narratives are first-person narratives. The witnessing ‘I’ configures itself as the corroborating eye, creating proximity among the witnessing ‘I’, the narrating ‘I’, and the listening (readerly) ‘I’. Contrary to this, *The Heart Divided* creates a collective we in the face of anticolonial struggle which soon disrupts with the formation of separatist Muslim Identity. The narrator focalizes the main characters and their individual witnessing perspectives.

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However, this collectiveness soon breaks apart with Mohini’s death. From this point onwards, Zohra, Sughra and Habib remain the only protagonists. In this way, Mohini’s death and her exclusion from the narrative forces one to accept the Muslim faction of the population as the new collective *us*. The novel as a discursive formation creates a collective *us* by excluding the political and social other into non-representation. In doing so, *The Heart Divided* represents Muslim identity as a separate socio-political entity and reconfigures the same exclusionary communal tension at the narrative level. Vijay enters the plot as a brief rupture and presents this representational limit.

At a personal level, Vijay is traumatized as he lost his sister who believed in a united India. Politically, he witnesses the failed negotiations of the Hindu-Muslim alliance in Delhi. He goes to the Jamaluddins house to tell them the sad news, “just then the door opened again and they looked up to see Vijay standing there with dishevelled hair and a wild look in his eyes” (504). With his shocking appearance, he resembles an apparition. Upon Habib’s insistence to enter the house, “he did not move” (504). This event, combined with the hopelessness of his facial expressions, disrupts the joyous celebrations of Zohra’s wedding inside the house. His physical restriction to the threshold of the house announces a new dynamic in their relations: not crossing the threshold and addressing them as a collective *you*, precipitates the disunity. The characters on the other side of the threshold are mostly politically active, upper-class Muslims in favour of separation. Vijay holds them responsible for the failure of Hindu-Muslim dialogue, as he says,

“And now .... now even the principle of vivisection .... is taken almost for granted .... now you want to leave us .... to break away to become another land .... another people .... but I tell you we shall try to keep up back with love [...] ‘But you want to separate .... Ah can you not look into the future?’ He pointed as if into the distance and his eyes were haunted. “Look it comes, nearer and near it comes .... the separation and the shadow .... the darkest hour .... and the rift between us becomes a chasm .... and the chasm a sea .... a sea of blood and tears .... of tears and blood ...” His voice quivered and faded and before they could stop him, he was gone. (505)

To define what later will be termed Partition, Vijay uses the word vivisection, literally implying the idea of the dissection of *one* living organism. He presents a case of a witness bridging the wide gulf of present and future. The word *now* stresses the present instant in which he testifies to the failure of the Cripps Mission. But in his plea to “look into the future”, and in envisioning a sea of “blood and tears”, Vijay seems like an apparition from the future who breaks the linearity of time and warns about the *darkest hour* which is yet to come. This image of an apparition is further emphasized in the fading away of his quivering voice and disappearance from the scene before anyone could respond. The gasps, the sighs and the recurrent ellipses in his utterance show the incommunicability of what he envisions, and the difficulty of communicating it to the ones who stand apart because of their ideological position. His testimonial utterance to the people who have conceived themselves as another subject, another people, is possible only in this small instant. He stands *outside* on the threshold, utters his
testimony like a soliloquy and vanishes from the scene without anticipating a dialogue. His utterance is symptomatic of what all witnesses have to suffer: the desperation of uttering what happened and the uncertainty of their communication.

The end of dialogue in this episode persists today and informs the geo-politics of South-Asia. Though a short interlude, Vijay creates ripples in the calm and composed domesticity of Jamaluddin’s. Each one of his listeners reacts to this disturbing episode. “Najma trembled and drew nearer to Habib and Zohra caught Ahmad’s hand in her own”, but Sughra’s reaction is the most telling one. If Vijay, who believed in one united India, appears like an apparition and vanishes away beyond the possibility of dialogue, Sughra as one in favour of Partition, also walks away “like in a dream”. As she opens the window, she imagines on the horizon “the crescent moon with its accompanying star sailing in a sea of pale green”, with joy she exclaims, “The herald of Pakistan!” But her eyes dropped lower and the sunset surged into them in a flood of crimson and she shuddered and turned away” (505). For Sughra, Vijay’s entry and the failure of political alliances leads to the formation of a new nation. It was, after all, in the Cripps Mission that the Muslims were given the opportunity to quit the future union of Independent India. The crescent moon, the accompanying star and the pale green sea are literally a reference to what later would become Pakistan’s national flag.

Despite her vision of a new nation on the horizon, she cannot help observing in that sea of pale green, “a flood of crimson”. She shudders and turns away from this crimson, symbolic of the aftermath of Partition. As she finds out that her feudal husband is working hard for the Muslim nationalist goals, “she look[s] up at him with radiant eyes,’ and says, ‘henceforth we shall go forward together hand in hand, towards our goal’. ‘Towards Pakistan!’ he said triumphantly” (506). One might say that listening to Vijay’s ominous words, Sughra prepares herself for the coming times by re-uniting with her husband. The novel ends with a note of unity of Muslim men and women on the national front. The configuration of Vijay’s testimony as the penultimate scene and the reunion of Sughra and Mansur as the final scene in the novel, narrates the limit of the subject of Muslim identity. As a witness of the pre-Partition period, Sughra is partially shaped by the same exclusionary principles that were used by the colonial powers to divide and rule, and partially by the marginalization of the mainstream Hindu political junta. Therefore, she reacts to Vijay’s forewarning through denial and abeyance; a reaction which the novel, as a literary discursive space, replicates.

2.7 Conclusion

Written between 1943 and 1948, the novel is an immediate response to the communal tensions and the rise of the nationalist sentiment among Muslims, which ultimately resulted in the Muslim League becoming the representative voice of the Muslims of India. The notion of self (Muslim) and community (ummah) promises a perfect nation, but, quite ironically, also creates a sense of double exclusion. Firstly, like Sughra who, after leaving Delhi, conforms to these new territorial limitations, many Muslims and minorities in Pakistan faced territorial
prohibition. Their previous homes and familiar places became a no-man’s land in the face of Partition. Secondly, the Muslims who were left behind in India after Partition, had a bitter sense of betrayal from a political solution that failed to represent their interests. The main characters within the novel do not represent these Indian Muslims. This clearly challenges the concept of nation as a transnational entity. Muslim national identity, constructed through the mouthpiece of an upper-class Muslim woman, bespeaks yet another kind of limitation. The progressive reformulations of gender are hijacked by the separatist political agenda. Women’s liberation becomes subservient to the political need to act collectively. The feminist ambitions, in this way, feed the objective of nationalism. Before Partition, women’s voices became the harbinger of a desired change whereas during and after Partition, women (and specifically lower-class women) became objects through which the violence of nationalist rhetoric was carved.40

All in all, by testifying to the pre-Partition nationalist struggles of the Muslims of India and shaping the subject of Muslims in terms of a separate nation, The Heart Divided forms a significant contribution to the canon of Partition literature. As with any piece of testimonial literature the novel also contains limitations, especially given the author’s proximity to the events and her specific religious and national allegiances. Shahnawaz provides a glimpse of the rich and complex way in which religion played a key role in making Indian Muslims a separate political identity. As much as the narrative presents a generation of Muslim men and women who demand their right to political representation, it clearly succeeds in offering an understanding of the separatist subjecthood of Muslim nationalism. In this way, The Heart Divided emerges as an autobiographical fiction which testifies to the socio-political movements of Partition and embodies the limitations of testimony.

In comparison with Shahnawaz’s The Heart Divided, Bapsi Sidhwa presents a different array of marginalized voices in Cracking India. Both the theme and the structure in Sidhwa’s novel extend further across time, understanding of the role of literary witnessing and testimony within the larger Partition literature and the literature on war and conflict. In the section that follows, I will focus on Cracking India as another novel about Partition which presents the marginalized voices of Partition and brings the ambivalent realities of Partition to the fore.

3. **Cracking India: Witnesses of Partition**

Bapsi Sidhwa experienced the Partition riots at the age of nine. Although born in Karachi to Zoroastrian parents, she lived most of her life in Lahore, a city that forms the setting of most

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of her works. Moreover, Sidhwa shows a deep commitment to the feminist cause by presenting her narratives through women who face different levels of marginalization. The issues of gender, identity, immigration, and dislocation that dominate her work not only represent a contemporary Pakistani citizen’s situation but also give voice to the concerns of a larger South Asian diaspora. In this respect, *Cracking India* is typical of her work in that it presents a marginalized female child as a witness of Partition. Rather than a Hindu or a Muslim point of view, the novel represents the socio-cultural set up of Lahore before Partition, the subsequent massacres and violence of Partition, and the socio-political changes in Pakistan that followed in Partition’s wake through the retrospective voice of a Parsee girl. Over the years, the critics have provided varied interpretations of the novel. *Cracking India* presents a tension between the will to be a nation and the violence that ensues from that will. The novel “forms a ‘border work’ about those who ‘belong’ and ‘unbelong’”. It focuses on women’s side of Partition story and “captures the struggle of a woman writer balancing between ‘the acts of traumatic recalls and narrative commemoration’”. Furthermore, *Cracking India* “uses the trope of the ‘Woman’ as an alibi for colonial and nationalist interventions in the South Asian history” and “presents the traumas of war and violence from a feminist perspective”. Most of the existing critical debates focus either on one of the main characters, Ayah or the first-person narrator, Lenny. However, the novel also presents different dimensions of Partition which to date have been largely overlooked. This analysis, therefore, focuses on the divergent aspects of testimony as portrayed through the involvement of different characters in the plot and as re-emphasized through the use of different motifs in the novel.

### 3.1 *Cracking India*: A Brief Summary

*Cracking India* is a *bildungsroman* with autobiographical references. It depicts the life of an eight-years-old Punjabi Parsee girl, Lenny. She shares a special bond with her Hindu care-taker Shanta, or, as she is referred to in the novel, Ayah (lit.: caretaker). As a young polio-ridden girl,

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44 Ananya Jahanara Kabir, “Gender, Memory, Trauma: Women’s Novels on the Partition of India”, *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 25, no.1 (2005): 177.


46 Kamran Rastegar, “Trauma and Maturation in Women’s War Narratives: The Eye of the Mirror and *Cracking India*”, *Journal of Middle East Women’s Studies* 2, no.3 (2006): 22.
Lenny depends on Ayah for her mobility. With Ayah’s help, Lenny tours around different parts of the city and becomes familiar with Ayah’s relationship with men of lower-class. Ayah’s sensual body and her love and care for different admirers, is symbolic of the peace and harmony among people of different religions, ethnicities and races before Partition. This peaceful environment is soon disturbed by the strong political and social discourses of the Indian Independence Movement. Ayah’s admirers, like many other people at the time, start to adhere to different political parties on the basis of their religion and ideological standpoints. One of these admirers is Ice-candy-man, a Muslim, who is her most possessive lover and who is also shown as the main perpetrator during the Partition riots.

His real name and identity are unknown, as he is referred to by his profession: a man who sells ice-candies. In fact, the pseudonym Ice-candy-man is most probably a reference to the tradition of calling people by what they do or where they live, as is well-known in both the historical and contemporary Lahore and the South Asian Parsee community. Throughout the novel, Ice-candy-man stalks Ayah and Lenny. Upon realizing that Ayah has a soft spot for another Muslim man named Masseur (who similarly is referred to in terms of profession), Ice-candy-man cannot control his sense of possession for Ayah. At a personal level, Ice-candy-man suffers from rejection and negligence from Ayah and, at a social and political level, he witnesses and partakes in the massacres of Partition. Upon discovering the maimed bodies of his female relatives in a refugee train, Ice-candy-man envisions every Hindu and Sikh as his enemy. Driven thus by the impetus of revenge, he burns multiple Hindu and Sikh houses in Lahore. At the time, when the religious minorities (Hindus and Sikhs) were migrating away from Muslim majority areas, Ayah chooses to stay in Lenny’s house.

At this moment, Lenny still thinks of Ice-candy-man as a well-wisher towards Ayah, so when he coaxes Lenny to tell Ayah’s whereabouts, Lenny cooperates. Subsequently, Ayah, like many other women during Partition, is abducted and raped by a group of rioters. In post-Partition Lahore, Ice-candy-man becomes her pimp, and those who once admired her, now become her exploiters. When, later in the novel, Ice-candy-man realizes that Lenny’s Godmother plans to send Ayah to India, he forces her into marriage. Despite the quick marriage, Godmother does visit Ice-candy-man’s house and asks Ayah whether she prefers to go back to India or to stay with Ice-candy-man. Upon Ayah confirming her wish to return to India, Ice-candy-man, deprived of his position and relevance in the post-Partition Pakistan, decides to follow her into India. Along with this plot, the novel also presents Ranna’s account of surviving through Partition riots in a separate section.

48 Trains that were supposed to bring the Muslims and Hindus to their respective post-partition provinces, but which were brutally attacked before they reached their destination. As Nisid Hajari explains, “special refugee trains, filled to bursting when they set out, suffered repeated ambushes along the way. All too often they crossed the border in funereal silence, blood seeping from under their carriage doors”. See: Nisid Hajari, Midnight’s Furies: A Deadly Legacy of India’s Partition (New York, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2015), 12.
After having briefly summarized the novel, let us now analyse how *Cracking India* serves as an example of a literary testimony in which Partition witnesses move beyond the binaries of passive victims and active perpetrators, to mediate dissent, resistance and struggle. In order to do so, four different witnesses of Partition violence are given due attention: Lenny, the main protagonist; Ranna, the rural boy; Ayah, Lenny’s caretaker; and Ice-candy-man, Ayah’s admirer. Each of them has a different take on the Partition events, and each of them struggles differently with the nationalist claims for the disruption, or, the *cracking* of a country. Their stories highlight the characteristics of Partition stories as reconciliatory, redemptive, self-consciously inward looking and ‘enabling’ for their subjects. The use of literary devices such as retrospective first-person narrator, intertextual references, and non-linear plot structure advance the purpose of testimony.

3.2 Lenny: The Reluctant Witness

Like most testimonial literature, Sidhwa claims authority and reliability by asserting the uniqueness of the main character, Lenny. In one of her interviews, she says, “[n]ow, I am Parsi, not Hindu, Muslim or Sikh and I wrote from a Parsi child’s perspective, because I felt it could bring some sort of fairness on the issue of Partition which still raises strong emotions involving religious communities”.49 Different scholars have engaged with the novel, mainly praising the work for representing the traumatized and silenced narratives of the women of Partition. However, Ambreen Hai challenges this status of fairness and objectivity. For Hai, using the apparently “neutral” grounds of a Parsee ethnic identity, the text “forge[s] a Parsee-Muslim alliance, [making the Hindu Ayah] a figure from which all duly sympathetic Pakistani middle-class readers may finally distance themselves”.50 By focusing on Lenny’s witness-position, this section analyses how Lenny’s witnessing is ambiguous. Through the ambiguity of Lenny’s testimony, the novel builds a discursive space in which the silences of Partition are recollected and encountered in the present moment of re-telling and re-listening. Through this reading, I will show how rather than distancing Ayah at the cost of building Parsee-Muslim alliance, Ayah’s silence is presented not as her weakness but as a resistive testimony and therefore a consistent reminder of the past.

As a *bildungsroman*, *Cracking India* tells the story of the maturation of Lenny, a Parsee girl, from early childhood to adulthood against the backdrop of Partition. Like Sidhwa, Lenny suffers from polio at the age of three, witnesses the instability and communal hostilities before Partition, the violent riots and massacres during Partition whereby particularly women and children are victimized on both Pakistani and Indian sides, and, finally, the resulting socio-cultural changes within post-Partition Pakistan. Far from a neutral, third-person witness, Lenny

is involved in the Partition violence as much as any other character. This is evident in a scene where the three-year-old Lenny breaks a plate and confesses this to her mother. Her mother rather than showing anger exclaims, “I love you. You spoke the truth! What’s a broken plate? Break a hundred plates!” I broke plates, cups, bowls, dishes. I smashed livers, kidneys, hearts, eyes … The path to virtue is strewn with broken people and shattered china”.51

Superficially, her ability to speak truth under any circumstances, makes Lenny a reliable witness. However, through the same trait, the novel exhibits ambivalence towards her status as a witness. For example, Lenny does not share with her Godmother her mother’s involvement in stealing petrol during the Partition riots. Reflecting on this act of holding back information, Lenny narrates, “I am tempted to tell her the truth, but I bite my wretched truth-infected tongue just in time. One betrayal is enough. I, the budding Judas, must live with their heinous secret” [emphasis added] (251). The use of the word “budding Judas” has a dual significance. On the one hand, it shows her guilt at betraying Ayah and of partaking in the patriarchal principle of sharing power. On the other hand, the retrospective guilt-ridden voice makes the literary space a redemptive one in which Lenny can encounter her past memories. To tell the truth is the most vital and significant aspect of being a witness. However, Lenny describes her tongue as “truth-infected”, implying that her tongue cannot hold back the effect of an ailment and therefore pours out truth (251). Rather than an ability, her truth-telling is presented as an ailment or a malady. This poses an ontological question to the very nature of truth-telling. One might ask, for example, under what conditions is truth harmful? At the level of plot, Lenny’s truth-infected tongue harms Ayah, who is raped and exploited by an angry group of rioters. But who is harmed at the level of narration? Could this truth-telling, the story of Ayah’s trauma and the trauma of Partition harm to the reader?

If the young Lenny is a witness to Ayah’s abduction and other violent events during Partition, the grown-up narrator is a witness to Lenny’s own involvement and participation in violence, generated primarily by patriarchy, colonial exploits and the rise of modern nationalist movements. The novel exhibits her “budding” involvement in the collective acts of violence, manifested in two specific episodes. In the first instance, Lenny replicates the street violence that she sees on Ice-candy-man’s demand. Lenny sees the burning of Shah Alam market, the ruthless communal violence and the “huge grin” on Ice-candy-man’s face (146). Upon returning home, the narrator tells, “In a rush I collect the dolls long abandoned in bottom drawers […] I pick out a big, bloated celluloid doll. I turn it upside down and pull its legs apart”. Unable to pull all the dolls apart by herself, she asks for help from her brother, Adi, as follows, “‘Pull, damn it!’ I scream, so close to hysteria that Adi blanches and hastily grabs the proffered legs […] I examine the doll’s spilled inside and, holding them in my hands, collapse on the bed sobbing” (147-8). In the second episode, Lenny and her brother discover their father’s hidden gun and out of curiosity take the gun to the courtyard, “I don’t know how long we take turns

51 All subsequent references to Cracking India are between parentheses in the text Bapsi Sidhwa, Cracking India, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2006), 94.
holding the gun. An hour – perhaps two”. Hearing the slogan of Muslim and Sikh rioters on the street, she stands “at attention with the gun I feel ready to face any mob” (164).

