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Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* and Margaret Bourke-White's Partition Photographs: Clash of Narratives or Postmemory Project?

SUMMARY: Memories of the Partition of India have, over the last decades, been constructed through a broad range of media, such as biographical memory, historiography, or literature. An interesting more recent example of remembrance is the illustrated golden jubilee edition of Khushwant Singh's novel *Train to Pakistan* (2006) which features more than 60 of photographs of the US-American photojournalist Margaret Bourke-White and a wide range of editorial paratexts. An analysis of this new edition will show that the textual and visual narratives thus combined differ widely and do not support each other as the editor Pramod Kapoor claims. However, if we look at the project as a whole we find it to be more than simply an "illustrated version" of the original novel. Rather, it can be seen as what Marianne Hirsch has called a 'postmemory' project: Kapoor connects different viewpoints and narratives and thus finds a form of expressing his own view of Partition and the ways the second generation should deal with it.

KEYWORDS: Partition of India, 1947, literature, photography, narratives, *Train to Pakistan*, Khushwant Singh, Margaret Bourke-White, *Life* magazine, postmemory.

In 2006 the Indian publisher Roli Books launched an illustrated edition of Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the novel. The book deals with a topic looming large in India's history: the events surrounding the year 1947 when India gained Independence and was at the same time divided, resulting in the two states of India and Pakistan. The partition of the country was a bloody affair as people were forced into migration on a massive scale and communal violence was on the daily agenda even before

August 15. *Train to Pakistan* tells us the story of how the fictional village Mano Majra was affected by these disturbances. For the 2006-edition the editor Pramod Kapoor supplemented the novel by photographs of the US-American photojournalist Margaret Bourke-White, taken during her stays in India in the years 1946 and 1947.

The new edition met with almost unanimous acclaim, especially for the successful pairing of text and photographs. Echoing Kapoor's conviction that the book and the photos "were made for each other" (Singh 2006: xvi), Anita Joshua, for example, stated in *The Hindu* that it appeared to her as if Singh himself "had commissioned […] Margaret Bourke-White to freeze frames of the Partition for his book" (Joshua 2006); and the *New York Times* correspondent Somini Sengupta asserted that Singh "reminds in words what Bourke-White's photographs seem to scream on the page" (Sengupta 2006).

In this paper I want to make the case for a more nuanced view, arguing that the illustrated *Train to Pakistan* is not a combination of mutually supporting narratives but rather a complex blending of deviating viewpoints. We encounter two distinctly different narrators who tell the tale from different perspectives, for different audiences and with different intentions: Khushwant Singh, the author, who was personally affected by the events of 1947 and confronts his experiences and memories through his writing, and Margaret Bourke-White, the famous photographer, who was professionally associated with the US-American journal *Life* and travelled to India in 1947 by the order of the magazine's picture editor. Both are witnesses to 'Partition' but record very different stories. We will see that the main narratives are not congruous—they intersect only in parts, reminding us of the fact that any act of transcultural reframing remains a delicate subject. Moreover, an analysis will show that the arrangement of the pictures does not correspond to the text's structure: because of the layout of the photographs it rather counteracts the novel's internal composition.

Last but not least, we will find that the editor, Pramod Kapoor, adds yet another narrative to the novel: Kapoor belongs to the post-Partition generation and has published the illustrated edition of *Train to Pakistan*

as an exercise in remembering and admonishing. His own perspective finds expression in his choice of pictures and in the captions to Bourke-White's photos. Taken together, the varying perspectives merge into a multifaceted postmemory project, to use Marianne Hirsch's term which denotes "the response of the second generation to the trauma of the first" (Hirsch 2001: 8). A reading of the book as postmemorial witnessing therefore allows us some interesting insights into some of the mechanisms and strategies of recording and remembering Partition. In the following we will first look at the two main narratives, then examine their combination, and finally look at how the editor's agenda further transforms the project.

Khushwant Singh

Khushwant Singh was born in a village in the West Punjab in 1915 into an affluent family of tradesmen. After studying law in Lahore and London, he worked as a lawyer in Lahore for seven years until he was forced to leave his home and migrate to Delhi on 12 August 1947, three days before the partition of the country. After two years of working for the Indian Ministry of External Affairs in London and Canada, Singh decided to become a full time journalist and writer from around 1950 onwards. *Train to Pakistan* was published, for the first time, in 1956, almost ten years after the events that found their way into the novel. In an interview in 1968 Singh declared:

> I really don't think [*Train to Pakistan*] is a very good novel because I think it's a documentary, and I've given it a sugar-coating of characters and a story. Basically, it is a documentary of the partition of India, an extremely tragic event which hurt me very much. (Singh 1968-69: 28)

In this quote we encounter the individual Khushwant Singh as a victim, trying to make sense of his experiences in the light of the fact that "[w]ounds inflicted by Partition will take a long, long time to heal" (Singh 2006: xxiii). Alok Bhalla has shown that the act of writing as a means of coming to terms with the events of 1947 is characteristic of the largest part of Partition literature (cf. Bhalla 1999). Like

other novelists, as for example Rahi Masoom Reza, Singh attempts to "regain coherence" while rediscovering the past (*ibid.*: 3128).

