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Lost Home and Poetics of Pain: Writing the memory of Partition

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This article explores the use of emotions as a narrative strategy within literary writing of Partition's short memory as the means for a kind of subaltern expression. The recent development of Affect Studies and the "affective turn" in different fields and disciplines (notably History) offer new perspectives in the comprehension of collective tragedies.² This sheds new light on the issue of the narration—and thus the memory of these tragedies constructed through narrative—which often remain subservient (as was particularly the case for Partition) to ideological 'grand' narratives, within which individual and even more so collective emotions have been considered as interfering (or "troubling", in Alok Bhalla's words) to "objective" narratives.⁴ Highlighting the intimate relationship among emotion, memory and narrative of the experience of collective tragedies, and showing that literature represents a privileged medium of this experience, this article aims to open new perspectives on the history of Partition and, more specifically, on the analysis of its memory, as constituted and conveyed by fictional material.

Fiction as a (subaltern) memory of Partition

Both the memory of Partition and its aporia—which is more significant today than ever as we are about to celebrate the 70th birthday of Pakistan and India's Independence with few remaining witnesses—are the preoccupation of most recent historical writings on Partition. In *The Pity of Partition* (2013), Ayesha Jalal thus underlines the limits of memory as a way of investigating Partition, since it both mingles with the crucial issue of guilt while being vulnerable to manipulation, and "ends up folding communitarian remembrances into the straitjacket of official nationalist narratives."⁵ While stressing these limits of memory is quite common—in the words of Urvashi Butalia, "working with memory is never simple or unproblematic"—historians such as Ayesha Jalal also distance themselves from Partition's "traditional" archives, rightly considered as subservient to colonial or nationalist political

² See notably MacMullen (2003); Vincent-Buffault (1986); Pernau and Jordheim (2015).

⁴ In his interview with Bhisham Sahni, titled "Objectifying Troubling Memories" (Bhalla 2000).

⁵ Jalal (13).

agendas.⁷ On the other hand, historians who regularly resort to interviews with survivors or witnesses, such as Ian Talbot in *The Epicentre of Violence* (2006) or Urvashi Butalia in *The Other Side of Silence* (1998), have promoted memory as a way of shaping a social history of Partition, arguing as Butalia has done, that "the way people choose to remember an event, a history, is at least as important as what one might call the 'facts' of that history, for after all, these latter are not self-evident givens; instead, they too are interpretations, as remembered or recorded by one individual or another."⁸

Others have elected to draw on fiction as a means to shed light on Partition and to use it to elaborate an alternative, popular History. As is well known, Partition has given rise to a number of stories, novels or films, that were written (or directed) mainly between 1948 and 1955 – in the "Heat of fratricide" as Jason Francisco writes (2000) – fictional works which convey intense basic emotions, such as pain, anger, surprise or fear.⁹ Since the 1990s, these fictional works dealing with the aftermath of Partition have been both intensively mobilized and re-examined. The publication of three anthologies of Partition fictions within two years (Alok Bhalla's *Stories about the Partition of India* in 1994, 3 volumes; Mushirul Hasan's *India Partitioned: The Other Side of Freedom*, 2 volumes, 1995 ; Saros Cowasjee and K.S. Duggal's *Orphans of the Storm* 1995), bears witness to the necessity of both invoking the memory of Partition and imposing its memorialization through the literary media, as also shown by the publication of series of interviews with "partitioned" writers (such as in Bhalla 2006) or collections of essays on theirs and other authors' fictions (Hasan 2000). Such works promise to allow us to, in Bhalla's words, to find "coherent explanations for the irrational passions," and in Hasan's, to provide authors "a voice in the inconclusive debates on Independence and Partition."¹¹

As reported by Jason Francisco (2000), what emerges from these works is the expression of vivid emotions on the one hand, and the striking differences between works written in the aftermath of Partition, and more recent, post-traumatic creations, on the other hand. If the former convey raw emotions such as pain, anger, stupefaction, hatred or sadness, the most

⁷ Butalia 1998: 10. See also Kabir 2013 ; Kamra 2015.

⁸ Butalia 1998: 10.

⁹ Jason Francisco, "In the Heat of Fratricide: The Literature of India's Partition Burning Freshly" in *Inventing Boundaries: Gender, Politics and the Partition of India*, edited by Mushirul Hasan, 371-393 (New Delhi: Oxford University Press. 2000).

