

## 1 Introduction

My whole soul rebels against the idea that Hinduism and Islam represent two antagonistic cultures and doctrines.

M.K. Gandhi

In July 1993, just seven months after the demolition of the Babri mosque in Ayodhya and the subsequent riots in Bombay, Sahitya Akademi-winning playwright Mahesh Dattani directed the premiere production of *Final Solutions* in Bangalore.<sup>1</sup> The plot unfolds in the midst of Bombay riots as two Muslim boys, Bobby and Javed, seek refuge in the house of the Gandhis, a Hindu family. Exasperated by their sense of the everyday humiliations of untouchability perpetrated on Muslims, Bobby and Javed expose the insidious exclusions on which the safety of the Hindu home is predicated.

The arrival of these two Muslim boys rekindles the memory of an old family secret. The secret returns us to the scene of the 1947 Partition of India and Pakistan when, in the rising tide of religious violence, the Gandhis set fire to their Muslim neighbors' shop. Torching the shop was not an expression of religious intolerance but rather a devious attempt to quash the business of their Muslim rivals. As a result, the burgeoning friendship between Zarine, the shopowner's daughter, and Daksha, the young Gandhi bride, comes to an abrupt end. Daksha's father gets brutally murdered in the violence that occurs in the wake of the Partition.

The Partition resurfaces as a repressed historical memory that continues to mold both secular and religious identities. The narrative Gandhi, in Tendulkar, *Mahatma*, 333–334.

action moves back and forth between 1947 and 1992, thus illuminating two historical moments that capture the crisis of secularism in India. Unfinished negotiations with the past fuel both Ramnik's generosity and his mother's hostility toward Muslims: Whereas Daksha harbors a festering resentment toward Muslims, her son Ramnik is guiltily aware of the family's complicity in demolishing the shop and repeatedly placates his guilt by overzealous acts of generosity toward Muslims.

*Final Solutions* dramatizes the self-interest that drives the violence in this case. Rather than explain violence as a "natural" explosion of primordial religious difference, Dattani considers the unstable historical conditions in 1947 and in 1992 as catalysts that generate essentialist religious identities. Set in this context, religious violence is a response to anxieties over material resources, insecurities generated by the implosion of former certitudes, and panic over the sudden collapse of long-standing social and political orders. Dattani deliberately invokes the specter of Hitler's "final solution" to the "problem" of exterminating Jews in Europe. By drawing analogies to Hitler's fascist politics, Dattani mounts his critique against violent and exclusivist Hindu nationalism in India.

The character of Daksha – as the grandmother and the young bride – is shared between two actors: The younger one is set in 1947 and removed from the action and other characters of the play, whereas the older one is set in 1993, appearing with all the other actors onstage. The narrative action is punctuated by flashback scenes in which the younger Daksha records in her diary her experience of being a young bride, her anguish when her father gets murdered during the Partition riots, her sorrow over Zarine's betrayal of their friendship, and her love of the legendary singer Noor Jehan's haunting melodies. Daksha's diary bears witness to the intrusion of the nation's public and political life into her private chambers.

In the 1993 Bangalore production, I played the role of the younger Daksha. Inhabiting Daksha's character required taking a leap back into a dark moment in the nation's history. Through her diary, I glimpsed a moment in Indian history, often overlooked in celebratory textbook accounts of India's nonviolent path to independence.

The character of Daksha offered me a lens with which to traverse the transformation of what Dipesh Chakrabarty has termed “practices of proximity” into the “politics of identity.” Chakrabarty offers proximity and identity as alternative ways of dealing with difference, where identity refers to a congealed fixity and proximity refers to negotiation of difference.<sup>2</sup> When, for example, does Daksha withdraw from the practice of negotiating difference with her neighbor and petrify Zarine as her absolute other? How does this fixity of identity structure the Gandhi home as Hindu and foreclose the possibility of hospitality to the Muslim boys? By tracing the contingent and particular ways in which negotiated practices of proximity transform into strident and implacable politics of identity, Dattani exposes how Hindu liberals, such as Ramnik Gandhi, are unable to attend to the critique of unthinking Hindu privilege launched by Javed and Bobby.

The character of Daksha reveals the encrusted prejudices of people who grapple with the tenacious hold of the Partition on their everyday life. Embodying the character of a seventeen-year-old bride who experienced the vicissitudes of a violent political history required me to imagine and inhabit the extreme ruptures that the Partition produced in the everyday lives of its survivors. Indeed, it made me ponder how entire worldviews crumble under the weight of tumultuous events. It was during the production of *Final Solutions* that I first considered the enduring ways in which discourses of the Partition interpellated religious and secular as well as regional and national identities.