Train to Pakistan tells the story of imaginary Mano Majra, a small village with both Sikh and Muslim families. The village is known for its railway station and the large single-track railway bridge spanning the nearby river Sutlej. As the events take place in late August 1947 Mano Majra finds itself located on the Indian side of the newly created border, with the bridge now connecting the two countries. Till then Mano Majra has escaped the mayhem following in the wake of Partition—a situation that is about to change when the story sets in. In the course of the book, we witness how communal violence gradually closes in on the village.

Singh confronts us—as well as the characters of the novel—with a narrative of Partition violence that slowly moves towards the emotional and narrative climax. In order to achieve this he skilfully combines and contrasts two narrative strands of the 1947-discourse: a general narrative of politics and a personal one of loss and pain. In the beginning he keeps both the novel's characters and the reader at a distance from the physical and mental violence of Partition. Starting off rather matter-of-factly with a one and half page historicising introductory section, the narrator, first of all, straightforwardly relates 'facts' about the period in question, gives a brief account of the bloody incidents accompanying the political events, and reiterates the large numbers of refugees, dryly informing us that "ten million people … were in flight" and "by the time the monsoon broke, almost a million of them were dead" (Singh 2006: 3).

Once the story has set in, we follow the events in the village and the lives of the three main protagonists in the story, amongst them Juggut Singh, the village goonda, who turns out to be the hero of the novel. Throughout the first half of the novel, Singh has communal violence come onto the scene only through reports, rumours and assumptions—information about incidents that have happened *elsewhere*, but at the same time foreshadow the events to come.[1]

[1] After the introductory sequence the story starts with another violent incident: the murder of the moneylender Ram Lal, the only Hindu of Mano Majra.

Train to Pakistan then gradually moves from the general to the particular as both the villagers and the reader come closer to the emotional and physical violence of Partition until, eventually, a first train full of corpses rolls into the station of Mano Majra—the turning point of the narrative (Singh 2006: 120).

The first emotionally touching scene, however, occurs later, approximately three quarters into the book, when Singh switches to the personal perspective of loss and pain—putting, as Butalia has phrased it, "people […] instead of grand politics" at the centre of the narrative (Butalia 2000: 77). The realities of Partition begin to find their way into the village when the Muslims of Mano Majra are pressed to leave their homes after a group of Sikh refugees has reached the village from Pakistan and the authorities fear that they might want to take revenge. We see how reluctant Muslim villagers are forced to leave for a country that doesn't mean anything to them; packed onto trucks to be deported, by train, to Pakistan, they are turned into exiles who can take with them on their journey only what they can carry. The omniscient narrator tells us how both sides—the Muslims who are leaving and the Sikhs who are staying—are miserable and both groups still refuse to believe that this is a separation for good. It is only towards the end of the novel that physical violence—or rather the outcome of violence—literally appears on the scene when the victims of a massacre that had happened elsewhere can be 'seen' floating down the river (Singh 2006: 199). Along with four villagers we become witnesses of the macabre sight which—again—finds its way into the village itself only in the form of a report.

The novel reaches its emotional climax on the last few pages, when we are again presented with intimate personal stories of loss, pain and violence. Through the memories of Hukum Chand, the district

Ram Lal, however, is killed in the context of a robbery committed by a gang of Sikh dacoits from a neighbouring village. The incident triggers some major narrative strands and symbolically foreshadows the violence to come, but it does not, in itself, constitute a case of communal violence as understood in the Partition context.

magistrate, we learn of the fates of three personal acquaintances of his who have fallen victim to Partition, or made their "tryst with destiny" as the narrator states with ironical reference to Nehru's speech (Singh 2006: 258–259). In three short passages, each of about one page, we learn how Hukum Chand's colleague Prem Singh went back to Lahore shortly after August 15 to retrieve his wife's jewellery and, after he had innocently passed a pleasant evening in the company of some Englishmen, was ambushed and murdered; how Sundari, the daughter of Hukum's orderly, newly wedded and still a virgin, was dragged out of a bus and gang-raped by a mob after she had been made witness to the castration of her husband Mansa Ram; and how Sunder Singh, a big brave Sikh and a friend of Hukum's, was trying to escape to India with his wife and three children on a train, stuck in a compartment carrying over five hundred people instead of the permitted 52; when the train came to a standstill and they were trapped therein for four cruelly hot days without water or food he could no longer bear to see his family suffer and decided to shoot his wife and children—only moments before the train began to move again to leave him as the devastated sole survivor of his family. Exchanging the abstract for the concrete situation, giving each victim a name and an individual story, the author leaves us with the personal narratives which are disturbing and deeply moving.