¹¹ Bhalla 1999: xxv; Hasan 1995: 9.

recent are inhabited by a feeling of nostalgia, an insatiable quest for the "Lost Home", testifying to what Urvashi Butalia (2015) identified as "the Long Shadow" of Partition.¹² These works, where the quest for a lost space is crucial and where the recurrence of the metaphor of rootlessness is quite striking, bear witness to the need for establishing a memorial site for Partition, a physical site that literature seems not to be able to offer. In the process of establishing a place of memory (especially as this place has no materiality, and as memory therefore cannot be collectively commemorated), the role of literature is yet to be questioned. Can it replace the collective celebration of popular memory and if so, in which manner?

Remembering women

How do we approach the history of women in the context of the project of remembering and understanding Partition? The methods and approaches discussed thus far have been central to this task: *The Other Side of Silence* by Urvashi Butalia alternates between memory and archives, constituted with both interviews and a number of historical documents, while *Borders and Boundaries* (published in 1998, as was Butalia's work) represents a feminist re-reading of Partition by historians Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, to shed light on the role of women during Partition but also on their symbolic function in the construction of the Nation. Kamla Bhasin and Ritu Menon, in *Borders and Boundaries*, both stress the ability of fiction to highlight the hidden histories of Partition and to shape its social history: "Partition fiction has been a far richer source both because it provides popular and astringent commentary on the politics of Partition and because, here and there, we find women's voices, speaking for themselves."¹³ These works encourage inquiry into the contribution of fiction to this history of women and the ability of literature to take part in the elaboration of an alternative history of Partition. At the same time, Veena Das' *Life and Words* (2006) has shown the way literature can contribute to the trivialization of violence against women by conveying the metaphor of woman-as-nation. She also shows that fiction bears witness to an internalization of this violence by women, an internalization of which Partition can be considered as the paradigm. This task is therefore a delicate one if one considers, like Veena Das (or like Menon and Bhasin), that the representation of women in Partition fictions is subservient to the great narrative of the Nation, and that the abductions, rapes and mutilations have been deprived of their reality in order to "reinstat[e] the nation as a pure and masculine space."¹⁵

¹² See discussion, Butalia 2015 : ix.

¹³ Bhasin and Menon 1998: 12.

¹⁵ Das 1996: 427.

Besides, the prism of the history of women allows us also to qualify the capacity of fiction to become the privileged place for a popular history of Partition, as this so-called "popular" narrative remains dominated by male voices, while women are still represented as passive receptacles of violence. The popular history of Partition as shaped by fiction thus remains a history of the elites that should also be read "against the grain". The issue of women during Partition also allows us to qualify the issue of the "lost home", which is a common place of Partition fictions. Indeed, much research have put into light the complex relationship between woman and the notion of "home" and land in South Asia, where women are "owned" before owning and belonging themselves and where, consequently, the issue of exile and rootlessness is transformed.¹⁶

How can one thus articulate the history of women and a gendered memory of Partition through fiction? If the history of women is revealed in the popular memory of Partition explored in the historical material presented by Kamla Bhasin and Ritu Menon, how is this memory expressed in literature, which remains subservient to a masculine narrative of Partition? Which narrative or linguistic strategies may encourage this expression? In other words, can fiction really formulate a subaltern memory through a direct and empowered voice, who tells rather than being told?

In this regard, considering that most female characters in Partition fictions were not given a subjective and independent voice,¹⁷ I have prioritized women's narratives themselves, drawing on two texts written by female writers, both of whom have a more or less autobiographical dimension, both written in the aftermath the Partition, both at the threshold of History as "romanticized" experiences. On the one hand is a novel, *Pinjar (The Skeleton)*, written by Amrita Pritam and published in 1950, which recounts a history of Punjab from the 1930 until about early 1948, through the stories of women who are victims of male violence; on the other hand is Anis Kidwai's memoirs *Azadi ki chaon men* (translated into English as *In Freedom's Shade*, 2011), which have been written in Urdu in 1949 but published only in 1974 (as it is widely known, Anis Kidwai was a social worker who took an active part in the women recovery campaign led by Mridula Sarabhai). These memoirs, which open in September 1947 with Anis Kidwai's husband's death, narrate her commitment to Gandhi's campaigns, her actions in Delhi refugee camps, and are accompanied by a number of

¹⁶ See in particular Menon 2004.