In both episodes, Lenny mimics the violence she witnesses during the riots. When she sees people murder other people, she reacts by imitating that behaviour on the dolls. Her desperate call to her brother to help in tearing the dolls apart, is symbolic of how violence becomes communal and collective in larger conflicts. This imitative potential reaches its climax, when she informs Ice-candy-man about Ayah’s whereabouts. Her contribution to Ayah’s abduction makes her feel guilty, and she encounters this guilt through testifying retrospectively by storytelling. To use Douglass and Vogler’s insights, if psychological trauma is “not physical injury per se, or even the emotional shock”, but “rather the mental experiencing of it, the affective and ideational processing of the event”,52 then the retrospective narrative voice of Lenny does not merely intend an alliance of conformity between Parsees and Muslims but, surely, provides an insight into the mental experiencing of guilt and suffering in young Lenny. This perspective of witnessing opens up the possibility, if not for neutrality, then surely for a discursive practice that involves encountering the past of large-scale abduction and violence on women during Partition on both sides of the border.

3.3 Ranna’s Testimony: A Child Survivor

Unlike Lenny who is a Parsee, upper-middle-class city dweller, Ranna is a Muslim, poor, village-bred boy. He lives in Pir Pindu, “a small village with majority Muslims surrounded by Sikh villages almost forty miles away from Lahore” (58). Twice before the Partition, Lenny visits this village with the cook of the family, Imam Din. When Lenny and Imam Din enter the village boundary through the cornfields, “a small boy, followed by three barking dogs, hurtles out of the deepening light gathered in the stalks. He chases us, shouting, ‘Oye! Who are you? Oye! What’re you up to? Oye! Corn thief! Corn thief!’” (61). The city dwellers are seen as a threat, intruding the peace or serenity of the village. Seemingly a comic interjection, Ranna’s sense of alarm towards the urban dwellers symbolizes the larger colonial divide between agricultural and non-agricultural parts of the country. As Talbot and Kamran explain,

When the commercialisation of agriculture threatened local landholders with expropriation, the 1900 Alienation of Land Act was passed. This designated communities as ‘agricultural’ and ‘non-agricultural’ tribes. The latter were unable to permanently acquire agricultural land [...] The capital was in fact diverted from the countryside to the city following the passage of the 1900 legislation.53

Apart from these two visits to the village, the young Lenny does not focalize the rest of the events in the village. In fact, the story of Ranna’s survival during Partition is presented in a

52 Douglass and Vogler, Witness and Memory, 10.
separate section through the retrospective voice of Lenny. Even though, as mentioned above, the narrative of Lenny, as the main witness of Partition, has received much critical attention, the narrative of Ranna’s survival is equally interesting. His narrative, with its distinct stylistic features, not only fills the gaps of Lenny’s witnessing, but also represents the much-neglected rural voices in the larger narrative of Partition literature. More significantly, his story offers a testimony to the horrors of Partition from the perspective of a child-survivor of the riots. As a child, Ranna witnesses the attack on his village by Sikh mobs, the murders, abductions and rapes of the women by them, the struggle of the villagers to escape death and to find refuge, the patriarchal mechanism of separately men and women and asking women to kill themselves rather than surrender their bodies to the religious other. The transformation of Ranna’s body symbolizes the change wrought by Partition riots. From a healthy, carefree boy with a “well-proportioned body” (61), Ranna is now “painfully thin” and his face is a “patchwork of brown and black skin” and the deep wound on the back of his head is “a grisly scar like a brutally gouged and premature bald spot. In time the wound acquired the shape of a four-day-old crescent moon” (206). Clearly, his body bears testimony to the “cracking” of India and to the hasty “patchwork” of dividing two countries along the poorly planned Radcliffe line (206). The scar on his skull, which resembles a “four-day-old crescent moon”, is a very grim reminder of the cost of the two-nation theory that promised Muslim brotherhood in the region (206).

It is noteworthy that the novel does not shy away from registering the uncertainty of Ranna’s testimony. Along with his father and cousins, Ranna hides in a windowless room during the attack on his village. His sensual perception is marred by different factors. Initially, due to the darkness in the room, Ranna cannot see clearly, so he can only focus on the events through his auditory senses: “[h]e heard his father’s voice and fought his way towards him” (211). Then, one of his uncles opens the door to escape and Ranna “saw his uncle slip out into the grey light and shut the door, plunging the room into darkness”. Afraid of the people barging into the dark room, Ranna loses consciousness in his father’s arms, but upon coming to his senses finds himself on the floor. Realizing that his father is about to open the door to the angry crowd, “Ranna, terrified, groping in the dark, tried to follow” (212). Finally opening the door, the father is met with a “sunlit sweep of curved steel. His head was shorn clear off his neck. Turning once in the air, eyes wide open, it tumbled in the dust” (213). Ranna receives a heavy blow on the back of his head and keeps falling in and out of consciousness. Whenever he gains consciousness, he hears the shrieks and wails of women from the mosque.

His blurred witnessing is represented by a moment when the narrator explains that “[o]nce he thought he saw his eleven-year-old sister, Khatija, run stark naked into their courtyard: her long hair dishevelled, her boyish body bruised, her lips cut and swollen and a bloody scab where

54 A founding principle of the separate state for the Muslims of India, whereby religion becomes the single most combining force to define the nationality of Indian Muslims and, in Jalal’s terms, which “recognises that the problem is one of sharing power rather [than of] qualifying the terms on which power is exercised by a majority”. See: Jalal, The Sole Spokesman, 70.
her front teeth were missing” (213). By the time Ranna goes outside the house to search for 
women in the mosque it gets dark, he can’t, once again, see very clearly. He can only hear the 
slow whispering voices of the wailing women and the relaxed yawning and sighing of the Sikh 
men as they say “Wah Guru”. Upon hearing these sounds, “Ranna realized that the men in the 
mosque were Sikhs. A wave of rage and loathing swept his small body. He knew it was wrong 
of the Sikhs to be in the mosque with the village women” (214). During the rest of his escape, 
Ranna faints every now and then. His experience of witnessing the horrors of Partition is 
informed by factors which usually mar the value of a testimony such as his inability to see, his 
recurrent fainting, the darkness in the room, the dark moonless night and his uncertainty of 
hearing the voices because of the wound on his head. This adds a complexity that is central to 
the discussion of an ideal witness.

Considering that a witness is needed where empirical evidence is missing, the witness 
becomes that absent empirical evidence. His words of testimony entail a special status in the 
absence of other proof (and sometimes complicate, complement or challenge the existing 
evidentiary proof). Along with the proof of his experience, however, equally important are the 
experiential gaps, the missing links, or the perceptual blanks registered in a witness’s narrative. 
These gaps which later inform what Ranna forgets of his experiences have remained less 
explored in Cracking India in general, and Ranna’s testimony in particular. In Douglass and 
Vogler's words, “except for the special case of ‘repressed’ memory in traumatic experience, 
there has been little attention paid to the importance of forgetting in memory discourse”. The 
terminology of repression implies forced and willed forgetting, but the instances analysed here, 
are forms of circumstantial forgetting. In facing the past in a self-conscious form of storytelling, 
one builds these forms of forgetting and thus a more comprehensive way of understanding 
testimony is constructed. By narrating Ranna’s testimony through the elements of uncertainty 
and unreliability, Sidhwa provides a better grip on the circumstances that shape him as a victim 
and a survivor of violence.

3.4 “History is a Woman’s Body”: Ayah and her Testimony

Ayah’s exploitation stands clearly as a symbol of how women were reduced to mere sites of 
revenge for national and religious honour. If during Partition their bodies were used to

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55 Douglass and Vogler, Witness and Memory, 19.

56 In a transnarrative way, Sidhwa provides a more hopeful end to Ranna’s suffering in a short story entitled, “Defend 
Yourself Against Me”. In this story, Ranna, who is named Sikander, lives in Houston and has Sikh friends. The story 
represents how the diasporic communities of Muslim Pakistanis, on the one hand, and Sikh and Hindu Indians, on the 
other hand, have found another way of creating transnational, transregional, cultural spaces where the ghost of pre-
Partition and Partition riots can finally be encountered. Sidhwa published this story in a collection of eight short stories 
entitled, Their Language of Love (Lahore: Readings, 2013).
symbolise religious or national honour, the post-Partition rehabilitation was yet another way of ‘reclaiming’ their bodies on somewhat similar grounds. Due to this dual subjugation both before and after Partition, Butalia considers that “history [itself] is a woman’s body” so to understand this silenced history one has to understand the silenced women who bore witness to Partition through their bodies. In existing criticism, Ayah has been analysed either as an allegory of the female experience of Partition or as a sacrificial figure in a political story. Indeed, Ayah’s story constitutes what Leigh Gilmore has called the “tainted witness”, whereby “when verbal records are impossible to make, or are destroyed, or remain untranslated or uninscribed, a testimonial record nonetheless exists within the body and in the history of bodies of those excluded from the public square as full citizens”. This testimonial record in Ayah has to be contextualized through her active mediation within the available means of resistance both before and after Partition.

Ayah’s actual age is not revealed in the text, but for Lenny, “Ayah is chocolate-brown and short. Everything about her is eighteen years old and round and plump. Even her face. Full-blown cheeks, pouting mouth and smooth forehead curve to form a circle with her head. Her hair is pulled back in a tight knot” (13). Except for the period of her abduction, Ayah is perceived primarily through Lenny’s focalization. The way in which Lenny, as well as Ayah’s admirers, desire her body, it seems that they reduce her to an object of desire. Ayah resists this passive role: she uses her vulnerable position to mediate through different possibilities at her disposal. She enjoys the attention given to her and accepts the love tokens of her admirers on her own moral terms. So, for example, she receives nutritious food from the old but voyeuristic cook, scented oils from Masseur (the massage man), colourful cloth pieces and silk doilies from the Chinaman, and, of course, the little gifts from Ice-candy-man. The same Ayah, however, refuses to accept a golden coin which Ice-candy-man obtained from the exploits of Partition massacres. As Lenny tells us, “Ayah returns the coin to Ice-candy-man. ‘Keep it. It’s for you.’ He says grandly, folding her fingers over it. ‘No,’ she says, shaking her head and hiding her hands behind her back. She’s like me [Lenny]. There are some things she will not hold” (166).

In retrospect, the grown-up Lenny creates a parallel between Ayah and herself. The golden coin is a physical (non-verbal) equivalent of Lenny’s verbal refusal to lie. Both signify a moral virtue. The use of a physical item to convey a moral point, which, in Lenny’s case, is a verbal act (that she cannot lie), amplifies the difference between their testimony: verbal and non-verbal. Like Lenny’s verbal witness, Ayah’s body contradicts and challenges the rise of communal hostilities.

However, Ayah’s abduction during the Partition riots, her sexual exploitation by different men with Ice-candy-man’s consent, and, finally, her forced conversion to Islam and marriage

57 Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence*, 143.
to him, transforms her from a caring, loving woman to a stoic and apathetic figure. Upon seeing her for the first time since her abduction, Lenny observes, “Ayah raises her eyes to me. Where have radiance and the animation gone? Can the soul be extracted from its living body? Her vacant eyes are bigger than ever [...] Colder than the ice that lurks behind the hazel in Ice-candy-man’s beguiling eyes” (272). Ice-candy-man wishes to create an illusion of happy marriage and a safe home by adorning her in the bridal clothes. But, as Lenny explains, “the illusion is dispelled the moment she opens her eyes – not timorously like a bride, but frenziedly, starkly – and says: ‘I want to go to my family’. Her voice is harsh, gruff: as if someone has mutilated her vocal cords” (273). Here, Ayah’s body is transformed from a site of unity, care and harmony to a site of disunity, apathy and chaos.

It is easier to read her transformation as a continuity of the traditional objectification she already experienced in pre-Partition India. If before Partition, her beautiful body arouses desire in others, after Partition, the same body with unfeeling eyes and mutilated vocal cords, arouses pity. This restricts her, in any case, to the logos of the object. Nonetheless, she mediates between the rigid divides of active and passive, subject and object: before Partition, through a careful manoeuvring, and after Partition, through a resilient and wilful silence. She declines Ice-candy-man’s offer of safety and security and shows emotional apathy to both Ice-candy-man and Lenny before her final departure to India. The complexity of her resistance and choices becomes clear by looking briefly at the socio-legal context of the rehabilitation of abducted women across the border. At best, the rehabilitation operation safeguarded the legitimacy of the family structure of the post-Partition states. Butalia speaks of this problem as follows,

Any woman who was seen to be living with, in the company of, or in a relationship with a man of the other religion after March 1, 1947 would be presumed to have been abducted, taken by force. After this date, all marriages or conversions that had taken place would be seen as forced, and would not be recognized by either of the two governments. No matter what the woman said, how much she protested, no matter that there was the odd ‘real’ relationship, the women had no choice in the matter.60

Through these new laws about women’s rehabilitation, Ayah and Ice-candy-man’s marriage becomes invalid. Yet, Ayah’s decision to go to India entails further difficulties on a social and religious level. Until a decade after Partition, women from both sides of the border were reclaimed. However, the available data and oral testimonies suggest that the “purity of the woman was more important for Hindus and Sikh” in India after Partition.61 Many of the reclaimed women, therefore, were not integrated in the traditional social structure, forced thus to spend their lives in the state-controlled orphanages. The novel, contrary to this reality, exhibits a situation where Ayah is given a choice. Within the plot, Ayah was not reclaimed by her Indian relatives, and on the Pakistani side, the ones who identified her as a prostitute, do

60 Butalia, The Other Side of Silence, 144.
61 Butalia, The Other Side of Silence, 161.
not report her presence to the rehabilitation centre until the intervention of Godmother. Before taking any legal step, Godmother asks Ayah about her final decision. By using her own upper-class Parsee position, Godmother could have made all the arrangements for Ayah, had the latter decided to stay in Pakistan.

Despite her mutilated vocal cords and empty eyes, Ayah makes a choice and a rather difficult one. She prefers to return to India. There are fewer prospects of re-integration for a lower-class Hindu woman ‘polluted’ by different men. In this context, her choice to go back, formulates a non-verbal utterance of resistance and denial to ultimate subjugation. Two incidents in the novel strengthen this argument. Firstly, during her stay in the rehabilitation centre, Ice-candy-man recites poems in Urdu to gain her attention and sympathy. Almost everyone, except Ayah, who sees Ice-candy-man in this condition, finds him pitiable. Her persistent apathy, silence and coldness to his wooing, transforms him into an “invisible” and “inaudible” man. Indeed, towards the end of the novel, Ice-candy-man, the most violent of all the men is reduced to “a truly harmless fellow” (288). Ayah’s silence as a mode of resistance is further highlighted when Lenny makes a last effort to communicate with Ayah:

And I chant: “Ayah! Ayah! Ayah! Ayah!” until my heart pounds with the chant and the [orphaned] children on the roof picking it up shout with all their heart: “Ayah! Ayah! Ayah! Ayah!” and our chant flows into the pulse of the women below, and the women on the roof, and they beat their breast and cry: “Hai! Hai! Hai! Hai!” reflecting the history of their cumulative sorrows and the sorrows of their Muslim, Hindu, Sikh and Rajput great-grandmothers who burnt themselves alive rather than surrender their honour to the invading hordes besieging their ancestral fortresses […] “Ayah! Ayah! Ayah!” we chant and “Hai! Hai! Hai!” the weeping women: and supported by two old women Ayah appears in the courtyard. She looks up at us out of glazed and unfeeling eyes for a moment, as if we are strangers, and goes in again. (285)

In this scene, the crying children and the abducted women mime the collective suffering of women and children during Partition. The only person unaffected by this chant is Ayah. Her refusal to show signs of recognition towards either Ice-candy-man or Lenny, manifests very strongly that it is not a matter of a lack of agency to testify which stops Ayah from empathizing rather she uses her apathy as a form of communication – thus silence in her case becomes resilience. By representing Ayah’s bodily suffering as a non-verbal experience, the incommunicable failure of testimony is communicated. Ayah’s experience might lack a verbal form, but by showing the change in her eyes, the author implies towards the absent testimony – the only proof of which is Ayah’s body.

3.5 “A Truly Harmless Fellow”: Ice-candy-man and the Circle of Violence

Lenny, Ayah and Ranna are victims and survivors who witnessed and “lived through [the] catastrophic experience” of Indian Partition, while Ice-candy-man embodies the role of the
Both the survivors and the perpetrator play an important role in shaping the testimonies in the novel. As mentioned earlier, most scholars focus on Lenny or Ayah’s role and their position as the recipients of masculine violence, while Ice-candy-man’s role as a perpetrator-witness to the Partition riots has not been given due attention. The following section deals with the importance of testimony from the account of the perpetrator. First, I will discuss the portrayal and implications of Ice-candy-man’s character as it is described from the perspective of the survivor-witness, Lenny. Secondly, I will analyse Ice-candy-man’s transformation from an eyewitness of the burning of Shah Alam market and the massacred trains to a perpetrator-witness who kills, loots and burns his socio-political others. Lastly, this section will elucidate how by using different narratives and structural motifs the novel fills the lacunae left by either Lenny’s limited witnessing or Ice-candy-man’s version of events.

Seen from Lenny’s perspective, Ice-candy-man is depicted as one of the admirers of Ayah. Unlike Ayah, whose real name, Shanta, is mentioned once in the novel, Ice-candy-man’s real name remains a mystery. As mentioned earlier, Ice-candy-man refers to the profession of the character. This way of identification served to dilute religious ‘otherness’ in a culture where religion played an important role in everyday exchanges. Throughout the novel, Ice-candy-man is shaped by the intense economic, social, and national-identity crises. The novel manifests these crises in his random changes of vocation, his relationship with public and private spaces, and his adherence to the dominant political, nationalist and religious sentiments. In fact, Ice-candy-man appears in different guises, which, on a deeper level, already convey an inconsistency or something distrustful in his character. In summers, he sells ice-candies, and during cold winters, he “transforms himself into a birdman. Burdened with enormous cages stuffed with sparrows and common green parrots he parades the paths behind the Lahore Gymkhana lawns and outside the Punjab Club” [emphasis added] (35).