The story of the Mano Majra Muslims—those characters with whom we are acquainted—closes with the protagonist Juggut Singh. In the ultimate climax he sacrifices his own life in order to save his beloved Nooran, daughter of the village imam, and thus, indirectly, also those of the other Muslim villagers. They are passengers on a refugee train passing into Pakistan over the Mano Majra bridge which is to be attacked by the group of revengeful Sikh refugees who had earlier arrived in the village from West Punjab. In a daring stunt Juggut cuts the rope that has been put up on the bridge in order to slow down the train so that its passengers can be murdered. The novel ends with Juggut being crushed under the wheels of the train which makes its way into Pakistan unscathed.

Looking at the overall plan of *Train to Pakistan* we find the narrative resting on a well-planned structure. We move from the general to the particular, the public to the private sphere, from the distance to the close up, and from premonition to the climactic arrival of violence. Singh comes ever closer to the victims: naming them and zooming into their lives, he tells us their story. Importantly, the novel does not end on the note of hatred and violence. In *Train to Pakistan* the self-sacrifice of the Sikh Juggut Singh for the sake of the Muslim community demonstrates that the author reconstructs communal unity by implementing the idea that violence is something that is carried into the village from the outside. *Train to Pakistan* shows how the human element prevails even within the utter madness of Partition violence. Albeit the village community does eventually succumb to the realities of the political and societal situation, it is only under the influence of the refugees, i.e. outsiders, that social ties start to fall apart. Singh's truth is that community has never fully collapsed, not even in the face of massacre and expulsion. In his preface to the illustrated *Train to Pakistan* he states that "[a] deep sense of remorse set in on both sides when ill-temper and hatred abated" (Singh 2006: xxii). Singh sees the horrors of Partition as an exception, an extraordinary situation which needs to be overcome. With this he becomes part of a large group of Partition novelists who attempt to reconstruct the battered communities through their writings:

> [These novelists] do not repeat what the historians already know—that there was violence of such fiendishness that each reminder of it still comes as a shock to our decencies and still violates our sense of a common humanity. Instead, they seek to make connections with the social and cultural life of a community in its entirety within a historically specific period. (Bhalla 1999: 3119)

In Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* man is retained as a fundamentally ethical being—a stance that falls behind when we look at Margaret Bourke-White's photographic narrative.

Margaret Bourke-White

Margaret Bourke-White, the US-American photojournalist, was born in 1904 in New York. She quickly rose to fame during the 1920s and 30s as an industrial and architectural photographer, and then ventured into advertisement photography for mass-market periodicals before turning to documentary. In 1937 she published, together with the writer Erskine Caldwell, the documentary book *You Have Seen Their Faces* for which the duo toured the American South during the Depression, documenting the life of poor farmers through photos, text and captions. The publication was celebrated, but it was also harshly criticised, especially by colleague photographers. They disapproved, on the one hand, of the highly subjective and condescending captions which were seen as presenting the stereotypical views of Caldwell and Bourke-White;[2] on the other hand, her photographs were condemned for being spectacular and dramatic—a style that was popular at the time and became even more widespread through Bourke-White's highly influential pictorial aesthetics. Like other photographers of the time, she was known for (and openly talked about) arranging scenes to make them conform to her subjective truth—developing "directorial techniques to dramatize the Depression" as the photography historian Belinda Rathbone suggests—a practice she continued during her time at *Life*, from 1936 to 1957 (Rathbone 2000: 136).[3]

Bourke-White was a determined and bold photographer, famous for her unflinching gaze which is also characteristic of her Partition photographs—pictures she took for *Life* magazine, an important fact whose implications have so far been underestimated. *Life* had been launched in New York by the media tycoon Henry Luce in 1936.[4]

[2] For a discussion of Bourke-White's and Caldwell's policy of captioning see Stott 1973: 220–223.

[3] Cf. also Stott who emphasises that Bourke-White looked not only for certain faces but also certain expressions, lying in wait until she "got from her subjects the look she wanted" (Stott 1973: 59–60).