¹⁷ See notably Didur (2006).

referential elements, such as (at least, in the English translation) original photographs of refugees, refugee camps, and of some of the major political figures of Partition (Gandhi, Nehru, Mridula Sarabhai); photographs of symbolic places or events connected with Partition: refugee camps, Nizamuddin Dargah in 1946, Maulana Azad's 1948 address at Jama Masjid etc.

Writing an emotional Partition

The depiction of the experience of Partition as a painful, even traumatic event can be considered as a *fil rouge* that guides us through these two narratives where the expression of emotions both inhabits and modifies the narration. The issue of the complex relationship between memory and History has of course been widely discussed by historians, notably in order to emphasize not so much the limits of memory as its contribution to the elaboration of an alternative and social history of Partition.¹⁹ In *Remembering Partition* (2001), Gyanendra Pandey observes that regarding Partition, “historians’ history works to produce the 'truth' of the traumatic, genocidal violence of Partition and to elide it at the same time” (45). He indeed refers to the “denial” of the official histories of Partition that, according to him, need to be deconstructed, and stresses the urge to write a “different History”. Similarly, in “The prose of otherness” (1994), he identifies a “language problem” raised by the historian’s representation of Partition, which fails to describe pain and suffering. He thus discusses the issue of the historian’s analytical position: how can one be objective while also properly depicting this violence?

Pandey is centrally concerned with the issue of objectivity, and whether or not it can suffice in addressing this scale of violence. He suggests that “historiography has been loath to examine the massive violence that accompanied (and constituted) Partition, and the experiences and emotions of the people involved in or affected by it.”²⁰ He decries the disinterest within historical writings in the popular construction, and thus the social History of Partition, and argues that violence and brutality are only taken into consideration in the field of fiction, in literature and films. Pandey writes: “That there are, however, other ways of constructing the memory of Partition and other themes that have been suppressed and (at least, publicly) forgotten is evidenced by a whole range of writings, fictional and non-fictional,” where one may hear “marginal voices and memories, forgotten dreams and signs of

¹⁹ See notably Veyne (1974); Ricoeur (2000) ; White (1973).

²⁰ Pandey 205.

resistance.”²¹ And notably, he suggests, the expression of emotions as a crucial component of the experience of Partition.

Pandey indeed resorts to fiction as it can both supplement and qualify historians’ history: Saadat Hasan Manto’s stories, as well as Anis Kidwai’s *Azadi ki chaon me* can shed light on the “truth of Partition”, as Pandey writes. He draws on Kidwai’s memoirs for informational purposes, as an historical archive. Whereas he doesn’t take into account the emotional aspect of these texts, he uses them to counterbalance the principle of rationality which governs the “scientific” writing of History, quoting Manto’s story *Toba Tek Singh*. Similarly, this question of rationality is at the heart of Kidwai’s discourse, notably regarding the recovery of abducted women.

Montage and metaphors as a testimony

As Pandey writes, emotion is a device that is commonly used by literature and film to convey the great human tragedies and to design a popular History that is too often left aside by historians. Everyone has in mind the visual or poetic strategies and the imaginary associations elaborated by fiction or cinema to allow the reader/spectator to experience in some way the tragic destiny of refugees, of separated families, of the victims of collective tragedies. The analysis of images as an emotional vehicle of history is at the heart of Georges Didi-Huberman's seminal work, and notably in the last volume in his series *The Eye of History* (*L’Oeil de l’histoire*), entitled *Peoples in Tears, Peoples In arms* (*Peuples en larmes, peuples en larmes*, 2016), in which one immediately identifies the close articulation between emotion and historical narrative. Analyzing Serguei Eisenstein’s films, and more specifically *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) which portrays the Russian Revolution of 1905, Georges Didi-Huberman shows the way the use of “montage” (editing) allows the viewer to "reach the pathetic through movement" (235), as he writes, quoting Eisenstein himself. "Tragedy," Didi-Huberman writes, "is possible in cinema because images themselves are gifted with pathos, can fraternize together and lift together, and this is what we call editing". For Eisenstein, Didi-Huberman argues, "the historical facts never go without concomitant social affects that can be supported only by formal editing specifically built for this: the pathos of the event is strengthened, multiplied by the pathetic construction." He concludes that editing is not the

²¹ Pandey 215, 214.

negation of the phenomenon, but on the contrary "the best method to make it sensitive, recognize and promote it."²²

