Divesting the Picturesque:

Bourke-White's Partition Photographs from Above

A thesis

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Abstract

In 1947-48, while on assignment for *Life* magazine, the American photojournalist Margaret Bourke-White documented the displacement and mass-migration of Partition refugees in India. Within art historical scholarship, discussion of these photographs remains limited to biographical analysis of the groundbreaking photographer. This thesis intervenes in this historical marginalization of the artist and her work by examining the photographs in a relation to the political and literary context of *Halfway to Freedom,* Bourke-White's 243-page report on the state of India. An investigation of the foreign narrator's role in the construction of a knowable landscape in *Halfway to Freedom* and E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India*, suggests that a dialogue with the colonial picturesque aesthetic offers an alternative view of a peripheral India, independent from European frameworks, and creates a space in which the subaltern subject may speak. In words and photographs, Bourke-White describes an anti-picturesque India seen from above.

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List of Figures

1. *Russia*, 1930, *For All the World to See*.**
2. *Buchenwald*, 1945 *For All*.
3. "How strong must a man be?" *Halfway to Freedom*, 1949.
4. "How strong must a man be?" *Halfway*.
5. "Atop the Chrysler Building," 1929, *For All*.
6. "The caravans had an Old Testament quality," *Halfway*.
7. *Taj Majal from the Gardens*, Agra, 1858-62.
8. *Taj Mahal from the Riverside with Ruins, Agra,* 1855-58.
9. "The future, as always, belonged to the young." *Halfway*.
10. "Sub-slums," *Halfway*.
11. "Praying for a child," *Halfway.*
12. "Rosenbaum Grain Elevator," Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.
13. "Debris in the wake of migration," *Halfway*.
14. "Cholera Hospital," and "Sher Shah's mosque," *Halfway*.
15. "A Sikh family," *Halfway*.
16. "Loyalist solider killed while stringing telephone lines," 1937.
17. "Purdah Carriage," *Halfway*.
18. "On the road from Tarragona to Barcelona" 1939, *Capa.*
19. "Madrid, Winter," 1937, *Capa.*
20. "Mountbatten among the jubilant crowds," 1947, *India in Focus*.
21. "With no wide angle lens in those days," 1947, *India in Focus*.
22. *Ocean Beach*, California, 1952*, TimeLife* Online Archive.

23. *Farm Workers*, Burbank, California, 1952, *TimeLife* Online Archive.

24. "The Spinner," *Halfway*.

25. "Kashmir," *Halfway*.

**Due to copyright law, the Bourke-White, Vyarawalla, and Capa photographs could not not be reprinted in this thesis. This list of figures, in combination with the thesis bibliography, would allow readers to locate the referenced images.

Chapter 1

Introduction……………………………………………………………………………………..1

State of the Research…………………………………………………………………………..4

Partition as Historical Trauma…………………………………………………………….7

Defining Practice as Distinct from Biography…………………………………….…10

Chapter 2

The British in India: Constructing the Landscape of the Subaltern…………..…11

Colonial and Barely Post-Colonial:

The Persistence of the "Eastern Clime"……………………………………….15

The Picturesque Viewing Tradition………..…………………………………………...17

The Unpeopled Landscape and Social Power……………………………………...21

Chapter 3

The Aerial Motif and the Photojournalist……………………………………………22

Humanizing the Elevated View….……………………………………………………..23

The American Material: A Comparison of the Figure in its Landscape……….27

A Report with Embedded Stories……………………………………………………….29

The Aerial Narrator Refuses the Picturesque…………………………..……….…32

How Anti-picturesque?..36

Working in Reference to American Documentary Practice……………………...39

Homai Vyarawalla: The Native Documenter…………………………..……...……45

Chapter 4

Aerial Mapping: A History in Views……………………………..…………………..…48

Abstraction in India and Other Photographs…………………………………………50

After Documentation: The Value of "Beautiful Suffering"……………………….....51

Train to Pakistan and the Subaltern Narrator……………………………..…………53

Human Ruins, Documenting Societal Suffering…………………………………..……60

Conclusion

The Modern Aerial Narrator, Viewing from Above and Below…………………..….61

"Partition defamiliarized the everyday; even if much in Delhi was the same as in Rawalpindi, what had changed utterly was the familiar relation between self and society."[1]

Introduction

In *Halfway to Freedom*, the linking of Margaret Bourke-White's Partition photographs to a narrative with embedded storytelling encourages communicability between an American audience and her Indian subjects through the introduction of picturesque passages. These stories position Bourke-White as the potentially-picturesque subject, a role historically reserved for the Indian figure, and invoke an accepted mode for viewing and understanding the foreign landscape that is denied in her photographs. Picturesque passages, as concessions to the foreign reader, contribute to the persisting cultural currency of Bourke-White's narrative. In her photographs the placement of the Indian figures, the introduction of an anticipated death motif, and the portrayal of the native architecture propose a landscape in which the relationship between self and society is uncertain. Thus, visual instability introduces the viewer to the peripheral space of the refugee subjects; a space defined by the individual subaltern stories of post-colonial India.

As one of the first photojournalists at *Life* magazine Bourke-White, lent her American audience visual access to landmark world events. In 1930,

[1] Suvir Kaul. Introduction, *The Partitions of Memory*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001) 6.

she was the first foreign photographer to document Russian Soviet-era industry. [Figure 1] At the end of WWII, she entered Buchenwald with the Allied army and photographed survivors of the Holocaust. [Figure 2] In 1946-7 she documented the trauma, uncertainty, and suffering of Partition in India. [Figures 3, 4] Her *Life* article "The Great Migration" led: "The scope of the Indian migration, as well as its hardships, is almost beyond imagination. It involves as many people as if all the residents of San Francisco began moving to Los Angeles at the same time that all the Los Angeles residents started out for San Francisco."[2] [Figure 5] With this report, Bourke-White documented India's fraught movement into modern independence and nationhood after the end of the British Raj. When viewed by an international audience, these images had the potential to inspire a sense of common humanity between an international audience and the Indian subject or divorced observation of a moment of madness in a foreign nation. The recent use of these photographs to illustrate the novel *Train to Pakistan*, by Indian author Kushwhat Singh, underlines the persisting visual and cultural power of these photographs and challenges their marginalization as photojournalistic ephemera.

In addition to the *Life* photo assignment, Bourke-White published a 243-page report on the state of the nation, entitled *Halfway to Freedom.* This report combines first-person narration with socio-political analysis of Partition and is illustrated by her photographs. While some post-colonial leaders envisioned Independence as a time of national unity, it rendered

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[2] Margaret Bourke-White, *"Great Migration," Life (Nov. 3, 1947) 123*.

ethnic, social, and geographic divisions more apparent. Crowds met to rejoice in the capital of New Delhi, and at the same time, intercommunal conflicts between Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs escalated into mass violence and migration throughout the country.[3]

My thesis explores how Bourke-White's photographs divest the colonial picturesque aesthetic and offer culturally transcendent images of the individual realities of life during Partition. The readability of these photographs may be best understood in reference to contemporary redefinitions of gender spheres, social spaces, and viewing frameworks. These photographs and their accompanying narrative contain picturesque and abstract moments; *Halfway to Freedom* begins: "High on the snow-ribbed northern rim of the Indian peninsula in a tiny and antique principality charmingly named the State of Swat."[4] But this invocation of a picturesque landscape and condescending, if admiring, narrative tone proves merely a nod to a picturesque, colonial aesthetic, a medium for constructing a knowable national geography. Bourke-White's photographs continue the motif of the elevated view and by documenting the space of the refugee, add the peripheral space of the subaltern to the postcolonial landscape. This space, absent from the patriarchal master-narratives of Indian history written by the British and partially reified by the post-colonial Indian

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[3] Tarun K. Saint, *Witnessing Partition: Memory, History, Fiction*, (Routle

[4] Bourke-White, *Halfway to Freedom* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1949) ix.

cultural elite, offers an image of India viewed from above and written from below.

State of the Research

While a limited number of scholarly books address Bourke-White, the discussion of her 1947 assignment in India is limited to a summary in the *TimeLife* online archive. The existing research consists primarily of artist monographs about Bourke-White's varied and groundbreaking career as a photojournalist. In these sweeping biographical works the authors; Viki Goldberg, Theodore M. Brown, and Sean Callahan; summarize the artist's life achievements, comment on her good looks, or emphasize the glamorous aura of this camera-carrying globetrotter. The more recent book, *Margaret Bourke-White: The Photography of Design, 1927-1936,* investigates the artist's "evocative abstract photographs of American industry and architecture."[5] These discussions attest to the ease with which scholars may transform an analysis of photography into a discussion of aspects that surround the image and contribute to its formation but do not represent visual analysis.[6] As Roland Barthes argues, commonly occurs because the referent, or what is represented, adheres to the photograph, they are one and the same: "And this singular adherence makes it difficult to focus on Photography. The books which deal with it, much less numerous moreover than for any other art, are

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[5] Stephen Benett Phillips, *Margaret Bourke-White: The Photography of Design, 1927-1936* (Washington, D.C.: Phillips Collection, 2003).
[6] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (Paris: Editions du Seuill, 1980) 6.

victims of this difficulty."[7] The adherence of the referent, proves especially challenging to analysis in the case of the documentary photographs which purports to represent a past event as historical "fact". As one critic stated in 1938, "A picture can often tell more than thousands of words, and a picture made by photography implies by its method of production a basis of fact. All know that such an implication is untrue, but everyone accepts the photograph as the pictorial evidence of an eye-witness—the cameraman."[8] Bourke-White worked roughly a century after the invention of photography, in 1839, and immediately, following the Farm Security Administration's national documentary project of 1935-44. The FSA photographers believed in their ability to capture the realities of life in impoverished rural communities and more specifically, to represent the trauma associated with poverty.[9] Under the supervision of Erskin Caldwell, Bourke-White conducted a similar photographic project, *You Have Seen Their Faces*? on the rural American South in 1937. In its documentation of marginalized refugee communities in India, *Halfway* represents a similar project on an international scale. In these photographs, an emphasis on trauma is qualified by Bourke-White's attempt to render the foreign India landscape accessible to an American audience without objectifying Indian figure and thus, engaging in a post-colonial equivalent of the picturesque aesthetic.

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[7] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 6.

[8] Beaumont Newhall. "Documentary Approach to Photography," (Mar., 1938) 2.