[4] In 1923 Luce had co-founded *Time* magazine; by the 1930s he reigned supreme in the US publishing world. The historian Robert E. Herzstein

Catering to the well-to-do American middle and upper-middle class, the magazine quickly rose to extraordinary success and became Luce's mouthpiece to propagate American ideals, preserve national unity and defend the pluralistic American Way (cf. Baughman 2001: 94–95; Vials 2006: 84). America, Luce impressed upon his audience, was entitled to economic, technical, artistic and moral leadership of the world (cf. Luce 1941: 61–65). For maximum impact on the readers, he counted on "the emotional appeal of pictures" and the power of the visual: he had, from the beginning, envisioned *Life* as "the biggest picture show on earth" and wanted his readership "to be for the first time pictorially well-informed" (Luce 1936: 2). To this end Luce devised a new genre: the photographic essay—a series of photographs on a single theme, deliberately arranged to convey a mood, deliver information and tell a story. Luce thus wanted to inform and influence his readers, but they also were to be entertained—a double agenda of pleasure and education which gave rise to the hybrid format of the magazine: a wildly mixed potpourri of instructive reportages on the one hand, and enjoyable advertisements plus articles featuring 'tabloid themes' on the other. Margaret Bourke-White's Partition photographs have to be seen in this context: in 1946, the year she went to India for the first time, she had been working for Henry Luce for 16 years. *Life* magazine was the frame for which she took her pictures—she travelled to India in order to bring back another exciting story for a popular US-American picture magazine.

Bourke-White's second visit to India lasted from autumn 1947 to early 1948. During this assignment she was accompanied by *Life* reporter Lee Eitingon who was responsible for "text and caption material" (Bourke-White 1949: 7). Together the two women crisscrossed through the Punjab by jeep, occasionally escorted by soldiers, at times travelling with the caravans of refugees for several weeks at a stretch.

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reminds us that Luce has been called "the most influential private citizen in the America of his day" (Herzstein 2005: 1).

In her book *Halfway to Freedom* Margaret Bourke-White remembers the events in an emotional and slightly dramatic tone:

> Lee and I went on with the convoys week after week until our hair became stiff and gray with dust, our clothes felt like emery boards, my cameras became clogged with grit, and the endless procession of misery we were portraying seemed, as Lee described it, to be "wrapped in a horrible nightmarish gray lighting, where the heartbreaking sight of human suffering was mercifully blurred by our own physical weariness." But long after the last of my negatives and Lee's captions had been dispatched by air to *Life*, and Lee herself had flown to another part of the world on a new assignment, those millions of peasants were still trudging blindly forward on their tragic journey (Bourke-White 1949: 8).

Most clearly, in the middle of mayhem and misery Margaret Bourke-White remained the photographer on the job. She chose to visually document the narrative of the temporary collapse of humanity, societal breakdown and—in addition—the end of British India. Luce was bent on spreading the news of a novel world order according to which British dominance had given way to the supremacy of a new power—the United States (cf. Luce 1949: 50-51). *Life*, as Bourke-White's biographer Vicki Goldberg states, was "in need of an eyewitness to the fall of the British Empire" and "sent Margaret Bourke-White to India" (Goldberg 1987: 300).

When we look at Bourke-White's pictures we see endless caravans of destitute refugees, we see people in a state of loss, pain and resignation, and we see the utter destruction both of bodies and possessions. Migration and death are Bourke-White's major pictorial themes. Her dramatic, typically "overemotionalized" (Stott 1973: 60), mise-en-scène and her unwavering close up views seem to focus exclusively on the collapse of all that makes us human—compassion, the capacity to participate in social contracts, the will or power to take moral responsibility. Since Bourke-White wanted to capture this story as convincingly as possible she felt entitled to manipulating motives and situations, as she had done before in other contexts: she arranged a stray bone here and there to get a more dramatic view, or directed a terrified group

of refugees to march up and down before her until she could land the perfect shot—an infamous episode that had later been told by Lee Eitingon (cf. Goldberg 1987: 311). Looking at the whole body of her photographs we can often literally follow her 'covering' a scene, incessantly taking photographs from all possible angels so as not to miss the pivotal moment within the event. With regard to her work for *You Have Seen Their Faces* Rathbone has stated that Bourke-White had been "after the most extreme signs of poverty and degradation she could find", often literally staging the scenes according to her wishes (Rathbone 2000: 135; see also Stott 1973: 59-60). In the Partition context, too, Bourke-White followed this principle: her photographs and the resulting photo-essay *The Great Migration*, which was published in *Life* in November 1947, spectacularly narrate the story of humanity heading for disaster (Bourke-White 1947: 117–125).[5]

Novel and photographs combined—a clash of narratives?

Looking at the illustrated *Train to Pakistan*, we find the textual and pictorial narratives intersecting at some points but strongly deviating at others. The editor Pramod Kapoor has chosen 66 photographs to supplement the novel; they are interspersed throughout the text, presented as single entities or as loosely arranged groups which either centre on comparable motives or display brief 'micro-narratives'. A few photographs have been selected in such a way as to be virtually complementary to single passages of the novel which are then reemployed as captions. The most prominent example is, of course, the cover image which serves as an illustration of the novel's title: it shows a cropped photograph of two trains packed with refugees. The refugee train is a familiar topos of Partition narratives and therefore makes for

[5] In the photo-essay the reader is led through a story culminating in death and destruction; as a whole, however, this story is a mere fragment within a trivialising medley of discrete texts and images which turns both the photographs and the victims into commodities. Unfortunately, a detailed analysis of the complex narrative and its context cannot be given here.