In her article "Transactions in the Construction of Pain" (1996), Veena Das also underlines the way editing strategies can be used to formulate what history does not tell. Referring to *Fundanen*, a story written by Saadat Hasan Manto in the aftermath of Partition, she shows that metaphors can be used to express the unspeakable of both violence and the effects of violence. In this story, a woman sitting in front of her mirror draws incoherent sketches on her body that accompany incoherent speech: both language and images fail to capture the reality of violence, but the scene itself as a metaphor of this violence can formulate an intimate history of Partition. As Veena Das writes in the conclusive section of this fascinating article:

It was on the register of the imaginary that the question of what could constitute the passion of those who occupied this unspeakable and unheard zone was given shape. The zone between the two deaths that the women had to occupy did not permit of any speech, for what "right" words could be spoken against the wrong that had been done them.²³

She thus skillfully justifies the use of metaphors as the only appropriate language to tell both violence and the experience of violence. The metaphor becomes an efficient historiographical device which validates and draws on fiction and "poetics" as a vehicle of an historical experience – something historians' history does not allow.

Similarly, Partition's violence in Amrita Pritam's *Pinjar* is mainly expressed through images and comparisons. Like in Manto's story, these images bear witness to the internalization of suffering in the female body which, in Amrita Pritam's words, has become the paper on which the History of the nation is written. *Pinjar* tells the tragic story of Pooro, a young Hindu woman who were abducted few years before Partition and then forcibly married to a Muslim boy as a result vendetta between their families. Throughout its heartbreaking narrative, the novel follows the tragic story of Punjab's women told to Pooro by the victims themselves: Kammo, an orphan exploited by her aunt; Taro, married by her parents to a man who is already married to another woman; the "Mad Woman", who dies in childbirth and whose baby is adopted by Pooro; a young Hindu girl, who has been victim of multiple rapes during Partition riots; and Lajo, Pooro's brother's wife, who has been abducted and then saved by Pooro, who manages to bring her back to her family. At the end of the novel, Pooro

²² (236).

²³ Das 1996: 87.

defies the national and religious boundaries: whereas she has been “found” by her Hindu family, she decides to stay in Pakistan with her husband, her abductor, and the novel ends with the following words pronounced by Pooro: “Whether one is a Hindu girl or a Muslim one, whosoever reaches her destination, she carries along my soul also”.

The expression of pain accompanies Pooro’s story with a series of metaphors that makes the female body a place of both suffering and disgust, two intense emotions that govern the novel. For instance, Pooro perceives and experiences her pregnancy as an unbearable event, comparing her fetus to a worm inside a rotten fruit:

If only she could take the worm out of her womb and fling it away! Pick it out with her nails as if it were a thorn, pluck it off as if it were a maggot or a leech! (1)

This section follows another where, peeling beans, Pooro suddenly finds a worm on her finger. Disgusted by this worm, she shakes her hand to get rid of it and then presses her hands on her heart. The feeling of disgust is thus internalized and embodied in Pooro’s unborn child (alternately compared to a thorn, a leech, a maggot) and her own body carrying this child, as the “result” of her forced marriage to her abductor.

Similarly, the rise of violence is experienced by Pooro as an intimate experience, in another sequence:

Thus passed August 15 of the year 1947 (...) In Gujrat district, the Hindus in the villages next to their began to flee. They left their cows tethered; their buffaloes lowed piteously. Their homes and fields became the haunt of ghosts. They fled during the night, but some were discovered and killed before they could get very far; others were found murdered many miles away.

Then it began in her own village. The Hindus moved into one home for safety. They hoarded grain and provisions in the courtyard and no man or woman stirred out. They were like animals in a cage. Only the Muslim roamed about free. They broke into the homes of the Hindus and occupied them (...) Pooro’s village looked deserted. The only non-Muslim left in it were the three charred corpses in the street. In two days, the crows and pie-dogs had torn away the flesh. Only the skeletons remained in front of the burnt-down house.