On other occasions, he boasts about inventing a magical fertility pill, whereas during the communal tensions he acts like a mad saint who can solve other people’s problems in the name of God. During the Partition riots, he becomes a rioter, looter and usurper, and after the Partition, he acts as Ayah’s pimp, claiming to be an illegitimate son of Muslim nobility. On a superficial level, he appears as an opportunist, but closer inspection shows that this random change of vocation is partly a consequence of his social vulnerability within the existing social and cultural hierarchy. He experiences territorial limitation even before Partition. Unlike Ayah who, as Lenny’s caretaker, is relatively stable in her work position and mediates between different domestic and public spaces, Ice-candy-man is limited to the outside and the public spaces. His work depends on circumstances beyond his immediate control and he is described as a person who is not welcome in the domestic sphere. When he offers Ayah a helping hand with house chores, Lenny reflects, “[i] imagine Ice-candy-man working alongside Ayah in our house. Mother’d throw a fit! He’s not the kind of fellow who’s permitted inside” [emphasis

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The upper-class Parsee household is a forbidden space for him, which he can enter only by disobeying the social hierarchies, made possible by the sheer chaos of Partition.

Now that we have analysed Ice-candy-man through the perspective of Lenny, let us turn to Ice-candy-man’s perspective. Perpetrator’s testimony does not receive moral credibility as easily as the testimony of a neutral eyewitness, a victim or a survivor witness of a violent event. If the victim or survivor of an event has the agency to tell, in Avishai Margalit’s words, “what it was like to be subjected to […] evil”, then perpetrator has the agency to tell what it was like to subject the other to that evil. This amounts to allowing the perpetrator a narrative space in which he can repeat perpetration at linguistic level. Just as his actions manifest what a man in the vain of power can do during the event of violence, in the event of telling about the event, the perpetrator can assert the necessity or the urgency of doing what he does. As Sibylle Schmidt says, taking “a perpetrator’s testimony is accompanied by the risk of taking in a dehumanizing, degrading view of the victims – and thus victimizing them twofold”. That is one of the reasons why scholars have been reluctant to lend the perpetrator’s verdict of events a similar weight and value as they do to the victim’s narrative. If all stories are stories of identity-formation and selfhood, then victim and perpetrator both construct their identities through their stories, each demanding trust, credibility and an empathetic listener. More than the historical accuracy of an event, both testimonies are to be critically analysed for what they tell about the inner state of mind of the doer or bearer of the suffering. Gitta Sereny elaborates this need to see the point of view of the perpetrator as follows:

[It is] essential […] to try at least once, as far as possible unemotionally with an open mind, to penetrate the personality of a man who had been intimately involved with the most total evil our age has produced [and] to assess the circumstances which led up to his involvement, for once not from our point of view, but from his.

Schmidt, taking Sereny’s argument further, asserts that a perpetrator’s testimonies “are valid forms of testimony, since they are acts of speech addressed to an audience, and the speakers claim to offer a truth which is rooted in a personal experience”. To the risk of putting victim and perpetrator’s testimonies in the same line, “one should consider perpetrator testimony as providing insight into the psychological or social structure of denial and of a specific absence of truth and conscious experience”. Through Ice-candy-man’s own account of events one finds this denial and absence informing his narrative. The episode of the burning of Shah Alam

64 Schmidt, “Perpetrator’s Knowledge”, 99.
67 Schmidt, “Perpetrator’s Knowledge”, 89.
68 Schmidt, “Perpetrator’s Knowledge”, 102.
market in Lahore led to a “communal war of succession for many weeks to come after 21 June 1947”.69 For Ice-candy-man, this amounts to a much-awaited spectacle. This is evident in his excitement to show the burning of the city to Ayah and Lenny, calling it a *tamasha* (spectacle);

As the fire brigade drives away, the entire row of buildings on both sides of the street ignite in an incredible conflagration [...] The astonishment on [Ice-candy-man’s] features is replaced by a huge grin. His face, reflecting the fire, is lit up. “The fucking bastards!” he says, laughing aloud, spit flying from his mouth. “The fucking bastards! They sprayed the buildings with petrol! They must be Muslim” [...] “What small hearts you have,” says Ice-candy-man, beaming affectionately at us. “You must make your hearts stout!” He strikes his out-thrust chest with his fist. Turning to the men, he says: The fucking bastards!” They thought they’d drive us out of Bhatti. We’ve shown them!”. (146-147)

This fragment foregrounds, firstly, how Ice-candy-man finds power by adhering to a communal identity, us (the lower-class Muslims) opposed to them (the rich Hindu merchants and tradesmen), and secondly, how the destruction of Hindu shops gives him a feeling of surprised victory. Instead of decoding Ice-candy-man’s violence as inexplicable madness, I suggest, instead, that his very being is a product of an imperceptible violence, oppression and inequality imprinted in quotidian social structures. The pre-Partition economic outlook of Lahore provides a context in this regard. The city was expanded under the British rule into newer towns and modern residential areas which were owned by the British civil servants as well as the upper-class Hindu and Sikh communities. In this scenario, most businesses within the city were owned by the upper-class Hindu and Sikh merchants and traders.70 Ice-candy-man’s witnessing is informed by the long-standing economic exploitation of an unequal social set-up, which he, as a lower-class Muslim, had to undergo. The spectacle of a mass-scale destruction of the political and religious other unleashes his inner rage or oppression which is kept outside under ‘normal’ circumstances. Bedraggled and jolted by this mass-scale violence at a personal level, Ice-candy-man testifies to Ayah, Lenny and other men,

“A train from Gurdaspur has just come in,” he announces, panting, “Everyone in it is dead! Butchered. They are all Muslims. There are no young women among the dead! Only two gunny-bags full of women’s breasts!” [...] I was expecting relatives… For three days… For twelve hours each day… I waited for that train!” (159)

From this moment onwards, Ice-candy-man unleashes the violence accumulated inside him, whereby he does not even hide his criminal acts of looting the houses of rich Hindus. In this way, his political identity becomes one with the angry mob. When one of the friends from Ayah’s admirers asks him, “Were you among the men who exposed themselves?” his response is one of unapologetic defiance and defence,

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If you must know, I was! I’ll tell you to your face – I lose my senses when I think of the mutilated bodies on that train from Gurdaspur … that night I went mad, I tell you! I lobbed grenades through the windows of Hindus and Sikhs I’d known all my life! I hated their guts … I want to kill someone for each of the breasts they cut off the Muslim women! (166)

His angry utterances testify to the violence he saw in the death-train, and to the reciprocal violence he enacts on others. This includes not just Ayah and her admirers but also the readers of his own testimony. Through the narrative of madness and loss of self-control, he demands empathy and authority from his listeners. However, this demand for empathy and authority are challenged by different techniques in the novel which put Ice-candy-man's verdict as well as the limitation of Lenny’s focalization in a different perspective. In contrast to his claims of madness and loss of self-control, Ice-candy-man acts very timidly and denies the allegations of misusing Ayah’s body for his own gains after the Partition. The denial of violence within the novel is treated with irony as his previous acts stand in contrast with his physical transformation, his soft cooing Urdu poetry, and his claims of being an illegitimate Muslim Royal blood after the Partition.

Lenny, once again, trusts his narrative of protecting Ayah and giving her home, “[n]ot only has his voice changed, but his entire speech. His delivery is flawless, formal, like an educated and cultured man's” (258). It is Godmother, however, who sees through Ice-candy-man’s garb and uncovers his reality to Lenny, as Lenny explains, “I see him now as Godmother sees him. Treacherous, dangerous, contemptible. A destructive force that must be annihilated” (260). As a perpetrator witness, Ice-candy-man creates a narrative which justifies his choices, but Lenny’s retrospective voice demands an understanding of his acts not an empathy with his behaviour. All in all, as a perpetrator witness, Ice-candy-man's testimony is significant for multiple reasons. Firstly, it brings to the fore the root of Partition violence by providing the pre-Partition social and economic context. Secondly, as a perpetrator, his testimony is significant not so much for the factuality of his record, but rather for what it says about his state of mind and his relationship with the political and religious other. Thirdly, as the main perpetrator of Partition violence within the novel, his denial and the absences within his testimony refer to the larger socio-historical amnesia over Partition in South Asia, persistent in the acts of commemoration of 1947 on both sides of the border.

3.6 The Novel as Testimony

The four witness characters of Cracking India, Lenny, Ayah, Ranna and Ice-candy-man, present different sides of Partition. However, beyond these realities, the novel uses different literary devices to situate these individual testimonies within a larger perspective. The first-person retrospective and semi-autobiographical narrating self of the grown-up Lenny functions to distance the reader from the naïve and sometimes fallible perspective of the experiencing self of the young Lenny. This retrospective voice also reveals the self-consciousness of telling a tale
of a traumatic past. For example, she mentions her uncertainties about the burning of Lahore, “the fire could not have burned for months and months [...]. But in my memory it is branded over an inordinate length of time: memory demands poetic license” (149). The narrative space, unlike the legal framework, allows for a more critical introspection for the one who testifies and the one who receives that testimony (the reader). The constant questioning or scepticism towards one’s own narrative of trauma, although treated as a sign of trauma itself, functions as a craft to bridge the witness and the listener. This builds the dialogic mechanism of testimony whereby the witness and the listener are bound by the intention of telling and listening. Neither of them exists in an isolated space. As the witness promises to tell with the intention of being heard and trusted, the listener listens and pays attention to the factual aspects of his story as well as to the intention of the truth-teller. Lenny’s retrospective voice functions as a dialogic space where doubt, uncertainty, and scepticism are essential tools in shaping the overall testimony.

Furthermore, *Cracking India* uses multiple intertextual references. These references can be divided into three major strands: the epigraphs of Allama Iqbal’s poetry used at different crucial points in the text, the translated versions of Urdu love poetry used by Ice-candy-man to assert his identity as an illegitimate Royal Muslim, and the folk tales and legends of love, bravery and compassion told to Lenny by Ayah and Hamida. Iqbal’s poetry was used during the Independence Movement to arouse a spirit of nationalism and Muslim brotherhood. However, Sidhwa puts his poetry in dialogue with the events that occurred during Partition. The very first chapter starts with Iqbal’s “Complaint to God”, in which he laments to God about the loss of Muslim glory and unity in the world. While the chapter starts with poetry which historically has been used to connect Muslims of India under one nationality, the story that follows in the novel shows the breaking away of bonds, love, and friendships between different religio-social communities. As a testimonial text, the novel puts in parallel the abstract values, which played a vital role in shaping Independence Movement, along with the loss of individual lives. One apt example of this metatextual dialogue is when the first British civil servant is killed within the plot. The chapter starts with a sombre, clairvoyant air of political unrest and riots. On this occasion, Sidhwa uses the following epithet:

> The times have changed: the world has changed its mind.  
> The European’s mystery is erased.  
> The secret of his conjuring tricks is known:  
> The Frankish wizard stands and looks amazed. (120)

The joy of the changed world in the epithet stands in contrast with the change wrought by the first murder of a British civil servant and its later consequences in the plot. Moreover, as a narrative tool, the presence of these verses also asserts the shared literary contexts which face the process of ‘cracking’ as did the countries and its people during Partition. Indeed, cracking becomes one metaphor for the changed world, and the narrative becomes symbolic of the desire to avoid seeing this cracking and the inevitability to face it. One, therefore, encounters apparently strange references to eyes, for example, Lenny says, “I close my eyes. I can’t bear to
open them: they will open on a suddenly changed world” (138). “Another set of green eyes gone!” laments the doctor (180), the “Oldhusband” in an abnormal state says, “[w]hat’s all this business about eyes! eyes! eyes!” he explodes. “You can’t poke the damn thing into their eyes!” (180). “The last thing I noticed was Ayah, her mouth slack and piteously gaping, her dishevelled hair flying into her kidnappers’ faces, staring at us as if she wanted to leave behind her wide-open and terrified eyes” (195). Lenny says about her new caretaker, Hamida, “[s]ometimes her eyes fill and the tears roll down her cheeks. Once, when I smoothed her hair back, she suddenly started to weep, and noticing my consternation explained, “When the eye is wounded, even a scented breeze hurts” (205).

This recurrent usage makes the narrative itself a witnessing eye that corroborates for the readers. The constant pain, tears, and apathy of eyes symbolize the painful and yet compulsory act of encountering one’s past. The witness sees what happens, but in this act of seeing, the awareness of encountering the pain and trauma of what is encountered is also registered. The text as an ‘eye’ witness testifies to the outside reality, the historical events and the subjective events of the characters, and shapes the literary text as a testimony of the political and personal dimension of Partition.

3.7 Conclusion

Brought together through the violent events of Partition, Lenny, Ranna, Ayah and Ice-candyman make their own choices. This makes them unique witnesses to Partition. The novel represents their acts of defiance, resistance, and survival, and constructs a self-conscious metatextual, testimonial space in which the impact of their stories is not limited to their spatio-temporal context. The retrospective lens of Lenny’s “truth-infected tongue” provides a painful, but much needed dialogic space to encounter the Partition horrors. The story of Ranna’s survival interrupts the narrative rhythm and heightens the unique position of Ranna as a child-survivor from the village. Ayah’s determined silence and departure from Pakistan as a doubly marginalised Hindu-woman, is representative of her resistance to the violence wrought on women’s bodies during Partition.

At the same time, the publication of the novel in Pakistan, at a time when the Hadood Ordinance was in full force,71 shows the continuity of such violence at an institutional level beyond Partition. Within this context, the narrative of Partition as divergent, dissident, and polemical gains a new political and cultural relevance in the post-Partition Islamic Republic of

71 In his zeal to turn Pakistan into a true Islamic nation, general Zia ul-Haq (1924-1988) regulated Hadood Ordinance. Although his regime ended in 1988, the laws which further strangled the rights of women remained in place until 2003. These laws changed the very definitions of rape and adultery, and made fornication a crime. Moreover, the Law of Evidence Order made a woman’s testimony half as good as a man. For more details, see an official report on Hadood Ordinance first published in 2007 by the Council of Islamic Ideology: Government of Pakistan <http://cii.gov.pk/Publicationss.aspx>
Pakistan. Ice-candy-man, the main perpetrator, breaks the imitative political and social mould and follows Ayah to the other side of the border. His choice to enter the territory of the religious and political other seems to highlight the widening rift between the subjective experience of the individual, on the one hand, and the political rhetoric, on the other.

4. Comparative Conclusion

_The Heart Divided_ and _Cracking India_ both represent Partition from two different perspectives. _The Heart Divided_ uses an upper-class Muslim woman’s perspective and gives insight to the framing of the Muslim community as a separate political subject before Partition while, at the same time, it embodies the socio-political and subjective limits of this subjecthood in the face of Partition. _Cracking India_, for its part, presents the perspective of an upper-class Parsee girl child before, during and after Partition. Both novels are formulated by two women, affected differently by Partition. Shahnawaz’s generation experienced the political turmoil of pre-Partition India. For most of the people of her generation, Partition became the only acceptable and inevitable reality where Indian Muslims had to form into a separate national entity. But this generation was least prepared for the violent eventuality of Partition, because of their immediate political and personal involvements in the milieu. Sidhwa’s generation experienced Partition during their childhood and grew up in post-Partition Pakistan. Hence, Sidhwa reflects back on Partition and writes with a more informed, retrospective lens.

Despite the differences between the authors, the two novels have much in common. Both are written with an autobiographical commitment and use social realism as a tool to investigate the subjective perspective on the violent events of Partition. In both, a marginalized voice becomes the witnessing voice, be it the voice of a female Muslim facing dual political marginalization in pre-Partition politics or the voice of a Parsee girl standing at the verge of marginality in both a pre- and post-Partition environment. The voice of the female other demands credibility by asserting its ambition to take part in the political structure defined primarily through male principle of power and by claiming its right to difference and uniqueness defined by gender.

The witnesses of Partition, in both novels, are bewildered by the outcome of a nationalist vision of separation, due to the overarching presence of patriarchal politics and by their own witnessing of the merging of the historical and political with the personal and subjective. The novels call for a deeper interaction of the discourse of the literary and the testimonial. Indeed, in many ways, the rupture of modernity and the legacy of the two world wars entangled with the colonial history, all make literature the site of trauma presented with the craftiness of the fictional and the literary. Storytelling, in this regard, becomes a tool to encounter the difficult realities of the past, be it the uncomfortable position of young Lenny realizing her role in Ayah’s abduction or Sughra dismissal of Vijay’s clairvoyant warning. Interestingly enough, the
narrative structure incorporates different formalistic and stylistic features which can be interpreted as adding to, making ambiguous, and sometimes even contradicting, the intentional telling of different characters. In this respect, the novels become more than social documents of their times. With their self-conscious stylistic features and their construal of authoritative and credible witnesses, they successfully mediate between the zones of the literary and the testimonial.
Chapter 4

Postmemory Witnesses of Pakistan in *Meatless Days* and *Songs of Blood and Sword*

In this chapter, I will analyse Sara Suleri’s *Meatless Days* (1989) and Fatima Bhutto’s *Songs of Blood and Sword* (2010) as examples of postmemory witnessing. By postmemory witnessing I mean witnessing in which the teller (witness) connects his or her own memories with those of the parents or grandparents to testify to certain historical events. Using Marianne Hirsch’s concept of postmemory, I will demonstrate how the narrators of both these memoirs create testimonial narratives about contemporary Pakistan based on their own experiences and those of their parents. In this way, the authors put postmemory witnessing in dialogue with larger socio-political events. This, in turn, highlights issues of identity and social structures, involving religion, gender and social class in this newly independent country. Both the first-hand and generation-to-generation memories told in these memoirs, play a key role in reconstructing the mainstream narrative about Pakistani history. Moreover, both narratives have a self-conscious and highly reflexive style of narration which contributes to their authoritative position as postmemory witnesses.

Elaborating on the term postmemory, Hirsch reflects how the contemporary author is faced with the dilemma of “posts”. She claims that “we certainly are, still, in the era of ‘posts,’ which for better or worse—continue to proliferate: ‘posttraumatic,’ of course, but also ‘postsecular,’ ‘postcolony,’ ‘postracial’”.¹ Due to this condition of belatedness, the stories of contemporary Pakistan always hinge on to two different planes simultaneously – local and global, indigenous and immigrant, national and international. My reading of postmemory witnessing in these memoirs aims to show how the narrators tackle this belatedness while facing the socio-political challenges of the rehabilitation from the Partition, the wars of 1965 and 1971, the issues of

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religious fundamentalism, the interchange of dictatorships and the unstable democratic situation in their countries. I will pay particular attention to the way these authors counter, at least in the textual space, the violence which denies them the right to be heard or to have justice.