I vividly recall the sense of political urgency that drove the cast and crew of this production. Our first attempt to stage the play was thwarted when the sponsor – one of the city’s premier newspapers – pulled us out of a regional theatre festival, fearing further clashes between religious communities. When we finally mounted the production in July 1993 – with the support of Maadhyam, a local non-profit organization – the political situation had stabilized and offered the audience the opportunity to speculate on the growing crisis of secularism within the nation. The Hindu right’s disturbing ascendancy to power in the intervening years gradually strengthened the emergent project of the Sangh Parivar to redefine India, both culturally and politically.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the comparatively insipid public response

to the violent pogroms against the Muslims in Gujarat that broke out in 2002 suggests the insidious ways in which the Hindu right normalizes spectacular forms of violence against minorities. It is within such a political and social context that this present project acquired its critical urgency.

The specter of the Partition returns to mold contemporary subjects of religious conflicts: Survivors and witnesses of post-1947 conflicts evoke the Partition as a recurrent point of reference. For example, in the wake of the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1984 by her two Sikh bodyguards, the widespread pogroms against the Sikh community constituted a pivotal moment that evoked the Partition in public memory. One survivor eloquently describes the betrayal and bewilderment: "The memory of '47 came flooding back, except that I feared this might be much worse.... When the Hindu mobs shouted 'Traitors, get out!' I asked myself, 'Traitors? Is this what I sang songs of Independence for? Was handcuffed at the age of six for?' Which is our home now? ... 1947 was no shock, the shock is now."<sup>4</sup> Pioneering oral historians Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin reiterate the significance of the 1984 pogroms in reviving anxieties about national and ethnic belonging. In their words, "1984 changed the way 'history' concealed our past from us. Here was Partition once more in our midst, terrifying for those who had passed through it in 1947.... Yet this was our own country, our own people, our own home-grown violence."<sup>5</sup> In her groundbreaking work, Urvashi Butalia also acknowledges that the 1984 pogroms played a pivotal role in her undertaking the project of collecting oral histories of the Partition: "It took the events of 1984 to make me understand how ever-present Partition was in our lives, too, to recognize that it could not so easily be put away inside the covers of history books."<sup>6</sup> Another survivor reiterates the sense of panic, apprehension, and deep disillusionment the 1984 pogroms evoked: "We didn't think it could happen to us in our own country," she recalls, "this is like the Partition again."<sup>7</sup> The aforementioned remarks rehearse the eruption of an older memory during a moment of historical crisis; the 1984 pogroms evoked the specter of the Partition.

The diachronic doubleness of these memories that shuttle between 1947 and 1984 reveal that the Partition as "event" had not

ended – that the religious tensions that sparked in post-Independence India were haunted by the traumatic memory of the Partition.<sup>8</sup> The Partition resurfaced at other volatile moments in the history of the subcontinent. Preceding and during the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992, the Partition reemerged in the hate speech of the Hindu right. Likewise, Muslims displaced from their homes during the ensuing Bombay riots allude to the Partition in an effort to make sense of the violent ruptures the ethnic conflict produced. Indian novelist Shama Futehally remarks that the Babri Masjid demolition has “made it impossible, so to speak, to keep the lid on Partition any more.”<sup>9</sup> Victims and witnesses of these riots frequently reference Partition as a touchstone of their experience of violence. The 1998 nuclear tests conducted by India and Pakistan conjured yet again the Partition. Suvir Kaul writes eloquently about the “extraordinary irony” that undid the Partition when the highly policed border between India and Pakistan was threatened into obliteration by “the power of mutually assured nuclear destruction.”<sup>10</sup> Ashis Nandy argues that the Gujarat pogroms in 2002 confirmed that the Partition continues to resurrect “fantasies of orgiastic violence” that taunt us to both exterminate the enemy as well as compel him/her to live in abject humiliation and disgrace.<sup>11</sup>

The uncanny doubleness of memory that mimetically evokes the Partition discloses, rather than closes, the specters of the past. These recurrent associations reveal that it is not only a former time that binds one to the memory of the Partition but also a former self. The Partition simultaneously possesses and dispossesses its survivors: Its spectral memory holds subjects in thrall to the dispossessed dimensions of their self, precluding any possibility of self-possession. Despite the institutional strategies of redress and reparation and the redemptive accounts of the nation’s nonviolent path to freedom, the unruly memories of the Partition resist efforts toward a harmonizing closure. The memory of the Partition continues to shape social relations between Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs in the subcontinent; conversely, contemporary religious conflicts shape and revise past narrations of the Partition.