That was not all. Pooro felt like one threw glass splinters in her eyes. She saw a band of a dozen or more goodas pushing a young girl before them. She had not a stitch of clothing on her person. The goondas beat drums and danced about the naked girl. Pooro could not find out where they came from and where there were going. It was a sin to be alive in a world so full of evil, thought Pooro. It was a crime to be born a girl.²⁴

Here, emotions arise from the internalization of violence and pain. The section opens with a number of referential elements: a precise date (15 August 1947), a precise place (Gujrat district), precise elements belonging to the collective imaginary of Partition (“the Hindus in

²⁴ (85-86)

the villages next to their began to flee”; “They left their cows tethered”; “Others were found murdered many miles away”). In the second section, the space is gradually reduced to Pooro’s village (“In her own village”), and violence is replaced by fear and threat (“They were like animals in a cage”; They broke into the homes of the Hindus and occupied them”), in other words a more subjective expression of violence. Moreover, fear and threat are accompanied by a series of images that aim at amplifying them: the deserted village, the crows and the pye dogs as necrophagous animals, the skeleton. Starting with the expression “That was not all”, the third section seems to announce the paroxysm of violence, but interestingly, this violence is metaphoric and concerns Pooro’s body: pain as unbearable in the narrative of Partition’s violence is internalized (“Pooro felt like one threw glass splinters in her eyes”), and gives rise to a feeling of guilt and shame (“It was a crime to be born a girl”), which intensifies violence. In order to tell the History of the margins of Partition, Amrita Pritam who, as we know, felt concerned for both the tragic destiny of Punjab overall and the equally tragic condition of women during Partition, promotes a language of the margins: the rhetorics of emotions, metaphors, and allegories.²⁶ In other words, this is a language that does not partake in the scientific rhetoric of history, but in the literary rhetoric of fiction.

Anis Kidwai: Partition, self-narrative and emotions

In a different vein altogether, Anis Kidwai’s memoirs appear to provide a detailed account of historical events with a large amount of referential information. Her work, however, combines a referential narrative with an intimate exploration and the spontaneous expression of emotions, as if the latter might allow her to retrieve the "truth" of history. This "truth" has received considerable reconsideration: a range of theorists have proposed that History acts as a narrative based on a regime of fictionalization.²⁸ Jenkins proposes, in *Re-Thinking History*, that "History is a discourse, a language game: within it “truth” and similar expressions are devices to open, regulate and shut down interpretation... such truths are really “useful fictions” that are in discourse by virtue of power (somebody has to put and keep them there) and power uses the term “truth” to exercise control: the regimes of truth.”²⁹ This has a direct relevance to the representation of partition, where Pandey has argued that the historian’s

²⁶ See notably her well-known poem “Aaj Aakhan Waris Shaah nu” (“Today I call Waris Shah”) where, addressing the Punjabi poet Waris Shah, she refers to “the millions daughters of Punjab” (Pritam 1998).

²⁸ Ricoeur’s *Histoire et vérité* (2001), Paul Veyne’s *Comment on écrit l’Histoire?* (1974) and Hayden White’s *Metahistory* (1973),

²⁹ (Jenkins 1991: 32).

history of Partition “works to produce the ‘Truth’ of the [...] violence of Partition and to elide it at the same time.”³⁰ The “truth” of Kidwai’s work, therefore, is found elsewhere.

Whereas Kidwai’s narrative is an historical account, it nevertheless doesn’t follow a protocol of objectivity. As a matter of fact, in the English translation, the first chapter is entitled: “I gather once again the pieces of my shattered heart”. On the sidelines of referential information, the narrative bears witness to the anxiety of both the Indian people facing Partition, and the author herself, the husband of whom, a local administrator based in Mussorie, bravely remained there in the midst of fire and blood. The intimate frame therefore mingles with the historical account, until Anis’s husband’s death at the end of the chapter, which, as we understand, is the triggering event of her commitment to the movement led by Gandhi, as she recalls on a passionate mode:

Now, when everything was over, my shattered heart imploded. For a moment, I was ablaze in a passion for vengeance but soon I regained control. Where thousands have lost their lives, he was just one. Was it not solace enough that he had died unsullied? He did not take another’s life; he didn’t not commit cruelty; he was not responsible for the destruction of another. Whatever God and faith asked of him, he submitted; whatever his dues in service of humanity, he settled” (16).

She thus describes both collective feelings, with a “we” that alternately refers to the people of the new Indian Nation and to the Muslim community (“anxieties and tribulations” of the Indian people, 1; “anger mounted in our hearts”, 4; “we were happy”, 4), and personal feelings (“My heart would clutch with foreboding”, 3 ; “Lifted my head with pride”, 5; “I went searching for happiness”, 6 ; “This was too painful”, 6; “Anxiety about Mussorie consumed me”, 9 ; “Whenever I think about those times, I want to take my own life”, 11; “I tried unsuccessfully to quieten my anxious heart”, 15; “The wound in my heart would fester forever”, 16; “The sorrow of my life”, 18). Conditioned by this first chapter, the whole narrative is overwhelming because of the dual nature (both collective and individual) of the tragedy that Anis Kidwai narrates: she successively evokes feeling such as deep sadness, despair, doubt, shame, but also pity, joy, wonderment, hope, empathy and even love. She thus writes as a conclusion: “I had a heart that could feel” (288).