an eye-catching and easily recognisable cover illustration.[6] A second example can be found at the beginning of the first chapter, when the village Mano Majra is introduced to the reader: we see a double-page image of a rural railway halt with a village at the far background (Singh 2006: 4–5). The corresponding caption begins with a quote from the novel describing how, amidst the mayhem of Partition, "[t]he only remaining oases of peace were a scatter of little villages lost in the remote reaches of the frontier", one of them being Mano Majra. Since the locale of the novel is purely fictional, the editor closes this caption with his own words, proposing that the village in the picture, called "Miya Mir", is "not very different from Mano Majra" (*ibid*.).[7]

Apart from such rare instances of close correlations (six in total), agreement and mutual support between the textual and the visual narrative is to be found mainly in the shared themes of migration and death. They are major constituents of the Partition story and Bourke-White has made them central themes of her photographic narrative, as we have seen. In the novel, however, these themes are not placed centre-stage.

[6] The photograph used here appears on the covers of at least two other books dealing with Partition, Narendra Singh Sarila's *The Shadow of the Great Game*, and Mohinder Singh Sarna's *Savage Harvest*. Incidentally, the image is not attributed to Bourke-White. The source given by Getty Archives is "AFP/freelance photographer"; the image can be viewed at www.gettyimages.de under the registration number 89134890, or at www.corbisimages.com, registration number BE065100. The same applies to the cover image of a different (presumably earlier) impression of the illustrated edition of *Train to Pakistan* which, too, features a picture of a train, albeit not for refugees but government staff as the original caption tells us. This picture is identical to the image on pp. 42–43 of the book (tenth impression, 2011). The Getty registration number for this image is 2628247; "Keystone/freelance photographer" is given as the source.

[7] The photograph actually shows a village called "Meean Mir" (i.e. Mian Mir) near Lahore (today part of the city) and dates from 1880; the photographer is given as W. Harris. The picture can be viewed at www.gettyimages.de under the registration number 3166950.

They appear, briefly, in the introductory sequence of *Train to Pakistan* which informs the reader unemotionally of the actualities:

> The fact is, both sides killed. Both shot and stabbed and speared and clubbed. Both tortured. Both raped. (Singh 2006: 1)

Some lines later we learn that the migrants "travelled on foot, in bullock carts, crammed into lorries, clinging to the sides and roofs of trains" (*ibid*.). [8] Yet, after the story has set in, these narrative strands go back 'underground': as shown above, they are skilfully woven into a gradually developing subplot that resurfaces only towards the end of the novel. Not so on the level of the visuals: the carefully built structure of the text is counteracted not only by the sheer number of photographs depicting these themes (52 out of the total of 66 photos[9]) but also by their layout within the book. By spreading scenes of migration as well as gruesome and often graphic images of death throughout the book without consistently aligning them to the advancement of the story, Kapoor neutralises Singh's technique of slowly increasing the tension and repeatedly forestalls the climax of the authorial narrative of expulsion and violence. While in the text communal violence and death are still acting in the garbs of rumours and apprehensions, they have already taken centre-stage on the level of the visuals. Thus, we encounter, for example, visible violence in the form of the corpses flowing down the river, for the first time, in chapter four while the first corresponding pictures are already to be found at the beginning of chapter three.

[8] On the immediately preceding pages, Kapoor presents us with a matching three-photo micro-narrative: on a double page he juxtaposes a rather harmless picture, displaying people waving from the windows of a train, with an image of Partition violence at its most drastic. We see a close up view of the mutilated corpse of an old man lying in a station next to the railway tracks amongst litter and rags; upon turning the page we face a hillside littered with whitened bones. Thus, Kapoor presents us with close-up views, while Singh still keeps the readers at a distance from the events.

[9] Of these 52 pictures, 25 show scenes of migration by train or on foot, and 27 show deaths or near death.

Likewise, the main portion of the photos showing scenes of migration (including a batch of photographs showing the miserable state of refugees in a makeshift Cholera hospital) is interspersed throughout the introductory sections of the book and the first chapter while the topic only becomes relevant at the end of the third chapter, when the Muslims are forced to leave the village. The atrocities described for the emotional climax at the very end of the novel (*ibid*.: 258–260), on the other hand, remain unillustrated.