In a very literal sense, a witness speaking on behalf of another generation might be seen as lacking the first-hand experience necessary to offer testimony. An intergenerational witness mediates between his or her experiences and the experiences of the others, on the one hand, and between the collective traumatic past and present audiences, on the other hand. This idea of a second-generation witness is also at stake in Hirsch’s examination of Holocaust literature written by the children of the Holocaust-survivors. The postmemory witness is shaped “by traumatic fragments of events that still defy narrative reconstruction and exceed comprehension”.

In other words, postmemory presents a framework which describes the relationship that the “generation after bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before”. In this way, the structure of postmemory and the process of its generation comes to the surface by paying attention to the way in which the generation after remembers “the stories, images, and behaviours among which they grew up” but which were “transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right”. Therefore, unlike a first-generation account, “postmemory's connection to the past is thus actually mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation”.

The memoirs selected for this study, by Suleri and Bhutto, provide a good case to study the “imaginative investment, projection and creation” of postmemory witnessing. Both *Meatless Days* and *Songs of Blood* relate personal memories of the author-narrators, combined with memories told to them by a previous generation of witnesses. This use of amalgamated memories “has been variously termed ‘absent memory’ (Ellen Fine), ‘inherited memory,’ ‘belated memory,’ ‘prosthetic memory’ (Celia Lury, Alison Landsberg), ‘memo ire trouée’ (Henri Raczymow), ‘memoire des cendres’ (Nadine Fresco), ‘vicarious witnessing’ (Froma Zeitlin), ‘received history’ (James Young), ‘haunting legacy’ (Gabriele Schwab) and ‘postmemory’.”

The variety of these terms highlights the difficulty of comprehending issues of legitimacy, authenticity, and the shaping of collective cultural memories in the narratives of postmemory witnessing. How can a narrative be authentic and reliable when it addresses the losses of one generation from the point of view of the next generation? How does literature, with its many “modalities”, deal with the issues of representation in the narratives of postmemory witnesses? In my reading of these two memoirs, I will address these questions with regard to Suleri’s and Bhutto’s presentation of Pakistani society through intergenerational memories, against the background of Hirsch’s concept of postmemory.

While Hirsch’s concept is a very broad one, in my analysis I use the terms postmemory witnessing or postmemory testimony for narratives that are shaped by different

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intergenerational memories. This is the case in both memoirs I will be reading: in both books a retrospective narrator narrates the events which lead up to a murder, while situating them within the broader picture of post-partition Pakistan. By reconstructing the traumatic events of the murders through acts of memory and other literary devices, Suleri and Bhutto create, to use Hirsch’s words, “a means to uncover and to restore experiences and life stories that might otherwise remain absent from the historical archive”. For, Hirsch argues, “[a]s a form of counter-history, ‘memory’ offer[s] a means to account for the power structures animating forgetting, oblivion and erasure and thus to engage in acts of repair and redress”. In order to communicate these memories, the authors use different literary techniques to transform personal ‘experiences’ into stories.

From the rich and varied literary tradition of Pakistani women’s writing, I have decided to focus on the texts by Suleri and Bhutto because they self-consciously foreground memories and acts of witnessing in order to situate their personal and familial narratives within a larger political context. Crossing boundaries of the personal and the political, the local and the global, Suleri and Bhutto both achieve narrative agency and power through the narrative transformation and configuration of memories. In *Meatless Days* and *Songs of Blood* these memories are recorded in what Marianne Hirsch calls the “parental past” as well as in the narrators’ own pasts.

1. A Brief Historical and Literary Overview

Before delving into the memoirs, let me provide a brief historical sketch of the context against which Suleri and Bhutto write. Ian Talbot notes that “[a]lthough Pakistan emerged as a state with a new identity, its political culture and characteristics were profoundly influenced by historical inheritances from the colonial era”. Soon after independence in 1947, the Pakistan movement, which claimed to represent the socio-political interests of the Muslims of the entire subcontinent, began to safeguard the interests of an elite which ruled the fifty-seven percent of the total population of Pakistan in Punjab. Consequently, other provinces, such as Bengal, Sindh and Balochistan, felt alienated from the centre. The Muslim League’s failure to represent

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6 Hirsch discusses the second-generation accounts by women writers which cast daughters as “agents of transmission”, subsequently, she maintains, that these works become “a reparative ethical and political act of solidarity and, perhaps, agency on behalf of the trauma of the other”. See: Hirsch, “Marked by Memory” in *The Generation of Postmemory*, 99.
all regional groups resulted in Martial law in 1958 under the presidency of Sikander Mirza (1956-1958). Khalid Bin Sayeed claims that “Pakistan [during 1951-8] was very much like Hobbes’ state of nature where every political or provincial group fought against every other group”.

After almost two decades of independence, the first democratic elections were finally held in 1970. During these elections, the East Pakistan’s Awami League, rooted in what is now Bangladesh, won with a clear majority over the Pakistani Peoples Party based in West Pakistan. Unhappy with the results, Yahya Khan (1969-1971) arranged a military crackdown and launched Operation Searchlight in 1971. Not only it led to a “civil war” between East and West Pakistan but also an “international war” between India and Pakistan. What started as a civil war by the Pakistani establishment, was seen as the “War of Liberation” by the Bengali people. Today, Bangladesh, India and Pakistan all claim to different versions of events. Nonetheless, it can be asserted that in the nine months of the war Bengalis, Hindu, Muslims Urdu-speaking Biharis and the West Pakistanis living in East Pakistan were brutally killed, and both Bengali and West Pakistani women were raped on a massive scale to instigate fear and compliance.

In the aftermath of 1971 war, Pakistani state became wary of the linguistic, cultural and ethnic diversity in Pakistan. Faced with the internal and external pressures of this newly established country, the Peoples Party, the ruling party at the time failed to represent all ethnic and cultural groups. This failure led the country towards another dictatorship under Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq (1978-1988). Under his rule, both the civilian identity and the constitution of Pakistan underwent a new form of Islamization. This radical Islamization helped the United States against Russia in the Cold War in Afghanistan but left a haunting legacy on Pakistani national identity and foreign policy. The transformation of Pakistan under Zia-ul-Haq was substantial. Even a strong opponent such as Benazir Bhutto, who served as prime minister between both 1988 and 1990 and 1993 and 1996, could not do away with the constitutional changes established under Zia-ul-Haq’s regime. Bhutto’s negligence regarding these and other policies resulted in the rise of civil violence in Karachi which had the “overtones of the earlier breakdown in Dhaka” during the 1990s.

When President Farooq Leghari resigned under Benazir’s rule in 1996, negligence was not the only issue brought up. Rather, his charge sheet against Bhutto “placed high on its list the prevalence of extrajudicial killings by the police and the rangers during 1995-6 in the campaign

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11 More detail about this milieu of Pakistani history is provided below in the section titled, *Songs of Blood and Sword: An Overview*.


14 Saikia, *Women, War and the Making of Bangladesh*, 58

to snuff out MQM\textsuperscript{16} militancy”.\textsuperscript{17} Benazir Bhutto is not the only one against whom this charge was made. As Raza Rumi puts it, the ruling elite in Pakistan has found in extrajudicial murders through police a “convenient mechanism to advance their political and class-agenda through this brutal colonial instrument”.\textsuperscript{18} Indeed, the Police Order of 1861 under which on the spot encounter killing by the police force was made legal has never been revoked by Pakistani authorities. In fact, the same method has been used by the military authorities as a counterterrorist measurement in the War on Terror.\textsuperscript{19} The use of targeted killing (both legal and illegal) gained wider acceptance during the War on Terror not only in Pakistan but in countries such as Israel, the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, and Switzerland.\textsuperscript{20} Although Nils Melzer and Rumi both criticise the way targeted killing is used legally against any suspected threat to public security, it is important to also draw attention to the illegal and anonymous targeted killing of civilians which is seen as one of the most widespread forms of violence in a city like Karachi. In Pakistani politics both extrajudicial killing by military authorities and extrajudicial killing not through any authorities have been rampant as well.

The 1990s saw Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif fighting for power, which resulted in bad governance and corruption. In 1999, Pervez Musharraf, the then chief of the army, arranged a coup d’état to overthrow Nawaz Sharif and became chief executive (1999-2001) and President (2001-2008) of Pakistan. In 2007, Benazir Bhutto, planning to participate in the 2008 election, was assassinated, which, in turn, resulted in her husband, Asif Ali Zardari, becoming the new President (2008-2013). Zardari’s democratically elected government was one of the first since Pakistan’s independence to have completed its full five-year electoral mandate. Nawaz Sharif, and his party PMLN\textsuperscript{21} (2013-2018), won the next election with a sweeping majority in 2013 and also managed to complete its tenure. In 2018, Imran Khan became the first elected prime minister with Pashtun origins, though he was born in the Punjab region. This has brought about a different political situation, where the power has shifted for the first time since Independence from the two most powerful parties (PMLN and PPP) to a political party not based in generational politics, i.e., PTI (Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf). It is important to understand that Pakistan has not seen long periods of democratic stability and peace since 1947. If the wars with India (1947, 1965, 1971, 1999) have left their mark on the geo-politics of South Asia, Pakistan’s involvement in the Cold War and since 2001 in the War on Terror have left open

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{MQM} Founded by Altaf Hussain in 1984, Muttahida Qaumi Movement [United National Movement] started as a secular political party which spoke for the Urdu speaking refugees who migrated to Pakistan after Partition.
\bibitem{Rumi} Talbot, \textit{Pakistan: A Modern History}, 17.
\bibitem{TargetedKilling3} Melzer, \textit{Targeted Killing in International Law}, xi.
\bibitem{PakistanParty} Pakistan Muslim League (N) is a centre-right conservative Party in Pakistan which was established in the 1980s in support of the dictatorship of Zia-ul-Haq.
\end{thebibliography}
wounds which will only heal over time. It is to be expected that Pakistani literature will continue to reflect on this history of belligerence.

Although considered “pointless, elitist, and a colonial hangover” in the early 1950s, Pakistani Anglophone literature, in general, and women’s writing, in particular, have come to provide, if not, a complete antidote, then certainly a space of resistance to the widespread authoritarianism, religious fundamentalism, militaristic jingoism and to the national amnesia surrounding the traumatic wars in recent Pakistani history. The term Pakistani English literature was first used by Alamgir Hashmi to define Anglophone literature produced by indigenous or diasporic Pakistanis. Indeed, Hashmi’s *Pakistani Literature: The Contemporary English Writers* is one of the seminal studies of English literature by writers of Pakistani descent. By the 1980s, university education became popular among men and women from both upper and middle classes and the English language flourished as the language of creative expression. As Shamsie writes, “today, an increasing number of upper and middle-class families in Pakistan have allowed their daughters to receive the same educational opportunities as their sons”. Along with this, the gradual growth of a Pakistani diaspora in countries like Britain, the United States and Canada, has also had an impact on the publication and reception of Pakistani literature in English. In *Hybrid Tapestries*, Muneeza Shamsie, provides a history of Pakistani Anglophone literature. She mentions that, although English was initially used to counter orientalist representations of South Asia, it gradually became a vehicle to reach out to a wider international audience, and bridged the gap between national and international, local and foreign, personal and political.

Placing Pakistani English literature within a larger context, Shamsie writes,

> Meanwhile in the West, during the late 1960s and early 1970s, the anti-Vietnam protests, the civil rights movements in the United States, the student revolution in Europe, and the feminist revolution impacted English literature, as did the presence of increasingly assertive migrant communities. Soon it was apparent that some of the most important new English writing was coming from Britain’s erstwhile colonies where women’s writing forged new narratives that challenged both imperial and patriarchal myths.

Even a cursory look at the diversity of Pakistani Anglophone literature proves the relevance of Shamsie’s claim. Taufiq Rafat (1927-98), Alamgir Hashmi (b. 1951), Imtiaz Dharker (b. 1954), and Moniza Alvi (b. 1954) gave a unique and credible voice to Pakistani English poetry. Ahmad Ali (1910-1994), Shahid Suharwardy (1892-1963), and Zulfiqar Ghose (b. 1935) have written both fiction and non-fiction, addressing the contemporary socio-political events. Short fiction flourished through the work of writers such as Aamer Hussein (1955), Daniyal Mueenuddin

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22 Shamsie, *And the World Changed*, 10.
24 Shamsie, *And the World Changed*, 12.
Along with this, many writers also produced work in such literary genres as the essay, epistolary writing, and memoirs. A few notable examples are the letters of Faiz Ahmed Faiz (1911-1984) and Alys Faiz (1914-2003), the essays of Moni Mohsin (b.1963), and Eqbal Ahmed (1933-1999), the travelogues of Salman Rashid (b. 1952), and the memoirs of Tehmina Durrani (b. 1953). Among the many anthologies and critical works on Pakistani literary writings in English I would draw attention to Tariq Rahman’s *A History of Pakistani Literature in English* (1991), Alamgir Hashmi’s *Pakistani Literature: The Contemporary English Writers* (1987), Muneeza Shamsie’s *A Dragonfly in the Sun: An Anthology of Pakistani Writing in English* (1997), *Leaving Home: Toward a New Millennium: A Collection of English Prose by Pakistani Writers* (2001) and *Hybrid Tapestries: The Development of Pakistani Literature in English* (2017).

More and more women writers, whether writing in Pakistan or abroad, have chosen English as a medium of their creative expression. Marginality, hybridity, and heterogeneous identity have become some of the common cords which weave the texture of such fictions together. Among the expatriates from the United States, United Kingdom, and other parts of the world, the fiction of Rukhsana Ahmad, Roshni Rustomji-Kerns, Sorraya Khan, Tariq Naqvi, Shahrukh Husain, Fawzia Afzal Khan, and Feryal Ali Gauhar speak richly about the issues related to Pakistani history and its interrelation with the outside world. Like Sidhwa whom I discussed in the previous chapter, Rustomji, a Parsee, witnessed Partition as a child at the age of nine. In her memoir, she gives an account of the events from Partition in 1947 to the assassination of Benazir Bhutto in 2007.27 Together with Miriam G. Cooke, Rustomji also edited *Blood into Ink: South Asian and Middle Eastern Women Write War* (1994), one of the first anthologies in English about the literary responses of South Asian and Middle Eastern women writers about different conflicts.

Against the backdrop of Zia-ul-Haq’s dictatorial rule, Rukhsana Ahmad first translated Urdu poetry of protest by women writers into a collection *We Sinful Women* (1991), and later wrote her first novel *The Hope Chest* (1996). The novelist Tahira Naqvi, who lives in the United States, also translated Ismat Chughtai’s 1940 novel as *The Crooked Line* (2006). Similarly, Sorraya Khan explores the personal relation and political tumult in Pakistani history since Partition in such novels as *Noor* (2006), *Five Queen’s Road* (2009), and *City of Spies* (2015). In novels like *Burnt Shadow* (2009) and *Home Fire* (2017), Kamila Shamsie builds on the same tradition and deals with questions of identity, gender, and history. Against the backdrop of perpetual socio-political unrest, the rise of fundamentalism and the War on Terror, the literary responses of these women writers consistently re-create Pakistani identity as heterogeneous, hybrid and fluid.

2. Postmemory Witnessing in *Meatless Days*

2.1 Critical Reception

*Meatless Days* (1989) presents different characters in Suleri’s familial and social life and juxtaposes their stories with the political upheavals in the country. The memoir lacks a linear and coherent plot. Instead, by focusing on a different character and event in each of the nine chapters, Suleri creates a cyclical return to some central events of loss and mourning, i.e., the deaths of her grandmother Dadi, her mother Mair Jones and her sister Ifat. Many reviewers of *Meatless Days* found the non-linear and incoherent plotline unconvincing. Frada Mozenter, for example, explains that *Meatless Days* is “an intriguing yet unsatisfying book”, since “neither the personal nor the political tales represented in this memoir seem to be ‘complete’”. Frada Mozenter explains that *Meatless Days* is “an intriguing yet unsatisfying book”, since “neither the personal nor the political tales represented in this memoir seem to be ‘complete’”. Rukhsana Ahmad calls the book an “exceptional autobiography”, but also stresses how the prose “works against the value of the narrative as a social document” being “devoid of politics and social history”.

Despite the mixed reviews upon publication, *Meatless Days* has garnered much critical attention and has been scrutinized from various theoretical perspectives, including postcolonial, post-modern, feminist and transcultural ones. Ray Sangeeta analyses the memoir for the “provisionality of the nature of personal, cultural, and geopolitical identifications” within the postcolonial literary debate and calls the text a “highly self-conscious, paradoxical, and in some ways indeterminate [version] of the bildungsroman”. For Oliver Lovesey, “*Meatless Days* constructs postcolonial subjectivity almost exclusively by speaking about other people; Suleri is not her tale’s protagonist”. Deirdre Fagan reads the memoir as an amalgamation of “South Asian culinary discourse” with an explanation of the feminine identity of women in a postcolonial world. Shazia Sadaf interprets the recurrence of food metaphors in *Meatless Days* as an example that illustrates the loss of identity in the postcolonial world. Geetha Ganapathy-Doré claims that *Meatless Days* creates “a dialogue between the history of Pakistan […] and her

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own selective memory”.34 Mara Scanlon, on the other hand, calls the memoir “an important corrective to the naturalization of the metaphors ‘mother land’ and ‘mother tongue’”.35 For Shazia Rahman, “Suleri’s deconstructive stance resists the categorization on which orientalism, nationalism, and patriarchy are based”.36 According to Inderpal Grewal, it is “an exemplary text of postmodernism in its rejection of the unitary subject and its delineation of a diasporic, multiple, incomplete subjectivity”.37 For Jenni Ramone the text represents a “self-conscious mode of self-representation as a post-colonial academic”, thus highlighting its global relevance as a piece of postcolonial and diasporic life-writing.38 Finally, for Shrabanti Kundu, *Meatless Days* portrays the narrator’s struggle for self-representation within a transcultural space.39

None of these existing critical studies have focussed on the intricate way in which Suleri uses intergenerational memories as an alternative to the mainstream historical narratives, or the way in which the narrator mediates between her memories and the memories of her family members forging a postcolonial literary response to violence and conflict. Therefore, I will read Suleri’s work as a postmemory memoir. My analysis is divided into two sections. In the first part, I will demonstrate how the narrator testifies to the ever-present war zones, whether in postcolonial Pakistan, where she spent her childhood and early adulthood, or in New Haven, Connecticut, where she teaches postcolonial literature at university. In the second part, I will show how the memoir, which is centred around memories, puts mourning and remembrance at the forefront through the use of stylistic features like self-reflexivity and metatextuality. In this way, this study aims to position *Meatless Days* within a larger canon of war and conflict literature through the lens of literary testimony.