*The Performance of Nationalism: India, Pakistan, and the Memory of Partition* explores the affective and performative

constitution of the Indian and Pakistani nation in the wake of the most violent chapter of its history: the Partition of the subcontinent. I recuperate the idea of mimesis to think about the mimetic relationship between political history and the crisis of its aesthetic representation. I also consider the relationship between India and Pakistan as constituted through a mimetic relationality, which evokes the fraternal metaphor of twins separated at birth. The particular performances I examine trouble the idea of two coherent, autonomous nation-states of India and Pakistan by pointing to the trope of mimetic doubles that suffuse the dramas of Partition. These performances reveal that the shadowy underbelly of antagonistic politics is constituted by the promise and betrayal of mimetic kinship. This study attempts to recover mimetic modes of thinking to unsettle the reified categories of identitarian politics. First, however, let us turn to a brief history of the Partition of the subcontinent.

### **Ruptures of Partition**

In August 1947, when the British finally ceded political interest in India after colonial rule for nearly two centuries, they transferred their power to two separate nation-states: India and Pakistan. Not only did the mounting anticolonial nationalist movement put pressure on the British empire to evacuate India; the economic exigencies that a greatly impoverished Britain faced in the aftermath of World War II also reinforced the British decision to “quit” India. The return of the Labour Party to power in Britain further expedited the decolonization process. The ideological commitment of the Labour Party to postwar reparation and decolonization rapidly changed the Indian political scene. Britain’s desire to relinquish its interests in India to a centralized national government, one capable of defending British economic and political interests in the regions of the Indian Ocean, appeared unfeasible. Lord Mountbatten, the last British viceroy, was sent to India to transfer power and consider alternatives to Partition. Instead of deliberating over these complex issues in the allotted ten-month period, Mountbatten took a mere two months to announce the date for the transfer of power and for Partition.

The division of the subcontinent into India and Pakistan was triggered by a combination of factors in the metropole and the colony: In addition to the shifting colonial position on retaining India as a colony, the demand for Partition was articulated within the context of a colonial state's framing of provincial politics and intra-elite factional conflicts within India that had already prepared the ground for irreconcilable differences. The two-nation theory, driven more by politics than religion, grew in momentum from the fears stoked by democratization in the 1930s, the Indian National Congress's anti-war stance, the growing empowerment of the Muslim League, and the British announcement to quit India. Add to this the more immediate factors expediting the process: Mountbatten's hasty and ill-conceived exit strategies and the rising tide of religious violence.<sup>12</sup>

Between June 3, 1947, when the decision to divide India was announced, and August 15, 1947, the day of formal Indian independence from British rule, roughly 15 million people were displaced. What the government euphemistically called "the exchange of populations" of Muslims into Pakistan and Hindus and Sikhs into India resulted in the largest human exodus ever recorded. According to *Millions on the Move*, a report published by the government of India, between August and November 1947, as many as 673 refugee trains moved approximately 2,300,000 refugees within India and across the border.<sup>13</sup> From mid-September to late October, 24-foot convoys, each consisting of 30,000 to 40,000 people, marched 150 miles to cross the border into India. Roughly 32,000 refugees had been flown in either direction; nearly 133,000 people had been moved to India by steamer and country craft boats. The disputed death toll ranges from 200,000 to 2 million: People died as a result of communal clashes, floods, starvation, exhaustion, and the proliferating cases of famine and cholera caused by unhygienic conditions. Approximately 83,000 women were abducted, raped, and killed.<sup>14</sup> Innumerable children disappeared. Many who were unable to travel with speed got left behind: the elderly, the infirm, the disabled, children, and women. Thousands of people were forcibly converted; many others voluntarily opted to convert in order to stay in their homeland. At least 500,000 people were massacred on

the trains referred to as “gifts” that people were sending across to the new nation.

The official territorial award was announced on August 16, one day after the independence of India and two days after the formation of Pakistan. The massive dislocation, however, had been set in motion by the cycle of violence that began with the Great Calcutta Killings of August 16–19, 1946, which left nearly 6000 dead and displaced 100,000 people. In addition, the Noakhali riots drove out the Hindus from a region where they constituted about a fifth of the population, and the Rawalpindi massacres in Punjab in March 1947 left 40,000 Sikhs homeless. The killings in Bengal in the 1950s prompted a further flood of refugees.<sup>15</sup> People were on the move, uncertain of where they would settle down and whether they would eventually belong to India or to Pakistan.

The Partition was unlike any other religious conflict in the region. Talbot and Singh identify crucial features that distinguish the violence of the Partition from more traditional communal riots: ethnic cleansing of minority populations, political desire for power and territory, sadistic violence, intrusion into the domestic sphere, and organized violence through the use of paramilitary groups, which included the complicity of state agents.<sup>16</sup> Talbot and Singh further point out that the organized violence of the Partition must be located within the framework of the Second World War and the widespread presence of weapons and demobilized soldiers in north India who trained volunteer groups through spectacular parades and drills. Seen in this light, the violence was far more organized than “spontaneous”; not an atavistic feature of fanatically religious groups, the violence was produced in a mimetic encounter with a European fascistic culture of hostility that was refracted ideologically and materially within the subcontinent.<sup>17</sup>

### **Colonialism, religion, enumeration**

Edward Said reminds us that “rhetorically speaking Orientalism is absolutely anatomical and enumerative, to use its vocabulary is to engage in the particularizing and dividing of things Oriental into manageable parts.”<sup>18</sup> British administrative policies consolidated Hindus



and Muslims as separate “enumerative communities” through the introduction of a range of bureaucratic measures, which mimetically reproduced western analytical categories of classification. For example, the introduction of the colonial census throughout India in 1881 had far-reaching effects in the ossification of religious identities. By imposing orientalist grids, such as the census, the British calcified fluid, flexible, and heterogeneous cultural practices into the antinomies of religious majority and minority.