A second and far more important aspect is that the central messages of text and photographs are not congruent. As we have seen above, Singh and Bourke-White tell different stories. His is a narrative primarily of the *processes* at work during the time of Partition: the pain of expulsion, the mechanisms of estrangement and a community's struggle to retain sanity, inquiring, to use Bhalla's words, "about the survival of our moral being in the midst of horror" (Bhalla 1999: 3128, ftn. 3). Bourke-White's story, on the other hand, has been shown to be one of migration, hardship, brutal death and—in stark contrast to the novel—the very collapse of our "moral being". By employing Bourke-White's pictures, Kapoor retells her photographic tale of the breakdown of humanity, further emphasising the point by employing some of the most brutal pictures of the collection, most of which had hitherto not been published in a print medium.[10] Bourke-White's photos, however, do not lend themselves to underwrite Singh's story of the survival of community in the face of disaster. The message of her visual narrative counteracts the gist of his text.[11]

In this context it is interesting to notice that Bourke-White's personal narrative of the events differs from that of her photos.

[10] Of the 66 photos, five show individuals who have been brutally murdered, three display persons of whom only body parts are left, and nine show scenes of massacres where no individuals are identifiable.

[11] Given their air of non-contextualised savagery Bourke-White's photos seem more suitable to illustrate, for example, Sa'ādat Hasan Maṇṭo's vignettes in *Siyāh hāśiye* (*Black Margins*) which "reject man as a creature who has any ethical sense or religious virtue" (Bhalla 1999: 3123).

In *Halfway to Freedom* she tells the story of Partition in a far more personal voice than that which comes to light in her photographs (Bourke-White 1949: 3–21). Instead of presenting us with the dramatically staged narrative of the *Great Migration* we hear stories of several little migrations. She allows us to partake of individual destinies, and at least some of the individuals she talks about are named and given a voice—very much in contrast to the victims in her photographs who remain name- and powerless. In her own book Bourke-White comes closer to the people, and like Singh she zooms into their lives rather than their faces. Moreover, as opposed to the one-dimensional theme of societal breakdown characteristic of her photographic narrative, her personal account allows for those very instances of inter-communal support and solidarity to surface which also characterise *Train to Pakistan*.[12] This shows most clearly that Bourke-White did not photograph the whole story she was witnessing. In order to meet the requirements of *Life* she chose one particular strand: her dramatic photos are well-composed products, taken to be turned, later, into a pleasurably spine-tingling story with a specific political message. Just as in *You Have Seen Their Faces*, her photos do not bear testimony *on behalf of* the victims but rather testimony *to* the victims (cf. Pandey 2001: 71)—quite contrary to Khushwant Singh who stated in an interview in 1996 that he also wrote *Train to Pakistan* as redemption:

> The sense of guilt, that I had not been able to do anything, to prevent this horrible killing that had gone on—one just saw, one heard, one saw corpses lying here and there, the city go up in flames—and unable to do anything except forgather in our homes, Muslims and Hindus and Sikhs, and drink in the evenings—and later on said, you know, one could have perhaps done a little bit more in saving lives or doing something and then I got working on this novel. It is kind of guilt-ridden [sic]—that I had not been able to do anything—that I created this novel. (Singh 1996)

Unlike Bourke-White, Singh writes for the victims of Partition—including himself. A "desire to offer some kind of reconciliation" is not

[12] Cf. for example the story of Gurdit Singh: Bourke-White 1949: 9–10.

uncommon, as Urvashi Butalia states with regard to Partition victims and their memories of 1947: to "seek forgiveness […], to restore trust, to somehow make amends, to extend again the hand of friendship" is an often-sought out way of making peace with what has happened and of laying memories to rest (Butalia 2001). The jubilee edition of *Train to Pakistan* thus combines different narrative foci, structures and messages. Text and photos do not seem to be "made for each other"—as an "illustrated edition" the book is not convincing. However, looking at the overall plan, we detect a much more complex project in which Pramod Kapoor's editorial narrative plays a major role. Kapoor has not only edited but also researched and conceptualised the book. By providing us with yet another perspective he transforms the work into a project which adds up to more than the sum of its parts, as we will see in the following.

Pramod Kapoor

The editor Pramod Kapoor was born in Calcutta in 1953; after receiving his higher education in Banaras he worked for Macmillan for some time, before, in 1978, he founded his own publishing house, *Roli Books*, in Delhi. Today, Roli Books produces both fiction and non-fiction in English and has by now built up a reputation in the field of high-end coffee-table books on art, design, photography and architecture (cf. Kapoor 2004). The idea to combine Singh's novel with Bourke-White's photos occurred to Kapoor in 2005: incidentally he had just reread the book when he came across Bourke-White's partly unpublished work in the Getty archives in London while "looking for material to commemorate sixty years of the partition of India" (Kapoor 2010: 8). In his introduction to the book he explains that, back in Delhi, he approached Singh "with the idea of illustrating" his novel for a golden jubilee edition (Singh 2006: xvi). The resulting volume, however, shows that Kapoor has gone far beyond simply furnishing the novel with illustrations. Instead, he has realised a personalised multi-layered project of remembrance.