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2.2 “The Structure of a Secret”: The Witness and the Context

Meatless Days was first published in 1989, just after the end of the longest dictatorship in Pakistani history and in the year of Benazir Bhutto’s appointment as the first female prime minister of an Islamic country. Interestingly, Bhutto also published her autobiography entitled, *Daughter of Destiny: An Autobiography* in 1988. In her autobiography, Bhutto writes about the cruel dictatorship of Zia-ul-Haq and positions herself as the legitimate heir to her father’s political legacy. However, upon becoming prime minister, Benazir Bhutto, quite ironically, clung to the same political establishment which she herself had opposed so heavily in her autobiography. In this way, although run by a female prime minister, the geo-political, social and legal policies under Benazir’s rule remained almost the same as they had been during Zia’s dictatorship. One very stark example is the continuation of the Shariya Laws, which were implemented during Zia’s regime. These laws targeted victims of rape and adultery rather than their perpetrators. Within this socio-political context, Suleri’s memoir tells of an ambiguous father-daughter relationship which stands for the author’s relation to the patriarchal state more generally. By using three different generations of women, her grandmother Dadi, her mother Mair Jones and her sister Ifat, Suleri creates an epic tale of matriarchal experiences. Through the stories of these different women, she comments on the link between the individual and the state:

“You were the state, and yet you did not know!” Oh my mind’s fool, I thought, astonished: it has taken you the deaths of a dear mother and a dear sister, the loss of three dear children, before you could contemplate such dangerous simplicity? You were born fit; you rendered yourself unfit. Now comes the time when you must make yourself historical. An impossible act, however, to explain to Pip, who needed badly to retain his version as the only form of history.40

Through his resistance to alternative versions of history, Suleri’s father stands for the general will of the state. In wanting to write their collective past as a family, Suleri finds a way to resist and counter the history of the state. Using her father’s titles, she claims that she could write about the past, as she says, “I could do a Whither Pip?” and I could do a Whither Tom? And Whither You and Me? and the whole sorry lot of us if I wished it’ (88). Hers is thus a project of re-writing history and re-writing herself in the process. Mirroring her father’s book title, *Whither Pakistan* (1953), and adding a touch of irony and sarcasm, Suleri establishes herself as a witness who, although closely informed by her father’s life, wants to offer an alternative testimony: her version of the “sorry lot of us”. The protagonist uses this phrase in reference to the men and women of her generation who were not the decision makers in the separatist

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40 All subsequent references to *Meatless Days* are between parentheses in the text. Sara Suleri, *Meatless Days* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1989), 127.
politics of Muslim nationalism in pre-Partition India and post-Partition Pakistan, but who suffered nonetheless for the decisions of the previous generations.

Therefore, in writing her version of Pakistani history, the narrator seeks to merge the binary positions of Muslim and non-Muslim, Pakistani at home and immigrant in the United States, woman and man. As an upper-middle-class Pakistani woman living in New Haven, Suleri enlarges her perspective through a collage of intertwined memories of women, mostly from the same class, that nevertheless seeks to offer a corrective to the dominant historical narrative about Pakistan. In the beginning of her memoir, Suleri recollects her decision to write the stories of women in Pakistan: a professor of third-world literature at Yale University, Suleri is questioned by a female student as to why there is not an equal representation of third-world women writers in her syllabus. A visual spectacle hinders her from answering immediately,

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. (20)

Suleri prepares the readers for a textual rendezvous with the upper-middle-class Pakistani women as the absent women of the third world, and a deeper socio-cultural understanding of their apparent silences. Here, one has to admit that Suleri’s perspective as well as the women about whom she writes all come from the same class structure. Her college friend who comes from a different cultural background can be one exception. Suleri does not include the perspectives of the lower-class women: the servants of the house. This could be due to her limited exposure to other social set ups or her inability to give voice to their concerns. Moreover, by thus reconstructing her memories, she hopes to rise “like a poppy from the fields of [her] recent dead” (76). The poppy flower used as a symbol for the dead soldiers during the First World War functions here to connect the death of her own relatives with the larger cycle of violence and lends authority to her position as a witness to this violence.

Suleri clarifies her position as a witness when she comments on her writing process as follows, “[a]nd so I will not write as though I believed in the structure of a secret” (175). The phrase “structure of a secret” points to her moral position that she would rather expose the truth than hide it. In this way, the nonlinearity and incoherence of Meatless Days is presented as a conscious, dissident choice. Furthermore, it positions the author-narrator of the memoir as a witness and shapes her portrayal of her family members and friends. Of particular interest is the way she reconstructs her father’s portrait, by combining her father’s memories of his childhood and adult years with her own memories of her father from childhood and adult life. The next section analyses Suleri’s representation of her relationship with her father and the role it plays in her narrative about Pakistan.
2.3 “The Separate Ways”: Father and Daughter

Like Benazir and Fatima Bhutto, Suleri is the daughter of a very influential public figure. However, this does not stop her from describing her ideological clashes with her father on multiple levels. While she uses her father’s memories of his life, Suleri also adds to them her own childhood memories as well as a retrospective understanding of her father. Ziauddin Ahmad Suleri was one of the most prominent journalists in Pakistani history. He wrote passionately about Pakistani politics, history and Muslim nationhood. While showing his loyalty, commitment and hard work to his ideological assumptions in journalism, the narrator also challenges her father’s interpretation of historical events. As is obvious from the title, the chapter entitled, “Papa and Pakistan”, explains her father’s obsession with Pakistan. The narrator tells about a father-figure whose ideological presuppositions permeate all parts of his life. Home, in this regard, is no exception.

In constructing her father’s portrait, memories and literary invention go hand in hand. Suleri’s introductory remarks about him form an apt example, “[f]or in the bigning [her father’s pronunciation], there was Pip” (110). Her mimicry of the biblical verse, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1), performs two functions: it draws analogies between God and father, and between Word and his journalism, thus highlighting the androcentric tradition of logos whereby the word of God/father/journalist becomes the all-present reality defining temporality (beginning) and lived experience. Secondly, she utters the word beginning as “bigning”, because her father used to pronounce the word with this emphasis. To make it even more comical, she calls her father by his nickname, ‘Pip’. This nickname is a reference to his life-long interest in Charles Dicken’s fiction: he wrote his MA-thesis on Great Expectations (1861). Thus, from the beginning of this portrayal, Suleri evokes his omnipresence in word and flesh, at home and in public, through the narrative which projects him in a slightly comic way. She describes his memories of early adulthood and of becoming a journalist for a daily newspaper, recalling, “[h]e was happy, then, feeling at the hub of himself and of history, and shortly thereafter was to feel happier still. For then he met Jinnah” (112). Z.A. Suleri was a devotee of Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the leader of Muslim League in pre-Partition India and the founder of Pakistan. This devotion heavily coloured the contours of his books about Pakistan and Muslim nationalism. The narrator writes,

So Pip became a person swamped in the true devotion of his [Jinnah’s] soul, working in the service of what he could only name perfection. And he named it, constantly: he saw to it that I grew up in a world that had only a single household god, called the Quaid [the leader], so that even today I feel slightly insolent to my upbringing when reality prompts me to call him by his real name, Jinnah. (113)

Especially reflective of this devotion were two of his books The Road to Peace and Pakistan (1944) and My Leader (1945). In response to this, his revered leader, Jinnah wrote a letter to him congratulating him on “marshalling facts so well and giving a clear picture of the seven years
of our [Muslim League’s] struggle” (115). Reflecting on this in her memoir, Suleri explains, “[y]ears later, I would think reproachfully about that phrase and the ideas it put into Papa’s head, because he has been martalling facts ever since” (115). Despite his claims to truth, Suleri shows how he missed a deeper understanding about the events of 1947 or 1971. As her father was in London during the Partition riots, she writes, “I wish, today, that Pip had been a witness of it all: surely that would have given him pause and conferred the blessing of doubt?” (116). She looks back at a past of which she was not a first-hand witness but justifies her questioning by pointing to her father’s own lack of first-hand experience of events he later wrote about.

Z.A. Suleri’s claim to be the sole truth-teller of Pakistani society and its recent history offers an example of a larger social system that does not allow any “blessing of doubt” with regard to past deeds. Z.A. Suleri is symbolic of the larger political will at work, as is evident when, in his old age, he develops a habit of using his index finger “as a pen, making it in constant scribbles write on each surface it could find” (130). Witnessing this habit, Suleri becomes “cognizant of a more pressing issue: in a room we could not see, a hand was still awake. It sought the secrecy of surface in the dark, and its finger was writing, writing” (130). Here again is an example of how memories coalesce with invention in literary testimony. Visiting her father after her mother’s death on a short trip to Pakistan, Suleri could see her father’s index finger, which scribbles “on each surface it could find” in the living-room. She takes that memory, exposes it to the invention of a witness who sees what cannot be seen in the ordinary circumstances, and imagines the hand at work in the “secrecy of surface in the dark”. Where this action could be a sign of involuntary movement in old age, she connects it with two other metaphors used previously in her narrative.

The metatextual nature of these images and the specific use of the index finger further positions her father as a witness and also links his act of witnessing to acts of witnessing in two different religious traditions. In Urdu, the index finger is also called, Shabdat ki ungli, (i.e., witness-finger). This finger is raised up during the Muslim prayer of Tashahud, (i.e., testimony of faith). Through Tashahud, a prayer testifies to his faith reciting, “I bear witness that there is no god than Allah and I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah”.

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, the Spirit of God is “hovering over the surface of water” culminating in God’s speech to create light (“let there be light”, Gen 1:1-3). The index finger resembles the restless hand which also hovers over the dark surface in the creation of narrative. Thus, the use of these embedded images (i.e., Tashahud– John– Genesis) related to three different religious traditions from East and West (i.e., Judaism, Christianity, Islam) situates Suleri’s testimony within these different traditions of witnessing. Secondly, as mentioned earlier, the narrator describes her act of writing as of someone who does not “believe” in the “structure of the secret”, in contrast to her father who yearned for the “secrecy of surface”. This points to the clash between two generations both ideologically and intellectually. The Indo-Pak war of 1971 made this clash into an irremediable rupture:

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But something of our spirits broke, in the war of 1971. It was not so much the country’s severing that hurt as the terrible afterimages we had to face: censorship lifted for a flash, flooding us with photographs and stories from the foreign press of what the army actually did in Bangladesh during the months of emergency that preceded the war. “I am not talking about the two-nation theory,” I wept to my father, “I am talking about blood!” He would not reply, and so we went our separate ways, he mourning for the mutilation of a theory, and I – more literal – for a limb, or a child, or a voice. (122)

The phrase “separate ways” has a double meaning here. It refers, firstly, to the separation between father and daughter when Suleri leaves for America after the 1971 war. Secondly, it also denotes the intellectual separation between the journalist/historian and the memoirist/fiction writer. Though the events of the 1971 war hit both father and daughter, they experienced these events very differently. Z.A. Suleri was left disappointed by the failure of the two-nation theory, while his daughter was left distressed by the human cost of these abstractions. Z.A. Suleri’s involvement with the military provides a context to understand these two different reactions.

Apart from his glorious career as a journalist, Z.A. Suleri was also part of the Pakistani military. In the war of 1965 against India he served as a colonel. He also worked for the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), the media wing of the Pakistani Military. He wrote vehemently against Z.A. Bhutto for his preference of capitalism over socialism and Islamic conservatism. Due to this, Bhutto removed him from the editorship of Pakistan Times and put him in jail. Just after Bhutto’s rule ended, leading to the worst dictatorship in Pakistani history, he was reappointed to his position as an editor and was also made the additional secretary of the Ministry of Information and Mass-Media Broadcasting. In the aftermath of the 1971 war, Z.A. Suleri, like many others, reacted by clinging to a stringent form of Islam. Living in the same environment, being brought up under the panoptic presence of her father, Suleri finds other means of identity-formation. Contrary to the abstract reportage where human carnage becomes insignificant, Suleri invokes empathy for the loss of a “limb”, a “child”, or a “voice” by inventing the rhetoric of mourning through the images of body and senses. In the section that follows, I discuss how the narrator uses the images of food and body, to emphasize the alterity of her witnessing compared to her father’s personal and political will.

2.4 The Metaphors of Food and Body: Dadi, Mair Jones & Ifat

2.4.1 “Living Inside History”: The Metaphor of Food

The title “meatless days” refers to the governmental decision (in 1947) to “conserve the national supply of goats and cattle” by designating “two days out of each week” as meatless days (31). This creates irony as Suleri informs that the people who could afford to buy meat, could also afford refrigeration and therefore never went without food. In another example, the culinary rituals around food provides Suleri with a sense of time and history. As she writes,
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. (34)

The entourage of cooks in Suleri’s home are juxtaposed to the sequence of dictators and democratically elected politicians in Pakistani politics lending structure to time and events, the former within the non-linear setting of the memoir and the latter in the context of Pakistan’s political violence. Similarly, the month of Ramadan, known usually for abstaining from food, is remembered for the sumptuous meals. Suleri writes, “[t]here were both lean times and meaty times, however; occasionally, body and food would sit happily at the same side of the conference table. Take, for example, Ramad[lan], the Muslim month of fasting, often recollected as the season of perfect meals” [emphasis added] (29). The silent moments of prayer are replaced by a secretive conversation among the family members when, “[f]or three wintry seasons I would wake up with Dadi, my grandmother, and Ifat and Shahid: we sat around for hours making jokes in the dark, generating a discourse of unholy comradeship” (30). Later in her life, the kitchen space, used in the loneliness of an immigrant’s life, becomes finally a private space: “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” (36). Decades later, when the narrator stumbles upon the meaning of “sweetbread”, she cannot help feeling betrayed by her mother. As she writes, “maybe my mother knew that sweetbreads are testicles but had cunningly devised a ruse to make me consume as many parts of the world as she could before she set me loose in it” (23). Food and eating here symbolize experience. Thus, the rituals of eating provide a range of experiences: the collective “unholy comradeship” during Ramadan, the privacy of the kitchen and the exposure to the unfamiliar. In this way, Suleri uses the images of food and its social implications to provide a sense of time in the narrative.

2.4.2 “I was also Burned”: Dadi’s Witnessing

Just as the sense of time is shaped through culinary images similarly, the sense of identity and locality is constructed through female bodies. This is clear in Suleri’s depiction of all the women within her house: from Dadi (grandmother), to Mair Jones (mother) and then to Ifat (sister). Dadi, and the women of her generation, saw the partition-riots. Seeing the terror of separation, Dadi came to believe that “there is more goodness in a woman’s little finger than in the benighted mind of man” (7). Dadi could not comprehend the madness of Partition that overtook the undivided land during the riots,

She was not among those who, on the fourteenth of August [Independence Day of Pakistan], unfurled flags and festivities against the backdrop of people running and cities burning. About that era she would only say, looking up sour and cryptic over the edge of her Quran, “And I was also burned.” She was, but that came years later. [emphasis added] (2)
Unlike many victims of Partition, Dadi’s suffering is not physical. Nonetheless, her psychological burning during Partition is superimposed on an event of Dadi’s accidental burning later on. This anachronistic treatment of Partition serves two functions. Firstly, Suleri, who is not the first-hand witness of the historical burning, recreates an act of witnessing displaced in time and space. The memories of loss during Partition are invoked as the narrator binds Dadi’s memories of Partition with her own memories of Dadi’s burning. Secondly, and more significantly, unlike the many victims who could survive neither in body nor in the cultural memory, Dadi survives the fire and, through her constantly transforming body, the narrator witnesses the beauty of survival:

I learned about the specialization of beauty through that body. There were times, as with love, when I felt only disappointment, carefully easing off the dressings and finding again a piece of flesh that would not knit, happier in the texture of stubborn glue. But then on more exhilarating days I’d peel [off] like an onion all her bandages away and suddenly discover I was looking down at some literal tenacity and was bemused at all the freshly withered shapes she could create. (15)

What can a burnt body, and that of an already wrinkled old woman, teach about the “specialization of beauty”? In this incident, Suleri presents the ethos of survival. The slow but consistent recovery of the body is symbolic of the gradual recovery of experience from oblivion through language. Her grandmother’s healing body becomes the space where Partition is commemorated. Moreover, her tenacity parallels the tenacity of the millions of individuals who faced the trauma of displacement, torture and homelessness in Partition. At the same time, Suleri forms the foundation of literary testimony as she looks at the recovering body conceiving thus the “specialization of beauty”. Through this testimony she transforms the abstraction of partition-trauma into a perceptual reality.

Once again, Suleri connects the personal with the political: her grandmother’s burning is linked to the changes wrought on the political scene of Pakistani history. After her recovery, Dadi metamorphoses from a conservative Muslim, who said her prayers five times a day, to a woman who suddenly stops saying her prayers. Suleri relates this change in Dadi as a form of resistance to the rapid Islamic radicalism used primarily for political gains, “I think we dimly knew we were about to witness Islam’s departure from the land of Pakistan. The men would take it to the streets and make it vociferate, but the great romance between religion and the populace, the embrace that engendered Pakistan, was done” (15). Dadi’s eventual death, and its immediate forgetting by the family members, exemplifies how for the ruling elite collective amnesia was the only way forward. Suleri writes,

Dadi was now dead. It happened in the same week that [Zulfikar] Bhutto finally was hanged [1979], and our imaginations were consumed by the public and historical dying. Pakistan made rapid provisions not to talk about the thing that had been done, and somehow, accidently, Dadi must have been mislaid into that larger decision, because she too ceased being a mentioned thing. [emphasis added] (17)
At a personal level, Dadi disagrees with her son in many ways, and at a political level, her suffering as a member of the generation who witnessed Partition at first-hand remains inexplicable to her son. By providing a brief sketch of her grandmother and by relating it to Pakistani history, Suleri provides an alternative outlook on the history that her father wrote about.

2.4.3 “She was Mrs. Ramsay”: The Reticent Mother

Suleri further shapes her counter-history through the character and experiences of her mother. Indeed, she blends her mother’s memories with both the metaphors of body and food and with intertextual literary references. Mair Jones represents dichotomous otherness in both the domestic and the public sphere. As a Welsh, non-Muslim woman and second wife of Z.A. Suleri (they married in England), Mair Jones does not fully belong to the Pakistani culture which is predominantly Muslim and where the second wife is mostly considered as the femme fatale. Moreover, her intellectual and political awareness were hushed because of her husband’s status in both domestic and public space. As the narrator recalls, “[o]dd, to think that just one man could keep us all so busy” (120). Reticence, indirectness and letting go of her sense of self became the modes of existence for Mair Jones. In the omnipresence of her father, Mair Jones survives by endorsing “a ravishingly absentminded smile and disappeared into Welshness, as though she had stumbled upon some hidden cultural ritual that she was too polite to disturb” (59).