Several South Asian scholars have developed Said’s insights about the relationship between enumeration and the ossification of identities. David Ludden establishes the dialectical production of communalism from its interaction with orientalism when the latter institutionalized oppositions between Hindus and Muslims in colonial administrative, bureaucratic, and legal practices.<sup>19</sup> Gyanendra Pandey argues that British officers treated Hindu-Muslim antagonism as a given “fact” that then became a touchstone in colonial bureaucratic practices.<sup>20</sup> When quantitative technologies of colonial state governance turned their lens to religious identities, it had the result of gradually turning what political theorist Sudipta Kaviraj has termed “fuzzy communities” – “a relative lack of clarity of where one’s community, or even region, ended and another began” – into enumerative communities.<sup>21</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty also accentuates the “pervasive marriage between government and measurement” that he suggests is constitutive of the “deep structure of the imagination that is invested in modern political order.”<sup>22</sup> Arjun Appadurai further develops the relationship between the logic of arithmetic and the production of religious violence: The categories of majority/minority are haunted by an “anxiety of incompleteness,” which diminishes the project of national purity and consequently triggers ethnocidal mobilization.<sup>23</sup>

The interdependence of governance and enumerative strategies was central to the production of religious differences between Hindus and Muslims of British India.<sup>24</sup> By the early twentieth century, religious differences had been institutionalized on the principle of communal representation. In 1861, the Indian Councils Act introduced separate electorates to increase Muslim representation through the system of elective local government. Constitutional reforms in 1919

and 1937 further democratized and consolidated Muslim political constituency. These changes increased opportunities for the Muslim political majorities in Punjab and Bengal to correct the educational and economic imbalance in favor of Hindu and Sikh populations. The Muslim backlash against the Congress administration in Uttar Pradesh (1937–1939) was to provide the critical catalyst in the demand for a separate homeland. Following the Government of India Act of 1935 – which introduced a substantial measure of representative government through provincial autonomy and represented one of the important efforts at transferring limited power to Indians – provincial elections were held in 1937 based on the notion of a communal representation.

The creation of separate electorates according to religious identity consolidated the idea that people sharing a particular faith constituted an identifiable group with common interests, which marked them off from another group, which practiced a different faith. This particular way of imagining community affirmed certain commonalities through the category of religious identity while underestimating other axes of similitude and association. This idea was embedded in everyday life, “the idea that (Indian) society consisted of groups set apart from each other. . . . The result was the flowering of a new communal rhetoric, and ultimately, of the Pakistan movement.”<sup>25</sup>

### **Performance and the nation**

What can a performative approach to the study of the nation make visible?<sup>26</sup> *The Performance of Nationalism: India, Pakistan, and the Memory of Partition* considers the ways in which logocentric, cognitivist ideas of “the imagined community” acquire their affective and material force through embodied performances. Moving beyond dominant considerations of politics underpinned by institutional policies, theories of rational choice, and Habermasian critical-rational public spheres, this study considers the centrality of performance as a tactic of political power. The relationship between power and performance has been theorized as far back as Machiavelli’s *The Prince* and continues to reverberate today from the quotidian secular Wagah ceremonies to the disruptive *rathyatras* (chariot processions) coordinated by the Hindu right.<sup>27</sup> This book makes visible the double-edged power

of performative politics – the aesthetic and spectacular representations of the state are not simply absorbed by its citizen-subjects but contested, contradicted, and negotiated through other enduring imaginaries of kinship and belonging.<sup>28</sup>

Dominant accounts of nationalism foreground how capitalist production, print technology, and monoglot reading publics combined to create the conditions for imagining the nation.<sup>29</sup> The consumers of the novel and the newspaper accessed the same information, and this served to link the mass-reading publics within the same imagined boundaries. Media such as newspapers contribute to the formation of public opinion, enabling civil society to exercise surveillance over the state. A good deal has been written about the centrality of print journalism, of literature – especially novels – in the creation of national identity. For example, Benedict Anderson examines “print-capitalism” as the institutional form through which the “imagined community” of nation is forged; Timothy Brennan argues that nations depend for their existence on a system of cultural fictions in which “imaginative literature” plays a decisive role; Homi Bhabha encounters the nation “as it is written” and examines its narrative address to draw attention to its language and rhetoric and thereby reexamine the conceptual object of nation itself.<sup>30</sup>