In the introduction Kapoor emphasises that the new *Train to Pakistan*, for him, is "an exercise in perpetuating the memory of those who perished" (*ibid*.). He thus picks up on a theme that has gained particular prominence during the last two decades: the question of the remembrance of Partition, both private and public, and the inquiry into which form this remembrance does or should take. In a recent edited volume that explores the "nuance and layers" of the ever more complex set of Partition memories Butalia reminds us that even today India has "still not found a way of memorializing Partition" (Butalia 2015: viii). There is no institutionalised remembrance of Partition, and private memory takes many diverse and often ambivalent forms which have, on the whole, not yet been systematically dealt with. So far, Partition is still to a large extent framed by the forms of remembrance chosen by the 'eyewitness generation', including "nostalgia for a pre-partition past" or "lament", as Sukeshi Kamra points out (Kamra 2015: 161, 163).

Kapoor, however, works from the perspective of the second generation. He interferes with Singh's first-generation narrative by complementing it with the photographs (and his own captions as we will see) and thereby re-narrates the story of Partition from a "postmemory" perspective. Postmemory, in Hirsch's understanding, describes "the relationship that the generation after those who witnessed cultural or collective trauma bears to the experiences of those who came before, experiences that they 'remember' only by means of the stories, images, and behaviours among which they grew up" but which are so powerful that they appear "to constitute memories in their own right" (Hirsch 2008: 106).[13] Postmemory therefore feeds on "representation, projection, and creation" instead of recollection (*ibid*.)—a mechanism which also applies to the collective memory of a traumatic event on a societal scale. "[A]s the numbers of those who retain direct, experiential memories

[13] Hirsch has first developed the term while studying modes of remembrance and representation of the Holocaust, inspired by Art Spiegelman's graphic novel *Maus* (1972, 1986, 1991), which incidentally begins with a reference to one of Margaret Bourke-White's famous Buchenwald photographs (cf. Hirsch 2001: 9).

diminish", Butalia states, "ways of remembering also change" (Butalia 2015: viii). Kapoor's *Train to Pakistan* edition must be seen as what Hirsch and Spitzer have called a "postmemorial act of reframing" (Hirsch & Spitzer 2006: 243).

As a postmemory project the book rests on two pillars: on Kapoor's selection of photographs and, secondly, on the editorial paratexts, including several introductory sections and, importantly, his own captions. As far as the selection of images is concerned it has been argued above that the layout and markedly graphic violence of the photographs present us with a counter-narrative to the text. When reading the new edition as a postmemorial project, however, the photographic narrative of migration and death becomes an extension of the Partition story as given by Singh—chosen to be told by the second generation editor Pramod Kapoor. Photography, as Hirsch argues, promises "to offer an access to the event itself" and forms an especially "powerful medium for the transmission of events that remain unimaginable" (Hirsch 2008: 107–108). The brutality of some of the photographs selected by Kapoor thus testifies to his struggle to grasp (and convey) the incomprehensible but also to his willingness to remember the unvarnished brutality of the event. The editorial narrative, i.e. the interplay of text and photos, reminds us that both Singh's personalised stories and Bourke-White's relentless view of violence represent valid ways of looking at Partition, just as both the retention and loss of man's moral being are valid truths—not as binary oppositions but as strands within a complex web of Partition narratives. The mechanism at play here is aptly described by Hirsch and Spitzer who point out that "[i]n relation to memoir and testimony, and to historical accounts and scholarly discussions, as within new artistic texts, archival images function as supplements, both confirming and unsettling the stories that are explored and transmitted" (Hirsch and Spitzer 2006: 245).

The second major component of this postmemory project is Pramod Kapoor's policy of captioning. Like Bourke-White and Caldwell in *You Have Seen Their Faces* Kapoor, too, employs captions to convey his personal reading of the images, revealing his own "projections

and appropriations". Photographs, as Hirsch and Spitzer suggest, are media onto which we can easily project our own anxieties, needs and desires (cf. *ibid*.: 241). *Train to Pakistan* features 62 captions of varying style and content: 19 use quotes from Bourke-White, her biographer Vicki Goldberg, or the novel itself; in the remaining 43 Kapoor articulates his own view. Through language and content he presents us with assumptions and retrospective interpretations which convey his personal understanding of the past. Employing a strongly metaphorical and at times melodramatic style he attempts to express what seems to be beyond expression as "the entire geography of a sub-continent was soaked in blood" (Singh 2006: xiii). He repeatedly uses evaluative adverbs or adjectives like "even", "tragic" or "grim" (*ibid*.: 3, 44, 253), and comments on images in emotive language full of pathos, for example when he speaks of the "killer disease cholera", "human debris", a "trail of corpses and graves", or the "stray limbs of loved ones" that were "the sole remains that could be cremated" (*ibid*.: 119, 171, 211); in addition, Kapoor addresses the readers through rhetorical questions such as "Did they eventually find a home?" or "Would anyone be able to distinguish an animal or a human in this debris?", thus drawing them into the events (*ibid*.: xix, xxviii). The latter case is especially interesting since it implies that there are, indeed, bones of both humans and animals to be seen in the picture in question.[14] This, however, is not the case if we believe the original archival caption of the photograph which reads "Cattle skeletons littering a rocky hillside after vultures picked the bones clean, during famine caused by drought". In his desire to tweak the message of an image so that it best serves his intention to convey the magnitude of the atrocities and affect the readers' innermost feelings Kapoor even goes to the lengths of offering us misleading captions.