In different sections of the memoir, Mair Jones appears like a shadow of her husband, supporting him fully in pursuing his goals. In doing so, her own personality becomes submerged. When her husband is under arrest, however, Mair Jones takes charge of his newspaper. As a protest, “she ordered into press an empty paper, [sheaves] of blank newsprint that bore nothing but the title, the Times of Karachi and the burden of nude paper […] She made them know how angry she was when she turned censorship into sedition!” (118). The blank sheets symbolize her act of resistance and the absence of her own narrative from the entire historical account that her husband created. Suleri, for her part, seeks to fill this absence through her writing. In the section entitled, “What Mamma Knew”, Suleri shows different dimensions of her mother’s personality, such as her work as a Professor of English literature in the Punjab University in Pakistan. Upon being challenged by her husband as to what she has contributed politically, Mair Jones responds as follows:

She looked at him, restrained. Her restraint said clearly: “Why, enduring you, you impossible, you moving man!” But to protect him, she added, “Oh, my children, I would say.” “And I – I have not done one great thing, but I saw greatness, during the struggle for Pakistan.” [emphasis added] (158)

Two utterances are presented in this extract. Firstly, her mother’s unspoken utterance, which is visible in her mother’s restrained body language and is substituted by Suleri for speech. Secondly, her mother’s utterance about her contribution in raising her children and witnessing the making of Pakistan. Suleri presents the rare occasion when her mother positions herself on
equal footing with her father in witnessing the struggle for Pakistani independence. Moreover, Suleri connects her mother’s unconventional teaching methods with the way she raised her children. As the narrator imagines, “I can feel her spirit shake its head to tell me, ‘Daughter, unplot yourself; let be’” (156). Living under different forms of censorships (public and personal), the one lesson which Mair Jones would teach her daughter is to “let be”, to free herself from the plot of traditional roles and life-patterns. This, however, is something that she could not say to her daughter. Suleri creates this transferral of will (from mother to daughter) through an imaginative invention. Through intertextual references, Suleri connects her mother with Punjabi and English cultures at the same time. About her mother’s reticence, Suleri remembers what Nuz, her stepsister, said about Mair Jones, “Mair was To the Lighthouse for me – she was Mrs. Ramsay” (153). On another occasion she writes;

I feel perplexed at the incongruity of this connection, but when I listen to the old Punjabi poem Hir Ranjha being sung, I curiously think of my mother […] surely she would be familiar with that trick of mind with which Hir told the world that she had become someone else’s name and now was Hir no longer? (162)

Hir [also spelled as Heer] is the female protagonist in the Punjabi epic romantic poem titled, Heer Ranjha (1766) by Waris Shah. Rooted in the Punjabi culture, known for her playfulness and extrovert behaviour, Hir appears to be far from the European, innately reserved and reticent person of Mair Jones. However, both Hir and Mair Jones, in their fervent love for a man, metamorphose into different persons: Hir claims that she has completely forgotten herself and that, what is left of her, is Ranjha, her beloved in the story for whom she ultimately embraces death, and Mair Jones transforms into Surraiya Suleri – her name after conversion to Islam. After her death, Suleri dreams about her mother. Through this dream she blends the metaphors of body and food together to create a complex perceptual reality around the memory of loss and mourning:

I noticed [there] was a refrigerated car and my father was inside it. […] What I found were hunks of meat wrapped in cellophane, and each of them felt like Mamma, in some odd way […] Then, when my father’s back was turned, I found myself engaged 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. (44)

One might say that the separate “hunks of meat wrapped in cellophane” are the fragmented memories of her mother that she has to carry one by one and transform into a narrative of loss. In this ritual of burying the parts, she restores a small knuckle from the anonymity of fragmentation and hides it literally “under her tongue”. The phrase ‘under my tongue’ is reminiscent of ‘on the tip of my tongue’. Thus, the memories of her mother are always on the border of the represented (her life as a wife and a mother) and the unrepresented (“unwritten volumes” of her mother’s experiences) (182). This dream has multiple functions. On the level of Suleri’s personal experience, it brings peace as the mourner can cling to something
substantial in the circumstances of her unsubstantial mourning (living in the United States, she could not attend the funeral). On the level of narration, the act of eating a piece of her mother reflects the dilemma of a witness: the simultaneous need to remember and to forget. Suleri keeps the knuckle of her mother when she had to bid farewell to all other parts. This also shows how literary testimony, through stylistic and rhetorical means, transcends the boundaries of factual evidence and the strictures of authenticity. The dream does not have a factual existence, yet by incorporating this dream Suleri testifies to her own suffering after her mother’s death.

2.4.4 “Now Hold me While I Die”: Ifat’s Testimony

The experience of Suleri’s elder sister, Ifat, a victim of targeted killing, becomes another strand in Suleri’s memoir of absent women. Suleri describes how her death was sensationalized by the media: “I stood by speechless as I watched the world sensationalize her life, her death. And then came the murder case, endless investigations that led nowhere but to greater trouble to our souls. It was Papa’s enemies, they said. No, it was the family, they said” (125). Like so many cases of targeted killing in Pakistani history, this case was never solved. Suleri writes, “[i]n some police station in Lahore a file of an unknown murder from 1980 lies forgotten, or perhaps completely lost. But we have managed to live with ourselves, it seems, making a habit of loss” (150). Pondering over the strange circumstances of Ifat’s death, the narrator reflects, “[t]hen I realized what I must have known all along: of course, Ifat’s story has nothing to do with dying; it has to do with the price a mind must pay when it lives in a beautiful body” (132). Suleri’s portrayal of Ifat’s life is an attempt to retrieve her life from oblivion through a de-familiarization of the body and the senses. At the same time, the nonlinearity and incoherent nature of Suleri’s testimonial portrait of her sister offers a rebuttal to the shocking and traumatic nature of her death.

Since its inception, Pakistan went through different crises. Through all these times, whether of dictatorship or democracy, basic human rights and freedom of speech have suffered. Suleri brings both these aspects together through the character of Ifat. The police claimed that her murderers could be her father’s enemies or someone from her husband’s family. The irony is that Ifat faced a sense of dislocation and non-belonging both in her father’s and later in her husband’s house. Her father does not approve of her marriage. To adjust to Punjabi culture, she tries hard to learn about Punjabi customs and mannerisms, yet she still faces alienation and aloofness in her husband’s house. Suleri writes, “[s]o in the end there was no place left where Ifat could return: in each room she was new. ‘Will no one ever let that girl be at home’” (143). Experiencing this constant dislocation, Ifat tells the narrator, “[m]en live in homes, and women live in bodies”. Suleri comments that Ifat “was preoccupied with the creature living inside her: I could watch her make a dwelling of her demeanour, a startling place in which to live” [emphasis added] (143).

First estranged from her father, then forced to acculturate herself in Punjabi culture and then finally facing an anonymous death: these are all different ways in which Ifat and by extension many other women like her, are made invisible or effaced. To counter this absence, Suleri, in a section titled “Immoderation of Ifat”, presents Ifat’s character from the perspective
of a younger sister who admires her elder sister’s beauty. Suleri recalls that Ifat’s wrists “were such a vessel” (133). On another occasion, she recollects the joy of witnessing, even as a child, “the lasting glamour of a face that both did and did not know its impact”, or, the pleasure of watching Ifat’s “expression spilling over with laughter, or amazement, or whatever else was prompting her to feel alive at a given moment of the day”, or, how the enchanting performance of the “theatre of Ifat’s eyes” upheld for her (134).

The reconstruction of Ifat’s story through memories is a way of giving voice to the silenced body. For example, recollecting an incident between Ifat and her father which she witnessed as a child, Suleri describes how Ifat twirled “her weight upon a heavy rope” only to fall and scream, “Papa, Papa!” […] “Now hold me while I die” (135). The narrator then notes that “[s]ome two decades later Ifat described her fall to me as though I had not been there, and it was entrancing to witness that event again” (135). This passage offers a complex interplay between memory and self-conscious storytelling. Clearly, the childhood incident could be treated as a harmless act of playfulness between father and daughter. However, in the context of Ifat’s murder, Suleri’s reconstruction points to its underlying, symbolic gesture of a dying daughter’s last plea to her well-known journalist father to “hold her while she dies”, to not let her case be subsumed among many other anonymous murder cases. Yet, her father fails to bring justice to her case either legally or literarily. It is instead, the narrator as the younger sister, who takes up the task of holding up Ifat’s memories to the world.

On another occasion, Ifat also proclaims that all fairy tales contain sexual references, urging her sister, “Sara, see, you must see!” “insisting that innocence was a lie” (137). This demands a special attention to the way these childhood memories function in the text. Indeed, just as Ifat is keen to burst the apparent innocence of fairy tales, Suleri’s tale about Ifat’s death bursts the falsity of the mainstream historical narratives. In fact, when Ifat’s younger self calls her father to hold her while she dies, she asks for the same attention that an ideal witness demands, since a martyr is a witness who testifies through the body. When performing her own death, the child Ifat claims attention through language and asks her father to witness the moment in which she is not dead, but at the verge of dying. Ifat finds agency of speech through this anachronistic literary rendition of her memory. By remembering the incident two decades later, the narrator emphasizes the need to bring the identities of the victims out of the collective amnesia of the social structure.

2.5 The Role of the Witness and the Memoir as Testimony

In the last section of her memoir, Suleri reflects on her role as a witness. Like Ifat who, at an early age, wishes to warn her sister of the seeming innocence of the fairy tales, Suleri warns the reader of the lives of women living under oppression. Suleri confirms that “living in language is tantamount to living with other people” (177). Just as the metaphorical use of food and body allows for a permeation into the secret lives of otherwise unrepresented women, so Suleri’s memoir, with its self-reflexive, metatextual and at times anachronistic interventions, establishes
a link between the history of Pakistan as a “third world” country and a global audience (20). By connecting the personal and the political, Suleri shapes women’s identities as the vulnerable other; whether that is through the Partition trauma – as anachronistically presented through Dadi’s body – through the reticent presence of Mair Jones – who, while living in a Muslim majority country with her converted identity of Suraiya Suleri, had to leave aside her cultural, ideological and political otherness – or through Ifat – whose beautiful body, presence of being, control over language, and joy for life stand in contrast to the political will.

Suleri demonstrates the complex interrelation between a witness and the events that are witnessed by weaving together several different intergenerational memories and by presenting them through a self-reflexive narrative voice and the literary technique of intertextuality. In doing so, the memoir defies the rigid confines of genre. This explains why it has been variously called an autobiography, an autobiographical novel, auto-narration, and a life-writing. Indeed, one can agree with Ganapathy-Doré who claims that “Sara Suleri’s own studies of Fanny Parks, Rushdie and Naipaul in *The Rhetoric of English India* function as efficient metatexts to her recasting of autobiography as a nexus of history, womanhood and language”. On the one hand, her memoir tells the story of the absent women from the third world, thus speaking to multiple audiences: the indigenous Pakistanis, the diasporic generations. On the other hand, the uniqueness and the specificity of Suleri’s position as a witness is made vivid through the peculiarities of storytelling. For example, the memoir abounds in metatextual references: family anecdotes, farces and romances, and all such references to the tradition of writing are interwoven with the narration. Suleri finds Pip as the fictional doppelgänger to her father’s character, elaborating on how both Pips (her father as the Pip in Pakistani journalism and Pip in the Victorian English society) suffer disappointment for their great expectations.

The name also serves as a metatextual and transnational connection between two distinct traditions of literature written in the same language, Pakistani and British, just like her mother. These intertextual references help to situate the memoir within an Anglophone Pakistani literary tradition.

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42 Ahmad, “Review of *Meatless Days*”, 744.
46 Ganapathy-Doré, “A Mouthful of Stones in a Mango Leaf”, 32.
47 Another intertextual reference to the use of “Pip” as a fictional doppelgänger is found in the American writer Kathy Acker’s 1983 book *Great Expectations* where she uses Dickens’s novel as a starting point to write her own biography. What combines Suleri and Acker’s use of “Pip” is there commitment to dissent from a male tradition of writing; in Suleri this is found in projecting her father as Pip in comical light and in Acker this is achieved by presenting a gender-shifting narrator. See: Kathy Acker, *Great Expectations*, (New York: Grove Press, 1983).
2.6 Conclusion

Suleri’s memoir offers a postmemory witness account of Pakistan through the retrospective and highly self-reflexive lens of an upper-class woman mediating between her own memories and the memories of her family. At the same time, Suleri opens up her own perspective by integrating and reconstructing intergenerational memories in a complex, fragmented and non-linear textual whole. She thus redefines cultural memory by situating the personal, familial and intergenerational memories within the larger symbolic order of Pakistani and American societies and the literary imaginaries of the East and the West. In doing so, she offers her narrative to both indigenous and international readers. The memories about her grandmother, mother and sister all offer a different perspective on the painful history of Partition, the war of 1971 and other ethno-linguistic conflicts within Pakistan. By presenting a parade of women who are complex and at times deliberately dissident to the majoritarian or patriarchal principles, Suleri thus provides a long and complex answer to the very question which set off her narrative: why there are so few women writers in third world literature.

3. Postmemory Witnessing in *Songs of Blood and Sword*

Four years ago, I set out to trace my father’s life. I opened dusty boxes filled with newspaper clippings, letters, diaries and official documents kept and collected by various members of the family over a forty-years period […] documents, both written by hand and officially typed, served to build a political as well as a personal chronology.48

This excerpt from Fatima Bhutto’s *Songs of Blood and Sword: A Daughter’s Memoir* provides a glimpse of the devotion with which she worked to commemorate her father’s controversial life. While in exile, Mir Murtaza Bhutto, the eldest son of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, organised an armed resistance against the military dictator Zia-ul-Haq, after the latter had assassinated his father. After Zia’s death in a dubious plane crash, he returned to Pakistan to enter into politics, but was himself assassinated under similarly suspicious circumstances. To retrace this personal and political chronology, Fatima Bhutto mentions her reliance on a vast body of external sources ranging from personal letters to official documents. Bhutto’s use of the archive tells us two significant things. On the one hand, the close familial connection provides her with the authority to open dusty boxes and, on the other hand, her dependence on these external sources shows her desire to be credible. Throughout her memoir, Bhutto recreates her father’s

past from a daughter’s perspective, rewrites the political history of her country, and engages in a self-reflexive act of witnessing through narration. Through a close reading of *Songs of Blood and Sword*, I will demonstrate how Bhutto combines intergenerational memories with different literary techniques to create her testimony. I will also highlight how the memoir engages with significant questions surrounding testimony, its literary representation and its relevance to the socio-political contexts.

Published in 2010, Bhutto’s *Songs of Blood and Sword* focuses on one man’s murder from a familial perspective while also relating this murder to the wider political crises in Pakistan. Within the tradition of Anglophone Pakistani literature, the memoir situates a personal testimony of extrajudicial killing within a larger discourse of national history since Partition, a constant string of political crises with various dictatorships in the country, the onslaught of the War on Terror (2001 to present), the rise in extra-judicial murders as a means of counterterrorism and the Drone War (2004 to date). Hence, *Songs of Blood and Sword* presents a highly interesting case in the contemporary literature of testimony. In what follows, I analyse the memoir so as to answer the following questions: How does Bhutto as a witness of her father’s political struggle and murder conjoin both the personal and the political, the historical and the subjective aspects of lived experience? How do the contexts of class and gender help Bhutto create an alternative testimony which diffuses the dominant official narrative of Pakistani history? How is the style and form of the memoir shaped by these multiple contexts? Finally, how is *Songs of Blood and Sword* an example of Pakistani literature in English which relates to and is relevant for a larger global audience.

3.1 *Songs of Blood and Sword*: An Overview

*Songs of Blood and Sword* chronicles the intertwined histories of the Bhutto family and Pakistani society. Bhutto outlines the trajectory of her grandfather’s political career and his later assassination. She explains how her grandfather, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, became the most popular politician in Pakistan during the 1960s because of his nationalist and socialist views. Later on, he became the fourth president (1971–73) and the ninth prime minister (1973–77) of Pakistan. Quite soon, however, Z. A. Bhutto became a very controversial figure in both national and international politics, especially during his presidency. Land reforms against feudalism, the nationalisation of industries, the founding of nuclear programme, and an emphasis on Islamic brotherhood were all important factors contributing to Bhutto’s controversial image. Moreover, the Indo-Pak wars of 1965 and 1971 made explicit the vulnerable geopolitical condition of the newly independent country. These two wars laid down the basis of the cold foreign policy between India and Pakistan and further shaped their international alliances during the Cold War era, whereby China was inclined towards Pakistan and the United States relied on India for their individual geopolitical goals. The civil war between East and West Pakistan over the election results of 1971 resulted in East Pakistan’s separation into Bangladesh. Z. A. Bhutto became the president of a demoralised society. His adherence to the
nuclear programme in Pakistan, despite severe international criticism, the rise of Pashtun, Sindhi, and Baloch nationalism, and his non-conformism towards the military junta played a key role in his overthrow. Thus, in July 1977, General Zia-ul-Haq dissolved the assemblies and Bhutto was put in jail for allegedly planning the murder of a political opponent.

For the next two years, his sons, Murtaza and Shahnawaz Bhutto, travelled across the globe to appeal for justice. Meanwhile, at home, Z. A. Bhutto, without a chance for fair trial, was hanged under dubious circumstances in 1979 and his dead body was not returned to the family. In reaction, both sons, while already in exile, organised an armed resistance against the military dictator. In her memoir, Bhutto includes a comment by the British-Pakistani journalist and writer Tariq Ali, to confirm this version of the events: “The failure to win diplomatic support from governments around the world played a big part in convincing Murtaza that the only option was armed struggle” (176). Later on, the younger son Shahnawaz was also found dead under suspicious circumstances. On the basis of an interview with the French lawyer, Jacques Vergès, Bhutto holds her aunt, Benazir, responsible for this murder. During Murtaza’s exile, Al-Zulfiqar, a militant insurgency organization formed in 1979 controlled by Murtaza, hijacked a Pakistan International Airlines flight and diverted it to Kabul in 1981. In the memoir, Bhutto provides another explanation of this hijack, claiming that Salamullah Tipu who joined Al-Zulfiqar without Murtaza’s approval was behind the entire planning of the hijack.