[9] Eric Rosenberg, "With Trauma: Walker Evans and the Failure to Document" in *Trauma and Documentary Photography of the FSA* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

Like her subaltern subjects, Bourke-White occupies a peripheral position within art historical research. The emphasis on biography in the existing Bourke-White scholarship is a legacy of a male-dominated narrative of art history that remained largely uncontested until the work of feminist art historians in the 1970s. Critics such as Griselda Pollack, Ann Wagner, and Shoshana Felman have demonstrated how an emphasis upon the biography of the female artist subsumes an independent artistic identity within the patriarchal societal norms.[10] This approach marginalizes the female artist, who like the female subject within art history, has often been afforded only objectifying allegorical and symbolic iterations. I wish to suggest that fact that Bourke-White was a woman represents an index of difference within her art that contributes to her sympathetic and non-objectifying portrayal of the Indian landscape.[11] As an American woman in India in 1947, Bourke-White's gender influenced her reception by the Indian people and furthermore, indirectly influenced the portrayal of the refugees in her photographs who respond to novelty of a climbing camerawoman. As a recent scholar argues, "It is harder for a woman than a man to start something but once she gets

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[10] "To identify an artist in this way [as a woman] has never been merely a parenthetical remark. The qualification has customarily been offered as a limit to, rather than a guarantee of, sustainability of the artist's role—with mostly irritating results for the artists themselves." Ann Wagner, "Sex Difference," in *Three Artists, (Three Women)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998) 2.
Griselda Pollack, *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism, and Histories of Art* (New York: Routledge, 1988).
Shoshana Felman, *What Does a Woman Want?: Reading and Sexual Difference* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1993).
[11] Ann Wagner discusses female gender as an index of difference in *Three Artists: (Three Women)* (Berkeley, University of California Press:

started she has an easier time because her accomplishments attract more attention than a man's would."[12] Bourke-White's accomplishments attracted attention during their time—they were spectacles for *Life* readers—but their continual cultural currency must be demonstrated within their accompanying narrative, historical, and art historical context.

Partition as Historical Trauma

Largely excluded from Indian national history until the 1990s, Partition continues to represent a trauma through its partial absence.[13] Remembering and recording the stories of Partition can contribute to a national recovery from this period of mass-migration, suffering, and cultural conflict. The sheer number of individual histories that must be recorded represents one challenge to this project: "People travelled in buses, in cars, by train but mostly on foot in great columns called kafilas, which would stretch for dozens of miles. The longest of the them, said to comprise nearly 400,00 people, refugees travelling east to India from western Punjab, took as many as eight days to pass any given spot on its route."[14] Until recently, historians have focused Partition research on the Punjab region, where Bourke-White was on assignment, because its location at the border of India and the newly-formed Pakistan made it the region with the heaviest refugee traffic. Migration, however, occurred throughout the nation. In "The Parting

[12] Catherine A. Welch. *Margaret Bourke-White*, (Los Angeles: Twenty-First Century Books, 1998) 1.
[13] Scholars such as Susan Sontag, Roland Barthes, and Virginia Woolf have identified trauma as characterized by a hole or absence.
[14] Butalia, Urvashi. *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000). Online, 3.

of Ways" G. D. Khosla identifies Partition as a period of fifteen months starting on August 16, 1946. He comments: "Riots in the Punjab were seldom handled with tact or imagination, and the indifference or incompetence of British officials in dealing with communal disturbances was frequently ascribed to the policy of divide and rule." Partition was a solution proposed by post-colonial leaders and approved by both the British and the new Indian government and it can be distinguished from other forms territorial change in "by the fact that they involve the modification and transformation of borders rather than just their adjustment."[15] Scholars have argued that the impact of Western thought and civilization in the first half of the nineteenth century awakened a political consciousness and sense of frustration within the Indian people.[16] With independence, Indian secretarial leaders harkened back to the ancient Hindu and Muslim cultures in an attempt to define postcolonial communities. This move led to the entrenchment of cultural differences and escalated regional conflicts. Neighborly differences, and simple miscommunications erupted into mass riots and killings and communities formerly peaceful border towns, like Mano Majra in *Train to Pakistan*, became stopovers sites for refugees fleeing their homes in accordance with the spatial categories of the postcolonial map. "There is a perception that partition violence disrupted not only such cyclical patterns of

[15] Ian Talbot and Gurharpal Singh, *The Partition of India* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
[16] Kaushik Roy, *Partition of India, Why 1947?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

traditional life but also modes of modern existence characterized by linear temporality that coexisted with older rhythms."[17]

The personal and conflicting embodiments of this period in which neighbors suddenly became "others" and aggressors are further complicated by the issue of gender. According to historian Rashmi Luthra the abduction and rape of women were leading forms of aggression.[18] In *The Other Side of Silence*, feminist scholar Urvashi Butalia describes how her research of oral histories uncovered the silenced and excluded voices of women and children: "Indeed their oral histories, particularly those of women, bring home to us not only the gender-biases of public policy then (and now), but the complicity of most official and nationalist historiography in perpetuating such bias."[19] She argues that a reincorporation of these missing accounts should define postcolonial period as much as the nationalism rhetoric of nation building. In another approach, Tarun K. Saint has studied the representational techniques and formal innovations of modes of witnessing and remembering in Partition literature of India and Pakistan. He identifies Hindu, Urdu, and Punjabi novels and short stories as 'fictive' testimonies that "as paradoxical mode of truth-telling that may achieve a resonance beyond the immediate context of suffering and trauma to which the writer bear

[17] Tarun K. Saint. "Negotiating the Effects of Historical Trauma," in *Witnessing Partition* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2010).
[18] Rashmi Luthra. "Unmasking Nation/Rewriting Home: Gendered Narratives of Partition and its Aftermath" *Communication, Culture, and Critique* (MI: University of Michigan, 2008).
[19] Butalia, Urvashi. *The Other Side of Silence: Voices from the Partition of India* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000). Online, 4.

witness."[20] Finding a mode to tell the truth of Partition remains a pressing contemporary issue. In 2001, following the 1998 nuclear blasts exchanged between India and Pakistan, Suvir Kaul argued that these aggressions represented "a bubbling up" of the "the knowledge of the enormities of Partition" systematically repressed into the Indian political unconscious."[21] Bourke-White's photographs contribute to this process of recovery by documenting the trauma in a medium that like the novel or short story presents the "fictive testimony" of the narrator through the selection of photographic angle, historical referencing, and treatment of subject.

Defining Practice as Distinct from Biography

Before documenting the reality of the life at the borders of India, Bourke-White contended with her own categorization, and potential marginalization, as a woman artist in the mid-twentieth century art world. Gender norms contributed to the personal narrative that accompanied her photo stories. Bourke-White's contemporary appeal lay in the novelty of a woman who would brave all conditions for a timely or novel shot. A feature article on the artist in the *New York Sun* proclaimed "Dizzy Heights Have No Terror for This Girl Photographer, Who Braves Numerous Perils to Film the Beauty of Iron and Steel."[22] [Figure 5] Alfred Eisenstaedt, a colleague at *Life*, described her in similarly, gender-loaded terms in the preface to a biography written after her death:

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[20] Saint. *Witnessing Partition*, 3.
[21] Suvir Kaul, Introduction to *The Partitions of Memory*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press: 2001) 3.
[22] Silverman, *For the World to See*, 6.

> "Maggie was vivacious, articulate, and very charming. She was also enormously attractive. But most of all, she was fully dedicated to her work. She was married to her cameras. No assignment was too small for her. If she had been asked to photograph a bread crumb at five-thirty in the morning, she would have arrived for the session at five."[23]

Bourke-White's "marriage" to her cameras, like her two failed marriages, proves less singly summarized from a non-male perspective that considers this art apart from the biography of its maker. My intervention, and attempt to distance the artist from her biography, is complicated by her written reports *Eyes On Russia*, *North of the Danube*, and *Halfway to Freedom* which some might argue closely link the photojournalist to her biography. I wish to suggests, however, that the combination of personal anecdotes and political commentary in *Halfway* contributes to the presentation hopeful future for India. In an attempt to discover the way a foreign narrator conceives of the landscape of a country and its people, I investigate Bourke-White's work in relation to E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India*.

The British in India: Constructing the Landscape of the Subaltern

In order to understand the way in which Bourke-Whites photographs challenged the historical framework for visualizing India, it is useful to examine the existing English tradition for understanding the country. With emancipation the country gained creative control of the construction of its national identity and history. While still a colonial possession and governed

[23] Silverman, *For the World to See,* opening letter.

by people who maintained a colonial British outlook, the country would always be envisioned as closely tied to the past; an antique "other". India's elements of the past intrigued even the most progressive English minds including the author E. M. Forster who spent a total of three years, living in India and working as a private secretary to the Maharaja of the state of Dewas Senior.[24] Writing in the 1920s, more than half a century after the institution of the British Raj, Forster witnessed the tenuous social and political environment of British rule following the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 and the Amritsar Massacre of 1919. The British historian Thomas Crane proposes that the literature of the early colonial period, the "Era of Confidence," adopts a positive tone in the portrayal of colonial relations. Forster, who composed *A Passage to India* upon his return to England in 1922, wrote during a less optimistic "Era of Doubt" in which the limits of the potential to assimilate India and British culture were recognized.

In the fictional narrative, the narrator continually comments upon the antique qualities of the nation and the confrontation between medieval and colonial elements. By dividing his novel into sections entitled: "Mosque," "Cave," and "Temple", Forster intimates the centrality of physical environment to the description of colonial India by a British author. This neat tripartite division mirrors the colonizer's impulse to render the Indian landscape identifiable, understandable, and controllable through historical building projects like the construction of a system of railways, government

[24] For an account of Forster's time in India from 1912-1913 and 1921 see: Forster, The Hills of Devi, 1953.

colleges, and law courts during the 1870s and the movement of the capital city from Calcutta to New Delhi in 1911.[25]

On a less physical level, the British attempted to gain a psychological grasp upon the foreign landscape and its people through the construction of a relatable history of India. While the British likened themselves to the Romans during the early colonial period, they proposed a closer link to the country and its history through identification with the last great Indian emperors, the Mughals.

> "Officials never hesitated to compare Britain's role in India with that of Rome in its eastern territories. But in India after the Mutiny the British began to construct for themselves a notion of empire in which they were not mere foreign conquerors, like the Romans, but legitimate, almost indigenous rulers, linked directly to the Mughals and hence to India's own past." [26]

British historians identified the sixteenth century reign of the Mughal emperor Akbar, a period of both cultural and political power, as a "golden age" of "pristine purity."[27] The arches and domes, characteristic of the Mughal period architecture, held visual resonances with the churches and public buildings of the early Christian empires of Rome and Byzantium as well as Renaissance Italy and thus, provided an apt visual reinforcement of

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[25] Thomas R. Metcalf. *An Imperial Vision*: Indian Architecture and Britain's Raj, "Indo-Saracenic Building Under the Raj." (Berkeley, Ca.: University of California Press, 1989) 55.
[26] Metcalf, *An Imperial Vision*, 56.
[27] Metcalf, 26.