The analysis of embodied performance in public spaces brings new questions to studies of nationalism. It places centerstage the role of performance in understanding the complex processes of nation formation. The internalization of an ideational construct of nation depends for its success on its affective translation into material symbols such as the flag, the military uniforms, and the national anthem. Sandria Freitag has argued that central to the act of imagining a community is the pictorial image where “spectatorship meets creation in a complex interplay between visibility, apparatus, institutions, discourse, bodies and figurality.”<sup>31</sup> Although performance certainly engages a visual vocabulary, it resists ocularcentric notions of the general dominance of the visual in late modernity and does not reinforce an artificial dichotomy between the visual and the linguistic.<sup>32</sup>

I also draw on deconstructive notions of the performative to think about the iterative constitution of refugees into national

subjects. How are people persuaded to attach their loyalties to abstractions rather than to the embedded, concrete relationships in their everyday life? The process by which colonial subjects are produced as national citizens through complex iterative practices is exemplified at the moment of Partition when national identities were still gestational. Those displaced were enjoined to resignify themselves as Indian/Pakistani, an identification with which some may have had little prior affiliation. The assumption of this new macro-identity also served to make official and permanent the displacement from their prior homes. The performative insists on the processual, unfinished, and constantly renewed function of national belonging – what Renan calls “the daily plebiscite” – rather than assume the unchanging, static, a priori ontology of national identity. It is within the context of a compulsory citationality that the reconstitution of refugees as national subjects needs to be thought.

The performative speech act fundamentally revises our understanding of the stability and given-ness of national and religious identities. By paying attention not only to the descriptive features of language, meaning, and intentionality of speech acts, but also to their ability to effect through their very utterance, performative speech acts demonstrate the world-making and world-shattering power of discourse. Conferring national and religious identities through the power of performative speech acts radically refigures the citizen-subjects of the Partition. The illocutionary force of performative speech acts, in the context of the Partition, makes visible that the very terms of recognition of one’s existence had to be articulated through the address of the state. The act of state recognition differentially interpellates the citizen: It is through the address of the state that the citizen acquires an ontological status.

Although the analytical categories of performance theory offer ways to think about the spectacular and iterative practices through which citizen-subjects were constituted in the wake of the Partition, I turn to the trope of mimesis through which to consider the undoing of the national and religious ontology. The conceptual richness of mimesis enables me to ask a range of questions with regard to the Partition, and it is to mimesis as a fertile conceptual lens that we will now turn.

### Mimesis as aesthetic representation

A protean and capacious concept, mimesis has been used over millennia to convey a range of meanings from falsehood, fiction, *imitatio* (tradition, convention, emulation), *mimesthai* (representation), and nonsensuous correspondence, among others. The concept traverses a spectrum of semantic and performative possibilities that range from aesthetic theories to accounts of self- and world-making. Rather than serving a strictly referential function, mimesis evokes a world of similitude; semblance rather than sign connotes mimetic modes of thinking. A brief consideration of some of the leading theorists and critics of mimesis gives a sense of the heterogeneity of associations generated by the concept.

Traced back to at least the fifth century BC, mimesis derives from *mimos*, designating both a person who imitates and a genre of performance based on imitation of stereotypical character traits. The first probing analysis of mimesis in ancient Greek thought emerges in Plato's *The Republic* (c. 375 BC), which advances a rich, complex, and multivalent conception of mimesis. Here Plato uses the figure of his mentor, Socrates, to mimetically address questions regarding the constitution of an ideal republic, where psychic and civic integrity are key to the governance of the city.<sup>33</sup> Mimetic arts could provoke the destabilization and disintegration of self-possessed, composed citizen-subjects, which could then precipitate the disintegration of the civic constitution.

The Socratic resistance in Plato's *Republic* to mimetic arts emerges not from a dismissal but rather from an acknowledgment of the transformative power of art to influence audiences. Plato cautions against irresponsible appeals to emotions that paralyze the critical-rational faculty. Losing self-possession through a mimetic identification with the charismatic actor/character/orator can disable critical distance and sway audiences to act in ways that are ethically dubious and politically treacherous.<sup>34</sup> Mimesis, in the Platonic conception, threatens the integrity of the autonomous subject, and therefore must be proscribed from the ideal republic.