In 1993, Murtaza came back to Pakistan to launch his political career, but this time found another rival in his own sister, Benazir, who, after joining forces with the military establishment responsible for their father’s assassination, became the first female prime minister of a Muslim country. Murtaza openly criticised Benazir’s and her husband, Asif Ali Zardari’s corruption, nepotism and foreign policies. On 20 September 1996, Murtaza was killed in a police encounter. While the official report states that the policemen were forced to open fire in response to the attack by Murtaza’s guards, *Songs of Blood and Sword* provides a contradictory testimony: her father was brutally killed under a well-planned operation. Since Benazir Bhutto, the sister of Murtaza Bhutto was in power, Fatima Bhutto puts the burden of ethical responsibility on the seemingly irresponsible state. Beyond the familial terrain, the author puts her father’s murder in parallel with the political unrest of the 1990s in Karachi. Many have called this time a period of civil war, which resulted in the killing of almost two thousand people in 1995 alone. Vazira Fazila-Yacoobali further describes this as a time of “virtual civil war between the security forces of Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto’s government and a heavily-armed, ethnically-based political party, the Muhajir Qaumi Mahaz (MQM, or Muhajir National Front), which claims to represent the interests of Karachi’s six million Muhajirs [refugees from India at the time of Partition]”.

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3.2 Critical Reception

Upon its publication, *Songs of Blood and Sword* received mixed responses. While the book was hailed internationally as “powerful”, “clear and unpretentious”, “passionate and angry”, it was also criticized for the lack of “objective history”. Matthews shares a similar view claiming, that “this book is not an explicit prosecution of the Pakistani government […] But for those who like their history presented in personal terms, it will not disappoint”. Gabriel Constans hails the book for the “unique perspective” through which Bhutto provides “an intimate look inside Pakistan’s past, present, and future”. Within Pakistan, *Songs of Blood and Sword* faced similar dual response after publication. Many journalists and close relatives, including Sanam Bhutto, reacted very strongly to some of the allegations made against Benazir Bhutto and the president Asif Zardari. According to Mahir Ali, the book is a “flawed memoir”, one which is “unfortunately peppered with inaccuracies” despite “plenty of poignancy in her recollections about her father”. About its mixed reception, William Dalrymple writes, “the author has now found herself being feted in the west – and featured like Benazir before her in glossies such as Vogue and Vanity Fair – while being severely criticized in her native country for telling a one-sided version of events”. Given its complex reception, it is surprising that the memoir has not received much critical attention within literary studies. This might be a result of greater attention to its historical accuracy and its familial context. My reading understands the memoir beyond the immediate context of political rivalries and instead upholds it as a literary testimony wherein Bhutto grounds her personal experiences of pain and suffering within the larger political narratives of Pakistani and international politics.

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57 Dalrymple, “Review of *Songs of Blood and Sword*”. 

3.3 Acts of Postmemory Witnessing

The very title of the memoir, “Songs of Blood and Sword. A Daughter’s Memoir”, points to the strengths and limitations of Bhutto’s testimony given her specific position as a witness. First, the title promises a configuration or “songs” of personal and political struggles in different generations, while the subtitle “a daughter’s memoir” suggests simultaneously a generational continuity and a break in the usual patrilineal legacy: rather than a son, it is a daughter who inherits and represents the past and builds a present reality around it. Nonetheless, this familial bond also has its limitations. The cover photo confirms this notion: Bhutto is standing near a window looking through the blinds. Like the subtitle, this posture shows her role as an intermediary. By positioning herself in this space, she promises a privileged access to the reality of her father’s life and death. Her perspective is shaped through this mediation between the personal and the political as well as through the generational distance facilitated through time and space. What Michael G. Levine says about Spiegelman’s *Maus* is applicable to Bhutto’s memoir as well:

> The subtitle of the first volume of *Maus*: My Father Bleeds History, conveys a sense not only of physical injury, but of psychical wounding and emotional anguish. It suggests that the literally unbearable pain of the first generation will have spilled over somehow into the next, that the still unassimilated historical experience of the father will have bled through the pages of the “survivor’s tale” drafted by his son.58

Bhutto presents this *spilling over* from generation to generation while narrating her father’s personal and political legacy. Born in Kabul, Bhutto spent her early childhood in Syria given her father’s exile. She reflects on her sense of double displacement as follows:

> I knew we were landless; I knew I came from somewhere else, somewhere I had never seen. Papa played old Sindhi folk *Songs*, ‘Ho Jamalo’ usually, when he felt like remembering the sounds of his home. He used akraks, the traditional Sindhi block-printed shawls, as table-cloths and he cooked achar gosht much too spicily. (271)

In exile, her father resorts to Sindhi folk music and food as reminders of a distant homeland. However, Bhutto was neither born in Pakistan nor had she visited it at that stage. Still she experiences homelessness and exile through her father’s shared memories. The *achar gosht* (pickled meat), the *ajrak* (block printed Sindhi shawls) and the Sindhi folk song *Ho Jamalo*, sung in the praise of a nineteenth-century folk hero, Jamalo Khoso Baloch, serve two different purposes here. For Murtaza, they refer to the past memories of lived experience whereas for Bhutto they signal a double sense of displacement: the displacement that her father experiences

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59 Provincial language of Sindh: the birthplace of the Bhutto family.
and shares through memories and the displacement which she can only recognize through retrospection upon her later visit to Pakistan.

Apart from this sense of exile and statelessness, Bhutto also inherits the constant fear and uncertainty from her father both literally and figuratively. Referring to this fear, Bhutto writes, “as a young insomniac, something of a Bhutto family curse, I would be scared to sleep by Papa with my very own personalised bogeyman” (269). Similarly, when she remembers her father after her uncle’s death, she notes: “Papa was totally distraught. I had never seen him so overwhelmed by sadness before and would never again, not like this … Papa’s eyes welled with tears. There was nothing to break the silence …. ‘I’m sad’, he said to me as I shifted uncomfortably next to him” (267–8). In this passage, Bhutto registers not only her father’s trauma, but also the inherited and submerged trauma of a young girl compelled to witness her father’s political and personal isolation. In fact, she refers to an incident when her mother reconfirms one of her childhood memories of witnessing her uncle’s dead body. She was only three years old when she saw her uncle Shahnawaz Bhutto’s dead body. Later on, her mother tells her:

> It stayed with you for a long time […] You remembered seeing your uncle face down on the carpet and nobody imagined how much it had affected you, but one afternoon, months later, you found your father napping in the bedroom in Damascus and he was lying down like Shah had been, on his stomach, his face covered, and you shook him awake, crying and screaming at him to get up. That’s how we knew. You thought he was dead, like Shah. (267)

The posture of a dead body stays as a sign of something horrific and inexplicable. Thus, Bhutto’s act of remembering the past depends on her own memories and the memories of others. However, as will be delineated in the later section, her witnessing also depends on different sources such as her father’s driver, close friends, political opponents, and other personal and official documents. Therefore, her testimony is not limited to what she bore from one generation to another but is inclusive of what her individual witnessing could not incorporate. This makes her a postmemory witness who combines intergenerational memories with different literary techniques to create her testimony about contemporary Pakistan.

3.4 Multiple Contexts: Daughter, Woman, Author

As I mentioned in the general introduction of this dissertation, one hallmark of literary testimonies is the close correlation of context and text. Bhutto’s *Songs of Blood and Sword* presents another example of this correlation. Bhutto presents her divergent stances (gender, social and familial positions) in the text in such a way that her testimony becomes ambivalent, polyphonic and intertextual at the formal level. These divergent stances are that of an apologist daughter, an educated upper-class woman and a writer engaging with a global audience. Although seeking empathy by emphasizing her position as a daughter, Bhutto is also aware of the privilege of education and class which empowers her perspective as a dissenting voice. She navigates these
tensions by incorporating other voices and testimonies within her memoir. Whenever limited by the lack of first-hand experiences, she resorts to documents, diaries, letters and other intertextual references. While these documents provide the further information necessary to her story, they also lend credibility and authority to her account.

Indeed, Bhutto creates a collage of different external sources and personal memories. She often draws from her grandfather’s letters to her father and from Murtaza’s diaries, letters, and newspaper clippings. She also publishes excerpts from *Venceremos*, a magazine established in 1966 by Murtaza aimed at young Pakistanis to raise social and political awareness. In this way, she positions her literary testimony within the writings of her own family. For example, she refers to *If I am Assassinated* (1979), written by her grandfather during his imprisonment. In this book, he appeals for justice to the international community and rebuts the charges made against him. The enduring value of his testament lies in its pithy analysis of Pakistani military establishment and political corruption. Bhutto not only includes long excerpts from this text in her own memoir, but also comments on its quality and currency as follows:

*If I am Assassinated* was not simply a tract on innocence and justice; it was like his letters – detailed, thorough, and resounding in its eloquence and force. Zulfikar weaves in an analysis of the political coalition that rose against him, the non-aligned movement, and General Zia ul Haq’s Afghanistan connections. (154)

While Zulfikar managed to write the book in prison, Bhutto emphasizes the often-neglected role of her father in getting the manuscript published: “Papa knew the book by heart, he could quote from it citing page numbers. I never asked why and in all those years Papa never mentioned his role in its publication” (154). In keeping with the apologist tradition in the family, Bhutto and her father reflect on writing a book about his life:

“You should write a book,” I said. Papa laughed loudly and threw his hands up in the air. “I can’t write a book while I’m alive. They would never let me come out into the open with the things I know.” “What do you mean? You have to do it – write a book about your life, Papa…” “No, I can’t. You’ll do it for me. You can write a book on my life”. (22)

This excerpt again places Bhutto’s memoir within a well-established tradition of literary dissent within her family and may further stress her credibility and authority as a witness to the events she is describing. All in all, these intertextual references to texts by her grandfather and father perform different functions within the text. While setting a precedent to her writing, these references and the collage of different sources also create a different picture of her father. Amidst the din of political rivalries, Murtaza’s image was tarnished by the allegations of terrorism. A terrorist is literally the political other to the responsible statesman. Bhutto rewrites the mainstream historical narrative to bring her father out of this political othering. She projects him as a loving and obedient son – as evidence of his obedience to Z. A. Bhutto, she produces an excerpt of a letter from Z. A. Bhutto to Murtaza in which he guides his son to go to Afghanistan for help in case of his death – as a responsible and kind father and as a morally
upright brother – even after the death of Zia-ul-Haq, he does not want to sabotage the political career of his sister. He decides to go back to Pakistan and join politics only after being disappointed in the way Benazir Bhutto conducts herself as the prime minister of Pakistan. In contrast to Benazir, Murtaza is shown to possess much more political insight. However, presenting the case of her father, does not keep Bhutto from looking more critically at many of his political choices. For example, while discussing how her father organises an armed resistance against the military ruler in Pakistan, Bhutto shows a mix of respect and criticism towards his political vision:

But now I can finally understand the danger that followed my father and Uncle Shah for most of my childhood; it suddenly all makes sense and while his are not the choices I would make now, I feel secretly proud of my father for abandoning the offer of a bland but comfortable exile in London to fight what he believed was an unjust system. (218)

Similarly, she also disagrees with the moral stance of the Bhutto brothers in planning to kill Zia-ul-Haq, “[b]ut it was irresponsible nonetheless. The attempt on Zia’s life, carried out soon after the PIA hijacking, only created a space, and a legitimate one at that, for Zia and the junta to react against the Bhuttos” [emphasis added] (237). For Bhutto the strongest motivation to write the memoir is to unbox the identity of her father: not a mere terrorist, but a responsible statesman. She writes:

I wanted to understand my father. I wanted to break the taboo of talking about what happened in Afghanistan. […] It wasn’t enough just to love him, regardless of his choices. I had to dig deeper and understand what happened through retrospective lenses. My reverence for my father did not change, but my method of questioning did […] My choice not only gave me the tools to understand a period that had been mythical for me growing up, but also gave me the added benefit of distance when working to understand a history that had deeply personal consequences. (203)

Clearly, this understanding also gives her (and by extension the reader) a better grip on the history of Pakistan and provides a means to analyse it from a woman’s perspective. Apart from the reference to works by her paternal relations, Bhutto also puts her work in line with other writers and intellectuals who wrote against the oppressive power structures. For example, along with using Khosrow Golsurkhi’s “Poem of the Unknown” as an epigraph in her memoir, she also derives her title from the same poem:

In you nestles Songs of Blood and Sword
In you the migrating birds
In you the anthem of victory
Your eyes have never been so bright (i)

Bhutto sets the tone of her memoir in dissent, following Golsurkhi, an Iranian journalist, poet, and persecuted communist. This tone is further strengthened when she notes in the introductory pages: “Milan Kundera once said that the struggle of people against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting; this is my journey of remembering” (10). Thus, Bhutto
creates literary precedents for her own narrative of resistance. Inevitably, perhaps, most of
these literary predecessors are men. Within this literal and literary patrilineage, she adds her
own voice and perspective. Hence, her witnessing is informed by her role as a daughter, as an
upper-class educated woman and as an author who is part of a tradition of critical testimonies,
both in terms of the works of her own grandfather and father and in terms of the writings of
intellectuals around the world.

As mentioned earlier, this memoir was published in 2010 when Benazir Bhutto’s husband,
Asif Ali Zardari, became the first democratically elected president after a long dictatorship. In
October 2007, Benazir Bhutto came back to Pakistan after a long exile and was killed in a bomb
blast on 27 December 2007 during her election campaign. After this event, in the general
election of 2008, Zardari became the president of Pakistan (2008–13). Soon after taking charge,
his projects and vision took the country into further difficulties. His decision to align with the
United States in the War on Terror resulted in a great number of drone attacks on Pakistani
soil. It is estimated that since 2004, of all the 406 recorded drone attacks, almost 356 were
conducted during his rule. According to one article published after the completion of his
mandate, many impartial analysts regarded “‘his five years’ stint as a period of rampant
corruption, bad governance, economic meltdown, nepotism, tall claims but little work, lies and
disconnect from ground realities’.” Within this context, Bhutto situates the violence done to
her father within a broader cycle of oppression and violence in Pakistani history and
contemporary politics.

3.5 Polyvocality, Intertextuality and Nonlinearity

In Songs of Blood and Sword, Bhutto uses different literary techniques which underscore the
testimonial dimension of her writing. She begins by connecting the specificity of her father’s
murder to the anonymity of many who were killed in the political violence in Karachi: “‘[m]an
found on a highway, cause of death body riddled with bullets, killer unknown – the victim had
been shot to death. End of story’. There is nothing new about this” (7). She attacks here both
the violence endemic to the city and the lack of storytelling about these deaths. Songs of Blood
and Sword defies this silence as it narrates the story of her father’s life and death. Although the
official version holds that her father was killed in an exchange of fire between his personal
guards and the police, Bhutto presents a different version of the events. She claims that the
personal guards did not open fire. Rather, the police surrounded his car and fired in a
premeditated way. She also asserts that her father survived this first round of fire. She reports
the testimony of Asif Jatoi, one of the survivors of the attack, as follows:

Mir baba [Murtaza Bhutto] was fine at that point [...] He didn’t even need to lean on anyone. The police [...] told Mir baba that they were going to take him to hospital and he walked over to the police car. He got into the open back section, where the policemen sit, and the APC drove off. As it neared Do Talwa, it stopped. We heard a single shot. Then it drove off again.” It was the last shot that killed my father. He had been injured, but he would have survived. He was walking and talking. It would take more than one bullet to kill Papa and the policemen made sure that the last bullet did the job. The last shot, Papa’s autopsy showed, was fired into his jaw at point-blank range. It was fired, forensics confirmed, by a gunman standing over him as he lay down in the police car.

These eyewitness interviews are part of a complex legal and political context. The Murtaza murder case dragged on in court for years. In 2009 all the policemen involved were acquitted of murder charges and the court pardoned the six workers of the People’s Party. However, in 2011, advocate Omar Siyal, appearing for Appellant Noor Muhammad, requested to reinvestigate the court trial. This appeal pointed to many flaws and gaps in the previous ruling:

The report of the initial inquiry tribunal has not been brought on record, the police officers have not admitted to shooting Murtaza and his guards in self-defence in their records and finally, that the trial court, in spite of lacking any substantial evidence ‘disbelieved’ all seven eyewitness accounts for the reason that they were ‘not of good character’.

By conducting interviews with the survivors who were considered unreliable witnesses by the court, Bhutto incorporates their testimonies into her own. In this way, the legal and the political context of the murder case of Murtaza Bhutto provides a strong justification for making the memoir a complex collage of different sources. Various intertextual sources make Songs of Blood and Sword polyphonic and dialogic in nature. One example of this is the way in which Bhutto includes different contradictory voices. She incorporates interviews from many journalists, party workers, friends and foes of her grandfather, father and her aunt. For example, her grandfather’s permission for a military operation in Balochistan (a province in Pakistan where many people have been involved in a separation movement) engendered hatred from the Balochi leaders and political opponents. Of the many interviews conducted by Bhutto for this memoir, one is with Sardar Marri, one of the strong opponents of Bhutto’s strategies in Balochistan. As Marri reveals, “Bhutto was no different from Hitler [...] Before the operation he initiated, death only touched certain areas of the province. Then it affected all of Balochistan. The violence was expanded. Before, our resistance had been traditional, tribal. Then it became more nationalistic” (118). Through a polyphony of different perspectives and a non-linear narrative, the form of the narrative challenges the dominating and simplistic metanarratives of

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history. This makes *Songs of Blood and Sword* a significant contribution to both contemporary testimonial literature and Pakistani Anglophone literature.

### 3.6 Conclusion

To conclude, Bhutto’s *Songs of Blood* is a complex postmemory testimony in which the narrator relies both on her own memories and on other resources, such as personal documents, letters, interviews, family-photos and official reports, to bear witness to the circumstances of her father’s murder along with the violent history of Pakistan. Bhutto mediates between her own experience as a daughter and an heir to the political and personal legacy of the Bhutto family and the experiences and perspectives of other people. Her identity as an upper-class, educated woman certainly shapes the way she remembers the past. By placing moments of violence in parallel with a larger cycle of violence, *Songs of Blood and Sword* transcends its time and place and speaks for the victims of violence within an international context. The memoir is, therefore, an example of how literary testimony can problematize a grand narrative by defying traditional, linear narrative structures. It also shows how the author as a witness can surmount the difficulty of writing authentically by using different formal structures. Bhutto’s memoir reiterates the need to understand historical, political and cultural tensions through individual, subjective, and quite often fractal forms of experiences.