Indian and Western imperial aesthetic similitude. The Governor of Madras Lord Napier argued: "the Government of India would "do well to consider whether the Mussulman [Muslim] form might not be adopted generally as the official style of architecture."[28] Indeed, the British adopted this architectural style, which they christened Saracenic, and deployed in the construction of numerous public buildings in New Delhi.

Despite this rhetoric of a bygone "Golden Age", the Indian renaissance might never rival its European counterpart according to the late-Victorian understanding of non-Western art and architecture. In 1870, James Fergusson wrote in *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture*, the first British history of Indian architecture, "It cannot of course be for one moment contended that India ever reached the intellectual supremacy of Greece, or the moral greatness of Rome."[29] The author more specifically argues that while Indian buildings, "display an exuberance of fancy, a lavishness of labour, and an elaboration of detail to be found nowhere else. They contain nothing so sublime as the hall at Karnac, nothing so intellectual as the Parthenon, nor so constructively grand as a medieval cathedral." The assumed "supremacy" of the architectural splendors of the Egyptian, Greek, and European civilizations espouses the Eurocentric perspective, which guided the colonial project from the institution of literary studies in India in the nineteenth-century to the final architectural designs of New Delhi in the beginning of the twentieth-century. Just as the British chose to establish a

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[28]Metcalf, 29.
[29] Metcalf, 26.

literary canon of solely European texts, so also they employed only European architects and thus, created little social, intellectual, or political space for the growing educated Indian elite within the new capital city.[30] Thus, the British constructed a historical landscape understandable in European terms and ultimately defined the topography of problematic intercultural and colonial relations. In the postcolonial period, the colonial categorization of Indian culture and its people as subalterns, or of inferior status, would continue to influence the narrative of Indian history.[31] The Indian writer that matures in the British-planned city of New Delhi always writes from a perspective influenced by colonial spatial discriminations and often, in the language of the former colonial rulers. Thus, the postcolonial narrator finds his voice, in part, from the persisting colonial narrative. In Bourke-White's documentary project, a resistance to the imposition of frameworks, whether the visual language of abstraction or the literary classification of genre, enables a vision of India apart from a British-constructed history.

Colonial and Barely Post-Colonial: Persisting Perceptions of the Eastern Clime

To suggest that Bourke-White speaks from a post-race or post-modern perspective, that she conceived of her world without any reference

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[30] Metcalf discusses the differing treatment of colonial architecture in colonial Australia and India and underlines the manner in which the architecture of India further isolated the educated India elite. *Imperial Vision,* 230. For a discussion of the literature studies in colonial India see: Thomas Crane. *Inventing India: A History of India in English-Language Fiction*. (New York: St.Martin's Press, 1992) 2, 20-3.

[31] For a further discussion of the subaltern see Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

to political and social frameworks would ignore the persistence of an underlying western perspective in the United States in the 1940s and 1950s. In *Halfway to Freedom* Bourke-White intimates that India possesses elemental characteristics, apart from the complex social and political situation of Partition, that forestall its movement into modernity. Indeed, the Indian climate nearly confounds her photographing of Gandhi: "The heat and moisture of India had affected all my equipment; nothing seemed to work. I decided to hoard my two remaining flashbulbs, and take a few time exposures. But this I had to abandon when my tripod "froze" with one leg at its minimum and two at their maximum length."[32] The detail of the tripod legs at once at their shortest and longest suggests that the foreign climate of India interferes with the functioning of the machine, which, if true, would impede industrial modernization. Indeed by 1947, India had undergone agrarian industrialization and experienced setbacks in the form of extensive crop failure in the Punjab region.

In *A Passage to India*, Forster's narrator similarly highlights the resistance of India to modernization in the peripheral region of the Marabar caves and sub-slums of the city of Chandrapore. At times, the persisting 'antique qualities' that forestall modernization are attributed to a more fundamental spatial difference between East and West. The character Fielding expresses the influence of geographic location upon the understanding of space. Upon his return to the West Fielding experiences a

[32] "The Birth of Twin Nations", *Portrait of Myself*, 275.

sense of visual relief in the harmony and legibility of architectural and natural forms:

> "As he landed on the piazzetta a cup of beauty was lifted to his lips, and he drank with a sense of disloyalty. The buildings of Venice, like the mountains of Crete and the fields of Egypt, stood in the right place, whereas in poor India everything was placed wrong. He had forgotten the beauty of form among idol temples and lumpy hills. Indeed, without form, how can there be beauty? Form stammered here and there in a mosque, became rigid through nervousness even, but oh these Italian churches."[33]

The disloyalty Fielding feels in his appreciation for the beauty of the Western architecture underlines his inability to conceive of Western and Eastern architecture as the art of separate artistic traditions that share forms such as arches, domes, and public squares. Fielding's analysis of East and West highlights a lack of architectural poise and a more general sense of confusion of form, "in poor India everything was wrong." At a broader level, Fielding expresses a doubt in the harmony of spatial relationships in India. This investigation of a Eurocentric spatial system has helped me to understand how Bourke-White might approach a similar task.

The Picturesque Viewing Tradition in Colonial India

Before Forster composed *A Passage to India,* the eighteenth-century painter, landscape designer, philosopher, and father of the picturesque,

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[33] Forster, *A Passage to India*, 314.

William Gilpin encourages a selective viewing technique for the traveler in the English, French, and Swiss countryside. According to Gilpin the picturesque "is a frame of mind, an aesthetic attitude involving man in a direct and active relationship with the natural scenery through which he travels."[34] More specifically, the picturesque composition facilitates sensory engagement between the viewer and the scene through the depiction of elements of inherent contrast—light and dark, craggy and smooth, near and distant. The picturesque theory accorded with the existing colonial impulses for exploration, collection and exploitation by offering the practitioner the "many pleasures" which are "accessible through a wide range of associations between individual sensibility and the ever changing panorama of the countryside—for instance the pleasures of seeking, anticipating, finding, examining, comparing, recording, re-creating."[35] Gilpin further counseled artists in the creation of pleasing images: "By all means copy nature's individual 'objects and particular passages' these should fill the artist's notebooks—but avoid reproducing the whole landscape as it lies before your eyes, for that will not make a picture, and certainly not a picture that will please."[36] Thus, the artist of the picturesque is ever mindful to create an image of visual delight for his viewer; a landscape of partial views constructed for the consumption of the colonial eye.

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[34]William Gilpin in *William Gilpin: his Drawings, Teaching, and Theory of the Picturesque* trans. Paul Carl Barbier (Oxford: Claredon Press, 1963) 99.
[35] Gilpin, *Theory of the Picturesque*, 99.
[36] Gilpin, *Theory of the Picturesque*, 106.

In one the picturesque colonial photographs, the Indian figure represents more a visual delight within the landscape scene than the subject of the composition. This viewing tradition endured into the early nineteenth century in the production of picturesque photographs. John Murray, an army doctor, photographed numerous views of the Taj Majal from the banks of the nearby river. In *Taj Mahal from the Riverside, with Ruins, Agra* (1855-8), the Taj Majal appears in the background of the composition and ruins, of another Mughal building, appear in the foreground. [Figures 6, 7] One author underlines the similarity of this view to its European counterparts: "Both the atmospheric composition and the balanced, picturesque backdrop recall German Romantic paintings." [37] In another of Murray's photographs, *The Taj from the Gardens, Agra* (1858-62), trees mostly obscure the architectural structure and only the tops of the domes are visible against the background of the sky. Gadebusch identifies this Indian architectural structure as an approachable symbol within colonial society: "As a monument to love, it became not only the ultimate emblem of Oriental Romanticism, but also a symbol of the cultivated, civilized Orient. The fact that the Taj Mahal rose above a monumentally large garden seemed to enchant especially the most British photographers."[38] By photographing this symbolically defined architectural structure, the British solidified the image of India as an

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[37] Gadebusch, Rafael Dedo. *Picturesque Views: Mughal India in Nineteenth-Century Photography*. Asian Art Museum; National Museums in Berlin, 2008, 10.
[38] Gadebusch, 10.

intriguing exotic, confined within the controlled space of the ornamental garden.

The distancing mechanism of the picturesque mode of viewing also facilitated the introduction of the Indian figure as a present but functionally and socially ambiguous part of the colonial landscape. Seated along the pathway of the garden, the two figures in the Murray photograph appear to be resting. Whether they are captured in a moment of rest while maintaining the garden or simply enjoying the natural scenery, the figures are passive and unproblematic. Their white clothing contrasts with their dark skin and allows for easy identification of the Indian figure. The photographer Samuel Borne complained of the "obstinacy of the natives" and his inability to "get them to stand or sit in an easy, natural attitude." He claimed that the Indian's "idea of giving life to a picture was to stand bolt upright, with their arms down stiff as pokers, their chin turned up as if they were standing to have their throats cut, the consequence was that I had often to leave them out, when I should otherwise have introduced them."[39] This complaint underlines how the colonial photographer required a curated naturalistic image of the subaltern subject in his picturesque photographs. Intent on creating an exportable image of exotic naturalism, he found the Indian figure, if problematic, superfluous to a portrayal of the Indian landscape.

In Bourke-White's photographs, the Indian figure is the subject of the national landscape. The evacuation of the figures from the frames would

[39] Gadebusch, 29.

render them unreadable. In the photojournalist documentation of the division of India, this emphasis on the Indian people may seem inherent to the assignment. Yet, a comparison of Bourke-White's photographs to her Indian contemporary Homai Vyarawalla highlights an alternative approach that situates the refugee and lower-caste Indian subjects firmly outside of the frame. Varaywalla focused her documentation on the transferal of political power in the city centers and thus, geographically and socially peripheral subjects remained undocumented.