Aristotle resuscitates mimesis from the Platonic conception of it as threat to civic and psychic integrity by suggesting that mimesis

offers us a means to understand past events and to make sense of the world we inhabit. Aristotle distinguishes the Platonic conception of mimesis as *pseudos*, or falsehood, from mimesis as fiction. The awareness of the fictional status of an artistic work enables the viewer to derive pleasure from otherwise painful memories.<sup>35</sup> The ontological otherness of a parallel, imaginary world enables a safe distance from which to reflect on our own world.<sup>36</sup> By highlighting the capacity of art to enable a deeper awareness of our world and our lives, Aristotle rejects Platonic moralism that proscribes mimesis. The transformation of painful past into aesthetic pleasure through mimetic practice depends on the capacity of the mimetic art to offer a renewed understanding of the event. Whereas philosophy is concerned with abstract universal, and history with contingent particular, poetry offers a sensuous understanding – at once concrete and contemplative – of the world we inhabit.<sup>37</sup>

During the thousand years that constitute the Middle Ages and up until the end of the eighteenth century, mimesis was frequently reimagined as *imitatio*, which consisted predominantly in the conventional emulation of authoritative literary texts.<sup>38</sup> Emulating exemplary texts not only offered artists the opportunity to aspire to the highest role models beyond their time; the intertextual tissue of meanings and resonances also established a sense of traditional continuity between classical authors and their mimetic counterparts.<sup>39</sup> Although second, the imitated work was not secondary; reconfiguring and retelling offered the possibilities for structured play while still drawing on classical models. Renaissance writers in turn drew on the artistic resources of the Roman tradition. Imitation was central to education by supplying both the method of repetition and the model of exemplary figures to inculcate and inspire virtue in readers.

The decline of imitation's significance at the end of the eighteenth century owed something to the emergence of detached, instrumental rationality, which privileged reason and disinterestedness. Whereas thinkers such as René Descartes and Immanuel Kant championed science, progress, innovation, and genius, others such as Alexander Pope continued to emphasize the importance of learning from past masters.<sup>40</sup> For Descartes the subject is the creator of the

world, a world idealized and formulated in mathematical language – abstract and universal; the language of abstract universality departed from that of mimetic similitude. Setting aside the incommensurable particularity of embodied experience, Descartes pursued science, which consisted of universal rules supplied in nature.

The quarrel between the ancients and the moderns polarized venerable tradition and innovative modernity, and definitively privileged originality over *imitatio*. Unsurprisingly, the Romantic period, which stressed uniqueness, also saw the emergence of copyright laws that legally bound creativity to individual private property. *Imitatio* now raised specters of plagiarism or intellectual piracy. The romantic genius struggled to break free from the shackles of tradition, to rebel against authority. The resultant devaluation of mimetic modes of thinking continues to circulate in the modern world.<sup>41</sup>

### Mimesis as world-making

*The Performance of Nationalism: India, Pakistan, and the Memory of Partition* argues that recovering mimetic modes of thinking about the relationship between India and Pakistan stresses similitude over semiotics, kinship over referentiality, and troubles the reified categories of identity politics. How do mimetic practices discohere the sovereign subject, enabling her to enter into a radically rearranged relationship with the other? Complicating theories of autonomous subject formation, I argue that mimesis re-enchants a Cartesian split between subject and object, self and other by reintroducing the specter of enigmatic semblance.

To make this argument I draw on mimesis as both aesthetic practice and social relation. As we have seen, the discussions of mimesis co-implicate aesthetics with ideas of subject formation. Even as early as Plato's *Republic* we find the dual connotations of mimesis as both dramatic representation and mimetic identification. Linking action to virtue, mimesis oscillates between aesthetic practice and subject formation.<sup>42</sup> More recently, critical theory has resuscitated the fertile concept of mimesis. For Walter Benjamin, the translator of Charles Baudelaire, Marcel Proust, and Theodor Lessing, language constitutes an archive of nonsensuous similarity in a predominantly disenchanting

world. Unlike a disinterested, neutral, instrumental approach that consolidates the subject-object split, sensuous knowledge attends to the proliferation of mimetic similitude. Likewise, Horkheimer and Adorno argue that the reified subject-object relationship supplants the manifold affinities that exist between things. Human beings are turned into mere examples of species, identical to one another through isolation within the compulsively controlled collectivity. Ruled by the principle of equivalence, dissimilar things are made identical by reducing them to abstract qualities, subsuming difference under sameness.

The rich contributions of Rene Girard, Michael Taussig, and Elin Diamond have augmented our understanding of mimetic practice and its relation to questions of desire, colonialism, and sexual difference. Girard complicates the dyadic structure between subject and object by exposing the triangulation within which mimetic desires are enmeshed; the desire to emulate the model draws the subject toward the object. He plumbs the varying implications of mimetic desire, depending on whether the subject is drawn to an idealized model or a rival. Far from autonomous or original, desires are mimetically generated, ignited by a mimetic rivalry with someone else. Girard's conception of mimetic desire cautions us against uncritical celebrations of mimesis by exposing its potential for insidious violence.