If, unlike Amrita Pritam, Anis Kidwai does not use metaphors, the expression of emotions circulates through emphatic expressions and participates in the development of the historical

³⁰ (Pandey 2001: 45).

narrative. Besides, these emotions are accompanied, even nurtured, by numerous quotations of poems (Mirza Ghalib, Mohammad Iqbal, Hafiz Shirazi, etc.), that emphasize them:

Charming young men with innocent faces left schools and colleges in search of matchsticks, kerosene, bricks and knives, as amassing these was more important than seeking knowledge. And then,

*ghar jala saamne,
aur ham-se bujhaya na gaya*
The house was ablaze before our eyes
But we could not douse the flames

Mirza Ghalib

This was the India of 1947-48, and it is a portrait of this I wish to sketch for you. But not because I want readers to gaze upon these scenes in horrified fascination, but because:

*taaza khwaahi dashtan gar daagh haye seena ra
gaahe gaahe baaz khwan en qissa-e-pareena ra*
If you wish the scars in your heart to remain fresh
Then, from time to time, revisit this old tale afresh.

Maulana Mohammad Ayyub Surti Qasmi in
Muqqadamah Tarikh-e-Gujarat

These quotations certainly reflect a wish to literarize the historical account, but also to penetrate and touch the collective imaginary of Urdu speakers and, as Anis Kidwai writes, to provoke or share emotions with the reader through the reference to a very popular heritage that promotes feelings and affects. The rhetoric of emotions, whether collective or individual, reflects Anis Kidwai's willingness to build an alternative history of Partition.

A subaltern language

This alternative narrative of the history of Partition, as inhabited by emotions, can be perceived as women's sociolect as actors of history and not as mere objects. The rhetoric of intimacy and inner suffering shouldn't be understood as an essential characteristic of female discourse, but rather as an attempt to narrate Partition through the *experience* of Partition which, for women, was the experience of pain.³² If, for historians of women such as Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, the goal is to "restore women to history and to restore our History to women", as they write quoting Joan Kelly, they also aim to show that this experience is specific and differs from men's, as women had to accommodate both a real and symbolic violence of major scale, as shown by women's massive abductions and recovery campaigns.³³

³² As it has been done in the 1970-1980, in the field of Women Studies. See notably Cixous (1975) and Didier (1981).

³³ (Bhasin and Menon 1998: 9),

In this regard, this episode, highlighted by both Amrita Pritam and Anis Kidwai, strikingly bears witness to the exploitation, reification and commodification of female bodies, and of the appropriation of female voices and stories.

A subaltern narrative is thus constructed by means of an autonomous subaltern language, which stems from the minorization of an experience in history. The reappropriation of a stigma (pain) as a federative pattern in order to articulate contestation results from what Gyanendra Pandey identified as a strategy for drawing on difference as a motive of oppression, the very one adopted by Dalit, Queer or “Negritude” movements, for example, where the denomination itself of the group itself bears witness to this oppression:

This is not a *politics* that flows from cultural difference (somehow already constituted), but rather a culture that flows from political difference – and an alternative political perspective. Consider the political claim that inheres in the very act of naming a political assemblage as ‘dalit’, ‘black’, ‘African American’, *adivasi*, aboriginal, First Nation, ‘gay’, ‘lesbian’ (not to mention LGBTQ), and for that matter even ‘women’. What this signals is the history and politics of a *becoming* ; and with that, the search of an ethics – a position from which to act without fear, to demand one’s right, to live.³⁴

The stigma thus allows a subaltern language and culture to be deployed. For Pandey, this reappropriation is of course undertaken through political mobilization and the constitution of a social group on the basis of the denunciation of oppression, which was not the case for abducted and/or raped women during Partition. It remains, however, that the narrative of oppression is undertaken by these women, as it is undertaken in Dalit poetry for example, by highlighting both oppression and the pain that it causes, which becomes at the heart of a rhetorics and a language of the oppressed. Interestingly, as Pandey shows, emotion and experience are located at the heart of this discourse and this language, and their formulation is perceived as an *appropriate*, relevant language to narrate the History of women during Partition.

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³⁴ (Pandey 2011: 16-17).

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