The Unpeopled Landscape and Social Power

The mere presence of the native figure within its landscape, however, does not guarantee the empowerment of the subaltern subject. The absence of the picturesque figure can be understood within the specific socio-historical context of English landscape painting. The maintenance of an ideal image of beauty and social harmony through the conception of an idealized social landscape was invoked the nineteenth-century English landscape painter John Constable. This Romantic-era artist painted landscapes of the English countryside from 1809-1821 with the chief concern of depicting the social landscape of rural England. In *The Dark Side of the English Landscape*, John Barrell argues that these scenes maintained the idealized social vision of the English countryside as a productive and harmonious part of the nation at a time of increasing demonstrations of unrest through such events as the peasants riots in East Anglia. Constable maintain this idealized social vision for his elite British patrons by the peasant figures within the composition at a

distance: "It was necessary for him to reduce his figures until they merge insignificantly with the landscape, to distance them, and even when they are in the foreground to paint them as indistinctly as possible, to evade the question of their actuality."[40] Constable forwent the idealization in favor of figural ambiguity. Constable's portrayal of the British peasants figures at work reinforced the ruling elite's conception of the social order of British society. Within the more recently and less-completely envisioned social and historical landscape of India, however, the picturesque photograph chose to divest the Indian figure of any definitive social role. Thus, the artist crafted a native figure that presented little challenge to British rule as its form and social function merged harmoniously with the picturesque scenery.

The Aerial Motif and the Photojournalist

Bourke-White perpetuates a semi-mythic identity established by her American commentators as a "woman of the air" through the introductory framing of *Halfway to Freedom*. This narrative choice parallels her recurring spatial elevation in photographic assignment. The report's first description of the photojournalist on assignment is set at altitude: "At eight hundred feet a prominent peak was still well lighted, and the Wali waited here for me to take his picture." This introduction of herself in a climbing action should not be considered coincidental. Bourke-White attests to her awareness of the novelty of her actions by subsequently detailing her Indian guide's reaction to her assignment: "The soldiers are glad to see that an American woman can

[40] John Barrell, *The Darkside of the Landscape: The rural poor in English Painting 1730-1840*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980. 138.

climb the mountain. They say they are glad to know that American women are so able. Because then they know that American men must be still more able." This statement lays bear the gender relations of the setting in which the artist worked, a setting defined by a masculine master narrative. In her recording of the suffering of the post-colonial, subaltern subject Bourke-White worked against a framework for the viewing the world that outlived the picturesque tradition and similarly, marginalized its subjects. Women would continue to be defined as socially inferior to men, reduced, like the enigmatic silhouette of the Indian figure, to the status of a visual curiosity at the sake of their individuality. At the very least, women, and the artist Bourke-White, would be remembered in terms of a language written by men. Thus, the post-colonial voice of the Indian reaffirms the inferior physical capacities of American women. Within this gender landscape, Bourke-White deploys the visual and narrative motif of "on high" to establish her position above master narratives and to claim a viewpoint within documentary practice that is her own.

Humanizing the Elevated View

The aerial view holds associations with mapping, surveying, and controlling large areas of land. When Bourke-White adopts an elevated viewpoint in India, she forgoes sheer scope of view in favor of a humanizing portrayal of the landscape. [Figure 10] In a photograph captioned, "The future, as always, belonged to the young. A fragment of the vast Muslim refugee camp at Delhi." the body of the first youth and the head of the second

obscure a third of the composition and subsequently, the refugee village below. The rocky outcrop on which two Indian youths sit initially allows the viewer to situate herself within the scene. The boy nearest the viewer sits with his knees tucked, rests his arms on his kneecaps, and holds his head in a gesture of concern. Just to the left of his head appear two mosque domes. This Islamic architecture contrasts with the aqueduct that appears at the right most side of the photograph and presents a visual reference to a colonial infrastructure-building project. These architectural structures represent two of the competing powers in the colonial landscape present. Furthermore, the faint mosque domes allude to a picturesque portrayal of the Indian landscape, which is denied in foreground of the composition by the refugee youths. One appears visually distressed, a victim of trauma while the other looks out directly at the viewer. In order to know the scale of human suffering and displacement below, the viewer must first define their relationship with these youths. Unlike Bourne's Indian models, these youths are captured in a natural, and in the case of the crouching youth, vulnerable pose that situates them outside of any Western frameworks for understanding the Indian landscape. They occupy a position above the post-colonial conflict and thus, offer a hopeful image for the future of the nation. Ultimately, Bourke-White adopts an elevated view but not an aerial attitude—the disconnected observations of a foreigner on a paid mission—toward her subjects. She remains as her colleague Alfred Eisenstaed stated

"greatly concerned with human value" and allows her subjects agency in their visual address to the viewer.

In "Sub-slums" Bourke-White shot a photograph of a lowercaste community from the roof of one of the dwellings. [Figure 11] Identified as chawls in the caption, these liminal spaces of shelter extend from the foreground to the background of the composition. A small space between them functions as a street, where a crowd twists to the high horizon-line and end of the community dwellings. Most of the people, many of whom are young, peer out of the picture frame. Only a few small children such as the two girls in the lower right side of the image appear to be concerned with their own thoughts and activities. The youths may have gathered to view the rare site of a woman "dripping in cameras" atop one of their homes. In the absence of the body of the photojournalist, however, the elevated viewpoint encourages a connection between the viewer and the urban poor.

Some might point out that images of refugees, spatial and psychologically displaced individuals, inherently deny a picturesque aesthetic in which human figure is captured in its endemic setting. Thus, these photographs might be characterized as the impartial documentation of a historical moment in which the movement of refugees came to define the social, political, and physical landscape. Even those who survived migration, found themselves within new communities in which the demand for housing, jobs, and places of worship far outstripped the resources of the post-colonial

city.[41] Thus, the very state of post-colonialism divested the picturesque aesthetic of its relevance and perhaps, also its very potentiality. In "Praying for a Child", however, a potentially picturesque subject—the lone figure amongst partially ruined architecture, demonstrates the potential for the persistence of the picturesque photograph. [Figure 12] The coupling of the ruins with a psychologically present human figure, however, forestalls the requisite removed contemplation of the scene by the viewer and thus, creates an image of an image of an absent picturesque. In the photograph, a woman prays before a fertility tree outside of a Calcutta temple. The tree and the woman encompass just over half of the frame. Three large columns extend from the right side and meet, or perhaps obscure, the body of the tree. The composition enfolds the praying woman. Forehead pressed to the tiled ledge, the woman is dwarfed by the architectural setting. The underlying brickwork peeks through the plaster of the columns and the capital of the middle column is missing half of its abacus. This photograph is the image that most closely parallels the Murray's photograph of the Taj Mahal. But the presence of a praying woman and the caption "praying for a child" divests anonymity requisite for an enjoyment of picturesque ruins. The mosque and its decrepit columns are linked to their social and religious function. The viewer is in the courtyard and too close to enjoy an enigmatic silhouette in a foreign landscape.

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[41] Kaul. Introduction, *The Partitions of Memory*, 6.

The American Material: A Comparison of the Figure in its Landscape

In order to gain a better understanding of Bourke-White's treatment of the subaltern figure its landscape, I viewed seven photographs of American scenes by Bourke-White in the Prints, Drawings, and Photographs collection at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. These photographs can be divided into the categories of early industrial and the socially awareness images. The machine-age photographs include *Backdrops—Theatre Guild* (1935), *Rosenbaum Grain Elevators* (1931), and *The George Washington Bridge* (1933). The social awareness photographs are *Legs, Irons, Hoods Chapel, Georgia* (1937) and *Inside a Southern Corner Store* (1937), both from Bourke-Whites collaborative project with Eskine Caldwell in *You Have Seen Their* Faces and *The American Way of Life* (1937) play different roles in Bourke-White's India photographs and some contemporary images of the US. *Rosenbaum Grain Elevators*, Chicago 1931 offers a view of American industry in which the figure is dwarfed within the industrial landscape. [Figures 8] Here abstraction rules the composition, and the human form possesses a marginal position. The repeated form of the grain columns lends the image a sense of regular backward procession. The columns frame the image. This regular progression converges upon the human figures, their identities remain unknown as they hold a discussion in shadow of the industrial form. The distance, confined to a visible block at the back of the composition also presents a knowable space of multistoried buildings that may be the worker residences. The combination of the machine aesthetic-inspired visual

repetition, the framing, and use of a vanishing point contribute to the portrayal of a controllable work through the use of abstraction. The literary critic Marina Zuyler proposes that the imposition of restrictive frameworks for viewing the world represents a flight from the uncontrollability of everyday life. Piet Mondrian who suffered from agoraphobia "rejected nature because it would never conform to his will or sit still in grid-like immutability" She argues that the "great monomaniacs of world literature"—Cervantes's Don Quixote, Melville's Ahab, and Moliere's Alceste—the authors "introduce us to lives that were radically shaped by a double project: to construct controllable spaces that protect these characters from the full range of life's shocks and disorders, and to find a set of indestructible norms that guarantee that somewhere still lies the promise of permanence."[42]

A Report with Embedded Stories

Halfway to Freedom is "A Report on the New India in the Words and Photographs of Margaret Bourke-White" that combines passages of objective historical analysis with subjective retold experiences and offer a genre-defying narrative. In "The Storyteller" Walter Benjamin investigates the transition of literature to the novel and discusses the rapid process of social change associated with modernization during the Post-WWI period. Benjamin states: "A generation that had gone to school on a horse-drawn streetcar now stood under the open sky in a countryside in which nothing remained unchanged but the clouds, and beneath these clouds, in a field of

[42] Marina van Zuyler, *Monomania: the Flight from Everyday Life in Literature and Art* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2005).

forces of destructive torrents and explosions, was the tiny, fragile human life."[43] These changes contributed to the inefficacy of the storyteller and the introduction of incommunicability into the lives of many people as the landscape came to be defined by the mechanical power instead of human or animal labor. While Benjamin mourns the decline of storytelling within society he concedes that it gives the modern critic "the proper distance and the angle of vision" to analyze the genre and concludes that the novelist is more isolated from the lived experiences than the storyteller. Benjamin states: "When the author of the novel who specializes in the art of narration isolates himself he creates an entirely different product from the story. Apart from life he is thus unable to give counsel; his objective becomes to represent human life in all its 'perplexities.'"[44] In *A Passage to* India, the novelist explores this concern in the irregular and sometimes, awful outcomes of social relationships within the monstrous landscape of the Marabar Caves. As a work that relates recent, traumatic experiences, Bourke-White's account of Partition is unsuited to the isolated perch of the novelist proposed by Benjamin. Constantly interviewing political figures like Gandhi, Nehru, and Stalin, Bourke-White to the removed, contemplative life. On the contrary, social-facility allowed her to gain access to her photographic subjects, in the case of Russia in 1930, this allowed her to first breach the iron curtain and then learn of the location of Stalin's mother and photograph her.

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[43] Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller", 1936, 83.
[44] Benjamin, 83.