Taussig develops Benjamin's conception of the "mimetic faculty" to consider its ramifications within colonial encounters.<sup>43</sup> Defined as "the nature that culture uses to create second nature," the mimetic impulse carries a vestige of a compulsive need for people to become/ behave like something else. The wonder of mimesis lies in the copy drawing on the character and power of the original to the point where the representation may even assume that character and that power. Taussig combines Benjaminian insights with Marxist ideas of alienated labor: The spectral commodity denies its historicity and multiple sensuous interactions and emerges as pristine fetish object, its particularity grinded into an abstract identity.

Elin Diamond's astute analysis of feminist performance insists on mimesis as a creative interpretive process. Counterposing identity with identification, she argues that identifications produce and



destabilize identity; in assimilating the other the subject doubles herself. If identity works to sustain a believable and mobilizing fiction that binds each individual into an imagined unity, identification is a "passionate mimesis," drawing another into oneself, projecting oneself onto another. Whereas identity operates through a logic of exclusion – my being or consciousness affirms its self-sameness by not being you – identification is trespass, to be the other is a loss of self. "Identification," according to Diamond, "violates identity."<sup>44</sup>

*The Performance of Nationalism: India, Pakistan, and the Memory of Partition* develops the idea of mimesis in three crucial directions: as aesthetic practice, as social relation, and as world-making. Considering the Partition of the subcontinent through its aesthetic representations offers a *sensuous understanding* of the events of political history. Charting a space between the contingent particular of history and the abstract universal of philosophy, aesthetic mimesis enables a sensuous knowledge that attends to the particular lives of protagonists while simultaneously enabling a bigger-picture understanding of events through *theoria* or contemplation.<sup>45</sup>

As social relation, mimesis takes seriously the promise and peril of similitude that does not dissolve into sameness. Mimetic relationality offers productive political possibilities for imagining cross-border affiliations. Recognizing the mimetic doubleness of political subjects moves us away from the shrill polarities of identity politics. The agon of the Partition illuminates the irresolvable doubleness at the heart of the fraternal encounter between India and Pakistan. Building on Elin Diamond's perceptive remark, "Mimesis is impossibly double," I argue that mimetic thinking moves from identity and the principle of equivalence endemic to abstract rationality to an insistence on incommensurable difference. This "impossibly double" attribute of mimesis, however, also cautions us to its contradictoriness. Although mimesis offers a powerful challenge to dominant ideologies of ethnic and national identity, it is not necessarily a benevolent or "progressive" force. For example, Chapters 5 and 6 consider mimetic desire as triangulated among masculinist institutions of community and state, where the possession of women and territory (Kashmir, in this case) becomes the means to stage rivalry between implacably hostile groups.<sup>46</sup>

Finally, *The Performance of Nationalism: India, Pakistan, and the Memory of Partition* considers the ways in which publics are constituted through mimetic practices.<sup>47</sup> Can mimesis initiate a process of renewed world-making? Theatre, the most social of all arts, moves us beyond the merely private or domestic sphere toward a larger, common civic *philia* – an emotionally charged public sphere of kinship and community. Aesthetic pleasure derives not only from dramatic action, but also from a sense of shared witnessing. The public recognition of the sufferings one has endured reconnects the grieving individual to a wider community of witnesses. Plato's warning that mimesis disintegrates the unity of the subject could point the way to a radical rearrangement of the discoherent subject, dispersed in the wake of grief. Could mimesis then offer the opportunity to rearrange the self and fashion a new ethical relation to the other? *The Performance of Nationalism* argues that grief can offer the occasion for reimagining community. Rather than privatizing grief, such acts of collective witnessing offer the ground to generate a powerful sense of solidarity.<sup>48</sup>

In addition, all the productions I consider in this book bear conscious semblance to earlier works. The mimetic practice of adaptation allows the artist to embed creative difference by retelling a story that is similar but not identical to the original. In the words of Edward Said, "The writer thinks less of writing originally, and more of rewriting. The image for writing changes from original inscription to parallel script, from tumbled-out confidence to deliberate fathering-forth, ... from melody to fugue."<sup>49</sup> Each of the works considered here is shaped through mimetic engagements with other texts: M.S. Sathyu draws on Ismat Chughtai; Kirti Jain draws on Saadat Hasan Manto; Ritwik Ghatak draws on Shaktipada Rajguru; Asghar Wajahat draws on Nasir Kazmi; and M.K. Raina draws on Shakespeare. Mimetic semblance points not only to the doubleness of characters within these stories but also to the palimpsestic doubleness of the narratives themselves.

This book examines dramatic and filmic representations of the Partition from the 1960s to 2010. What can varying narrations of the Partition tell us about the particular historical moment of its creative articulation? Contemporary retellings of the Partition do not simply reflect the past but inscribe within their very narration the stories one

wants to tell of the present. The following chapters hold the mimetic discourses of performance and history in contrapuntal tension without dissolving their discursive differences into a unifying closure.<sup>50</sup> The discrepant discursive fields of performance and history have discrete agendas and internal formations, and critically interanimate each other. Weaving together in contrapuntal tension aesthetic, political, and historical discourses without harmonizing closures allows us to pay attention to individual, sometimes dissonant, narratives and attend to their incommensurable heterogeneity.