### 4. Comparative Conclusion

Although both the memoirs represent Pakistani history through a female perspective, both are shaped by different historical and socio-political contexts. To begin with, Suleri and Bhutto represent two different generations of Pakistani women. Both write about Pakistani history through intergenerational memories. Suleri makes her memoir authentic by finding an alternative diction in food and body whereas Bhutto combines other documents such as family photographs, family letters, interviews to support the veracity of her witnessing. Moreover, while Suleri was born and raised in Pakistan and decided to migrate to the United States conscientiously as a political choice, Bhutto was born and raised in Afghanistan and Syria respectively, came to live in Pakistan during her adolescent years and after the death of her father chose to stay in Pakistan as a political stance. The fact that Suleri writes this memoir from outside Pakistan lends her narrative a critical distance from the events she writes about. On the contrary, Bhutto’s location serves as an immediate connection with the event of her father’s death. In both the memoirs, the postmemory witnessing results in a counter narrative that focuses on mini-narratives and personal suffering, rather than the grand-narratives of the privileged few. The publication timeframes of these memoirs also highlight how the authors
assume a position of political resistance through their works. The self-reflexivity of the narrator, the non-linear progression of their *bildungsroman*, the intergenerational memories and intertextual sources, all make these narratives complex literary testimonies. Finally, these literary testimonies make the submerged, absent, reticent and rejected dimensions of Pakistani history accessible to the indigenous Pakistanis, to the diasporic Pakistani audiences world-wide, and to the international reader interested in the geo-politics of Pakistan since Partition.
Conclusion

Something terrible has finally come to an end, and the moment has arrived to turn it into a testimony, into a literary testimony as well. It’s also a moment for considering the possibility of reconnecting the social and emotional ties broken by the violence.\(^1\)

This is a quotation from an interview with Fernando Aramburu, whose novel *Homeland* (2016) depicts the history of two families against the backdrop of the ETA separatist movement and the violence it inspired. Although it is a work of fiction, the nine protagonists seek to evoke the complex history of the Basque community. As a witness to the political developments of the Basque region, the author carries the authority of first-hand knowledge of the culture and the people he aims to represent. Hence, as Aramburu himself mentions, the novel can be considered a literary testimony. In the interview, he also indicates his preference for the personal experiences of the fictional characters over any form of “theorizing”, the selection of “two families” who constitute “a small society”, and memory as a mode of narrative about the historical event of ceasefire.\(^2\) The interview thus highlights the importance of empathy in literary testimony which makes it an ideal form to remember and understand the past in a pluralistic way through the fictional lives and stories of different protagonists. It is precisely these same concerns which transform *Homeland* into a literary testimony that have also been addressed in this dissertation. As mentioned in the introduction, I define literary testimony as a narrative which bears witness to an historical event through the experience of a character or the perspective of a narrator. Because the literary and the historical are intertwined, literary testimonies are often haunted by the tensions between the historical events that are represented and the literary means of representation. In the preceding chapters, I have analysed three different aspects of literary testimonies: (1) the representation of a witness’ experiences vis-à-vis an historical event, (2) the use of literary techniques to heighten the role of testimony, (3) the significance of the different contexts that shape the literary testimony.


\(^2\) Zabalbeascoa, “Literary Testimony”, *The Millions Interview*. 
1. The Representation of the Witness’ Experiences

In the introduction, I mentioned the tensions between a witness’ experiences and their literary representation. The extent and the magnitude of violence experienced by the survivor often leads to subsequent difficulties of representation. While this has led scholars in Holocaust-studies to emphasize the unrepresentable aspect of certain experiences, scholars focusing on Latin American testimonio and the atomic bombings in Japan have focused more on the abilities of a witness to use narrative tropes to convey an experience. Despite the fact that one might question whether Holocaust literary testimonies can be compared with hibakusha or testimonio, scholars generally agree that the witness actively resists being silenced by violence, be it in “the form of protest against violence”, as “a particular claim to truth”, or due to “the urgency of a situation”. This dissertation has demonstrated that the active resistance to being silenced by violence on behalf of the witness can be found in all the texts analysed. Indeed, in and through their narratives, the women writers could be seen to resist not only the disruptive events of war or conflict, but also the different literary traditions through which war in general, and the specific conflicts in particular, have been depicted.

In chapter one, it has been shown how both Rebecca West and Vera Brittain represent the consequences of the Great War on the individual psyches of British men and women. West’s character of Jenny and Brittain the narrator both resist the violence of the Great War. West’s and Brittain’s narratives also resist the typical male depiction of the Great War in mainstream masculine narratives of trench-experiences or heroism, by adding a depiction of the horrors and trauma of the Great War from a female perspective. Similarly, in chapter two I analysed that Bowen’s character of Stella and the first-person narrator of Mitchison’s diary resist the violence of the Second World War as it unfolds in the urban and rural settings of Britain. Both represent the consequences of the Blitz while simultaneously representing the individuals’ struggle to position themselves ideologically and intellectually. Both narratives add an alternative female depiction of the Second World War which otherwise might have been ignored. The third and fourth chapter demonstrated that all the Pakistani female writers resist the violence of Partition and subsequent Pakistani conflicts, by representing the violence inflicted on themselves, their family members and, at times, Pakistani society as a whole. All the narratives either resist the nationalist, one-sided depictions of Indian Independence or the

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3 Des Pres, The Survivor, 29.
4 See: Hoffman, The Longest Shadow; Fridman, Words and Witness; Friedlander, Probing the Limits of Representation; Felman and Laub, Testimony; Lyotard, The Differend; Wiesel, Dimensions of the Holocaust.
6 Wiesel, Dimensions of the Holocaust, 8.
7 Engdahl, “Preface”, ix.
political attempts to silence alternative voices about injustice. Moreover, as postcolonial or diasporic writers, the authors resist being reduced to the existing Anglophone literary tradition, adding instead a new literary register.

Next to a witness’ active resistance to being silenced, he or she cannot be reduced to mere trauma or symptom either, as the poststructuralist notion of the “decline of the subject” suggested. In his or her struggle to represent the traumatic past, a witness also provides hints to the process through which he or she constructs this past in the present. Due to these mediations between the past self and the present self, a literary testimony quite often presents a witness as fluid and heterogeneous. In my readings in the different chapters, this heterogeneity and fluidity of the witness’ identity has come to the fore even as Derrida’s argument that the witness is both “unique” and “exemplary” continues to hold as well. The very fact that the witness has to struggle to find a literary form to represent the disruptive experiences of a given event, makes the witness both unique and heterogeneous. It adds to the complexity of understanding the witness, one which is both “unique” and “exemplary”, to use Derrida’s terms, and heterogeneous at the same time.

In this respect, this dissertation has shown a wide spectrum of witnesses whose acts and narratives of witnessing reflect the richness, heterogeneity and plurality of literary testimonies: first-hand witnesses who position themselves as unique and even exemplary, witnesses whose testimony remains morally ambiguous or tarnished by their ideological interests, witnesses who are uncertain about their position as truth-tellers, second- and third-generation witnesses whose life experiences are inevitably linked with the traumatic experiences of another generation, muted witnesses and even child-witnesses. The first-person narrators, Brittain and Bhutto are first-hand witnesses who claim the authority to speak about an event and, in doing so, bring a collage of evidence to the fore. West and Sidhwa represent witnesses who, apart from their first-hand encounters, also bring to light their own uncertainties about knowing and representing something. Bowen’s characters of Stella and Kelway and Sidhwa’s character of Ice-candy-man are witnesses whose acts of witnessing and testifying become somewhat tarnished by their own interests and by their own ideological and religious alignments. Moreover, the figures of Ranna and Lenny in Crack India present an opportunity to understand the role of children as a means to reflect on society from the viewpoint of the most vulnerable of all. In contrast to Lenny’s urban background, Ranna’s testimony presents the rural perspective on the events of Partition and gives voice to the communal killing of women in the name of honour. Another category is that of the muted witness: Ayah in Crack India and Ifat in Meatless Days. Ayah’s muteness occurs at the moment she is abducted and her later, wilful denial to speak and show sympathy to Ice-candy-man and Lenny. Ifat’s extrajudicial

9 Vattimo, “The Decline of the Subject”, 40, 47.
murder immediately takes away the agency to speech. The representation of Ayah and Ifat’s testimonies nonetheless presents literature as a dynamic discursive space against the violence incurred on their bodies. Although some of these witnesses might “frighten us”, they represent an active engagement with the past in order to bring about changes in the present, be it as a change of perception in the witness or by evoking empathy in the reader.

2. The Use of Literary Techniques

The second point in my definition of literary testimony refers to the use of different literary tools to represent a witness’ experience. As mentioned in the introduction, Delaperrière suggests that literariness in testimonies undermines “the traditional understanding of literariness often identified with novel fiction”. Indeed, this is also shown by the different literary structures, forms and techniques used by the authors discussed in this dissertation. The most significant ones are intertextuality, metafictionality, nonlinearity, and self-reflexivity. Firstly, intertextuality has been shown to function on multiple levels and to shape a text’s relation to other texts. At a literary level, intertextuality provides a means to understand the tensions in a text to find lineage in, break away from, or mediate through the existing literary tradition. At the level of representation, intertextuality provides a mechanism to include evidence which the narrative itself cannot provide, such as, photographs, letters and so on. At a textual level, intertextuality functions to enhance the impact of a text as a reading experience. As for metafictionality, which was particularly analysed in The Heat of the Day, I demonstrated that the text raises questions about the role of stories and testimonies. Indeed, metafictionality has a double function in this novel: the text becomes self-reflexive as a story and a testimony, because Stella’s legal testimony of Robert Kelway’s death is placed in parallel with alternative information in the novel. In this way, metafictionality functions to problematize any simplistic understanding of stories and testimonies.

Concerning nonlinearity, in all the texts considered, the characters and narrators foreground temporal disruptions in the narrative to convey the sense of disruption experienced in war or conflict. The events of war and conflict are presented as disruptions in time which have definitive consequences for the characters involved. In many of the texts, the violence is depicted through a formal and temporal split: the time before the Great War or the time before Partition is contrasted in terms of style and diction with the time after these events. Moreover, the characters and/or narrators are often split as well, between the experiencing self and the

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12 Felman and Laub, Testimony, 73-4.
narrating self. While writing through a split of time, the narrator actively engages with the past event and the present in which he or she testifies. The mediation between these two temporal frames enables the witness to enter in the “process that leads from catastrophe to creativity”. Indeed, through this mediation, the witness regains control over his or her representation. Thus, from a proof of experiential disruption, the witness shapes his or her identity as a survivor through a creative disruption.

All the texts discussed represent the subjective experiences, both fictional and nonfictional, of the narrators and characters within larger historical events of war or conflict. With regards to these experiences, I have generally focused on the narrator or main protagonist’s perspective about the events and the way in which the narrative complements or challenges their perspectives. The focus on the retrospective narrator or the main protagonist has proven helpful as it provides a unique insight into how the narrators and characters represent their acts of witnessing. Formally, all the narratives which I have analysed are distinguished by a greater or lesser degree of self-reflexivity. At the level of character or narrator, self-reflexivity enables the witness to think about his or her own uncertainties, anxieties and limitations. At the level of the narrative, both the role of literature and the role of testimony are also being questioned in these texts through self-reflexive or meta-literary reflections on the part of the narrator or characters. Through literary testimony, otherwise imperceptible, marginal or sidelined events are transformed into aesthetic experiences, as its Greek root aisthēta denotes, i.e., something perceptible.

3. The Significance of Different Contexts

The third and final point of my definition of literary testimony considers the significance of different contexts. Throughout this dissertation, the particular contexts of gender and class proved significant for literary testimonies. The female perspective of the selected writers and their characters could be seen to result in a specific representation of war and violence, especially with regard to questions about the authority and authenticity of the narrative, and the “subjecthood” of a witness. As discussed in chapter one, the knowledge about the past event lends authority to a witness’, and the way a witness constructs his or her “own way and pattern of life” within a narrative is what lends the narrative authenticity. To create authentic

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14 Engdahl, “Preface”, ix.
15 Yoneyama, Hiroshima Traces, 85.
17 Golomb, In Search of Authenticity, 10.
narratives, a witness mediates between direct experience, witness-accounts of other people, and second-hand information such as mediated reports. Whether through the use of memories, second-hand testimonies, or a collage of evidentiary sources, the testimonies I have analysed show how the specific gendered context comes to shape the authenticity of these narratives as literary testimonies. These narratives show how language, storytelling and narration enable a female witness to find and construct her identity not as a victim or a remnant of destruction, but as a survivor who reinvests in shaping the present and the future within a given society. Rather than sensationalism through violence in the outside, these texts have demonstrated a special commitment to representing the effects of violence on the psyche, “the mind in the war”. As a result, dreams, hallucinations, and moral trepidations have informed the representation of the inner selves or psyches effected by war.

Thus, Jenny, in West’s *The Return of the Soldier*, is cured of her recurrent nightmares about war by shifting her attention away from war news to Chris and Margaret’s love and her curing of Chris from amnesia. In *Testament of Youth*, Brittain’s war time experiences isolate her from men who returned from the trenches and women who never volunteered as nurses. Isolated thus, she experiences hallucination of having a bearded face. Only upon finding, what Levine calls, “an addressable you” through her speech and through her writing, are the mental scars of the war diminished. In Bowen’s *The Heat of the Day*, Stella breaks down in front of her son, Roderick as she confesses to the circumstances of Robert Kelway’s death. In Shahnawaz’s *The Heart Divided*, the penultimate scene disrupts the idealisation of Muslim nationhood and externalizes the nightmare of Partition through the dishevelled appearance of Mohini’s brother which forewarns Sughra about the consequences of Partition. In Sidhwa’s *Cracking India*, Lenny’s retrospective reflection allows her and the reader to see how she, as an eight-years old child, became an instrument of violence rather than a weapon against it. In *Meatless Days*, Suleri presents not only the effects of violence on herself, but also on her sister, mother and her grandmother, thus drawing attention to a generational history of women living through violence and bearing witness to it. In *Songs of Blood and Sword*, Bhutto shows how she, like her family members, becomes a chronic insomniac.

In other words, the emotional, psychic or mental damage that comes from experiencing war and conflict lays at the heart of all these narratives. Yet through testifying to that experience, the literary testimonies not only create a distance from the sensational implications of violence, but also reconfigure the female body from an object of violence to a subject and, consequently, a survivor of violence. This inversion is evident in the way all these narrators also reflect on their struggles to present their narratives as authentic narratives of war, which allow for psychological uncertainties, anxieties and, self-doubt. For example, on multiple occasions, Jenny includes the instances of her forgetfulness or incorrect observations. Stella, though

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confirming the court’s version of Robert Kelway’s death, still admits in front of her son what actually happened. Similarly, although Mitchison presents the events of war as they occur in Carradale, she also finds herself doubting both her own position to represent the local people, on the one hand, and her connection with the metropole intellectual elite, on the other hand. The inclusion of these uncertainties does not taint these testimonies, but instead make them available for the reader as dynamic discursive frameworks.

In general, the female perspective also has an impact on the praxis of remembering. For example, on the day of the armistice, Brittain represents the death of a mother who is anxious and preoccupied about the safety of her sons. By drawing the attention towards her death as an accident amidst the celebration of the end of war, Brittain clearly emphasizes the need to remember over the urge to forget the traumatic past. Similarly, by presenting Chris’ return to normality as a means through which he can forget Margaret once again, West treats with irony the assumptions about normality. In other cases, these texts present a woman preoccupied with her role as a writer of stories (Mitchison) or as a teller of truth (Lenny). Suleri, on her part, relies on subjective memory rather than historical narration to present the suffering of women in her house. Consequently, the aesthetic of these narratives lies in mourning and remembering.

A second contextual framework within the literary testimonies discussed, is that of class. All the narrators are either from an upper-middle-class or upper-class urban background. This class background means that the authors have access to resources such as education, intellectual networks, and relative financial freedom compared with the larger numbers of working-class women in Britain or uneducated populations of men and women in Pakistan. Their works either make explicit reference to class differences or simply focus on their own individual experiences without claiming to represent a certain class. For example, in The Return of the Soldier, West contrasts Kitty and Jenny with the working-class Margaret. Their interaction is made possible through amnesia and abnormality. One can either understand this contrast as a critique of the existing rigid class structures or as a way through which West perpetuates and legitimizes the same class prejudices in her narrative. In The Heat of the Day, Bowen’s understanding of how war affects people from different classes is manifested in her different treatment of Stella, the upper-class socially aloof woman, and Louie Lewis, a working-class woman. The brief interaction between Stella and Louie works temporarily towards diffusing the class divide. In Testament of Youth, Brittain does not focus on representing women from various classes so much as on representing her own experiences within the war milieu. Mitchison, for her part, struggles to define herself across the class differences and to represent the socio-political concerns of the people of Carradale.

In Cracking India, Lenny, the upper-class narrator, mediates between the experiences of her caretaker, Ayah and the rural boy, Ranna. Through Lenny’s retrospective narration, the gap of Ayah’s silences is filled, and by providing a separate section on Ranna’s experiences from Lenny’s perspective, the narrative foregrounds the need to understand the plurality of experiences to grasp how historical events impact the lives of different people. As for Suleri, although she aims to represent the lesser known lives of the women of third-world countries, her portrayal largely depicts women from her own class. Lastly, Bhutto’s class privilege is
reflected in her ability to mediate between different forms of information and being able to interview different people to authenticate her narrative. All in all, these female writers represent class differences differently: some choose to represent their individual experiences within a stratified society, others mediate between different classes, and still others choose to represent their experiences in relation to the larger social circle.

4. Conclusion

Literary testimony is not seen as a specific genre, but rather as a discursive framework in which narratives of war and conflict are presented through the prism of personal experiences. The literary testimonies I have analysed in my dissertation belong to the genres of diary, memoir and novel. Despite these different genres, the texts share common features which fit within the framework of literary testimony: the tensions that a witness experiences in representing his or her encounter with war or conflict, the gendered perspective which influences a witness’ understanding of war and conflict, the self-reflexivity within the narrative which, in turn, determines both the form and the content. By presenting British and Pakistani women writers within the framework of literary testimony, this dissertation has shown that beyond time and space, these women writers show similar concerns when it comes to representing the disruptive events of wars and conflicts. Despite the cultural differences, the British and Pakistani literary testimonies point to a locus where national and temporal boundaries give way to a global and inclusive discursive framework. In this way, the framework of testimony is usefully expanded from the historical contexts of Holocaust, Latin American testimonio, and the atomic bombings in which it has predominantly been used, to other contexts of war and violence within literary studies. In general, literary testimonies show a great commitment to challenge the mainstream historical and political narratives on war and conflict of any given society.
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