Through the recounting of political events and the use of photographs captioned by another reporter, *Halfway to Freedom* offers an largely information-based format which is punctuated by storytelling. Benjamin argues that the introduction of great quantities of information through the media, whether news or advertising, led to the production of content that while valuable in real-time fails to transcend its time like a story. The documentary photograph, stored in archives and reproduced as evidence, purports to hold information about a moment. Yet Bourke-White chose to link this visual information to a report with storytelling moments. The reader revels in the scene of her climbing a Kashmir mountain, feels concerned as she narrowly escapes a flood, and finally, marvels at her successful photographing of challenges of Gandhi in an unlit room. These anecdotes encourage identification and endearment with the protagonist in the foreign clime.

After admitting her relatively poor spinning skills, Bourke-White details her observation of the Gandhi's secretary spinning: "I enjoyed it even more than I had anticipated, for, in the middle of the secretary's demonstration, the spinning wheel fell to pieces. That made me feel better about the machine age."[45] This narrative moment provides little "information" to the reader who has already learned about the social significance and symbolism of Gandhi's spinning wheel. Instead the anecdote encourages a sense of shared experience with the reader. Earlier in this

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[45] Bourke-White *Portrait of Myself,* 278.

chapter, Bourke-White expresses her awe for the simple life of Gandhi and his followers. The aside, "That made me feel better about the machine age," introduces a moral to the story: while the simplicity of the non-mechanical may prove alluring, it is not be abandoned too hastily. Like the invocation of the biblical motif in her description of the refugee caravans, this moment attempts to create a connection with the American reader. Ironically, this storytelling moment upholds the material products of modernity that Benjamin associates with the death of the storyteller: "counsel woven into the fabric of real life is wisdom".[46] Benjamin identifies the best storytellers as travellers, who know of many exotic places and customs, and peasants who, as tenders of the soil, gain a deep connection to their locality: " the storyteller that thrived for a long time in the milieu of work—the rural, the maritime, and the urban—is itself an artisan form of communication".[47] According to Benjamin's theory, Bourke-White may be identified as a person with the life-experiences to be a great storyteller. In her constant travel and early documentation of the machine-aesthetic, she is also closely aligned with modernity. This personal alignment provides a major thrust for the narration of *Halfway to Freedom*, a report whose prose narrates the movement of India into modernity and whose pictures attest to the trauma associated with this rapid transition. Ultimately, Bourke-White's photographs allow a storytelling-like connection to form between the viewer and the subject through their focus upon specific refugees. The function of the elevated view

[46] Benjamin, "The Storyteller", 85.
[47] Benjamin, "Storyteller," 87.

in Bourke-White's photographs, however, pushes back on Benjamin's identification of a removed position with the inability to give counsel in his claim that "Apart from life he is thus unable to give counsel; his objective becomes to represent human life in all its 'perplexities.'" *Halfway to Freedom* ultimately defies strict genre classifications and demonstrates how spatial remove from the author's subject can aid resist uninvolved observation and categorizations.

The Aerial Narrator Refuses the Picturesque Setting

A reading of Bourke-White work as in dialogue with the picturesque tradition is supported by her narration of *Halfway to Freedom*. A comparison of the narrative function of the picturesque landscape imagery in *A Passage to India* shows how another narrator deploys the aerial perspective and images to encourage the transcendence of racial boundaries. Though the authors wrote at a historical remove of twenty years, they both suggest that great changes to the social and political landscape of India are forthcoming and promise to align the nation's path with those already established by Western nations. Bourke-White states, "I found startling parallels to Western life and problems; many times I was reminded of the struggles of the infant American republic."[48] At the close of *A Passage to India,* Forster similarly proposes the Indian nation as moving toward a time in which the British and Indian characters may enjoy a friendship unmediated by ethnic or social divisions. Fielding attests to his desire to connect with his Indian friend Aziz

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[48] Bourke-White, *Halfway*, xi.

questioning: "Why can't we be friends now."..."Its what I want. It's what you want."'[49] While Fielding cannot reconcile his intellectually-based yearning for inter-racial friendship with his social ties to a British identity, the landscape may adopt a decisive tone and provide the answer to Fielding's question. The aerial narrator states:

> 'the earth didn't want it, sending up rocks through which riders must pass single file; temples, the tank, the jail, the palace, the birds, the carrion, the Guest House, that came into view as they issued from the gap and saw Mau beneath: they didn't want it, they said in their hundred voices, "No, not yet," and the sky said, "No, not there."'

In place of the picturesque, Forster crafts a landscape both divided and indefinable, present and past, and consigns the future and the hope for connections within this landscape to an the spirit of a former and temporary inhabitant of the colonial landscape, Mrs. Moore.

The narrator proposes the transnational spirit of Mrs. Moore, Esmiss Esmore, as an alternative to the picturesque paradigm. Thus, the narrator agues that connections between people with disparate, and even conflicting, personal histories may be made by referencing an intermediary force or image, which, like a true relationship, defies the confines of the human form. Just as the British invoke the picturesque tradition as a means to assert their colonial hegemony, so also the Fielding deploys the image of Mrs. Moore as a means to achieve his goal of saving Adela from economic ruin:

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[49] Forster, *A Passage*, 215.

> "Just as other propagandists invented her a tomb, so did he raise a questionable image of her in the heart of Aziz, saying nothing that he believed to be untrue, but producing something that was probably far from the truth. Aziz yielded suddenly. He felt it was Mrs. Moore's wish that he should spare the woman who was about to marry her son, that it was the only honour he could pay her, and he renounced with a passionate and beautiful outburst the whole of the compensation money, claiming only costs."[50]

Despite the tie to economic motivations indicative of the picturesque colonial relationship of exploited images, the image of Mrs. Moore successfully bridges a gap in human relations, which the picturesque image would only widen. Thus, Esmiss Esmoor—part-Hindu, part-English, part-"oriental"—becomes the great connector. This multiple figure presents hope for the transcendence of the gap of understanding in human relationships. Aziz similarly realizes the need for a linking agent in the future of his country: "Islam itself, though true, throws cross-lights over the path to freedom. The song of the future must transcend creed."[51]

When Aziz observes the Mau tank, the motif of the earth and the sky suggests the desire for connection between the seemingly antithetical elements: "Reflecting the evening clouds, it filled the netherworld with an equal splendor, so that earth and sky leant toward one another, about to

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[50] *Passage*, 290.
[51] Forster *Passage,* 298.

clash in ecstasy."[52] In the discussion of the relationship between Fielding and his wife Stella, the narrator comments on the realization of a greater connection: "There seemed a link between them at last—that link outside either participant that is necessary to every relationship."[53] Forster proposes that the invocation of a symbol, or spirit such as Mrs. Moore, may provide this external element and the key to the successful bridging of human difference. Similarly, Aziz manages to overcome his enduring bitterness toward Adela and express his forgiveness by thinking about the spirit of Mrs. Moore. In his letter he writes: "'For my own part, I shall henceforth connect you with the name that is sacred in my mind, namely, Mrs. Moore.' When he had finished, the mirror of the scenery shattered, the meadow disintegrated into butterflies."[54] By using the sacred name, Aziz creates a mental bridge across the space of cultural difference and misunderstanding and provides an optimistic portrait of the breath and power of human sympathy. In his forgiveness, Aziz comes to identify the "very English girl" with the transnational Esmiss Esmoor. This connection renders the "mirror of the scenery," indicative of a distanced and colonial viewing of the picturesque landscape, irreparable. In place of the cold reflection of the mirror, the narrator offers an animated scene composed of sympathetic characters—inhabitants of both the earth and sky. Thus, the reductive, picturesque

[52] 343.
[53] 357.
[54] 359.

landscape becomes a living mosaic of fluttering, shifting wings; an image of the future that transcends creed.

Through their portrayal of the Indian landscape as seen from above, Bourke-White's photographs might function similarly to the symbolic image of Esmiss Esmoor as a linking agent between disparate cultures. As Barthes stated "What the Photograph reproduces to infinity has occurred only once: the Photograph mechanically repeats what could never be repeated existentially."[55] This reproduction of the past to infinity represents the power of the documentary image to transform trauma, or absence, into a visually relatable form to a viewer of another culture.

How Anti-picturesque?

Some might argue that Bourke-White's photographs of Partition present a relatively picturesque view of a time of immense suffering. In her photographs, people struggle to carry heavy burdens, appear concerned, and prayer but graphic images are largely absent. The photographs, however, address suffering of Partition by documenting the "death to come". Images of emaciated people lying on the ground offer little hope for the recovery of these exhaustion, starvation, or disease souls. In a photo set captioned "Debris in the wake of the migration. The old man is dying of exhaustion. The caravan has gone on." [Figure 12] the old man remains separated from death only by time. In another photograph captioned "Cholera hospital: some live, some die." this leitmotif of "death to come" pervades and establishes a

[55] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 8.

depressive tone. [Figure 13] In the foreground, the four adults and a baby lie on straw matts or low-woven beds. They are unattended by family or medics and while the positioning of the men suggests that they are alive; the baby lies in a pose of ambiguous vitality. Potential caregivers abound in the middle ground and background where refugees sit in groups and appear to talk or simply, wait. One woman attends a body that lies in fetal shape that echoes the position of the baby and one of the men in the foreground. This woman's administrations to the ill underlines the absence of caregivers in the foreground and heightens a sense of unease in the viewer at the possibility of having viewed corpses in the foreground. This possibility of the presence of death or death to come in the photograph allows the uncertainty of the everyday Partition experience to be communicated the American viewer.

A comparison of this photograph to a photograph that appears in *Train to Pakistan,* helps to alleviate this uncertainty. In this a photograph captioned "Cholera Victim" a baby's body appears in the same skeletal, fetal form. The Indian author chose to include an overt illustration of death to accompany the fictional narrative. Other images of corpses and violently damaged human bodies accompany a narrative that includes scenes of rape, torture, and death. One literary critic has argued that the power of this novel its portrayal of the complex nature of Partition or as the narrator admits: "The fact is, both sides killed. Both shot and stabbed and speared and clubbed. Both tortured. Both raped." I would argue, however, that in the recounting of such violent scenes as the rape of a Muslim girl by the village

gangster repeat and reinforce both the violence of Partition and the subaltern status of women in India. Singh's novel forgoes political or social commentary in favor of the exploration of the human effects of the political act of Partition. The fictional world that the author describes attempts to answer the question how individuals conscious of violence or immorality should react. The paring of this narrative with images of death, however, fails to afford the viewer a psychological space for contemplation for future outside of the patriarchal frameworks of religion and social structure that helped to precipitate to the violence.