[14] The photos (both dating from 1946) and corresponding captions can be viewed at www.gettyimages.de under the registration numbers 50873436 and 50879246, respectively.

As far as content is concerned, Kapoor tends to present us with his suppositions about things or situations *not* to be seen in the picture: things hidden, feelings not shown, or peoples' motives for acting. A typical example is the caption accompanying a picture showing, according the archival title, "Muslim women boarding a train at New Delhi in India to travel to the newly independent Pakistan".[15] Kapoor's own description reads: "Hiding anxiety behind their veils, Muslim women rush to the Promised Land on a train to Pakistan" (Singh 2006: viii)—clearly an overstatement for two reasons. Firstly, there is no way of telling what the women might be "hiding behind their veils": except for one girl standing in the dark doorway to the train compartment, we cannot see any of the women's faces since they are clad in Burkas; besides we see them standing rather than "rushing"—their anxious and hasty retreat is Kapoor's own reading. Secondly, Kapoor's usage of the Biblical metaphor 'Promised Land' is a highly suggestive interpretation: the phrase which he has borrowed from Bourke-White and which occurs in three further captions of his (Bourke-White 1947: 4, 12, 99; Singh 2006: xxvi, 110, 251) implies that the Muslim travellers are, by their own choice, migrating to a much longed for place—the very contrary of what we know to be true for a very large number of refugees and of what we learn in the novel's narrative.[16] Kapoor amends this and other images by strengthening their validity through dramatic language or by projecting an assumed meaning onto them—the latter a common strategy in the context of postmemorial projects (cf. Hirsch and Spitzer 2006: 247).

[15] The photo and corresponding caption can be viewed under the registration number 3396428. The image is not attributed to Bourke-White.

[16] Bourke-White reminds her readers of the fact that the journey to Pakistan often meant expulsion rather than emigration when she asks in *Halfway to Freedom*: "Why were millions of people wrenched from their ancestral homes and driven toward an unknown, often unwanted 'Promised Land'?" (Bourke-White 1947: 13).

The illustrated *Train to Pakistan* as a postmemory project

Kapoor pools three narratives in his golden jubilee edition of *Train to Pakistan* which tell the tale of Partition from different perspectives. Kapoor himself, of the post-Partition generation, has no first-hand experience of the events. Unlike Singh, he does not feel the need to counterbalance the narrative of Partition violence or to individualise the experience of violence. Instead he wants both the narratives of redemption and of moral breakdown to be acknowledged and authenticated and to this effect complements the novel with Bourke-White's photographic narrative and his own emphatic captions.[17] He uses inherited memory to satisfy new needs important to a "generation after": taken together, the three narratives add up to a postmemory project which points *ahead* rather than backwards. Kapoor wants to look back in order to learn from the events and shape the future accordingly: in his introduction to *Train to Pakistan* he states that he wants to teach a lesson to future generations to "prevent a recurrence of this tragic chapter in our history" (Singh 2006: xiii). Unlike Bourke-White who captures the present moment, and Singh who remembers in order to find a way of dealing with the present, Kapoor wants us to remember lest we should forget so that we learn from the past—an act that seems to become easier as more time elapses. Kamra has observed that "[o]ne of the effects of reluctance to face this past […] has been that when partition is acknowledged in the genres of collective memory (popular culture in particular), it is distanced in time and space from the present, and remains a story about the eyewitness generation, its participation, victimisation, dislocation and trauma" (Kamra 2015: 159). Kapoor, however, as a postmemorial witness, uncovers the pits of this trauma (cf. Hirsch 2001: 20) so that coming generations may bear the "burden

[17] Bourke-White's photos have come to gain particular importance for the visual remembrance of Partition in multiple Indian contexts as, for example, in national exhibitions on Indian history or official history textbooks. This aspect cannot be discussed here in depth and will be dealt with in a separate paper.

of Partition" with due responsibility (Singh 2006: xiii, 109, back cover). Singh, too, had eventually been able to take this step: after a period of 40 years he stated that *Train to Pakistan* was meant "to create communal harmony" (Singh 1996). The book, according to him, "has a moral, it tells a tale" (*ibid*.)—a tale that has been resituated and expanded by the editor so as to turn memory into commemoration and make it comply with what he feels is a contemporary desideratum: a blunt and drastic warning against present and future communal violence.

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