Focusing on the symbolic, affective, and embodied dimensions of state-making, Chapter 2 considers the role of political performance as a key technique in the constitution of publics. It lays the groundwork for the book by considering the performative dimensions of political power through a consideration of high political debates and spectacular displays of state power. From a brief account of the high politics of the Partition played out by the colonial and nationalist elite, I turn to the Retreat ceremony at Wagah, at the border of India and Pakistan. The border ceremonies at Wagah exemplify the spectacular strategies that not only reify and make visible the power of the state but also insidiously inscribe social power onto the bodies of its spectators. The spectacular representation of the nation at Wagah attempts to secure the mimetic political relationship between the representative and the represented through the sensuous evocation of patriotic *philia*. The mimetic rituals across the border performed by Indian and Pakistani border guards, however, ironically destabilize both accounts of identity within and difference without the nation. This chapter argues that mimetic semblance across the border unsettles the spectacular production of political power.

Chapter 3 turns to the cinema of avant-garde Bengali filmmaker Ritwik Ghatak, which explores the mimetic relationship between person and place in partitioned Bengal. For Ghatak, love of country cannot be subsumed within accounts of nationalism and political contestations over territoriality. Ghatak systematically rejects the logic and lure of the nation by invoking the nonsensuous similitude between person and place in the riverine Bengal. Ghatak demonstrates the affinity between place and person through the trope of nonidentical

twins; the relationship between the twins is analogous to the bond between the twin Bengals. By insistently depicting two orphaned siblings as analogous to the partitioned East and West Bengal, Ghatak forwards kinship as the terrain on which the Partition played out its antagonistic politics.

In Chapter 4 I continue to explore the ramifications of the Partition's displacement by turning from the eastern to the western border between India and Pakistan. This chapter specifically addresses the ways in which Hindu and Muslim minority communities configured questions of displacement, national belonging, and gender. Does the concept of accommodation offer a spectral mode of cohabitation between the self and the other? By looking at two performance texts, M.S. Sathyu's film *Garm Hawa* (1973) and Asghar Wajahat's play *Jis Lahore Ne Dekhiya* (1988), I argue that home, property, and the idea of accommodation provide an urgent lens through which to consider the anxieties regarding national belonging in the partitioned subcontinent. I explore how the dialectical production of Hindus and Muslims, India and Pakistan pivots around the question of semblance. The mimetic doubleness disturbs the symmetries of insider/outsider, and destabilizes the sovereign subjects of the Partition.

Chapter 5 turns to the gendered dimensions of the violence that occurred in the wake of Partition. The constitutive role played by gendered violence during the Partition took on an uncanny mimetic dimension. As bearers of the nation, women ensured the perpetuity of both the religious community and the nation. By desecrating the possession of the rival, mimetic violence reveals that women themselves were evacuated of subjectivity. Not only were members of one community responding to violence done across the border but the nation-states, too, participated in this scenario of mimetic violence. Kirti Jain's 2001 production, *Aur Kitne Tukde*, depicts the circulation of female bodies between men from opposing communities and nations. This chapter takes up the relationship between embodiment and discourse in a context where bodies themselves circulated as "somatic texts." I argue that marking female bodies through specific

acts of gendered violence constitutes a mode of transcription for men to communicate with their mimetic counterparts.

If “woman” was the token of exchange in a conflict between warring men, Chapter 6 considers the ways in which the valley of Kashmir becomes the object of desire in the mimetic fraternal encounter between India and Pakistan. This chapter considers the ways in which the Bhand Pather, a satiric form of Kashmiri folk theatre, negotiates the hostility of antagonistic politics in the region. Through an analysis of M.K. Raina’s folk adaptation of *King Lear*, *Badshah Pather*, I consider the ways in which mimesis offers the occasion for the constitution of a witnessing public. *Badshah Pather* oscillates between the satiric critique of Bhand Pather and the tragic awareness of human vulnerability. In the process, the performance moves the audience toward an affective public sphere of kinship and solidarity. The public witnessing of grief, particularly of parents mourning the untimely deaths of their children, generates a powerful sensuous solidarity among the audience.

In the final analysis, *The Performance of Nationalism: India, Pakistan, and the Memory of Partition* argues that recovering mimetic modes of thinking potentially unsettles the reified certitudes of community and nation. Mimetic semblance does not dissolve difference into sameness but rather exposes the doubleness of the self, the non-identity of the self with the self, thus fracturing the unity and uniformity on which civic and religious nationalisms depend.