The uncertainty present in Bourke-White's photographs, on the other hand, works against a spectatorial experience of individual suffering. As Susan Sontag argues "Being a spectator of calamities taking place in another country is a quintessential modern experience, the cumulative offering by more than a century and a half's worth of those professional, specialized tourists known as journalists."[56] Sontag questions the value of mass reproduced images of suffering that allow the modern viewer to see pain without registering an emotional response. In Bourke-White's hospital scene, however, the viewer recognizes the absences, signs of trauma, in the Indian body and refugee community and through their contemplation of the multiple stories that might proceed from this uncertain point and contributes to the reenactment of a more complete history of Partition.

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[56] Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Other's*, (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2004) 13.

Uncertain Times: Working in Reference to American Documentary Practice

In addition to the colonial picturesque aesthetic and native fiction accounts of Partition, the Bourke-White's India assignment should be understood in reference to the established documentary photography tradition in the United States. By 1936, American practice had progressed from the hazy scene of movement in the newly industrialized American city in Alfred Stieglitz's *The Terminal* (1892) through the Great Depression to the documentary project of the Farm Security Administration (FSA).

Bourke-Whites' photographs foretell of the trauma of Partition and thus, differ from the approach of the FSA photographers to document the displacement, homelessness, and starvation of people displaced in the US during the Great Dust Bowl. As Anthony Lee points out, "in the 1930s there was a widespread belief, especially among photographers, that trauma—the wounding in ordinary people caused by unprecedented deprivation and despair—could be illustrated in pictures."[57] In the photograph of the cholera hospital or the resting family with the exhausted old man, however, the trauma is anticipated. The cholera victims and the man, may die, but they may also survive. The uncertainty of the outcome contributes to sometimes stoic and seemingly impassive character of the refugees photographed. In the opening photograph to *Halfway to Freedom* the viewer is introduced to a family faced with uncertainty and the caption "A Sikh Family: They did not

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[57] Anthony W. Lee, Introduction to *Trauma and Documentary Photography of the FSA* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012) 3.

dream the way could be so hard, so long." [Figure 16] A consideration of this image in comparison to Dorthea Lange's *Migrant Mother*, also taken in 1936, suggests the differing roles of the documentary photographer in the domestic and international setting.

This discussion of the FSA Lee suggests the value in preserving fragments of traumatic experiences: "the photographs represented a common belief in the power of the camera to make the horrors of the Great Depression instantly visible and to freeze the relentless flow of tragic events as iconic images." As Leslie T. Davol argues Dorthea Lange's depictions of the working-class poor, and I would add, the migrating poor created iconic images and afforded the subjects a more symbolic than personal identity.[58] In Lange's *Migrant Mother* the arrangement of the children around the mother alludes to the Christian iconic type of Madonna and Child or universal mother. The mother holds a baby in her arms and two young children fill the space behind her. The tent in which the family was living is excluded from the image and thus, the photograph cedes contextual information in the creation of an image that complies with the rhetorical goals of the FSA. The transient living structure of the tent would have underlined itinerancy and subsequently, isolated certain viewers from identification with the suffering family and the iconic power of the image.[59] Bourke-White's photograph of the five person Sikh family encourages psychological identification with the

[58] Leslie T. Davol. "Esther Bubley's World War II Boarding House Photos," *Washington History*, 2 (1999-8) 50.
[59] James C. Curtis. "Dorthea Lange, Migrant Mother, and the Culture of the Great Depression," 14.

Indian subjects at a less iconic level. The couple is surrounded by their three children and comprise a complete family unit. While Lange's mother raises her hand to her cheek, furrows her brow and casts her eyes at some point beyond the viewer. This pose suggests that some trauma has already occurred. The face of the Sikh mother, on the other hand, is comparatively unreadable. Like the inclusive, semi-aerial view of India offering in "Refugee Youths" this familial image offers an expansive view of the Indian population, a view in which specificity of detail and setting resist integration of into an iconic viewing framework. Thus, the image remains tied to its specific subaltern voices and may not become a visual complement to a less-inclusive master narrative of Indian history.

Like the Great Depression, Partition was an epidemic rooted in international changes, whether economic or political, and heightened by domestic disparities in wealth, societal divisions, and geography. Partition, however, was characterized by a level of self-inflicted violence among the nations people much more so than the Great Depression. While wary locals attacked transient dwellings or Hoovervilles and forced the migrants to move on, this violence pales in comparison to that described in *Train to Pakistan* where the blame is complicated the violence appears in multiple forms: "Muslims said the Hindus had planned and started the killing. According to the Hindus, the Muslims were to blame. The fact is, both sides killed. Both shot and stabbed and speared and clubbed. Both tortured. Both raped."[60]

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[60] Khushwant Singh. *Train to Pakistan*, 1.

Partition preceded a series of civil conflicts fought on such multiple fronts from 1947 through the late 1980s and its tying to specific border proves insufficient. A comparison to the documentary work of Robert Capa during the Spanish Civil War of 1936-1939 enables analysis of the way in which Bourke-White's photographs portray a domestic conflict of great violence associated with the division of a country into two autonomous political entities.

Capa's photographs present the violence of civil war in unequivocal visual terms. When the French newspaper *Regards* published Capa's first pictures of the siege of Madrid, the issues's cover proclaimed his photographs of the 'crucified capital' to be 'prodigious'.[61] In "Loyalist soldier killed while stringing telephone lines, December 1937" the dead man is caught in a moment of agony. [Figure 17] Rigid arms, thrown back head, and open mouth lend a palpable agony to the image. In *Halfway to Freedom*, death is foretold in the weak bodies of the refugees, however, there is always the chance that these bodies will be among the survivors of this "biblical scale" suffering.[62] In the crucified body of the solider, deliverance can only be hoped for at a spiritual level and the image, as it reenacts the agony of the death with every viewing, renders inaccessible this source of hope through a freeing of the spirit from the iconic image.

An even clearer example of the divergence of Capa and Bourke-White's approach is evidenced in the treatment of the theme of migration.

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[61] Robert Capa, *Robert Capa Photographs* (New York: Aperture, 1996).
[62] Bourke-White, *Halfway*, 8.

Bourke-White's photograph captioned "Everything on wheels that could carry a burden, even this antique purdah carriage was pressed into service," offers an image of resourceful conversion in the face of unusual circumstances. [Figure 18] The line of carts and oxen extends to the horizon line and conveys a sense of movement and progress along a path. The way is long and hard but again, the outcome of the exodus is uncertain and thus, holds a sense of partial promise. As Bourke-White states in the preface to *Halfway to Freedom*:

"Europe seemed heavy with the death of an era; India stood eager and shining with hope on the threshold of a new life. Tragic mistakes, false starts, unhappy compromises obviously wait for India in her immediate future, and the division into two nations is not the least of the difficulties. India is not an old country; it is a very young one. And there is no doubt in my mind that India is to take an important place among nations."[63]

Robert Capa's photographs document the heaviness and paralysis in Spain preceding the "death of an era" in Europe. In a photograph captioned, "On the road from Tarragona to Barcelona, January 15, 1939. Before they could read Barcelona, many refugees were killed by strafing from Facist planes." there is certainty; some refugees did not complete the journey. [Figure 19] As in the photograph of the solider, there is an arrested sense of despair to the scene. In the foreground, two dead horses lie on the verge of the road. One of the horses is still harnessed to the abandoned wagon whose

[63] Bourke-White, *Halfway,* xi.

contents of large canvas, bags spill out onto its tongue. Caught halfway between their proper place inside the wagon and release on the road below, they are suspended, like the solider, in an unnatural and disturbing space. They lend a sense of paralysis to the scene that evacuates any hope of forward movement, either to complete destruction with their contents spilled on the ground or back to their purposeful space within the wagon. At left, at woman passes by, she moves through these remnants of migration. The separateness of her everyday concerns from that of the wagon and its owners make certain the death on the street.

A final comparison between the treatment of the native architecture styles underlines the Bourke-White's sympathetic definition of the Partition landscape. "Sher Shah's mosque" and "A women praying" offer two images of native architectural structures as spaces that facilitate rest and prayer. In "A women praying" the universal concern for renewal through the birth of children persists through the Partition. The outcome of these prayers, while wholly uncertain, nonetheless, initiates a process of renewal by linking thoughts of the future with an era of death. Similarly, in the image of the mosque, a pointed arch frames the scene of the huddled masses; the structure, like the purdah carriage, fulfills a new purpose and functions exceptionally in the exceptional circumstances of human displacement. Together, these photographs lend native architecture the capacity to elicit hope for a better, if uncertain future. The sense of a hopeful future and even a future, is absent in Capa's "Madrid, Winter 1936-7" photograph of two

women standing outside of a building. [Figure 20] The women face in opposite directions. They inhabit the same street but lack any form of human engagement and their respective backdrops, compound this psychological divorce with a visual division through the difference in wall surfaces. At the left, exposed brickwork with visible bullet holes and at the right, the flat surface of a stuccoes wall. Destruction and isolation is realized in their architectural elements and in the downcast faces of each of the women. Most unsettling, perhaps, the women stand on a bed of shattered stuccowork and bricks. The introduction of abstraction into the image through these divisions suggests a harsh environment in which human sympathy, even between fellow victims of war, is absent. Capa denies any enjoyment of the ruined architectural form or the persistence of human bonds in the face of violence, destructed surfaces, failed connections, and visual divisions create image social paralysis facilitated by war. Through their portrayal of social paralysis Capa's photographs propose only a void of human connection. Bourke-White's photographs respond to this European absence with her portrayal of struggling people, who move toward an uncertain future, within the Indian landscape.

Homai Vyarawalla: The Native Documenter

The comparison of Bourke-White's work to her contemporary, Capa has suggested that the Bourke-White's photographs foretell "possible death" and uncertain times. Nonetheless, some might argue that the photojournalist captured relatively benign images of the 1947 social landscape. In the

photographs of the Indian female photographer, Homai Vyarawalla, however, a truly partial image and persisting colonial depiction of India underlines the inclusivity of the narrative relayed in Bourke-White's work. Homia Vyarawalla was the first woman press photographer in India and is acknowledged to have "captured the last days of the British Empire."[64] *India in Focus*, the recent and only monograph on the photographer, chronicles Vyarawalla's documentation of a very British landscape populated with Indians.

While Vyarawalla photographed Indian leaders, including Nehru and Gandhi, images of Partition in 1947 are absent from her work. At the time of Independence, Vyarawalla remained stationed in the former seat of colonial British power and captured the ceremonial transition of power. In the photograph "Mountbatten among the jubilant crowds outside the Parliament House on August, 15th 1947", the last viceroy of British India and first governor general of the independent India, stands in a carriage and waves to the crowd. [Figure 21] Smiling, cap-and-turban-bearing Indians surround him. Indian men line the a retaining wall of the parliament building; some sit, while others stand and another photographer is visible at the right side of the composition. The scene is one of universal jubilation, a crowd of liberated Indians rejoicing in the European architectural setting of the Parliament House courtyard. Though the space is crowded with people, the tone of the work is certain; the Indian nation is, as Bourke-White describes in her

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[64] Sabeena Gadihoke, *India in Focus: Camera Chronicles of Homai Vyarawalla* (Parzor Foundation: India, 2006).

narrative, “moving toward a shining new freedom,”[65] a freedom qualified by the peripheral violence, migration, and poverty outside of New Delhi.

Other photographs by Vyarawalla document the crowds associated with the declaration of the independence. “With no wide-angle lens in those days, I could shoot only a quarter of the crowds in a single frame,” the photographer claimed. In one image, Vyarawalla captured the crowd at close proximity. [Figure 22] Here a rough timber fence divides the crowd from a grassy area, presumably the lawn of the Parliament House. The fence creates a strong diagonal that creates a visual divide between the space of government, British India, and the space of the people, the new India. Five black parasols and one white are visible in the crowd. The four black can, more or less, be identified with their holders by tracing the stem of the parasol to the hand or head beneath. The white umbrella, however, remains an enigmatic anomaly amongst the otherwise, orderly scene of the crowd and recalls the white-clothed Indian figures of the Daniells’ photograph. These are the visual delights of a peacefully transitioning nation, where parasols recall images of cultured people strolling through a park or garden, and augment a feeling of social certainty in the neatly divided space of the image. The refugees of the Punjab, Bourke-White’s subjects, lived outside the architectural structure of the British-planned city and the protected world of the parasols. Ultimately, Vyarawalla’s photographs depict a stable social structure captured from a position just apart from the crowds of native

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[65] Bourke-White, *Halfway,* 98.

people. While Bourke-White climbed on the roofs of the chawls, structures of dubious architectural integrity, and as her narrative recounts, was initiated into the social spaces of Indians of varying castes, Vyarawallas shot her photographs from a privileged space just barely on the British side of colonial barriers.

This comparison of the native photographer's work with that of the American photojournalist underlines the contradictory meanings of Independence and Partition in different regions of the country in 1947. While peasants starved due to crop failure in the Punjab, the eager government attempted to cement a national identity through building projects.[66] This was the year that the Government Museum and Art Gallery, Chandigarh, located in the city of Chandigarh was built by Le Corbusier. The museum, composed of a the National History Museum, National Gallery of Portraits, and Chandigarh Architecture Museum and is one of a series of museums that Le Corbusier designed in India as part of one of his ever-expanding architectural projects. Thus, Indian national art came to be housed in a European modernist building within the newly independent nation and this post-colonial construction project reinforced the subaltern status of the Indian nation.

Aerial Mapping: A History in Views

"The view from above" and a connection with a postcolonial subject propose an alternative to the elevated and aerial views preceding Bourke-

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[66] Roy, *Partition of India, Why 1947?*, 33.

White. The attempt to gain control of a landscape or people through use of an aerial view can be seen in France through the project of Roger Henrard to create a map of the streets and quarters of the city. Similarly, the aerial photograph is often associated with military missions and an attempt to gain a grasp of either a native or enemy landscape.

Bourke-White completed a series of aerial photographs in 1952. In this project, she flew across the US in a helicopter and captured images of city and rural life. These images ran in Life magazine as the first photographs of the US taken from a helicopter. The photographs include images of iconic landmarks, the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco and the Hotel Del Coronado in San Diego, and also the less touristy images of horses running along a beach and migrant workers in a field. [Figures 20, 21] In the image of migrant workers, Bourke-White employs abstraction as a means to highlight the insignificance of the figure within the human and machine constructed landscape of vegetable rows. This image calls to mind Benjamin's conceptualization of the post-WWI solider in his field. These images are taken from a much greater height than the India photographs and they lack any connection with the figures in the landscape. Instead they offer views of the expansiveness of the American West. The horses are little more than specks moving along a narrow spit of sand, buffered by the surf and cliffs. Thus, in the portrayal of the landscape of her own country, Bourke-White invokes abstraction as a means to document and comprehend the modern world.

Abstraction in India and other Photographs

In "Sub-slums," "The caravans had an Old Testament quality," or "Refugee Youths" In the photographs that include abstraction, on the other hand, the relationship between self and society is more spatially and psychologically explicit.. Bourke-White establishes the human figures as the dominant subjects of the images. In one of the first photographs in *Halfway to Freedom*, "How strong must one man be? How much must he endure." The man carrying the woman on his shoulders appears doubly tall, the landscape setting, on the other hand, occupies a nominal portion of the frame. Bourke-White allows the single figure to tower within its landscape by adopting a low angle. The systematic invocation of abstraction would detract from Bourke-White's portrayal of the humanity of her foreign subject. This visual language, deployed by a body of male European and American photographers and painters, would create a postcolonial equivalent of the picturesque. Abstraction does surface, however, in Bourke's "The Spinner" an image of Gandhi on his weekly day of silence that has become one of the only widely reproduced images from Bourke-White's India assignment. [Figure 27] The spinning wheel dominates the foreground of the composition at an indeterminate distance from the seated figure. Bourke-White may deploy a limited abstraction in the depiction of a leader of the people who is neither suffering, socially peripheral, nor definitely subaltern.

After Documentation: The Value of "Beautiful Suffering"[67]

Susan Crane argues that after the initial exposure of the public to photographs of traumatic experiences, in this case the Holocaust, "recirculated" images should be removed by scholars from the public-view because, "repatriating them might serve Holocaust memory better than their reduction to atrocious objects of banal attention."[68] Crane further suggests that once the initial documentary purpose of images—their function of attesting to the event—is met, they can become objects of a misplaced interest in the suffering. In the exhibition catalog *Beautiful Suffering,* the authors similarly problematize the use of images of suffering within contemporary media. In her article about the photograph *Afghan Girl* by Steve McCurry, Holly Edwards tracks how the function of the image changed overtime, "My strategy will be to trace the meandering life cycle of a mechanically reproduced image episodically functioning as (but no limited to) document, 'art', advertisement, and fundraiser, thereby articulating the traffic in pain that is endemic to contemporary visual culture."[69] This transformation of "document" to "art" and subsequently, into a tool to fulfill other more-economically motivated goals underlines the transformation of an image overtime. Initially, the identity of the afghan girl was unknown and later, National Geographic conducted a search to find her. The photograph

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[67] *Beautiful Suffering* is the title to exhibition catalog
[68] Susan A. Crane. "Choosing Not to Look: Representation, Repatriation, and Holocaust Atrocity Photography", *History and Theory* 47 (Wesleyan University, 2008) 309.
[69] Holly Edwards. "Cover to Cover: The Life Cycle of an Image in Contemporary Visual Culture," *Beautiful Suffering*, 76.

became the cover of table coffee books, armchair portals into the foreign lands of India, Afghanistan, and Pakistan.[70] The image now serves as part of the décor in an Afghani restaurant in San Diego. The bewitching eyes of the girl star at the customers as they sample the cuisine of this country. But could the customer enjoy their lamb kebab as much if they knew that the girl was a war refugee who was only partially complicit in her photographing? The photograph, once a document of human suffering, has been rewritten as a portrait of exoticism in Afghanistan.

Bourke-White's photographs of suffering in India, on the other hand, resist cooption into ethnographic curiosities either by Indians or foreigners. There exists too much context in the photographs like "Refugee Youths", "Sub-slums", or "Praying for a Child" to be converted into a symbol of Indian exoticness within contemporary culture. When these images have been deployed, instead, they are closely linked to narratives of partition, as in *Train to Pakistan*, and part of a movement, native to their country of origin, to better understand a fraught period of history. The more abstract and symbolic Gandhi photograph on the other hand has been reproduced extensively. This leader, unlike the refugees, was a willing participant of change enactment during Independence, a change whose power lay in symbolic associations and thus, he was a conscious part of the symbolic making of the image. Gandhi, arguable does not represent a subaltern subject which must be of inferior class, rank, gender or social standing. Though he

was educated at University of College London where he received a degree in laws and thus, he might speak and speak well, in the language of the ruling British. By 1947, however, he was the leader of his own non-violence movement. As a leader with his own followers, and even more so in the following years in which he withdrew from political and increasingly, social life into solitary contemplation, he stepped out of any framework that might define his as subaltern. Thus, the allowance of male defined language of symbolism and abstraction proves less problematic that in a portrait of a refugee.

Train to Pakistan **and the Subaltern Narrator**

Like previous narrators sympathetic with the independence cause, Bourke-White attempts to facilitate cross-cultural understanding. Thus, Bourke-White takes up the task of previous chroniclers like E.M. Forster who stated of writing *A Passage to India*, "My intention was to create a bridge of sympathy between east and west."[71] Bourke-White's documentary photographs create more than an intercultural link. They continue to be deployed in the opening-up of Indian partition-era history and provide a visual compliment to the native voice. As the contemporary literary historian Kavita Daiya argues: "By making visible the everyday in which violence is produced, and the inter-articulation of class, sexuality, caste, and ethnicity in violence that comes to be called nationalist, cultural texts in the form of literature and even film illuminate how modern societies negotiate and

[71] *The Hill of Devi.* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1953) 23.

contemplate meanings of freedom and loss, belonging and violence."[72] As early as 1948, however, published and filmic accounts of Partition violence, seen to fuel and "inflame communal passion", were censored.[73] This censorship contributes to the documentary power of Bourke-White's photographs. Thus, the photographs of the America woman "dripping in cameras" become a part of the native narrative of the new nation.

The 2006 edition of the 1956 novel *Train to Pakistan* by Khushwant Singh includes 56 of Bourke-Whites photographs as illustrations. In the preface, the editor Pramod Kapoor emphasizes that the combination of Singh's and Bourke-White's photographs may serve as a lesson to future generations stating: "*Zar, zoru and zameen* (wealth, woman and land), all three so beloved to man, were brutally violated. Almost ten million crossed a sketchy line drawn by a crumbling empire. Only half of them reached an alien land they were forced to call home." While the editor identifies his goal of creating a volume that will discourage future conflicts, his avowal is termed in the language of the masculine dominant narrative. Just as the imperialists interacted with the Indian landscape and people in order to gain economic and political dominance, so also this Indian editor adopts an imperialistic tone in his analysis of history. The editor's sentence construction identifies "Wealth, woman, and land" as equivalents in their shared role as objects of male desire. The imperialists sought these same resources within other

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[72] Kavita Daiya. "Honorable Resolutions: Gendered Violence, Ethnicity, and the Nation" *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 27 (Apr-June 2002) 243.
[73] Daiya. "Honorable Resolutions," 222.

cultures.. In this way, though the editor purports to reclaim the experience of partition for the benefit of future generations, he ultimately underlines the persistence of an imperialistic outlook and persisting forms of cultural dominance and "othering". "What all this means is that at least some attempt made in the novel to understand the social and religious roots of communal violence, to explore the connections between the daily life of the villagers of Mano Majra and the violence visited upon, and perpetrated by them. To that extent the novel does not give in to the convenient temptation to blame some violent 'outsider' as the motivation behind all evil, which is of course the easy fiction, the scapegoat, that we offer for our own misdeeds."[74]

Bourke-White describes the arbitrariness of the boundary lines in a less politically-loaded manner: "What had been merely arbitrarily drawn areas on a map began emptying and refilling with human beings—neatly separated into so-called 'opposite' religious communities—as children's crayons fill in an outline map in geography class. But this was no child's play. This was a massive exercise in human misery." Her invocation of the crayon metaphor juxtaposes the ease of establishment of the boundaries with difficulty of their implications.

The narrator of *Train to Pakistan* introduces the reader to a remote part of India, initially untouched by partition but not entirely divorced from the machines of the modern age: "Mano Majra is a tiny place. Of the many slow passenger trains, only two, one from Delhi to Lahore in the mornings

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[74] Suvir Kaul. Introduction to *The Partitions of Memory*, 18.

and the other from Lahore to Delhi in the evenings, are scheduled to stop for a few minutes. The others stop only when they are held up." The constant passage of trains serves as a sort of clock tower for the town and the citizens arrange their waking, commerce, and sleeping schedules according to the passage of the trains. As the narrator states: "All this has made Mano Majra very conscious of trains." Soon after, a train arrives carrying not passenger but the bodies of dead Sikhs and thus, the reality of partition comes to the town. Instead of focusing upon the political events, as Bourke-White does in a significant section of her report, this author offers a fictional, localized account of the human dimension: the sudden horror of partition. Bourke-White's photographs aid in this process and thus, continue to contribute to understanding of the division of the nation.

By addressing the architecture, people, and narratives of the post-colonial peripheral spaces, Bourke-White's documentary work contributes to the establishment of a native, Indian narrative despite her own status as a cultural outsider. Subaltern studies, which began in the 1980s and continue today, have examined the capacity for the creation of a native, post-colonial narrative and thus, may facilitate a more complete understanding of Bourke-White's contribution to the postcolonial Indian history. . One literary critic stated of Gayatri Spivak's work: "Her theorizations gather force not only by virtue of her examinations of the imperial project and her unerring grasp of its underpinning ideologies but also because she is the historical object of

imperialism's narrative."[75] Spivak, as an "object" of imperialism, possesses a closeness to the postcolonial narrative that Bourke-White lacks due her ethnicity and her comparatively limited cultural familiarity with the country.

As academic endeavor, this branch of literary criticism has attempted to create psychologically-based cultural analysis through the study of textual sources and encouraged a search for narratives written in regional languages by native authors. The term "subaltern" refers to people of inferior class, rank, gender, or religion. Thus, an Indian woman like Spivak speaks from the doubly subaltern position of both a former colonial subject and a woman. Spivak argued in her landmark article "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988, 1999) "Women outside the mode of production narrative mark the point of fadeout in the writing of disciplinary history even as they mime 'writing as such,' footprints of the trace (of someone? Something?—we are obliged mistakenly to ask) that efface as they disclose." Women "mime" their written narratives; composed in a verbal language created by the elites of a white, male world; the language of dominant culture and gender cannot afford them the capacity to express all of their ideas. This same argument applies to the subaltern Indian male, who may only possess "a voice" by first adopting European-inspired modes of educations, dress, and language and becoming a part of the colonial system that dispossessed his native culture. Dipesh Chakrabarty argues in an analysis of the recording of non-European

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[75] Mridula Nath Chakraborty, "Everyone's Afraid of Gayatri Spivack: Reading Interviews with the Public Intellectual and Postcolonial Critic," *Signs* 35 (Spring 2010) 631.

histories, 'There is a peculiar way in which all these other histories become variations on a master narrative that could be called "the history of Europe." In this sense, "Indian" history itself is in a position of subalternity; one can only articulate subaltern subject positions in the name of this history."[76] Bourke-White's characterization of the caste system as "medieval" and description of the migration scale as "biblical" does write Indian history through comparison to the established Western narrative.[77] Subaltern analysis provides an effective means to analyze the "speech capacity" of colonial subjects in literature such as the British-educated, Indian born character of Aziz in *A Passage to India*. The refugee family or youths of Bourke-White's photographs, represent subaltern subjects that who are silent because they inhabit a social space apart from the British city centers.. Spivak and others argue that the subaltern cannot "speak" within a postcolonial system that continues to convey information through a logocentric system.[78] The documentary photograph, of the silent subaltern, by bringing visual representation into the historical narrative may help to alleviate the strength of their persisting subalternity.

The "act of speech" provides just one medium for the construction of a national narrative and its privileging re-inscribes European-established

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[76] Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for "Indian" Pasts?' *Representations* 37 (Winter, 1992) 1.
[77] Bourke-White, *Halfway*, x, caption to "purdah carriage" photo inset.
[78] "Logocentrist tendencies situate 'the word' and 'the act of speech' as epistemically superior in a system for understanding the world." Barry Sandywell. "Logocentrism," in *Dictionary of Visual Discourse: A Dialectic Lexicon of Terms*

historical norms upon the postcolonial historical subject. In a similar, if more literary context, Aijaz Ahmas problematizes Frederick Jameson's rhetoric of "otherness," in the categorization of books written by African, Asian and Latin American writers as 'Third World Literature.' He argues that

> "there is no such thing as 'Third World Literature' which can be constructed as an internally coherent object of theoretical knowledge. There are fundamental issues of periodization, social and linguistic formations, political and ideological struggles within the field of literary production, and so on—which simply cannot be resolved at this level of generality without an altogether positivist reductionism."[79]

In her discussion of "third world women," Spivak similarly underlines the imprecision of positivist categorizations:

> "Chromatism seems to have a hold on the official philosophy of anti-racist feminism. When it is not 'third world women,' the buzzword is 'women of color.' This leads to absurdities. Japanese women, for instance, have to be coded as 'third world women!'…This nomenclature is based on the implicit acceptance of 'white' as 'transparent' or 'no-color,' and is therefore reactive upon the self-representation of white."[80]

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[79] Aijaz Ahmad, "Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness," *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (London: Verso, 1992) 97.
[80] Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, Ma: Harvard University Press, 1999) 164-5.

Both of these critics underline the inability of strict categorization to order and knowledge in the postcolonial world. Instead these systems, in an attempt to differentiate the postcolonial literary or demographic body, reference colonial theories of race and ultimately, reinforce subalternity.

Human Ruins, Documenting Societal Suffering

In his guidebook to picturesque viewing Gilpin counseled travelers to seek out the unexpected in the textures and contrasts of natural forms in the unknown landscape of the countryside. These surprises would delight the viewer. Bourke-White's photographs of Partition offer images of a not discrete visual surprises but a landscape of an uncertain future seen from above. The uncertainty present in these images lends the images a hopeful tone wholly absent in Robert Capa's portrayal of paralysis in civil-war Spain.

When contemporary photographers such as Thomas Moore or Sophie Ristelhueber address the state of post-war nations, they document ruined buildings, the depressions in the earth created by bombs, or sutured bodies of mine victims. These images convey the effects of human inflicted trauma from a temporal remove of at least several years. According to curator Joel Smith these "global photographs" create a space for meditation on "recent chapters in time, so over-settled in their meaning, and yet for the moment still fresh enough, that a few well-rendered concrete details stand a real chance of enriching the narrative."[81] While these details attempt to alter the narrative or uncover otherwise, forgotten social spaces they often contribute

[81] Joel Smith, "Footprints" in Andrew Moore's *Cuba* (New York: Damiani Press, 2012).

an at once tragic and picturesque tone through the images of ruined landscapes and buildings. Viewers may delight in the partial column and exposed interior elements of a building in the form of the spiral staircase that leads to an airy, absent second story. In *In Ruins* Christopher Woodward argues that artists, authors, and viewers use ruins to heighten the "sadness of inner reflections" by using "architecture as a sounding board to amplify the emotions."[82] The aestheticizing of the ruins of a society, however, requires a certain emotional remove of the documenter from the pain of the subject. The photographer must consider how best to frame the sufferer and this act represents, in some ways, a betrayal of human sympathy. As a documentary photographer in India at the time of Partition, Bourke-White possessed an immediate relationship with the social conflict that became her subject. Details may enrich a narrative but first that narrative must be written; *Halfway to Freedom* records this narrative in visual and written terms that contribute to a more inclusive iteration of Partition history.

The Modern Aerial Narrator, Viewing from Above and Below

In the modern novel, the aerial positioning of the narrator often establishes a more ambiguous relationship between the author and her subject. The divorce from a single, grounded reality allows the narrator to inhabit multiple minds, portray time in a nonlinear fashion, and create a more subjective portrait of human communities. In Virginia Woolf's 1925 novel *Mrs. Dalloway* the narrator adopts an aerial perspective in her depiction of

[82] Christopher Woodward. "An Exemplary Fragility", *In Ruins* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2001) 105.

the post-WWI city of London and its inhabitants. Similarly, in *A Passage to India*, the author's support or denouement of Indian independence melds with the commentary of the sky; throughout the novel the sky observes the happenings below: "No, not yet," and the sky said, "No, not there."'[83] Forster allows the commentary of an additional narrative voice, neither that of the characters or the omniscient narrator, to mount the most definitive commentary on the state of India in 1924 and thus, the offer describes an Indian landscape of complex, anti-picturesque relationships.

More than two decades later, Bourke-White's invocation of an elevated, semi-aerial position similarly facilitates her anti-picturesque portrayal of India; in this case, as a landscape of specific subaltern subjects whose presence challenge the marginalization of individual Partition stories**.** Today, as illustrations to the fictive testimony *Train to Pakistan*, these photographs challenge the silencing of the native voice and persisting colonially indebted frameworks for understanding Indian history. By photographing her subjects from the roof of a slum structure, the height of a rocky outcrop, or the upper story of a mosque, Bourke-White offers the viewer an elevated and precarious position. From this unstable point of survey, the viewer appreciates the uncertainty of life in Partition India. The viewer may remain semi-aerial or join the crowd and find the stories, fictive testimonies, and histories below.

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[83] Forster, *A Passage*, 366.

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